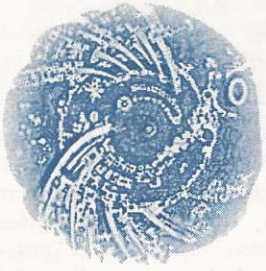


Auroville Today

AUGUST 2003, No.175



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- A beginner's guide to development
- Auroville's Future: You can't plan on whims and fancies
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Publishing Sri Aurobindo's Complete Works

What does it mean to edit and publish the Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo? Editors Richard Hartz and Peter Heehs and assistant editors Matthijs Cornelissen and Bob Zwicker of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Archives and Research Library speak about the joys and difficulties of this immense endeavour.

It was good tidings for all lovers of Sri Aurobindo's writings. In 1996 the Sri Aurobindo Ashram announced that it would bring out The Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo in 35 volumes. The set would include around 2,500 pages of new texts that were not part of the *Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library*, the 30-volume set published around 1972 and no longer available. Publication of the Complete Works would begin in 1997 and was expected to take four years. But by August 2003, more than six years later, only 21 volumes have been published. Why the delay?

"The estimate of four years was made by Jayantilal, the founder of the Archives, who initiated the project and has since passed away," Bob ventures carefully. "Jayantilal was an inveterate optimist who always minimised the difficulties. The rest of us had serious doubts about the four-year schedule, but he had none, so he boldly went ahead and announced it. As we expected, the work is taking longer than four years. But even the editors underestimated the time it would take!"

"When we began, we had 20 years of work behind us. In 1975 Nolini-da passed on to the Archives all of Sri Aurobindo's manuscripts in his possession - more than 150 notebooks and thousands of loose sheets. In 1977 we started the journal *Sri Aurobindo: Archives and Research* in which over the next 18 years we published more than 2,000 pages of newly discovered writings, including most of the *Record of Yoga*. During this period we also brought out *Essays Divine and Human* and new editions of *The Future Poetry* and *Savitri*. By 1997 when the Complete Works began, we had half-a-dozen volumes ready or almost ready for publication and another half-a-dozen well underway. But after those books were printed, things slowed down. We have ten people working full-time on the job, another ten working part-time, but it is still a long process."

Why is it taking so long? "First," answers Richard, "because we are perfectionists. Otherwise this work would be rather pointless, since reasonably adequate editions of the major works are already available. We read the text of each volume at least twice against Sri Aurobindo's manuscripts and the early editions of his works. The exact procedure differs from one book to another, but to do it properly is always time-consuming. Second, we are including much more previously unpublished material than we had originally planned. The volumes we are bringing out are getting bigger and bigger. In the beginning they were four or five hundred pages each on the average, but the new ones are six or seven hundred pages or even more, and there will be more than the projected 35 volumes. Part of the reason for this is that we have had

some surprises, especially with Sri Aurobindo's letters. When we started, the volumes of letters were not our responsibility. Kishor Gandhi was to edit the letters. But then he passed away. All his material came to us. We had thought the letters were in pretty good shape, so we were planning to add some new letters and then print the books. But when we started comparing the Centenary edition of the letters with Sri Aurobindo's manuscripts, we found that many mistakes had been made when the letters were first transcribed. So now all the letters - thousands of them - are being compared with Sri Aurobindo's manuscripts to ensure their accuracy. Several people in the Archives are doing this full-time, leaving less manpower available for other volumes of the Complete Works.

"Actually, the whole project is going pretty quickly by normal standards for this kind of work. Recently I was looking at the critical edition of the *Mahabharata* which was brought out over a period of decades by the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute. In the introduction to one of the early volumes, the chief editor remarked that he had been in charge of the project for seventeen years. During that time, critical editions of four of the eighteen Parvas had been published. Sri Aurobindo's writings do not pose exactly the same kinds of problems as the *Mahabharata*, but if you want to produce a good edition you cannot cut corners."

The old edition and the new

How does the new Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo differ from the old Centenary edition of his writings? Bob explains: "The Complete Works will be more accurate than the Centenary edition and contain a lot of new material - well over 3,000 pages that were not in the Centenary edition. *Essays Divine and Human* has about 300 pages of newly published writings on philosophy and yoga. *The Record of Yoga*, Sri Aurobindo's diary of his sadhana between 1909 and 1927, is a 1,500-page text that has been published for the first time. His writings on the Upanishads now fill two volumes, not just one as in the Centenary. The Vedic material, likewise, will take up three volumes instead of two;



Artist's impression of Sri Aurobindo in his room dictating *Savitri* to his scribe Nirodbaran while The Mother stands behind Sri Aurobindo. Painting by Emanuele executed on a stone slab.

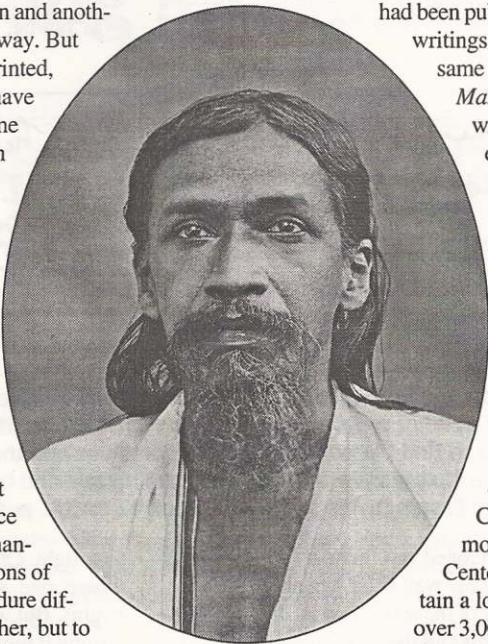
most of the new texts will go in a volume we are calling *Vedic Studies with Writings on Philology*. Many autobiographical writings will be added to *On Himself*, which will require two volumes. The *Letters on Yoga* may take up four volumes, not just three, because so many letters will be added. So you see, although the Complete Works is taking time, the result will be worth the wait. People will be getting more than they were promised."

Letters on Yoga

Does the Archives now possess all of Sri Aurobindo's writings? How complete will the Complete Works be? "With the exception of the letters, it will be fairly complete," answers Peter. "We have virtually all the surviving manuscript material for his books, essays, poems and plays, and we will include almost everything that is not too fragmentary to publish. But the *Letters* will not be complete. More letters could still turn up unexpectedly, and we can't even use everything we have. In some cases we have the whole correspondence, including the disciple's own letters, such as Nirodbaran's and Nagin Doshi's. In other cases only Sri Aurobindo's answers have been preserved, but sometimes these are meaningful only if you have the questions." Matthijs elaborates: "Many people have cut out the personal stuff, sometimes literally with scissors. So you have these frustrating cases where you are left with a remark by Sri Aurobindo such as 'Yes, this is a perfect description of the psychic emergence' and you don't know what experience it refers to. That is one reason why editing the letters is so difficult. To include a single line like this out of context doesn't make sense. Neither is it possible to include the disciples' complete letters. They often went on for pages at a time, with a few words written here and there in the margin by Sri Aurobindo."

As it is, we may have to publish the *Letters on Yoga* in four volumes rather than three, even if we give only Sri Aurobindo's answers as in the previous editions. In the other volumes - *Letters on Poetry and Art*, *On Himself* and *The Mother with Letters on the Mother* - we will include the disciple's question when it helps. The preparation of these volumes of letters is now our main focus."

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Sri Aurobindo
Photo circa 1911-1920

Traditionally, the August issue of Auroville Today has one or more topics specifically dedicated to Sri Aurobindo, whose birthday on August 15th coincided with India's Independence Day. As many of our readers have a deep interest in Sri Aurobindo's writings, we publish here an interview with those responsible for publishing his Complete Works.

The other main topic in this special issue is planning the city. We examine the views held on the planning process by members of the many groups involved, including their deeply cherished beliefs on the city to be.

Publishing Sri Aurobindo's Complete Works

continued from page 1

Letters on Poetry and Art

In the early days the Sri Aurobindo Ashram was a hotbed of poets, with Sri Aurobindo, in his own words, "directly responsible for the poetry department". For him, writing poetry could be part of one's sadhana if practised with the right inner attitude, and he helped his disciples in their poetic efforts. "Hundreds of his letters on poetry and literature will now appear in a new volume, *Letters on Poetry and Art*," explains Peter. "In the Centenary edition these letters (about 500 of them) appeared in three different books: *The Future Poetry*, *On Himself* and *Savitri*. But now we have some 1000 letters, so we decided to put them in a separate volume; it will be almost 800 pages long. Even so, it will not contain the detailed comments that Sri Aurobindo made on specific poems of his disciples. Nirodbaran and Amal Kiran have published some of their poems with Sri Aurobindo's corrections and appraisals. We decided that only Sri Aurobindo's remarks of general interest will be included in *Letters on*

script doesn't seem to make sense. But we are extremely cautious about making such emendations – even more so than previous editors."

Richard gives an example of an incompletely revised sentence. "In the second paragraph of the essay *Purna Yoga*,¹ Sri Aurobindo originally wrote: 'It does not matter if for the present you fall short of your aim so long as you give yourself wholly to the attempt.' He then revised the sentence and changed 'wholly' to 'wholeheartedly'. He also crossed out the two occurrences of 'you' and wrote 'we' above them. Where 'your' appeared before 'aim', he crossed out the 'y' so that it became 'our'. But he did not touch 'yourself'. So the manuscript reads: 'It does not matter if for the present we fall short of our aim so long as we give yourself wholeheartedly to the attempt.' The ungrammatical phrase 'we give yourself' obviously came about due to an oversight in revision. No editor would print it, even though it is what is in the manuscript. When the essay was published in the first edition of *The Hour of God* in 1959, 'yourself' was corrected to 'ourselves' as Sri

'Guna' everywhere. In the Complete Works, we have gone back to what was printed during Sri Aurobindo's lifetime. Another example, also in *Essays on the Gita*, is the word 'dharma', which Sri Aurobindo wrote with or without capitalising the 'd', depending on what he meant. In the Centenary edition the word was uniformly capitalised, blurring the distinction he intended to make. Here too we went back to the original. In this one book, there are more than 1,000 small differences such as these between the new edition and the previous one. People say that we have 'changed' it, but in fact what we did was to revert to the original, that is, we restored what Sri Aurobindo himself wrote."

Savitri

The Archives has been severely put to the test in connection with the edition of *Savitri* that was published in 1993. Many people were shocked by the number of differences from previous editions. Sri Aurobindo had worked on *Savitri* for 34 years – from 1916 until the month before his passing in 1950. During this time the poem

grew from a narrative poem of moderate length into an epic of almost 24,000 lines. He revised the poem again and again, filling notebooks, chit-pads and loose sheets of paper with his alterations and additions, and revising by dictation when he could no longer see well enough to do it with his own hand. The text was undoubtedly a challenging one. Only after seven years of careful checking and rechecking of the original manuscripts was it announced in the *Archives and Research* journal of

December 1986 that a new edition of *Savitri* was ready. But this turned out to be just the beginning. The long list of corrections published in the journal caused an outcry in some circles in the Ashram. There were people who found that the new edition contained changes which were not to their liking or not what they were used to reading in an earlier edition that the Mother herself had given them. And had not the Mother said to Amal Kiran in 1954 that she wouldn't allow him to change even a comma in *Savitri*?

Richard answers: "There has been a lot of confusion because that statement of the Mother has been misinterpreted by people who don't know about the editorial work she actually authorised. Taken out of context, what she said to Amal may sound like an unanswerable argument against the new edition of *Savitri* and, by extension, against the work of the Archives as a whole. It is cited, for example, in several court cases against the 1993 edition of *Savitri* which we have had to fight in the last few years. (As you can imagine, this has not helped us to stay on schedule with the Complete Works.) But the fact is that in 1954 the Mother approved of plenty of changes in the printed text of *Savitri*.

More generally, she sanctioned the method of basing corrections on a comparison of the copies, typescripts, etc., with the manuscript – the method that was later applied more systematically by the Archives. Her approval of the editorial process is mentioned in Amal's book *Our Light and Delight* in the next paragraph after he reports that she told him he was not to change 'even a comma'. So her words have to be understood in this context.

"Contrary to popular belief, the published text of *Savitri* was in a state of flux in the early days. Mistakes were gradually being noticed and were corrected almost every time there was a reprint up to 1976, after which the Archives began its work and it was decided not to make any further corrections until the new edition was ready. There are more than 170 differences between the 1950-51 edition and the 1954 edition, including about 80 involving commas and others that are much more significant. In the last two pages of Book Four, Canto Two, several lines of the first edition were replaced in 1954 with versions whose wording is entirely different. These versions were taken from a typescript revised by Sri Aurobindo, which had been overlooked when the first edition was prepared. The Mother was aware of the work that was done on *Savitri* in 1954. Since she approved of the corrections then being made, her remark to Amal cannot possibly have meant that she wanted the text printed in 1950-51 to be kept exactly as it was. She could not have meant anything other than what Amal himself explained in an interview a few years ago, namely, that he was not to change anything according to his own ideas. In the same interview, he mentioned another conversation he had with the Mother in which he explained to her that corrections in *Savitri* might be necessary because Sri Aurobindo's words had sometimes been misread. She said, 'That's a different matter.'

