

For three days in October, Elliot's Beach in Chennai saw ten teams from all over India playing *Ultimate* by day and night on flood-lit fields. At the end of the tournament, the coveted *SOTG* or the 'Spirit of the Game' award was awarded to the Auroville Ultimate team.

Coren, the team's captain, and a newcomer from the USA, explains: "The Spirit of the Game award is given to the team that best embodies the ideals of the game. After every match, each team evaluates the opposing team's performance and spirit – how well they understood the game, how much respect and fairness they played with and how that spirit felt compared to their own."

Ultimate is a non-contact team sport played with a 175 gram flying plastic disc, similar to a frisbee. Attributed to high school students David Leiwant and Joel Silver, the game was born in 1969 in a school parking in New Jersey, USA. The object of the sport is to score points by passing the disc to a player in the opposite end zone, as in American football. Originally called *Ultimate Frisbee*, the sport was renamed *Ultimate* because 'Frisbee' is the trademark for the line of discs. There are more than 4.9 million players in the US alone.

"*Ultimate* is a sport of the future, and fits very well in Auroville," says Coren. "For one, both men and women play side by side. Plus there are no referees in the game. Each player takes up that responsibility and a foul gets called by the players themselves. So the quality of sportsmanship of a team and fair play is valued more than winning."

"For the most part it works," says Coren. He recalls his experience playing *Ultimate* at university in the US: "There were always some

The Ultimate sport experience



The Auroville Ultimate team

teams who were more aggressive – getting angry at themselves, or angry at their own team members or at other players. But they stood out... Or if there was one player who was particularly aggressive, you could feel that person's presence. It was like a red flag on the field. It was like – whoa! – you're taking it far too seriously!"

Ultimate was first introduced in Auroville seven years ago at Deepanam School. Aurevan,

then 13-years old remembers. "A French guest brought the game to us. He was a friend of one of the kids' parents and started teaching us all kinds of things – there was juggling, and *Ultimate*. When he left, he presented us this beautiful disc with a dog on it which we kept playing with for a long time – until the disc, the only good one, had broken as we had stepped on it so many times!"

In March this year, *Ultimate* got reintroduced to Auroville by an American guest named Mark. "It slowly grew over the summer," says Coren, "and it was going to the tournament that galvanized us as a team. Earlier, we were playing once a week, but now we meet more often, and the game really feels anchored."

Coren believes that playing *Ultimate* gives people a chance to practise the principles of Auroville. He explains: "In Auroville, every one is aspiring towards human unity. And in the game, we're a team of old and young, guests, and newcomers and Aurovilians, Indian and Non-Indian, men and women – it's a whole range of people. And to be in a diverse group and feeling that we can move beyond the atmosphere of competition is very liberating."

"Auroville can be quite a challenging place to live on many levels," he says. "And I feel it is very important to maintain a balance between sincere aspiration for a new way of living, and reminding ourselves to not take it all too seriously. And then to cultivate those activities and experiences which are just about joy."

Saturday eve Certitude Sports grounds: it is close to dusk and the light is fading fast. Fluorescent green cones mark the boundaries of the large playing field. Joyful cries are heard as runners criss-cross the red expanse chasing after a dusty white disc. It is the Auroville Ultimates in their last stretch of this week's game.

Excerpts from Auroville Radio and in conversation with Priya Sundaravalli

REFLECTIONS



A statue over a temple in Kullapalayam village

Psychic Gibbons

A newcomer looks at life in Auroville.

The first impressions of living this divine realization were quite bland to be honest. For the untrained eye, one cannot really distinguish the difference in intention between tourists with dreadlocks hanging out at any Manali/Goa café, versus those similar-looking blokes lurking about the entry road to Auroville. Alas, it seemed to be just another collage of Shiva t-shirts, branded by a huddle of masses that not too long ago wore the Che Guevara equivalent, prior to their first psychedelically-induced spiritual epiphany. Endless opportunities for spending divine cash, cafeterias, boutiques, a cyber café with rates three times higher than normal, surely this must have been some sort of infestation.

