For nothing here is utterly what it seems.

Sri Aurobindo, Savitri
To look for oneself is to look for others
To look for others is to look for all
To look for all is to find and understand the Supreme Being / the universe

Lalon Fakir, an 18th century mystic poet/philosopher, East Bengal

Osmosis between the others and oneself and between all the different entities and aspects within one self is at some level as effortless as inhalation and exhalation. All of us after all have multiple identities; we represent ourselves, our gender, our family, our nation, and our many relations. Mostly, we do this seamlessly without much thought. Yet, understanding, appreciating and accepting the “other” within and beyond ourselves is a complex task. In large cosmopolitan cities the others remain ghettoized within their own neighborhood – requiring little or no meaningful interactions with people different from them. Auroville, nurturing a high human diversity by its design and intent even within its small resident population, does not allow one to remain completely insularized within oneself or with one’s own kind. Interaction between people of diverse culture, language, background is further enhanced by the city’s transitory but significant guest population.

This confluence of diverse groups of people makes intersection of fields, disciplines, cultures, ideas, arts, and thoughts possible – creating a medici effect, an environment for extraordinary innovation. The effect of the chemistry of interactions among people can be immensely positive if intelligently channeled. In fifteenth century Italy the Medici family tried out an experiment which in some aspect was similar to Auroville. They had invited and translocated the best...
minds in every field to Florence. This nurturing of interactions between diverse disciplines and groups that otherwise might not have occurred had a catalytic effect. It made Florence the epicenter of a creative explosion of new ideas and world view - the effect of which can be felt even today. Now research is being conducted, books are being written on how to create this *medici effect* – in communities, in work places and, more importantly, within oneself by recognizing and nourishing the other(s) that exist.

As most of us know, living among others with or without cultural differences is not easy. The task is doubly challenging because such interactions make us confront and define our own identities. Some become more “indianized” or “anglicized” while others staunchly defend the cultures/identities they inherited and may even have resisted before - with fanatic fervor. The majority, however, manages to find the middle path most of the time – synthesizing the cultures within oneself and thus enhancing their own creative potentials. Auroville, for its myriad of categories - Aurovilians, newcomers, friends of Auroville, guests and volunteers – irrespective of their nationality, statehood, language and background, offers that platform for interaction and innovation.

However, as we find out in Auroville on a daily basis living, simple words, gestures, and even a nod can be misread. Perhaps that is why recognizing the self and identifying with the others – has been a topic that has inspired philosophers, mystics, and poets for centuries. It has also influenced science. Jakob von Uexküll, an early 20th century German scientist, transformed scientific study of animals by suggesting that anyone who wishes to understand the life of animals must start by considering their umwelt, i.e. their environment-cum-self world in its entirety. It encouraged researchers to identify with the animals – to be in their shoes (or rather, in their feet, paws, hoofs, claws, etc.) in order to understand them by understanding the world/environment as they perceive it. A similar sentiment is also found in a much different text - Bharata’s Nātyāśāstra. Nātyāśāstra is a treatise written sometime between 200BC and 200AD on natya or performance arts - including theatre, dance and music. There, natya is considered to be the highest form of worship because human beings, despite being restricted by their own form, can become the omnipresent while performing by identifying themselves with other beings – humans, plants, animals or even gods through natya.

In Auroville, along with the challenges and rewards of living with the others, there are concerted efforts to find the negative and positive traits within oneself, to identify with others' points of view, to recognize and understand the differences by creating safe spaces. This is attempted through restorative circles, deep dialogue exercises, workshops, conflict resolution, mediation, and other such processes and interactions. Acknowledging and addressing both one’s uniqueness and unity-in-diversity will likely help to channel these into creative forces of innovative ideas, designs, thoughts, governance, and processes. Each person in Auroville, consciously or otherwise, is actively contributing to this amazing experiment unfolding.

**Questioning myself and the ‘other’:**

**by Nina and Audrey**

Two Aurovilians, separated by time, space, generations and a world apart. Molded by the experiences in their lives they both find themselves in Auroville. Here they share and confront the ‘other’ and themselves. Through this sharing they hope to address the other in themselves and in the community – as a small step towards better understanding.

**Audrey:** I grew up with the confusing self image of the ‘other’ as a dyslexic. I had created in my mind two selves the capable one and the dumb one. Realization of the ‘other’ outside of me perhaps happened for the first time during the World War II when my good friend (our gardener, a person of Japanese origin) was taken away to a camp in Montana, and our beloved teacher, who had fled Germany, was suddenly portrayed as the ‘other’ in media propaganda. Much later when my own children went to school during integration, despite all our good wishes and support – both communities continued to experience trauma, assumptions, and prejudices that play themselves out even to this day.

**Nina:** When Audrey was growing up in the USA my mother was growing up in India – cocooned in her world – with extended family members. Though ‘others’ who the elders defined as those “who are not like us” existed – she was not conscious of any difference. Upon returning to Calcutta after a
Audrey: I grew up being comfortable with people who were considered to be the ‘others’ by most people around me at the time. My beloved nanny who happened to be an African American sometimes took me home with her. The curiosity I received from the children in her neighborhood made me feel nice, but different. My experience among ‘others’ led me to explore racism as an adult and attend workshops on the topic. I realized that there is no single solution. In fact, in my yoga these issues are there for my growth. I found out that sharing these issues and experiences can be healing.

Nina: I realize my parents’ experience during the partition has somewhat ingrained its ‘otherness’ view in me. I had the distinct presence of the ‘other’ for the first time when I had left home to study. Wherever I have lived, and worked – in India or abroad - I experience the friendly curiosity of being the ‘other’ myself. I also learned to enjoy being the ‘other’ as it allowed me the freedom that I had le

Audrey: Prior to arriving at Auroville I had only some limited exposure to French citizens during my brief visit in Paris some years back. I did not find them particularly friendly then, but considering the language barrier and as a tourist in their country, I thought I was unknowingly imposing somehow. In Auroville, barring a few exceptions, my experience made me fall back to my adolescent assumption about the French people. I had assumed that ‘they’ thought that they were the most cultured country and we from the newest, most boorish one, much too friendly and unsophisticated. I was disturbed by my feelings and assumptions because I knew rationally they did not make any sense and yet it irked me that my experiences would justify.

Nina: What attracted me to Auroville most is the part of ‘A Dream’ and the ‘Charter’ that talks about a place - above all creeds, politics, and nationalities for the purpose to realize human unity. Yet it is here that I sometime found it difficult to see any adherence to that notion. As a newcomer looking for accommodation, I went to see a place where the European steward told me that she was doing me a favor but otherwise she did not usually consider Indians as house-sitters. She added gestures to mimic the splutter and stain etc of Indian cooking, of which none would be allowed in her kitchen in her absence. My initial shock was quickly replaced by a combination of nationalistic feelings laced with a big dose of anger and ego. I could have addressed this issue in so many ways yet what came up in my mind was raw and basic. Where was the notion of a place above nationalities? My reaction was as disturbing to me as the statement by my fellow Aurovilian.

We have found that when we are sad, tired, disturbed and vulnerable it is perhaps harder to see the ‘other’ as we may even feel disconnected from ourselves. When our own long-brewed misconceptions get voiced by someone, or by an institution, that can be the sort of affirmation to nurture them further. We feel it is time to look at those assumptions within ourselves and question them deeply.

Perhaps these issues of the ‘Other’ are there to help us attain the wholeness or oneness. Our conversation attempts to highlight an issue that is very much a part of Auroville and its quest for Human Unity.
The other

by Arunima

Arunima Choudhury was born in Bengal and grew up in a joint family till the age of nine. Then her parents sent her to Pondicherry to study in Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education. The abrupt transition from living a life with her parents surrounded by uncles, aunts and cousins to living in a hostel and having to understand and adapt to a completely different ambiance has marked her for all her life. She says that her attempt to find her place in society and define her identity began right then and that the more she advances in life the more she realizes that identity is a multi-faceted phenomenon, and that what makes life interesting and rich is the transgression of the frontiers of established identities. Arunima lives in Pondicherry and often visits Auroville. Arunima may be contacted on arunima.choudhury@gmail.com.

As a child I grew up in a strangely eclectic religious atmosphere. My parents and I lived with my uncles and aunts as a large, extended family. Our household deity from several generations was Krishna. On special occasions such as on my grandfather's death anniversary or on Janmashtami, Krishna's birthday, my youngest uncle who was a staunch Vaishnava, organized devotional concerts in our house. Big, hefty men clad in white dhotis and kurtas, some with cymbals and others with khols (a two headed drum held horizontally while playing) strapped around their necks and hanging down to their midriffs, gathered on our terrace. At first they sat in a circle and sang. As the night deepened and the singing got more fervent, they rose to their feet and began dancing as well. My father and uncles joined in, the music and dancing rose to a pitch of excitement and ended with a shower of exclamations, Hari! Hari! This was followed by the Vaishnavas throwing handfuls of sugar candies in the air which I along with other children scuttled to gather.

My father though had strayed from the flock. He had become the follower of a Bengali freedom fighter turned philosopher-saint, settled in Pondicherry, and a French woman, my relatives muttered amongst themselves, with revolutionary ideas on education, marriage, society and equality of sex.

And I was sent to a school run by nuns where every week we went to the chapel and read colourfully illustrated books on the miracles wrought by Christ. I was particularly attracted to the picture of a gentle, bearded Christ feeding a small, fluffy lamb.

There was no contradiction in all this. I bathed in the holy soup of Krishna, Jesus, Sri Aurobindo, The Mother and felt safe and protected.