"The discovery of errors in the published text of *Savitri* continued after 1954 and led to many further corrections when the Centenary edition was published in 1970. But most of these mistakes were obvious enough to be noticed by someone reading the printed book. In those days, the manuscripts and typescripts were checked only when an error was suspected. (It was while doing this kind of spot-checking in 1954 that the revised typescript I



But this was intelligent and constructive criticism, in contrast to much of what the Archives has faced more recently. It had the valuable effect of stimulating Nirodbaran and Amal, who had worked on the earlier editions under the Mother's supervision, to play an active role in preparing the new edition of *Savitri* and ultimately to take full responsibility for it. They spent four years looking at the manuscripts and other materials related to each point in our list of proposed corrections. It was they who decided every detail of what was finally printed. What was remarkable was to witness Nirodbaran's absolute integrity. He had been the one who had copied the manuscripts of *Savitri* for Sri Aurobindo and he had done a very impressive job. But if our readings were right, he had made some mistakes in copying the hundreds of pages of difficult manuscripts. He now had the authority to make the final decisions. He could easily have justified his own copying where we doubted its correctness. Nobody could have challenged him. But he never once took that attitude. His only concern was with seeing what Sri Aurobindo had written and following it."

The handwriting

Gradually, Sri Aurobindo's finely etched handwriting became notorious for being almost illegible. In his *Correspondence*, Nirodbaran cites an instance where he protested, "Good Lord, your writing is exceeding all limits, Sir!" Sri Aurobindo retorted, "Transformation of handwriting. The self exceeds all limits, the handwriting should do so also." Peter comments: "There are early periods of the handwriting when almost every letter is distinctly formed. There are later periods when you often have just the general shape of a word and have to see from the context what word fits, looking at a combination of form and meaning. The last stage of the handwriting, around 1947 when Sri Aurobindo's eyesight was failing, looks almost illegible at



from left to right: Peter Heehs, Matthijs Cornelissen, Richard Hartz and Bob Zwicker.

Poetry and Art." Adds Bob: "Some day we plan to publish the letters not by subject but by correspondent. In this format the disciple's questions are included as well as Sri Aurobindo's replies. In the case of literary correspondence, the disciple's poems can be printed along with Sri Aurobindo's comments. The material will be left in chronological order and we will be able to include more of it. The correspondence really springs to life when it is presented as a day-to-day exchange between master and disciple. We may eventually wind up with 20 or 30 books like this. But we will take this up only when the Complete Works are finished."

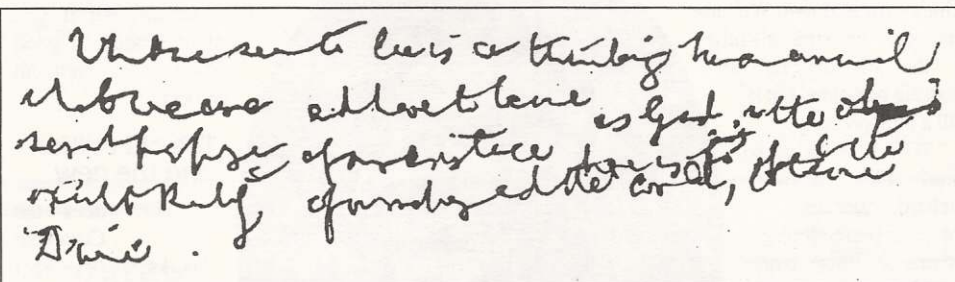
Preparing editions of Sri Aurobindo's writings

On what basis do the editors in the Archives prepare the texts for publication? And what does 'editing' mean when applied to the writings of Sri Aurobindo? Answers Peter: "We don't 'edit' in the way the term is usually understood. Our aim is to publish Sri Aurobindo's works in accurate texts that represent his final intentions. The authenticity of the text is our concern. When we have to make decisions, they are based on textual evidence and not on subjective factors such as our own stylistic preferences. If a sentence is somehow defective due to a slip of the pen or incomplete revision, we may emend it, but only when we feel sure that the emendation is what Sri Aurobindo intended to write. He used to joke about his slips of the pen, so that possibility has to be taken into account when something in the manu-

Aurobindo presumably intended. In *Essays Divine and Human*, where such essays reproduced from his manuscripts are now published, we have accepted this emendation and others like it. In newly published material we have made similar emendations ourselves where necessary."

Peter continues: "Any time there is a doubt about a sentence, our first response is to look at the manuscript. Sometimes a translator will come and ask if a certain sentence is okay or not, and give all sorts of reasons why it should be changed. (This usually happens with translators, because they have to understand every word before they can translate it.) The answer is always found by analysing the physical evidence. It is never a question of making a purely subjective decision. It is the same when we evaluate previous editions. In practice, when we prepare Sri Aurobindo's writings for publication, part of our work consists of restoring texts to their original form where we feel that others have edited them too freely."

Matthijs clarifies: "Our effort is to keep the writings as Sri Aurobindo wrote them. We have found that former editors took lots of liberties with capitalising words and changing punctuation marks. In the Centenary edition, for example, the policy adopted for Sanskrit words was to capitalise the first letter of all words that are not italicised. In *Essays on the Gita* the word 'guna' occurs a couple of hundred times. Sri Aurobindo rarely italicised or capitalised that word. In the Centenary edition, it has been systematically capitalised; 'guna' has become



A sample of the handwriting of Sri Aurobindo. The text reads: "What we seem to be is a thinking human animal. What we are and have to become is God; the secret purpose of our existence here is to find the occult Reality of ourselves and the world, to become Divine." This text was written between the middle and late 1940s.

From *Essays Divine and Human*, vol. 12 CWSA, p. 287

mentioned was found by accident.) Yet the only way to be sure about the accuracy of the text is to read the final manuscripts all the way through and look at all the subsequent stages of copying, typing and printing to see whether differences from the manuscript were due to Sri Aurobindo's dictated revision or to someone else's inadvertency. This is what the Archives has spent so many years doing.

"After completing three such readings of the manuscripts of *Savitri*, we published our first list of proposed corrections in 1986. There was some criticism of that list, and this had to be dealt with before we could proceed further.

first sight. Often it is hard to figure out where one word ends and the next begins. But when you study this handwriting it turns out to be rather systematically illegible, making it not impossible to read. For example, sometimes in trying to decipher a word it helps to count the dots of the 'i's; generally they are all there somewhere. And if we are lucky, there may be an earlier draft of the same text that is clearer. Meanwhile, as we struggle to transcribe the texts, the pressure to finish the book and get it to the press is mounting, because we are always behind schedule.

continued on page 3

Light play in the Petals

Art and technology collaborate in the meditation chambers of the twelve petals around Matrimandir

The pace of the work to complete the twelve meditation chambers in the petals around the Matrimandir has been slow, as this work was never considered a priority. These days, however, much progress is being made and there is light at the end of the tunnel – in fact almost literally in the case of the light shields for each of the windows, the port-hole-like opening in each Chamber. Auroville Today met with artist Shanta (Chantal Gowa) to hear about the latest realizations.

"I have been working on this project for over 7 years," says Shanta. Recognised for her intuitive sensibility and artistic vision, Shanta was invited by Roger Anger to select the correct colours and design the window shields for each of the twelve meditation chambers surrounding the Matrimandir. Each of the

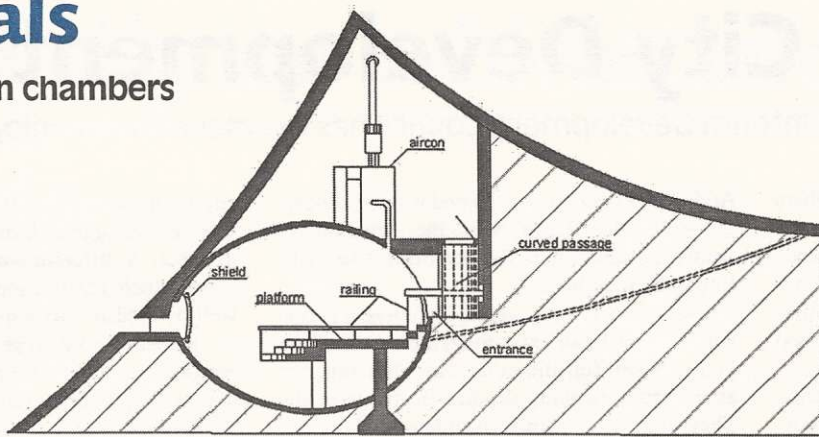
fresco style and tested in the Generosity chamber. But it has given a somewhat washed-out impression and more and more I got the feeling that it is the wrong choice." The search for the perfect violet continues.

"The Mother always spoke of pure colours. When She spoke of pure red, it is not pink that she meant! Mother spoke about the petals as a space in which to have a colour bath," explains Shanta. "If you need courage for example, you go to the appropriate chamber with the red walls. There you sit for whatever time you need and immerse in the vibration of that colour." Shanta believes that if the colour is the exact pigmentation as visualized by The Mother, then its vibration will bear the quality attributed to it. "This is why we have been so particular to get the colours right."

Currently a seemingly correct deep blue pigment has been 'discovered' for the Peace chamber and brought all the way from Germany. "It is a pure pigment, and we had to mix it with media and prepare the paint ourselves," recalls Shanta. She goes on to narrate the elaborate process that followed. "We decided to use the dynamised water prepared by Bhagawandas that had been exposed to the mantra of The Mother [see *AVToday January 2002, #156*]. We made close to 15 litres of paint, and seven of us painted the rooms."

Alongside the work to select the pigments, the design of the shields for each window progressed. Shanta explains that until three years ago the shields were visualised as circular semi-transparent pieces. "Then Roger Anger wanted to try the overall shape of the Matrimandir. This resulted in oval shields, measuring 155 centimetres by 130 centimetres."

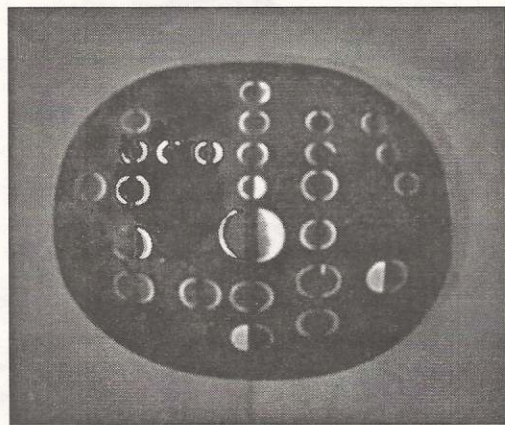
The white-colour shields are double layered and curve inwards. A gap of a few inches separates them. The inner layer consists of a sheet of translucent fibreglass. The outer layer is also made of the same



Section through petal chamber (not to scale)

material. It is on this layer that Shanta creates her designs of oval cut-outs of various sizes. The light coming through the two shields into the Chamber has a *chiaroscuro* effect, a magical play of golden light and shadow through the cut-outs in the fibreglass. Shanta shares her experience: "I discovered a wonderful effect. Sometimes it is like a sphere, sometimes like the moon, like the various phases of the moon. It feels like something from another world."

Shanta does her experiments using some of the



The play of light and shadow through the window shield of 'Generosity'

chambers is to be painted a specific colour, to which The Mother attributed a specific quality, so that visitors to the chamber can meditate on that aspect of their journey towards integrality.

"Sincerity (light blue), Peace (deep blue), Equality (blue violet), Generosity (pure violet), Goodness (reddish violet), Courage (pure red), Progress (vermillion), Receptivity (orange), Aspiration (golden yellow), Perseverance (light yellow), Gratitude (light green), and Humility (dark green) are the dozen.

Shanta has painstakingly researched the meanings behind the attributes of each colour. Gathering The Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's own words to describe these attributes, she has built up a voluminous reference work to which she constantly turns for inspiration as she visualizes her window designs.

"When I first came here, it was the pale shades that Aurovilians liked," says Shanta. "An early experiment was with the colour violet painted in a Spanish



Shanta appraises a model for the shields

finest white paper available in France. But recently work progressed a step further. In collaboration with Joel, who fabricates light aircraft bodies in a factory near Bangalore, Shanta has realised the first of the 12 shields, an inspired creation of breathtaking beauty, which will soon be placed in the Peace chamber.

As with so many other aspects of the Matrimandir, the collaboration of artistic vision with modern materials and advanced technology has again borne fruit.

Priya Sundaravalli

SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM ARCHIVES AND RESEARCH LIBRARY

Publishing Sri Aurobindo's Complete Works

continued from page 2

"A lot of what we do is essentially glorified proofreading. That sometimes brings the danger that the work becomes just the grist of the day, where you go through another 20 pages of text. Doing this kind of work is entirely different from reading Sri Aurobindo's writings for yourself, where you can enjoy the flow of the argument and the beauty of the language. We sometimes miss the forest for the trees. But there is a reward in this work. It is fascinating to study the way in which Sri Aurobindo revised his own texts - a privilege which others cannot share with us. This work does take you into his consciousness, so to speak, and it gives a kind of precision and in-depth understanding, looking at the exact nuances of the words he is using and seeing why he is changing one word to another. It gives a particular intimacy."

