

AUROVILLE TODAY

November 1992 Number Forty-Six

LEARNING TO MEET



Early Pour Tous Meeting at Tapaloka

Meetings in Auroville are a fact of life something like the weather—although a little more predictable. But unlike the weather, which we can't do much about, meetings could be cooler and better. "There will be a general meeting tomorrow to try and see whether it is possible for all of us to agree on a course of action." Sound familiar? This is Roger Anger speaking to Mother in 1969. He goes on to ask seven questions on organization and coordination to get "some clear written answers" which would "be the truth" and "dispel the confusion". Here are his questions, and the answers Mother gave him (6.2.1969):

Q: Does the construction of Auroville require a working-method, organisation and co-ordination?

A: Discipline is necessary for life. To live, the body itself is subject in all its functions to a rigorous discipline. Any relaxation of this discipline causes illness.

Q: What should be the nature of this organisation, in the present and in the future?

A: Organisation is a discipline of action, but for Auroville we aspire to go beyond arbitrary and artificial organisations.

We want an organisation which is the expression of a higher consciousness working to manifest the future.

Q: Until this group consciousness appears, and until we can work collectively in the true and right way, what should we do?

A: A hierarchical organisation grouped around the most enlightened centre and obeying a collective discipline.

Q: Must we use organisational methods which have proved effective but which are based on human logic and the use of machines?

A: This is a makeshift which we should tolerate only very temporarily.

Q: Must one allow individual initiative to manifest freely and inspiration and intuition to be the moving force behind personal action, and should one reject all ideas not felt as good by the interested party?

In order to be workable, this requires all workers of Auroville to be yogis conscious of the Divine Truth.

Q: Has the time come to wish for, to set up, to try for a general organisation, or should one wait for the right attitude and men?

A: An organisation is needed for the work to be done—but the organisation itself must be flexible and progressive.

Q: If to wait is the solution, nevertheless it is necessary to define organisational principles and to avoid uncontrollable disaster?

A: All those who wish to live and work at Auroville must have an integral goodwill; a constant aspiration to know the Truth and to submit to it; enough plasticity to confront the exigencies of work and an

endless goodwill to progress so as to move forward towards the ultimate Truth.

And, finally, a word of advice: be more concerned with your own faults than with those of others. If each one worked seriously at his own self-perfection, the perfection of the whole would follow automatically.

(from: *The Mother on Auroville*)

Did these answers "dispel the confusion"? Some years later an Auroville publication noted: "The main problem with our meetings can be traced to the fact that we don't have television in Auroville. It's like a weekly soap-opera, people come, not to participate but to be entertained." However, now that video has spread (even to the Greenbelt) it seems this observation no longer holds true.

Eleven years and countless meetings later, the 'Auroville Notes' of 1980 describe the palpable tension of the Thursday afternoon Pour Tous Meetings in Tapaloka (Certitude): "Community Meeting—Why? . . . We will keep on until all of us (*nous tous*) have at least the beginnings of a basic accord, a certitude and solidity within. . . Words can lead us to the edge. Beyond words lies—God knows what? Do we choose to take the leap beyond—or don't we? Auroville wants to know. Now."

About sixteen years and countless meetings later, the Auroville International UK

In Auroville, meetings of one kind or another are happening continuously, not only in formal meeting places, but also at the Pour Tous stall, on the Sports Ground, in people's houses, on the road. Community meetings, however, seem to be a breed apart, offering challenges and opportunities on a different scale from other discussions. Community meetings perform various functions—communication, ratifying proposals, the expression of dissent, psychological support and bonding—and, at their best, release a flow of community energy and inspiration. Yet, in the context of Auroville's ideals, and after twenty three years of practice, have we discovered anything really new in terms of how we meet and come to decisions? Appeals to Mother, to truth, to decency and common sense remain, ultimately, only appeals. At the same time, Auroville's growth demands that our community meetings take account of new realities, like those involved in the transition from extended village to emerging township.

In this issue of *Auroville Today* we take a look at our community meetings; at their somewhat traumatic history, their present functioning, and at possible ways forward. We also focus upon another aspect of Auroville's karma yoga—development work in the nearby villages. Although this has involved fewer Aurovilians, it has a similarly long history in terms of experimentation, success and failure, and now an experienced team feels able to initiate a new approach. One of the key insights of this approach is the need to think and act bioregionally. And this has been brought home forcibly to all of us recently by the problem of the untreated Pondicherry rubbish which has been appearing on our doorstep—making this year the 'year of the flies'. Finally, we emerge from the garbage to introduce a new Auroville experiment in polyphony and harmony—the Auroville choir—who are plunged deep in rehearsal for their eagerly-awaited concert.

newsletter reprinted from the Auroville News: "The Pour Tous Meetings, after years of service, had finally fizzled out. There was clearly no point in meeting 'in that way' anymore, and if the meetingless months were in some way a vacuum, they were also a welcome relief." It seems people were content to 'rest', and 'get on with their own little life', and Auroville seemed to run itself. Except: "We could function, develop, live without meetings, but it began to seem as if we might as well be living *anywhere*. If we wanted to live in *Auroville*, another step in the 'collective' process would have to be made."

Twenty-one years and countless meetings later, ". . . It need not be argued that the decision-making process in Auroville has been, besides the weather, the most frustrating aspect of our life here as a community. From the early origins of the Co-op (continued on next page)

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to the present, we have created various methods of administration. We have chosen our representatives to handle the question of decision-making; everything was tried, from pulling the names out of a hat to voting. We propped them up and we pulled them down, usually without a thank you, as we were eager to get on with a new, better, improved model", wrote François Grenier (Auroville Today, April 1990, p.6).

Twenty-three years and countless meetings later, Aurovilians attack each other over the organization of the Residents' Assembly of the Auroville Foundation. Isn't there someone to blame for this? "There are people who haven't missed a meeting in years. Of course they never say a thing, except after the meeting when you hear them remark: 'Once again, they didn't get it together.'" (Overheard in the Coffee Shop)

What are the problems and what is the cure?

A visiting meeting observer told us we in Auroville do not distinguish enough between the form and the content of a meeting. All the emphasis is on the content: the topic under discussion rather than 'how' is it discussed. We could ask ourselves the question: what 'form' could a meeting take of persons who have consciously gathered from around the world to implement the Charter of Auroville? This would be a complete study in itself. For example, in such a context as Auroville, would difference or dissent from any prevalent view be a value to be respected? Does dissent contribute to making consensus a meaningful process? Will respect for dissent help clarify a goal and allow the wide-ness of participation required for implementation of changes? Is the keeping of agreements on ground rules a necessary trust-component essential for the process? The perspective needs to cover everything from the architecture of the meeting room to

the tea break. For example, there seems to be a worldwide consensus among meeting specialists that a break of some sort is mandatory after each hour of meeting. This break can be very short but it is extremely important to break accumulating energies that will turn 'negative' as people can't help becoming restless in their fixed physical position. Also we have to keep dealing with issues on which we may have mixed mental positions and feelings. There are people in Auroville who still seem not to have recovered from the famous Matrimandir Meeting that lasted seven hours. Giving ourselves a break is, of course, only one of the many points in 'un-ending education'.

Twenty-five years and countless meetings later, we have met the enemy—ourselves, unconscious of what we are doing in meetings. "Once again, they didn't get it together", has to change to "We're the ones who have to work it out..."

Bill

Meetings and Dinner Parties

"It is as if you invite people to a dinner party, and you don't prepare any food. Such big meetings need a lot of preparation to fulfil their purpose and not waste people's time." (Comment of a 'visiting meeting professional', after attending one of our general meetings.)

Here are a few tips:

- shop in advance for:
 - well-seasoned facilitator
 - pungent notetaker
 - balanced agenda
 - meeting room du jour
- serve hot or chilled a 'break' (international standard: one break per hour)
- summarize and evaluate for just deserts.

Bon appetit!

FROM THE BEGINNING...

A selective listing of community meetings and executive groups

February 7, 1969: General meeting in Auroville about organisation and coordination.

March - August, 1970: Twenty-two weekly meetings with Mother (usually called the Aspiration Talks). Aurovilians discussed with Mother about Auroville and together with her formulated two documents: "Auroville and the Religions", and "To Be A True Aurovillian" (cf. *The Mother on Auroville*).

1970 - February 17, 1971: Establishment of "Comité Administratif d' Auroville", based in Pondicherry. After it collapsed, one member asked Mother if it should begin again. She answered, "More Committees, more useless talk." (cf. *The Mother on Auroville*)

1975: Comité Administratif d' Auroville (CAA) reconstituted in Pondicherry. "Auroville Committee" set up in Auroville. Both ceased to function after six months.

