



Auroville Outreach

A newsletter from Auroville Universal Township

April 2003

Microorganisms for macro problems

While working for Coca-Cola in S.America for 7 years as a plant manager, Colombian-born Aurovilian Margarita Correa became interested in microbiology, with special emphasis on the possibility of making high grade compost out of city garbage. In 1997 she came to India, where she began working with Auroville's Pitchandikulam Bio-Resource Centre (see Oct 2002 issue), joining Auroville in 1998. In 1999 she began research into the use of "effective microorganisms" (EM; standing for a range of natural available eco-friendly bacteria) in a variety of environmental and agricultural situations.

In 2001 Margarita took a trip to the Mata Amritanandamayi Math in Kerala, where, in course of solving a problem the Ashram was having with odiferous toilets and cow houses, she met Sri Mata Amritanandamayi Herself, popularly known as Amma. Amma

gave her the vision of helping India's 700 million small-scale farmers as well as doing other important environmental work, and from that time she has never looked back.

Margarita's energy and track record to date are remarkable. Among the many projects which she has already successfully worked on, the following specially stand out.

- In south India, where some 12 million coconut palm trees are estimated to have been killed by mite infestation, EM is being used to restore plantations to full health and productivity by way of their powerful fertilising and pesticide qualities.
- Increasing rice production by 50-60% using EM in paddy fields in Uttaranchal, raising output from around 3 to 5 tons per acre. (Bearing in mind that some 60 million tons of rice - 20% of India's national production - was lost in 2002 to pest attack and disease, the wider ramifications of this experiment are tremendous.)
- Increasing the leaf output per acre in a major Assam tea

Auroville is an international township in Tamil Nadu, South India, founded in 1968.

Inspired by the vision of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, over 1,700 people from India and some 30-35 other nations are building a township dedicated to an experiment in human unity, with the eventual hope of contributing to international understanding and the evolution of human consciousness. Nearly 5,000 of the 40,000-plus local people living in the dozen-or-more villages that comprise the Auroville bio-region are also involved in the project, providing their skills and labour.

The township, projected for 50,000 people, will radiate out from the central Matrimandir and its surrounding gardens in 4 zones, the International, Cultural, Residential and Industrial. A large forested area, the Green Belt, will eventually surround the entire township area.

Present activities in Auroville include wasteland reclamation and reforestation, organic farming, village development, education, health care, renewable energy, appropriate building technology, arts and culture, handicrafts and small-scale industries, architecture and town planning.

As described by its founder, Auroville aspires to be "a universal town where men and women of all countries are able to live in peace and progressive harmony, above all creeds, all politics and all nationalities."

For more general information visit the website: www.auroville.org



Sick coconut palms before treatment with EM, and the same plot one year later!

- plantation by around 20%, while at the same time completely eliminating the need for costly and environmentally damaging chemical pesticides to achieve equal or improved yield. Now more than 5,000 hectares of tea in India (the equivalent of 1% of the total area under cultivation), plus 12,000 acres in Sri Lanka, is being grown using EM.
- Treating some 2 million litres of waste water per day with EM in the huge AIMS hospital in Cochin, and transforming it into water clean enough for use in toilets and gardening. At the same time the hospital has benefitted from a 50% saving in the cost of electricity, previously required for the aeration of the effluent treatment plant.
- Introducing EM treatment technology to the 3,500-person campus of Amrita Institutions in Coimbatore, headquarters of the Natural Agricultural Network of India (NANI), to turn the daily one-ton of kitchen and food waste and 1.2 million litres of waste water into high quality compost and re-usable water (like at AIMS hospital above).
- Helping low caste families to transform coir (coconut fibre waste) into marketable compost which they are then able to sell at extra profit.

- Turning paint sludge from a TVS moped manufacturing plant in Hosur into compost.
- Drawing up plans for the treatment of 2 kms of the highly polluted Adyar river running through Chennai, to render it clean and mosquito free.
- Persuading the huge Murugappa Group (whose interests/products include tea, vanilla, coffee and rubber) to switch from chemical fertilisers and pesticides to EM alone.

