



Child Protection

In our last Special Newsletter we told of the disturbing television documentary by the BBC on child abuse, which featured Auroville. A short film appeared on the BBC's Newsnight programme. The film concentrated solely on the abuse of children in the Auroville area, based on apparent "evidence" from several local people known to bear a grudge against the community. The film had the appearance of a deliberate campaign to discredit Auroville's internationally acclaimed work, and deeply disturbed residents and supporters from around the world.

Auroville's response was to make a thorough investigation into the issue and to submit a detailed and comprehensive complaint to the BBC, which is presently being investigated by the BBC's Editorial Complaints Authority.

However, Auroville was not content to sweep the issue under the carpet, as even though no current evidence could be found of child abuse within the Auroville community, it was acknowledged that the issue is certainly one of concern in the areas surrounding Auroville – and indeed throughout India. Following general meetings of the community, number of concerned people have in recent months, formed a *Child Protection Group*, with the aim of tackling the issue head-on. The areas of work which the group are focusing on are:

- Preventative work with a focus on education and awareness raising
- Establishing mechanisms for reporting of response
- Development of a child protection policy for Auroville and those working with children in Auroville outreach work

A connection has been made with a charity organisation working from Chennai (Madras) called Tulir. This organisation has long experience specialising in the prevention and healing of child sex abuse, and is a registered non-profit organisation. Tulir has offered training to those in Auroville who work with children, and help with developing strategies for dealing with the issue. Connection has also been made with a Pondicherry

organisation with similar aims called Pondicherry Multipurpose Social Service Society (PMSSS), which has experience in children's empowerment and in particular the setting up of children's parliaments. A number of Aurovilians have undertaken a workshop with Tulir and more are planned, and a representative of PMSS attended one of the meetings and explained in detail the various tools his organisation could offer.

Preventative work with a focus on education and awareness raising.

Those who work in Auroville schools are being invited to attend Tulir awareness raising workshops, and it is planned that materials used at these workshops will be modified to form the basis for education and awareness raising with children, staff and parents in Auroville schools.

For the larger Auroville region, it is proposed to re-establish the primary education programme (PEP) and expand its scope for all school age children. This programme was successfully run by Auroville Village Action for many years, but stopped due to funding constraints in 2004. Fundraising will be needed to re-start the programme. Its main thrust is to train Government school teachers in innovative learning programmes that cover a much wider scope than normally taught. Sex education would be included in the programme and appropriate materials developed to help instil in children a greater awareness of appropriate sexual behaviour, with particular emphasis given to the needs of children approaching puberty. It is also proposed to introduce the subject into women's groups run by Village Action.

The idea of a children's parliament or council is also proposed, in order to foster children's empowerment. A seminar is proposed, inviting and training people who would be interested to learn more.

Establishing mechanisms for reporting and response.

One of the difficulties Auroville groups had when responding to the BBC reporter's accusations was that there was a lack of an independent mechanism for reporting child

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abuse, and a lack of skills in this work. It is therefore proposed that a Child Protection Officer be identified and trained.

For issues relating to the surrounding villages, it is proposed to re-establish a legal and counselling centre. Such a centre was run successfully by Village Action, until funding shortages forced its closure. The task of this centre would be to mediate on issues and offer counselling and legal support in cases of domestic and child abuse. It has been decided to fund-raise for the re-establishment of both the legal and counselling centre and the primary education programme.

Development of a child protection policy (CPP) for Auroville and those working with children in Auroville outreach work.

A child protection policy is being developed which sets out common values, principles and beliefs, and describes the steps that will be taken in meeting the commitment to protect children. An Auroville child protection policy will describe the ethics that are held and the code of conduct requested of citizens and guests in regard to children.

Auroville is starting to actively fundraise for this work. If anyone would like to make a donation, or would like to offer help or suggestions, please contact Martin – contact details on the last page.

All major international organisations have such a policy, which is known by all who work for the organisation. Although it is known that Auroville has a zero tolerance of the abuse of children, it is becoming clear that there is a need for a clear and consistent understanding of what that means.

It is recognised that child abuse is a global issue and Auroville is delicately positioned and vulnerable, and situated in an area where any talk about sex, and even more so about its abuse, is still highly taboo. This creates a safe haven for abuse, and the entire east coast region from Chennai southwards is a known destination for sex tourists, and statistics show staggering rates of incidents. It is also recognised that donors for Auroville's acclaimed outreach work have the right to question its child protection policies and their implementation.

