

Auroville Today

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Auroville's monthly news magazine since 1988

"The value attached by the ancients to music, art and poetry has become almost unintelligible to an age bent on depriving life of its meaning by turning earth into a sort of glorified ant heap or beehive..."

Sri Aurobindo in *The National Value of Art*

As a creative soul I'm always looking for inspiration. During an interlude in the current turbulent weather I decided to take myself off in search of that 'something'.

An artist is not just a painter or a sculptor. The Mother believed that "all those who produce something artistic are artists! ... whatever may be the type of their production". Architecture and landscaping are forms of art and abound in the bioregion. But that was not what I was looking for. I wanted to see what Auroville had to offer in the form of accessible, public art.

What though, do we class as 'public' space? Basically any place where people are free to roam. This includes the roads and pathways, all public buildings and park areas as well as the publicly-accessible exhibition spaces. Despite the open community style here, however, it is not acceptable to roam around in someone's garden, which ironically is where some of the best art is that I spotted through the shrubs.

I knew it wouldn't be possible visit everywhere in one day so I set off with a basic plan in mind: I would visit the Solar Kitchen, Savitri Bhavan, Bharat Nivas, the Visitors Centre, the Town Hall and a few other places where I was told there was some form of public art or other.

At the entrance to the new Pour Tous nearby the Solar Kitchen, is a tiled swan mural created by Auroville potter Michel. This mural was recently discovered gathering dust in a store room and was restored to glory by the lily pond, an apt and fitting location given the nature of the design. The dining area of the Solar Kitchen itself houses a beautiful stained glass window, a piece originally made by an Irish artist for a meditation room in a house in Cambridge, England, but later donated to Auroville. Mother had commented that this work was very beautiful, and I can't but agree, particularly with the early morning light shining through it. In front of the Kitchen is a display of alternative bike-parking structures executed in cement, but is it art? I walked through the manicured front garden, marvelling at the landscaping ... this is art too, I mused, the plants and colours placed in vibrant display.

Savitri Bhavan is home to the Sri Aurobindo statue, but this is a monument more than a sculpture. Inside, the building was cool and calm in comparison to the heavy heat outside. A beautiful display of photography lined the white walls, each photograph titled with a caption from 'Savitri'. There was even a smile or two and whispered words of assistance. This place is available for exhibitions by artists but the selective work must have a connection with the development of consciousness, Sri Aurobindo and The Mother.

Where 'Art' Thou?

Louise goes in search of public art in Auroville



Next stop: Bharat Nivas. Where to find some public art here, I wondered. I went first to Atithi Griha Guesthouse, where I'd heard a new painting had been mounted. It's a shame that it was lined up with a couple of other traditional paintings, located in the dining area. I had expected an actual wall mural rather than a framed piece.

I continued searching around for something, anything that resembled art. Nothing! The lobby of the Sri Aurobindo Auditorium where sometimes art is displayed is empty. I traversed the area to the Indus Valley cafeteria, which is next to the Kala Kendra Gallery. There was one sculpture there, a bright yellow twist, but there was no plaque saying who the sculptor was. I learned later that it was made by Aurovilian Henk van Putten. I mounted the steps of the Gallery in anticipation. Though there was a small exhibition going on, there was no-one here at all, not even someone to oversee the display. Most of the lights were off and the poster-filled board inside held literature about exhibitions long gone. In contrast to Savitri Bhavan the Gallery felt deserted. To be honest, it was uninspiring and felt run down. I'm sure the place will look great in the evening but in the daytime the absence of proper lighting is quite depressing and does no justice to the exhibited works. A place like this should reflect light, colour and energy all the time.

I returned outside, the air and cloudy sky quite welcome now. As I glanced up at the facade of the building I couldn't help but think that with all the artists around it would be nice if they could cover up the rain dribbles with bright murals. I'm sure the kids would love to be let loose. One painting is there, I noticed quite by chance, an amazing blaze of blue hidden behind one of the side entrances to the auditorium. But again, there is no indication who the artist is. Across from the gallery is a fantastic space. It's overgrown now, but just imagine if it were manicured and filled with statues and places to sit. It would be a wonderful meeting area to meet and chat or even to study in peace.

Feeling a bit dejected I bumped my way down to the Visitors Centre. This is the place, I thought, where there must be something of interest. Wrong! The only signs of creativity were some painted rocks hidden away in the children's and picnic area. However, they were boldly colourful, as only children can be with their art. Also, there was one beautiful stone depicting wildlife just in front of them. It was obviously painted by someone older and more experienced though. I later discovered that the wildlife murals one sees at the toll booth on the ECR near Chennai are from the same artist. I have travelled that road many times and never knew the paintings were from Auroville!

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Top: The stained-glass window at the Solar Kitchen restaurant.
Second row: Swan mural at the Pour Tous Distribution Centre; statue 'The Offering' at the Town Hall
Third row: The exhibition space of Savitri Bhavan
Fourth row: The exhibition space at Kala Kendra; statue at Bharat Nivas

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At the Town Hall I marvel at the statue in the small triangular pond. Is it Krishna? Is it Buddha? I'm not sure but it is amazingly tranquil. A small brass plaque tells me its title 'The Offering' and that it was made by Robert Lorrain, a Canadian sculptor, who donated the work to Auroville. At the other side of the Town Hall is a rocket-like sculpture, designed, I learned, by the late Roger Anger, Auroville's chief architect, who is also responsible for the two beautiful sculpted forms against the walls next to the staircase. Above the reception area hangs an enormous globular sculpture, also conceived by him with the central ball executed by Auroville artist Shanta. I know this because I read about it. But the receptionist didn't. I found this quite sad. At the very least, employees in the public arena should have some knowledge of their area.

CSR is home to a ferro-cement sculpture, basically two roof panels artistically linked together. The effect is striking. But this was guarded by inquisitive dogs and there was no-one around to ask about its origin.

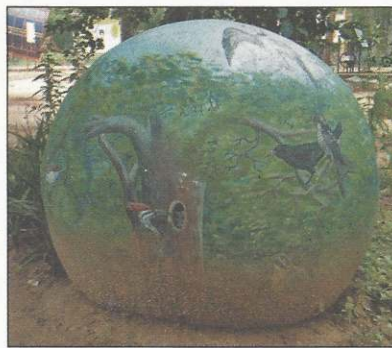
Finally, weary, hungry and thirsty after the bumpy ride with a back that felt like I'd gone 10 rounds with a professional boxer, I arrived at Svedam's Well Cafe. I'm not sure if this is classed as public or not but the ingenious prints of Louis' work on flex (perfect to weather the weather) certainly brighten the surroundings.

The Mother wanted Auroville to be known through its art; yet on my limited trek of almost 3 hours I didn't find much to inspire me. This is not to say that Auroville produces no art: the exhibition halls at Pitanga, the Pyramids and Aurelec regularly show Auroville creations but these are only limited accessible to the non-Auroville public.

I went to see Pierre Legrand, an established artist and long-term Aurovilian to try and gain some perspective on the subject of 'public art'. Pierre is currently a member of the new L'Avenir d'Auroville team, Auroville's town planning department.

Top row: Sculpture by Roger Anger in the garden of the Town Hall; globular sculpture in the Town Hall conceived by Roger Anger, central piece executed by Shanta. **Second row:** Painted stone at Visitor's Centre; sculpted forms by Roger Anger in the Town Hall.

Bottom row: Ferro-cement sculpture at CSR; paintings at Sve Dam café.



"The fact is there's no urban art here!" he said, "I'm surprised you're writing a story about it. It's a dream of mine, though."

I asked why he thought there was little on view when there are so many artists in Auroville. "Actually there are not that many artists here when you consider the population, plus there's no supportive infrastructure for artists. We must remember that Auroville is still quite small, almost a village. Only, we seem bigger because of all the international exposure," he replied.

"We are still quite basic in terms of culture and visual art. There's a sophistication required that we have not yet reached. Just look at the depth of Indian artwork. We do have places for exhibitions but these are only short-term and after a couple of weeks they are forgotten."

"But still," I said, "Surely there are some works which could be displayed? The artists must have spare work lying around which could be shared. Are there any other reasons?"

"Vandalism is one prime reason. It is prevalent here and there are not many protected spaces where artists would be prepared to install work," said Pierre. "Another reason is that there is more competition than support here. So to put up a piece, open for view, open to the elements and to other things...we're just not ready. It wasn't like that before...I don't know what happened. I used to give art away, paintings, sketches, installations..." he drifts off. "We have become quite bourgeois," he adds.

"You know," he says, "even in Paris or many of the other great cities, there isn't actually much public art. If you walk around there are many monuments, but not much art. And just think how many artists there are there! Galleries are the places to go and they're free. It's the same here, the galleries house public art. In terms of public display areas in Auroville, the architecture doesn't really lend itself well."

"I do like the concept of flex-mounted work," Pierre says when I mention Louis' display at Well Cafe, "Louis is very innovative, I like that."

It was an interesting search, unfortunately concluding that there is far too little public art in Auroville as yet. It would be a joy to see more Auroville art in public places, outside the galleries. For art speaks a language of its own, a language which brings us closer to the divine in many ways.

Louise

Collaborating towards a new culture

"Auroville should be recognised through its arts." The Mother

Auroville has always been known for its artists, yet the creative individuals in the community struggle to have their work considered worthy of 'work' when it comes to financial support. This is not unique to Auroville. Almost universally artists face challenges to get their precious gifts recognised as valuable contributions to society. Much of this stigma comes from the exponential growth of art as a commodity. Only the lucky – not necessarily talented – few are able to make a living purely from their creations.

The September issue of Auroville Today featured a report on the Integrated Sustainability Platform (ISP) and its views on the future of the city. Amongst the numerous 'new arenas' suggested for addition to the existing infrastructure is that of 'culture'.

Marco and Krishna, who are members of the ISP Culture Group (now comprising ten members), explain that the group's main focus is now on the development of the Culture Zone. This zone would not house 'schools' but centres of research and development as well as art and music studios, all closely interlinked, to allow people of all ages and experience to develop together. It is this desire to create artistic 'movement' or rather 'an artistic movement' which fuels the group's vision. Group members Rolf and Pushkar presented artistic interpretations, by way of sketches, of how the group's vision, including layout, buildings and shared spaces for the Cultural Zone could be assimilated into the Galaxy Plan.

Krishna eloquently says that next to Kalabhumi, the only existing artist community in the Cultural Zone, there is a

need for more facilities for artists in Auroville, like dedicated studios and meeting spaces. A new development will be the Centre for Research in Performing Arts (CRIPA) which is being built. Krishna talks about the facilities of Kala Kendra in the International Zone, "Though it is a gallery, a studio space, and has opened the Indus Valley," she says, "it has yet to become a place where artists meet and discuss, or just hang out".