November 9, 1975: General Meeting under the Banyan Tree about the newly formed "Auroville Society" (a legal body registered by Aurovilians)

December 1975: Intense, community-wide meetings to organize Auroville in response to the cutting off of Auroville's funds by the Sri Aurobindo Society. Many meetings were held in the Pour Tous Office and so the "Pour Tous Meetings" began on a regular basis in various locations.

1980 - 1983: Various "Auroville Cooperatives". Seven to twelve people met regularly to coordinate activities, deal with government authorities and mediate disputes. It effectively became an executive arm of the Pour Tous Meeting. The last Co-op was a loose association of representatives from all the work groups.

1984 - 1987: Various "Executive Councils", a twelve-member body, selected by various processes including voting.

October, 1986: Regular Pour Tous meetings stop. Replaced by occasional General Meetings.

October, 1987: Seven-hour meeting to decide upon the Matrimandir skin design.

October, 1987: Beginning of the present "Auroville Council"—seven to twelve people whose role shifted gradually away from external affairs to internal community activities.

April 1988 - March 1989: Establishment of "Core Group". A group of about twenty-five, to function as a link between the Auroville Council and the Auroville Assembly (the community).

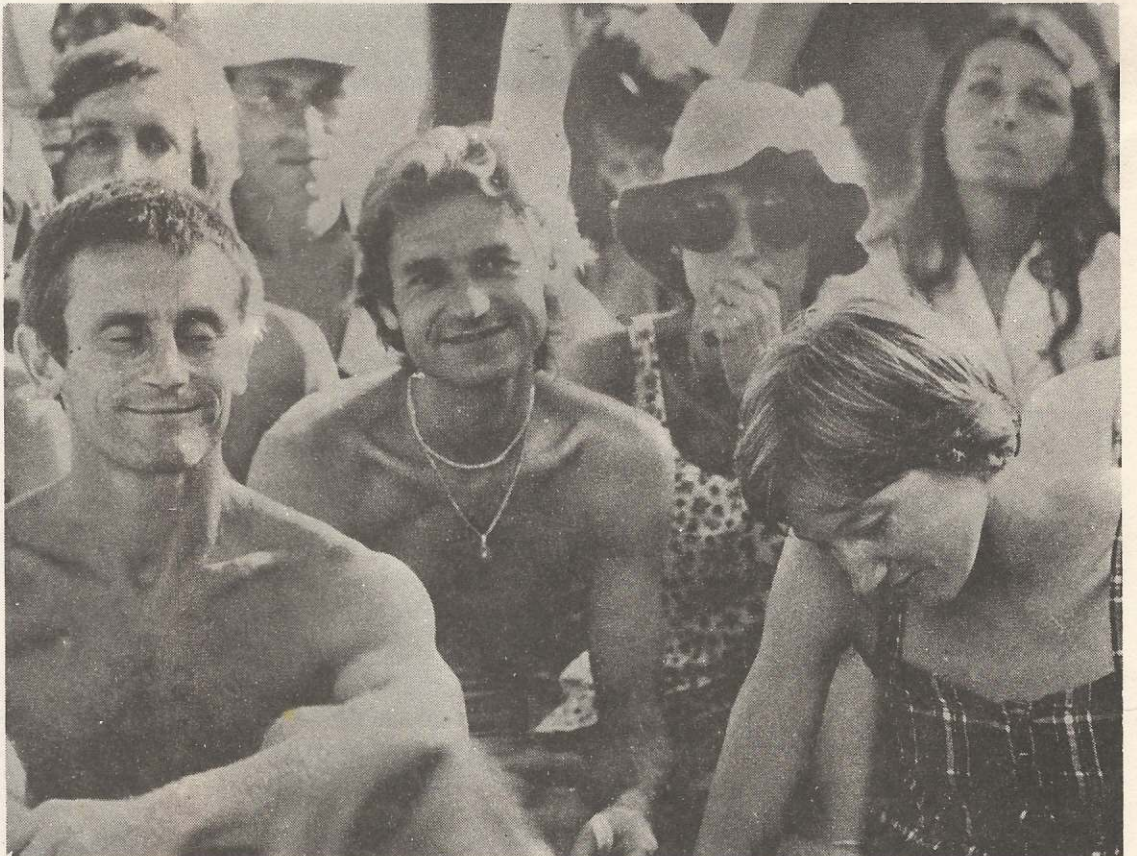
September 1988: Auroville Foundation Bill provides for an International Advisory Council, Governing Board, and Residents' Assembly.

1988 - 1990: "Task Force": a body of half a dozen Aurovilians to deal with specific external matters.

May 1991: First "Working Committee" selected through a community vote. A body of seven persons to coordinate between the Residents' Assembly and the Governing Board of the Foundation.

September 1992: First 'official' Residents' Assembly meeting

October 1992: Second Working Committee chosen 'spontaneously' and unanimously at a Residents' Assembly meeting. □



Meeting moods...

(Photos from Auroville Archives)

Those Were The Days...

There's been a lot of debate as of late—much of it strident—in our general meetings and in the pages of the Auroville News—the equivalent of our weekly community bulletin board—as regards meetings, assemblies, decision-making quorums, democracy, and rights of oppressed minorities and hierarchies. Throw in a new secretary, a few old masters of ceremony, and you've got quite a mix—a foundation whose load-bearing capacities depends, I suppose, on how much sand has been used.

In this arena of conflicting views one issue raised by many concerns the non-attendance of meetings on a regular basis by a large majority of the resident population of Auroville. Of course various minorities choose not to attend meetings for different reasons at different times of the year. Those who do attend meetings attribute a variety of motives—usually political—to those who don't. Now, I actually resent this. I'm a sporadic meeting goer these days which for some is a symptom of advanced civil delinquency and for others an illumined political statement. It is neither, really. The fact is that since the advent of video the entertainment value of meetings has quite simply plummeted.

Today in this age of democracy you just go to a meeting and raise your hand to nominate your best friend or worst enemy—depending on the job to be filled. I, like many others, was a regular card-carrying meeting-wallah back in the 80's, a period some of today's historical revisionists equate with the dark ages. I'd like to disagree. I'm a nostalgic and like to look back on the days when our circus masters knew how to put on a show that would be a guaranteed crowd-puller. Whether it was for a reenactment of the events of 1972, the Spanish Inquisition, or the destruction of Carthage, people including the chairman would actually—believe it or not!—show up EARLY! You'd feel the tension and excitement build up all week, and come the great day the chariot races of Byzantine had nothing on us for excitement!

Yes, those were the days when meetings were meetings and chairmen (even if they were women) were men, not facilitators trained in Findhorn. And we had it all: acrobats, contortionists, (s)word (s)wallowers, dancing bears and lion tamers for the minor shows; and our major epics would have put Cecil B. De Mille to shame, and made Brecht out to be a minimalist.

There were many memorable meetings but it was the Matrimandir Marathon of '87—billed as the clash of the Titans—that had the highest ratings ever. Historically entertaining, it was a *nec plus ultra* as far as meetings go. The organisers outdid themselves in putting on a seven hour extravaganza that left even the most famished of our imperial and plebeian appetites sated for months. With its wild beasts, gladiators, heretics thrown to the lions and virgins singing hymns as the angels wept—Oh! the roar of the crowd I can hear it now!—it could only be compared to some of the better shows put on in the Roman Coliseum circa 100 A.D.

What to do? The times have changed. One can only adapt. Myself and a few fellow traditionalists are saving up to rent a VCR and we'll spend the Silver Jubilee watching reruns of 'I Claudius' and 'Ben Hur'.

Roger

Discovering the Truth...

The Auroville Foundation has created a new body called "Residents' Assembly". At first sight it seems to be another name for the usual general meetings of the community where contentious issues have traditionally been thrashed out. But on a closer look it is not. It is defined as every adult member of Auroville. This makes for a crucial distinction from the earlier general meetings and raises many difficulties in answering the question "How does the Residents' Assembly take a decision?" It also provides an opportunity to look afresh at the question, breaking away from our own traditions and moving on to something closer to the ideals expressed in Auroville's Charter.