Richard describes the experience of deciphering words that have almost been given up as illegible: "In front of you is the manuscript of a writing that has never been published before. It is to be included in a book that is nearly ready to go to the press. But in the printout there are

still places marked with '[. . .]', meaning an illegible word. I know that this piece of paper has been lying around for maybe 90 years or so and that something is written there, something that came from Sri Aurobindo's consciousness, which nobody has been able to decipher. This is the last chance to read that word or phrase for this edition. And that is exciting. At this point I lock myself in the cold storage room where we keep Sri Aurobindo's original manuscripts and I will remain there until I solve the problem. I feel somewhat like a yogi doing tapasya in a cave in the Himalayas. Taking my small loupe with 8x magnification, I put it on the word in the manuscript and sit there looking at it, aware of the context but preferably with no preconceived ideas about what kind of word it might be. I have found that it is mainly a question of tenacity, of not giving up. After staring at a word sometimes for hours, there is a mysterious moment when suddenly, without my knowing exactly when or how it happened, I know what is written there. You can call it intuition or whatever you like. That is one of the satisfactions of this work."

The meaning

Editing Sri Aurobindo's texts is one thing, understanding them is something else. Peter remarks: "In a sense, the meaning is not our problem. Our aim is to provide an accurate text by following Sri Aurobindo's manuscripts. Obviously, to be able to do anything in the English language you have to know the language, and of course we try to understand the text ourselves as part of the process. But it is not our work to interpret the text for readers. Here and there we have added factual footnotes about the manuscript or some textual difficulty, but we do not comment on the text. For the *Record of Yoga* we will publish a glossary and a structural outline of the system of terminology, because it is so unusual and inaccessible. But even there, we keep the element of subjective interpretation to a minimum. We study the contexts in which Sri Aurobindo has used a particular word, in the *Record* and in his other works, and on that basis we formulate a definition, as close as possible to his own words, taking the Sanskrit dictionary definition and if necessary the etymology into account. That is as far as the responsibility of the Archives goes, as we see it. Any interpretation of the text or

commentary on it is an individual's personal business."

The Mother's works

Is there any chance of bringing out a Complete Works of the Mother - a revised and enlarged edition of the *Collected Works*? Bob shakes his head. "Not at the moment. We are fully absorbed in Sri Aurobindo's works. The Mother's works are on hold. What is being done for now is to reissue the 17-volume *Collected Works of the Mother* in a new edition. Its text will be the same as that of the first edition, apart from the correction of a few errors. And by the end of this year we will issue a CD-ROM of these 17 volumes, with a good search programme. I may add that the 17 volumes are now available not only in English but in French - and the work of preparing the French edition for press was done largely by Jyoti Sobel, who is now an Aurovillian. So for the moment we are concentrating on Sri Aurobindo's works, but a Complete Works of the Mother will come."

In conversation with Carel

¹ Sri Aurobindo, *Essays Divine and Human*, CWSA, vol. 12, p. 98.

² Nirodbaran, *Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo*, p. 689.

In brief

Praying for rains

This year's summer rains have so far failed. Due to the lack of sufficient monsoons in the last few years the ground water table has gone down to an alarming level. A few silent concentrations took place to ask for Mother's Grace for the rains to come. The power supply to Auroville has become irregular due to the shrinking of thermal and hydro power generation.

Matrimandir concerns

Dr Kireet Joshi, Chairman of the Auroville Foundation, addressed the residents of Auroville to explain the decisions taken at a Governing Board Meeting in New Delhi on June 24th. The Board found that the Matrimandir Core Group appointed by it has not functioned harmoniously and fruitfully to the extent expected. The Board expressed anguish that Auroville has not yet succeeded in demonstrating the spirit of united endeavour vibrant with Harmony, Goodwill, Discipline and Truth as given by Mother in one of her messages to Matrimandir. The Board urged the Core Group members to make one more effort. Other decisions taken include the approval of the appointment of the Acting Secretary as the second signatory for the Matrimandir accounts; a call to Auroville residents to come forward to help complete Matrimandir; and a re-iteration of the Board's views that Mr. Roger Anger is the architect of Auroville and of the Matrimandir.

MM test lake

With the help of experts of the German Landesgewerbeanstalt in Nuremberg, a trial pond has been made, using for lake-bed sealing a compacted mixture of clay called Bentonite and red laterite Auroville soil. After more than a month of monitoring it appears that the water level does not drop at a rate faster than that due to natural evaporation. A deeper pond will now be constructed to test the sealing technique on a larger scale.

MM inner skin

Aluminium profiles to frame the translucent triangular panels of glass for the inner skin of the Matrimandir, manufactured at a factory in Mysore, have arrived. The profiles will be fashioned into 750 triangular frames, each side approximately three metres long.

New issue of MM journal

Issue no. 11 of the Matrimandir Journal, 'The Divine Shakti and the Integral Yoga', is available from matrimandir@auroville.org.in

Auroville News Policy

A new policy for the weekly Auroville News is being prepared after a survey in which 142 people participated. The main changes will be that the word 'Auroville' will no longer appear in the title, and that contributions will be screened by an editorial team which is accountable to the Auroville Council.

RITAM

From August 2003 the Sri Aurobindo International Institute for Educational Research (SAIIR), will publish a new bi-annual journal RITAM on material and spiritual researches in Auroville. It will publish articles, interviews etc. which are relevant to Auroville, both from people in Auroville as well as from others. Those wanting a free hard copy please write to unity@auroville.org.in. The magazine will also be available at <http://www.auroville.org/index/ritam.htm>.

Auroville City Development

For the last three years, the Interim Development Council has overseen the development of Auroville. Its mandate expired in May

Development is controversial everywhere in the world. Managing development well means balancing the known needs of today against the uncertain needs of the long-term future: weighing-up the conflicting interests of industry, the environment, commerce and the general public. This is difficult.

In Auroville, there is the added complication that we are not just building a city. We are participating in an Experiment of which the City is merely the physical manifestation. So Ideals have to be added to the scales, with their attached baggage of passionately held interpretations and irreconcilable disagreements.

Auroville Today decided to take the temperature, so to speak, of that section of the community which has day-to-day responsibility for developing the City of Dawn. We spoke separately to the Interim Development Council, Auroville's Future, the International Zone Group and the Green Group. (The Industrial Zone Group were out of town, and there are currently no bodies representing the Residential or Cultural Zones.)

We asked them how they see the next three to five years. What do they want? How will they be working with other groups? What do they actually do?

A note on the Masterplan

The Auroville Masterplan is the official development plan for Auroville which was approved by the Ministry of Human Resource Development on April 12, 2001. It is a "perspective plan", which contains the broad concepts and philosophies of the township's development. It has a time-span of about 25 years. Within the framework of the perspective plan, detailed development plans will be made, which have time-scales up to five years. Development plans can only be made once the ground realities are clear; they require surveys to acquire the necessary data. Lastly, there will be annual plans made for implementation.

The Masterplan also forms a crucial safeguard for Auroville's place within the bio-region. Without it, Auroville cannot request any kind of protection from the Tamil Nadu or Central Governments. Since land-purchase is still a problem, this protection is of the utmost importance.

The need for a Masterplan was therefore accepted fairly equanimously by the community. However, it is by no means regarded by all Aurovilians as a definite plan for how Auroville will actually develop. Nevertheless, both Auroville's Future and the Interim Development Council regard the Masterplan as the basic blueprint for the City.

The Interim Development Council

If any group can be said to manage the process of what gets built where in Auroville, it is the IDC. All planning applications must be referred to them, and they can effectively veto any projects. They are also responsible for developing the city's public infrastructure.

This is a very difficult task, considering that they have almost no resources. Auroville is chronically short of human and financial capital. Since it takes enormous amounts of both to build even a small town, the IDC really are trying to make bricks without straw.

The IDC also, in the nature of things, attract the most direct criticism from the community. There are several reasons. Firstly, implementing the Masterplan means upsetting existing residents. "Take the road plan," says Joseba. "When the plan is put into execution, and the road work commences, someone challenges the concept entirely, or starts asking for the road to be shifted an extra 10 or 20 meters from where they are living!"

Secondly, being the body responsible for saying No to peoples' cherished projects does not make the IDC popular.

Finally, since the IDC are seen as champions of the Masterplan, they become a lightning-rod for community discontent on that subject.

Auroville's Future

L'Avenir d'Auroville, or Auroville's Future, dates back to 1965, and has the distinction of being created by Mother Herself.

"Three things were established during Mother's own time," says Pashi. "One was the

Architect, Roger Anger. Second was the concept of Auroville. Third was the creation of Auroville's Future as the department to assist Roger in executing it."

After nearly forty years, including a period where it ceased to exist altogether, Auroville's Future is still fulfilling this role. They function as the town planning department for the City. They start by making assumptions about the population growth of Auroville. From there, they can estimate likely patterns of consumption for water, energy, transport and so forth. The level of detail required for this work is considerable. The team is awesomely knowledgeable, dedicated and energetic. And they are quite happy to call in outside help: one of the key consultants in developing the Masterplan was Mr Dattatri, former Chief Town Planner of the Chennai Metropolitan Authority.

Like the IDC, Auroville's Future are completely committed to implementing the Masterplan. They are not unsympathetic to desires for a more "organic" growth of the City. But as Anandi explains, "Mother was very clear she really wanted a plan. And She discussed with Roger so many small details about it. For us that is also a sign that there had to be a plan. Otherwise we would be developing like other cities all over the world - they have grown organically."

The International Zone

The International Zone perhaps presents the smoothest road in terms of its development. Many of the problems that make life extremely difficult for Auroville's Future, the IDC and the Green Group do not exist in the International Zone.

Auroville owns all but five acres of the land. There is nothing much there to knock down. No-one lives in it or near it, so NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard) attitudes to new roads and infrastructure aren't a problem. Relationships with likely providers of capital and inspiration (the Auroville International centres overseas) are good. Finally, uniquely, Auroville as a whole is not yet passionately married to any particular outcome. So the constant cataract of complaints that pours down on development debate elsewhere is only experienced as a tiny drip in the International Zone.

To top it all off, the team doing the work is as passionate, informed, diverse and committed as you could wish to meet. And positive! The word "problem" only occurred once during the interview.

The existing buildings in the International Zone are Bharat Nivas (soon to be restored to its rightful role as the Indian Pavilion rather than de facto Auroville Town Hall), Savitri Bhavan, the Tibetan Pavilion, the Guest House of the American Pavilion and the Unity Pavilion. This last will be "very important" says Sergei. "It will be where we co-ordinate development of the International Zone. And it refers to the soul of humanity as a whole, if other buildings are referring to souls of the nations. The International Zone Group office will be there, as will architectural planning. And it will be a place for Pavilion Groups who have no places of their own."

The team sees itself as having two main tasks at present. The first is to understand Mother's vision for the International Zone. The second is to work very closely with the Auroville International centres who will be prime movers in actually building the Pavilions - "the spiritual embassies of the nations," in Sergei's words.

The Green Group

In some ways, the Green Group are the odd-people-out in our group of interviews. They are not specifically responsible for developing any part of the City. They have no formal powers of veto. They do not make development proposals.

However, perhaps more than any of the development working-groups, the Green Group provides a bridge between Auroville's eco-village past and its hopefully eco-friendly future. And they are custodians of Auroville's most visible and precious external achievement - the trees. It is as if they are holding our collective conscience.

Interviewing AuroFuture at their (old) office in the morning, and then meeting the Green

Group at Oasis Juice Bar the same afternoon, was like flying from Singapore's Changi airport to Tibet. A different world, a different worldview. Much gentler, more diffuse, but just as well-defined. So what about development?

Kireet, whose work with check-dams has reached a point where a monsoon of up to 20cm is contained with no run-off, agrees. "It should be in harmony with Nature, all the building, the landscaping and everything we are going to do in Auroville. No pollution during and after building. Not abusing nature, but taking all the steps in line with nature. It will ask us to be very conscious on the way."

The other groups talked mostly about "what" they are doing and "why". But the Green Group is primarily concerned with "how we do it," says Gemma. "All these people with passionate views about This Is What It Should Be... If we can find a way to create something with a reasonable degree of harmony and peace, instead of what we do at the moment, then that's actually the aim, isn't it?"

This makes working with Auroville's Future and the IDC, in particular, a little difficult. It is not because of any wish - on either side - to be stand-offish. But the working-methods don't quite meet in the middle. Kireet explains, "Fixed proposals have to be somehow flexible as well. If necessary, we have to change the plan and do it better. Everything changes so fast we that have to adapt constantly."

Conclusion

It seems worth repeating that development is difficult. Not counting Matrimandir and the Matrimandir Lake & Gardens, few issues carry such an emotional charge in Auroville, or affect our everyday lives to such an extent.