Culture is a way of life in the broader sense of its meaning. A 'culture zone' would provide more than just a place for the creative community to work. It would ideally be a place where discussions and collaborations would manifest, where ideas would take shape, where a new way of life would come into being, or a new way of being would come to life.

Discussion is considered a key to any societal development. "A piece of art will always raise discussion," says Krishna. "For instance, put up a painting or install a sculpture and there will always be those who comment on the location, appropriateness, subject matter, aesthetic value or even relevance."

Artists tend to create within their own space. A number of creative communities within Auroville have developed a sense of collaboration, "but, we need to tease the people out of their holes," says Marco. "We want people to start questioning. For instance: What does it mean to have culture? What is 'culture' in Auroville? How can art play a leading role in the work here? Where are the artist innovators the Mother spoke of? Is it possible to create an infrastructure to

reflect all of this? It's all of these questions which helped to create the initial ISP vision. Creative souls have the ability



An upturned car in the Greenbelt. 'Interactive art exhibit – please paint something beautiful' says the note on a nearby tree

to think out-of-the-box. It is interesting to note that there are now two artists involved in the new L'Avenir team. Marco adds that culture is not just

Beyond and above this intellectual utility of Art, there is a higher use, the noblest of all, its service to the growth of spirituality in the race.

Sri Aurobindo, in *The National Value of Art*

about art. "The concept of the Cinema Paradiso, which screens regular films, is not about just showing a movie. It is about generating discussion. Theatre and music, they all generate discussion. New ideas only come from interaction and discussion. We wanted to have a couple of benches outside where people could hang around comfortably after a showing and chat. In the end the planners did not share our vision for the social aspect of the building so we ended up installing the light outside to encourage people to stay for a few minutes."

A positive start to encouraging collaborative participation from the creative community will be the Culture Group's launch, by early October, of an Arts and Culture Newsletter. Previously, postings on art and culture were included in the News & Notes, but this meant limited visibility as the articles were lost amongst the official bulletins. The aim is to open up discussion forums and to disseminate articles on the arts, not just from Auroville but from around the world. In this way, the Newsletter will become an educational tool, serving the dual purpose of gaining insight on up-to-date global developments in all creative fields (architecture, art, music scenes, etc.) as well as exposing the Auroville arts and cultural scene. What is anticipated is that the forums will house more constructive forms of discussion as opposed to general critique.

What support does Auroville offer its artists? "Artists are not considered important to the building of the city," says Krishna. "Land acquisition and water for the proposed 50,000 people

are more important than developing an art movement, obviously. An economist is more valuable to city development than, say, a poet." "There is some funding available which a number of groups are taking advantage of," says Marco. "Theatre and music projects have won small grants. But maintenance is not part of that funding."

Will the Group also promote public art? "The Visitors Centre Group are looking at the option to create an exhibition area there in the future," says Marco. "But if you're talking about art within the city limits, then the Youth Centre is developing rapidly. Some may say that what they produce is an act of rebellion, for example the upturned car structure, but they are obviously communicating much more. It is always a deep expression of feeling which leads to creation. We shouldn't suppress this, we should encourage it."

The price of much of the Auroville artwork is quite high and so not accessible to the average Aurovilian. Options to make this possible include an Auroville Art Library. "What the Mother said about the use of money, this needs to circulate and be applied," Marco says. "We need to develop an artistic movement not centred on the exchange of money. Art can be free of possession if we can learn to let it. We hope to see the development of an artist movement in Auroville which is Aurovilian in nature ... no rules, no guidelines ... simple discussion and freedom of exchange and collaboration of ideas."

Louise

Journalistic contributions for the new Art & Culture Newsletter can be mailed to renu@aurovillearts.com

Affidavit against the Trustees of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram

In the August 2008 issue, Auroville Today published an interview with Peter Heehs and a book review of his new biography *The Lives of Sri Aurobindo* published in the US by Columbia University Press. Since then, the book has generated enormous controversy within the Aurobindonian community. Some people have lauded it and regard it as inspiring, ground-breaking, and as making Sri Aurobindo accessible to an entirely new readership. Others feel that the book denigrates Sri Aurobindo because, they believe, it focusses upon his human rather than divine characteristics. In particular, a few Ashramites and their friends were so upset about the book that they took action.

The cases in Orissa and Chennai

Learning that the book would be published by Penguin India, in November 2008 a Writ Petition was submitted to the High Court of Orissa in Cuttack to prevent the publication of the book by Penguin. The Court issued an interim order to the effect that the book could not be published until the publisher had received a no-objection from the concerned Ministries of the Government of India. This case is still pending.

In the beginning of 2009, two almost identical criminal cases against Heehs were launched by individuals in two districts of Orissa. The two magistrates arraigned Heehs on various counts, including instigating 'deliberate and malicious acts intended to outrage religious feelings' and bringing out 'defamatory matter'. After issuing a summons, the magistrate of Barbil in Keonjhar District, a remote, largely tribal district in the northwest of the state, issued a non-bailable warrant against Heehs who had filed a request to be exempted from personal appearance and be represented by his lawyer. This case was taken by Heehs's lawyers to the High Court of Orissa, which stayed all proceedings as well as the non-bailable warrant. The second case, in Cuttack, likewise was stayed by the High Court.

One of the relatives of the Writ petitioner in the High Court in Cuttack then attempted to have Heehs deported by writing to the Indian Immigration Authorities that the validity of the residential permit of Heehs should not be extended. When the authorities did not accede to this representation, another relative of the Writ petitioner filed a Petition at the High Court of Madras asking the Court to direct the Managing Trustee of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, the Regional Registration Officer of Pondicherry, the Foreigners Regional Registration Officer in Chennai, and the Superintendent of Police (North), Pondicherry, to deport Heehs forthwith.

The Writ was dismissed on 28 April 2010. Observing that the Indian authorities had extended Heehs' Residential Permit, the Court observed, "Therefore, in our considered opinion, it is for the petitioner to assail the correctness of the extension of visa granted by the authorities concerned and no relief,

much less the one sought for by the petitioner, can be granted." For the power to grant or refuse stay in India to a foreigner is the exclusive privilege of the Government.

The case in Puducherry

The next litigation was initiated on August 23, 2010. Five persons claiming to be inmates of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram (Sraddhalu Ranade, Raman Reddy, Niranjana Naik, Sudha Sinha, and S. Ramanathan) filed a suit at the Puducherry District Court against the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust and its five Trustees (Manoj Das Gupta, Dilip Kumar Dutta, Dilip Mehtani, R. Prabhakar, and Albert Patel). This is a so-called 'leave application' under section 92 of the Civil Procedure Code, which deals with public charitable trusts. Any beneficiary can approach the competent court of law with such an application if he or she deems that the trustees are not duly discharging their function. With this application the plaintiffs, who are claiming to be beneficiaries of the Ashram Trust, seek the leave of the court to institute a suit against the Ashram Trust and its Trustees.

The petitioners claim that the Trustees committed a gross breach of trust by "instead of promoting Sri Aurobindo's tenets and philosophy... continue to harbour, defend and openly extend support to Mr. Peter Heehs, who authored 'The Lives of Sri Aurobindo', a sacrilegious book...". The petitioners claim that the Trustees refusal to expel Heehs from the Ashram, on their advice and that of others, constitutes breach of trust. The affidavit states, "By allowing such an unbeliever [Heehs] to reside in Sri Aurobindo's Ashram, the Respondents/Defendants as Trustees have allowed the propagation of such false and malicious ideas about Sri Aurobindo amongst the rest of inmates and believers. The continued presence of such an individual within the Ashram has been extremely deleterious to the interest of the other inmates in their pursuit of Sri Aurobindo's spirituality." The affidavit concludes by praying to the court to "grant leave to institute a suit" against the Ashram Trust and its Trustees as they have lost total confidence in the Trustees' ability and willingness to execute the trust and its properties as per the Trust's objects. "In the circumstances, the present Trustees have to be removed and new trustees who will protect the interest of the Trust have to be appointed...." The petitioner's views are prominently advocated on the website *mirrorofmorrow.org*.

Various reactions

The filing of the case against the Trust and its Trustees has caused substantial unrest among the members of the Ashram. In fact, already in June 2010, one of the former trustees had pointed out, "The Trustees are not elected by a body of voters; they are in the board following the principles and procedure laid down by the Mother, the founder of the Trust." He had also been "shocked" that certain senior Ashramites had

its counterpart in time. Without the living link between the spiritual and material realities provided by the members of the Ashram themselves, the Ashram remains what it is and always will be, a place of pilgrimage and veneration of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother at the Samadhi, but no more than that.

We therefore offer our support to the trustees of the Ashram who have acted in the true spirit of the Integral Yoga, remembering the Mother's instruction 'In peace and silence is the greatest strength.' They have acted wisely to preserve the integrity of the Ashram. We hope that they will continue to serve for many years to come and it is our fervent hope that the actions of all who are part of the Ashram bear witness to the teaching that they have received.

We do not accept that recourse to a court of law for the settlement of disputes between brothers and sisters in faith has a part to play in the life of any Ashram, let alone the Ashram that bears the name of Sri Aurobindo.

Yours Sincerely,

Martin Littlewood

Chairman, on behalf of the Board of Auroville International

Sonia Dyne	AVI UK
Francine Finck	AVI France
Linda Grace Mosselman	AVI Netherlands
Isa Wagner	AVI Germany
Friederike Mühlhans	AVI Germany
Julian Lines	AVI USA
Bryan Walton	AVI USA
Martin Littlewood	AVI UK
Christian Feuillette	AVI Canada
Alfonso Galiana	AVI Spain
Robert Aarsse	AVI France
Mauna van der Vlucht	Auroville (Honorary member)

promoted signature campaigns in the Ashram and sent letters of allegation, based mainly upon unverified rumours, to various wings of the government.

A similar view on the matter can be found on the website *ifyfundamentalism.info* which deals with Integral Yoga and fundamentalism. "The petitioners are seeking the court's intervention in the management of the Ashram because the Trustees have not expelled Peter Heehs from the Ashram. This action not only publicly challenges the integrity and authority of the Trustees, but opens the Ashram to further division and negative publicity in India and the world...."