There was also a Muslim servant called Chamatkar which means 'wonderful'. Chamatkar was old. He had a white, longish beard. His face was like soft, crumpled paper with bright, laughing eyes. He always wore a dirty, white skull cap and a lungi with blue and white checks. He often carried me in his arms and the elders in the house teased me by saying, "When you grow up we will marry you to Chamatkar." Chamatkar too found this funny and when I was unbearable, pulling his beard or wanting to wear his skull cup, he would threaten me with the same fate. I knew he had a wife but he lived alone in our house on the ground floor in a damp room with a single window. Like all devout Muslims he prayed five times a day. I knew I was not supposed to disturb him then, but when I could I peeked in through the window to watch him spread his prayer mat, wash his feet and hands, and kneel down to pray. This ritual of withdrawal into a private world which had nothing to do with the one which surrounded him, fascinated me.

I don't know if I asked him about his beliefs, maybe I refrained unconsciously because I knew there was an invisible barrier to be respected. But I do not think that I was consciously aware of the fact that he was the other.

As I grew up the outline of the others grew clearer, all those who believed in other divinities than the community I belonged to, were the others, all those whose financial and social status was inferior to ours were the others, all those whose skin colour and physical features were different than our own were the others. My father later sent me to a school founded on the teachings of his gurus and there all those who did not belong to the same line of belief were the others. So in fact we were surrounded by others and had to define our identity by distinguishing ourselves from the others. All this happened during my teen years. And it was natural to lose the innocence of my childhood and define myself by taking into account existing boundaries. But along with the growing awareness of these boundaries was also a growing revolt against them. The devotion that was spontaneous during my childhood now became fraught...
with obstacles. The ethical rigidity of Rama repelled me, the elitism and intellectual snobbery of my education suffocated me, the belief of middle class families of which my family was a part that all those who are poorer are also dirtier, less intelligent and less honest than they, frustrated me.

I wanted a way out. I could not say to hell with religion and become a Marxist because I was fed on belief along with my mother's milk, but accepting that was like entering into a room, locking myself in, and throwing away the key. I wanted a way out, to a place where my atavistic tendencies and my personal beliefs could find a meeting ground, where poetry and philosophy fused, where humanity and divinity walked hand in hand.

Kabir showed me the way. A boyfriend who walked on the margins of heresy himself gifted me a tattered translation of Kabir's poems translated into English by Tagore. Wallowing in a morass of confusion and disillusionment where the heaven that I had been promised had turned out to be a country divided into mined frontiers, the poems touched my being with their simplicity and courage.

... It's just as well my prayer beads scattered
I'm free of all that holy chatter!
The burden of my head is gone.

or

Your words are sweet as sugar
Your deeds are poisoned bread.
Quit the words, walk the talk.
Turn the poison to nectar.

or

Some say the lord dwells in heaven.
Some say in the land of holy cows.
Some say in the land of Shiva.
In every age they set up their shops!
Do what you must, you seekers!

There are so many more. I could keep on quoting. Here was a voice which went directly to my heart, where all that created The Other was knocked down with frightening ease and nonchalance, mosques, temples, the Gita, the Koran, the rich, the poor, and what remained was not emptiness but an infinite vastness.

So Kabir made me reconcile myself with form by being supremely irreverent to it. His words gave me the courage to be radical because he had by abandoning everything found all. The world was made whole again, The Other only an illusion.
Lev Tolstoj

Paola Rondina, from Italy, was a volunteer in Auroville for 3 months.

The first time I read these words of Tolstoj was on a movie screen in Auroville, Tamil Nadu, India. It was a warm and humid Indian night and probably one of my last visits at Cinema Paradiso.

Now I wake up during the night because there is too much silence around me: no frogs or birds, neither the sound of the wind between the bamboo branches or the rain tapping on the leaves. I open my eyes in the darkness and I ask myself: “Where am I?” Well, I supposedly am in a place that used to be my home, my country, but now seems unknown to me. My body is here in Italy, 8000 kms away from my heart, which I left in Auroville.

I do not write pretending to be objective and neither do I try to keep some form of distance: I write like I am writing about my love, like I am talking about my family or my dearest friends. I write about what I know because I loved it and can’t do otherwise.

Whoever arrives in Auroville for the first time comes with her/his own ideas about what to expect, what to watch for, or search... It also happened to me the first time. I was skeptical; I had the feeling of entering an enclave: a place of young people looking for alternatives and former young people looking for alternatives, all living together in a world apart, in voluntary exile equipped with modern comforts. With quite some presumption I called them “runaways”.

But then I came back. There was something calling me back. I know that it sounds strange or may seem that I had visions or heard voices but I believe that each person reading this knows exactly what I mean. The call was so strong, clear and absolutely irresistible that I had no other choice but return.

All of us, sooner or later in our lives, experience the difference a person can make when motivated by an ideal. Sometimes only one brave act is enough to start a revolution and this is the thing I did not understand at the time but do recognize now. Auroville is made by human beings who try, day in day out, to make a difference for themselves and for others; they are goodwill-persons who reached a point of no return with compromises; women and men who consciously stopped to sacrifice themselves on the altar of a way of life in which they cannot recognize themselves anymore and joined a revolution, beginning with the hardest part of it: revolution of the inner self.

Auroville is a utopia, an experiment, a dream, a continuous becoming. It is made by men for men, a foundry of ideas, an exploration into finding new possible ways of living together, and it is not always perfect.

Anything new-to-be-created requires persistent testing with care and with love, and with continual adjustments and corrections that form the process to put together the ideal with the existing realities. It’s an inevitable stage in the creation of something that does not exist yet, in this case: a new way of living. And it is a very big work, a work with human beings and for human beings. It is a work to live for and to be proud of what we have done, instead of a work aiming towards a lot of things in the illusion of a pursuit of happiness. Aurovilians seriously try to be happy for how they are and for what they are, for what each of us can give to the world and for what the world can return back.

I never had seen so many smiles. I had never smiled so much.

When I came back home I became aware of the forest breathing around me, of flower fragrances and nature sounds, and it was an endless ode to life and its beauty. I never felt this way before..., I was a part of an All infinitely bigger than me.

Well, this is Auroville to me, a place on this planet called Earth, tiny grain in the Universe, where you can try to change the world by changing first of all yourself. Where day after day you learn to live in respect of yourself, of the others and the environment; a place not out of the world but for the world and into the world.

I understood that if you want to run away you can go anywhere, even to Auroville. But if you do NOT want run away anymore and want to look life straight in the eyes, there is no better place to do this than in Auroville, Tamil Nadu, India.

My partner and I came to Auroville in January, eager, bright-eyed, ready to participate and learn. January and February, the high season. Yes, that was us, cycling around town with maps in our cycle baskets or sticking out of a pocket, getting lost repeatedly nonetheless, asking stupid questions. We were among friends. We found accommodation and work. We socialised with our co-workers, mostly fellow enthusiastic volunteers from around the world. We had a blast. We did not meet many Aurovilians. March and April were filled with goodbyes, each week we said goodbye to another of our (guest) friends. Then came summer, and our friends left us alone... You did start to welcome us then as, after all, we were sticking it out in climatically difficult months. We noticed that sometimes you would greet us as we rode through the forest, red faced and sweaty. This was new. If you work in a service capacity you might acknowledge us standing in line with a smile, you might even remember our names.

In July and August we began to feel at home. People who had difficulty seeing us before now asked if we were Newcomers. No, no we’re not, we’re guests. “Oh.” We met more people and got involved in more projects. I started to occasionally hear myself saying ‘we’ in reference to ‘us’ in Auroville. I sometimes forget that I’m one of ‘them.’ We even went to a general meeting. Friends told us it would be okay. We knew we couldn’t actually participate, but we wanted to observe, we wanted to learn more about this intriguing community that was pulling us in. An Aurovilian reminded us “you’re just guests.” Oh, that’s right! By September and October, we felt like part of the community. Aurovilian friends and all. We were invited to parties and mistaken by guests as Aurovilians. I can now identify the guests from the Aurovilians, mostly. I recognise your faces and share many of your hopes and frustrations. I want what’s best for our community. In November and December, we find ourselves annoyed by the tourists, the short-term guests and all their questions. I sit with people I know and navigate the community with confidence. We contribute our labour and time, we write, farm, build, discuss and collaborate. We are at home. We also prepare, reluctantly, to leave. “How long are you here?” I leave next month. “Oh, you’re just a guest.” I suppose I am. But I’ll have been a guest for nearly a year, and I know you know that’s significant, to me at least. I’ll be a guest again, probably many times more. Recently someone asked me, “Are you Australian or Aurovilian?” Do I have to choose just one? I hesitated before answering, though only one applies. Can I be simply a part of humanity as a whole? I ask you, what does it mean to be Aurovilian? I ask myself, what does it mean to be Australian? To nobody in particular, and also to everyone particularly, I ask, does it matter? Who are you? Are you just a guest? Maybe I can guess.

Rebecca is an anthropology PhD student from Melbourne, Australia, who came to Auroville via Savi and stayed throughout 2011. She spent her time here asking about and contemplating ideas such as ‘home,’ ‘belonging,’ nationalism and ‘development.’ She also spent considerable time drinking watermelon juice and getting purposefully lost in the forest!
The world we see is less of an indication about the world and more of an indication about our seeing.

Alan Cohen

Guest Season is upon us and this issue draws your attention to differing perceptions that guests to Auroville may have. Articles received look back at guests we attracted in earlier days, share some perspectives of long-term volunteers, load you with zany but completely true statistics, and one gives a deliberate and imaginative misrepresentation of an imaginary guest.

But how do guests see us?