The first major difficulty that we face in defining a process for decision making by the Residents' Assembly is the question whether Auroville should follow the democratic path used nearly everywhere else in the world and make decisions by majority vote. If we take this path, then for every decision we will

need at least a simple majority—which means more than 300 votes—at figure never yet attained for any decision in Auroville's political history either by way of attendance at a meeting or participation in a referendum. We could of course fix a quorum, so that decisions can be taken by a lower number of people. But even if a lower percentage were fixed, it could certainly not be too low as that could lead to a situation where a decision taken in one meeting is challenged or reversed in another meeting or referendum or signature campaign. These situations have occurred in Auroville and to ignore them would only invite their recurrence and the ensuing confusion. Based on Auroville's experience, we have to conclude that, whatever formula is arrived at in this direction, it cannot be satisfactory. What is even more important is that such a process has no relation whatsoever to what we have come here for.

We are all agreed that we are here to serve the Truth, the Divine Consciousness. Yet we are unable to make a distinction between this

higher realm of Truth and our own opinions, which are held by us with all the fervour of the heart and backed by all kinds of arguments. "What I believe to be true is obviously the Truth and the others' belief is false. What better way to find out the real Truth than make a head count of how many support my view, or better still, let's fight and the winner takes all." It follows that such a decision arrived at is not necessarily in accordance with the highest Truth. Moreover, such attitudes keep us trapped within a cycle in which today's winner is sure to be tomorrow's loser and so on ad infinitum.

If we are sincere, if we are not paying lip-service to our Charter, then we need to discover this realm of Truth, of Divine Consciousness, and establish real relations with it. It's easier said than done. Of course. But let's make a beginning—we are sure to falter, make mistakes, but with practice we could progressively achieve success. At least a conscious change of direction would be made.

Sanjeev

From Fear to Faith

Any attempt to improve Auroville's internal functioning has to take into account two major factors. Firstly, that the decision-making and executive structure of the community—in other words, the Residents Assembly meeting, the Working Committee and the various work groups—does not necessarily reflect the way that many community decisions are made. From the very beginning, in fact, Auroville has been a collection of strong individualists, and many of the most important and influential decisions affecting the community have been taken by individuals, or small groups of individuals, who either operate outside the existing structure, or use it as a means to manifest their ideas. Secondly, any attempt to organise Auroville has to take into account not only the day-to-day exigencies that confront us, but also the reality that Auroville is intended to be a site of collective yoga. It's not at all clear, in other words, if the type of organisation required by the former is also relevant—or even supportive—of the latter.

What can we learn from these challenges? It's understandable that individual initiatives which affect everyone, and yet which appear to bypass the collective process, are heavily criticised. But the fact that it's happened so often over the years suggests that we are dealing with something more than mere bloody-mindedness or selfishness. Actually, if we see Auroville as an energy field, a force, which is available to whoever wishes to open themselves to it, it is obvious that an individual is as able to do this as is a larger group. In fact, in certain situations more so, as the individual may be more one-pointed, concentrated and committed than the group, which often has to deal with many conflicting demands within it. Here, perhaps, are the roots of the much-quoted 'divine anarchy', and the explanation of why different 'leaders' may be thrown up (and out!) temporarily at different moments in the collective manifestation. Of course, the potential for manipulation and power plays in such a situation is also very high, and fear of this lies behind the repeated demands for a commonly accepted process. But the larger point remains; that what is crucial is not the outer forms in themselves, but the quality of our contact with that energy field, with Mother's force, and that the outer forms are only useful to the extent that they encourage this.

What about the implications of Auroville being a site for collective yoga (whatever exactly that means)? In this context, if Auroville can be perceived not only as a collection of individuals, but as a collective being, made up of many disparate parts and levels which may be in conflict with each other, we can interpret some of the sudden shifts in community direction as a process of

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intuitive rebalancing, of realigning forces in the collective body which may have got out of hand. It is also true that, without a strong psychic centre, the effort of shifting from one inner emphasis to another often swings the pendulum wildly to the other extreme, and sometimes we appear to lose as much as we gain. But the fact remains, that any community organisation we come up with must not only work in terms of the 'outer' world of office orders, town planning and tax demands, but must also be subtle and flexible enough to take account of and respond to these inner needs—to the progressive evolution of the collective consciousness.

Organisation is a double-edged sword. It is essential for creativity and growth; it can also freeze us in outmoded forms. Over the years, Auroville has experienced both aspects as the community has swung between faith and fear, between empowering and restraining, as the motivating forces determining its collective organisation. Recently, the latter has seemed to predominate, expressing itself through fear mechanisms like the wish to institute checks and balances in our internal organisation. Perhaps the greatest challenge we face as a community—and as individuals—at the moment is to move once more from fear to faith, faith not so much in individuals as in Mother's force expressing itself through individuals, faith in the Auroville which is waiting to manifest. And this brings us back to the individual. For, to paraphrase Confucius, if we are inwardly organised—harmonised, open and trusting—we are far more likely to reflect this, and attract this, in our outer communal forms. For everything, in the end, is a mirror...

Alan

Towards Creative Meetings

In universities and even the business world, we see the breaking down of authoritarian, hierarchical structures. Decisions are no longer always made at the top and imposed upon people lower down. Instead, a horizontal decision-making structure is gaining ground—where the whole group shares the responsibility for the decisions. An important factor comes into play, which is the group-consciousness—which may be more effective and larger than that of the individuals constituting the group. This change requires a whole new way of meeting together and deciding. It is essential that the input of each individual in the group is taken into account if the group wants to arrive at a larger truth. On the other hand, the individual's input needs at times to be restrained or channelled for the group to be able to move forward.

A lot of study and research has been done to find practical ways to help groups to arrive at creative decisions that are supported by the whole group—and to avoid the negative factor of frustration and dissension. The need for facilitators rather than chairpersons at such meetings is increasingly felt and nowadays there are experienced facilitators and good manuals providing methods and suggestions about how to make meetings more successful, ranging from preparing the meeting room to problem solving.

In Auroville, in spite of our many meetings, there has been to my view insufficient experimentation with such methods. The average Aurovilian's distrust of structure, 'techniques' and planning is proverbial. Meetings, whether big (over a hundred) or small, should 'just happen'. Much more research and experimentation could be done to see if we can improve our meeting process. Perhaps the time has come now to start.

For our meetings in Auroville, particularly general or Residents' Assembly meetings, it would be helpful if a small group of people would make time available for preparation, facilitation and evaluation. In this way we could make our meetings more of a learning process. Especially preparation and study to see to what extent the various stages of a large meeting could be prepared beforehand, and evaluation—sitting together after the meeting to see what worked well and what didn't and—is necessary for lessons to be learned, and for the Auroville meeting process to be more creative.

Annemarie

In Auroville Today No. 37, we identified Auroville's bioregion and asked how far we, as a community, are conscious of our relationship and responsibility to this larger area that embraces over 20 villages and Pondicherry town. The answer seemed to be 'not very much'. On this centre page, however, we focus on two new bioregional initiatives; a project aimed at the social and economic regeneration of the surrounding villages, and a proposal from Aurovilians, concerned by the fly menace this year, to help Pondicherry Municipality process its organic waste into compost. The message of the flies seems to be clear—if we ignore the bioregion, the bioregion will definitely not ignore us!

Interview

"THIS IS NOT CHARITY BUT SHARING"

The Life Education Centre, an innovative project of 'Village Action' (see box on page 5), at present occupies two huts in a compound in Kottakarai. Planned and initiated by Ardhendu and Dee, and coordinated by Martha, the project—after an eight-month experimental phase—is now into its third month with a class of thirteen children (including eight girls) from the poorest rural class; a further group of 13 girls is being prepared to take the programme next year. The project has received funding only for the first year of the five year experiment, but long-term funding is being pursued.

Auroville Today met Ardhendu, Martha and Dee to discover more about the project, and to explore the implications of the new approach to rural development that the

project represents. Ardhendu has coordinated Village Action for the past two years, and has over 15 years experience in non-formal education with children from the Calcutta slums, rural development, organic agriculture and administrative design. Martha, a Columbian by birth, came to Auroville recently after being involved with community development, both as an educator and field worker, in many different countries, including Columbia, Mexico, France, Holland and India. Dee coordinated Village Action for many years, and has been particularly concerned with encouraging villagers to become self-sufficient and empowered through setting up rural enterprises. At present, she assists in the work of the Auroville Greenwork Resource Centre, Isaiambalam.

Auroville Today: Does the Life Education Centre Project (LEC) represent a new direction for Village Action?

