

AUROVILLE TODAY

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The Group and the Individual

IN November, 1988, we announced, in the first issue of Auroville Today, the coming into force of the Auroville Foundation Act. The Act provides that all the assets of all organizations relatable to Auroville are temporarily taken over by the Government of India, which will transfer these assets in due course to the Auroville Foundation. Now, one and a half years later, we continue to await the birth of the Foundation.

How can we ensure that the Foundation will be a valuable tool to help implement the ideals of Auroville? How to avoid the usual pitfalls of a collective body, described by Sri Aurobindo as "its characteristic attempts to subordinate to itself the free will, the free action, the power, dignity and self assertion of the individuals constituting it"?

In Auroville, we rarely — too rarely — spend much time thinking practically about the future. *Solvitur ambulando* (problems are solved by going ahead) seems to be our motto, and so it is not surprising that many started to give thought to the potential problems of the Foundation only relatively late. Since Aurelec, Auroville's computer factory, decided to go to court against the Government of India, stating that they do

not form part of the Foundation, the issue has come into the limelight.

At the same time, individuals are raising objections against the centralization of Auroville's connections with the Tamil Nadu Electricity Board. This was one of the reasons why the managers of Kottakurai Bakery laid down their responsibilities.

The main theme of this Auroville Today relates to these two issues which, though in appearance different, are in essence identical: freedom of the individual versus a — real or imagined — forced centralization. Two issues whose immediate consequences are different: a court case for those who chose to fight, and a complete withdrawal from their activities for the others.

We trust that in the process of working out these issues Auroville will find its balance and harmony, and "experiment with a courageous faith whether after all it is not the utmost possible liberty, dignity and manhood of the individual which will best assure the well being, strength and expansion" of the collective.

The quotations are from Sri Aurobindo's Ideal of Human Unity, Chapter III, The Group and the Individual.

THE AURELEC CASE

AUROVILLE IN COURT AGAIN. The dislike is universal, amongst all parties. Back to the bad old days? Another bone of contention to split Aurovilians? On the face of it, it looks like it. But, though views may be miles apart, people are not. Differences of viewpoints are more acceptable in Auroville today, and attempts are continuing to settle the matter out of court.

AUROVILLE TODAY talked to Nini and Kalya, two of the three executives of ADPS, who explain their motivations. On page 3, Michael, member of the former Task force, presents another view.

AUROVILLE TODAY: *How did the story start?*

Nini: Before the Act was passed we discussed with the new Administrator how businesses should relate to what they were setting up for Auroville. We understood that they had not given it much thought. We prepared a paper for him that he took to Delhi.

Shortly afterwards we discussed the issue in the ABC [Auroville Board of Commerce]. It appeared that some units were apprehensive that their activities would be too closely monitored under the Act by people in the Auroville community who would dictate the terms under which they could operate. And there was the fear of government interference. When everything belongs to the government, they can say what they want and there's no way you can

whatever legal body they set up for Auroville, so that that body has the ultimate control.

Nini: Then we learned that Aurelec Trust had been listed in the schedule to the Act. The Act used the words "being relatable to Auroville", and gave as its *raison d'être* "to settle conflicts over misappropriation of funds and assets". The latter clearly did not apply to Aurelec. When the Administrator came again, we discussed this question of relatability with him. We said that the ADPS activities of Aurelec Trust do not fall under the Act, because we had never received donations for it from Auroville and we had nothing to do with the Sri Aurobindo Society. And the land on which Aurelec is built was never owned by them. The Administrator was extremely concerned and said that he would try to find a solution. The next step was to start discussing it in Auroville.

Kalya: We went to a lawyer who knows Auroville to get his opinion. He gave us in writing that Aurelec Data Processing Systems (ADPS) was not relatable to Auroville. He said Aurelec Trust can be relatable but that the ADPS unit need not be, and that the Auroville Electrical Service unit would be. We went to Delhi with that

"Businesses in Auroville should be allowed to exist in any form that is convenient to those who do the business."

question it.

