

AUROVILLE TODAY

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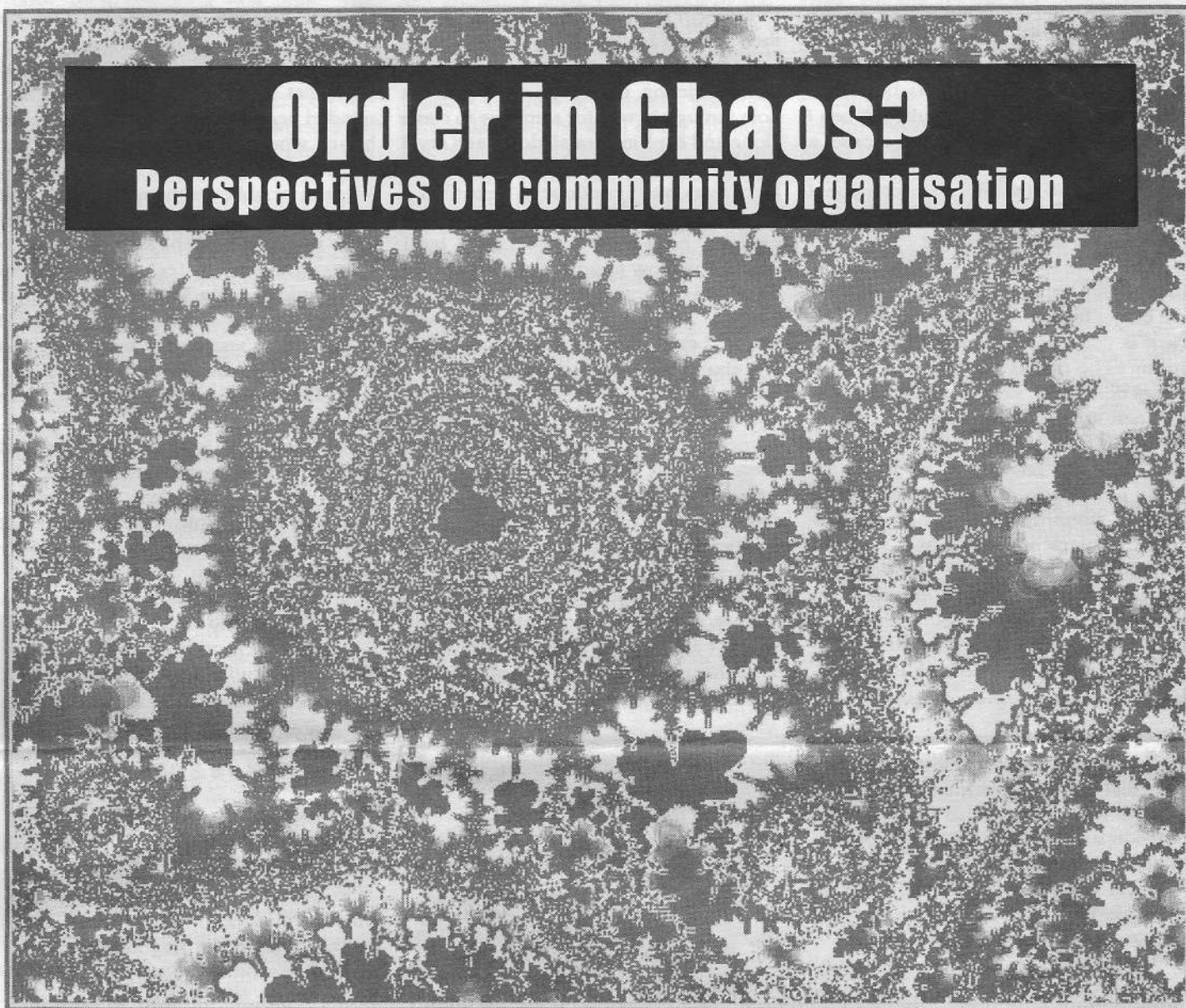
"The city will be built by what is invisible to you. The [people] who have to act as instruments will do so despite themselves. They are only puppets in the hands of larger Forces. Nothing depends on human beings— neither the planning nor the execution— nothing! That is why one can laugh."

(The Mother, Sept. 1969)

Forms emerging from the invisible. Order shaped by forces that exceed our understanding. This could also apply to fractals, those wonderful computer-generated patterns that tremble between order and chaos. Fractals, in their deep order yet surface unpredictability, can be seen as metaphors for Auroville's process, as well as reminders that true order, beauty cannot be controlled. It can only be lived, experienced, through an alert surrender to something infinitely greater than mind, a process akin to what the poet Keats called 'negative capability'.

In this issue we take a look at aspects of Auroville's present organisation and process. But we also explore the boundaries of its larger being through hearing from those who, having been part of the community for many years, are now living in other areas of the world. How do they relate to the community now? Do they, like fractals, continue to replicate previous patterns or have different kinds of 'order' emerged? Finally we experience the 'fractured' landscape yet inner wholeness of that extraordinary region, Ladakh, through the eyes of one of our intrepid editors who trekked there earlier this year. Ladakh, like Auroville, exists on the margin. Yet fractals teach us that it is precisely on the margin, on the razor-edge between the new and the old, the known and unknown, that the greatest potential for change exists.

Order in Chaos? Perspectives on community organisation



Fractal, generated by computer programme "Fractool"

The Auroville Council

FEEDBACK FROM THE FRONTLINE

In January of this year, a new organisation (see box) was set up in an attempt to make Auroville's decision-making and executive process more effective. After ten months, how well is this new structure working? Alan asked KALYAN, who is a member of the Working Committee, and STEVE, who is on the Concept and Communications Committee, to give us their views.

Steve: During the first three months of the Concept Committee we managed to identify the fundamental issues which we felt the community should be tackling. However, in terms of bringing these issues to the community, we've only done about average. The problem is that, while the results of the Local Area Meetings that we held were remarkable – it was like hearing the voice of the collective personality – there's a lot of work involved in organising them and putting

together the feedback, and there are not many people who can do this work in a timely manner. On top of this, for the last two months pressures from outside Auroville (relating to the visa issue etc.) have taken up a lot of time and sucked a lot of energy out of our internal process. When there are so many fires to be fought at one time, it's difficult to follow anything through. The result? In the past few weeks I've become ineffectual because I do nothing but run around going to meetings. And we're still trying to select the new Entry Group, something that should have been completed by the end of May.

Kalyan: Some good things have come out of this new organisation – particularly the Local Area Meetings – but it's facing some major problems. One is that there are too many grey areas

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THE NEW ORGANISATION

Four groups – known collectively as the Council – were formed to look after different aspects of our organisational needs. The Working Committee takes care of all matters relating to the Auroville Foundation and to any governmental or international body; the Executive Committee looks after internal community matters; the Concept and Communication Committee prepares plans and policies, as well as facilitating communication between the other groups and the Residents Assembly; and the Charter Council looks at issues in the light of the Auroville Charter. In addition, regular Local Area Meetings – LAM's – were initiated to evoke suggestions and responses from the larger community to particular proposals.

How do Auroville's organisation and process appear to someone who has only recently joined the community? On this page we ask two new community members to give us their views.

I am sitting in front of the computer, trying to figure out the Auroville computer system; and at the same time, I'm swatting mosquitoes and wiping the sweat from my face. It's all new, and it's all very difficult. The new computer system, the bugs, and the weather are only the most obvious and immediate problems. I am also trying to remember to drive on the left side of the road, trying to remember not to snarl at the person who seems to be taking up my "personal space," and trying to understand all these strange, new accents. "I'm sorry, what was that you said?" has become a standard phrase in my vocabulary. When I say that, I get a blank look in response; a look that asks, "Are you some kind of nincompoop?". No, I am not a nincompoop, I am just having a hard time trying to figure out what the hell is going on!