Ardhendu: Yes, very clearly. It grew partly out of the fact that Village Action, for many years, has relied upon only one or two field workers to cover all the surrounding villages as contact persons, and this just wasn't sufficient. And it was difficult to work through the existing power structures in the villages because it took so much time to get all the leaders together to discuss and decide upon anything, and there were vested interests. But then we saw that the village children who formed the eco-clubs we helped to set up were able to do things in the villages—like roadside tree planting, starting kitchen gardens and making soak-pits—without having to go through village meetings. So we had this idea to create a number of apprentice social workers who would be living and working in their villages, but with the ability to help other villagers fill in applications, obtain loans, resolve disputes etc. This is how my planning for this project began, but it went much further later.

Dee: The Life Education Centre represents a different concept of development from that which we have tended to follow in Auroville. It's based upon a number of realisations. One is that you cannot develop people; they have to develop themselves. In other words, they have to be involved in the planning and implementation. Another realisation is that the local people have a tremendous amount of wisdom and information. What we wish to do is to help them perceive this wisdom, to articulate it and so participate in the growth of Auroville and the development of the bioregion.

Martha: There's another important point. The traditional leadership in the villages is collapsing. The new leaders are those with money and motorcycles; those, in other words, who have embraced consumerism. We would like to help to create new values, and a new type of leadership where the leaders have a social consciousness as well as skills that can benefit the villages. We also want to empower traditionally disad-

vantaged groups like the women and children. In this project, therefore, we are drawing upon the experience and knowledge of the village children who have missed out on formal schooling. We will also teach them skills which they will apply in their villages in their own way.

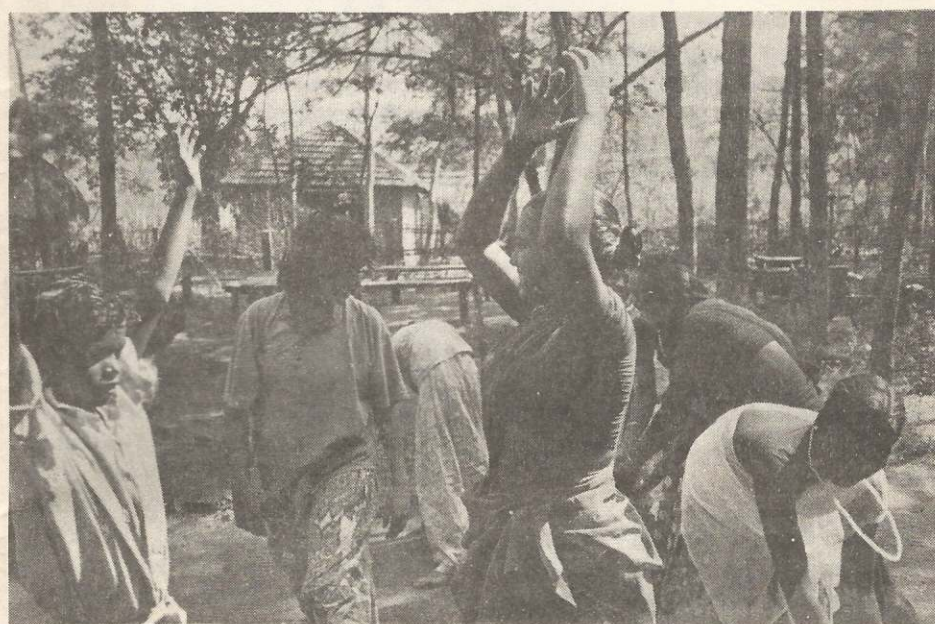
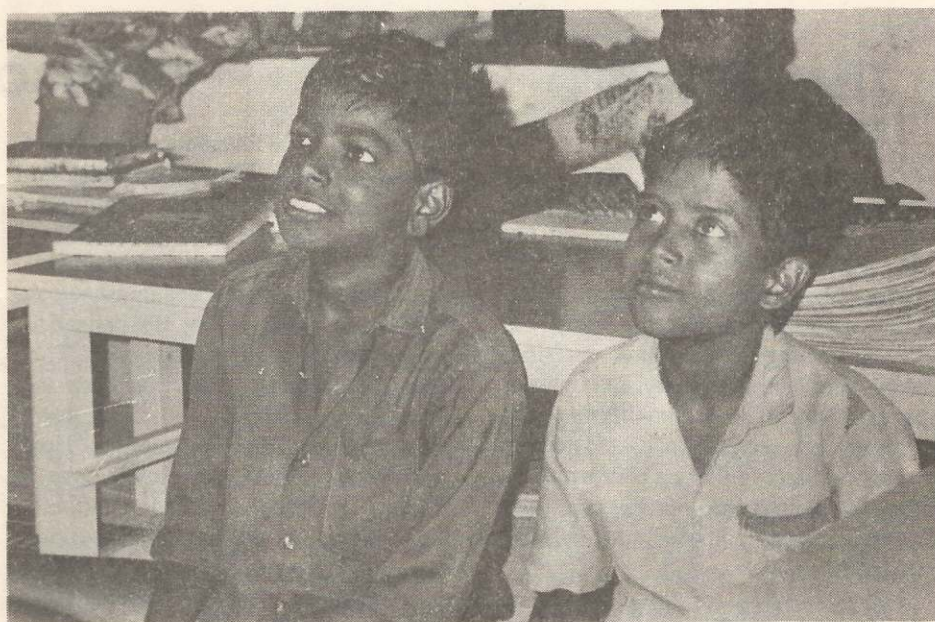
Are you encountering any problems in using this new approach?

Martha: Yes. One problem is to do with how Auroville has related to the villages in the past. My analysis is that the model has been rather paternalistic, charity-based. Historically, perhaps this had a function. But the whole approach of just giving people what they ask for makes them dependent. However, when you want to change to another

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relationship where you relate to the people in a different way, and you ask them to start taking initiative and responsibility, it can create some resentment at first. Also, this approach is a long-term one, and we in Village Action have to begin getting used to planning 25 years ahead.

Ardhendu: Actually, Village Action never gave so much to the villages. But what happened was that when the first Aurovilians came here, the village situation seemed so hopeless that anything that seemed like a positive community initiative by a villager was encouraged. The problem was that there was no evaluation or stress upon quality. So when I came, I began asking questions about what was actually happening, and how useful it was. This created some resentment among certain village groups, and even among some of our own staff.



Top: Two Life Education students, looking to a different future

Above: A break for exercises with Martha (2nd from left)

The Life Education Centre Project aims, among other things, at the social regeneration of the villages through making the villagers more empowered and self-sufficient. Is the present Auroville a help or a hindrance in this attempt?

Martha: I believe that the majority of Aurovilians don't know, and wouldn't know how to respond to what is happening in the villages. They are too busy in building up Auroville. They provide employment and give wages to the villagers, and they think that's enough. In terms of how society is organised in the West, where there are adequate social services, this attitude is understandable. But here the situation is different. For example, if a mother with a young baby is employed in Auroville, a young girl will be kept out of school to look after the baby. Do we want this? So helping the villagers means more than just providing employment; it involves providing support services like creches for instance.

Dee: It should be said that when Aurovilians give something to the villagers, it's often from a genuine feeling of wishing to help. And it's nice—you feel good, and they feel good. But if it's done too often, and too haphazardly, this creates a dependent situation which we don't want. It's too easy; it assuages guilt without really curing the problem.

Ardhendu: We should not oversimplify. Some Aurovilians, through personal contacts, do transfer a sense of quality and caring to the villagers. Also, all developmental organisations have some charity element—it's only a problem if it is predominant. The problem with charities, generally, is that what is given depends more on the whims of the donors than on the needs of the people. The donors are not really interested in finding out what the real needs are and what

happens to what has been given. In terms of development, giving time and attention to people is the most important thing, but charities tend not to give this. What we are trying to do through this project is to respond to what the people want, and to empower them to do it in a cooperative way. This is not charity but sharing.

Martha: The Aurovilians come from many different cultures and backgrounds, each of which has a somewhat different vision of society's responsibility to its citizens. Very few Aurovilians have any previous experience of social work, or speak the local language well. All this makes it difficult to work effectively in this field. There's another crucial point. We cannot know how to relate to the villagers if we do not really understand how to achieve human unity among ourselves. That's why I believe that the work of Village Action should begin with the Aurovilians themselves rather than with the villagers. Because only when we've really understood and achieved something inside us will we be able to do it with others. People will copy what they see, not what they are told.

So the effectiveness of your work in Village Action is limited by the limitations of the Aurovilians and our life-style?

Dee: Precisely. When you study community development, you learn to recognise patterns. And I see that Auroville is not so different from the villages. Like them, we have our hierarchy which creates power structures. Like them we have a wide gap between different classes—yes, we have classes too! Like them, we are sadly lacking in awareness of the bioregion and the need to plan holistically.