Now that’s where we become sensitive, isn’t it? It’s true that OutreachMedia does everything it can to try and ensure that at least visiting media get properly informed... in a desperate bid to have Auroville ‘correctly’ represented. But it doesn’t always work..! What, for instance, would an innocent visitor make of Giorgio’s photographs posted here? Do Aurovilian school teachers dress up theatrically for classes? Do we see a man meditating or a man trying out a cushion for comfort? What is she doing rising out of the ground so ceremoniously (photo next page)? We invite you to have a little fun imagining how we can be perceived by guests.

Ah! The media and our/their perceptions! Naturally, all media is a neutral transmitting medium. But we are warned about them in a humorous announcement by OutreachMedia. That’s because it is widely understood that what is chosen to be transmitted is motivated by perception (invariably based on pre-conceived notions), and what is received is guided by the same. It is very easy to deliberately misrepresent facts and invite objectionable stereotyping. And that is a general concern. We address this in a separate section on censorship in Auroville.

Photographs by Giorgio

by Krishna

It is widely understood that what is chosen to be transmitted is motivated by perception and what is received is guided by the same.
Auroville isn’t
by Dianna

This is an imagined letter from an imaginary guest on a short visit to Auroville.

Dear Margaret,
I am writing this to you from the strangest place. I was in Chennai getting some cheap medical tourism done when a French woman in the hotel said would I like to share a taxi to a place called Auroville down the coast. She had a copy of “Auroville Today” a rather smart magazine with pictures of intelligent looking white people having meetings and coolies digging the roads and village ladies smiling as they carried huge loads on their heads. I wanted to try out my new face so I said “Yes of course”, in true British exploring spirit.

The first night I stayed at a little hotel called Auroville Aurobindo Hotel but couldn’t see much as it was pouring rain all night, and the next, and the next. When it cleared someone told me I wasn’t in Auroville, though everything was advertised as Auroville, but in a village called Kupiyakpukalam or something, where the natives wore the strangest short lumpy skirts and cows wandered about everywhere.

I eventually got a taxi up the City but couldn’t find it. It doesn’t exist. It is a tourist trap to get you here to go to the expensive Boutiques. It has been here, sort of, for 40 years but only has about five big buildings including the bizarrely named Town Hall, without a town. They proudly claim they have 2,000 inhabitants but I work that out at 50 people a year. And there seemed to be lots of Korean people for some reason. Maybe they are attracted by the cult. Their leader is a French woman (French! Who had two husbands!) and lives in a gigantic golden ball. You can visit her at certain times but it seemed very
complicated so I gave it a miss.
The residents seem to live in containers or tree houses somewhere as I couldn't see many houses except a big posh white block where the executives live. People rush around on motor bikes on the most appalling muddy and pot holed roads while most of the work seems to be done by the coolies.
I rashly rented a rattling old motor bike as there are no buses allowed but it broke down all the time and I had to push it, a very humiliating experience for someone of my age. A nice young man from Iceland (Iceland!) gave me a lift and I nearly had a hernia trying to climb up on the back of his bike. Never again.

A notice in my room says not to go out after dark so I am a prisoner from 6 till 6 as those are the hours of darkness here. I tried to go to sleep at 7 o'clock as the electricity was off so I couldn't read and there was nothing else to do. Didn't sleep very well as howling dogs were fighting outside my window and I kept hearing something scuffling in my room. In the morning my watch, which I had placed on the bedside table, was in the middle of the room and had been chewed. When I reported this to the guests at breakfast an Aurovilian in their uniform of faded shorts and T-shirts said it must have been a rat. "Some of them have a thing about leather," he said in a strong Russian (Russian!) accent. He then proceeded to tell the assembled table how the day before he had set a trap for a visiting rat but it was a big one and got the trap stuck on its head and was running around like that till he hit it with a frying pan.

The Aurovilians are said to be unfriendly to outsiders but I have spoken to a few. A German couple tell me they work here in the forest for no payment and pay for everything while they are here. They have been here a year and spent all their savings and now have to go back to Germany to make some more money to pay Auroville to live here. A very strange arrangement!

Lots of old people here, still wobbling about on their motor bikes and living (relatively) cheaply in the sun. Maybe it will become the New Spain though personally I would prefer to retire to Tuscany though of course can't afford it.

Love
D.

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Getting to know (y)our Guests

(This information was interpreted from statistics that were gathered from Aurocard and C-form data as a project of SAVI by Michael, a volunteer with SAVI.)

October 2010 – October 2011:
Total guests: 6463
46% of them were men and 54% were women.
They stayed for an average of 30 days each.
415 days was the longest stay of a volunteer.
The youngest guest was a few months old and the oldest guest was 100 years old!

Almost 2 out of 3 guests you meet are either interning or volunteering in Auroville.

WOMEN GUESTS: When they are younger, they travel here alone; later on, they come with their families; but, after they hit middle age, they leave their partners at home when they come to Auroville!

WHO ARE THEY?
Germans: 50% of 50+ yr olds are Gemini, Cancer or Virgo
Russians: 10% are Gemini males and 10% are Aquarian females
Young French in Reve: 20% Aquarians
French in Sharnga: Many Virgos and Pisceans
Longest staying: French, German, Indian

WHEN DO THEY COME?
February!!!!!
Dec 15 – March 15: 50% of all guests
January: Preferred by Leos
August: Preferred by Cancerians

WHAT ARE THEY?
Younger guests: Gemini is the best represented sun sign
Middle-aged guests: Aquarius is the best represented sun sign
Older generation: Cancer and Gemini are the best represented sun signs

WHERE DO THEY PREFER TO STAY?
Aquarians: Reve, Quiet
Gemini: Sadhana Forest
Virgo: Sadhana Forest, Center Guesthouse
Sagittarius: Center Guesthouse
Quiet: Gemini, Cancer, Aquarius
Sharnga: Taurus, Cancer
Earth Institute: Aries, Sagittarius

40-50 yr old German women: Center Guest House
50+ yr old German women: Quiet
Young French adults: Reve
Middle aged French: Sharnga Guest House

RARE MIGRATORY ‘BREEDS’ IN AUROVILLE:
Young British Men
Italian Libra Men

ABSENT AMONG AUROVILLE GUESTS:
20-23 yr old Spanish Men
70+ yr old Italian Men

MOST COMMON GUEST:
French Gemini

SERVING AUROVILLE:
Japanese (mostly younger men come here)
Koreans
Indians
Israelis

HOLIDAYING IN AUROVILLE:
Italians (mostly older women come here)
Russians

A QUESTION: How come Librans, Scorpios, Aquarians and Capricorns avoid living at the Earth Institute?? (Of course, Arians and Sagittarians absolutely love being there!)
To Censor: To examine (a book, film, news, personal letters, official dispatches, performances, etc...) and to remove or suppress what is considered morally unacceptable, politically unacceptable, or a threat to security.

In our search to define the ‘culture’ of this growing experimental city, we take a look at the issue of censorship in Auroville. As a community, we share values about this but we have vastly different perceptions about whether our views are being repressed or not, about whether we are repressing the views of others or not, and about what is acceptable or unacceptable.

**Does Auroville censor?**

by Tim

*FROM THE AUROVILLE WEBSITE: When you want to visit Auroville for filming, writing or photographic purposes, you will have to get in touch with Auroville’s OutreachMedia, the Auroville service in charge of facilitating visits of journalists and film/video makers. Their particular aim is to ensure that all journalists and filmmakers get correct, up-to-date information or relevant/representative footage from the best sources so that generally their visit is a fruitful and constructive one.*

Auroville’s OutreachMedia team has somehow acquired an unfair image for itself among many Aurovilians, who seem to think that it is a censoring body for the township and its inhabitants. Nothing could be further from the truth. OutreachMedia has never acted as a censoring body within or for Auroville, and would never wish to. The role that OutreachMedia does play, with the full support of the Working Committee, Governing Board and Foundation Office, is to try to ensure that Auroville is accurately and truthfully portrayed, especially in documentary films, though also whenever possible in magazine and newspaper articles.

Regarding the latter, part of the problem OutreachMedia faces is that many journalists, specially foreign ones, don't allow themselves enough time to learn about the project. However, there are others who arrive with a preconceived idea of their own regarding what Auroville is, and regardless of all the facts that are openly available to them simply proceed to twist what they see, hear or read into a story that they want to write.

In its efforts to ensure that Auroville is accurately portrayed, OutreachMedia may at times point out blatant inaccuracies and blunders. Anyone who thinks that that is censorship should reconsider.
Do you recognise Auroville?

“An entirely self-sufficient township, Auroville turned out to be exactly as Aurobindo Ghosh had visualised. People here grow their own crops, vegetables, prepare their own spices, oils, garments etc. The tourists, on the other hand, bring in the money to create the spiritual temple, Matrimandir and build the town further.”

“As a traveller, what amazed me was that I could live in Auroville with barely any money spent. For Rs 200 a night, I stayed in a hotel for five days; though people internning with Auroville can stay for free. Every traveller here usually eats at the solar kitchen either free of cost or at a minimum cost of Rs 20-30.”

“I decided to make the most of my five days by learning pottery making. But there are other options too – dance, music, dramatics, painting, sketching, metal art, candle and essence making etc. People can write to Auroville through their website and ask to intern with the town itself. You can volunteer in running the township while you learn your art.”

“If I had to describe Auroville in two words, I would say it replicates Atlas Shrugged by Ayn Rand. The book spoke about a secret township in mountains, unreachable and untraceable. Created by geniuses, scientists, business tycoons and greatest artists of the world; leaving the rest of the world to discuss their mysterious disappearances.”

“An entire township created by one thought, and thousands of volunteers, Auroville is a wonder in its own way. It was everything I was looking for: a perfect escape.”

“...the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, also known as Auroville.”

“During the official opening ceremony of the "City of Dawn" in 1968, representatives of 126 nations took part; at the moment there are just 36 of these still present. The model city, planned on 50 hectares, would foresee 50,000 people with accommodation; there are around 2,000 left. Exact numbers one doesn’t get from the management.”