Kalya: In this paper we presented our philosophy that businesses in Auroville should be allowed to exist in any form that is convenient to those who do the business. That is a minimum requirement. We proposed that the land could be owned by

opinion and met there amongst others with some Auroville Task Force members. They were convinced that all of Aurelec was relatable. After two days of meetings the impasse between the opinions could not be broken.

What made the people in Delhi so con-



It's summer again ...

Photo Sven

vinced that ADPS had to be relatable to Auroville?

Nini: Basically two things: First their belief that Mother had directly intervened to solve Auroville's problems by creating this Act.

Kalya: And second their feeling that everything that has anything to do with Auroville should be part of the Act, however remote it is, and that nothing connected with Auroville should exist outside the Foundation. From the human point of view the meetings were very good, but legally nothing could be worked out.

In Auroville we went on having meetings and ultimately everybody agreed to drop the relatability question, and give things time to work out. And it would have

stayed that way, were it not that someone told our bankers that they would be liable to legal action as we were not admitting relatability and that they therefore were acting against the Government. We were told that copies of our letters written to the Government were shown to the bank by a government officer. The bankers asked us to make a statement. We said that we do not admit relatability to the Foundation and we also gave the legal opinion we had obtained. The bankers consulted their lawyers who said that it was not clear which units were relatable. The bank gave us time to either get from the Government a letter that we were not relatable or to get an injunction from the High Court. We went to Delhi to meet the Government and we

A (partial) chronology of the Aurelec Court Case story

September 1988

- Auroville Foundation Act passed by the Parliament of India. The Indian Government temporarily takes over all the assets of all organisations specified relatable to Auroville, to be handed over to the future Auroville Foundation, an independent foundation to hold the assets of Auroville for "humanity as a whole" and to ensure that the aims and ideals of Auroville are fulfilled.

October 1988

- Formation of the Auroville Board of Commerce (ABC). One of the aims: to agree upon a policy for commercial units to operate under the Auroville Foundation.
- Aurelec circulates a legal opinion among a few people that maintains they are not relatable to Auroville. This leads to an Auroville General Meeting with all the trustees of Aurelec. The meeting decides that Aurelec could not go ahead and declare itself unrelatable to Auroville, but that Auroville would not force Aurelec to declare itself relatable. Everyone would make an effort to create a comfortable climate to work out all the apprehensions.

Early 1989

- Aurelec writes to the Custodian (the representative of the Indian Government pending the birth of the Auroville Foundation) saying that they are examining the relatability question and it should not be assumed that they are relatable. Two of the six Aurelec trustees disagree with the letter saying the question cannot arise because the Act has already made them relatable.
- The Auroville Board of Commerce tries to define how commercial units should function under the Foundation.

June 1989

- Aurelec's bank asks Aurelec for a statement to clarify their relationship to Auroville.

July 1989

- One of the executives of Aurelec writes to the bank that they have a legal opinion that they are unrelatable to Auroville.
- The bank writes to OSD (Officer on Special Duty who represents the Custodian in Auroville) to ask if ADPS is relatable to Auroville or not.

August 1989

- Bank states that ADPS needs a court order or letter from the Government to operate their bank accounts. ADPS asks the Custodian in Delhi for a letter authorizing them to operate their bank accounts.

October 1989

- Aurelec Trust Meeting of four trustees unanimously pass a resolution declaring ADPS, Prisma and the photo-typesetting unit not relatable to Auroville. It states that the Auroville Electrical Service (a unit of Aurelec Trust) is, however, relatable to Auroville. Two trustees are not present at the meeting and protest against the resolution and lack of adequate notice regarding the meeting.

- The Aurelec Managing Trustee replies to them that the meeting was in accord with the provisions of the trust deed and the resolution was validly and unanimously passed.

November 1989

- Meetings and personal interventions to dissuade ADPS from going to court.