(continued on page 5)

The Life Education Centre Project was drawn up in response to several crises, both local and national. These crises include the high percentage of rural children dropping out from conventional schooling, the social and economic impoverishment of the villages, and the degradation of the rural environment. The aim of the project is to tackle these challenges simultaneously through offering educational opportunities to the children of the rural poor—the children attending are paid a 'wage' in lieu of what they would have obtained as casual labour—while giving them a training in the ethics of sustainable development. During a foundation course of nine months, they receive a grounding in basic communication and calculating skills, and through studying their own villages they begin to understand aspects of economics, sociology and ecology as they apply to their own lives. For the next six months, they will receive training in two vocational skills from a choice of nine (including horticulture, food processing, weaving, dress-making, office administration, metal work), and subsequently they will be helped in starting their

own village enterprise or in joining an existing work group. For the next year, they will receive support from a trained field visitor and from other

The Life Education Centre Project

members of the class. It's also expected that some of the problems identified in the villages during the foundation course will lead to communal development projects which may be taken up by Village Action staff together with the students, local youth clubs and/or village council.

In the first three years, about 50 children will benefit directly from the training, and the villages will benefit through community-service projects, through an increased awareness of their needs and through the rise in community spirit brought by the students.

As the organisers put it, "We will consider the project successful if 50% of the students either set up or join enterprises which provide goods and services to the villages. We will consider the programme successful if our students have been able to stimulate enough environmental awareness that the villagers take up on their own, or with public resources, small-scale projects in watershed protection, soil regeneration, recycling, gardening etc."

For further details, contact Village Action, Isalambalam, Auroville 605101

(continued from page 4)

Ardhendu: It's important, in any community development programme, that the planning should not come down from the top, which is also what tends to happen in Auroville now. That way, people feel disempowered, and all the information they can give is lost. When people are 'poorer', they tend to be more conscious of nature and use her ways more. Perhaps by bringing in other world views apart from our own, by listening to the villagers who live so simply, we can learn better how to manage our resources in Auroville.

The villages, like Auroville, are influenced by global pressures like the world economic situation. How realistic is it to believe that you can really transform the fabric of local village life when the larger picture appears so hopeless?

Ardhendu: Perhaps we are living in a doomed global society, and that nothing we can do will change this. But even if we are heading for a 'post-doom' society, isn't it important to have learned some basic lessons about what to do next? Actually, even though there are mopeds and televisions in the villages now, their dependence on international markets is much lower than in the West. And they are still willing to do things like fasting

they are still willing to do things like fasting for a month and walking barefoot to a temple in Kerala; they still have a faith in something greater. So I believe that it's well within our capacity to do something different here. Even if, through this project, we only gain more insight into their minds and learn more about the villages, it will have been important in itself. And even if we may not effect major changes, why should this deter us from making the attempt?

Dee: But we've already done it in this area! 'Bellaura' and the other leather workshop in Kottakarai are the models for what we wish to accomplish through schemes like the Life Education Centre. In these cases, we provided the initial training, but now the villagers involved are completely self-sufficient—and they have more orders than they can cope with. The villagers in charge love Auroville, but they don't feel the need to become Aurovilian. They are influential in their villages, they are involved in community work, and they don't exploit their workers, because they emulate the way they were trained—which was educational and empowering. These two workshops are the precedents for the Life Education Centre. And that's why I believe in it!

Interview by Alan
October 5th, 1992



Pondicherry rubbish outside New Creation School



DRAWING BY PEO

The Year of the Flies

These days I eat my breakfast with toast in one hand and the morning paper in the other, the latter to wave away the dozens of flies which are trying to land on my bread. After three months of fly infestation I'm getting pretty good at this morning exercise. Where do these flies come from?

In the 'Brief News' column of our August issue we wrote about the local farmers hauling waste from the Pondicherry rubbish dump and putting it on their fields as 'compost'. Pathogens, all sorts of bacteria, and the fly larvae come in this way to the villages surrounding Auroville. The 'compost' is made into piles and stored, and eventually is ploughed into the fields all around us. As there were no summer rains this year, the so-called compost has been lying around in various places instead of being ploughed into the ground, promoting the breeding of fly larvae.

Joss, Ed and Jan are the Aurovilians who have been trying to do something about the fly menace. First of all Joss made a video film to help raise awareness. Then the Aurovilians, accompanied by the Secretary of the Auroville Foundation, Mr. Tripathy, met with the District Rural Development Agency (DRDA), with people from the Pondicherry Public Works Department, with the Pondicherry Health Officer, with the Commissioner of Pondicherry and with the Special Officer of the Municipality, to offer to help find a possible solution to the problem, which would benefit all of us.

What exactly is the source of the problem? I asked Joss to show me the video to get an idea of what is happening. It shows how the garbage is collected in Pondicherry by the (around 700) municipal workers. It consists of organic waste from the bazaar, trash from

the streets and medical waste from the hospitals. Some of the workers, and of the 4000 independent ragpickers, told Joss about the pitiful circumstances under which they are working—without medical care being provided for them. They all complained about the stench which is so bad that they can only eat very spicy food after first drinking alcohol. The garbage gets brought to the municipal dumping ground where there are bullock carts waiting in line to carry it away before it even hits the ground. There is no question of it being treated. Cows, goats, pigs, dogs and people freely roam around at the dump. A few months ago 15 cows died suddenly after they had been grazing there, but veterinarians speculated that the reason might have been Anthrax. Whatever the reason, it is a fact that—potentially very dangerous—medical waste is being dumped. When Joss showed the video to the Pondicherry Chief Secretary, the latter urged some of the major hospitals to make their incinerators functional again. But the main offenders are the private clinics which have no facilities to dispose of their pathogenic waste.

The Pondy government has asked Auroville to come up with a trial solution for treating their waste in a part of the municipal dumping ground. The first thing to be done is to make a wall around the compound and then make arrangements for the proper treating of the waste and for making compost. The team of Aurovilians is presently looking into this and into how to turn the Pondicherry dumping ground into a profitable composting ground, which could even look good. The compost could be sifted, packed in bags and sold, as is already being done in Bangalore. As the cost of chemical fertilizers is rising sharply and there is an increasing interest in organic farming, there is going to be a need for good organic compost.

But the real answer to the problem is making people aware of the problem and of possible solutions. Joss is trying to do this with the video he made. Besides showing where the garbage comes from and where it goes, the video also shows the Auroville Eco-Service which encourages every Auroville household to have separate bins for organic and non-organic waste and engages people to sort out all recyclable waste and sell it. It is important to make more and more people aware that they can do something at home, and in their street. They too can separate waste and make compost piles in their yard or on a piece of communal ground. With some effort and energy, Pondicherry could become a clean model city for India, a city to be proud of. "Pondicherry, the cleanest city in India."

Tineke

The village compost problem

The local villagers don't have good compost any more as they have less cows to provide the manure for the compost. Instead, many of the farmers are growing cash crops, like cashews, and they believe that what comes from the Pondicherry dumping ground—which contains much inorganic waste—is good for their crops. Educating the villagers about how to sort out the inorganic waste and to use proper composting techniques would help get rid of the flies, as in proper composting the heat kills most pathogens.

In the Firing Line

The first Working Committee of seven members came into being in May '91. Its task: liaising between the Residents' Assembly and the Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation. On the 30th of September its one and a half year term ended. YOKA was part of this group (see *Auroville Today* of September '91) and *Auroville Today* asked her about her views and experiences.

Auroville Today: Did you as the first Working Committee have a 'programme' or a particular direction?

Yoka: Our main thrust was towards transparency, communication, openness. Before the Working Committee came into being, Auroville had had a Council for internal matters and a Task Force for relations with the outside world and especially with Delhi. But the Task Force drifted too far away from the community and did too many things on their own without consulting the community about what they discussed in Delhi, about what they planned to achieve. The community was tired of this and wanted a more open communication with the Working Committee. When this Working Committee was elected, it was supported by a large part of the community and hopes were high that a more open and transparent process would evolve and that the community would be kept involved in the decision making process. We wanted a completely new way of functioning and to be more involved in the community. There was also a part of the community who did not cooperate with this Working Committee, because they did not agree with the way the Working Committee was chosen, which was through elections, with positive votes and negative votes. This section of the community felt that this method was not in accordance with the spirit of Auroville. It was against their vision of how Auroville should be organized. So, they boycotted the elections, and also afterwards they no longer participated in the community process. This created difficulties.