"Most of the affidavit is devoted to a repetition of the unfounded charges made over the last two years by Ranade, Reddy and others against *The Lives of Sri Aurobindo*. The book is described in the wildest and most irresponsible terms which do not correspond to anything Heehs has written. The effect of this rhetoric is to draw attention away from the real motive of the petition. The legal action brought against the current Trustees attempts to replace the balanced and judicious men who are long-time direct disciples of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother with ambitious figures... This lawsuit is a direct attack upon the rules, structure and functioning of the Ashram itself. It is an open attempt to take over the Ashram."

The website further states that the efforts to destabilize the Ashram are being openly assisted by a few other members of the Ashram, some of whom have been offering classes and lectures in Auroville. At the end of a detailed rebuttal of all the charges made in the affidavit, the website opines that the Honourable District Court of Puducherry should immediately dismiss the suit.

The views in Auroville and of Auroville International

Many Aurovilians have read Heeh's book. In the main, the response has been very positive, although some Aurovilians had reservations. However, the filing of the affidavit at the Puducherry District Court against the Ashram and its Trustees, which is perceived as an attack upon the Trustees, has been universally condemned. Deeply upset, the Working Committee of the Residents' Assembly, on 17 September, 2010, sent a letter of solidarity and support to the Ashram Trustees. Individual Aurovilians have also written to the Trustees offering their support. A posting on Auronet, Auroville's internal website, drawing attention to the filing of the affidavit received a record number of 'hits'. However, Aurovilians and friends differed in how they felt we should respond. Some felt this was an Ashram matter and that Auroville should keep out of it. Others said there should be no collective action on Auroville's part but that individuals should respond as they felt moved.

Those who felt strongest about Auroville becoming involved pointed out that Auroville was associated in many people's minds in India with the Ashram and that disunity there would inevitably reflect upon Auroville. Others were disturbed that one of the main petitioners, Shradhalu Ranade, is allowed to continue his classes at Savitri Bhavan in Auroville as this might be understood that Auroville was supporting his stance. In fact, some Auroville International Centres and some Sri Aurobindo Centres in the USA have already, months ago, dissociated themselves from Shradhalu. Savitri Bhavan has not given a public explanation of their position but in an email to AVToday its executive Shradhdhavan wrote, "I deeply regret all these happenings which express and threaten to widen a deep split amongst people connected with Sri Aurobindo and the Mother; but Savitri Bhavan has always been open to the whole Aurobindonian family, as well as welcoming members of the general interested public, and I hope that it can remain that way."

Another concern raised by some Aurovilians is the statement in the affidavit that Peter Heehs is 'an unbeliever'. This implies that the work of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother can be regarded as a religion. Both Sri Aurobindo and The Mother have on more than one occasion categorically stated that their work cannot be considered a religion and that the Ashram is not a religious association. The Supreme Court of India pronounced upon the issue in 1982 when it judged that "the teachings of Sri Aurobindo only represent his philosophy and do not constitute a religion."

Sri Aurobindo doesn't ask to believe, but to experience. This statement in the affidavit effectively reduces His and The Mother's teaching to a religion and a dogma.

Auroville International expressed its concerns in an open letter to the members of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry [see box].

It is sad that for two years, since the publication of the book, the detractors and supporters of the book have not been able to resolve the conflict amongst them. Since the petitioners have taken it upon themselves to challenge the Trustees by filing a suit, it has now fallen upon the Puducherry District Court to consider the merits of the case.

In brief

Housing issues

The Entry Service requests all Aurovilians to welcome and house new people. The Service has received a record number of applications since July 2010.

Work, maintenance and contribution policy

The Budget Coordination Committee in cooperation with other working groups has submitted a draft Work, Maintenance and Contribution Policy for community review. The purpose of the policy is to help clarify where Aurovilians may work, establish a proper maintenance framework, promote a more equitable distribution of maintenances and clarify the contribution policy for units, consultants, guest houses and for individuals who are able to work, but who are not working.

Beach control

PondyCAN! in Pondy, together with Aurovilians who live in or represent beach communities plan to involve local fishing villages to prevent further erosion of the coast.

Upasana launches KAPAS

On 22nd September Upasana launched KAPAS in Madurai to focus on production of organic cotton fabric, starting at the farmer level and reaching into spinning and weaving communities while exploring the use of natural yarn dyeing with Auroville's *The Colours of Nature*. The project would also like to engage Indian consumers and ask them to be more aware of their buying choices and consider supporting the organic movement.

Sustainable agriculture plan

The Steering Committee for the development of the Auroville Sustainable Agriculture Plan (ASAP) is working on a five-year Agriculture Plan which involves detailed assessment of all Auroville farms. It will be ready in 6 months.

Water Task Force

L'Avenir d'Auroville has set-up a Water Task Force to take care of overall water management. The group will propose development steps and set up a professional service for the implementation and maintenance of the water infrastructure.

Angetram

Four young Aurovillian Bharata Natyam students, R. Auropremi, G.M. Janani, K. Vidhya, and T. Swathi, performed their Arangetram, their graduation performance, at the Sri Aurobindo Auditorium on September 10.

Olympic Triathlon

On Sunday 12th of September Auroville hosted its first ever Olympic distance Triathlon (swim 1.5 km - bike 40 km - run 10 km). Seven hardy Aurovilians Auroson, Aurovici, Jacky, Mark, Michael, Peter CS and Sourya participated.

Biomedical Waste Disposal

The Auroville Health Centre has improved the treatment of the way they dispose of biomedical waste. Pathological waste, including soiled cotton, band aids, gauze or cloth, will be disposed of through incineration; left-over medicines (pills only) will either be re-distributed (if not expired), returned to the manufacturer, burnt in the incinerator or placed in a secure deep pit burial.

Carel

Open letter to members of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry,

Dear friends,

We, the Board members of Auroville International, are writing to you to convey our serious concerns about the impending legal action instigated by a few members of the Ashram community against the current trustees, which appears to us to be a threat to the integrity and credibility of the Ashram itself.

We write in a spirit of friendship and respect, aware that we have been deeply indebted to the Ashram for the spiritual and practical help we have received in our efforts to bring the vision and teaching of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother to a wider public outside India. Many of us have had the privilege of hosting some of you on visits to our own countries, and we have seen for ourselves how hearts have been touched and lives changed by the inspiring message that you have brought before this wider audience, many of whom may never have the opportunity to visit Pondicherry.

These people, like the thousands all over the world who know Sri Aurobindo only through his books or the internet, carry within their hearts a picture of the Ashram that they have never seen with their physical eyes. This Ashram, the focus of their hopes and aspiration, is the house of Sri Aurobindo, pervaded by his atmosphere, a sacred space still presided over and guided by the living presence of the Mother, to whom all questions and conflicts are referred and to whose loving guidance all are subject.

These people are not mistaken. It is the Ashram that exists in eternity, as a template for

October 1, 2010

Creating Lilith

Christine talks about her early life in Auroville and the creation of Lilith, an apprenticeship course in dressmaking, underwear and swimwear based on a professional German curriculum.

Christine begins her story. "When Benito and I saw the first video on Auroville in 1991 – 'The City the Earth Needs' – our lives were changed. When it was over we just sat there in silence then said: 'Come on, let's go.' Within a couple of months we landed here with our five children and a German shepherd dog.

"I realized we had been looking for our place for years. We were very happy but life here was too difficult for our daughter, Ines, who was fifteen, severely disabled and had no social contacts as she could not go to school.

"We returned to Germany for nine years to care for her until one day, when she was twenty five, she said: 'Mama, Papa, I am old enough how to be on my own; you can go back to Auroville.' We immediately sold everything and came back with two suitcases and a teenage daughter. Fortunately, before we left, we had bought some land beside Félicité, and donated it to Auroville and had built a simple house there. We called it 'Happiness,' and that is where we very happily live today.

"We were just getting settled when my sister developed cancer and so I had to go back to Germany to care for her. She was living with my 89-year old mother so I cared for the two of them and worked in tailoring as well. When my sister finally died I was utterly exhausted. I returned to India and collapsed in Happiness, hardly going out for six months."

This was a period of introspection and deep rest for Christine. She fixed-up the house which had got into an awful state during the family's absence and created a beautiful garden. Eventually she felt strong enough to face the next stage of her life.

"I did not know what work to do. In desperation, on Mother's birthday at Darshan, I surrendered to Mother and asked her; 'I need to know what to do here in Auroville; please give me a direction.' The very next day I read in the News and Notes that the Project Coordination Group (PCG) were offering funds for various projects. I remembered how my teenage children and their friends were always saying how difficult it was for them to get any further education without going to Europe

as there was little, if any, professional training for them in Auroville. I suddenly thought; 'I have qualifications in tailoring. Why don't I set up a unit where I can give Aurovilian girls a professional German training?'

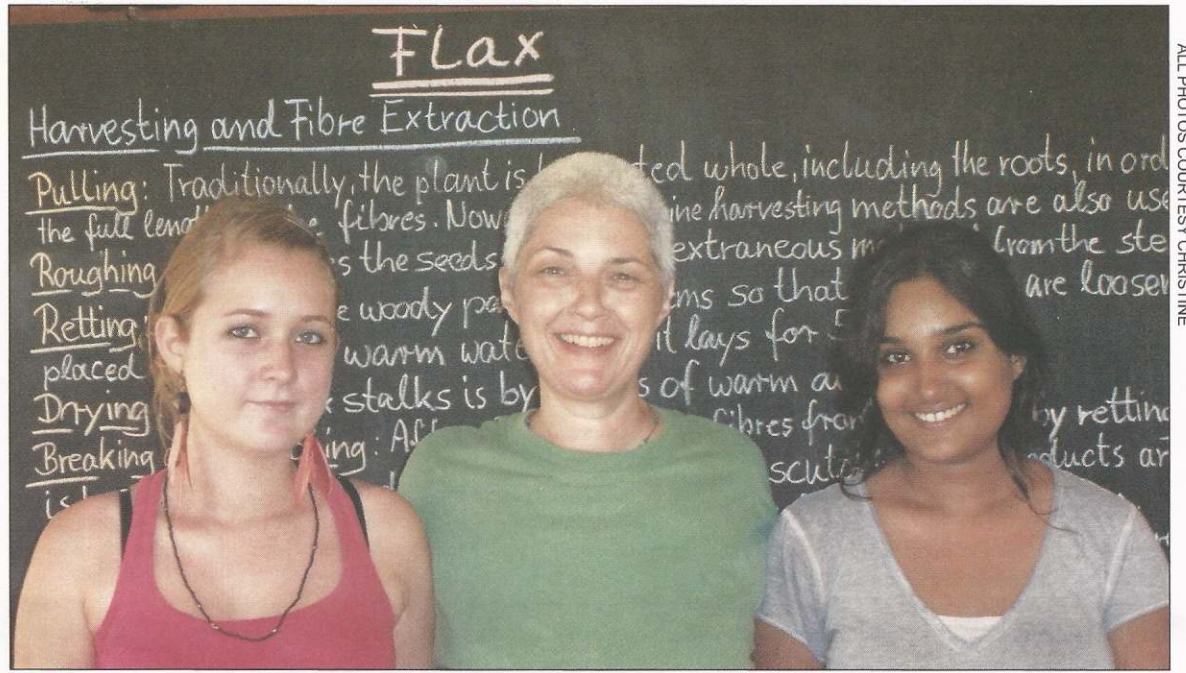
"I visited the existing tailoring units and was encouraged by several Aurovilian women who had been along a similar road themselves. I wrote a project for the PCG then put a notice in News and Notes announcing a two year professional tailoring apprenticeship programme. Two girls applied."