To quote Margarita, "EM is a tool with widespread potential applications. It could have a major transformative effect here in India, where adequate solid and liquid waste treatment facilities are often lacking, and there is widespread pollution (India is the world's largest producer of basic chemical pesticides, and 6th in the users' league), though its use is naturally being resisted by certain industries with vested interests, such as pesticide manufacturers."

As awareness of EM and its tremendous potential grows, Margarita - whose work is being supported by international backers like the UN's Environmental Programme, the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO), the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), BAIF (an Indian NGO concerned



Margarita making EM 'chapatis' for use in waste water treatment

with agricultural issues) and the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM), and spiritually through her association with M.A.Math, Ramakrishna Mission, Vivekananda Kendra and Auroville - is finding herself in increasing demand for consultation, hands-on coordination work, lectures, conferences & seminars, training & workshops, and for interviews. It is not unusual for her to find herself in several major cities in the course of one week, addressing audiences of several hundred people or meeting with Board Directors of top companies, Government officers, wildlife conservationists, major estate managers and the like; though her compassionate nature makes her specially enjoy interacting with and helping local people like village farmers, tribals and self-help groups such as those already mentioned transforming coir into compost.

Margarita is a remarkable woman doing a remarkable work, but it should never be forgotten that the joint heroes of her story are the EM micro-organisms themselves. What she and her micro-allies are doing is a good reminder that humanity can benefit so much more from working with nature than from assaulting and confronting it.

For more information e-mail margarita@auroville.org.in or see the website www.auroville.org



Teaching low-caste workers to make saleable compost with waste coconut fibre

"Auroville is an achievement..."

Timing of the last Newsletter prevented us including mention of the visit to Auroville, at the turn of the year, of Prof. Murli Manohar Joshi, Hon'ble Minister of Human



*Prof. Murli Manohar Joshi, Hon'ble
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Resource Development, Science & Technology, Govt of India.

After a visit to the Matrimandir and Savitri Bhavan, where he saw a new introductory video on Auroville, followed by attendance at a seminar at the Centre for Indian Culture on "The Sense of Infinity" organised in collaboration with the Institute of Advanced Studies, Simla, Prof. Joshi went on to the Indian national pavilion, Bharat Nivas, where he saw the "Genius of India" slide show

referred to in the last issue of the Newsletter. Following that he made an address to the residents and a number of guests in the Sri Aurobindo Auditorium, in course of which he said the following:

"Auroville is an achievement and yet a promise which is still to be fulfilled. For Auroville is a great effort at fulfilling a tremendous dream, a Divine Dream. This dream has consequences for the growth and the development of a new form of economy, a new form of social organisation, and a new form of hierarchy. (...) I am aware that the task is extremely difficult, but it is the one task that should be carried out, if humanity is to make the next step forward in its upward march."

"The Charter of Auroville that the Mother has given is an uplifting Charter; it is an inspiring Charter, and it is a Charter that fulfills the highest ideals that India has conceived throughout the ages for social harmony and human solidarity. (...) Your efforts fill me with great hope."

He then visited the "Light Mandala" at the Pavilion of Tibetan Culture; and completed his evening by taking dinner at the Solar Kitchen in company with Sri Kireet Joshi, Chairman of the Governing Board, and other key figures, before returning to Pondicherry.