So there was on the one hand this hope and a new spirit, and on the other hand already a dichotomy. This dichotomy showed for instance with our first major topic, Aurelec, when at a certain moment we decided to have a referendum. A major part of the community said yes to Aurelec being out of the Foundation, but one section did not agree with this and made a petition on their own and went straight to the Governing Board, bypassing the Working Committee and our community processes.

What do you see as the most important achievement of this Working Committee?

We created the Development Group. One of the deadlocks at that time was town planning. Alienation had taken place between Aurofuture and Roger A. on the one hand and a part of the community on the other which felt that they were not able to take part in the planning of the town. There was the 'Album' (town plan) that Aurofuture had created and then sent to Delhi, which hadn't gone through any community process. Most people felt Aurofuture wanted to try and get the town plan ratified in Delhi and impose it on the community. So there was a real deadlock there. The Working Committee spent a lot of time during its first months discussing this problem with people of Aurofuture and others, and among ourselves. This is how we came up with the idea of the Development Group. Aurofuture would be more in an executive role and the Development Group would be taking the decisions and would be

a representation of the wider Auroville. We presented this to a general meeting and that went quite well; it was accepted. This new group is functioning, it's not ideal but there is much less tension in this area.

You said the community had expectations of openness, communication—and there was also the request to organize the Residents' Assembly. Was this very much present in your consciousness? And what were the difficulties?

I think it was very much in our awareness, especially in the beginning. We tried to keep the contact through reports in the Auroville News as extensively as possible, and we had open meetings and tried to get into dialogues. And the Residents' Assembly was certainly very much present in my own mind. I found it very important that it would become alive in a good, constructive way. But there was not so much enthusiasm in the rest of the group. I had difficulty to persuade them that it was important, and there were other pressing topics—it was sort of far away from them. But they told me, 'Why don't you



Yoka

organize it?' So I called for an open meeting on the organization of the Residents' Assembly—three people came (laughter) and between these three people the discussion didn't go off too well! At that moment there was clearly no energy in the community for this issue. I also think that at that moment people felt enough trust in the Working Committee to take care of things in general. Where did it go wrong? It was with Matrimandir that it went wrong. And I don't know exactly... but a shift, subtle at first, took place. The Working Committee started taking a different direction. Instead of trying to solve the problem (of the outer skin) through a community process, it sort of shied away from the community. At that moment Ananda kept a neutral stance and I advocated a different direction—but I didn't get support inside the Working Committee. What happened was that the majority of the Working Committee members did not acknowledge the Residents' Assembly as having the authority to decide on Matrimandir's skin—as in their opinion Mother had given this responsibility to Roger A., and the General Meeting in 1987 had confirmed this. But in November 1991 another very well attended general meeting decided that the final decision should rest with the community. And I still believe that it was a major mistake

On the evening of the 3rd November, after a short illness, Yoka left her body. It was a profound shock to many Aurovilians who loved and respected her for her patience, modesty, simplicity and—above all—immense goodwill, which she brought to everyone she encountered and everything she did. Like a clear flame, she was devoted to the Mother and Auroville, and she served them for many years through her work for Auroville International Nederland and for 'Aurofonds' which publishes books of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, and later, after moving to Auroville, through her work at the Secretariat and as a member of the first Working Committee. As a trustee of the Dutch foundation, Stichting de Zaaier, she also helped secure its support for many projects in the community.

Through her quiet integrity and warmth, she was a unifying force, as was reflected by the number and variety of Aurovilians who attended her burial at Forecomers on the morning of the 5th November. We miss her very much, but know that she is always with us.

to disregard the community. They were afraid that the community, being divided over the issue perhaps almost 50-50, would never come to any agreement, that there would be a lot of negativity for years to come, and there would be a stalemate. But what Mother time and again stated is that she didn't really 'see' the outer skin, but she insisted that we should agree to work together and that *that* was important. It would have been right for the Working Committee to keep stressing that point. We did that in the beginning when the issue came up and I think that was right, and if we would have kept stressing that point, perhaps some synthesis would have been reached. But now the majority of the Working Committee went along with one section of the community, and strengthened that section, and frustrated the other part. Since then there has been a great distrust in the community towards this Working Committee.

But I think two of them have understood now.

What about the future Working Committee and the relation to the Residents' Assembly?

There should be a very active Residents' Assembly. The Residents' Assembly is mistaken to think that the Working Committee does the work and they don't need to bother. And then when something happens they wake up and are dissatisfied and angry. There should be a continuous process. For instance, regular open meetings with the community where the Working Committee shares what it has been doing, and where people can ask questions and bring up topics.

Should the Working Committee be organizing the Residents' Assembly meetings or should the Residents' Assembly do it themselves?

I have always felt that the Residents' Assembly should organize itself. There should be a group of four or five people who take care of the location, chairperson, notetaker etc., and whatever needs to be done. For then the Working Committee can concentrate on the topic and does not need to be burdened with that work. If a more neutral group is organizing the meetings, it would also prevent that the Working Committee objects to calling a meeting and that people have to make petitions to have a meeting, as has happened. The Working Committee may get very involved in an issue and then try to manipulate.

How do you see the relation with the Governing Board?

I respect the people of the Governing Board very much—they are fine people, outstanding; I really appreciate their good will towards Auroville, their efforts to help Auroville; they are very busy people, but still they make time available for Auroville. But I also feel an uneasiness, because for me Auroville is a very special place created by the Mother for something completely new

and we still don't know what it will be. She has put an energy here which makes things happen in a different way from outside. For instance, Matrimandir, I feel, has its own inner processes and time schedule which are determined by factors we don't know. For example, when in '73 Mother left her body, at the same moment the ring which connects the four ribs was completed, which was very significant, and which could never have been planned. When the Governing Board suggested that Matrimandir should be completed in February next year I felt some uneasiness. It was this old mental approach. But I think it was done with good intentions, I think the Governing Board felt that some push had to be given.

I remember that when I lived in Holland and came here to visit, people would often tell me that you cannot really understand Auroville if you do not live here. And I think it's true. But it's difficult to accept for outsiders. It has to go deep inside, the experience of Auroville, and that happens only when you live here. It's not so that outsiders are less sincere or less committed to Auroville's ideals, but they see these perhaps more from an idealistic or inner level only, whereas if you are living here you have to deal with the physical aspects of manifesting them, plus with our own human nature, which I think is a very difficult aspect of this yoga as it brings all the weaknesses and obstructions in us out into the open in order to transform them. That's what happens here a lot, and it's difficult for outsiders to understand. They tell you that everything should be 'peace and unity', and 'why are you fighting?' and they don't understand that it's a process of becoming aware and conscious of these aspects and working on them.

But if we deal with the Governing Board from an attitude of trust, things will work out positively. If we have this attitude of fear and anxiety, then what we fear is what we project and what we will get.

I have seen how the Secretary (the Secretary of the Governing Board who is living in Auroville—eds) has changed over the months. I don't know to what extent, but he has started to understand and he certainly approaches things differently now. That's something the Working Committee has done a lot of work for, which has not been acknowledged, because people don't know. We have had many meetings with him, he has listened to us and he has changed. And this gives me hope that in the Governing Board there is the willingness to understand the process of Auroville. We have to make an effort, that's all.

You were the only woman in the group. Were you very conscious of that?

Yes, it made a lot of difference. In the beginning I was not too much aware of it, but later I did and I became much more aware of the difference between male and female energy. I have never been a fanatic feminist, but now I came to see that women approach an issue quite differently from men, general-

(continued on next page)

(continued from page 6)

ly speaking. Men are more oriented towards achieving and results, action; and women are more encompassing, wider, giving more attention to communication and relating to people.

The next group which has been selected has clearly less mental and more 'heart' qualities. Do you think that it is enough to be a 'heart-person' or are certain skills also needed? I think of administrative skills, experience in business, legal knowledge...

Not necessarily, although it certainly helps. Auroville is so diverse. In our case, for instance, we had to deal a lot with the business aspect because of the Auroville Foundation and the wish of the business units for a separate status. But I can very well imagine that the next Working Committee might have to deal, for example, more with the education aspect. So it is very difficult to predict what the Working Committee members will have to know. But I think what is important (smiling) is that they can listen very well. And to know that they are not there to just push their own opinion, but that they have to be really open to the community, and understand which direction is to be taken. And the aspect of community is very very important, because people give decision power to the Working Committee and as long as there is trust, they will step back and let the Working Committee do its work; but as soon as there is something making people uneasy they jump up and they feel they have been used.