Christine gives a big smile and walks through Auroshilpam in the Industrial Zone, into a light pleasant room with a large table with three sewing machines and two dress dummies in the corner. Piles of Vogue magazines, materials and patterns lie on the shelves and two girls are intently bending over a half-made skirt, holding big scissors. "This is a dream come true for me," Christine says.

"The girls follow a professional German curriculum and learn English from Erin, maths from Ulla, pattern-making from Gaby, fashion drawing from Alice, business and economics from Stephanie, and I do the technical class. They also learn a lot about fibres, threads and weaving, the different types of clothes and looms which will be useful for them to work in India. They are here from nine till four five days a week. When they complete the course they will get an Auroville certificate. Meanwhile, three more Aurovilian women have come and joined the pattern and technical drawing class.

"I have been incredibly lucky. Prema gave me this room which was a storeroom and the sewing machines. Uma gave me these big pattern drawers. We need so many small things to start with, like different coloured threads, zips, buttons, needles ... but it is slowly coming together.

"The PCG has given me a grant of Rs 2.2 lakhs which includes my maintenance and money to buy the initial things. Next year I plan to start doing underwear and swimwear which will be more profitable as many units here already make clothes. I need a lot of specialized equipment, however, and these are difficult to get in India. I will probably get the elastic materials from China or Indonesia and am already trying to find suppliers. Eventually I would



Dasha, Christine and Sadika at Lilith

like to see this unit develop into a Training School."

Why did she call it Lilith? "I thought for a long time about what it should be called, then someone suggested this name and it rang a bell in my head. Lilith was the first wife of Adam in the Bible and was a strong independent woman. That is what I want for the girls who pass through here, to become independent women with a skill and profession. And to have something they can pass on to others."

Christine talks about the new direction it has given to her life. "I love the mental stimulation this work is giving me. I have my German textbooks here and I am always looking things up then translating them for the girls. I now have a new life, using my brain and passing on my years of experience in the fashion industry. But the greatest satisfaction is being able to provide a service for these girls. They are learning and enjoying a garment and underwear apprenticeship without having to leave Auroville. Most parents cannot afford to send their teenage children to Europe or America for several years. Even to go and study at a college in Chennai can be expensive nowadays. I think this unit will quickly get bigger when we start with underwear and swimwear production. The girls also get a maintenance which is very good for them."

She pauses reflectively. "After saying all this, however, I must tell you of a turning point I experienced when my sister in Germany died. I was suddenly aware of how short life is and how the main thing is that we enjoy and get satisfaction from what we are doing. I thought of the wonderful

women I know in Auroville who have built up their units over many years but how stressful and time consuming it can be for them. They take their responsibilities to their employees and Auroville very seriously and I admire them enormously.

"However, I am now fifty years old and have spent twenty five years caring for children, especially our severely-disabled daughter. I just cannot face years

of potential stress again. By creating a small teaching unit with a five day week I hope to avoid the stresses of commercialism and deadlines for orders."

She gives a happy sigh. "My husband Benito works in reception at Pitanga which he loves, I am creating Lilith and we live in Happiness. I am very, very happy.

In conversation with Dianna

I've always loved beautiful clothes but could never see how I could learn how to make them. This is a fantastic chance for me to do a professional apprentice training here, five minutes away from my home. I am originally from Bangalore where there is a good Fashion Design School, but I would hate to have to go away, and anyway there is no money. I have never actually made clothes for myself before – all this is completely new to me. I love the way Christine lets us make things for ourselves as it makes it very creative and personal. I always wanted to do something in design or architecture but the course was too long and, of course, not available here.

Last year I spent three times a week doing a sort of sound engineer apprenticeship at Sound Wizard which I really loved. There were only two of us doing it, learning the theory and then helping with conferences and concerts. Unfortunately there just was not enough time for people to explain things to us new people so it fell apart. It was a great pity. I can see how these training courses need a lot of time from the ones who can do it and here in Auroville there are often too many demands on them. Somehow we must overcome this and provide more proper training for our young people. We are inspired by the energy in Auroville but are excluded from it by lack of personal attention and proper training. This is very short-sighted. It means we have to leave to educate ourselves. And many of us do not come back as we are frustrated with the system."

Sadika – 19 years



I always loved fashion. I am always stitching something and when I was given a sewing machine for a birthday present that was fantastic.

I went to Future School and Alice gave us a course on fashion-drawing which really inspired me. Mahi had a sewing machine and I used to go to her house and she would show me patterns. I have always had this vague dream, this picture in my head, of having a shop somewhere selling my own clothes.

For a while I worked in a unit but nobody told me what to do or how I could learn more. It was a production line and not suitable for someone like me who wants and needs personal training. I got very unhappy and frustrated and had no idea how to improve myself until Christine started this course.

If your parents do not have money to pay for your education in Europe then you have to stay here. Even doing a two year course in Chennai or Bangalore can be expensive. However, I would say about half of the Kailash generation kids have gone to Europe, mainly Germany or Holland. They work and study at the same which they say can be quite difficult, but most of them love the challenge. They come back for a holiday every one or two years. I don't know how many will come back for good, which is a great pity as Auroville desperately needs their skills. What is the point of educating the kids to a high standard if they then take their experience and talents elsewhere? I think it is sad and stupid.

The professional training I am getting here is amazing, right on my doorstep. There is lots of stimulation around here as we are surrounded by creative clothing units that make super colourful and creative clothes.

I consider myself very lucky."



Dasha – 18 years old

The Learning Community

Johnny's 'Unschool', as it was described in the book 'Little by Little' by Heidi Watts, has been written about a number of times. However, that's not surprising as it has been in existence for about 35 years now.

Amaresh Deshpande is a volunteer Mathematics teacher at Future School and Transition School. Prior to coming to Auroville he lived outside Kodaikanal, dividing his time between teaching at the Kodaikanal International School, writing fiction and living on a farm. He recently paid a visit to Johnny's and wrote...

"It was refreshing to see what is being attempted. 'Attempted' is the wrong word, because Johnny has been narrating stories to children all his life. That day he was telling them about the Aboriginals of Australia. Sitting on a low stool in the cowshed classroom, he played the didgeridoo and narrated a myth about the rainbow serpent. A natural break followed to allow the children to share their delightful variations on pronouncing 'Ngalyod', one of the Aboriginal words for the immense-proportioned serpent. A Didgeridoo too can hardly be resisted. When the excitement settled down, Johnny told them about the Aboriginal belief system of living in a continuing state of dreaming and showed a picture of their huge sacred rock, 'Oluru'. Again a nice sounding word to play with!

Then Johnny announced that a partially Aboriginal man who was visiting Auroville would soon visit the school.

In The Learning Community (as the school is known) there are 11 children, aged 7-11 years. Nine of them were part of the eager audience. Jonathan (amongst the two who were missing) is his own little man – he is the explorer

amongst them, and naturally can't sit down in a group and listen to a story. At first he was looking for chicken eggs. A girl (the other missing one) was helping Susanne bake peanut-and-date ragi cookies in a mud oven. Meanwhile Jonathan made his own oven by rearranging a pile of bricks, and so the cookies were now being baked in two locations. After a snack-break of honey on brown bread and sliced apples, Johnny handed out black cardboard sheets to the kids to paint on. Porcupine quills couldn't be located; so pencils, backs of brushes and sharpened twigs, variously dipped in a few colours, were used to attempt pointillism – the technique used by the Aboriginals. A book depicting Aboriginal art was passed around. Jonathan wandered in and out, but didn't respond when asked by an adult if he too would like to paint. This time he had a blunt knife sticking out of his shorts and seemed to be looking intently around the farm to put it to some use. Soon he was out of sight.

I too wandered around and came across three children doing long addition the Montessori way, facilitated by Natasha. This quiet space amidst the banyan grove is called 'The Nest'. The setting altogether belongs to an ancient time.

I left shortly after lunch. What struck me throughout the three hours that I spent observing them was the high level of engagement of the children with whatever they were doing. In other words; no one seemed bored, or lazy, or distracted, or troubled, or meddlesome, or indifferent. These curious students and their parents visit Johnny 3 days a week, while at other times they are encouraged to interact with different communities."

Amaresh Deshpande

Auroville Botanical Gardens celebrate its 10th anniversary

Ten years ago, 50 acres of land on the outskirts of Edaiyanchavadi were earmarked for a large real estate development to be called 'Peaceful City'. Auroville succeeded in purchasing this vast barren plot, which had first been deforested and then surrounded by barbed wire. The enthusiastic plan to create a 'living textbook of botany' was born.

The Auroville Botanical Gardens (AVBG) group intended to create a place to not only promote the conservation of the Tropical Dry Evergreen Forest and biodiversity in general, but to be of educational value. A place where both Auroville residents and the villagers could come.