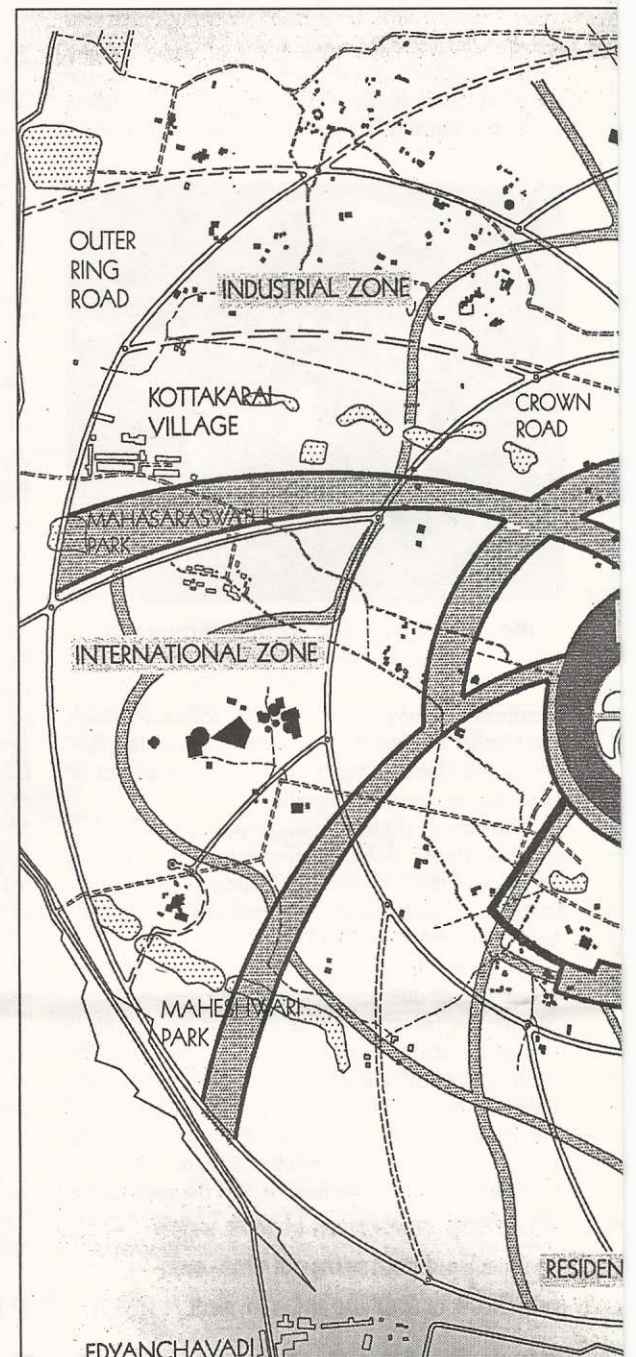
Development has a long tail. Once a block of flats is put up, or a canyon is built-over, that is the end of the story for many years to come. So it seems right that we should vigorously debate the principles on which to build the City the Earth Needs. What do we need, come to that?

Asking lots of "what" and "why" and "how" questions can help to make sure that we - and the earth - don't suffer unnecessarily when the bull-dozer moves in. And the grandeur of the vision must be weighed against the costs, both financial and human. Even projects that come to be seen as iconic often have very shaky

beginnings. Construction of the Sydney Harbour Bridge involved demolishing half a suburb, compulsorily displacing thousands of people. Was it worth it? Probably. But let's hope that they talked about it for a bit before starting.

Luckily, this is Auroville. There will, no doubt, have been very many words exchanged by the time we are a city of 50,000.

David C



A Beginner's Guide to Development

Are you confused about which group does what? AVToday provides

How to Read the Guide

Function: what the Group basically does around town

Mission: the purpose and intention of the Group regarding development, as clearly stated by them during the interview

Orientation: is their conversation basically oriented towards "What", "Why" or "How" statements?

Team: to what extent do they appear to be a team as conventionally defined? (100% = exhibits all characteristics of a Team)

Efficiency: AVToday's subjective impression of how effective the Group feels itself to be. (0% = life is almost impossible, 100% = we're totally winning)

Style: what is their conversational style? what do they talk about?

Leadership: what sort of leadership style (if any) do they exhibit?

AV Ideals: to what extent does the Group seem to think it understands and reflects the ideals of Mother? (100% = certainty that we know what She meant, and we're doing it)

Self-doubt: awareness exhibited that they might be mistaken, or on the wrong track. (0% = untroubled by self-doubt, 100% = tortured by it)

Inclusivity: willingness to include and work with ideas radically different from their own (100% = max inclusivity)

AVT feeling: the general feeling - state of your correspondent after the interview

The Interim Development Group

Function: Manage the overall development

Mission: To implement the Master Plan

Orientation: "What"

Team: 50% - but only two (hugely dissimilar for interview, so difficult to rate)

Efficiency: 40% - a noticeable sense of which almost certainly does not reflect reality

Style: Tendency to focus on the problems in slightly harried outlook overall. Very inter-

ship between the Yoga and building the city

tive outlook emerged after encouragement

Leadership: Dogged, persistent

AV Ideals: 85%

Self-doubt: 25% - the IDC takes much dire

AV, which has a bad effect on morale despite

of Mission

Inclusivity: 30% - genuinely acknowledge

validity of viewpoints different to the Mission

them in?

AVT feeling: Positive, but your correspondent

need to be reassuring and sympathetic.

"You can't plan a city on whims and fancies"

Interview with Anandi, Lalit, Pashi and Sheril of Auroville's Future

AVToday: As the original town planning office in Auroville, how would you describe your role in city development?

Pashi: We at Auroville's Future want to go ahead with development according to the Mother's mandate. Whether it's planning or surveys or whatever, only Auroville's Future has been doing this work. Also, groups of technically

competent people, like planners and architects, have been encouraged to come together for planning for each of the four Zones. These inputs can be taken into consideration in the context of what Roger Anger has conceived for the City.

We believe that the Residential Zone is the most important one, because the maximum population is going to be in that Zone – 40,000 people. Over the last two years, thanks to financial help from Asia Urbs – a European Commission project – we have been able to look into the various aspects that would go into the detailed planning of this zone. Surveys of the existing communities – their water consumption, power consumption, infrastructure, sewage treatment etc. – are helping us to come out with a functional blueprint which will be presented to the community soon. This is our first five-year Development Plan.

Lalit: We have targeted a population of 5,000 in the next five years. For that we have worked out the water and energy requirement, the social facilities, infrastructure, schools, health centres and so on. We have selected the pockets for development in all Zones. The challenge is for the community to come out with various options, alternatives, within broad parameters. We can build this much, leave this much open, these are the facilities required and so forth.

AVToday: What are the immediate needs?

Pashi: The most pressing need is, of course, related to the land which we do not fully own. How can one plan and develop a city without this? The starting point in any urban habitat's development is always consolidating land and putting the infrastructure in place. In our case, we cannot even lay the crown road, let alone the main arterial road of Auroville for this reason.

Lalit: The City area now has 1,250 acres, of which Auroville

owns almost 1,000 acres. Our population is increasing by about 100 people per year or more. Our second main concern is the development of affordable housing, as the financial background of new arrivals to Auroville is mostly middle-income and slightly below-middle income.

The third key issue is water. Auroville will be under construction for the next 20 years. So we have to estimate our water requirement for construction, as well as for normal living needs. Until now this has not been possible. People say that because there is a water problem, there should be no more than 10,000 people in Auroville. But we should not forget a fundamental point – that when Auroville was started, there was not a drop of water. If we take the base as zero, we are already at some level. And if you argue that this is a static capacity, you are doubting your own capacities – it is as simple as that.

AVToday: How do you interpret Mother's statement that the City should house 50,000 people?

Pashi: There have been different interpretations. Some people believe that when Mother said 50,000 people, she also meant the 40,000 existing village inhabitants of the area. However, Roger Anger – who has talked so much on Auroville with Mother – is convinced that Mother didn't mean that. She meant 50,000 seekers who wish to follow the Charter of Auroville. This is an important point that is overlooked. What is Auroville, and why are we here in Auroville? Basically, we are here because we have accepted to work towards realising the ideals of Auroville – seekers of that Human Unity that is implied in Integral Yoga. From that point of view, building the City is not purely a development issue as it is understood all over. It has a totally different objective, because the physical manifestation is only one aspect of it. There are many other levels of manifestation in Auroville which are also among the real objectives of Auroville. And if we don't accept this, the question is "What are we doing in Auroville?"

AVToday: How does Auroville's Future plan to meet the challenge of 50,000 Aurovilians plus the village population, plus the satellite city growing around Auroville?

Pashi: This population of 50,000 may take a long, long time to materialize. We cannot determine how long it might take, because it is a voluntary effort on the part of the individual to choose to come and participate.

On the other hand, there is a standard, normal

growth rate of population outside Auroville, which follows a pattern as revealed in the Census. So 50,000 Auroville residents will share the region with a population of about 150,000 people – up from 40,000 today. Our responsibility as planners is to take into account the growth patterns of the entire bio-region. If we overlook that, we are asking for a serious problem.

Auroville will need to start thinking in terms of developing co-habitation. At the same time, we have to be wary of the fact that some villagers have only their own economic benefit in mind. The landowners, in particular, want to get the most out of it. So land-protection comes into play, not only for the City but for the Green Belt also. What form should it take?

For we may not have the resources, or even the intention, to acquire all the land in the Green Belt. One of the reasons the Green Belt was created as part of the town plan was to experiment on the ecological aspect along with the villages that are dependent on that land. So we cannot acquire it all and say, "Right this is our territory and you cannot enter."

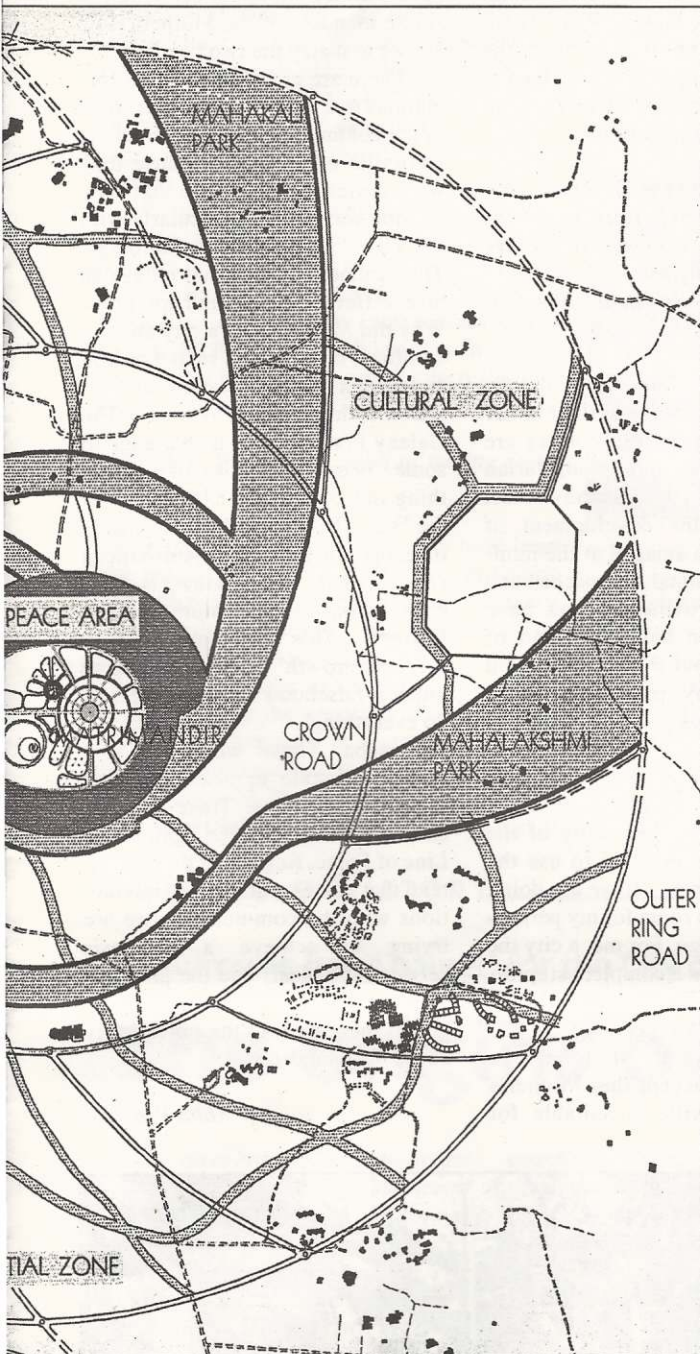
AVToday: How is the working relationship between Auroville's Future and other working groups in Auroville?

Sheril: In meetings, conflict points emerge more readily than the points of consensus. It's been the case before that people had a completely different opinion about how things should be. For example, the Zone Groups function independently, which can easily lead to differences of opinion, or confrontations.

There is now a trend being set where everyone is consulted. Many different issues that have come up in the recent past have been resolved by discussion. Now that we try to work together, there is not so much of a problem. We have realised that actually we have the same concerns, but a different way of expressing them. For example, I work regularly with the Industrial Zone Group as a representative from Auroville's Future. I keep them up-to-date with what is happening here. All the development and planning is now happening more in harmony.

Pashi: We feel that that some Aurovilians' points of view are based on emotions, rather than hard facts. But on whims or fancies or emotions you cannot plan a city; you cannot plan anything. So we need to get away from that emotional aspect of what so-and-so said, and the interpretation, to come to the statistic-based and data-based thinking to see what is practically possible and what is not.

Abha Prakash



Development

a simple guide to a complex subject...

Auroville's Future

Function: Administrative work of planning a city – water, power, transport etc. Essential nuts and bolts, plus some big-picture planning.