“And so we find ourselves looking at a post-modern concrete building ‘The world of the Divine’.”

“Why does a loving, open community make itself so invisible? What is hidden here?”

Does censorship have a role in Auroville?

“Auroville’s presence on the global stage has become more prominent. We have an increased flow of tourists and visitors and our relationship with the Indian administration has also changed. There’s a paranoia that we’ll say or do the wrong thing vis-a-vis the outside world, and not without reason. Aurovilians have received Quit Notices in this way. A culture of censorship in our media has emerged. You can’t publish anything even faintly controversial in the News and Notes, for example, in case it ends up on the desk of someone looking for an excuse to attack...”

“Since the Foundation was established there are many things we are afraid of saying; we were quite iconoclastic at one point but we can’t be like that now.”

Do you enjoy it when the MEDIA comes to Auroville..? Writing about how we all walk around in white robes, barefoot through the red dirt, drive around on Humvees, eat organic food, and gather together to hug the banyan tree while singing OHUM? No, but that is what some of the outside world gets to see through the Media. And the guest session is coming. Soon Auroville will be full of visitors, tourists, students, volunteers, journalists, researchers, film makers, and photographers and what-have-you. They create reports or articles, and post their publications in the mass media such as newspapers, radio, magazines, documentary film, or on the Internet. Better be aware, folks! Quote of the Week: “Journalism is popular, but it is popular mainly as fiction. Life is one world, and life seen in the newspapers another” - G.K. CHESTERTON, All Things Considered

OutreachMedia in the News and Notes, 15 Oct 2011, pg 5.

“Auroville experiences a very high level of freedom to experiment and play and there are those out there who see that, but for some reason the grim voice of criticism seems to dominate. Why so?”

“... I don’t make fun of everything. ... At the same time, my work is to go everywhere where people don’t want to go, wherever there is a problem I must be able to tackle it.”

“In fact, nothing is off-limits for me in terms of subject-matter.”

“... there are certain subjects I wouldn’t make fun of.”

“Our standards must be so framed that we are not reduced to a level where the protection of the least capable and most depraved amongst us determines what the morally healthy cannot view or read.”

I have always found it difficult to write about Auroville, like struggling against an octopus, perhaps. Auroville is so vastly multi-dimensional, or so like a finely cut diamond with an infinite number of facets... it is so hard to say something concrete about it. It slips through your hands as soon as you think you have grasped it: neti, neti... not this, not that. I once envisioned writing a book about Auroville, then gave it up as a too hubristic endeavor. It can't help but lie, for when you say one thing, you are denying the truth of some other part of it. I felt that again yesterday as I ran headlong into this or that paragraph I had written and realized it was only partially true, and that there was another truth that turned what I had said into a lie. IMPOSSIBLE!

From The Life Divine (2005 edition):

This surface mental individuality is ego-centric; it looks at the world and things and happenings from its own standpoint and sees them not as they are but as they affect itself: in observing things it gives them the turn suitable to its own tendency and temperament, selects or rejects, arranges truth according to its own mental preference and convenience; observation, judgment, reason are all determined or affected by this mind-personality and assimilated to the needs of the individuality and the ego. [642]

Our oneness with others must be fundamental, not a oneness with their minds, hearts, vital selves, egos,—even though these come to be included in our universalised consciousness,—but a oneness in the soul and spirit, and that can only come by our liberation into soul-awareness and self-knowledge. To be ourselves liberated from ego and realise our true selves is the first necessity; all else can be achieved as a luminous result, a necessary consequence. [653]

The division of our being from the being of others can only be healed by removing the divorce of our nature from the inner soul-reality, by abolishing the veil between our becoming and our self-being, by bridging the remoteness of our individuality in Nature from the Divine Being who is the omnipresent Reality in Nature and above Nature. [654–655]

Sri Aurobindo
Roger Toll lived in Auroville from 1971 to 1979 at Centre and Gratitude. He worked at Matrimandir, in publications, in early efforts at governance, in Auroville relations throughout India, and in Pondicherry with Satprem. Since leaving, he has edited and written for newspapers and magazines in England, Mexico and the United States.

We were a happy lot, for the most part, in the early days of Auroville. There was a lot of freedom, little oversight, few people and no money. Left largely to ourselves, we bumbled forward, building keet huts and new communities where we wanted. There was no grass, few trees, and views that stretched forever. Best of all, at least in the earliest days, the Mother, still physically present, provided guidance, counsel, decisions and blessings.

A visitor, however, might never have known at first sight how content we were in our remote corner of the earth. I recall helping a BBC documentary team from a prestigious weekly show, famously friendly to spiritual seekers in the early seventies, that became progressively frustrated as the week passed by. “Why doesn’t anybody smile?” the producer would ask. It’s a question I heard countless times during those years. For all I know, it may still be voiced by visitors today.

For the most part, we Aurovilians felt a fraternal complicity in our communal experiment, and we generally liked each other, but to outsiders we were not a congenial lot. Dispersed in small groups across many acres, we tended to cast our gaze inward, concentrating on our own communities and our immediate needs. The outside world felt intrusive, which made it challenging for new arrivals to feel welcome. Perhaps we even saw our lack of embrace as a virtue, a barrier to those who were not “predestined” to be there. (The predestined, of course, found their entry points with ease.)

I didn’t like the word “outsiders,” a strange term when our task was human unity. Aren’t we all one, after all? Nevertheless, it was tiring to fend off visitors’ preconceived ideas of how a utopian-minded community should act. It was hard to keep repeating what Auroville was all about; we hardly knew it ourselves, though we kept discovering it as we advanced. I took to advising new arrivals not to ask questions but rather observe, feel, live a week or a month in our guesthouse without judging. “Why?” they would counter. “You’re asking another question,” I’d say.

But the township kept growing, despite us. In those early days, we sensed quite accurately which newcomers would stay and which would go. There was magic in the air, perhaps the influence of the 60s: fresh faces would cycle up and stop in front of you and you’d feel as though you recognized them as comrades from adventures long ago. “Ah, you’ve arrived!” Others, you sensed, would be gone in a week. And they usually were.

I remember a fascinating string of exceptional people who came to visit our fledgling town, like zephyrs of fresh air in that red-clay existence, an embracing Yin to our introverted Yang. They were excited by the daring vision of a universal town willing to experiment in everything new, which they saw as potentially a laboratory for solutions to inbred systems that no longer seemed to work. They would stay with us, or visit daily from the relative luxury of Pondicherry since we had very few spare beds to sleep in.

They were people like Gregory Bateson, the brilliant British polymath and social scientist; Swami Satchitananda, the religious master; Maurice Girodias, the famous Paris taboo-breaking book publisher; scores of musicians and writers and filmmakers; and even the Dalai Lama, who came to visit the young lamas who taught the Tibetan children who lived with us in the early days. People came from the UN and UNESCO, exploring how they might benefit from our nascent experiment in community and human unity. And yet I was always surprised by how few Aurovilians took advantage of this flow of knowledge from other fields than ours. Were we too arrogant, believing that we already had the true knowledge? Or were we incurious, which may be even worse? Were we too enclosed in our world, too shut off from the outside? Or maybe they never knew, spread out as we were with no telephones, laptops nor even drums to communicate to far flung communities. (In 1973, only about five people had motorcycles; everyone biked everywhere.)

Even in those early years, I feared a tendency to parochialism, to small thinking, constricted vision. Which to me was the opposite of the vastness I found in Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. I understood Auroville as an engine, a generator, a crucible that—when sufficiently stoked with the flame of its residents’ aspiration—would help light the world, contributing to some eventual transformation... not like the work of Tibetan monks chanting in a distant cave, but by working, experimenting and building the city we would create some new sort of embryo to offer to the world. Perhaps that is happening. Perhaps not. But we don’t seem to have a lot of time to lose.

Auroville is more mature today, more diverse, larger, with more rules than there were supposed to be, and more limitations. Thus, it is more complex. On occasional visits, I still see very few gratuitous smiles handed out to new arrivals, but perhaps there is more opportunity for interaction between outside and inside with the denser population, the many places to eat, the offices, boutiques and cultural events that offer windows into the community that any stranger can peer through and see life as it exists anywhere, with smiles, laughter, conversations and discussions. Maybe it’s too normal, and the original vision—so extraordinary, so daring—has been abraded, eroded, and taken for granted. Then again, maybe not.

When I visit, I quickly reconnect with my version of Auroville, the one I still carry, somehow still fresh, from its first decade. But it is harder to locate in the forests we planted and in the roiling dust of passing vehicles. Yet I keep seeing it, that original seed, in the place it most rightly belongs: in the people of Auroville, who are handsomer and fitter than elsewhere, and in their eyes, which are more alive than anywhere.
Claudine Vignes has been living in Auroville since 2000. In Paris, she used to create educational video games using computer graphics. Here in Auroville, she has participated in a number of films in collaboration with CSR and Upasana.

I have this passion for creating images…. 3D, aquarelles, collages, videos, photos... Thanks to a new reflex digital camera and an exceptional macro lens, I’m discovering a for me hitherto unseen and fabulous world, the world of insects and spiders which we so rarely have the opportunity to observe as it is too small and often too scary to most of us.

Facing the beauty of this world, its shapes, its colours, its improbable encounters, I became filled with wonder and respect, and felt the strong urge to become witness of this extraordinary dimension by sharing it as seen through my eyes.

All these pictures were taken in a small stretch of ‘tropical dry evergreen forest’ close to the Bay of Bengal in the south of India, known as Auroville. Day after day it brings me great joy to zigzag its paths and discover its secrets. My perception of those wild, underbrush weeds and grasses has completely changed in the process as now I know they are home to a multitude of creatures...