Five minutes after the verbal exchange, it's forgotten, but in the meantime some of the bigger frustrations present themselves. How is this place organized? The answer seems to be that it's not. How do you get things done here; slowly, slowly or not at all. There are lots of committees and boards and groups, that's clear, but I don't understand how they relate to each other. What is the jurisdiction of each group, where does its authority come from, and how does it implement its decisions? Who has the authority to say "yes", and who has the authority to say "no"? My experience in meetings here is that the loudest voice or strongest personality prevails. Often with very little discussion, a decision is reached,

Sally: Trying to figure it out

and then twenty minutes later, it seems that the decision has been reversed. I sit there like Alice in Wonderland, wondering what rabbit hole I have fallen into. I try to recreate in my mind what just happened, but I can't follow the trail. The trail seems to meander through a vast wasteland and then end at a brick wall. I stand in amazement and frustration looking at the wall and wondering, do I climb over, punch a hole through it, wait for someone to come along and explain it, or sit down and cry. I have bloodied all my knuckles and shed a lot of tears, and I continue to be baffled.

Auroville makes very little sense to me, yet I stay on. I want to understand, but I don't know how to go about it. There are no official mentors or teachers or manuals. There is no one to say, "this is how it works". I can't go to the library and find an organizational chart or a list of bylaws. I can't go to the Town Hall and introduce myself to the administrators and apply for a learner's permit. When I ask someone a question, I may get anything from a knowing smile to a quick exit. I am left on my own to figure it out for myself.

There are some things that one must do alone, and I am prepared to do them, yet it is much more difficult when you feel like you are swimming through a surrealistic dream. I ask myself, "Why are they – the Aurovilians – making it so hard"? Then I

realized that the confusion is not limited to the Newcomers: the Old Timers are suffering with the same problems as I. The only difference seems to be that they are used to it, and have come to regard it as normal.

I decided to become a Newcomer because I hoped that this would be the place that would support my inner development and evolution. When I first arrived, I felt that I was in a community of like-minded people, a place where my neighbours would understand my need to explore and push the limits that my Western neighbours thought were a little too far out. In some ways, I have found this to be true, and I feel blessed. At the same time, however, I feel frustrated. Sri Aurobindo and The Mother offer the possibility of an answer or a way for me. If I hang in there and do the work, maybe it will come. Maybe this will become my way. The choice of effort is mine; I can make it or not.

My task here is to do the yoga, not talk, talk, talk, or spend weeks trying to discover what should be obvious. The simple should be kept simple. A well thought out general plan with delegated authority would support that aim, not interfere. When things get really chaotic in my own mind, I clean and organize my drawers and cabinets. I guess my personal theory is that, if the "stuff" out there is organized,



PHOTO: SVEN ULSA

maybe there will be room for the troublesome, interior stuff to get sorted out. It seems to me that Auroville needs to start cleaning its own drawers.

What to do? My suggestion would be to streamline the quasi-organization. Give a small group of trusted individuals the authority to make decisions, and create a body to implement those decisions. If they do a good job, keep them; if they don't, throw them out. In the meantime everyone will spend less time bloodying their knuckles, and have more time and energy for the yoga.

Sally

Sally from Sausalito, California, recently came to Auroville to stay, having lost her heart after a brief unplanned visit earlier this year. She has a background as interior designer, and now applies her skills to the cladding of the inner skin of the Matrimandir.

For me, one of the most interesting aspects of the Auroville experiment is that of self-governance – how a group of human beings that share neither a common language, culture, nor history can come together and manage their affairs in a way that can provide a model that will ultimately contribute to human unity (and perhaps even planetary survival).

As I began to observe, and then slowly participate in, the Auroville process, I found it inspiring, tedious, rich, sometimes cumbersome and deeply exciting. It seems to me that the same things that make decision-making in Auroville so frustrating are part of what also makes it a genuinely valuable experiment for the 'outside world'. All of the elements and energies that exist in the world are also embodied here – very literally from the sublime to the ridiculous. We're not merely attempting to create a process or realise a goal with a collection of homogeneous, like-minded, generally privileged individuals (difficult enough in its own right, but easy by comparison). The work we've taken on is both huge and essential; divinely simple in concept, incredibly complex in execution – an alive, in-the-world, continually transforming, multi-cultural experiment in human unity that is truly at the service of the Divine and its ultimate, evolutionary union with Nature.

In Auroville, there's really no place to hide. There's really no one to call if you have a dispute with your neighbour – at least no one with the power to "settle it" arbitrarily. You have to either live with it or be actively involved in resolving it, take personal responsibility or just turn it over to Mother. There is no one else.

While, today, the sheer number of



Aurovilians challenges the feasibility of the discussion phase of decision-making occurring in the Residents' Assembly (thus the recent creation of the Local Area Meeting process), it is still the only body that can make binding (and even then bound pretty loosely) policy decisions for Auroville. By design, then, policy decisions directly reflect the current state of the collective consciousness of Aurovilians, be it inspiring or abysmal at any given moment. While people can choose not to participate, and many do opt not to, this in itself is also a direct reflection of the current state of collectivity. We can't hide from ourselves behind an elected representative, union, professional organisation or the courts. Mother's Force is certainly evident, but *this*

Kathryn: No place to hide

Mother didn't wear apron strings, so although we occasionally try to take refuge there, She doesn't really let us get away with much. Good or bad, evolved or unevolved, integral or fragmented, harmonious or discordant, if we care to know where we are in any aspect of our collective life, pretty much all we have to do is look.

Okay – that puts us way ahead of the more "developed" societies. But then what? We know we don't want to create a numbing, inflexible, unresponsive bureaucracy, but how *do* we want to manage our collective affairs? We instinctively distrust position, title, authority, but how to get the work done? We weren't given our own planet, continent, or even nation-state within which to conduct our experiment. If we're committed to human unity, then we must accept being "relational" – i.e. *in relationship with* each other Aurovillian (and the culture, history and experience each brings), our natural environment, the Tamil population and culture, visitors to Auroville, the Indian Government at many levels, each of our respective Governments, our funding sources (developmental, educational, and commercial) and also with the Divine.

As we know from personal experience, each relationship requires care and attention, and while the last is, for each of us, a highly personal, individualized experience, many of the others simply *must* be cared for on more of a collective basis. Can we learn to delegate? Do we understand the difference between responsibility for actions and responsibility for outcomes? If

we adopt transparency as a key element in all our processes, we don't even have to trust each other to do this. As long as the Auroville Foundation Act of 1988 is in effect, any community-wide responsibility must be delegated by the Residents' Assembly; the Residents' Assembly can undelegate it if necessary.

Ultimately, we would not have been called here if our being here didn't make a difference. Each of our individual actions and thoughts affects (not determines) the collective experience, the outcome of the unfolding experiment of Auroville, and the course of human evolution. That's why we're here – to learn, at every level of our (perceived individual) being, to see ourselves reflected in each other.

We have a long way to go. The success of Auroville, while not assured (as opposed to the inevitability of continued human evolution), is clearly strongly supported. Let's let our community processes reflect the Truth that, at a cellular level, we each are aware of. The Dream is right there, well within reach, just a slight perception shift away. Will we allow the shift? Will we realise the Dream? I know, at least in part, it's up to me. That's the Auroville experiment.