Mission: To implement Mother's vision of a city for 50,000 people, as evidenced in the plans of Roger Anger

Orientation: "What"

Team: 100% – meets all the criteria, even with Luigi absent

Efficiency: 100%

Style: Very positive – lots of talk about plans, intentions, networking. The office has charts showing involvement by AF people in events around the world, and a list of work priorities. Upbeat, but very grounded.

Leadership: Effective, pragmatic, patriarchal (the men spoke 10 times more than the women during our interview, based on MS Word word-count)

AV Ideals: 100%

Self-doubt: 0% – no need for it

Inclusivity: 75% – provided you're basically on board for the Mission, 0% – otherwise

AVT feeling: Rather overwhelmed

The Green Group

Function: Look after the nature side of things in Auroville

Mission: To develop Auroville step by step, as things emerge, always in harmony with Nature

Orientation: "How"

Team: 25% in conventional sense, but evident real affection between members gives a sort of glow to the whole thing

Efficiency: un-rateable – beside the point

Leadership: By example, and very effective

Style: Mixed. Curiously tentative, but very passionate. Depressive tendencies well counterbalanced by demonstrably effective optimism. Very likeable and witty, contributing only instances of actual humour in all four interviews (the name "Mistress Plan" itself nicely ironic).

AV Ideals: 0% – not the point at all

Self-doubt: 60% – goes with the territory, since greenwork is so much a matter of trial and error

Inclusivity: 65% – natural inclusive urges, frustrated by methodological conflicts

AVT feeling: Gentle, sad, oddly hopeful

The International Zone Group

Function: Planning and executing the development of the International Zone

Mission: Exploring, understanding and finally manifesting Mother's vision for the Zone

Orientation: "Why" ("We need to research and understand the vision... before working towards its realisation." – Ruslan)

Team: 85% – a large and very diverse team (including "virtual" members) brilliantly managed

Efficiency: 90% – pays small price for genuine diversity within the team

Leadership: Almost pathologically earnest and well-intentioned

Style: Intimidatingly together – an amalgam of research, good ideas, dauntless ambition ("Human Unity is only the beginning" – Ruslan), effective networking and a structured approach ("Let me list in order the buildings that currently exist" – Sergei)

AV Ideals: 50% – no ideological aggression, they're just getting on with it

Self-doubt: 10% – a healthy touch of humility in the face of a big task, but no doubt at all that it will be successful

Inclusivity: 80% – the highest score of any group, probably because their job is (a) outward looking by its very nature, and (b) still in its early days

AVT feeling: Perceptible feelings of awe and inferiority, hastily assuaged by New Creation Corner coffee

David C.

Left: photo collage of a model of a Line of Force: essential part of the city for some people, complete anathema for others.

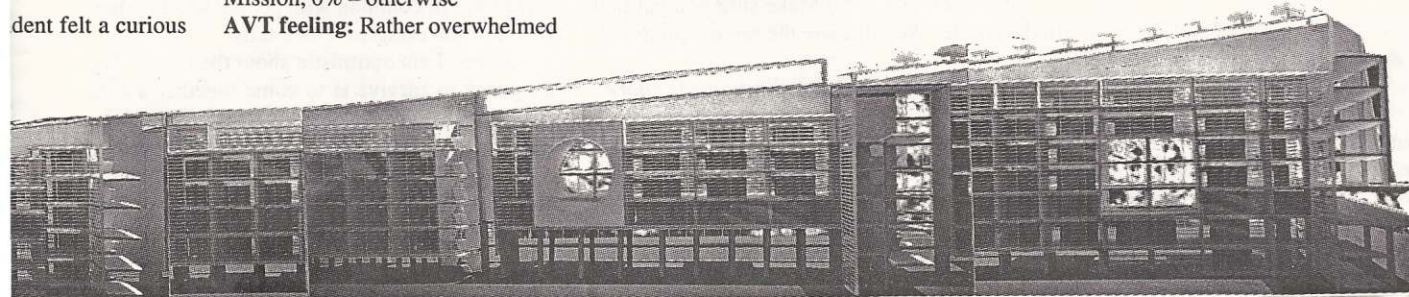


PHOTO: COURTESY: DOMINIQUE

"How are we to execute Mother's Will?"

An interview with Joseba and Peter A. of the Interim Development Council (IDC)

AVToday: The IDC's primary role is to implement the Master Plan. How far are you really able to fulfill this mandate?

Joseba: We are following the agreements formulated in May 2000. To develop the infrastructure and implement the perspective Master Plan which, as we know,

newcomers for this reason a couple of years ago. We, as Auroville's Development Group, started looking into the problems as we had seen some of these crises coming. The Reve housing project, for example, was begun. It catered to individuals and families with varying income levels. To reduce the overall costs, we financed the infrastructure of the

come from? Auroville cannot be developed on the funds generated by itself. The IDC has to find alternative sources.

Peter: The City is primarily a laboratory. All our living expressions should be based on research. As long as we are building our own tiny house for our own little family, we will never get money from the world. But if any thing we are doing, including the

For the continuation of this project, however, we need a huge amount of money. Even if we start our experiment on a limited scale and it is successful, we need more people to join in and we need substantial funds. We know that some people who like a 'countryside lifestyle' would like to remove the Line of Force altogether. But the question is, are we going to remove the fundamental elements of the Galaxy Plan? If we do, then we no longer have the Galaxy Plan. Roger Anger arrived at this vision of the city after a certain inner quest and conviction.

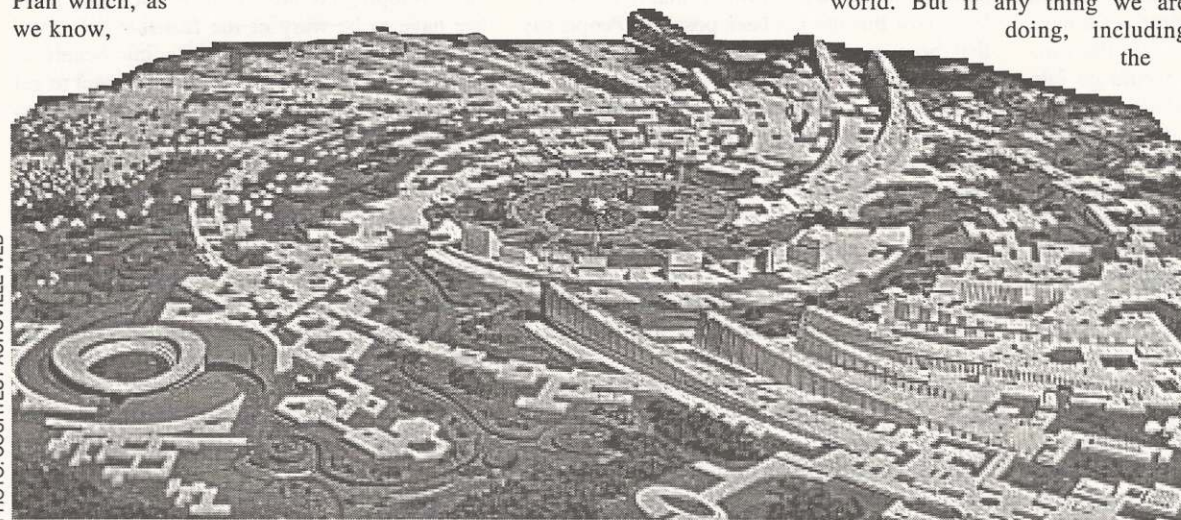
Auroville's future development.

Peter: There's exactly the crux of the matter – since the Mother is not present physically since 1973, how are we to execute the Mother's will? This has been a contested issue within the community. It is even ingrained in our legal way. We have a Residents' Assembly. On the other hand, for our city development, we have a Chief Architect carrying the single mandate of the Mother. How are we to marry the two?

There are also certain mind formations that we have to look at within the community. People joined the Auroville experiment because they were critical of the course that civilization was taking particularly with the cities and high-rise buildings. They cannot imagine that cities can take different forms and qualities. Why did Mother want a city and not a village, if the city is such a poison and such a hopeless case in the evolution of human development? The Galaxy Plan is really a challenge to some because it looks like something out of a 1960s urban map in the West. These people believe only in an organic growth for Auroville, a concept that, in my view, is built entirely on human nature and its instincts. This big emphasis on 'organic growth' for Auroville is as much a falsehood as 'planning will do everything'.

Joseba: Those who are for a 'green' lifestyle oppose the urban development plans. There are, for example, 90 signatures against the Line of Force. Regarding the discontent that arises out of our interactions with the community – we are trying to achieve a synthesis between the ideals and the practical plan of action. If this bridge is forgotten then we lose the potentiality of the original dream.

Abha Prakash



The Galaxy model. The prominent long buildings are known as 'the lines of force'.

is a broad, directional plan without details. That is our role in principle. But at every step we have to be in contact with Auroville's Future to identify the needs regarding development in Auroville.

The main problem is that the community does not give any material resources for development. To let you know the seriousness of our position, from this July we have not even one rupee to continue for the next financial year. So we spend a lot of time and energy preparing project proposals in order to finance our activities.

The community, for the past five years now, has been going through several crises, including housing and economy. Auroville was closed to

project through outside donor agencies to which we presented viable proposals.

The Development Group is sensitive to Auroville's realities and takes necessary steps toward solutions regardless of the conflicts it sometimes faces within the community.

AVToday: What is the IDC doing to find the resources and the money to build the city?

Joseba: If you look at Auroville's basic infrastructure needs for water and energy and non-polluting collective transport, hundreds of crores of rupees are necessary. But where are these crores to

house, is looking towards the future, then the money will come. We are not expressive enough in that adventure.

AVToday: Given Auroville's monetary dependence on the outside world, would you say that it has to open itself more to innovative, urban development?

Joseba: Absolutely. For example, I am part of the first experiment in the Line of Force collective housing project which is fundamental to the Galaxy Plan approved by the Mother. The first phase was completed with the available funds from the participants: money was given according to each person's ability.

"A bit loose"

An interview with Gemma, Kireet and Sydo of the Green Group

AVToday: How does the Green Group function?

Gemma: The way that the Green Belt Group functions is a bit loose. To a certain extent, we see what happens. Our overall planning idea is to start off with a vague thing – these are the general aims and this is roughly where it would happen – and see where it goes. If a project appears, and it needs to go somewhere, we find somewhere for it to go.

Kireet: We say, "please look at how Nature is here, and try to build according to that." That asks for a very conscious, very sensitive approach. And that is step-by-step, I feel. Of course, we have to think in accordance with what we want, but each step has to be considered again and again.

Sydo: Planning is hard. You can say, "Okay, there we want farms." But where to find the people? Not many people want to be farmers! Do you need town-planners? The town forms itself, as it has shown over the years. The only thing the town-planners have said so far is "Don't build here, don't build there."

Kireet: We have to think ahead, and not backwards. We have a lot of philosophy to put in the right place. But if it's a plan like the Galaxy Plan, I have my doubts. Although I was very impressed with it at the time, in 1972! We should always ask, "Would Mother still think it's now the right attitude?"

Gemma: The IDC and Auroville's Future wanted to write a more detailed Masterplan, and they asked us again and again to contribute the Green Belt part of it. Our instinctive reaction was always a kind of 'Oh no', because even the best

plan tends to get so rigid after a while. It doesn't matter whether we make it or someone else makes it – it still has this tendency. But then we thought, 'All right. We need to make some kind of contribution. We make an effort. We contribute. But we contribute in our way.' So we wrote 'The Mistress Plan' to complement the Master Plan.

AVToday: Are there any strong views on the city?

Sydo: It's not so much in the development of buildings, or the development of roads and infrastructure. The city evolves more in a cultural way. I feel we are most a city when we have a cultural event that is really good. In this respect we're growing as a city. Ten or twenty years ago as I understand it, there were very few cultural events happening. It was a very basic life. In that sense we have grown and become more city-like. But I think we are now in between city and rural.

Kireet: Why not spread it out more? There is still a lot of land available. Why put it so densely together? I really like what Kahlil Gibran said about building the cities of the future. You have a house, the green around, and you are in harmony with nature.

AVToday: How do you see the process within Auroville?

Gemma: What is important is how we do it. I have this opinion, you have that opinion and so forth, and that's fine. They're all fine opinions to have. But how to get past these opinions? What really frustrates me is when you go to these meet-



Hanging loose: creepers entwine trees in the Auroville forest.

ings and you see this (*bangs fists together*) all the time. Everybody has the same aspiration. Everybody wants Auroville to work. Everybody wants it to function.

Kireet: Often, people like to make it complicated.

Gemma: But the bottom line is that we all share the same aspiration. We all share that. It should make it so easy.

Sydo: (to AVToday) Make sure you put that in the article. "We all share the same aspiration."

AVToday: So what is that aspiration you share?

Kireet: To build in a harmonious way, in a simple way, considering nature all the time, be in harmony with it. We have reached a certain population on this Earth, and we are grabbing, we are destroying, we are breaking down, it is getting

worse, some species are gone... We are trying to reverse that trend here.

Gemma: But that's your thing. Everybody's is different. That is your aspiration for Auroville. The thing that we have in common is that we all believe in Auroville. But the Auroville we believe in is different for everyone. The common thing is that we believe in it. It's not what we believe, but that the belief is there. That's what I feel I have in common with people whom otherwise I would disagree with totally.

Kireet: I am optimistic about the future. The only way to survive is to come together and to co-operate and work together. Otherwise Auroville will not succeed. I am still optimistic.