The exhibition “Invisible world” was hosted by Gallery Square Circle, Kalakendra, Bharat Nivas, for several weeks from 17 December 2011 onwards.
March 11-15, 2012

Tantidhatri
International
Women’s Theatre
Festival

This unique festival is inspired by the Transit Festival (Odin Theatret, Denmark). It will feature productions from Denmark, Wales, Austria, France, New Zealand, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Italy, Japan and India, and will this year take place in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala.

Read more about it at tantidhatrifestival.blogspot.com
Hibiscus Art Village Project

by Miki

Kalakendra has been hosting the Hibiscus Art Village Collective featuring around 20 artists from Auroville. Professionals joined with Future School students in sharing their work with the community with the intention to open a creative dialogue within Auroville. As Louis of Svedame explained: “The passing on of our experience to the next generation (hence the title of this show) is the main focus of the event as well as the gathering a team of artists to work collectively together as part of the Hibiscus Art Village Project. The essence of the project is to enlarge the creative experience and bring it to the community, to become a living blooming garden of imagination…”

The exhibition intended to raise funding as well. New and emerging young artists and others will eventually congregate at the Village to learn from seasoned artists who live and work here, as well as from invited artists from abroad and other parts of India.

In future, the Village hopes to create specialized art studios (such as sculpture-making equipped studios, a welding studio, pottery and painting studios, etc). The exhibition took place from 25th of November until 12th December 2011. The venue provided a space to meet and have lively discussions on art and culture with Aurovilian artists, enjoy dinner and music, perhaps make connections for future cultural projects and, of course, to creatively and collectively dream in an atmosphere promoting the arts.
Alec Cumming in Auroville

by Adam, Art 18/21

The works of one of East Anglia’s [UK] most promising young artists, Alec Cumming, immediately offers the viewer a series of surprising productions, of luscious and textured oil on canvas, incorporating both the vitality of youth and yielding the promise of what is still to come.

Together with his developed sense of form, Cumming economises his palette, which as his work progresses, becomes sparer in range but with an enhanced clarity in the harmony of colours. But as with all artists, often what is to hand and available becomes necessarily important and the colours that are ‘in stock’ are made to work.

This paring down of colours combines with Cumming’s developed use of over-marks, a device that attracts the gaze and pulls the composition together: a series of black lines scoring the canvas, the drip of paint down the image, or the final trace of a mark that hangs across the top.

Somehow Alec discovered Auroville as his temporary art residency and maybe with us in February. Check him out at http://aleccumming.co.uk/ and look out for his exhibition in the City of Dawn!
It is around 1900 that Sir Jagadish Chandra Bose, a polymath of his time, started working on plant physiology – then a controversial field. He had found that all plants, and all parts of plants, have sensitive nervous system – different but similar to that of animals, and that their responses to external stimuli could be measured and recorded. An astounded Bose realized there are plants all around us, continually communicating; it is us who cannot perceive it!

Bose had found that the electrical impulses of animals and plants to external stimuli, including touch, music, pesticide/poison, are amazingly identical! However, despite being a revered physicist, working in a British-funded laboratory under the Raj, he found it difficult to gain recognition for his work in the primarily Western scientific world.

Initially scorned

Sometime around 1911 The Nation published: “The idea that plants feel sensations akin to animals is absurd, laughable. It is a realm of biology bordering on the paranormal. Are we really supposed to believe that that trees suffer when they lose their limbs, that we are safe from the wrath of peas only because they have not yet learned to organize? How many consequences are we willing to accept? What are we to do in the face of all this vegetable suffering?”

Though shrugs and jeers may have been more common – curiosity and interests were triggered amongst a number of people – gardeners, farmers, artists, playwrights (including Sir George Bernard Shaw, a famous vegetarian of his time) – and also amongst his peers. Today, decades after Bose, plant physiology and Bose’s groundbreaking work are much recognized.

In a recent article, which is a tribute to Sir J.C. Bose, author Stefany Anne Golberg asks: “Understanding the plant experience helps us understand the human one, too?” Like some of us, she wonders – “Okay what do we do with this knowledge that plants too feel? Should we not then eat plants, decorate with flowers, roll on grass?”

Golberg writes: “Maybe we never should have started asking questions about our environment in the first place. But it’s too late now. Our relationship to the natural world is forever fraught. Are we stewards? Intruders? Does it matter? What concerned J.C. Bose was perception. He was interested in what plants perceive. But more important, he was interested in what we perceive about them and what we can learn about perception itself from them. With scientific tools and increased awareness, Bose demonstrated that it was possible to enhance our experience of the world by turning our attention to the silent, invisible phenomena around us”.

Scientific proof of fundamental unity

In 1918, Bose delivered a lecture on ‘The Automatic Writing of the Plant’. A local newspaper reporter in attendance wrote this: “Sir J. C. Bose spoke of two different ways of gaining knowledge, the lesser way is by dwelling on superficial differences, the mental attitude which makes some say, “Thank God I am not like others.” The other way is to realize an essential unity in spite of deceptive appearance to the contrary. Bose believed in the fundamental unity of all life, the fundamental unity of everything — “a uniform and continuous march of law.” But it wasn’t just a belief. Bose had scientific proof”.

For Bose, thinking of life as a unity wasn’t just about theories — it had real world implications. Though several patents were granted to him, Bose never sought them out for personal gain, preferring that his inventions be “open to all the world to adopt for practical and money-making purposes.” Likewise, the belief in the unity of all things was not Bose’s innovation, nor was it therefore an invention

Sir J.C. Bose thoughts resonate with Rumi’s hymn:

“All souls are one.
All existence is but the reflection of the Beloved.”

“Okay what do we do with this knowledge that plants too feel? Should we not then eat plants, decorate with flowers, roll on grass?”

>> continued on page 43
of science. Bose was well aware that he was bringing thousands of years of Eastern philosophy into his British-funded lab. For a scientist in an increasingly fragmented India in the time of the 20th-century Raj, who had spoken publicly against the caste system, the message of unity not only had scientific and metaphysical ramifications; it had political ones as well. Bose’s scientific innovations were a broader challenge to the root assumptions behind scientific enterprises and whether they ought to be strictly defined by the West. Barriers between animal and plant, biology and physics, East and West — these were all limits to humanity’s access to universal truths.

“Amongst such phenomena,” Bose wrote in 1901, “how can we draw a line of demarcation, and say, here the physical ends, and there the physiological begins? Such absolute barriers do not exist…. It was when I came upon the mute witness of these self-made records, and perceived in them one phase of a pervading unity that bears within it all things, the mote that quivers in ripples of light, the teeming life upon our earth, and the radiant suns that shine above us, it was then that I understood for the first time a little of that message proclaimed by my ancestors on the banks of the Ganges 30 centuries ago: “They who see but one, in all the changing manifoldness of this universe, unto them belongs Eternal Truth unto none else, unto none else!”

The idea of a sad rock

Ms. Golberg points out that Bose, being a firm believer of connectedness of life and all beings animate or inanimate, had gone even beyond the plants:

“Bose was the first scientist to study inorganic matter in the same way a biologist examines a muscle or a nerve. Bose performed his plant experiments on rocks and metals, too. He found that, just like plants, the “non-living” responded when subjected to mechanical, thermal, and electrical stimuli. Even rocks and metals became numbed by cold, shocked by electrical currents, stupefied by anesthetics.”

The article concludes: “It’s easy to accept that an animal is happy when we are nice to it. It’s less easy, though not impossible, to accept that a plant grows measurably better when we are nice to it. Harder to take seriously is the idea that grass feels pained by our walking feet. Harder still, the idea of a sad rock. The further things get away from their likeness to humanity, the more difficult it is to empathize with them, and therefore to feel that we should care.”

This note is inspired by and quotes from the article ‘If You Pick Us, Do We Not Bleed? Understanding the plant experience helps us understand the human one, too’, by Stefany Anne Golberg, November 2011, The Smart Set (from Drexel University, Philadelphia, USA).

“Maybe we never should have started asking questions about our environment in the first place. But it’s too late now. Our relationship to the natural world is forever fraught. Are we stewards? Intruders? Does it matter?”

All the pictures are from web.
For a person who has worked in the art field since the early sixties, Audrey is a low profile artist. She studied painting at the art institute of San Francisco. She has had many group shows as well as solos. She helped found a cooperative gallery in Alameda, California, and worked six months on The Dinner Party, an installation honouring women throughout the ages, now permanently in the Brooklyn museum.

In Auroville, she has opened a cooperative atelier in the Creativity community in order to facilitate regular workshops, reintroducing people to their own capacity of self expression and stimulating them to engage in their own work and community art projects. Her work is in private collections in India, Europe and the USA.

To view her work at 'Art on Sunday', call Henk at 2623665 and make an appointment to visit Petit Ferme on a Sunday morning.
Clay masala by Miki

On display from Nov 4 – 19, 2011, at Pitanga was a lively ceramic exhibition done by students of the White Peacock studio, located near the Kindergarten in Auroville. Three facilitators, Anna, Saraswati, and Adele have been helping both children and adults to realize a riot of creations in clay using very colourful glazes. Their approach is not to train or judge but to allow the imagination to sprout on its own, to unveil personal observation of the natural world, and to ponder on stories, wishes, dreams, actual events, then, to apply all this to a piece of clay.

The result is evident in Pitanga: an array of colourful objects ranging from tiles, figures, pots, decorations, fanciful dwellings; from the natural world, the imaginary world and the world of the future. We see mythological animals, pets, families on excursions, microscopic whole and holistic depictions of events, the everyday life of a child growing up in Auroville, and castles with lighted doors opening to the future. We see dwellings without geometry in shades of light pastel, symbolizing the lightness of being, an exploration of fairy tale architecture. What is to be learned from this? That, perhaps, we could train ourselves to start thinking outside the box, instead of living right in it, quite dreary and absent-mindedly replicating the industrial west. Do we really need to live that way? Can we break out of that mould and try something different?