The Egyptian Museum

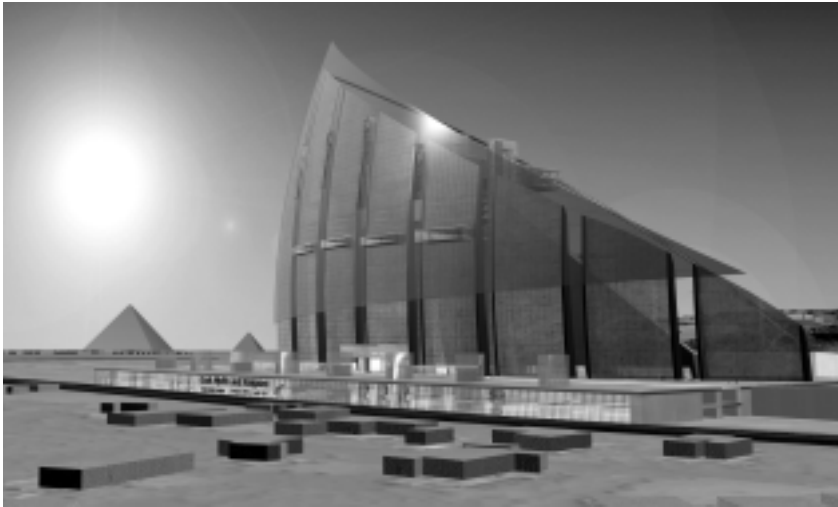
There are moments in life when, confronted with some stunning new photo, painting, shape, fashion or design, the immediate reaction is an exclamation of "Wow! How fantastic... beautiful ... fabulous (or whatever)". The design for The Egyptian Museum in Cairo by Auroville's Brand New Day (BND) unit headed by French-Canadian born architect Dominic Dube tends to evoke just such a reaction.

Sixty storeys high (approx. 200 metres) and occupying some 100,000 sq.metres, BND's design results from an extraordinary call in January 2002 to the architects of the world from Egypt's main museum of antiquities in Cairo, supported by the United Nations and UNESCO, inviting them to submit plans for a comprehensive new museum to be located near the Pyramids at Giza. No less than 1,500 entries were received. Of those 1,500, the international judging panel in October '02 whittled the number down to a final 20, but then – encouraged by architects around the world and the International Union of Architects – in Paris added another 30, all of whom are to be incorporated in a book. BND's design has been included in that second batch of 30, making it one of the most outstanding in the world, when one considers that nearly all the famous names in architecture from Europe, Asia and the Americas had made submissions.

When asked how they had approached their design, Dominic elaborated as follows. "In awareness of the proximity of the River Nile, which has for thousands of years been absolutely central to Egypt's life, well-being and culture, we were first inspired by the timeless felucca river craft of that great river, the life blood of Egypt and its civilization, to create a shape like a giant sail, carrying - as we saw it - the energy



The Minister under Auroville's central Banyan tree near Matrimandir



BND's design for the new Egyptian Museum

from the past, the contents of the museum to be, to the present time, to today's humanity. For the chunk of the museum where the collections are to be displayed we used the concept of a giant golden sarcophagus, housed within the heart of the outer administrative and support structure of the museum."

Talking about the experience, Dominic told how the BND team of 18 architects and support staff - some 40% of whom BND has recruited from the local villages and trained up to become significant contributors, like skilled model-makers - had felt inspired and carried by a higher energy, which they ascribed to Auroville's strong connection with the Mother and Her Egyptian ancestry. Over a period of 6 months they had gone into amazing detail to come up with their proposal, which had to incorporate storage and display space for some 15,000 artifacts, including the complete collection of Tutankhamun artifacts, plus many tens of thousands more from other sources and those yet to be discovered; had to allow for a flow of around 20,000 or more visitors a

day, including their transport; and had to provide adequate space for admin, vehicle parking, restaurants, research, and many other needs. The end result, they knew, would go far beyond the published budget of 350 million dollars to build, but they had a strong feeling not to cut back, hoping that their proposal might so excite the imagination of the international judging panel that they would feel justified in considering an increase.

Through their submission BND has certainly put itself - and India - on the world map of available architectural talent, but it is not the first time that the unit has hit the headlines. Not so long ago they won the 'Commendation Trophy' in the annual design competition run by India's prestigious 'A & D Design' magazine for 2001 with their plans for Auroville's Reve community, and

more recently have again won the same prize in the competition for 2002 with their design for an exciting Aurovilian residence in the Kottakarai area.

With new architects already signing up to join his team from as far away as Korea and Thailand, Dominic is more than ready to take up a range of other challenging projects to pour his and the team's talents into.

For more information e-mail brand-new-day@auroville.org.in or visit www.brandnewday.com



Prize winning design for AV house with stairway detail (below)



Enquiries or feedback relating to this newsletter and its contents are always welcome, and can be communicated to:
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