Sydo: Yes. All these problems that show up, they are challenges and opportunities to grow and see more.

David C

"Spiritual Embassies"

An interview with Peter A., Ruslan Y. and Sergei of the International Zone Group

AVToday: What is the International Zone for?

Peter: The International Zone is the work area where Auroville interacts most strongly with the outside world. Through AVI (Auroville International) Centres, the countries participate directly in the development of the International Zone. So it is the Interface Zone. We are challenged by high expectations and helpers from outside. We are reminded from outside what we should do. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why Mother introduced the International Zone. Or we may live in our village-consciousness of yesteryear and forget why we came here.

Ruslan: Mother said the University will be the key, the *raison d'être* for Auroville. The University and whole of the International Zone is about Human Unity, one of the conditions for the realisation of the new consciousness in the world. But it is just a condition. It is an aim for us now, but it will be a means for the realisation of new consciousness.

AVToday: What is the point of having separate national pavilions?

Sergei: Nations up to this time have been the biggest entities that united human beings, but which also had some kind of individuality. They are the largest gatherings of humans. This is probably why Mother wanted to work with them. Roger Anger wrote – "Pavilions should represent what the countries brought for the evolution of humanity as a whole." The whole question of Auroville is the evolution of human consciousness. The Pavilions represent the main achievements of the nations in this regard.

Ruslan: Countries are real, alive beings. This idea of Mother about the soul of nations, it is a reality – not just words. People should be able to get in contact with it. Of course, this is possible only when you develop yourself. When you go deep enough to contact your own psychic being, then you can start research on the nation and you find a soul there. On this level,

There is a lot of resistance to this in Auroville, partly because there is a feeling that 'We are international'; and partly because some people left their country on a negative note.

AVToday: How is the progress so far

Ruslan: The International Zone's mission



The Unity Pavilion under construction in the International Zone.

the spiritual level, all nations are united. Here we may realise unity, real unity of humanity.

Peter: People ask, "Why go for nations at all in a time of globalisation?" But we now understand that you have to develop as an individual – as a person or a nation – before being able to transcend and unify. The emphasis on the nation soul is strong, and it should express before you go through to universal brotherhood.

has been very generally described by the Mother and in some works of Sri Aurobindo. We need really to develop the vision more in detail. As it becomes clear, we can start working towards its realisation. Our Group has three architects. We also have virtual participants – the AVI members overseas, and those Aurovilians who do not regularly attend our meetings, but are concerned with the International Zone. So a group of

maybe 30 people participate in this process of understanding.

AVToday: Which countries are most advanced in their planning?

Sergei: The French are very active, of course, with cultural links to Pondicherry and so forth. A Spanish group has published a book on the soul of Spain which would serve as a model of work for the International Zone. The Italians are active, holding exhibitions and concerts here under title of Italian Pavilion. The Germans recently came out with a well-developed concept... maybe soon they will be ready for the physical stage. The Russian Ambassador recently visited Auroville briefly with the Consul-General from Madras. His last words were, "Start building the Russian Pavilion as soon as possible!"

Ruslan: There is also the African Pavilion. Tekeste is an Aurovillian from Ethiopia. His main aim in being here for the last 5 years has been to establish a connection between Auroville and Africa. He has a strong feeling for the unity of Africa itself – so everyone speaks of the African Pavilion, rather than Ethiopian Pavilion, the Egyptian Pavilion and so forth.

Sergei: There has recently been a movement by France to kick-start the European Plaza, which has been dormant for a long while. It is difficult to assess the level of agreement, but probably the French, the Germans and the Italians will participate. The European Plaza is particularly significant, because it may provide common facilities. These may include a conference hall, a concert hall, an exhibition hall and so forth. The individual pavilions should not have to provide all their own facilities.

David C

AUROVILLE HISTORY

Has Auroville been named for the City of Dawn – or has it been named after Sri Aurobindo?

The origins of the name 'Auroville'

"...there has even been the dream or a psychic prevision of a fulfilment exceeding the individual transformation, a new earth and heaven, a city of God, a divine descent upon earth, a reign of the spiritually perfect, a kingdom of God not only within us but outside, in a collective human life."¹

In the 1930's in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram the number of sadhaks was just above a hundred; the relationship with the outer world was reduced to a minimum; the admission of new inmates was virtually stopped. Sadhana entered its golden age, and Sri Aurobindo soon foresaw the possibility of a massive manifestation of the supramental plane. In 1930 the Mother stated:

"The work of achieving a continuity which permits one to go up and down and bring into the material what is above, is done inside the consciousness. He who is meant to do it, the Avatar, even if he were shut up in a prison and saw nobody and never moved out, still would he do the work, because it is a work in the consciousness, a work of connection between the Supermind and the material being. He does not need to be recognised, he need have no outward power in order to be able to establish this conscious connection. Once, however, the connection is made, it must have its effect in the outward world in the form of a new creation, beginning with a model town and ending with a perfect world."²

In the mid-1930's, being offered a large estate on a hill near Hyderabad in Andhra Pradesh with a large river flowing below, the Mother

conceived of a first model town, to be organized around her symbol. On her request Antonin Raymond (the architect of Golconde) came up with a layout echoing the concept of the radial city of the Italian Renaissance and eternal utopia. The Mother spoke of that early vision as of an ideal country, much grander than Auroville, economically self-sufficient, encircled by walls: a real *temenos*, with Sri Aurobindo living at the centre. This formation resurfaced in 1960, when the 'ideal city' took the character of 'a small supramental creation'. The Mother told Satprem:

"What would it be like, for instance, to have a small supramental creation as a nucleus of action and influence radiating upon earth (to limit it to the earth)? Is it possible? (...) Is it possible to find a place where the embryo or seed of the future supramental world might be created?"

What I myself have seen... was a plan that came complete in all details, but that doesn't at all conform in spirit and consciousness with what is possible on earth now (although, in its most material manifestation, the plan was based on existing terrestrial conditions). It was the idea of an ideal city, the nucleus of a small ideal country, having only superficial and extremely limited contacts with the old world."³

Had the time come? In 1964, on the occasion of the first World Conference of the Sri Aurobindo Society, the project of Auroville was

first presented to the public. On June 23, 1965, the Mother told Satprem that she was the one who called it 'Auroville'. This is confirmed by Huta who writes that it was the Mother, at the beginning of 1965, who named the new town Auroville.⁵

Greetings from Auroville

In the Report on the Quarter of the *Bulletin of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram*, April 1965, the double terminology, Sri Aurobindo's town and the City of Dawn, is introduced for the first time:

"We publish in the issue some pictures of Auroville, our new project. This project which has been inspired by A Dream of the Mother is for a full township named after Sri Aurobindo, 'Auroville', which is the 'City of Dawn'."

In a long and detailed speech, delivered by Navajata (the then Secretary of the Sri Aurobindo Society⁴) in November 1967 for All India Radio, among other things it was stated, "Named after Sri Aurobindo, Auroville literally means the City of Dawn". The draft had been first read to the Mother, who approved of it. In her visit to Auroville in 1969 the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi also referred to Auroville as named after Sri Aurobindo. It thus appears that Auroville was presented from the beginning as named after Sri

Aurobindo – as well as 'The City of Dawn'.

Though there is no written evidence about the Mother referring to Auroville as the City of Dawn, the fact that this appears in official documents from the earliest years is proof

enough that she approved of it. The same applies, for even more obvious reasons, to the association with Sri Aurobindo's name. It seems, however, that replying in her own handwriting to a letter from Eleanor Montgomery (the founder of the Sri Aurobindo International Centre in New York, which would later become the Foundation for World Education) the Mother explained that Auroville's name came from the French 'City of Dawn'; this document, however, is still to be traced.

But where is the contradiction? Georges Van Vrekhem's explanation in his book *The Mother – The story of her life*, makes a lot of sense: "Auroville means 'City of Dawn' and is closely connected with the supramental transformation, the Sun being the symbol of the supramental." And: "The Mother, presumably wanting to ensure that her and Sri Aurobindo's teaching and its material expressions did not become a religion, has stated that Auroville means 'City of Dawn,' referring to the French word *aurore*

which means dawn. It is, however, clear that the name of Sri Aurobindo remains associated with it."⁶

This may well be the end of the query. Those practicing Integral Yoga may spontaneously relate to Auroville as named after Sri Aurobindo, whereas those coming for a more general human unity have the freedom to relate to it as 'the City of Dawn'. Nor are the two mutually exclusive. Whatever way we choose, one implies the other, for Auroville is both: Sri Aurobindo's town, and the dawning of the supramental sun. Also because mottoes such as goodwill, human unity etc. were (and are) misunderstood, from 1972 onwards the Mother kept insisting in many messages that Auroville is to foster the advent of the supramental reality, while her very last message commences "Auroville is to realize the ideal of Sri Aurobindo who taught us the Karma Yoga. Auroville is for those who want to do the Yoga of work."

Paulette

¹ Sri Aurobindo, SABCL vol. 19, pp. 846-847

² CWM, Vol.3, pp 178-179

³ Mother's Agenda, 18.7.61

⁴ The Mother was the chairman of this international organization, which she had started in 1960.

⁵ Matrimandir, Mother's Truth and Love, by Huta, p. 3

⁶ The Mother – The story of her life, by Georges Van Vrekhem, p. 497 and fn. p. 498

The future of Auroville farming?

A high-powered team is assessing the viability of Auroville farms

There are four aspects of the farms' assessment. One focuses upon the history of farming in Auroville, examining the original vision and how farming has changed over the years. Another major aspect will examine the situation of the farms today (comprehensive data will be compiled and analysed for each farm), while another will ascertain the market for Auroville farm produce. Finally, strategies will be worked out which attempt to bridge the gap between the present reality and the farmers' and the community's stated objectives.

The impressive project team comprises John, who has thirty years of farming experience in the U.K. and southern Europe, David, who has degrees in tropical soil management and ecological agriculture and ten years experience of NGO management in Africa and Asia, Natasha, who has degrees in Biochemistry and Zoology and has farmed in India, Priya who has a Ph.D. in sociology and 15 years experience working in market research, and Tomas who has farmed in Auroville for many years.

Auroville farmers have not always had a good press. They have been criticized over the years for, among other things, not producing enough, for always wanting subsidies and for selling their produce at exorbitant rates. "This is rather unfair," says John. "Auroville farmers are farming in the most difficult way under some of the most testing conditions in the world. Only a limited range of foods can be relatively easily grown in this area. And while it's true that some farmers have received significant financial help over the years, there has always been a chronic lack of funds for basic infrastructure."

Then there is the management issue. "Most Auroville farmers are stressed-out by the responsibilities they're carrying," explains John. "The farmers have found it very difficult to find people to share management responsibilities because farming is not an attractive option for most Aurovilians, and Indians who qualify in farm management don't want to go into the fields."

There is also the lack of technical input. John is one of the first professional farmers to farm in Auroville. While he notes that quite a lot of research has been done by individual farmers over the years, some of it, he says, has been about reinventing the wheel. "What astonishes me," says David, "is that we don't even have a soil map of Auroville. There are so many gaps in our knowledge. For example, there's a real need for expert technical input to help us assess what can be grown in this bioregion, or the options for improved processing and storage of Auroville farm produce. And while Brooks is doing a first-class energy audit of Annapurna Farm, this is a ten year project which, in its present form, is too complex for the average Auroville farmer to make use of."

Finally, there is the matter of the changing tastes of Aurovilians. In the early years the com-

munity was small, many Aurovilians were involved in afforestation and farming and locally-grown food, like ragi and varagu, was the staple diet. Today, conditions have changed. The population is larger, only a very small proportion is engaged in farming, and many Aurovilians seem to prefer processed or imported food to that which can be grown locally. One aspect of the assessment process will focus on collecting information concerning what Aurovilians are actually eating today.

"The fundamental need as I see it," says John, "is to tie the farmers into the market. At present there is a growing gap between what Auroville farmers grow and what Aurovilians prefer to eat." Although the Solar Kitchen takes much of the farms' produce at present, John points out that the farmers could experiment more with what they grow – "sweetcorn, for example, which is a popular food and a much-needed source of carbohydrates would grow well here, as would onions" – while David notes that locally-grown organic food, which sometimes looks unattractive on the shelf beside chemically-grown products, could be made more interesting if it is prepared in innovative ways: "Dr. Beena's recent Auroville cookbook is a good step in this direction."

But closing the gap between what our farmers produce and what many Aurovilians buy is

Auroville food is either labelled as, or implied to be, organic. In fact, according to guidelines laid down by organic accreditation agencies in the West, hardly any Auroville produce would qualify for this status. One of the potential outcomes of the farms' assessment is to establish a code of practice in order to guarantee the quality of Auroville produce.

Then again there is the question of environmental awareness. David believes that older Aurovilians tend to be more concerned about what they eat and where it comes from than the younger generation. In order to partly remedy this situation, David's wife, Natasha, is currently developing a curriculum which teaches ecological literacy through farming.

Finally there is the issue of productivity. While our farms produce significant quantities of seasonal vegetables and fruit, there is still a huge shortfall in the production of staples like rice (currently only Annapurna and Siddhartha farm are producing rice for Auroville). Why is this? Partly it's a matter of lack of soil fertility. However, as the assessment team discovered, not all the farmers see producing good food in quantity as their prime objective: some put more emphasis upon research or upon preserving the physical environment. The priority they also give to health, well-being and spirituality reflects, to some extent, the unique nature of farming in Auroville.