In this exhibition there are multiples of everything, observed minutely, signifying that we are not all the same and objects can be interpreted in a multitude of ways: from the fantastic to the everyday, journalistically, mythologically, with a sense of the playful, a feel for the magic journey, finding treasures from the past or just having a cup of tea.

According to White Peacock's website, the white peacock is a symbol of eternity, beauty and transcendence. And, when the monsoon is over, if you need a break from the everyday hustle and bustle, they at the studio will open their doors again to students, both children and adults, on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday for more independent explorations of clay. Their website is: www.avpeacock.org

Exploration between One and Many by Jyoti

From the ancient days in the East, the sense of Chi or Ki is considered a very important element in life. Even today, we use this word very often. For example, the word “fine” or “well” will be described by these two letters 元氣 literally meaning “connected to the source”. Chi represents subtle energy, i.e. Prana in Indian spiritual tradition. Chi occupies a main role in the Eastern arts such as painting & calligraphy, music, architecture & garden design, martial arts, tea ceremony and others. The well-known I-ching and Fen-shui are examples of applicable knowledge of this subtle energy science for daily life. Most of the town planning in successful civilizations of the past was carefully conducted according to Fen-shui science. Martial arts such as Chi-kong, Tai-chi-chuan, Aiki-do are based on the energy flow in the body, and between the bodies, especially muscles, inner organs and glands, aiming at an overall harmony. These practices may lead to a healthy, noble and humble personality.

Mountain and Water

Here, I would like to focus on the unique significance of Eastern brush painting. One of the main streams of brush painting is called Shan-sui or San-sui, which means Mountain and Water, the symbolic representation of two Chinese spiritual traditions. The unshakable mountain as the ideal of Confucianism and flowing water as Taoism's ideal. Confucianism emphasizes the importance of duty in social life, while Taoism on the other hand aims to achieve complete freedom in the life of the individual. Logically, these extreme world views may cause different standpoints and arguments to occur even though they originally come from one lineage.

We can see that many of Shan-sui paintings show misty mountains and a few temples, or a hermitage on the mountain, a streaming river and sometimes the sea in the background. You may find a hermit or poet as the main human figure, very small, possibly with an accompanying friend. When you stand in front of Shan-sui paintings, you will find yourself becoming involved, exploring the landscape of the misty mountain and the gently streaming river, you may even feel the texture of the evergreen forest.

It is quite a pleasant sensation to the eye and also to the rest of the body. It gives a feeling of relaxation and connection with nature. It is because you are invited to the journey in the painting just as the painters experienced it through their brush stroke.

The vagueness, unclarity brought by the mist is important. It leads our focus into a deeper
exploration of our inner and outer nature, not to think but more to feel. It evokes our poetic imagination.

We can state that the experience of Shan-sui painting is nothing but a visual meditation.

**Inner fire**

Art is the transmission of consciousness through matter. Naturally the state of consciousness of the artist determines the quality of the artifacts, while his/her social status, technique and knowledge are not of primal importance. It is quite natural that the character of an artist is receptive and spiritual, and this is the true meaning of “Tradition - 内在火” in the East, it means: the transmission of the inner fire.

Today, we say tradition is too old, but be careful to state that. True tradition is ever new and it allows constant rebirth of the form according to the time-spirit.

For that, it is necessary to learn the form, to be caught by the form for some time. After some struggles, you will master the form and be able to play with it, guided by the inner fire. The more we integrate the past, the stronger our vision becomes, and our confidence towards the future.

**Progressive creation**

Creation of art is nothing but a playing with limitations and conditions. Neither the rules in society nor complete freedom of the individual alone can fulfill progressive creation. For all elements are necessary and everything is equally important.

Therefore I would say that there can be no integral awareness by aiming at, or remaining in, either of these extreme positions. Rather by understanding and accepting both we will be able to flow between the extremes, guided by the spiritual fire at the center of our beings.

*Chi flows in the entire Universe, we are the eternal travelers between One and Many.*
For All / Pour Tous and the Early Years of Its Economic Development

A more detailed follow-up on the economic time-line article in the previous MAgzAV by Clare

From the beginning of Auroville in 1968 to the mid-seventies, all administration and financial support was exclusively handled in Pondicherry. The first Auroville office was in the Ashram - across from the Ashram post office. In 1971 it was moved to a very large complex facing the ocean, the 'Beach office', which is today the administrative home of the Sri Aurobindo Society. Of course, the Mother was the top administrator and economic controller and all correspondence to her usually went via the Secretary of Auroville, Navajata, then to Shyamsundar, - or through her personal secretary, Maggi Lidchi.

At that time, there was a bus service that went daily from Auroville into Pondy at 8am, 12:30pm 6:00pm and came back from the Beach office in time to turn around for the next trip. If Mother had approved a project presented by you, you would go and await the monies you needed to get the supplies. For these you would usually have to go to Madras with the AV van or government bus (private buses were yet to visibly hit the streets & highways). Added to that money was usually whatever personal funds the project holder had available; labours of love are like that. It is amazing how Pondicherry grew to meet the demands for supplies, which, in those first twenty years, meant an exhausting activity for the materialization of anything physical on the barren lands of Auroville. Now we can find almost everything there.

In 1971 I felt we should be having our own administrative service/center in Auroville where Aurovilians could go and tell what their needs were. It should be done in such a way that the monies were administered internally and protected. (Mother said that money was the Divine's power in the material world, but that it was in the hands of the hostile/vital forces and needed to be won back for the Divine). Obviously, if Auroville is to be a divine dream coming true, we need to give this power a special and proper channel. At that time money was everywhere in Auroville.

Since we were all volunteers, the cost to maintain us had to be an internal arrangement. Although, once approved by the Mother, you were given a place that included a bed, bedding, mosquito net, toilet items and clothing if necessary, you were asked to pay a monthly support fee your first two years to help with costs for food, electricity etc in the community where you resided. Exceptions to this procedure were always accorded by the Mother when the person she approved had no extra income.

A proper channel emerges

In March 1972, I wrote to Mother, “If one day Auroville is to function fluently for need and demand without the internal exchange of money, perhaps the time has come to create that ‘proper channel’.” (Personally I wasn't entirely sure about this yet as money was everywhere circulating in Auroville, but I knew that if the statement was ‘correct’ she would approve it). I also wrote “We could begin in a temporary building and see how things evolve.” And in an additional note...
given at the same time, not wanting to draw too much attention to that 'channel', I asked: “Mother, if this is the work to do and money comes for this work, what should be the name of the bank account?” That ‘bank account name’ was for me Mother’s name for ‘that proper channel’.

The next morning I went to find out Mother’s response. Shyamsundar said, “I never saw Mother so happy! She tapped energetically with her finger on the letter and said, ‘C’ est ça! C’est ça! Donnez-moi du papier et un stylo!’” (That’s it, that’s it! Give me a paper and pen!) Then she wrote first two words, very large, in English ‘FOR ALL’, then a slash and smaller ‘Pour Tous’. I then opened with Surabhi Patel an account at the SBI -as if by magic without any AV controlling signature-, and began the 2-years lasting construction of the first ‘Pour Tous’ building, which is now the post office in Aspiration.

On February 28th 1974 we opened for service. Everyone had to have an account number before they could order with their maintenance money ‘on deposit’ or with their personal funds. No one received their maintenance money in cash and no one was allowed to purchase any ‘order’ across the counter except through their ‘FA / PT’ account. On behalf of all Aurovilians I would monthly collect all support monies from the Beach office and deposit them in the bank account named by Mother.

**Food distribution**

The food distribution was not started by “For All / Pour Tous”: it had been started by ‘big Joss and little Joss’ six months earlier for the community kitchen baskets in Auroville. Shyamsundar asked me to give it a home in our new building as it was a primary physical ‘need’. Although it was not the first service need that I had been planning to transform ‘exchange wise’, I could not ignore the validity of his perception and so we began, after first eliminating the internal exchange of monies, with food and sundry ‘needs’ for Auroville and Aurovilians.

The purchasing vandi left for Pondy at 6:30 am every day. The ‘orders’ and the necessary funds were picked up from me at my hut in Aspiration, where I kept the money in a specially made money/orders belt. Although there were plenty of other service needs in Auroville, we were overwhelmed by the food & sundry orders that grew forever, and further expansion was too difficult with only our five-persons team. Although our accounting was set-up by an American certified public accountant, balance sheets became a monthly nightmare as everyone wanted an account and that included not just individuals.

**Units’ contributions**

By the end of our first year, with monthly audits I myself imposed and with the help of Auroville’s public accountant, every community, individual, unit and visitor had their own “For All / Pour Tous” account. Prior to opening, while still building the first PT, I had obtained signed agreements from the then commercial unit holders, that after one year of our establishing the work of “For All / Pour Tous” they would begin contributing 10% of their earnings into it in order to help support the needs of Auroville and Aurovilians. However, soon all the agricultural units began contributing produce, which allowed us to cut back on our purchases outside. By 1975 we were servicing needs without the internal exchange of money, to the tune of Rs. 50,000/- a month! In today’s economy that would be about Rs. 350,000/-. That amount did not include the AV produce, which was freely sent.