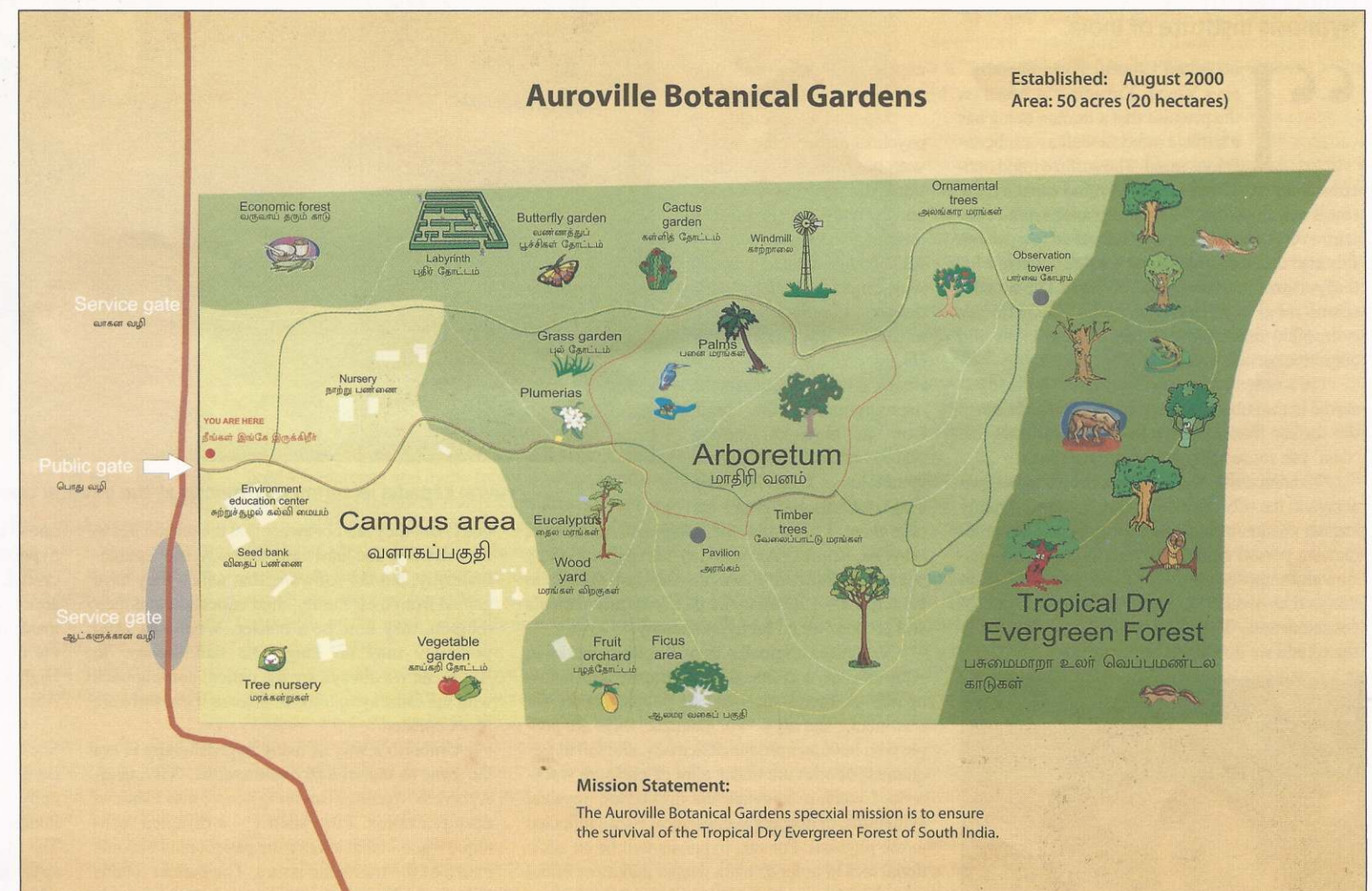
There are 12 Aurovilians working at the AVBG, along with approximately 20 local workers. Designations range from gardeners to environmental educators. Volunteers also join the team from time to time.

Now, after years of toil, the Botanical Gardens' achievements are impressive.

There is a protected sanctuary of a Tropical Dry Evergreen Forest with many of the constituent fauna returning. There is an Arboretum, containing over 250 different tropical trees, some of which are threatened with extinction in the natural habitats. A nursery propagates around 50,000 plants a year, including many varieties of indigenous plants that are used in reforestation projects and ecologically-sustainable landscape developments. Lastly, there is a cactus garden, a seed bank and a maze.

Central to the development is the educational campus which receives school visits 120 days of the year, hosting over 5000 children and their teachers from local government schools. The children come to reconnect with nature. They are taught about the consequences of consumerism on the environment and what they can do in a positive way to protect the ecosystem. Following classroom sessions, the children are given a map on which three walking trails are marked out. Along the way they experience a formal garden, butterfly garden and maze. Recently completed is the new cactus garden which houses what seems like hundreds of weird and wonderful species of cactus.

The maze is 'amazing'. Kundhavi is a volunteer at the AVBG. She says that when she first came to Auroville, the shrubs demarcating the maze were only about two feet high. Now they are over six feet. The children are given a map of the maze before they enter, along with a list of animals. The



aim is for the children to orient their way around the maze using the map and to mark down each animal they find. The 'animals' are beautifully painted boards strategically placed in the nooks and crannies.

AVBG has plans to create learning stations, which will be located at various points around the marked walking trails. These stations will demonstrate different aspects of nature and traditional uses of natural resources. The information will be mounted on natural *cudapah* stone slabs, which are termite-resistant. They will teach how to utilize natural resources by reviving old techniques and promote understanding and appreciation of the way in which nature is used in daily life. For example, the children will learn how to make brooms from grass and how traditional houses were made from

bamboo and leaves and they will get to learn about the life cycles of indigenous wildlife. The main board in the educational campus demonstrates what the area was like when the first Aurovilians arrived and the progress made.

The Botanical Gardens undertakes landscaping projects locally and externally to try and meet running costs but they are still struggling to become self-sustaining. They hope to become so in three years. They have submitted proposals for funding to various sources to help finance their educational programmes. The team has come up with a few new initiatives. The Botanical Gardens is experimenting with the creation of ready-made patio gardens in locally produced terracotta pots for people living in apartments. They also have an extensive range of plants, shrubs and

trees which are available for purchase by Aurovilians, along with ready-to-plant vegetable seedlings from the Annadana Seed Bank.

Paul, one of the founders of the Botanical Gardens project, is as usual very busy and continues tying up trees as he explains that what he's most proud of is the way that the Botanical Gardens has become such a collective project, with many Aurovilians participating in its growth. He's also really happy that they are able to host the children from the villages. Over 100 schools from the surrounding area have come here on day trips. He hopes that the nursery will eventually become the main support for the project so that they can evolve in the way they initially planned.

When I visited, Adhi, Santo and Julia were engaged in transplanting, preparing and carrying around pots,

making cuttings and sowing seeds. "Everyone works hard here, multi-tasking between fundraising, administration and planting. It's an ongoing challenge," says Biggie who first came to Auroville in the mid 1970's from the South of France. She says that she has always been connected with land and plants, so much so that "they almost go through my body."

In the future, she tells us, they would also like to encourage local artisans to display their work around the Gardens. An area for sculptures, statues, rocks and bamboo screens would add to the aesthetic look and feel.

Actions definitely speak louder than words at the Botanical Gardens!

Louise

For further information visit www.auroville-botanical-gardens.org

RESEARCH

World Bamboo Day

World Bamboo Day was celebrated in Auroville on September 18th with a morning display cum sales outside the Solar Kitchen and an evening session at the Visitor's Centre.

Under the trees opposite the Solar Kitchen an impressive variety of bamboo articles was displayed. Beds, chairs, tables and children's tables, large sofas with big white cushions, baskets, jewellery, soap, place mats, mirrors, trays, vases and cups, all made of bamboo. Even shirts and blouses made from bamboo and viscose – the latest fashion craze in Europe we were told – were for sale. "We hope to have this event every year," said Balu, the main organizer. "Next time we plan to include children's workshops and lots of hands-on events."

Balu was the driving force behind the Auroville Bamboo Research Centre, a project of Mohanam Cultural Centre. "We have a design team of nine boys and we are now training them in working with bamboo," he says. He turned to a few ladies to hear their comments on the sofa. "Get a good designer in," one suggested. "The furniture could be more refined, simpler, and definitely less expensive. Maybe concentrate on fewer items and concentrate

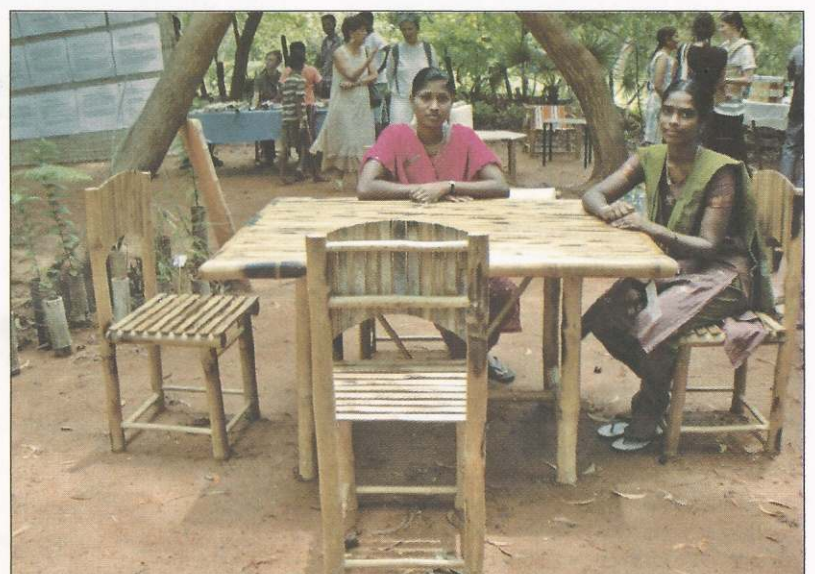
on the beds and the tables – forget the bamboo earrings," suggested another. He listened appreciatively. I heard afterwards that the boys had sold four beds and had several orders for tables and chairs.

Balu explained what had given rise to such creativity and industry. "In our tradition the bamboo represents the moving, flowing and coming together of the elements and is always represented at marriages. It is also a valued medicinal tree and is useful for many things. It is a very fast-growing plant and has many varieties. We use the local bamboo. A local trader gets us the wood. The variety around here is called *kalmoongal*, a very strong species which is easy to harvest and needs little water. The timber is very eco-friendly; the plant grows 30 metres in five years. It grows in the wild. Some Aurovilians have been talking about growing bamboo on land that is not used – that would be an excellent idea."

A tall Frenchman on a strange-looking bicycle wobbled by. "Hi, Dominik, let's have a look at your bamboo bicycle", called Balu. Dominik

alighted and flushed with pride informed a fascinated and unbelieving audience how he made the world's first bamboo bicycle. He shows how metal joints (made by Aureka) are attached to the bamboo frame using a strong epoxy resin and then tied with bamboo yarn. "Only the joints and the wheels are not bamboo. We very carefully measure and cut the bamboo then put it in an oven to get the moisture out. Having the two horizontal pieces that support the wheels is a difficult business as they have to be exactly the same thickness and length." People queued up to ride the bike and said how light it felt. A three metre high bamboo giraffe looked on in amazement.