One important question that needs to be answered, however, is that of food security. Does Auroville want to be self-sufficient in terms of food? While most Aurovilians appear to favour this in principle, the issue is complex. If food security means growing indigenous food locally, then either more Aurovilians would need to take up farming and we would have to acquire much more farm land, or we would need to encourage local village farmers to switch from cash crops and become our organic suppliers.

Such a locally-grown organic diet would be limited. Could Westerners thrive upon it? In the early years many Western Aurovilians tried living on a wholly indigenous diet. Almost all of them fell sick because their metabolisms couldn't cope. "This is one reason why the assessment group is adopting a more pragmatic definition of food security," explains David. "We're defining it not only in terms of what can be grown locally but also in terms of what many Aurovilians are eating at present. For example, potatoes and apples are popular but cannot be grown here. So this wider definition of food security would imply that Auroville would have its own farms, or links with organic farmers, up in the hills where such food can be grown."

The farms' assessment project is still in its early stages. However, the team is already think-



David and John

ing about other possible strategies for the future. While they emphasize that they're not interested in forcing all the Auroville farmers into one mould, they see advantages in the farms marketing and selling their produce collectively, in developing new markets outside Auroville and increasing food processing as a means of selling excess production. They also suggest that additional accommodation could be provided on all the Auroville farms to encourage young people with few resources to take up farming (as one Auroville farmer put it, "We are an ageing population").

As for improved technical input, the assessment team suggests that institutions which already have links with Auroville, like the University of Washington, Wageningen Agricultural University and the GEOCommons organization, could encourage qualified students to do applied research on topics like food production, energy efficiency and marketing in Auroville. Additional help is needed to carry out other, no less important tasks like data collection and entry.

"The key to the success of all the strategies we are proposing is how they integrate with each other," says David. "We need to become familiar with 'joined-up thinking', an approach which makes us consider the interconnections and the larger implications of our choices and actions. If, for example, we decide to produce more for modern tastes, how will this impact upon costs and the environment? If our farmers concentrate more upon supplying a basic indigenous-type diet, how will this affect consumer behaviour? If we don't attempt to change the low status accorded to farm work both in Auroville and in India, how can we expect to attract the brightest and most committed people to farming?" This is not a kind of thinking which comes naturally to farmers, many of whom are already overwhelmed by the daily details of their work. "Which is why," says John, "the farmers are to be praised for agreeing to participate in this assessment. It will mean a lot more work for them, and the findings may be painful for some, yet they have been very cooperative. I sense that the farmers in the Farm Group have reached a stage where they are able to be honest both with themselves and with each other in the interests of improving their work. This could become a model for other groups in Auroville."

Alan



Bullocks: Indispensable for farming

more than just about changing tastes. "The Auroville farms' pricing system is badly out of kilter," says John. "It takes no note of seasonal variations in the market of conventionally-grown food. Also, many customers don't understand why they have to pay such high prices for our farmers' produce."

In other words, giving clear and correct information is one of the keys to rebuilding consumer confidence. For example, the assumption that food grown or produced in Auroville is of higher quality than food available in the conventional market allows Auroville farmers and processors to charge a premium rate for their products. But is Auroville produce always better? If so, in what way and how much is it better?

Then there is the issue of labelling. Most

LAND

Landi for the land

CARTOON: EMANUELE



Donations for the land are gaining momentum, as are creative ideas for raising money. To date, well over \$250,000 has been raised.

Some of the international initiatives include:

- a group of 25 people in Holland are committed to working one day a week to raise money for the land. In one week they raised \$1,200
- June Maher from California is planning to raise \$1,000 by cooking meals for her friends and inviting them to pay \$25 a head
- Chandresh Patel, another Californian, will run for 100 minutes and he's inviting friends to sponsor him by the minute. He's pledged to match whatever people sponsor him for and

he's hoping to raise \$10,000

- AVI Italy is holding flea markets and making things to sell for the land
- 2,000 Euros were raised during the German AVI meeting, while participants in the AVI meeting in Paris raised a similar sum after passing round a basket
- AVI USA has recently sent a 1000x \$1,000 appeal to about 1,500 friends in the USA
- with support from the AVI Centers, the Land Fund team is preparing a similar direct mailing campaign to about 1,500 friends in Europe

Initiatives within Auroville include:

- on 12th July a Sports Day was held at which the land situation was publicized. Special events included a celebrity obstacle race in which prominent members of the community were sponsored to participate. They could only back out if they pay the equivalent of the amount they have been sponsored for!
- on August 15th a fair will be held at the

Visitors Centre which will sell Auroville products for the land and give information to visitors about the land situation

- the Forest Group is donating to the land all receipts of its 10% fund for the next six months
- Aurovilians are passing on land information and appeals to their personal email address lists
- a personal appeal was recently sent to a number of Aurovilians. They have donated or pledged \$20,000 so far
- the birth of Landi, the land mascot drawn by Emanuele. The Landi campaign includes five easy things to do for the land – buy a lottery ticket and pledge half of any winnings to the Land Fund (between 4th-10th August, which has been designated Landi Lottery Week, everybody is urged to purchase a lottery ticket); buy a meal for Landi when you eat out; buy a dress or pair of jeans for Landi when you shop for clothes; organize a surprise party for Landi by telling all your friends who know about Auroville to send a small donation as a gift; go for a walk on the and

land remember how much you appreciate it. Landi posters are going up everywhere and Landi stickers will be given to people who donate for the land at Auroville restaurants. Eight stickers will qualify for a free ice cream!

As Paul, one of the moving forces behind the Million Dollar Challenge, puts it, "The idea behind all these initiatives is to get as many people as possible thinking about the land issue while trying to create simple ways in which they can raise the money we need. Rarely a day goes by without us hearing about another pledge of \$1,000. However, if the goal of raising \$1,000,000 by 15th August is to be reached it means \$20,000 a day has to be raised from now on. It sounds preposterous, but that's what I enjoy about life: doing the unfeasible."

Alan



Drawing the World

“Drawing is a universal language,” says Emanuele, an Italian born cartoonist who settled in Auroville in 1995. “When you draw, you can travel to any country in the world and you can express yourself, communicate with people, even if you do not speak the local language.”

Emanuele discovered his passion for drawing as a child. At the age of sixteen, he started working for his father's company in Italy, designing greeting cards. Some twelve years later he came to Auroville, where he started concentrating on making cartoons and illustrating children's books.

A lot of the children's books he has been illustrating over the years are educational and deal with the environment. Amongst others, he made drawings for the *Shikra* collection of books, which were published in both English and Tamil and dealt with wildlife in the bio-region. He also illustrated the book *The Gita of Waste*, which explains waste management to children and he has been working on a book about the water cycle of the region.

“Through this work, I am myself learning a lot about the environment,” says Emanuele, “and really enjoying it. Illustrations are a great tool for creating awareness about the environment. One can convey a lot through images. One can make people laugh, and one can also make people think.”

At present, Emanuele is working for the TDEF (Tropical Dry Evergreen Forest) project, together with Joss and

Paul. He is working on a poster and eventually will be illustrating a series of educational books which will be used in the schools of Auroville and the bio region. The poster shows seven indigenous trees in all their majesty, which will later be studied in the books in detail. Each tree will have a spirit (which one can already glimpse merged in the tree trunks), which will lead the children through the stories. Looking at the poster, one is amazed by all the small details that come to form a whole, whether it is the shy mongoose looking out from behind a bush, the snakes engaged in their mating dance, the graceful paradise fly

inspiration, especially for young people.”

He also works on small stories, the latest of which, *Sunaka puranam* or *the Chronicles of an Ordinary Dog*, is a parody of human beings who aspire to practice integral Yoga. Both *The Gunas* and *Sunaka Puranam* can be viewed on the Auroville website.

“I am also working on a character – writing a comic book,” says Emanuele, “It will take another few years to finalise it. This character I am creating will be a very ordinary man, who goes through life (childhood, adolescence, adulthood). He will experience normal life: joy, suffering,

“In Auroville, there is time and opportunity to learn about your nature, who you are inside, and to develop whatever it is one has chosen to do,” feels Emanuele. “If you believe in who you are inside, you can create, or attract opportunities that make you learn more about what you have chosen to express. You meet the right people at the right time, the circumstances help you to develop your experience.”

Asked whether his style has changed since he has come to Auroville, Emanuele explains, “Having spent over twelve years in the world of greeting cards, I was working on syntheses made by others. I was greatly influenced by Walt Disney. When I arrived in Auroville, I felt the need to find my own, individual style. I started to try and unscrew my commercial hand and fit on a new one. And I am still working on that. I think I still have a long road in front of me.”

“I study a lot from real life,” he continues, “It is from real life that you can get to the essence or truth of things. After the study of real life, you digest it, and it comes out through your filter.”

Emmanuelle



Cartoons: self-portrait of the artist at work

catcher in flight, or the delicate dragon fly resting on the lily leaves in the pond. Nature, in all its beauty and diversity has been brought alive by Emanuele's great skill.

Emanuele also creates cartoons and comics for the AVNet and AVWebsite. He has worked, together with Manoj, on a series of comic strips entitled *The Gunas*, which deal with the three Gunas: Tamas, Rajas and Sattva, depicting how they influence the life of an ordinary man. “We are trying to convey the meaning of a secret life behind our life through comics,” explains Emanuele. “It is a different approach, and can serve as

adventures, relationships. But every now and then, something else, another character of sorts, will be coming up...”

Recently, Emanuele has also started discovering and exploring a different medium – painting on stone. He uses granite, kaddappa stone and marble. “It is a research,” he explains, “I want to try and paint miniatures on stone. I make collages, assemble the stone with wood, then I scratch a little. In fact, it is the stone, and its texture, that is guiding my brush.” Some of his beautiful stone paintings are on display in Savitri Bhavan. (One of them is featured on page one of this issue.)



AUROVILLE INTERNATIONAL

The AVI meeting in France

When the Auroville International (AVI) centres came together for their 2002 meeting in California it was decided to have, exceptionally, two meetings in 2003. While the first one, which took place in Auroville in February, was mainly organized to make the AVI's work better known inside Auroville (see AV Today of March 03), the second one was needed for some internal AVI topics. The beautiful venue, the Chateau Meridon 30 km southwest of Paris run by a Franco-Dutch cultural foundation, and our charming hosts, the French AVI team, helped to make it again one of those heart-warming gatherings of the worldwide AVI family. To reach the chateau challenged our adventurous spirit – French workers had just gone on General Strike – but a warm welcome and the superb “haute cuisine” of the Meridon team amply made up for it.

Following the motto of our meeting, “Under the Sign of Human Unity”, most of our discussions and workshops focussed on the development of the International Zone of Auroville. We had intense exchange sessions involving pavilion groups, which are seen as the carriers and focalizers of energy streaming into the creation of the national pavilions (in the case of Germany, they can also become the nucleus and motor of fruitful AVI work). In a parallel program other groups explored the questions of “Human Unity and Society” and “Human Unity and Disturbances – events that marked the world since 1968”. The practical outcome of the last group was a long roll of paper where events and their dates were written down. When we met for our last day's final sharing, it was laid out and

everybody was asked to write down the year when he or she first came into contact with Mother and Sri Aurobindo, or Auroville, and say some words about it. What a beautiful bunch of touching stories we put together!

But before this we had a good mixture of hard work and fun. Under the first category fall the discussions about some necessary changes in the AVI statutes and the choosing and electing of new office holders. We ended up with “ladies to the fore”: Sonia Dyne (AVI Great Britain) as new Chairman, Sylvie Piot (AVI France) as Treasurer and Friederike Werner (AVI Germany) as Secretary. Wolfgang Schmidt-Reinecke, who had to vacate the chair according to the statutes, was appointed Executive Director, remaining one of the strong pillars of our AVI work. As one of our important future tasks we see a closer cooperation with international bodies dedicated to Human Unity like UNESCO. Aurovilian Yanne Dimay, one of the organizers of the very successful Auroville presentation at the recent

UNESCO conference in Paris, gave us a very uplifting report. According to her, UNESCO doors are now much wider open for us than in the past.

As to the fun...there was a visit to Versailles and its magnificent chateaux; an evening which included a classical Indian dance performed by beautiful Devasmita Patnaik and an impressive-expressive modern dance performance by Paolo Baetens; another evening of popular French songs, saucily presented by singers dressed up in the Montparnasse style of the Twenties; a slide show of Dominique Darr's “35 years of Auroville”; Bhaga Gabrias's workshop on “Consciousness of the Cells”; and a last evening bonfire under the full summer moon where members of each nation present (we counted 16!) con-

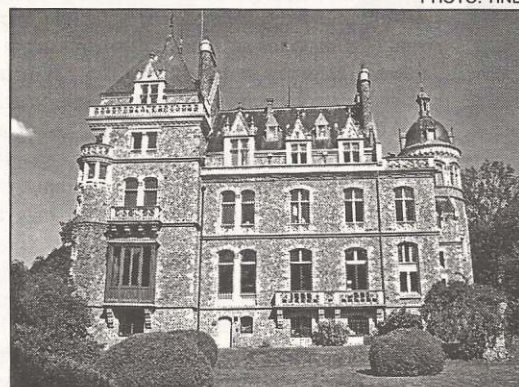


PHOTO: TINE

Chateau Meridon, venue of the 2003 Auroville International meeting

tributed something typical from their country – a song, story or joke. So many beautiful voices to discover!