A team is working on the formulation of a child protection policy, which will be put to Auroville community for ratification. It is hoped that it will be a policy that everyone in the community could stand behind and feel that it represents its true love, commitment and responsibility for all children.

New Creation Bilingual School

An Appeal

We don't often make a direct appeal in our newsletter, but this time we make an exception. One of the special projects in Auroville which we support, and one which is very close to our hearts, is New Creation Bilingual School. A number of our members give regular support to the school, as many have visited and seen the wonderful work being carried out there to educate the poorest children in the area.

The school is going through a financial crisis at the moment, and funds are needed for the day to day running of the school. We are looking for people who are willing to donate regularly, even just a small amount, to help with our daily running costs. We would of course be also happy to receive any single donation, large or small, which we can put towards this work.

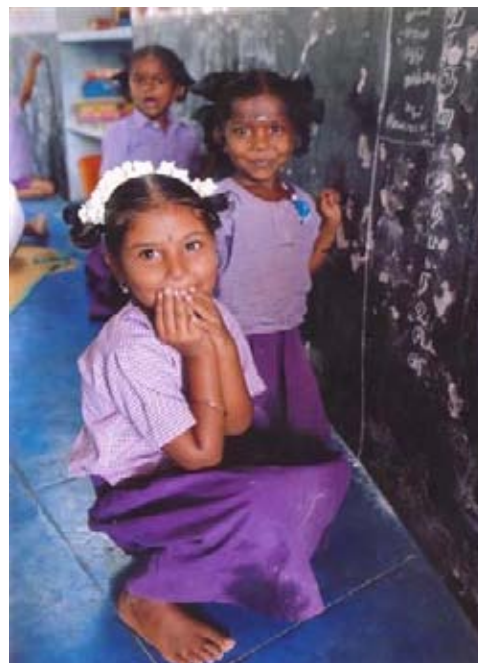
We are proud of the work of New Creation Bilingual School, and the progress it is making towards giving the best education possible to the poorest village children. As you can see from the newsletter, the school has achieved special accreditation status (CBSE), something quite exceptional in such a school and up till now only achieved by wealthy fee paying schools. This will have a real effect on the education of the children and their prospects for the future.

If you would like to help support the work of this exceptional school, please complete the donation form enclosed, and send it to the address given.

Please help if you can!

The new aim of education is to help the child to develop his intellectual, aesthetic, emotional, moral, spiritual being and his communal life and impulses out of his own temperament and capacities, - a very different object from that of the old education which was simply to pack so much stereotyped knowledge into his resisting brain and impulse a stereotyped rule of conduct on his struggling and dominated impulses.

The Mother.



Auroville and Human Unity

A personal view

Auroville is now 40 years old, and perhaps it is time to reflect on achievements and to see what lessons can be learnt for the future. This reminds me of a question asked by a journalist during our visit to Kazakhstan last year. She asked, quite sensibly I thought, how we measured human unity, and how we would know if we had achieved it. I was not sure how to answer, but said something about the process being never-ending, always moving always to a greater perfection. She was very sympathetic, particularly because that we were honest and not trying to “sell” anything to her, and seemed to accept my explanation. But I am not sure I am happy with the answer, and I think we have something to learn from this question.

It is clear to me that what we see in Auroville is a process, and that process towards human unity is what we could call the *collective yoga*. “All life is Yoga” says Sri Aurobindo, so perhaps all collective life is collective yoga. Our lives together in our home, in our workplace, in our local community. All this is collective yoga, but the progress is slow, taking thousands of years and many lifetimes to learn. What is needed is a conscious process, which is an accelerated one, where real progress can be achieved in just one lifetime. This is Auroville’s reason for existence.

So, has this not been done before? I wonder if it has. There have been many collective experiments from ashrams to monasteries, but perhaps Auroville is different. With these institutions, behaviour is controlled, there are rules, there is a hierarchy or at least a leader imposing discipline and giving guidance. In Auroville, each individual has freedom (within certain limits of the law and acceptability) to act according to his or her inner motivation and inner guidance. Human unity cannot be imposed, it must be discovered. This process however has many risks. It presumes a sincere dedication to the ideal and an acknowledgement of the need for progress. It also requires, what Mother indicated was the minimum quality, that of goodwill. But the potential for this path is much greater indeed.