December 1989

- The bank informs ADPS that their accounts will be frozen within three days unless their status is clarified.
- ADPS files a petition in the Madras High Court to obtain an order restraining the Government from acquiring, transferring or in any manner interfering with the property or administration of ADPS. The court issues an order saying ADPS can operate their bank account in Pondicherry.

January 1990

- General Meetings in Auroville begin a process of clarification and information about the case and what the community should do.

February 1990

- Auroville Council discusses the situation with the executives of Aurelec and members of the Task Force.

March 1990

- General meeting to take the decision in regard to Aurelec. Community agree that Aurelec is relatable to Auroville. A majority vote to draft a statement of Auroville's position which can also serve as an application to implead Auroville in the court case and simultaneously to form a group to find an out of court solution.

April 1990

- The application for Auroville to implead in the Aurelec Case in the Madras High Court is printed in the *Auroville News*. An Aurovilian subsequently impleads the application, but the High Court receives an objection that it doesn't represent the view of the whole community and awaits clarification.
- AURELEC AND THE FOUNDATION—THE MIDDLE GROUND—a report by the group appointed by the General Meeting in March—is circulated throughout Auroville. It recommends the amendment of the Act to accommodate industries in Auroville according to the guidelines that have been discussed by the Auroville Board of Commerce. These include a contractual lease of the land which is the property of the Foundation with certain environmental and accounting conditions. It also recommends that "relatability" be defined according to the Minister's speech in the Indian Parliament introducing the Act (by an addendum to the Act), thereby making it possible for Aurelec to be outside the Act by definition.
- The Government of India files a counter-affidavit in the Madras High Court, which maintains that ADPS is relatable to Auroville.

were surprised to learn that they were ready to go much further than we expected. They were ready to give management, control and possession and a letter to hold off the bankers. But when our man in Delhi went to collect this letter it was always "come back next week".

Nini: I called up Delhi a few times and finally they told me that a letter had come from Auroville written by the Task Force saying that we should be given all help possible but that the community of Auroville feels that Aurelec is definitely relatable. Therefore, Delhi couldn't give anything in writing to us.

Kalya: We had another meeting with them in Madras. That meeting was attended by all the concerned parties and it was pointed out that it was legally impossible for the Government to give Aurelec what they had agreed to in Delhi, even if Auroville wanted to.

Nini: Someone tried to bring the discussion to a conclusion by saying that Aurelec doesn't want ownership, but only control, and as control is linked with ownership, it is something Auroville doesn't want to give. There it is. The ultimate control is something which cannot be given.

And then you decided to go to court.

Kalya: Yes. But I should like to make clear that we have not gone to court against the Act, or against Auroville or against the Foundation. We have gone to court against the Government who have issued orders saying that Aurelec is relatable, and is covered by that Act. It has been presented that we are fighting the Foundation, that the whole of Auroville will be destroyed and that this procedure will enable the S.A.S. [Sri Aurobindo Society] to come back. But I believe that this is completely crazy.

Doesn't your petition say some negative things about Auroville? Can it not be used as a precedent?

Nini: I got a call from the bank that within three days the accounts would be frozen so there was little time and we just pulled the petition out of the file.

Kalya: Of course it was wrongly worded. We agreed to correct the errors in the petition when this objection was raised.

Why do you deny any relatability under the present Act, while you have accepted it under the previous one?

Kalya: Under the first Act we didn't need anybody's signature to enter into new liabilities. There was absolutely no change because after we handed over the management it was given back to us the next day. The only thing we agreed to was to inform if we were creating immovable assets. At no point did that Act restrict our activities.

But under the Foundation, Aurelec Trust does not exist. And that gives rise to a great number of questions. For example the question of guarantors for bank loans. Who the guarantors would be is not even clear. And this is not the only problem: for anything we do here, we need piles of permissions, licenses, from maybe twenty bodies in the Government. These details have to be worked out. But Aurelec couldn't survive the two or three years it would take for all this to be formulated.