ON RESIDENTS' ASSEMBLIES AND WORKING COMMITTEES

Do we need rules and regulations?

Meetings of Auroville's Residents' Assembly have occurred with great regularity during these last months. In *Auroville Today* #43 we reported on the meetings held in July and August, which were attended by over 160 and 120 people respectively. These meetings decided that a discussion paper concerning the relationship and the sharing of responsibilities between the Governing Board and the Residents' Assembly be submitted to the Governing Board.

The Governing Board's position in its meeting on August 14th regarding this discussion paper left many Aurovilians unhappy. The Governing Board stated that the meetings of July and August could not be regarded as meetings of Auroville's Residents' Assembly, but as meetings of a group of Aurovilians only. The discussion paper, therefore, represented only the views of a group of Aurovilians, not those of the Residents' Assembly. The Governing Board however promised that it would study its contents.

"By what right can the Governing Board determine that these meetings are not meetings of Auroville's Residents' Assembly?" was the indignant reaction of many Aurovilians. "True, we have no official rules for the conduct of our Residents' Assembly. But throughout the history of Auroville we never framed any such rules for our general meetings. Framing them now might well stifle an evolutionary process. Do we need codification? Do we need to copy some kind

The Working Committee members showed signs of 'burnout'. Was this due to the strain of the work or were there other factors?

It has been a heavy year with major problems—among others the relation with the Governing Board and the Secretary, plus the Matrimandir and Aurelec issues—topics with a lot of tension around them. You also have to be available at all times, with VIP's visiting etc. This year had many such things and your own rhythm—and other responsibilities that all those who served on this Working Committee have—get continuously disturbed. Also, you are always approached as a member of the Working Committee—when you shop at Pour Tous, people start asking things and tell you about problems they hope you can help solve, and the same happens when you come to a birthday party... And you carry a lot of the problems and the tensions.

But, to add a positive note here, I must say that all this time (one and a half years) we were a very good team in terms of work. The secretarial work was shared very well—the others took notes too, wrote letters, reports, etc.

What did you learn personally?

To talk! I'm a quiet person who is more inclined to listen, without pushing my point of view and here I really had to do it. The others were all such competent men, used to speaking and pushing their points—I had to be really strong to be listened to and to make my point and to express myself. It was a very good learning process. And it was also a very good way to get to know Auroville—and

human nature! This was a more difficult aspect (laughs).

In what sense?

When you go into a direction which people like, then they want you to be strong and have authority and take decisions, but when you go in a direction they don't like, they say "You're on a power trip!" And it made me see very clearly how narrow human nature often is.

I know from two other ex-members that people who were friendly with them stopped relating to them after the Matrimandir issue, didn't even greet them any more... They felt quite a lot of hostility. I think that went quite deep. They didn't find that so easy to handle. In this work, whatever you do—at least this is our experience—there is always a section of the community which criticises you, condemns you very strongly.

There's something I would like to add here. People are bound to make mistakes, and they do, also in this Working Committee. But then immediately there is this attitude of condemnation. You're finished, you're a bad guy (or gal), not to be ever trusted again etc. This brings a very negative atmosphere. If we could be a bit more open or wide with each other, saying ok, you made a mistake but let's talk it out, and then give another chance—that would create a much more constructive atmosphere. Now we're really destroying each other, blocking each other's energy, instead of encouraging each other. Let's give each other some space to learn.

Interview by Annemarie
October 17th, 1992

of democratic or 'alternative' system in use elsewhere in the world?"

But there was also recognition of the fact that we have rarely managed to make our general meetings 'work'. We have experienced that general meetings were only attended by a certain section of Aurovilians; that decisions taken were quite often not respected or recalled in a subsequent meeting; that meetings were boycotted for one reason or another. And still many Aurovilians do not attend these meetings for a wide variety of reasons, ranging from a simple 'no-interest in politics' to boycotting a decision making process. And many are the reasons that lie in between these two extremes.

The pressure to create a Residents' Assembly that would be both recognized as such by the Governing Board and be effective was increased as the old Working Committee resigned on September 30th, and the need for a new one was apparent. Working papers appeared in the *Auroville News*, containing ideas on how the Residents' Assembly could function. We quote a few:

"Have a strong Working Committee which takes decisions. If the Residents' Assembly does not agree, it can correct the Working Committee."

"Let the Residents' Assembly create a core group of 40 experienced and well-known Aurovilians, who will act as a bridge between the Working Committee and the community, and who will select the new Working Committee."

"Let all the working groups select among themselves one or two persons who will participate in this core group."

"All the powers are with the Residents' Assembly. This is the body which should take all important decisions. Let 10% of the Residents be sufficient to constitute a Residents' Assembly, which can take decisions by simple majority in case consensus is not possible."

Meanwhile, the old Working Committee resigned and as the need for a new Working Committee became more pressing, one general meeting decided to focus on this and to see if a group of seven people could be agreed upon. In that meeting something strange happened. Though all working papers had stressed the need for competent and experienced Aurovilians to be members of the Working Committee, the meeting proposed, instead, seven long-term Aurovilians who are not particularly known for their administrative skills but who, according to many of those present, have the capacity to act from the heart level instead of from the mind level only. The proposal was adopted by consensus in two consecutive meetings. Six of the seven Aurovilians proposed accepted their nomination, and a seventh Aurovilian proposed by consensus also agreed to participate.

Meetings, meanwhile, continue, with the object of framing rules for Residents' Assembly meetings. We will keep you informed. □

SHORT NEWS

Monkeying Around

A monkey has joined the community—and he didn't even contact the Entry Group. So far, he's been observing the behaviour of the primates who eat at Bharat Nivas Kitchen, he's raided a house in Certitude (net gain 12 bananas and two papayas), and—it's rumoured—he's visited Matrimandir Chamber, Hanuman paying his respects?

Paper Tiger?

The Council had to mediate recently when one Aurovilian claimed that another Aurovilian's dog had made an early Christmas dinner of his goose and turkey. Canine aficionados were unconvinced. "That dog Tiger could never have done it—he's a wimp", one of them opined. However, the continued absence of the goose and turkey, and the paralytic grin on Tiger's face seems to offer circumstantial evidence...

Cadbury's Fruit 'n' Nickel bars.

Chocolate sales in Pour Tous stall—running at Rs 15,000 a month—plummeted after a report in an Indian newspaper that Indian chocolate contains dangerously high quantities of nickel. A representative of Cadbury's rapidly appeared and distributed a report from a U.K. laboratory showing that the amount of nickel in their chocolate was much lower than claimed—and that certain brands in the U.K., Germany and the U.S. had higher concentrations. Unfortunately, the representative was not asked about the identity of any other interesting additives which ensure that chocolate melts in the mouth and not in the hand.

New Auroville Calendar

The Auroville Greenwork Resource Centre is bringing out another calendar for 1993. Its colour photographs show scenes in and around Auroville, and everybody who has seen it considers it far better than last year's effort. If you would like one, contact AGRC, Isaiambalam, Auroville 605101, or your nearest Auroville International centre for details of cost.

Auroville FAX

At last, Auroville has its own FAX number. It is 91 413 862274. Please ensure that your FAX message includes the name of the Aurovilian you are sending it to—and the community where the Aurovilian lives.

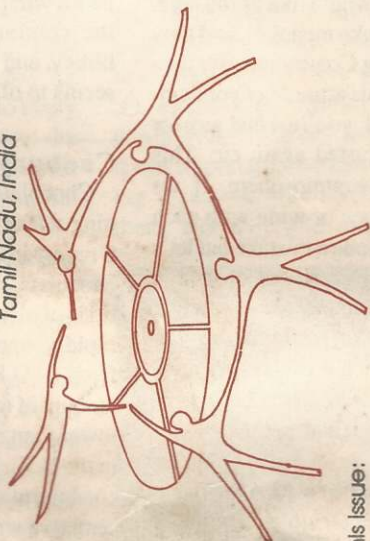
Photo below: The new Working Committee. From left to right: Anu, Jacques, Andy, Rita, Gupti, Patrick, Menaig.