Kathryn

In college, Kathryn majored in Political Science with a focus in International Relations and later worked for, studied and evaluated government at two levels (state and city) in the U.S. She came to live in Auroville about a year ago, and is presently active as a managing consultant for Pour Tous.

"Auroville is global, universal"

ROGER TOLL lived in Auroville between 1972 and 1979. Since leaving, he has been editor in chief of the *Mexico City News*, editor and publisher of *Más* magazine, a Spanish language magazine in the U.S. with a circulation of 700,000, and editor in chief of *Snow Country*, the leading magazine of skiing and winter sports in the U.S.

When I walked into a London bookstore in October, 1971 and saw the rendering of Auroville as a galaxy on the wall, and then was invited to a meditation at the Sri Aurobindo centre that evening where I felt Mother's powerful touch, I dropped everything to go to Auroville. It was a necessity. I arrived in time to see Mother, in her room, on my birthday, February 20, 1972. I never left India until the summer of 1979, when I left for good.

The first two years, while Mother was alive, were extraordinary. I awoke every day literally wondering whether the transformation had taken place that night. We all lived in expectation of that moment, and we followed the progress of her work – later to be revealed integrally through the *Agenda* – in each issue of the *Bulletin*. When there were problems or questions, we referred them to Mother. We even sent

her our dreams, and she would write back or ask us to come and see her, and she would work on us in silence in her room, then give us a vast smile. The yoga was up-close and intimate, and she worked directly on our bodies and our obstructions.

It was also a time of great expectation in Auroville's body. I worked on the Matrimandir at the time of putting in the foundations, then the pillars, then the bottom of the sphere, the lower slab. Concretings started in the afternoon and went all night; it was the closest Auroville ever came to a party. Aurovilians from all over would participate, as would a number of the young Ashramites who eventually became part of Auroville.

Soon after Mother left, harsh realities hit when we uncovered the Sri Aurobindo Society's arrogance and its determination to run Auroville as it saw fit. Cultures clashed, and the open, democratic, often unruly spirit of the West collided with the structured, form-conscious spirit of India. The strife was a blow after the heady days under Mother. Even the Samadhi lost its former intense appeal. When, in 1976, an Aurovillian fell from the scaffolding at Matrimandir, it seemed to be the concretization of all our internal

ills. I worked for months at Jipmer as one of her attendants, and became close to Satprem as her go-between with him. Subsequently, I helped him translate the trilogy on the Mother and spent a good deal of time in Delhi and elsewhere on Auroville matters. I was hopeful that Satprem could help Auroville come together during those years of crisis, but it wasn't possible. The split at its soul was too deep.

Though I loved Auroville more than I can express, I left it in the same spirit as I arrived: a need. I left driven by the necessity to continue my yoga outside. I was apprehensive of leaving, yet I sensed the need to build myself more broadly, to grow my human capacities and abilities to the level of my spiritual life. If either one side or the other were too strong, I thought, the total being would have less of a chance to progress.

Now, 17 years later, I feel that I was right. It was good for me personally and for my yoga. I have found that the opportunity to mesh what was learned through long and sincere sadhana in Auroville with the professionalism and material richness in the West (in the sense of being able to achieve one's creative desires more easily) is greatly satisfying. It is a gift to have the material support of the environment.

Nevertheless, I have sometimes yearned, with a touch of nostalgia, for life in Auroville, for the feel of that precious land. Of course, I have occasionally contemplated returning. As I watch Auroville, I remain fascinated by the experience of my Auroville brothers and sisters and the enormous sacrifice they have made, a sacrifice all the more poignant when one observes the recent *Quit Notices* some of the community's longtime citizens have received and the ensuing insecurity of life for all "foreigners".

Aurovilians have made a great sacrifice, having left their careers – and possibilities for careers – in the West to

give themselves to an experiment whose outcome is now too much in the hands of the Indian Government. Perhaps my greatest concern for Auroville today, in fact, is that many Aurovilians are still considered "foreigners".

Sometimes the gulf between the experience of us Aurovilians living outside of Auroville and those inside it seems enormous. After all, the demands – the pluses and minuses – can be so different. In Auroville, the focus is intensely on the experiment, on the yoga, on the reason for being there; that is the joy and the difficulty. In the West, we sometimes miss that focus, dissipated as we are by the necessities of daily life and work; again, the joy and the difficulty, but in different ways. All of us who leave, I suspect, share a sense of not being at the centre, and have had to make the "centre" within themselves.

Just days before I left India, I was meditating on the roof of the house I built in Certitude, worried about leaving the cradle Auroville represented. I was taken into a deep state, and was soon soaring straight up into the sky, as though in a rocket ship, directly above Auroville, then above India. The horizon rounded, and soon I was far out in space looking back at the earth, the deep blue of lapis lazuli. As I looked at this glorious sight, gold dots started appearing in a geodesic pattern around the globe. They began to sparkle, shimmer, like stars at night. Soon, thin gold lines began connecting the dots to one another. I was awed by the sight and wondered what it signified. The answer then came to me, subtly but lucidly: Auroville is global, universal, and Aurovilians who leave will carry Auroville, indelibly inserted in them, into the far reaches of the earth. While the outer expression of Auroville is evolutionary, ever-growing and ever-changing, its inner reality is constant, and everywhere.

Roger Toll



The immediate reason I left Auroville was that I had to face a weakness in my being which surfaced as an annoying alcohol-addiction which, eventually, was blocking more than 50% of my functioning. It was time to work on that specifically. Deeper reasons began to dawn on me only after I wanted to give up everything, including my life, and when life thereafter started changing for the better.

In the beginning I felt more integrated in the Dutch society than I do now. It was not difficult because I had to interact with people in order to set up a life here, like finding a proper neighbourhood to live in, and a good job for me and for Vasanthi. I had and still have a positive attitude towards people here and experience they very much appreciate that and respond in the same way. Now that all is running smoothly I withdraw more within myself and feel the ever present nearness of India and Auroville stronger and stronger.

I experience two major differences between life here and life in Auroville. People here live kind of directly; there are no great inner ambitions but rather outer ones. In Auroville it is the opposite. Here in Holland you find people, because of their outer focus, rather bal-

The yoga of cycling

SURYA, who is Dutch, lived in Auroville from December 1972 until June 1990 except for two periods, and worked mainly on Matrimandir. He now lives in Amsterdam with his wife Vasanthi, and works on assembling computers and printers for IBM. Recently he began operating as the E-mail link between Auroville and AVI Holland.

anced and predictable in behaviour: all is arranged according to social codes and cultural and legal laws. But if you are perceived to be hindering their careers or acquisition of material possessions, they feel insecure and can become aggressive.

In Auroville it is the opposite. There, because of the inner focus, people more easily share the outer things (although that has also changed over the last five or six years). But because the social and cultural laws are not fixed, and because it is inwardly an open society, trying to discover a True way of living together in a True Harmony, it can trigger unpredictable behaviour by individuals and the collective. This makes people feel insecure towards each other. To learn to live truly together is the real thing, but it is very difficult to make a

true collective as long as the individual's inner basis is (apparently) not strong enough.

Here in Holland my inner life is most of the time in calm waters, but often now I concentrate and aspire for the harmonisation of my mental, vital and physical being and activities. Often in the early morning, when I cycle to my work, spontaneously a mantra comes up and I chant that to the rhythm of my pedalling, just as I used to do in Auroville. The yoga of cycling? Typically Dutch perhaps!

Occasionally I feel the presence of Mother's protection. My life has changed a lot for the better inwardly as well as outwardly.