But are not these powers delegated to you under the Foundation?

Kalya: Would you delegate the power to enter into a one crore loan and determine what the collateral would be? I wouldn't. Even if this power were delegated to me, how could I risk the Foundation? I don't mind jeopardizing ADPS because if I take a wrong decision only Aurelec Trust goes down and not the whole Foundation. Suppose ADPS goes bankrupt. Has the Foundation to be responsible for ADPS's debts? Imagine the repercussions it would have for the Foundation! Could any unit in the Foundation obtain again a bank's help? That's going to

be tough.

To me it makes much better business sense to keep the commercial units separate.

Can you envisage Aurelec being in the Foundation?

Kalya: Not today. But in a few years, I can very well imagine that it can be worked out. I am not saying that it will but it can be, I have no doubt.

Nini: But also look at it from a different angle. What eventually happens regarding Aurelec is one issue. The other issue is that Auroville should prepare ways for future industries to come. Auroville can't be on the dole for the rest of its life. There are many people around the world who would like to do something and have the profits going to Auroville. For that, safeguards have to be set up, and responsible guidelines. I don't think Auroville has the right to close those doors. We started in the ABC to work on some guidelines with a contract to enforce them, but there was not much interest.

Kalya: What we want to have is voluntary participation in Auroville. You cannot force people to participate.

But if you leave it voluntary, there might be more non-relatability.

Kalya and Nini: And why not?

Nini: I should like to add that the interest in keeping Aurelec alive is not personal. People don't understand that. There's a perception of Aurelec in Auroville that is quite different from the reality that Aurelec is. Aurelec is probably ten times less profitable than any handicraft unit of Auroville. These are things people don't know or do not understand.

So the question is also how to break the stereotypes and undercurrents that make the communication process so difficult.

Kalya: All our communication has been with members of the Task Force. It is only since the Council called us that we ex-

plained our side ourselves. It's more effective when you are talking to people who want to know, rather than to people who want to inform. My concept of the Council people was quite different from what I saw in reality. Finally we are all the same, trying to get out of one problem or the other. Communication is really the solution.

Still there seems to be a breakdown in communication because you say the business point of view cannot really be appreciated.

Kalya: Well, being a businessman has still a negative tone in Auroville. On top of that there are those who think that there are large profits in Aurelec and that not enough money is flowing towards Auroville. Some people feel that the way in which Aurelec makes its donations to Auroville is unacceptable.

But I must add that it is not like the past, when people wouldn't look at you on the road. It's not like that with this story—nothing at all. People are more relaxed and that's a good point.

Is there a way out of the court process at this stage?

Kalya: I think it is up to Auroville to simply convince the Government to withdraw the order. But this will probably only be possible when people agree that Aurelec can be outside the Foundation, at least for now. If that order is withdrawn, then we withdraw our writ petition and the case closes. Then there is no question of a domino effect, no question of the Act being jeopardized, no question of anything. But that presently seems to be impossible. When you think about it for two seconds it is stupid. It is easy to say that Aurelec has made the first step but there is only One first step and that was to send us the order the first day.

Interview by Bill and Alan

The Aurelec Case: The View of the Task Force

Michael Tait briefly represents the position taken by the members of the Task Force.

From the beginning, our discussion with Ulli, Kalya and Nini, the executives of Aurelec Data Processing Systems over the last 18 months have been hindered by a basic difference in viewpoint. Stated simply, ADPS executives considered that *since they did not want* ADPS to be legally part of the Auroville Foundation they should be excluded and that this was possible if Auroville supported it. We considered that this choice was not legally open to us and for us the resolution of their real or imagined functional difficulties as a unit within the frame of the Auroville Foundation was the only subject which could usefully be discussed.

The legal position is that the Parliament of India has passed an Act which brings into one institutional entity those things

Auroville (Emergency Provisions) Act, 1980, now, in order to avoid being brought under the Foundation, they have taken the position that ADPS is not and never has been related to Auroville.