In the evening the bamboo mania continued at the Visitor's Centre. A tasty and authentic buffet meal of South East Asian food was served, complete with bamboo drinks from bamboo cups. German Weltwärts volunteers presented the latest bamboo and viscose fashion in a glamorous show, choreographed by Aurovillian Oke, a



Bamboo chairs and table at the bamboo market at Solar Kitchen

Korean fashion designer. Dominik gave a talk and demonstration on his bamboo bike and rode off to thunderous applause. Pashi gave a talk on how Auroville could benefit from cultivating bamboo, and which varieties would be suitable for our area. He advocates growing bamboo as bio-mass to produce electricity. "At a rough estimate we could cover Auroville's electricity needs with one hundred and fifty acres of bamboo," he said. Rolf from

Kalaboomi gave a slide-show on the use of bamboo as a construction material. He showed the huge curved bamboo roof of the Madrid airport, pre-fabricated bamboo houses in the USA, a bamboo bridge in Bali and many buildings. The presentations were followed by 'Bamboo Music' performed on bamboo instruments. The evening wound down with music by Jivan on his conventional guitar and with singing and dancing.

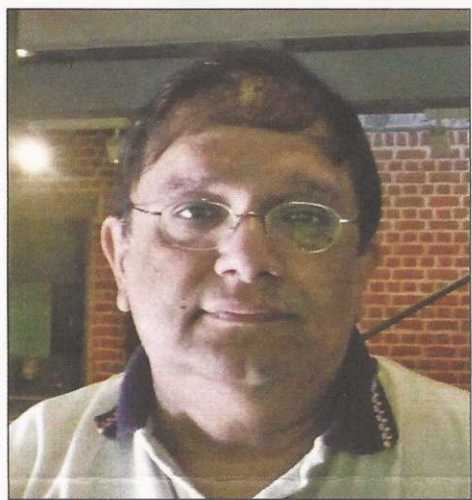
Training in hypnosis

In September, 25 Aurovilians, most of them therapists, joined the fourth course in integrated clinical hypnotherapy – the basics and applications of hypnosis. The course was conducted by Dr. Yuvraj Kapadia, CEO of the California Hypnosis Institute of India.

“Integrated Clinical Hypnotherapy,” says Yuvraj Kapadia, “is based on the premise that a human being has a surface mind as well as a subconscious mind. The surface mind contains about 10-12% of the total mind capacity, the rest is subconscious. This subconscious mind contains everything that has ever happened to a person. It is also the store of a person’s value system, what that person considers ‘good’ or ‘bad’. The subconscious mind is far more powerful – experts say even 6000 times more – than the conscious and cognitive surface mind.

“In a normal state of consciousness, the ‘data’ stored in the subconscious mind is not accessible to the surface mind. But we know that some of this ‘data’ can cause a physical or mental illness.

“Traditionally, hypnosis has been used to gain access to the subconscious mind. In the commonly known version of hypnosis, the hypnotizer manipulates a person’s mind through thought-transmission and imposes his own will to make people do things they would never do in a normal state of consciousness. That form of hypnosis is usually feared and we do not use it.



Dr. Yuvraj Kapadia

“Other schools of hypnotherapy focus on behavioural change through the suggestive powers of the mind. Here, hypnotherapy becomes a tool for accomplishment, for ‘going out there and doing it’, for expanding your life in the material consciousness. This system is rather popular, but is also not followed by us.

“Integrated Clinical Hypnotherapy is different. Here, the therapist brings the patient into a hypnotic state, a state of deep relaxation, where the conscious mind is still in control. The therapist, as a facilitator, then helps the patient to view his or her subconscious mind to find the possible origins of a disease. Working simultaneously with the thoughts, emotions, energies and the physical body, the therapist, with the patient’s consent, then uses different techniques to create a shift of awareness in the patient. This process may take time. It is not like a one-time surgery. But this comprehensive approach has yielded good results. It has shown that hypnotherapy is a safe and highly effective method for facilitating healing.”

Yuvraj knows what he is talking about. Born with two defective heart valves, he was for years treated allopathically. Unsatisfied with the results he studied hypnosis, and was then able to heal himself. Ever since, he has been active as a hypnotherapist healing others. As CEO of the California Hypnosis Institute of India, he has been giving lectures and courses in India and abroad, in particular in the Middle East. His childhood connection to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and his familiarity with Sri Aurobindo’s and The Mother’s teaching has helped to make this form of hypnosis gain acceptance in the Ashram, where he recently conducted a training course for over 30 people.

The Auroville experience

“That the Ashram accepted this method of healing was the eye-opener,” says Moghan, an Aurovilian of French origin who has been working as a psychotherapist for over 20 years. “I thought, well, if the Ashram has accepted it, let’s have a look at it. I have sufficient experience to evaluate if a teaching is ok or just superficial. And I am happy about what I learned. The techniques of Yuvraj are scientific and rational, and, I

expect, will be a welcome addition to my tool box.”

Moghan’s speciality is psychosomatics. He works with the links between emotions, the subconscious mind and the body. But, he says, he has not always been successful. “I have treated patients with cancer and other severe diseases. I used various techniques, including NLP (Neuro Linguistic Programming), a therapy that aims at deprogramming the brain from its previous learning which caused the original symptoms. I had to drop some patients as I could not help them. I hope that these hypnosis techniques may be helpful. As soon as the hypnotherapy course is finished – we do the last course in November – I’ll call some of my former patients and propose we go for hypnotherapy.”

Veronica, originally from England, works in Auroville as a craniosacral therapist and naturopath. “A broad spectrum of people comes for treatment,” she says. “For example, there are people who have an immune deficiency, and fall ill frequently, or who are under a lot of pressure work-wise. I work to alleviate the immediate physical symptoms, or deeper psychological issues reflected in the physical. For me, hypnosis will be an additional tool in order to work deeper and more effectively.”

Yet, she warns against the idea that it is a quick-fix. “Hypnosis may bring the patient awareness of the cause of a problem; but awareness by itself doesn’t automatically heal the issue. Moreover, the therapist has to take great care that, in helping to create awareness of the original trauma, the person is not getting re-traumatized! Very sensitive and painful issues have to be approached extremely carefully.” Depending on the person’s psychological make-up, e.g. whether he or she is more emotionally or more mentally suggestible, Veronica uses different techniques to ‘re-script’ the scenario that is the cause of the illness. “There are a number of psycho-therapeutic modalities that work with the re-scripting concept and the results are very positive,” she says.

Umberto, an Aurovilian of Italian origin, is similarly positive about the course. He works with Ayurvedic massage and aura readings to help his patients. “They are great tools,” he says, “but I am always looking for something new with which to help the patient better. Hypnotherapy will allow me to combine the tools of hypnosis with that of Ayurvedic massage.”

Umberto explains that his work often consists of helping people to ‘update their software’. “People come to me with a physical pain in their



Yuvraj Kapadia lecturing on hypnosis at the Integral Learning Centre in Vértité

body. But they are not aware that the reason lies in the software. The hardware, the body, moves automatically; but the software, that which they have gained from their family, their education and their religion, may now be a barrier. What was valid yesterday may no longer be valid today. In Ayurveda we always see the patient coming back with the same symptoms of disease if the software is not updated.”

Umberto’s way of using hypnotherapy is not the same as that of a psychotherapist. “Giving an Ayurvedic massage can bring people into a state of deep relaxation. I use silence – a different technique – and in that silence the patient may become aware of the traumatic issues. The patient retains full power, even in deep relaxation, and I provide the silent support during the process. Sometimes a patient does not allow me to go deeper, which, of course, I respect. At other times, the patient gets a very strong indication of what causes the problem at the physical, mental, emotional, or even at a spiritual level.”

Modern psychology has extended our knowledge and has admitted us to a truth which the ancients already knew but expressed in other language. We know now or we rediscover the truth that the conscious operation of mind is only a surface action. There is a much vaster and more potent subconscious mind which loses nothing of what the senses bring to it; it keeps all its wealth in an inexhaustible store of memory. The surface mind may pay no attention, still the subconscious mind attends, receives, treasures up with an infallible accuracy...

Sri Aurobindo in ‘Kena and other Upanishads,’ CWSA Vol 18 p. 54

For Mallika, a long-time Aurovilian from France, hypnotherapy is also a welcome addition to her skills. She works as an acupuncturist with knowledge of homeopathy, and as an aura-somatic pranic healer. “I started my healing practice in 1981, and ever since have been trying to find the cause of the problems of people who come to me for healing. With these alternative therapies I could go quite deep, but sometimes there is a blockage. The hypnosis technique and modalities can help to overcome those blockages.

“I was conversant with the theory of the mind and the power of the subconscious mind. The course helped me to understand how the subconscious mind could be accessed and be a tool for therapy. I was surprised to see the quickness of the results. You aim to heal but sometimes do not have the full picture, and using this method I realised it was possible to heal people more deeply and resolve issues successfully.”

Yet hypnosis was not a new phenomenon for Mallika. “I realised that the way I work already contains elements of gaining access to the subconscious mind. Very often patients go into an altered state of consciousness which is by definition what hypnosis does. In this state they can go to an inner place where they can receive answers to their questions and from there healing works. “And,” she adds, “speaking of hypnosis, in the Matrimandir Inner Chamber built under the very specific instructions of The Mother to create a ‘place for concentration,’ there are many elements allowing

one to access a different state of consciousness – a hypnodial state – such as the play of the light on the crystal, the crystal itself, and the pristine purity and atmosphere. All these elements help one to go deep inside oneself, to attain multidimensional levels of the human being where one can connect to the Higher Self, to Truth, Love, Mother, Sri Aurobindo, the Divine.”

German Lisa, at 27, is the youngest participant. She has a BA in psychology from the University of Bangalore and now does a course in Indian philosophy at the Indian Psychology Institute in Pondicherry with emphasis on Sri Aurobindo’s and The Mother’s work. “I am interested in hypnotherapy,” she says, “because it is a good addition to what I was taught. The study in Bangalore described the therapist’s role as critically thinking about the patient’s problem; but it did not teach you how to access the issues in the subconscious. That is what I am learning now – to help a client find a new belief system by working with the subconscious mind.” She laughs. “The book *Hypnotizing Maria* has a wonderful sentence: ‘You’re the one who has hypnotized yourself into the life you live every day.’ Well, I am learning to help people lead a different life!”

Hypnosis as a help in sadhana

A major question for those living in Auroville is to what extent hypnosis can help people in their *sadhana**. All healers are familiar with the issue. Says Moghan, “Already in France people came to me who were stuck in their spiritual path. Most of them were not grounded. I helped them to get grounded and not escape to out-of-the-body spirituality. Here in Auroville, people also come with their psychological problems, such as relationships breaking down, insomnia, jealousy, mourning, and depression. I speak with them about their life to find out what is preventing their progress in order to lead a more meaningful life in Auroville. Hypnosis may be a great help here to enhance inner peace.”