At times when I see something or come across people or situations that go against what I feel to be correct, I act or



speaking out directly and don't care who is in front of me, whether they be my friend or my "enemy". I no longer want to waste time as I did before, smiling it away, nodding yes, yes, yes, but thinking and feeling the very opposite, and finally ending up with pain inside. And what do I discover here? People get "shocked" at first by my directness, of course, but then some of them feel, thank god, that I mean well and wish

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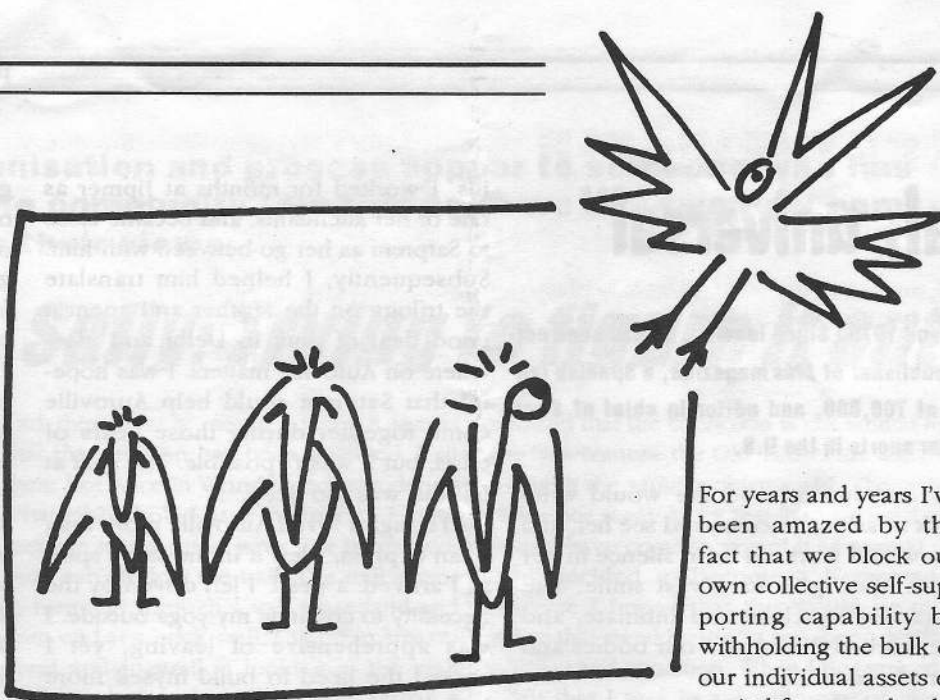
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the best. And, as I also invite them to do the same to me, we force each other to be more conscious of what we say or do.

How do I relate to Auroville now? By (almost) all means I want to say, because it is within me, that unmistakable deep need to become an Aurovilian. In the past few weeks the connection has become more and more practical, because I help the AVI Dutch centre now, and it feels wonderful.

Now that I am in Europe I have surrendered to the fact that I live here, and since accepting this, I feel detached from Europe. But, at the same time, I feel that I can live in Auroville in a detached way now, and not as before when I could not accept certain things going on. Before, in fact, I let too much of my ego get involved. Now I am more conscious of this and want to change.

For the past one and a half years I've had the feeling, which is getting stronger, that in this life I will return to India alive in this body, or in an urn as ashes to be sprinkled in the Bay of Bengal in Auro-



For years and years I've been amazed by the fact that we block our own collective self-supporting capability by withholding the bulk of our individual assets or capital from use by the community as a whole.

ville. And that I will return to Auroville, maybe in this body or else in a new body to be born soon after my death.

If I return soon, I wish to work at Matrimandir or in the Matrimandir gardens. Another activity I would like to undertake is to help activate the right people to set up a real Auroville Bank.

Some prefer to invest their money in banks or shares in Europe and the USA that yield, on each dollar we put in, at least 50% profit, and give us at the most 10%. The other 40% is simply lost for Auroville. An Auroville bank could invest its profits in India and in Auroville in particular, and we would not have to

ask for donations any more.

Over the years, I have not had much contact with ex-Aurovilians in Holland: we all have our own lives here. But the beauty of it is that now when I speak to an (old) Aurovilian here, the contact is more positive and detached and that that feeling stays: this kind of contact is truer, it leaves space for a truer relationship.

For the past few months Vasanthi and I have come into close contact with Aurovilians again because we have made a guest-room for them in our house. About six young Aurovilians have stayed with us so far. And here I am with my 46 years and they with their average age around 21. And my God, what I've been able to learn from them! They are wonderful, and their no-beating-around-the-bush directness has moved me. In Auroville, we do not seem to be much further yet than talking about IT, and they appear getting a little further by living IT more.

That made me aware that the future of Auroville lies safe in the hands of those who are succeeding us.

Surya

"It's no burden to be living in France"

YANNE AND CROQUETTE, along with their two children, arrived in Auroville in 1976. Among other things, they became involved in theatre (they set up the "Theatre Expression d'Auroville") and education. Later, Yanne wrote her first novel and joined the original editorial team of *Auroville Today*. Subsequently, Yanne and Croquette founded *Auroville Aujourd'hui* as a journal for French readers.

Since 1992, they have lived in Paris. Yanne continues to write novels (two of which are in the process of being filmed for television) and Croquette is a communication consultant, running workshops for top businesspeople and politicians.

Croquette: We left Auroville because Baba, our son, wanted to study at a university in France and, above all, to experience the world outside Auroville. I've never wanted Auroville children to feel imprisoned here, so I decided to support him in this. But this meant we would have to earn money in France to pay for his education for, having lived for 20 years in Auroville, Yanne and I had no financial resources.

Yanne: In addition, I had the feeling that for my personal development Auroville was not rich enough. Beside my other work, I was writing novels, and I wanted to be published, to be read by French readers. But to do this, and to discover whether I truly was a writer or just a dreamer, I felt I had to expose my work to professionals in France.

And so we arrived in Paris with two suitcases, little money and lots of debts! Yet we never had any fears about how things would turn out. And it really was miraculous. We spent the first months house-sitting for friends – somehow, on the eighth day, which was the limit we set ourselves for staying in one place at first, another possibility would always come along – and then we earned enough money to rent a small studio.

Interestingly, our friends didn't want us to become Parisians like them, but to stay different, to remain 'Aurovilian'. So that helped us not to become 'integrated'. We live simply – we don't have a car and our small flat is almost empty – so that, at any time, we can just pick up

our suitcases and leave.

Croquette: Why do our friends in France see us as being different? Because, to begin with, we express gratitude for everything that happens to us. Saying 'thank you' is unheard of in Paris because people there have come to expect many things – social security etc. – as a right. But coming from Auroville, where nobody has any 'rights', we perceived everything as a grace. In the same way, we are much more oriented to service than to claiming our 'dues'.

Many people in the West are calling for something else because they are not satisfied with their lives and, once you put them on a different path, they follow it very readily. I've discovered this through seminars I give to top professionals on improving communication. When they sign up, they are expecting to buy a tool, a trick, to make them more successful. I tell them the secret is very simple. "If you want to communicate something, you have first to make contact with the other, you must first build a bridge. But while your message may be mental, the bridge is not: the bridge is the heart. So I am going to teach you to open up your heart... so that you can become more successful!" Once, of course, they contact their heart, their consciousness begins to change so, in that sense, I'm engaged in a subversive activity!

Yanne: When I left Auroville, I was a little bitter that I hadn't had the opportunity to develop myself fully here. But now that I've achieved much more of



this in France, when I return to Auroville I try to see only the nice side of things here – the beauty of the land, the progress, the very special people.