So what is the collective yoga? It certainly isn’t a number of more or less enlightened individuals doing an individual yoga together – although the individual yoga is indispensable for members of a sincere collective. It is not an imposed collective discipline, although an individual and collective discipline is of course needed. It is not just a common aspiration or working towards a common aim, although this is of course important. It is something else which perhaps we are only in the process of discovering. It

is perhaps a working and relating together on the level that Sri Aurobindo calls the psychic being – the level of the soul. And it is this that we are finding out how to do.

For as Sri Aurobindo and the Mother tell us, it is at the level of the psychic being that we are already one, where human unity already exists. Human unity is not something new that we have to invent, it is already there at the essence of our being. It only needs to be revealed.

Today we are under increasing pressure to act collectively, but it is proving difficult. We struggle to agree with one another, to find effective ways of working together and to make decisions. This has always been so since the beginning of civilisation, so humanity has created artificial means – complex hierarchies, democratic systems, communist systems, capitalist systems. These will all fail as they are all precarious structures, at the whim of human nature. They are all designed to make up for our failings to realise a real human unity.

So why don’t we seek human unity first, and base our mechanisms on that? Then the mechanisms we use will have a solid base. We habitually seek out our differences and pursue them endlessly. We constantly dwell on those things which separate us. If instead we concentrated on the things which unite us, then I think we would be surprised at how soon our differences would melt away.

The first and most important quality of any working group is the inner connection between its members. Without that, how can it work? Perhaps this should be the first work that any group does together, and then continued until a real harmony exists. Then, even when differences of opinion exist, the inner connection will provide the avenue towards a solution. This is difficult, but not so difficult. There are many techniques available to us, but few groups in Auroville practise them. And why? Because we don’t have time for that! Because we have “real” work to do! Perhaps if we remember that the *real* work is Human Unity, and work towards that, the rest will follow.

So how will we know when we achieve human unity? We will know because we will feel it in our hearts. We will feel that sense of oneness in our working together. At the beginning it may happen only for a few seconds now and then, but it will be clear – and I believe it is already happening.

Martin.

The Collective Manifestation

After all, the ways of being of the Divine, all the forms of being of the manifestation are necessary to express the Divine. It is this manifestation as a whole, in its totality, which progresses towards a growing, infinite, eternal perfection. It is not each separate element, individually, it is the whole altogether, as a collective and total expression of the Divine Truth. All this is moving forward constantly, eternally, towards a greater perfection. The universe of tomorrow will necessarily be more divine, if one may say so, than the universe of yesterday; and that of yesterday was more divine than the one preceding it. And thus it could be said that it is the Divine, in his expression of Himself, who is in perpetual progress towards a more and more perfect, more and more divine manifestation.

The Mother, Questions and Answers 1956

Matrimandir

Matrimandir Newsletter – August 2008

Replacing the discs

Eight men take their stations around one of the large golden discs resting on a wooden platform high above the equator of Matrimandir. On a word from their leader they lift the 200 kg disc into an almost vertical position against the outer skin of the building. It is a moment of intense concentrated effort, with some supporting the disc above their heads while others, positioned higher up, pull the heavy disc into position. Far below, several people watch the operation in progress - for it has been some time since we last put up discs on the outside of Matrimandir.

The lifting and mounting of the heavy components of the new stainless steel crane on the top of the building at the beginning of the year had obliged us to remove a vertical section of some 30 discs on the eastern side of the building so that scaffolding could be erected for the lifting. And now that the crane is up and in operation, its first task is to lift up the discs that had been removed.

It is quite magical to watch the crane from the ground as it unfolds from its hidden position on the top of the building. From much of the gardens area the crane is totally invisible when not in use. Then in the space of a few minutes, as the crane rises on its hydraulic legs, then the horizontal arm grows longer and longer extending the booms in the manner of a fishing rod. When the arm is fully extended, it stretches out some 23 meters from its central point of support.

During June several trials were made as the crane installation was finalised and the electronic controls and safety mechanisms were installed. We had one setback near the end of June when the site was struck by lightning during a thunderstorm, knocking out some of its sophisticated controls. But now, having installed replacements, we are back in action and the process of refitting the discs has begun.

The disc fixing team has wheeled over one of the 2.4 m diameter discs from the storage area after giving it a good cleaning -- the golden tiles look fresh and new in the July sun. As the crane hook comes down two men fix it to loops on the back of the disc and then take hold of the long guide ropes.