So approaching the Visitors Centre bookshop, the plan now was to buy a nice collection of the Master's works, and go read them under a tree somewhere. If one is urged to spend, one might as well do so in an appropriate direction. Surprisingly, the rather poorly-versed lady behind the counter had to check in some computer log, to search for what I had requested, as if selling something Sri Aurobindo wrote was a rare event. Not to mention that the first three compilations I inquired for were met with a polite "Saari sir, no *staak*. Book *ille*", shaking her head apologetically.

The city for a never-aging youth had not one copy of "The Gita for the Youth", a beautifully-compiled selection of the Master's essays on the Gita. It was a book that I read years ago, the one that drew me to Auroville in the first place. Round the corner at the boutiques, all conceivable products to bathe, smell good, look cool, feel hip and jazz up any aspect of life were pouring off the shelves. Somehow hand-made trinkets with eco this and sustainability that catchwords were deemed more

essential to furthering human unity, in this radical place where money would no longer be sovereign lord.

Knowing that there must be something more to the scene than what I initially inferred, I decided to stay, probe further, and dig deeper. After all, I had come already deciding to stay, and a little commercial startle was not about to waver resolve. Next on the agenda was finding a place to stay. This should have been easy enough. Obviously a place that seeks vibrant enthusiastic youthful energy has plenty of hostel-type accommodation facilities. After all we come as volunteers, and render service.

More grim news hurled forth when I learned that since this particular youth was technically not a student, being given residence in the few existing hostels was disallowed. The only alternative lodging was at one of the dozens of guesthouses, all of which had exorbitant rent tariffs on a daily basis, double or triple their Ashram-related equivalents in Pondicherry; unfeasible especially to one planning on staying the long haul. As usual an interesting twist of fate granted the possibility for an 'under the counter' deal with an Aurovillian, offering to rent out her out-house at a price marginally less than average facility rates. Fair enough, like they say, beggars can't be choosers.

Over and above this rather expensive monthly rental, it was soon brought to my notice that a monthly guest contribution also had to be coughed up, for somebody has to pay for all the free facilities everywhere. Things were starting to get a little strained now, for having just gotten into professional life prior to this, there were not that many personal assets to fall back on.

What with administrative facilities in one direction, groceries in a diametrically-opposite one, office somewhere else off course, Auroville planning was evidently discriminatory towards those without personalized vehicles. In those initial days of ideological bliss, before I was run off the roads a couple of times by intolerant truckers, cycling became the thing. Soon though, it had to be a motorcycle, which involved rental as well as fuel. At this point, Dad had to be intimidated for further support, but things were wearing thin. The entry process was initiated, and a scrutinizing interview as to ones intentions and reasons for arriving on the scene took place with some level of ease. Thereafter newcomer status was accorded after six months or so. By the end of which, of course, I was flat broke, having used up every last penny scraped together through city living. Here, in this city the future needs, where money is no longer sovereign lord.

It has since been over a year and a half now and this scribble is just the tip of the iceberg of serious conflicting observations. Every conversation initiated to address this situation is inevitably met with the same heaving sighs of unfortunate helplessness because, after all, it is all just one big experiment, right? And what I obviously do not understand owing to my inexperience is that everything takes time...and those who came "at the beginning" had it far worse. Sure. But that really is no excuse for setting up a system where it is virtually impossible for people of goodwill to come forward and participate and contribute.

What can be noticed is that the structure currently in place targets and enables the influx of a very specific profile of person while those who simply cannot afford to invest so much, monetarily, at an early stage of life and have no inflated personal assets to donate are inevitably marginalized, if not obstructed all together. I have much to be grateful for because, by some stroke of luck, not only can my family afford this endeavour of mine, but their three generation long relationship with the Pondicherry Ashram helps them understand why a person like me would want to be here in the first place.

Others may not be so lucky. Spare a thought here in this pseudo-cashless society, let's cut back on trying to make money off potential newcomers to Auroville, and embrace them for the energy they have to offer, for the new ideas, perspectives, vibrations and love they may bring.

Ranjeet

PICTURE OF THE MONTH

Winter monsoon arrives on time



A refreshing soak for a girl and her pony in a pond in Auroville's greenbelt.

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