After all, it is not just money that builds, organizes, sustains, entertains and services the life of Auroville.
In May 1975 I left for France to study ‘voice’ for three years under a master. “For All / Pour Tous” was a system based not on a person but on a service and everyone knew how it worked and could pitch in. Ezhumalai specialized in totaling orders and entering deposits (and has continued the work of consolidation of balance sheets for ABC as well as assisting the CAG for 35 years!). Surabhi, our light of lights, over saw everything! Christine had come to help with order preparations and later took over from Surabhi. Madhasun got the orders & met the vandi driver for all purchases. Our prices beat the Ashram’s!

After several years everything shifted over to the second Pour Tous building in Aspiration. By now the team was very French and the name For All stopped being used. The For All / Pour Tous bank account was abandoned and all accounts shifted over to the ‘Pour Tous Fund’ created with the Sri Aurobindo Society (SAS). Later, when the SAS lost power over the project of Auroville by the Emergency Decree of Parliament, it closed down this account and took the monies with it. But the system was in place and centralized enough that during the subsequent struggling years the team continued to help everyone as they could. Unfortunately it was years before Auroville’s certified public accountant, the late Yusuf Patel, and General Tewari realized that they could have used the ‘For All/Pour Tous’ bank account all along since the Sri Aurobindo Society had no signature on it. This would have allowed for a continuous instead of interrupted financial system.

A system of ‘Envelopes’ had avoided the ‘control’ of the SAS. Pour Tous meetings were regular with Aurovilians creating their own administration and working groups – and gradually evolved in what today is the Residents Assembly meeting. In the newspapers of India during that time Pour Tous was often mentioned. After the decree of the Supreme Court in early 1980’s, in favor of the ideals and Charter of Auroville, things could grow with confidence.

**Emerging of the Financial Service**

Although I was on the Financial Board of Auroville for a time in the early 80’s, the real vision of “For All / Pour Tous” was to hold the Divine’s resources for Auroville. When requested by Otto, in 2001-2, to organize with Surbhi the foundation ceremony of the third Pour Tous at Solar Kitchen, I asked if we could also open again a “For All / Pour Tous” account since that was the name Mother gave and hence it has a grace behind it. We went to the SBI and, with Otto, Rathinam and myself, we re-established that account. A year later, after opening the new Pour Tous, I gave a donation check made out to “For All / Pour Tous”. Jocelyn, who knows the vision well, said a week later, “Clare, they can’t find the account...! I went to the SBI... big mystery (the audit told of ‘illegal account closings’...hmm...). Let's just say, I hope the third time is the charm'.

Within the years of development many have contributed their ideas and talents to our economic development. The system for Auroville’s support of its volunteers went through a change during the ‘revolution’ in 1978, allowing Aurovilians to withdraw cash and do their own shopping. This has brought about the confusing notion in the minds of many that maintenance for one’s voluntary service to Auroville equals a salary. There are those doing their best to clarify that it is a ‘thank you for your service’, yet there are those who do not want this clarification. Personally, I am always proud to say that Auroville is the only not-for-profit township in the world where everyone is a volunteer – aside from those coming for paid work.

**“For All / Pour Tous” account**

For me the most important economic clarification is the “For All / Pour Tous” bank account. Named by Mother this ‘channel’ was to hold the Divine’s resources for Auroville. When requested by Otto, in 2001-2, to organize with Surbhi the foundation ceremony of the third Pour Tous at Solar Kitchen, I asked if we could also open again a “For All / Pour Tous” account since that was the name Mother gave and hence it has a grace behind it. We went to the SBI and, with Otto, Rathinam and myself, we re-established that account. A year later, after opening the new Pour Tous, I gave a donation check made out to “For All / Pour Tous”. Jocelyn, who knows the vision well, said a week later, “Clare, they can’t find the account...! I went to the SBI... big mystery (the audit told of ‘illegal account closings’...hmm...). Let’s just say, I hope the third time is the charm’.

**Voluntary values**

The ‘voluntary’ value of the real financial ‘in-kind’ contribution to our economy is, with the present system, not recorded in its full depth. A new system is being prepared in a computerized research /service with the ForAll-PourTous.org website. This will definitely take time but may one day reflect more than only monies given. After all, it is not just money that builds, organizes, sustains, entertains and services the life of Auroville. It is the inspired hearts to make a better world - with the generosity of their actions, their perseverance, their kindnesses, their dreams and their faith in our Charter.

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We’re on the way

It seemed to us particularly appropriate to interview Pierre Legrand on the subject of beauty. Not just because he is an artist, but because he is an “involved” artist, if we may say so, who participates since long on discussions and reflections regarding what form the city has to take, and who since a year is member of L’Avenir d’Auroville, the group of Aurovilians in charge of planning and coordinating the development of the town. I first interviewed him in his studio, but seeing that the transcript of the interview contained a lot of chatter, he preferred to write a text. We found this text, which he gave us in two successive parts, particularly inspiring.

During the interview, my principal question had been:

“Isn’t there a certain beauty of Auroville that is disappearing? How come, and which is according to you the beauty of Auroville that has to manifest?”

Pierre:

Being an artist as well a member of L’Avenir d’Auroville, that’s the burning question I ask myself 24 hours of the day. And being an Aurovilian artist as well a sadhak, I am receptive to inner experiences which I try to give material expression through painting or sculpture. And it is always of very great beauty - but rarely of conventional beauty. It is still very punctual, still far from generating an immediate collective acceptance. I am on the way and have gone through many influences, western pictorial traditions, oriental calligraphy, Indian tribal art, aboriginal paintings, etc...etc... This gives a certain perspective and also a big opening to the understanding that it is difficult to qualify a work as being beautiful or ugly. It all depends on the context.

As for being member of l’Avenir, I had assumed that my mandate would be to see at what point this new beauty could incarnate in the city, in the form of architecture, urban design, or the gardens, circulations etc. Unfortunately this seems far from being the priority of our group - and on top of that we are submerged by utterly prosaic proposals that leave little space for dreams and imagination.

It is true that the beginnings of Auroville were marked by very great beauty, since the inauguration, the first huts of Aspiration, Last School, the Pyramids, the first houses of Auromodèle, etc. And we knew a free life, vast, joyous, generous. We’ve had the fortune to live some years in a radiant and contagious future. And this future is always there, in the invisible. Once I was talking to Satprem about the beauty of Japanese public baths and he said to me,’All that is beautiful and true will be in the new world’. This brings also to mind what Mother said about Amarnath (the city built by Akenaton), that a formation needs to be fixed in the occult, and that material destruction cannot prevent its true survival.

We have lived a little of this. It is our grace, our privilege, - and our responsibility. And it...
is also true that this beauty is disappearing, if alone by being more and more inundated by an invasion of its opposite. What to do?

**A wrong question**

To start with one needs to go a little further than a vague, almost tearful and nostalgic memory. One needs to see that already in those very first days this beauty was not recognised by all, that the discord between several architectural trends was embryonic. And that many were here to live a post-hippy dream very far from that which the Mother asked from us. These different tendencies, already in germination then, have grown, have diversified and multiplied to come to fruition in today's joyous or distressing chaos.

One should also not forget that we were young, free, not bogged down by responsibilities or stifled by some paralyzing knowledge. But that which was an advantage with regard to one's receptivity to the force of the Mother, also turned out to be a source of mediocrity if it was not accompanied by work, by discipline, by consecration; for let us not forget the first sentence of the Charter: we are here to put ourselves at the service of the Divine.

We can find many excuses for the present situation, up from the conflict with the SAS which hardened opposite camps and caused scars and resentments still not healed... And then the government take-over putting a solid concrete administrative block on what was still largely spontaneous at the time.

But let's not get stuck in bitter and useless nostalgia.

Just on the side..., it has always astounded me that the experience of having collectively lived the architectural beauty of Aspiration, Auromodèle etc... was so little contagious. The moment that the Aspiration group fell apart, and people started building here and there, was the beginning of the horror... Nothing, absolutely nothing of it seems to have made its way into the general awareness. Are we condemned to follow some genius, Roger or other, in order for this beauty to incarnate? The question is open. It's the same question we can ask about certain villages in the Himalayas: the people are bathed in breath-taking beauty but appear to be the same ordinary persons as in the slums of Bombay or anywhere else. In fact, it is your question that is off track!!!

The question is not which beauty Auroville is expected to manifest. The question is: what is it that Auroville is to manifest? And if Auroville IS, automatically there will be great beauty -but it's a beauty far beyond the quarrels of different schools, manners, tendencies. Because the moment we talk of beauty, we put our foot in an ant hill and won't be able to find ourselves back.

So what does Auroville have to manifest? Asking that question is bizarre, as it is all written, black on white and very clearly in those succinct and luminous phrases of the Charter.

1. One is here to give oneself to the Divine. And from there we receive the inspirations, the necessary ideas. Silence, silence, silence! While, instead, we are searching right and left for dusty teachings and wait for advice from so-called experts of all kinds. We're clearly in the human domain.

2. I was recently quite amused when reading an article by a young Aurovillian who is very much against the galaxy and who said that he is for the Charter but not for the city, and that Mother doesn't speak of the city in the Charter... While the word AuroVILLE appears in each sentence... What to do? There's a very large resistance against the city concept indeed.

I'm continually disturbed by this, and the only answer that I can come up with is that we haven't yet found the architecture of the future. Everything still has to be done and everything is possible as long as we stay open and that's what brings us to where the shoe pinches.

3. We are here to manifest a concrete Human Unity... A few weeks before I was invited to become member of l'Avenir d'Auroville, I had an experience at Matrimandir and suddenly I felt great sympathy for ALL Aurovilians, without distinction, sensing in each the presence of Mother and the incredible hide-and-seek play of creation... And it was to see if this experience would hold that I joined Avenir. One of my first decisions was telling myself that from that moment on I would consider each person as if I met him/her for the first time, without any a priori, any memory...