Veronica stresses the need to see spiritual growth in a holistic perspective. “Someone might have a block in their spiritual development which is often based on a psychological issue. One of the issues in a spiritual community is the high aspiration, a kind of ambition to reach higher states of being, without dealing with the ground reality of their emotions and what stops them from progressing. Many of us are still on this level. As therapists we may be able to assist their move to new states of awareness and understanding.”

And she adds, “Helping people with their spiritual growth and what prevents spiritual growth would also be a focus of the Auroville Institute for Integral Health, which we are in the process of setting up. The Institute will host multiple healing disciplines, hypnotherapy being just one of the modalities we will use to provide a comprehensive holistic healthcare service.”

Yuvraj sums it up. “I see hypnotherapy as a science where the therapist is reintroducing people to the power that they always had, to their own power. It is not the therapist who is doing anything; it is the patient’s power which is re-awakened by the therapist pointing the torch. The therapist blends mental awareness with developing spiritual insight. By getting insights from the person’s subconscious mind, there is a possibility for that person to get access to higher levels of consciousness as defined by Sri Aurobindo.”

Carel

* *sadhana: the practice of yoga, the opening of the consciousness to the Divine.*



Learning hypnosis

Sharing Auroville knowledge and experience

At the end of August, a three day seminar on 'green practices' was held in Auroville. Fifty professionals and students from all over India attended the event, which was organized by Auroville Consulting. But who and what is Auroville Consulting? And what are its objectives?

“Basically, Auroville Consulting was set up to generate funds for Auroville Collaborative,” explains Raghu Kolli, one of the initiators. “The idea behind Auroville Collaborative is to get experts from outside Auroville to partner with Aurovilians in developing solutions to pressing needs in our community, like transportation, housing and communications. Auroville Consulting, on the other hand, brings together Auroville expertise to train and help outside clients manifest their projects.”

So how did it all begin? Chandresh, another of the initiators, remembers Raghu dropping by some years ago. “At that time he was a guest and interested in developing modular housing as a solution to our housing problem. His idea was to find a way that professors and experts who wanted a sabbatical could come to Auroville and spend six months here while we would provide accommodation and materials to make this project happen. I thought it was excellent idea. That, for me, was the seed of Auroville Collaborative.”

In the event, the housing project didn't take off then. But when Raghu joined Auroville a few years later, he continued to think along the same lines. “I made several proposals to bring students and experts to Auroville to help us solve our problems or work on areas we were neglecting. Then Prashant of L'Avenir d'Auroville suggested cycle paths as a potential area to focus on and the Bicycle Friendly Area project came out of that.”

In the Bicycle Friendly Area project, students and designers worked on innovative solutions to make cycling in Auroville a more pleasant experience. What did the Auroville Collaborative team learn from that experience?

“The interface with the students was fine,” says Raghu, “but the ground-level planning was not as good as it could have been. Also, we thought that different Auroville units would pick up the innovations and develop and market them, but this didn't happen. So next time we have to be prepared to do the follow-up ourselves or encourage new units to take up these new ideas: existing units obviously have as much as they can handle at present.”

The next project was the ‘Auroville Green Practices Portal’. Martin had been working with the Living Routes programme [a U.S.-based programme which brings American students for a semester to work and learn in Auroville] and they had organized seminars on various aspects of sustainability. Martin and Raghu decided to take the next step by putting together a knowledge resource which would focus upon the green and sustainable practices – like farming, afforestation, renewable energy and solid waste management – which are core areas of expertise of Auroville. The project was supported enthusiastically by Stichting de Zaaier.

“We had no idea what we were getting into,” says Raghu. “We didn't know how much information we would collect or the level of expertise of the Aurovilians in these fields.” In the event, it took them six months to collect, analyze, design and develop the web portal. The Auroville Green Practices Portal was formally launched on 26 August 2010. (<http://www.green.aurovilleportal.org>) “Our idea had always been to have some event at the end of the project, but initially we didn't know what kind. Then a friend of mine, a senior executive from a



Chandresh, Raghu and Martin

large Indian company who visited Auroville, suggested we should hold a conference and invite senior managers and decision-makers to see the results and hear Aurovilians present their expertise in green practices. The idea was not only that the participants would take away the knowledge and apply it in their own projects but that they would engage Aurovilians as consultants. In this way, the Auroville units would get more projects. We also wanted to present an integrated approach of the work Auroville is doing, something which hadn't been done before.”

“There was another objective in holding this conference,” adds Martin, another initiator. “We were also targeting university students because when we spoke to the Auroville units they said they had many projects but not enough people to do them. So by inviting university students to the conference we were hoping they would be enthused by what we are doing and join Auroville as Newcomers or interns to take up this work.”

Was the seminar a success?

“There were many encouraging signs,” says Raghu. “The organization went surprisingly very smoothly and we managed the schedule very well. From the feedback we got people felt the quality of the presentations was high and some were deeply touched by the Auroville experience. There was also the sense of connectedness and inter-relations between various areas, partly thanks to the overview illustration which we gave out as a poster. However, while we reached out to many architects, our attempt to involve urban project developers was only partly successful because we didn't have the channels to access them. Still, many link-ups have been made and there are specific projects which Aurovilians have been asked to help materialise. For example, one participant with a twelve acre property wants assistance in implementing the green practices that were presented at the conference.”

“The other thing was the financial aspect. The conference had been planned as a commercial activity, the first activity of Auroville Consulting, and we had hoped to generate surplus funds. In the event, we just broke even. However, without any sponsorship, we covered all our expenses, subsidized the participation of 20 students and offered complimentary registration to 3 special guests of Auroville.

We also supported about 40 Auroville speakers, a 10-member organizing team and 6 young Aurovilians.

“We had wanted to involve the larger Auroville community, to make them feel it was their event, but this didn't happen,” adds Martin. “In future, we have to find ways of achieving this.”

“The next project of Auroville Collaborative has already started,” explains Martin, “and it is once again in the area of external communication, where Auroville is weak. It will be a knowledge resource about education in Auroville. We want to present the methodologies used in the broad area of education in Auroville, the experiments being tried and what we have learned from them. The idea is to share this within the community and with the world so that Auroville becomes a centre of excellence in learning experiences. We have partial funding from SAAIER and are still seeking the rest. We are also in the process of fund-raising for two other projects in the pipeline – an educational programme on solid waste management for schoolchildren and a book on Auroville Arts and Crafts.”

They intend to complete the project and develop the Auroville Education Portal by December.

“Looking further ahead,” says Martin, “we have a few dreams. For example, we'd like to take the approach we employed in the Bicycle Friendly Area design workshop to a whole other level. We're developing an Auroville practicum for twenty or so students and professionals to spend four months in Auroville working upon practical solutions to a specific need that the community has. It will be a learning experience both for the students and for us. At present, we are looking for institutional partnerships to set this up.”

“The focus could be upon energy or housing or a mixture of the two,” adds Raghu. “This kind of thing will require much more organization and this time we have to do the follow-up. It will also require much more involvement from the Auroville resource people.”

Raghu mentions, however, that the priority now is to make Auroville Consulting an income-generating proposition as they need a financial base for activities like these. He is also keen that Auroville Consulting will nurture talented young Aurovilians to interface with outside clients and take up challenging projects and, in the process, make themselves economically-sustainable. Toine, another initiator of Auroville Consulting, is taking an active role in mentoring the team members on the basis of his experience in the corporate world.

“We need to give much more thought to building our human resources,” adds Chandresh. “As a community we spend far too long fire-fighting and too little on what we need to sustain our activities. That's why we want to adopt this management incubator model.”

Raghu points out that Auroville is changing. “Far more knowledge workers – highly qualified, communication-oriented people – are joining Auroville these days. The knowledge economy is totally different from the production economy Auroville has developed over the years and the existing system doesn't allow them to plug in easily. I see Auroville Collaborative and Auroville Consulting not so much as units as platforms for this knowledge economy, encouraging different ways of thought and action. These are urgently needed if Auroville is to take the next step in its development.”

From an interview by Alan

EDUCATION

Reviving a night school

Udhayam Educational and Cultural Centre in Ambedkar Nagar village celebrated its first anniversary on 15 August. Aurovilians from the village along with Aurovillian youth resurrected the neglected night school and cleaned-up the sports ground.

The ferro-cement roofed building is smartly painted. “For 20 years this building was a terrible mess,” says Murugan, one of the main driving forces behind the renovation of the night school. “It was overgrown like a jungle. But it was well constructed in 1991, so it was not completely spoiled.”

“Ten youths from Auroville and thirty from Ambedkar Nagar got together. We talked about how we need to develop ourselves and learn to do things together for our community. We wanted not just to be employed but empowered.” They decided to restore the dilapidated night school. “We felt bad that our village had let this happen.”

Aurovilians from Kottakarai and Bridget and Kathy from the Thamarai Cultural Centre in Edaiyanchavadi helped with donations and by doing write-ups for fund-raising for books and cupboards and painting the place. “We were able to partially restore the building and have now also a place for volleyball and for badminton.” It is an important development. “This sports ground is a place of companionship for these young men. They have a lot of energy. If they were not here playing volleyball, they might be getting into trouble,” says Murugan.

The building has two rooms, the second as

yet unfinished. A group of ten-year old boys are sitting on the floor reading aloud together, although the teacher has not yet come. A big blackboard is full of drawings and Tamil and English writing. Colourful posters hang on the walls. There are portraits of inspirational men like Pandit Nehru, Rajiv Gandhi, Buddha and, of course, Ambedkar himself, the famous Tamil Dalit lawyer after whom this village is named. When I ask the children who these men are they proudly call out all their names. Once their initial shyness is overcome, they talk to me in English and sing me a song.

“We have about thirty children who come five days a weeks here after school. They come in two shifts as we do not have space or teachers for everyone at the same time,” says Murugan. “The school is very important for these kids. They cannot do their homework in their houses as often there is no electricity or it is very crowded and noisy and there is nowhere quiet for them to sit down and study. Many of the parents do not really encourage them as they themselves never went to school and do not understand the importance of doing homework.” As an aside, he tells me that when he was a boy only one person from this village went to college but now there are at least twenty boys – and girls – (he emphasised this rather proudly) – who go to college.



Children at the Udhayam Educational Centre

“We have three teachers here, but though they are doing very well I would like to see them get some further training.” He shows me photographs of young German students who worked at the school through Welwärts, the German organisation which sends young volunteers abroad. “They were very helpful and encouraging when we started,” he explains. “One of them was a teacher and he showed us how to do things. They still write us letters which is nice. I think they learned a lot.”