Auroville, no doubt, is a state of consciousness and can be 'lived' anywhere, but I still think it is very important to experience it physically, because here is something which is not found anywhere else. It's a concentration of consciousness. You are forced to face your problems here in order to progress, whereas over there in France I can sometimes escape looking at myself, there are so many distractions.

At the same time, I am not blind to Auroville's failings. If some Westerners who visit Auroville see it as a sect, it's not just because of the pictures of Sri Aurobindo and Mother in Aurovilians' homes. It's also because there are some Aurovilians who behave like a sect. If Aurovilians don't want to be seen as a sect, Auroville must be totally open so that people can come and judge for themselves what is happening here.

Again, as I perceive it, there's a tendency now for some people in Auroville to substitute money for service, to claim rights or to pay for what they want rather than offering their energy freely. If this trend continues, the spirit of Auroville will definitely be diluted.

Croquette: When I see Auroville from the outside now, I often feel like smiling because the problems that seem

so enormous to you often seem much less important to us who are not 'in the soup'. Now we keep hearing about the Matrimandir problem, for example, but for us the important thing is that Matrimandir is there, it will continue to be there, and nothing can change that! Being outside Auroville also makes me think more about the basic, long-term issues that Auroville has to face. When you live in Auroville you can get too caught up with coping with the immediate difficulties and not spend enough time reflecting on the deeper issues which are crucial to the evolution of this society.

Yanne: Of course, living in Paris I miss certain things: the faces of the Aurovilians, sunsets through the palmyra trees. But it's no burden for us to be living in France because we've found a way to be there which is a continuation of the way we were in Auroville. It's very, very interesting.

Croquette: Some people seem to think that something is 'lost' by someone who leaves Auroville. But why? If I have managed to make progress in my yoga in Auroville, I am convinced that I will never have problems outside. On the contrary, if, as we did, you leave Auroville 'full' of Auroville, you can enjoy and appreciate things 'out there' much more fully.

From an interview by Alan

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between the different groups where nobody takes up certain responsibilities. When you have a power vacuum like this, it enables certain negative activities to flourish in the community which often results in an intervention from outside authorities: this is a cycle which I have often observed. And the situation is made more difficult because when action is required, we are hampered by the fact that we're not convinced that direct action is the way of Auroville, so no group has the 'teeth' to enforce anything.

Practically speaking, I think the present organisation can be simplified by putting together the two executive arms – the Working Committee and the Executive Committee – to form one management group, and combining the Concept and Communications Committee and the Charter Council to make up another group that focuses upon conceptual aspects. There is also a need for a central Secretariat and information centre that would accommodate all the major working groups and facilitate inter-communication.

Another problem facing the new organisation is that there are too few people who have the capacity – intellectually, energetically and materially – to be involved in governance work for the community on a regular basis. I think it's time to recognise the people who can do this and to give them the chance and material support to work as executors of policy decisions taken by the whole community. All organisations are essentially hierarchical: for me this is axiomatic. So I think it's time to trust those who can do the work while ensuring that certain checks and balances exist against the abuse of power, as collective somnolence is a fertile ground for power politics.

"What is needed to administer Auroville is a consciousness free from all conventions and conscious of the Supramental Truth. I am still waiting for someone like that. Each one must do his best to achieve that."

The Mother, 15.7.1970

Further, I feel that if there is general agreement on certain norms of conduct within the community, and the community feels that it is important to protect itself against certain behaviour, then a necessity arises to enforce these norms in some way. This is not to frame rules but to accept basic principles and limits so that liberty does not become license.

Steve: Something which has run through many of our discussions in the new organisation, and which was echoed in feedback from the LAM's, is that many difficulties would be easier to solve if there were certain things that all of us, as a community, could agree upon. The reason we talk about the guidelines at present is to help us remember the fundamental basis of Auroville, and to remind us that we came here for different reasons than the ones that normally motivate people to move from one place to another.

However, I disagree with Kalyan about the need for rules or hierarchy. The problem with rules is that they make people lazy: either you just go with them or you find a way round them. When Mother said "No rules" I think she meant that we had to find another way based upon a collective understanding, a collective mind, something which, I think, is even today almost realizable. Again, if

power is too easily given to one group, then the temptation for that group is to exercise it without finding out what is really going on or looking within themselves. One of the excitements for me during the past two or three years is seeing more and more people doing things not out of fear but out of love and connectedness to others. I'm afraid that a hierarchical structure will just put us back to sleep and reverse this process.

Kalyan: When I talk about the need for power or hierarchy, it is not to repeat what has been done before. But if we can conceive of certain aspects of Auroville life where we cannot allow too much experimentation – like building skyscrapers, or destroying the Greenbelt, for example – and there is a basic agreement in the community upon this, then this is the basis of the power to say 'No'. The other way, of course, is an organic or unwilled process, trusting that eventually Auroville will naturally take the right path. Maybe the way forward could include both planning and organic growth.

Steve: One of our big problems at present is getting information from the community. Just as we need a central secretariat where all the major groups would have a daily presence and be

linked together by computers, so we need people to go out into the community to find out what is going on and what people think about things. Then, for example, if there was a problem between individuals or groups, they could all be interviewed, the information fed to LAM's who would then give their opinion, and this could then be fed back to the protagonists. This is a horizontal rather than hierarchical system which works through the operation of community pressure and information rather than laws. Because, on a human level, I think a lot of our problems would disappear if individuals understood better the significance of their actions and what the general viewpoint was. I also think that our major problems have been with us a long time, and that the whole community, rather than a small group, should be involved in resolving them. For, ultimately, no small group can walk this spiritual path for us.

Kalyan: For the first time since I've been involved in this new organisation I feel all kinds of miracles are happening. More people are aware of and are discussing community issues than ever before, there is more clarity and more occasions on which consensus has been possible. Something in the community has definitely moved.

At the same time, I still feel that, as a community, we tend to act only when forced to do so by external forces rather than remaining continuously aware of our problems and taking responsibility for solving them ourselves. In this sense, our central malady is a lack of constant awareness, a tendency to fall asleep when we are not confronted by an external threat. The capacity to continuously question, correct and renew ourselves is the key to the growth of this community. □

One of the most difficult things to describe is the so-called "Auroville process", the way in which many major decisions are made, or unmade, in this community. It can't be neatly captured in a diagram or flow chart. In fact, the term "process" seems altogether too smooth, too ordered, for something which frequently appears crude and chaotic, employing, as it does, the clash and counterpoint of strong egos and seemingly random inputs of information. And yet the very term "Auroville process" reflects a perception that there is some pattern, some underlying rationale in our crude engagements with each other. What could that be?

Recently, I was reading once again about an important concept developed by Ilya Prigogine, the Nobel Laureate in Chemistry. Prigogine recognised that living systems are "open" systems in that they are always engaged in taking in or releasing energy to their immediate environment. He also discovered that living systems are always in a state that is far from equilibrium.

This sounds odd. How can anything as wonderfully ordered as a living system be out of balance? Prigogine explained that an organism is characterised by continual flow and change in its metabolism as it adapts to internal and external changes: that without the in-built dise-

quilibrium which allows it to respond so quickly, it could not, in fact, survive.

Interestingly, this echoes Mother's definition of death as the consequence of an organism no longer being able to follow the ever-changing, ever-unfolding Becoming.

The in-built disequilibrium enables an organism to make moment-by-moment micro adjustments to changing circumstances.