With a last look up to make sure that all is clear, the man in control pushes the up button and the disc floats upwards. The two men with the guide ropes hold tight, for it is a windy day and the large sail-like disc begins to sway and turn as it rises above the sandstone-clad tips of the petals and catches the wind. They are well experienced at this, having lifted of almost 2,500 discs already, for we have removed and replaced them twice during the last nine years (to redo the waterproofing).



The new Matrimandir crane lifting a disc

When the disc reaches the required height, the crane is swung around by 90 degrees to face the eastern pillar of Matrimandir where the team of eight men is now waiting on a platform on the scaffolding to receive and fix the disc. With seemingly no effort, the disc does a one-quarter turn around the building, and then the job of laying it gently down on the high platform begins. The men there lift up their arms to catch hold of the disc and gently guide it to lay flat on the high platform. The crane's job is done for the moment.

Then, with a truly major effort of concentrated action, the team lifts the heavy disc up into place over the nine fixing bolts. I hold my breath as they struggle to match the position of the first leg with its anchorage. This moment is very precarious, for any relaxation of effort, any slip or wrong movement can result in broken glass tiles. With a practised flow the team executes the dozen steps needed to secure the disc on the building. I relax and breathe a little easier after the first few legs are fixed. It is always riveting to watch this intense phase of the disc-fixing process.

In the cramped space behind the disc, crowded with the steel legs of neighbouring discs, the members of the team push and pull a little more to adjust the level of the remaining disc legs.

With the disc now fixed in place, the team members climb up under cover of the discs to the roof level where they take a look around at the green, hazy horizon and then head back down the stairways to bring up the next disc. In the course of a morning three or four discs will be fixed in place.

Watching all the steps of this amazing process, one is reminded of the immense efforts that have been put in by so many people over the 37 years of Matrimandir's construction. Most of the men now at work on the discs

weren't even born when the construction started. It is a remarkable story, with the sustained energy of almost four decades moving towards the goal of completing the main structure of Matrimandir.

Finishing the entrance shield

Lower down on the structure, is another team. The staircase in this eastern rib has been used by the workers as the entry point to the structure for many years, and it is here that the finishing touches have now to be made. The major work being finalized at this level is the placing of the last panels of long golden tiles that make up the "shield" framing the eastern entrance to the building. The shields on the other three entrances are now complete.

Final touches are being given to the tile work here: the last specially shaped gold-in-glass tiles have to be measured, fabricated and then glued in place with black silicone. The joints will then be filled with a yellow silicone to give an even finish to the work. This phase is almost over and soon the large flower disc with its round rose-colored centre, marking this entrance through the Mahalakshmi pillar, can be placed above the doorway.

Other works needed for the full completion of the structure

Apart from replacing the discs on the eastern rib and the finishing of the entrance shield there, the remaining works now pending are:

- installation of the topmost row of discs close to the crane (which will help to further conceal it);

- replacing the foils on all the 'porthole' windows in the outer skin with a different colour (this will change the colour of light projected onto the inner translucent skin and will require some research to perfect);
- fixing of a set of 700 aluminium rings around the 'portholes' of the outer skin to help seal the waterproofing layer (this work has just begun and will take a few months for one team to complete);
- the finalisation and installation of the drive systems for the main sliding doors in each of the four entrances;
- the soundproofing of the Chamber AC system on the north pillar (the south side soundproofing has just been completed with marvellous results);
- the completion of the crane's "gondola" (now under going trials) which will allow two people to be suspended from the crane and to attend to the cleaning of the discs.

Once these few jobs are done we will really be able to say that the structure is complete, though there will always be bolts to tighten and lighting effects to be perfected, not to mention the overall maintenance, a huge and multifaceted job.

Of course, two major adventures still lie ahead: the establishment of the Matrimandir gardens and the creation of the water body that is to surround it all, which means that we will be reporting to you for quite some time to come!

Auroville London Study Group

We have been holding our "London Meetings" for several years now, and a number of people regularly attend. They are a chance for in depth discussion on a number of topics concerning the Yoga and Auroville. The topic for our meeting in July was *Reincarnation*. Here are a selection of the texts that were read aloud and discussed

"The true foundation of the theory of rebirth is the evolution of the soul, or rather its efflorescence out of the veil of Matter and its gradual self-finding. Buddhism contained this truth involved in its theory of Karma and emergence out of Karma but failed to bring it to light; Hinduism knew it of old, but afterwards missed the right balance of its expression. Now we are again able to restate the ancient truth in a new language and this is already being done by certain schools of thought, though still the old incrustations tend to tack themselves on to the deeper wisdom. And if this gradual efflorescence be true, then the theory of rebirth is an intellectual necessity, a logically unavoidable corollary. But what is the aim of that evolution? Not conventional or interested virtue and the faultless counting out of the small coin of good in the hope of an apportioned material reward, but the continual growth towards a divine knowledge, strength, love and purity."