During the day Murugan works in the stockroom of the Matrimandir, but teaching these children is his real love. He is a born teacher even though he has no formal teacher training. “I tried two times in Pondicherry but I was not successful. Maybe you can find out if it is possible in Auroville for me?”

As I say goodbye to the children and young men, Murugan shyly asks: “Do you know anyone who would come and teach English?”

Dianna

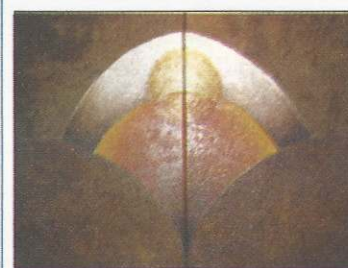
PASSING



Belgian born Agnus Gastmans left her body on September 8th at the age of 71. She was a well-known artist whose principal way of expression was collage. Her works were exhibited in The Netherlands, Germany, Switzerland, the UK, Belgium and India and she received many important commissions from public and private institutions in The Netherlands.

After she joined Auroville in 2001, Agnus' interest shifted to painting on rusted steel boxes, researching simple shapes to express feelings such as joy, gratitude, beauty and love. At a later phase she started paintings again on canvas, mixing the paint with pumice powder and glue which resulted in a similar coating as the boxes. All these paintings were connected to Sri Aurobindo's poem *Savitri*, which was the continuous source of

her inspiration. Agnus was known for her elegance, glowing with an inner light. A video about Agnus, *A Portrait of a Painter* made by Auroville Video Productions, is available on YouTube. Agnus' body was buried at Adventure community on September 10th.



'Joy' painting on metal boxes

Rock n' roll golf

The first thing that springs to mind when you think of Auroville is probably not golf. But three times a week a couple of hard-core addicts get out their golf clubs and hack their way round an improvised golf course on fields behind Edaiyanchavady village. Actually 'hack' is unfair. Sasha and Suryan display a great deal of skill in negotiating the *mulus*, date palms, cows and numerous other natural hazards which characterize the area where they play.



The distinction between fairway and rough is not always clear

Their enthusiasm is unmistakable. So what gets them out here in almost all weathers?

"It's something about the closeness to nature," says Sacha. "Sometimes when I'm playing I'll stop, look around, and realize what a gift it is to be here in this natural environment with all this beauty around. We see wonderful sunsets here. Then again, for me golf can be a very spiritual game. It's about getting a small ball from here to there and the only person in the way is yourself. It's all about stilling the mind and focussing on the moment. So I'm sure it's a sport that The Mother would have been into!"

Suryan admits that at first he thought golf was

an elitist as well as environmentally-unfriendly sport. "But then I read Michael Murphy's *Golf in the Kingdom*, which is basically Sri Aurobindo's philosophy presented through golf, and I saw that golf had a spiritual dimension. It's a kind of yoga because you have to control your emotions and basically rise above them to get to the right place in yourself. It's about getting away from wanting to play well and being 100% present to what you're doing."

Both of them learned to play on conventional golf courses: Sacha up in Kodaikanal, Suryan in England. When they returned to Auroville they began knocking balls around with a few friends.

"We started at the Eucalyptus Grove," remembers Sacha. "We made a hole in the cricket pitch nearby because that was the only flat area, but then we got into an argument with the Tamil guys who played there. So then we went to a small field behind Aurodam where we dug a few holes and put up a few flags. Later, we found another place at Irumbai. Then, by chance, we found this place right next to it which is heaven because there is grass and a number of reasonably flat spots. We had to clear some of the scrub and level the greens but now it's quite playable."

"Actually it was even better a few months back," adds Suryan. "But then Auroville went and ploughed up some of the land. Still, we have nine holes. The longest is over 300 metres so we can use all the clubs."

St. Andrews, of course, it is not. In fact, it takes a very trained eye to discern a golf course among the scrub. "We've got a lot of natural hazards like cows, goats and thorn bushes," admits Sacha. "Sometimes a cow comes by and stands in one of our holes and we had a mad cow that used to chase

us. And, because it's a bit wild, we must have lost at least a hundred balls. I call it rock n' roll golf."

"The course is constantly changing," adds Suryan. "It rained not so long ago so now the ground is softer and we can start measuring out our shots. But when it hasn't rained for some time, it gets very hard and the balls roll much further and bounce all over the place. Then it's more difficult to motivate yourself."

Par for the nine holes is 31 (four par fours, and five par threes). The present record is two over par, a considerable achievement under

these conditions. Do they have any special rules?

"Our basic rule is that if you land on the fairway you can move your ball two club lengths if it has an unplayable lie – which happens quite often – and you can tee it up on a nice tuft of grass," says Suryan. "You're also allowed to chip on the green and to move your ball if the ground is too uneven or the hole is obscured by something like cow dung. And we have one Out of Bounds, the fruit orchard."

"We also used to give putts if you got within a metre of the hole, but today we actually make them," adds Sacha. "This course really improves your short game!"

How do the local villagers view this mysterious rite?

"We don't see many people here – it's very quiet, except for the occasional drinking party who don't bother us," says Sacha. "But we're friends with the guy who has the fruit orchard. He and his wife are very nice people. They help us find our balls and we buy them presents once in a while."

Aurovilians, of course, are dreamers. So what is their dream for the future of golf in Auroville?

"This area is not very suitable for farming or building because it is low-lying and gets very wet in the monsoon," Suryan points out. "My idea would be to have a golf course of a high standard but also to preserve the beautiful surrounding wetland area that it might have been, hosting a far more diverse array of indigenous wildlife had agriculture and development not claimed it. It could then also serve as a park for people to enjoy."

"The thing about golf is that it can be played and enjoyed by people of all ages and abilities," says Sacha. "I envisage a driving range where you



Now where is that ball?

can practice, as well as a mini golf course and a chip-and-putt course. Add in a little café and it would be a great place for people to socialize."

The area where they play is located in the Green Belt but is partly village land. Realistically, do they see Auroville buying up additional land at 40 lakhs an acre so they can turn it into a full-fledged golf course?

"It could be a viable business," muses Suryan. "You could build a clubhouse, construct a water-catchment area, even a high-end hotel, and people from outside would pay to play here. And there's another thing. Golf is not an ecological sport: conventional golf courses break up natural habitats and need a lot of water and pesticides. India is developing fast and there will be a demand for more and more courses. So if we could construct a natural, an ecological golf course – and Auroville already has a lot of knowledge in this area – this could be a prototype that could be adopted elsewhere and Aurovilians could earn consultancy fees." He pauses. "But I would never expect Auroville to buy up this land for a golf course because there are so many other priorities. The biggest hope would be that an outside donor would buy 10-15 acres in this area and give us stewardship of it. At the moment everything's very organic; if it wants to happen, it will."

From an interview by Alan



Suryan (left) and Sacha after the match

AUROVILLE HISTORY

Mother's entry process

Shyam Sunder Jhunjunwala joined the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in 1964. In 1971, The Mother appointed him as her liaison with Auroville, in which function he also presented to Her the names of those who wanted to join Auroville for Her decision. Here he speaks about that early entry process.

"In the beginning the work was not so complicated. Each person who wanted to come to Auroville was interviewed by a group of four: Monsieur André, Mother's son; Roger Anger, Mother's architect; Navajata Poddar, the secretary of the Sri Aurobindo Society; and myself. We would ask the applicant to fill in a form which contained the usual questions plus the question, 'What brought you to Auroville?' That, in fact, was the main question. Because at the time quite a few people would apply without knowing much about Auroville; they were impressed by the name and the popularity.

We tried to find out if the person was really interested in the ideal, or was coming 'just like that'. We

would also look into the applicant's financial position; if the applicant could maintain him or herself, and whether he or she could contribute to the building of Auroville or to the building of a house for her or himself. But there were no hard and fast rules. Generally the interview would take 15 minutes. Sometimes it was longer, and even much longer when a candidate started lecturing us on what Auroville should be. That could be very tiresome! (laughter).

Another issue was to what extent an applicant was familiar with the work of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother. We all felt they should be, and if they were not, that they should become familiar. For otherwise, what brings them to Auroville? I remember there was a person who tried to examine Sri Aurobindo and

Mother in his own light, but there was neither devotion nor consecration to the cause. We felt the person did not belong.

In the beginning of Auroville, Mother used to receive many letters from people who wanted to join Auroville to retire there. Usually she would reply that Auroville was not a place for retirement. So I would inform such people, in a very gentle way, that Auroville was not suitable to their requirements. But there was no iron rule.

Then, with a passport-size photo and our comments, the form would go to The Mother. I brought it, because it was too clumsy that all the four 'wise men' (laughter) would go and see Mother on that topic. Then Mother would decide. Initially, She would ask me what the opinion of each of us was. Later, Mother would only ask my views, and then give Her decision. Mother judged each case on its own merits. Generally, Her decisions were in accordance with what I had proposed. But that was not an absolute rule.

For example, there was a case where Mother was slightly less approving. But I found the fellow to

be all right and I told Her that. She agreed to admit him. Then one day he suddenly ran away. When I informed Mother about it, She said; 'You see Shyam, sometimes I am also right.' (laughter).

At the time there were many constraints: financial constraints, housing constraints, you mention it. For once we had admitted someone, we had to take the responsibility of providing food and lodging. We had also a reporting system in place to find out what the man was doing, how he was behaving. We would get reports from the person as well as from the community. This, factually, constituted a probationary period of one year. And that probationary period could be extended if we felt it was necessary, or we could stop the period mid-way.

We would discuss the issues with the person and then either we would extend the period or we would say 'No sir, you have to leave.' In such cases there would be usually a hue and cry. If the person was insistent he or she would send letters to Mother. Sometimes Mother relented. But all decisions were ultimately Hers.

After November 1973, when Mother had left her body, the work became more difficult. By that time the whole thing had fallen on me because Roger was often in France, Navajata was generally out on tour, and Monsieur André would only attend to work when he came back from France. (laughter). So I tried my best to go within, pray to Mother and find if someone should be admitted or not.

When the problems between Auroville and the Sri Aurobindo Society came to the front, my work effectively ceased. The entry process then came into the hands of the Aurovilians themselves."

From an interview with Jaya and Jyothiprem, February 2010.

Published with permission of the magazine 'Sri Aurobindo's Action'

Some of Shyam Sunder's notes on his interaction with The Mother on Auroville have been published in the chapter *Mother steers Auroville* in his book *Down Memory Lane*, published by Sri Aurobindo's Action, 1996.

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