For me, the success of our meeting was most deeply expressed by one of our first time participants: he said he had come with the stressful feeling that he had to contribute “something substantial”, only to discover that there was only one thing that he needed to do: TO BE.

Friederike

TONGUE-IN-CHEEK

Good News for Auroville yacht-owners

We are delighted to announce that thirty-five years of intense lobbying by the notoriously luxury-loving Aurovilian community has finally culminated in success. According to an article in The Hindu on 17th June, the Pondicherry Government is “planning to set-up a yacht marina that will be able to house 2,000 luxury yachts.”

Assuming there are 1,200 Aurovilians on the Master List, this is

an allowance of approximately 1.7 yachts each. “Obviously, we would prefer to have space for more than this,” commented one Aurovilian (who preferred to remain imaginary) “but it's a good start.”

It does, however, raise the problem of whether a yacht-mooring will now form part of the “basic needs” which Auroville undertakes to provide for its citizens. A population of 50,000 would mean – on current projections – a need for 83,000 moor-

ings. This will be a stretch for the coastal resource of the Union Territory.

In the meantime, by rigorously excluding Newcomers and Guests we should be able to meet our yacht-mooring needs for the next few years.

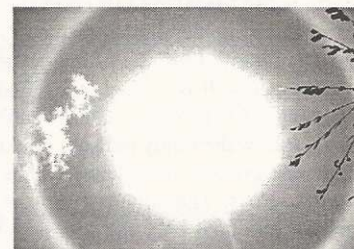
Auroville Today recently had to sell its corporate yacht, as part of a cost-cutting exercise. We will auction-off our pre-booked (since 1988) mooring shortly.

David C.

In brief

Solar Halo

Auroville and Pondicherry witnessed the rare phenomenon of a halo around the sun for a few hours on the afternoon of June 27. The scientific explanation is that halos are caused due to light refraction by ice crystals present in the cirrus clouds. A spiritual explanation has not yet been forthcoming.



Schools starting

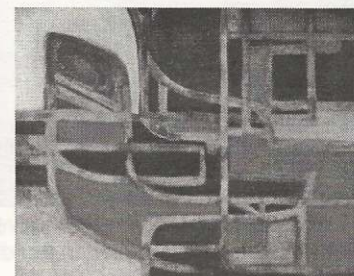
The Auroville schools re-opened after their summer recess with a gathering of children, parents and teachers around the Banyan tree near the Matrimandir listening to Sunil's music.

Exalted Bodies

During the month of July a photo exhibition on classical dances of India was running simultaneously at Bharat Nivas in Auroville, at the Aurodhan Art Gallery, the French College and at the Alliance Française in Pondicherry. The photographer Mireille-Josephine Guezennec travelled extensively in India for over a decade to photograph eminent Indian classical dances. For her work she was awarded the “Prix Kodak Grand Reportage”. The inauguration was preceded by a short Odissi dance performance by Kanchana and her students.

Yvonne Artaud

Under the title ‘Argo, ou la grande aventure de la vie’, Yvonne Artaud exhibited paintings in Savitri Bhavan and in the Aurelec Cafeteria.

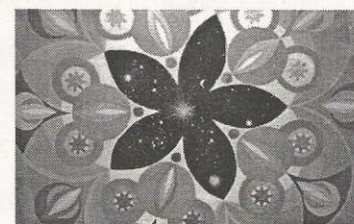


Gotipua dance

A series of photos on Gotipua dance, made by Dr. Susil Pani, was exhibited in Pitanga. Gotipua is an art form developed in the state of Orissa where boys from the age of 6 to 14 years old, dressed like girls, perform both dance sequences and asanas and acrobatic postures.

Happy rhythms of the Spirit

Aurovilian Soham exhibited his drawings ‘Happy rhythms of the Spirit’ at Savitri Bhavan.



Passings

Ramalingam, a 37 year old Tamil Aurovilian who was the main trainer at New Creation's Woodcraft Training centre, left his body on Tuesday, May 6th, 03. Marika Wackevitch, the mother of Igor Wackevitch, who was living in Courage, left her body on May 29, at the age of 85.

Grave Business

Auroville's least talked about real estate

Diary: Cycling up the Edayanchavadi road towards Adventure to see Auroville crematorium.

Following the directions given verbally by a friend, I look for a rusty metal gate after the farm house belonging to a Pondicherry business man. I see it blending imperceptibly with the live fence, its trellised frame plaited with dry mullu stems. It is locked, but I find footholds. Tossing my bag inside, I clamber up and drop in.

I follow the sandy red path, snaking between the wild growth of cashews, palms, and silver 'work' trees. The sounds from the road grow fainter and now only the occasional noise of a passing motor vehicle filters through the silence of that lazy June afternoon.

Suddenly I am in a clearing. On the periphery, nestled amidst a triangle of palmyras and a work tree, a gravestone catches my eye. On it, hewn in English,

Bonaventure

1947 - 1996

Aurovilian

Simplicity, Tamil Nadu

and the same in Tamil script. At its base, a lone ceramic gnome with blue boots and a pointed cap contemplates, a pipe at his lips.

Butterflies flutter past and bird-calls slice through the hush. It seems like a perfect place to rest.



The memorial stone for Bonaventure whose body was buried in Pondicherry

"If you don't get supramentalized, you will die!" declares Cristo with a straight face. "So a group of us came together in 1999 to promote Auroville's own cemetery and burial ground." They called themselves the Farewell Group - a team of Aurovilians concerned with providing amenities for the final

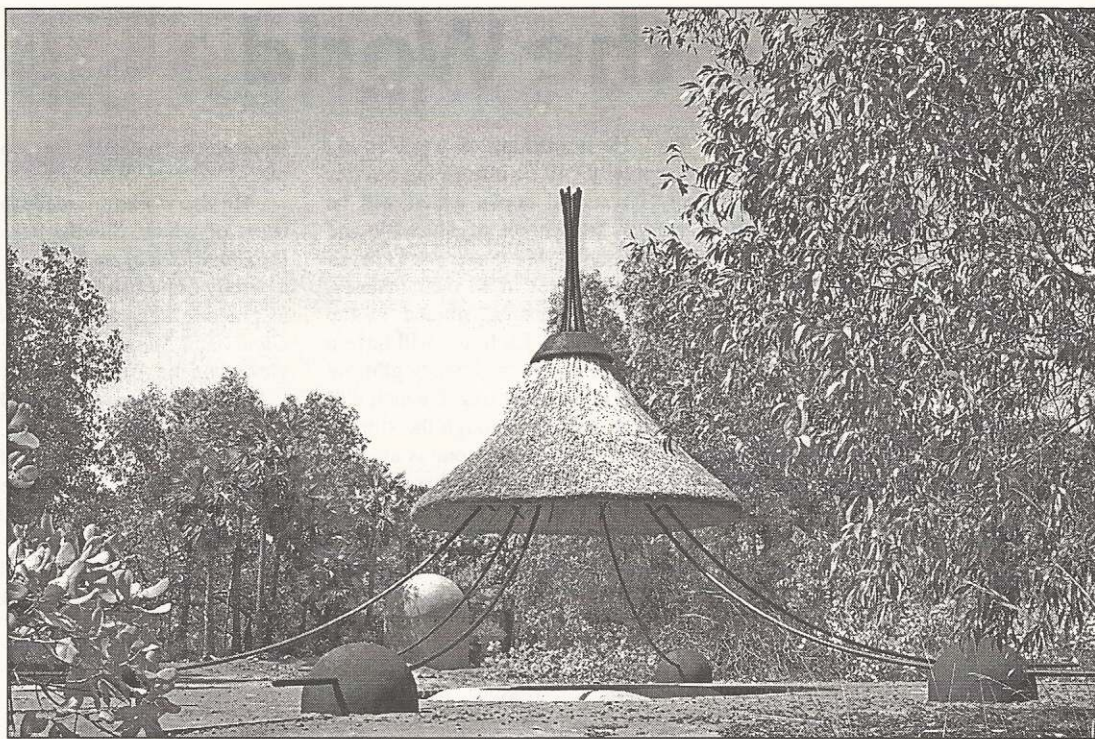
send-off, and Cristo is its scientific/research head of sorts. "Though many of us may prefer to forget about death, it is an inevitable end that awaits most of us. We need facilities within Auroville to deal with the situation when somebody leaves his or her body."

In the early years, deaths in Auroville were few and far between (see box), and friends or family could choose to bury or cremate their dear departed in any place of their choice. A few unmarked graves lie in Certitude, and the Greenbelt communities of Forecomers and Adventure. One even rests in the sacrosanct grounds of the Matrimandir. However, the most popular yet controversial choice was and continues to be the garden attached to one's house plot. Cristo prefers that option himself even though he feels that this practice should generally be discouraged. "This is in my own will," he says. "For some reason, I prefer to do it like that and have designated the place in my garden which will be ecologically safe."

For Cristo, it is clear that whatever resting place people may ultimately choose or be assigned to, it would be both unwise and impractical for a growing city to have no well-defined space for the dead. Auroville's current census registers at 1700 and the number grows annually. It is only natural that the number of deaths will also increase.

"Our first task was to find a suitable location," says Cristo, "suitable primarily from an environmental standpoint." Two factors that needed consideration were the distance from residential areas (at least 90 metres according to the Tamil Nadu Panchayat Building Rules) and the danger of ground water pollution due to burials (preventable by water-tight caskets). The community at Adventure came forward to provide land for the project, and a four acre area was immediately made available, extendable by an additional two acres in the future, if necessary.

The process so far has not been a bed of roses. Cristo refers to complaints from some residents of Edayanchavadi about alleged smoke disturbance from cremations. "The land picked was at a distance of over 250 metres from the nearest residence in the village. There is a buffer of at least four acres between the crematorium and the nearest house," he stresses. "Also, a tar road runs in between the two, so the separation is distinct. From the beginning, we have been extremely sensitive to anything that may hurt the sentiments of our neighbours in the village. We are not stupid enough to build a crematorium under people's windows." He mentions a special ceremony performed by the village priest to consecrate and bless the land. "We know that there are beliefs attached to such places. We have been following the traditional ways and respecting whatever customs our neighbours may have.



The Auroville crematorium designed by Werner

"At present we use a technique used by the Ashram," he explains. "The body is entirely covered using dry cow-dung patties rather than wood, and this hardly generates smoke. So the inconvenience to the public is almost nil. Also in Auroville, cremations are less frequent than burials."

The other issue that the group continues to grapple with is money. While the overall project is projected to cost approximately 40 lakh rupees (€ 80,000), only a sum of 2.19 lakh rupees (€ 4,400) has been made available through grants from the Gateway Group in Auroville. Says Cristo, "This money was used to erect a temporary crematorium designed by Werner, the German architect, to dig a well, and to build a shed."

For Cristo, this is just the beginning. The research he has done is extensive and detailed. For example, from his readings of The Mother he believes there is a need for facilities to keep the body preserved for seven days. Of this he says, "After all, people are here to participate in the Yoga of Sri Aurobindo. And some of us may be found in a state where it may seem as if one is apparently dead but in reality may not be dead at all. Particularly when someone is in *Kalpasmadhi* it is almost impossible to tell the difference. So in order to avoid accidents, the body will have to be kept in a safe condition until a doctor can guarantee that tissue decomposition has started. Only then you know it is over."

Down-to-earth and detached in his approach, Cristo, like a true scientist, continues to keep updated about the latest happenings elsewhere in the funerary world and informed about the latest in cutting-edge technology - like the solar-powered crematorium existing in Switzerland that saves on fuel costs and eliminates environmental pollution, or the

Geographical Positioning Systems (GPS) to locate old graves and identify potentially usable sites using satellite technology. According to Cristo's research, burial sites apparently have a life-cycle of 30 years after which they may be reused. Cristo also is familiar with indigenous practices. He has travelled to Benares and Pashupatinath in Nepal to observe and learn about current death practices, and has also witnessed the rites following the

last Shankaracharya's passing, whose body was preserved in salt. All this information has been carefully filed in his folder titled 'Rigor Mortis'. In it, there is even a brief note on sea-burials.

With all this talk of technology, what is Cristo's opinion about Aurovilians who may choose to donate their bodies or organs to medical science, especially when one

of India's most academically prestigious medical institutions - JIPMER - exists in the neighbourhood? "An important and excellent question!" beams Cristo. "This is again a private matter. This may have legal implications for Auroville. Suddenly if you have a team of doctors or surgeons who come to Auroville to take organs from a body, some people may object, especially if they have not been warned in advance. That is why in the project we have a caretaker, who will help not only to keep a record of the dead but also a record of future clients and what they want to happen to their body when they pass away. Of course all this will be voluntary."

Though the group feels there is little interest from the community for this project, it plods along cheerfully with a commendable sense of humour. In their project proposal, under the heading 'Beneficiaries', two lines sum up, "We will all benefit from it. The later, the better."

Priya Sundaravalli

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