Sri Aurobindo, "The Problem of Rebirth", *The Supramental Manifestation and Other Writings*

"You are on this earth at this moment because you have chosen so in the past", said the Mother to her youthful audience at the Ashram Playground. "If you go deep enough where all outer things are as silent as can be, you will find within that flame of which I often speak, and in that flame you will see your destiny. You will see a centuries-old aspiration that has concentrated little by little to lead you through countless births to the great day of the realisation – a preparation which has been made in the course of thousands of years and will now reach its culmination."

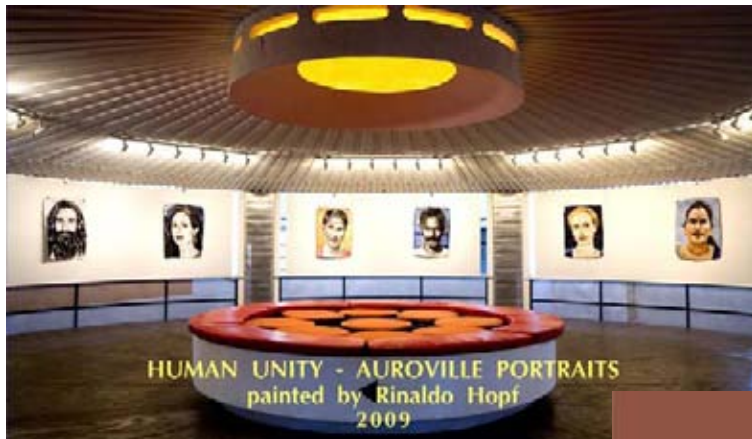
The Mother, *Questions and Answers*, 1954, pp. 271-2

"The soul needs no proof of its rebirth any more than it needs proof of its immortality. For there comes a time when it becomes consciously immortal, aware of itself in its eternal and immutable essence. Once that realisation is accomplished, all intellectual questionings for and against the immortality of the soul fall away like the vain clamour of ignorance around the self-evident and ever-present truth."

Sri Aurobindo, "The Problem of Rebirth", *The Supramental Manifestation and Other Writings*

If you would like come to these meetings, there is more information on the back page. We look forward to seeing you.

Auroville Calendars for 2009



2009 Calendar

Human Unity Auroville Portraits

The calendar starts December 2008 and ends January 2010. Paintings by Rinaldo Hopf which were shown at a recent Auroville Exhibition.

Size: 29cm x 16.7cm.

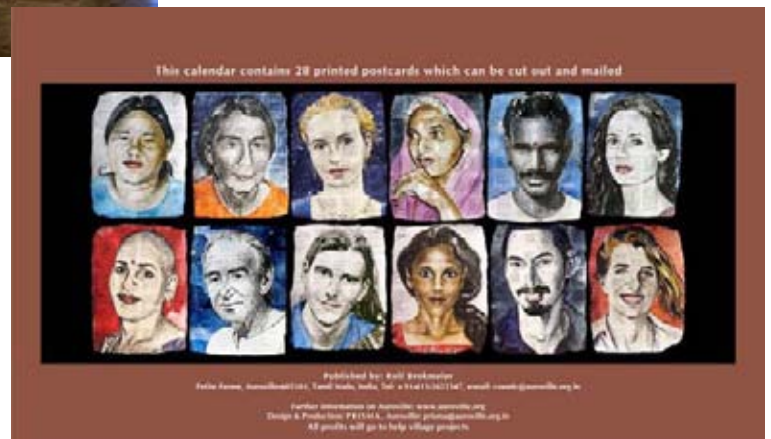
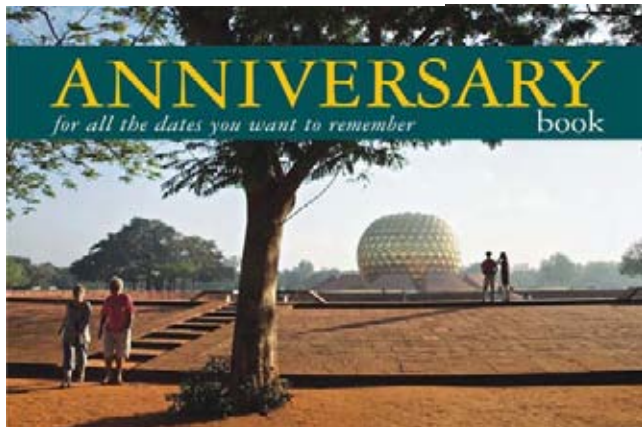
Price £6.50 each including postage