But what about macro-changes? What about evolution? Prigogine's most interesting insight is that "dissipative structures", as he termed living systems, have the capacity to evolve to another level of organisation through a process of internal stress. Fritjof Capra explains:

"When the flow of energy and matter through (dissipative structures) increases, they may go through points of instability and transform themselves into new structures of increased complexity. Prigogine's detailed analysis of this striking phenomenon showed that, while dissipative structures receive their energy from outside, the instabilities and jumps to new

forms of organisation are the result of fluctuations amplified by positive feedback loops. Thus, amplifying "runaway" feedback... appears as a source of new order and complexity in the theory of dissipative structures."

To put it simply, a self-reinforcing intensification of an apparently destructive element in a system – what we commonly call a "vicious circle"

– may, at the point of greatest intensity, catapult an organism or organisation to a whole new level of order.

How does this relate to Auroville? Clearly Auroville, in many ways, conforms to Prigogine's definition of a dissipative structure. It is an "open" system in that it releases and draws energy from its surroundings, there is a great deal of disequilibrium, and there are strong anti-organisational, or anti-status quo, elements which can become rapidly amplified in a community where the ordinary norms of behaviour are frequently set aside. Could it be, in other words, that the behaviour which some of us find most difficult to

stomach in certain fellow Aurovilians – the extremes of viewpoint, the refusal to compromise on issues which seem marginal, the stubborn resistance to authority, a fundamentalism which causes them to divide the community into the "elect" and the "damned" etc. – is the means by which the community process is raised to such a pitch of intensity that a breakthrough becomes possible? And isn't this, in fact, what we have experienced time and again in our process – that at the point of greatest tension, the moment of impossibility, something else comes through?

There are plenty of dangers in advancing such an argument, not the least of them being that it appears to provide a justification for plain bad or anti-social behaviour. But if, without encouraging certain outbursts, we could look deeper and see them as symptoms, eruptions, of an organism aspiring for change, we might start using the intensity and disequilibrium generated in a conscious, creative way to dislodge us from our well-worn grooves.

It won't be easy, it won't be comfortable to play consciously with these energies, to dance on the edge of disorder and chaos, for the urge to reassert the status quo is always strong. But until we stumble collectively upon the sunlit path, maybe it's one of the most powerful ways of levering us forward.

Alan

Dancing with Disorder

Thoughts on the Auroville Process

THE AUROVILLE DIASPORA?

What happens when someone leaves the community after spending a long time here? Why do they leave, where do they go, and how difficult – or necessary – do they find it to adjust to a society and to social norms very different from those they experienced here? What becomes of their relationship to Auroville? In fact do they really 'leave'? For underlying all these questions are the larger ones: what IS Auroville? a place? an aspiration? a state of consciousness?

Here, as an introduction to the topic, are some responses from people who have spent several years in the community but are now living elsewhere.

Once an Aurovilian, always an Aurovilian

PATRICIA arrived in Auroville in June, 1972. She worked in the Matrimandir community kitchen, then in the gardens and on the structure. In the late 1980's she helped in translating Mother's Agenda and then, a few years later, she and her partner Alain began Auroville Video which became the main focus of their work until 1993. Her last year here was spent in teaching and coordinating activities at Last School.

The ostensible reason I left Auroville was because I felt a tremendous intellectual thirst. When I left the States in 1971 I had been studying towards a Ph.D (literature, linguistics). In my last years in Auroville I had become more and more involved in education. In particular, having the blessed opportunity to work closely with Kireet Joshi (former Director of Education of the Ashram international school and later on employed in the Education Ministry of the Government of India – eds.) opened major windows – he dissolved my chronic Aurovilian aversion to the "mind." Anyhow, I got a chance to enroll in St. John's College Graduate Institute in the U.S. where the program is exclusively an intense reading of the so-called "great books" of the Western canon. I needed to nourish my long-neglected Western roots... and so I was off on the path of the "Araldite" ("erudite" – eds.!) as Francois Grenier would say.

On another level, I can say that I simply knew that it was time to go. It was as if that Unseen Finger was beckoning me, as inexorably as it had when I left the States and made my way to India. The Adventure now called me in an unexpected direction; I had no choice but to follow that call, for it has never failed me.

Two years at St. John's merely whetted my appetite. And I wanted to test the waters of hard-core academia and my ability to stay afloat in it. I came to Charlottesville, a place I had frequently visited, each time remarking that if I ever left Auroville, this is where I'd like to live; there are a number of old Aurovilians here, and lots of good vibes and the University of Virginia's Religious Studies Department, History of Religions. I'm about to start my second year here, one of the few graduate students focusing primarily on Hinduism. I'm learning lots of wonderful things, working with



truly brilliant and profound people, reading fabulous stuff, writing hundreds of pages of papers – it is demanding in the extreme. And so far I love it. This particular Ph.D program is among the most rigorous – people around me have been in it seven or eight years, or even longer! I have no intention of taking that long, and often I am not even sure I will go through to the end. Who knows? I'm following the thread.

But the US, for all its insanity, is indeed the "land of opportunity." Alain and I often laugh to find ourselves actually managing to make it financially (albeit frugally), with a house and two cars and food in the fridge. I have received really good scholarships and grants to study, and part-time work on the side.

There are so many differences between life here and in Auroville that it would be easier to list the similarities. One is still oneself. The Divine is everywhere. There is no place where one cannot strive (and usually fail) to be a true Aurovilian. Money tries its best to be the Sovereign Lord and the good old sense of personal possession slyly creeps up upon you, just like in Auroville. But happily, most human hearts are good and are ardently striving towards some ideal. An occasional human being is even inspiring.

What do I miss most? The collective Fire. Individual Aurovilians. India. Do I still relate to Auroville? Oh, yes! It is in my dreams, in my active thoughts, in my heart all the time. The Internet connection is a wonderful tool. That old rag, the Auroville News that I at one time so heartily despised (while reading it cover-to-cover!), is such a wickedly transparent window on the community when you know how to read it. I love getting it hot off the press and am very grateful to all who make that possible (as well as to dear Mauna).

More importantly, the really big issues, like Matrimandir and now the

Learning better to surrender

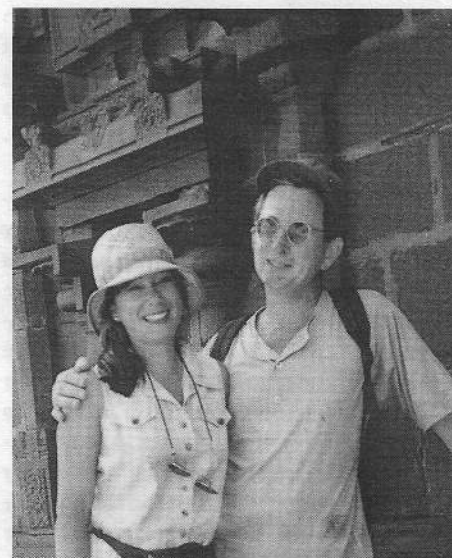
ED and his partner Mindy left Auroville 'temporarily' earlier this year. Ed has been living in Auroville since 1977, and his work has focussed mainly upon land restoration, particularly in the area around Forecomers which he managed for many years.

Mindy and I left Auroville for a number of reasons, primarily to keep contact with our families and aging mothers and to make some money. Our personal financial resources being finished, there was no choice, for Auroville at present does not provide for anything but the basic minimum in terms of life styles. When it comes to even minor developments or maintenance like painting or roofing a house one needs some personal money or a lot of patience to endure the Auroville bureaucracy. Certain freedoms, like an occasional meal in Pondy, a small trip or vacation are virtually impossible on an Auroville maintenance. Also, as a place the size of Forecomers requires many kinds of inputs, most of which are not subsidised by Auroville, it became very difficult to properly maintain the status quo there, let alone initiate any new developments. And if one wants to visit family or travel for any reason, how does one manage a major expense like airfare? True, Auroville will take care of a real emergency. But are we limited to only emergencies? Without going into business full-time in Auroville, what is one to do?