**And how surprised I was to realise how far one still is from such innocence! I was alarmed to see how the Aurovilians are divided into camps, sub-camps, sub-sub-camps and how the smallest word can have incalculable consequences, and how one remark can bring about frustrations and maddening but always alive animosities.**

And while trying to keep that distance, naively enough, I turned out to be seen as a ‘traitor’ by one camp and as a double agent by another, with all the implications that that entailed.

I would run the risk to for instance make some jokes which often would be taken either literally or the other way around so that in the end I was supposed to have said things I would never even have thought. It is true, I was naive, totally ignorant of the forces at play, of clashes in the past, of alliances and mismatched alliances.
All this to explain that talking about beauty in that context would suddenly appear to be a vague ‘academic’ exercise. And there lies the real question. How to find back that innocence? It may well be that the fact that we didn't know each other very well brought about the harmony we enjoyed in those first years... But presently we're stifled by the fact that X has done this to Y, that so-and-so is connected with so-and-so, that A has cheated B, and that D may have put too much in his own pocket... We only get to see things through a filter of the worst kind of gossip and rumours that are not always founded...

And here we can salute the Internet as being the perfect tool to swiftly inflame any situation, to immediately poison all minds by spreading rumours that may not be based on anything, and to cast doubts on about every new initiative!!

We knew that it was a Yoga of the descent. At least we have ‘read’ about it, without much knowing what it would really entail. One advantage of this situation is that now, at least, we do know.

Yoga? Yes, it's there, the beauty of the entire situation: either we take the circumstances as a point of leverage for the yoga, the transformation – or we decide once and for all that it is just impossible and turn instead to booze, TV or other distractions, each of them as little hygienic as the other.

Auroville or the yoga of descent

Sometimes I think that Auroville is a bit like the graveyard of elephants! It is said that once an old elephant feels that his death is near, he leaves the herd and goes straight to a place full of bones where elephants go to die. And Auroville is in the process of witnessing the death of all ideas, all panaceas to come to an end; they come to offer all their marvellous knowledge and then die, one after the other, due to their own arrogance or inadequacy.

That's where we're at. And talking about Beauty is a bit more of that. Let's put aside all our IDEAS on beauty, fraternity, harmony, ecology etc... etc...

At several places in Savitri, Sri Aurobindo speaks of the moment where one has to leave all behind. Let's have this courage, individually and collectively. That's what we're here for – and we are not the only ones facing this challenge.

Yes, it's a painful situation. Let's use this pain, this anguish to call with all our might that particular experience that would give us back confidence and faith in the adventure. Sri Ramakrishna somewhere says that for the Divine to respond, one should call with the energy of a man who is drowning and screaming out for help.

In Evolution II, Satprem talks of India being a very favourable milieu – precisely because of her actual fall. Auroville is highly favourable to awaken the fire. Finally! And if we call there is an answer. All of us have known these unexpected moments of peace, of calm, of joy, light, openness, love, forgiveness; these moments where the body suddenly becomes porous, transparent; where the circumstances interpenetrate, without barriers, where there is no more mine, yours, where the opposites harmonise... It is there, the new world isn't far, we all bear witness to that. And it is because of this that we keep at it. Otherwise we would have taken to our heels ages ago. But those moments are rare, fleeting.

Would there be a method, a tool?

Auroville is the tool. Our collective life is the method. But we have to look at the situation from the right angle.

1. These highest experiences most often spring up totally unexpectedly. When we don't think or have given up, or when we just are quiet. They don't come as a result of powerful shenanigans, analyses, theses or other crap... Silence, silence, silence.

2. That said, when are we going to realise that Auroville's current method of solving problems, which is to call meeting after meeting after meeting, has no power whatsoever? They leave us exhausted, with the little faith we still had forever gone. And the more we try to come to an agreement, the more we put oil on the fire. We are going to need a lot of courage to make the wind blow in another direction. In the Agenda, Mother explains that the way to solve a conflict with someone is to pass through her. With other words, we ourselves can't do anything!! It is she who knows, who sees, who does, who laughs! So much for the way.

The tool?

On top of that, she has given us a marvellous tool. The sooner the Matrimandir will be there, she said, the better for Auroville. It is there, most of the time empty.

It is like we have an orchard full of the most marvellous fruits, and we stubbornly keep drinking bottled fruit juice!

It is there, immaculate, resplendent, luminous and benevolent, and supremely welcoming for those who want it.

Speaking again of Beauty, I draw all my inspiration from the Inner Chamber. And I know very well that I receive only an infinitesimal droplet from an inexhaustible Niagara...

A silence so profound, so full, so pure. A shower of light, a bath of newness where all our personal problems are washed away, where all our interpersonal conflicts are harmonised, where we suddenly see the truth behind the falsehood, the beauty behind the ugliness, the humour behind an impossible situation – and the supreme lightness of finally having abandoned all one's burdens into the hands of a consciousness so full of tenderness, care and love.

I am always surprised to see animosities between people lasting for days, months, years... How many times have I gone to the Matrimandir with a heart heavy like this, not knowing how to solve a conflict or struggling to find an answer to a problem – there were days that I even went three times! And sometimes nothing happens apart from appreciating the air-conditioned coolness, but often the answer does come, unexpected, sudden, so simple... And most of the time it isn't just that the problem is solved: it has disappeared, washed away, dispersed, forgotten.

And it is this that surprises me every time: to what an extent we still are living in a world full of things, objects, thoughts, concepts, opinions – monolithic, solid, impenetrable, irreconcilable, in constant competition one against the other, - and we live embittered, preoccupied, full of doubts, fears... (the reader may continue the list...).

And all this disappears. It isn’t the true reality. There is something else, permeable, generous, patient, loving. Another inner reality that will manifest in the form of architecture, gardens, collective spaces, and in a joyful collective life, harmonious, impish, vibrant. A kindergarten of the infinite.

It isn't far away. And that is the Beauty that Auroville is called to manifest.

Translation by Divya Goswami and Mauna.
Sebastian and his family have been living in Auroville for over seven years. Before coming to Auroville, they where living in Italy. Sebastian was a noted life-style and fashion photographer with a studio in Milan. Since arriving in India, he has continued to photograph, collaborating with many international magazines while at the same time actively pursing his personal and artistic work. One of his long-term projects is an extended photo essay on the ex-French colony of Pondicherry, which is soon to be published by the well-known Indian publisher Roli Books. We asked Sebastian some questions about the book as well as some of his thoughts on photography.

QUESTION: CAN YOU GIVE US A BRIEF SUMMERY OF YOUR PONDICHERRY BOOK?

Answer: The book on Pondicherry is a further step in my exploration of "the place", my perception of a specific environment and how it's lived by individuals. My last book, Poetic Places, was an extended photo essay composed of series of panoramic portraits of 21 major Italian poets photographed in their space of artistic activity. The key to discovering each poet was again "the place", here in a literary and metaphorical sense: the space in which the poet recognises himself. Using fundamentally an anthropological criteria, the "place" serves as a go-between and interpretation of the poetic message.

In my Pondicherry book I have tried to remain true to the same criteria only on a much wider scale, that of a city, which is criss-crossed by many different influences. The challenge in the book was to avoid and incorporate the obvious. I had to go beyond the walls and penetrate into the private sphere, into homes, spaces and routines which exemplified a certain culture or cultures, and where I could perceive and record a series of recognizable messages. As with the last book, this is not a book of only photographs but more a compilation of perceptions, which are also offered in words.

The images of the book were sent to several noted French and Indian writers who have, through the magic of words, offered up a very personal and insightful view of Pondicherry - words and images working in a complimentary way for an artistic perception of the real world.

Photographing is a way of imprisoning reality, understood as recalcitrant, inaccessible, - of making it stand still. One can't possess reality. One can possess (and be possessed by) images - as, according to Proust, one can't possess the present but one can possess the past. To possess the particular world of Pondicherry as experienced by me was my objective, as well as sharing it in the form of images - to re-experience the unreality and remoteness of the real.

I have a protective feeling towards Pondicherry and other similar places in the world that are locked in a dance between the past and the present... and that are crisscrossed by different cultural influences.

QUESTION: WHAT PHOTOGRAPHIC APPROACH DID YOU USE FOR THIS BOOK?

The photographic approach was essentially that of "straight photography" as opposed to journalistic style photography. I have not used the large or medium format but remained with the simplicity of the 35 mm camera, almost always using a tripod and with long exposures. The images are captured digitally and in colour, so I have, in a sense, only tried to keep the discipline of "straight photography" but not all its aesthetic criteria. The access to certain locations and the time needed to photograph what I was interested in forced me to return many times to the same location. The project was in continuous evolution as to what it would ultimately produce. I kept all doors open and placed no limits.

QUESTION: WHAT DID YOU WISH TO ACHIEVE WITH THIS BOOK?

I have been very lucky in getting the support and collaboration of some very talented and visionary writers. Each writer offers the reader a very different view of Pondicherry, - always from a very personal and perceptive position. It was clear for me from the start that I wanted to have a cross-cultural view so I contacted writers of very diverse backgrounds. Pascal Bruckner, a French intellectual with a good understanding and love for India, shares his observations on Pondicherry and how the photographs affect his perception of a city he visited several times. Akash Kapur, an Indian American, who has deep roots in Pondicherry but has travelled and lived abroad for many years, shares with the reader his worldly Pondicherian view – his observations on southern Indian transformation may surprise many people. The third author is Amin Jaffer, an Indian who is both an art historian and director of Christie's in India; he recalls the time he spent in Pondicherry as a student researching Indo-French furniture. The collaboration with such talented people has been very exciting for me and I hope it offers a more dynamic view of Pondicherry.

Images of the book will be exhibited at Aurodhan Gallery, 33 Rue Francois Martin, Kuruchikuppam, Pondicherry from 4 – 24 February 2012.