Auroville Anniversary Book.

For all the dates people want to remember. A timeless calendar for all the years, published by Prisma.

Size: 24cm x 16cm, 72 pages.

Price £8.00, including postage



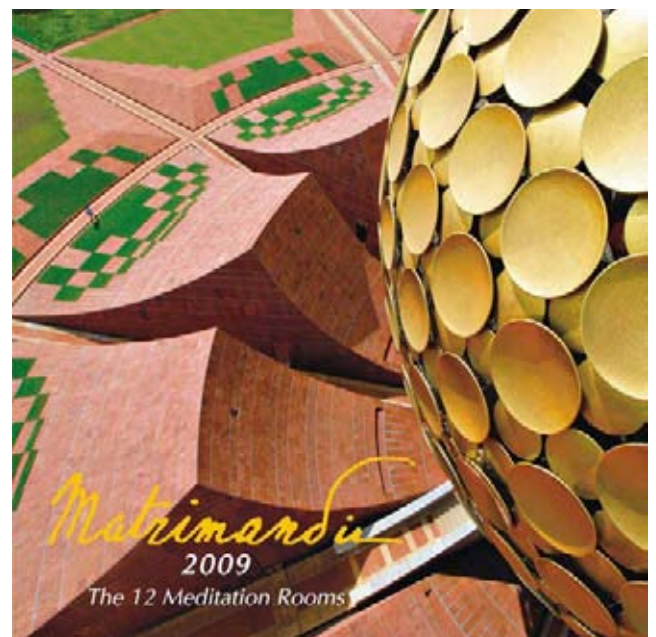
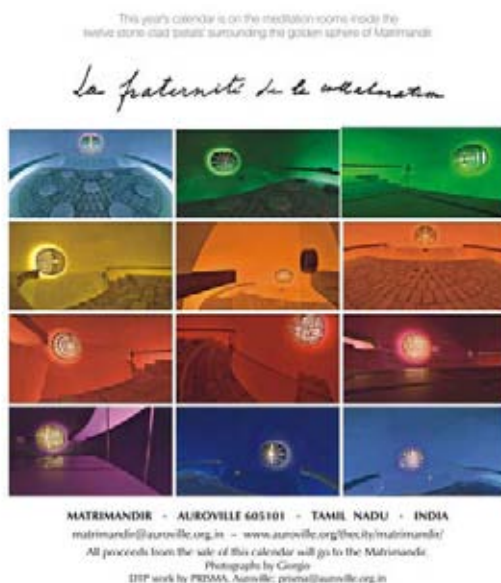
To Order Calendars:
Please send a cheque payable to Auroville International UK, or e mail info@aviuk.org

Matrimandir Calendar

This year's Matrimandir Calendar features the 12 Meditation Rooms. Proceeds go to Matrimandir.

Desktop: size 19.5 cm x 20 cm

Price £6.00, including postage



AUROVILLE CALENDAR 2009



Auroville 2009 Calendar

Children of Auroville

The photos were taken by *Ireno Guerci* during several masked celebrations held annually at Transition school .

This joyful calendar conveys a feeling of the international - multicultural reality of Auroville through a small but representative selection of the hundreds of beautiful children living here.

Hanging, open size: 33.5 x 47 cm

Price £8.00, including postage



Auroville Exhibition at the Nehru Centre

August 2008

In August, Auroville International UK held a major exhibition at the Indian High Commission's cultural centre in London, the Nehru Centre.

The exhibition was opened on Monday evening the 11th August by Sraddhalu, Sonia Dyne and the deputy director of the Nehru Centre, Rajesh Srivastava. After the official opening, Sraddhalu, from the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, who had flown in the day before especially for the event, gave an enthralling talk about Auroville to an audience of around 120 people. The exhibition continued a further two days with a number of interested visitors.