At present, then, we are living in the States. Mindy is a registered nurse working through an agency doing mostly home care, a work she did this work before moving to Auroville. I am doing contracting work, roofing houses, painting, carpentry, masonry etc. These are skills I picked up largely in Auroville because surviving in Auroville often means doing it yourself, or at least closely supervising jobs, especially construction work.

Major differences between here and Auroville? In my last years in Auroville I spent much time in overseeing many activities. Here I am directly occupied in doing a number of those same activities. It has been very beneficial for my body! I've regained my old callouses, and I'm a little less fluffy around the waist!

Again, in Auroville we generally take for granted the freedom and the necessity to undertake many things without certification, a license or college degree. For much needs to be done with too few people to do it. Here in the US it is also possible to "follow your dream" but one must be very exact about the numer-



ous taxes and laws that are in place to regulate almost all activities. In Auroville it seemed easier to do things in the spirit of offering to HER. Here it is more like doing things for oneself or small community rather than the larger whole.

Has my perception of Auroville changed? After giving so much of ourselves and personal resources to Auroville for many years it is a bit disappointing that Auroville cannot provide better for oldtimers. Auroville must come more seriously to grips with its finances and relations with its middle-aged and elderly population. It makes one wonder how it will be twenty years from now for those of us who elect to stay in Auroville. Will there be adequate accommodation and amenities for senior citizens while remaining a place for a youth that never ages?

On the other hand, living and working in the States adds scope to one's vision. Being in a well-worn groove for too long anywhere is not really healthy. For example, I have learned a lot about construction techniques and new materials while here. And I am happy to realise that I am still quite capable of surviving in the Western world, although it is disappointing that it is taking so long to save money.

I've learned that there is much to learn about the real value of money, its power and use. I am also learning better to surrender to the situation when SHE asks me to. Dharma, karma?? Anyway, it's all HER lila.

Ed

Quit Notice crisis, can be lived day-to-day. The temporal immediacy helps us actively participate in our community (because Auroville will always be my community and my home) – to adhere inwardly, to aspire and pray and try to do whatever can help...

Have my perceptions of Auroville changed? Hmm... Yes and no. I believe I am able to approach issues and individuals with greater detachment and clarity – I have painfully realized how I often let myself fall into a narrow way of seeing and reacting, and sometimes didn't have the courage to uncover my deepest sensibilities, but just aped what

was expected of me. I think most Aurovilians suffer from the "Box Syndrome." I feel freer now, and perhaps a fraction closer to uncovering my own unique "human-ness" as a step towards changing it.

One general comment: Once an Aurovilian, always an Aurovilian. Although I am constantly thrown into situations that would be impossible to experience in Auroville today, the inner reference is the same: that deep place that is the Aurovilian Self.

Consequently, my true brothers and sisters are always Aurovilians.

Patricia

ACROSS THE ROOF OF THE WORLD

A TREK IN LADAKH

Six Aurovilians in mid-July organised an expedition through Ladakh, the fabled land of Shangrila which only opened to public access in 1974. Here, from one of the trekkers, is an impression of this Indian border area in the Himalayas.

You hear only the rain on the tent and the roar of the torrent streaming under the snow block forming the ice bridge. At 4:30 a.m. it is still too dark to see anything, but I hear a grumble about a headache. Here we are camped on the ascent to the Shingo-La (5,200m / 17,000 ft.), a pass that will take us between the Himalayan peaks into the Zaskar Valley. The night before it was still uncertain whether our 5:00 a.m. departure could happen because of the rain and snow conditions on the pass. "Get up, it's OK," shouts Lakhpa, our Tibetan guide. He's already made tea and a packed lunch. It's not so easy to roll up the tent with freezing fingers but everyone hurries to be on the path as soon as possible. Five hours later we were having lunch in the bright sun and snow at the top of the pass with the prayer flags fluttering in the wind. As they say, "It was worth it!"

That was our first pass in the land of passes. A "la" is a pass and Ladakh is definitely "la land". To walk the length of Ladakh in 23 days along the ancient route that people have travelled for thousands of years was our plan. We succeeded quite beyond expectations.

We had seven ponies to carry all the food, the 70 litres of kerosene and the stoves to cook it, the tents and rucksacks. Food supply along the way is not reliable, but Instant Maggi noodles, Coke and Pepsi can be found in the most remote villages at premium prices. However, in some ancient period Ladakhis developed the ideal trekking food that sustains the whole culture of the region. It is called "tsampa" and it is roasted barley powder which is light

and portable, stores well, nourishes, and mixes well with whatever else you have. The other staples are yak products, including milk, cheese and yoghurt. Yak curd along the trail tastes better than ice cream. Even the much-maligned (by guide books) yak butter tea can be very tasty. As Jean put it, "If you're expecting sweet tea, forget it. Think 'soup' and you'll be very satisfied."

What you don't experience from hearing about Ladakh, or even looking at the spectacular photos that are so elegantly reproduced in travel literature and in coffee table books, is the sacred space that this region of the Himalaya actually is. Where the roads have yet to penetrate, the heavy tourist, military and commercial forces are not felt, and therefore another very special world exists as it has

existed for a very long time. (But it may not last much longer as the bulldozers and "civilization" are moving in very fast.) Ladakh, even though it is a part of the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir, has the feeling of Tibet.

The paths to the remote villages which lie in the narrow valleys between the passes are everywhere lined with "prayer walls" and shrines ("chortens"). The monasteries ("gompas") are frequent and either occupy a prominent place in the village or sit at a special remote site high on a peak. These Buddhist monasteries are the basis of the culture in Ladakh and their spirit pervades these mountains. Walking for long hours through these regions with their spectacular vistas on all sides and the splendours of the clear air and play of light

and clouds on the mountains cannot really be at all adequately communicated. And, as if the natural beauty was not enough, the continual reminders of prayers, mantras, prayer flags and monasteries in which a nearly continual worship is in process have a profound effect that is quite unexpected. Even on the highest peaks this sense of the sacred is very strong. You are not at all in the wilderness. You seem to be closer to yourself and, of course, to the Ineffable. It becomes a little more apparent why the Himalayas are the home of cultures deeply rooted in spiritual traditions.

Four hours off the main trail lies the monastery of Phoctal. It is perched high in the cliffs in such a way that German engineers and architects say it can't possibly stay up there. But it has, for the past two thousand years. On the peak above the monastery a lone tree is growing quite beyond the timber line. Inside the monastery at the top of the mountain is a water source that never fails. These are all mysteries that are taken for granted in this unique land.

Bill



Above: Ladakh



Right: Yaks in the Zaskar Valley.

Left: Approach to the Shingo-la

(Photos: Bill)



On the road again

"Crossroads", the dance sequence created and danced by Aurovilians, has been dusted down and performed at two dance festivals in October, one in Bombay and one in Jaipur.

Beware!

There have been complaints that light aircraft from the Orient Flying School in Pondicherry have been flying low over Auroville. The Chief Flying Instructor requests those who are bothered by low flying planes to note the registration number on the planes and report them to him. Apparently, if the registration number can't be read, the planes are not flying too low...