AUROVILLE TODAY

By Airmail
Bookpost

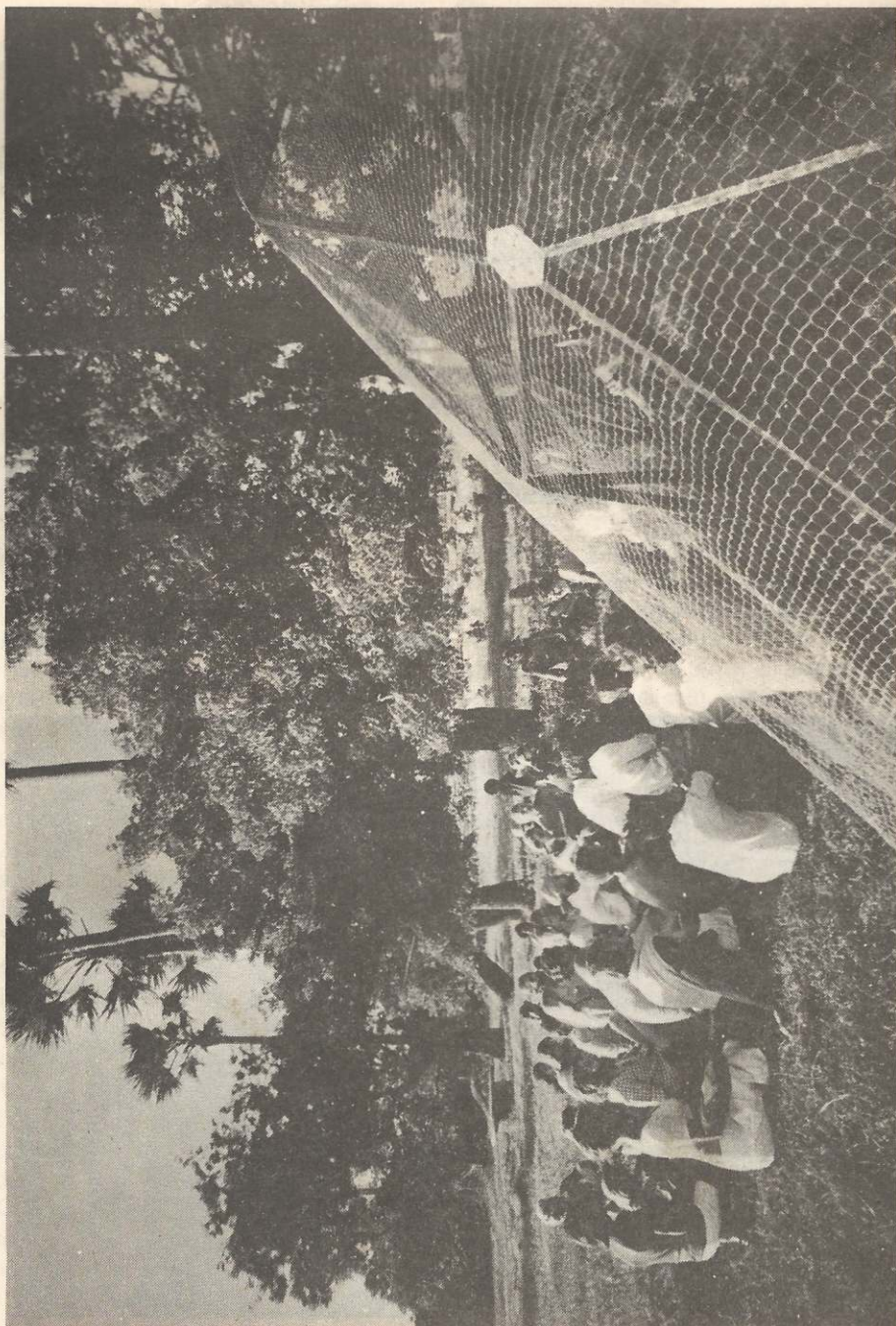
C.S.R. Office,
Auroville 605101
Tamil Nadu, India



In this issue:
'Learning to Meet'; Village development and
the bioregion; an interview with Yoka; etc.

AME AND MICHAEL
SPACE
AUROVILLE

November 1992
Number Forty-Six



'Meeting' history... (Archive photo)

PORTRAIT

Pushkar and Music: A Unifying Force

"PEOPLE SING FOR the joy of singing, but in a choir there is also the challenge of attuning to one another. I see the choir as a microcosm of Auroville. The music is a harmonizing force—not only on the vocal level, but on another, deeper level. We will not be able to unite our voices unless we unite ourselves."

Pushkar and I were sitting on the beach at Repos watching the last few swimmers take a dip before sunset, and talking about music, the choir, Auroville and many other things; about resonance and harmony; about art as a reflection of life. But let me introduce Pushkar to you.

Pushkar is 22 years old and has been in Auroville for one and a half years. It seems he always knew about Auroville, for as an eight year old boy he joined the Ashram School in Pondicherry. Soon after, he started studying music. Even as a baby, playing the piano had always fascinated him. At the Ashram School, the music curriculum was good, but he chose to study also on his own. Sometimes visiting musicians would hold workshops. There were many concerts at the School every year, and many opportunities to

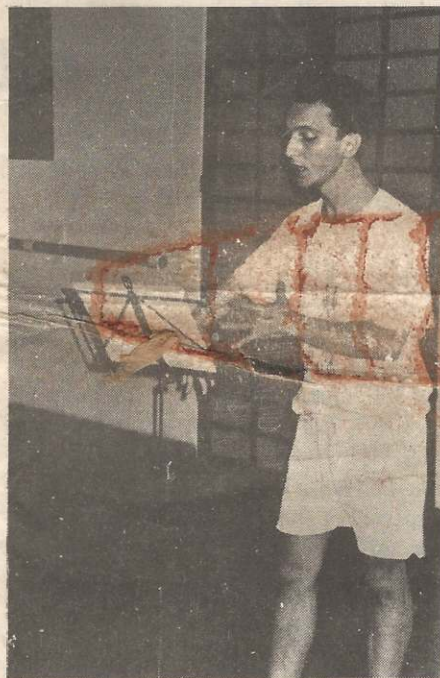
play together in groups, especially chamber music.

While in Spain on a family visit, he got a chance to deepen his knowledge studying solfeggio, music theory and piano at a music school belonging to a friend of his mother. In 1988, he decided to study music seriously, entering himself into a choir in Palafrugell, Girona. Travelling to France, Poland and other places within Spain, they sang for the Federation which spread the Catalan culture, mainly through popular Catalan folk songs. The budget was small and concerts were usually free. This meant that while performing on the road, they stayed in youth hostels, or if they had an exchange with another choir, they would stay in the homes of the choir members. The most exciting time was in 1989, when the choir performed in Paris, as one of the many groups at "Pour les Droits de l'Homme", a Human Rights Concert in Cergy-Pontoise.

When he settled in Auroville, Pushkar never thought he would be directing a choir. While he was waiting for his cousin Nuria, a singer, to come from Spain, he started singing with a group of about 8 Aurovilians. Some of them left, others joined, and in this way a choir formed which started singing in Pitanga hall regularly. For Pushkar, directing was difficult at first, because he felt he was too young. However, Nuria encouraged him and took the responsibility for training the voices. The choir grew to about 35 singers—a variety of people, some of whom have musical backgrounds, but mostly people who just love to sing. After its successful inaugural performance last winter before an audience of enthusiastic Aurovilians, the choir continues to struggle with consistency and perseverance, which are difficult qualities to sustain in Auroville.

"It will take time to get there", says Pushkar, talking about attuning on a deeper level. "And so people don't need to get discouraged. They need to go on."

On December 26th the next performance is to be expected. On the programme are about 20 pieces in 7 different languages, including four pieces composed by Pushkar himself.



Pushkar

Jill

Auroville Today provides information about Auroville, an international township in South-India, on a monthly basis and is distributed to Aurovilians and friends of Auroville in India and abroad. It does not necessarily reflect the views of the community as a whole. **Editorial team:** Tineke, Roger, Jill, Carel, Bill, Annemarie, Alan. Typesetting on computer: Annemarie. Printed at Auroville Press.

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The contribution for the next 12 issues of *Auroville Today* in India is Rs. 150, for other countries Rs. 750, Can.\$ 30, French F. 150, DM 47, It.Lira 35,500, D.Gl. 52, US \$ 25, U.K.£ 14. This includes the postage by airmail. Please send your contribution (or your supporting contribution of double the amount) either to the Auroville International centre in your country (add 10% for admin. and bank charges) or directly to Auroville Today, CSR Office, Auroville 605101. **Cheques should be made payable to Auroville Fund**, specifying: 'Contribution for Auroville Today'. You will receive the issues directly from Auroville. Personal cheques are preferred to bank cheques. Please do not send postal money orders. Subscribers will receive a reminder when their subscription is about to expire.

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