The rooms where the exhibition was held looked splendid, and the pictures of Ireno, John Mandeen and a few by Martin, looked very beautiful. We also had a display of books, and products from Auroville, as well as

leaflets and brochures. On the second day, we had organised a small discussion group, which was facilitated by Elizabeth Edema, on the subject of Human Unity.

The exhibition and talk created much interest and enthusiasm amongst the people who attended, and although many attendees already knew about Auroville, some knew nothing at all and it was an opportunity for us to meet many new people.

We would like to thank the Director and staff of the Nehru Centre for their hospitality in hosting our exhibition, and their kindness in making us feel welcome.

Photos of the exhibition can be found on our web site on www.aviuk.org.





Other News

Next Meeting

SPRING MEETING, and Auroville Presentation

The meeting will be held in April 2009 at:

Auromira Centre,
126 Whitton Avenue East,
Greenford, Middlesex, UB6 0PY
Tel: 0208 903 6504

The nearest underground station is Sudbury Town (Piccadilly Line)

Anyone interested in Auroville is very welcome to come along. Please bring a contribution to a shared lunch.

We will announce the date nearer the time. For more information go to www.aviuk.org

Looking for a Home

AVI UK is looking for a home somewhere in the London area. We are looking for a room or small flat where we can keep a selection of books and information about Auroville, and a display of pictures. It would be a place to meet regularly and to offer talks or workshops.

If anyone has any ideas, or can offer something to us, please contact Martin at the address below.

London Meetings (see page 5)

Regular London meetings are held about every two months, at the home of one of our Trustees, David Widdicombe. They are held on a Sunday from 2.30pm to about 5.30 pm.

The meetings afford an opportunity to study the teachings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. They start with a meditation and an introduction on a chosen subject by one of those attending, and then a discussion. Among the subjects chosen so far are "Our Many Selves", "Surrender", "Sadhana through work", "Death", "Meditation", "Religion and Spirituality", and the recent Auroville book "Awareness through the Body", "Human unity and cultural differences in Auroville".

The address of the meetings is:

5 Albert Terrace, Primrose Hill, London, NW1 7SU

To find out when the next meeting is, please phone David on (020) 7586 5209.

Next International Meeting

The next Auroville international meeting is to be held in the Netherlands, May 2009. It will be a chance for Aurovilians and members of AVI groups from around the world to meet. If anyone wishes to come, please contact Martin at the address below.

AVI UK Website

AVI UK has a website. It can be found at www.aviuk.org. Please take a look at the site, and find out more about what we do. There is more information about our projects, about making donations and how you can participate. News of forthcoming events can be found at the top of the home page.

We have a facility to make secure credit card donations online. These can be made for any purpose, either by choosing from a menu, or by sending an e-mail. Gift Aid tax relief can be arranged automatically, when a donation is made. If anyone has ideas for inclusion, please contact Martin on info@aviuk.org. We would welcome any contribution.

Donations

You can make a donation to AVI UK or to any Auroville project with a credit or debit card via our web site. Just go to www.aviuk.org/fundraising.htm. Otherwise please send a cheque, payable to *Auroville International UK*. We are always grateful for your help.

Auroville Today

For those who wish for a more detailed and up-to-date view of Auroville we would strongly recommend subscribing to *Auroville Today*. The magazine is produced in Auroville and is published monthly. It is an interesting and stimulating publication with news, comment and discussion about all aspects of Auroville life. Some of the articles we use in our Newsletter come from *Auroville Today*, so if they interest you, why not subscribe? If you are interested, please write to:

Auroville Today, Sincerity, Auroville 605101, Tamil Nadu, India

The yearly subscription is £25.00 and cheques in £, can be sent payable to *Auroville Unity Fund (Auroville Today)*, OR see enclosed form for our special membership offer with *Auroville Today* included.

NOTE: To save on our administration, would subscribers to *Auroville Today* who do not take advantage of our special membership scheme, please send their subscriptions direct to Auroville, to the address above and not to Auroville International UK.

Next issue

If you have anything to offer for inclusion in the next newsletter, please contact Martin. We would welcome any offerings from those who have visited Auroville recently or any thoughts which you would like to share.

Address:

For all correspondence please write to our Secretary, Martin Littlewood, whose address is:

30 The Green, Surlingham, Norwich,

Norfolk, NR14 7AG Tel. 01508 538300, E mail: info@aviuk.org