CIRHU Papers

CIRHU Papers 3, *A Quest for Unity* has just been published by the Centre of International Research Into Human Unity (CIRHU) team. It includes an article by Bhavana on Village Action, a report on the first world-meeting of the Club of

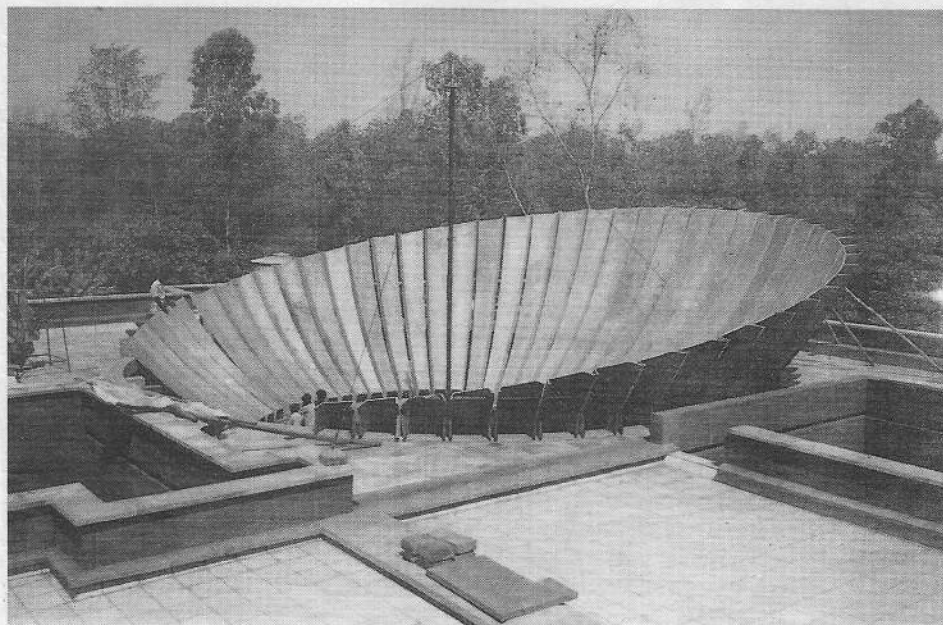
Budapest by Bhaga, articles on genetic mutation and cycles of human evolution, (children's) poems and photographs. Copies are available from CIRHU, Bharat Nivas, Auroville 605101.

Love it or Loathe it

Calls from some Aurovilians to 'clean-up' the Auroville News because of the poor image of the community it may propagate outside Auroville have evoked strong responses from Aurovilians abroad. As Jack Alexander put it, "With a standards committee instead of an artist (as editor), I feel we will kill the product of years of evolution and not end up with a forum of expression but something closer to propaganda."

Stop Press

The Government of India has refused to withdraw the leave-India notice issued to Gilles Pfeiffer who has lived in Auroville for nearly 20 years. He will have left the country on November 5th.



Solar bowl under construction on top of the collective kitchen

PHOTO: GILLES G.

Solar kitchen inauguration

The project team for the Solar Kitchen plan to inaugurate it on March 14th, 1997, which will be the 25th anniversary of the Pour Tous food distribution system. As they put it in an open letter to the Economy Group, 'Our dearest wish now is that on this auspicious day we would simultaneously inaugurate officially the "Cuisine Solaire Pour Tous" and we would also boost ... our pour tous (for all) economy so that it enables us to live in a way which is closer to the ideals put forward by Mother.'

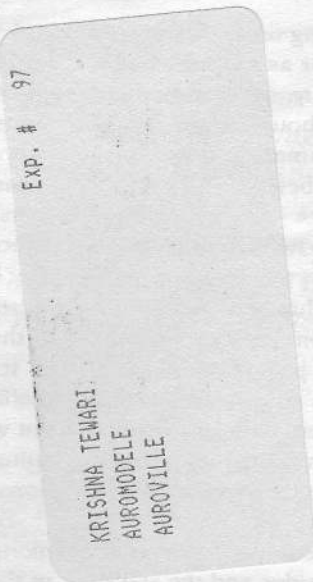
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IN THIS ISSUE:
REFLECTIONS ON COMMUNITY ORGANISATION;
THE AUROVILLE DIASPORA; TREKKING IN LADAKH, ETC.



November 1996
Number Ninety-Four

Weaving is my life

A sandy road leads to the edge of Auroville's industrial zone. A gate bearing the sign, "Imagination, Auroville's handloom: eco friendly fabrics, carpets & tapestries" opens up to a small field surrounded by several keel-roofed buildings. From all sides you can hear the sound of shuttles shooting back and forth on the looms. From one building floats the sound of Mozart's Requiem. I peek inside and find Elie sitting on the ground, surrounded by designs and a huge box of coloured pencils. Nicola, her apprentice, is squatting under the loom, painting the warp of Elie's newest project, an enormous four-panelled wall hanging for a house in Madras.

Elie is a tall French woman of Russian aristocratic ancestry. Asked why she became a weaver, she answered: "I always liked weaving. It first was my hobby, but it became my profession. When I was married to an artist in Switzerland I was the one who had to work to maintain our life. Then I divorced him and moved to a community in Burgundy, France."

Here she got acquainted with the works of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother which she found in the community library. One of the members who had just come back from a stay in Auroville in the early seventies told her about it and thought it would be something for her. She wrote to The Mother asking whether she could come. And the answer was 'yes'. "I did not know whether the 'yes' was for me to stay at Auroville, so I first spent one year at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry. Then I got bored and moved to Auroville in 1972".

When she arrived in Auroville she first worked in a small embroidery workshop in Udavi, an Ashram-run school-cum-handicraft unit in a village near Auroville. "I had several little boys helping me! We embroidered skirts from the designs I made, and Nata was exporting them." Soon she began working at the Matrimandir construction site, and did so for a long time, until she took up weaving again.

She left Auroville in 1985 to go back to France. "There I joined a group of crafts people called 'The encouragement of the work of art'. I also worked for an American weaver living in Paris, Sheila Eeks." Eventually, feeling lonely, she stopped weaving and started working in a library. She returned to Auroville in 1993. "I'm very happy to be back," Elie smiles.

Wall hangings are Elie's specialty, though in the past she sometimes wove carpets. "But I never wove cloth. It does not interest me. Weaving is a very slow and meditative process. What I like about weaving is that I first make a drawing and then see it manifested in matter."

When she makes a wall hanging she



Elie: "Weaving first was my hobby, but it became my profession."

some strokes of weft. She draws her inspiration from Aztec art and from Native American Indians. "I also like geometrical designs."

At the moment Elie has an apprentice, the 17-year old Nicola from Switzerland. "I put a message in the Auroville News that I was looking for an apprentice. And then he turned up with his mother." Nicola never thought that he would be interested, but he likes it. They get along very well. Nicola says: "Only one time she shouted at me." They both laugh.

She teaches him the basic weaving techniques. Nicola: "At the moment I'm helping Elie with her new wall hanging, but personally I am more interested in weaving cloth." "He should not copy me," she remarks. When asked how she can teach him weaving cloth when she doesn't like to do that, she explains that he will learn how to use the flying shuttle and the pedal from one of Dara's weavers across the compound. He would like to buy his own loom.

For Elie there is a difference between working here and in France. "I feel less lonely now. First of all, I don't work in my house as I did in Paris. I have an atelier in an area where I work with a group of weavers. Although they don't do the same thing as I do, we are together."

When her present project is finished she hopes to get an order for a wall hanging for a house in Hyderabad. The rest of the time she 'just' weaves. "In August I had a well-received exhibition in Pitanga. I did not sell anything there, but I just sold a piece in the art gallery of Restaurant 'Satsanga' in Pondicherry, where I will exhibit this winter.

Asked whether she can live from this work, she replies: "Not yet. But I hope when I get more orders for hangings for houses in India, I will be able to."

Interview by Tineke

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