We could not accept that Truth is contingent on convenience. Nevertheless, we have had numerous discussions to find out if there would be a possible acceptable solution to put before the community.

The conditions under which the Aurelec managers would consider ADPS as part of the Foundation are in practice those of a de-facto owner. Whilst accepting that the land and buildings could on paper be the property of the Foundation, they required a legally binding agreement that the assets, future development and allocation of profits be irrevocably under their



"Whatever the inclusion of ADPS in Auroville under the Foundation may bring, we have to face these together as a collective."

which are relatable to and form a part of Auroville. It is not in the power of any government officer or of the Residents' Assembly to voluntarily exclude from the Foundation anything that is known to be relatable. Only by amendment of the Act by the Parliament of India could such a thing be conceivably possible.

Despite the fact that the trustees have always declared that Aurelec is an Auroville unit and continue to maintain that it is spiritually, socially and economically related to Auroville, and despite the fact that they declared ADPS to be relatable to Auroville under the previous

control. Auroville was to be allowed only municipal type rights over building design and environmental regulations. Whilst this has been the spirit of the relationship between Aurelec and Auroville in the past, to give paper ownership to the Foundation and actual and irrevocable ownership rights to the management is not what is intended under the Foundation Act, and is not the expression of the Auroville Charter the Foundation should represent. Consequently, we have not been able to find a mutually acceptable solution.

Given that Aurelec's position is not accepted either by Auroville or by the

"SO FAR not referred to, but important, are the psychological factors at play. For example, because over the years Aurelec has from time to time been the target of criticism or hostility, defensive and independent attitudes and behaviour patterns have taken root there. Equally, because Auroville has from time to time felt there were reasons to doubt Aurelec's willingness to go along with the 'Auroville process' and in reaction to the above mentioned attitudes and behaviour patterns, there exists an over-readiness to find fault with Aurelec's present stand. In these circumstances, it seems clear that trust has to be re-established, which requires time and an uninterrupted input of appropriate behaviour backed by appropriate feeling."

(from: AURELEC AND THE FOUNDATION — THE MIDDLE GROUND, a report published by a sub-group of Aurovilians on 12.4.90.)

The Aurelec Case: Who's who?

Aurelec Trust is a ten year old Charitable Trust with four units:

1. Aurelec Data Processing Systems (ADPS):

The computer manufacturing unit, with an eight-crore turnover in India.

2. Auroville Electrical Service (AVES):

Installing and maintaining electrical connections in Auroville and liaison with the Tamil Nadu Electricity Board.

3. Prisma

A graphic design and advertising agency.

4. Photo typesetting unit

A small, recently formed activity.

Aurelec Trustees

Nini (Sunaina Mandeem): Managing trustee and executive of ADPS.

Ulli (Ulrich Blass): Executive of ADPS.

Kalya: Executive of ADPS.

Dhandapani: Manager at ADPS.

Alain (Bernard): Executive of SAIER (Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research)

Toine (van Megen): Matrimandir Management Group

Members of the Task Force

This body was set up to take care of Auroville's external relations. It consisted of the following Aurovilians: Alain Bernard, Michael Tait, Krishna Tewari, Prem Malik, Frederick Schultze-Buxloh.

Government of India, the ADPS executives have taken the question of their relatability to the court.

In order to support their case, they have made certain statements in their affidavit which cannot remain unchallenged by the Auroville community. To have the opportunity to do this it is necessary that we be impleaded in the court case.

As to the difficulties anticipated by ADPS management there have been a series of meetings between various groups of Aurovilians, largely those directly concerned with business units, and the ADPS executives. At these meetings the disadvantages and advantages of having business activities as a part of the Foundation were debated at length.

No insurmountable difficulty has been identified and there was a consistent consensus of opinion that neither the Residents' Assembly nor the Governing Board would interfere unjustly in the management of any commercial unit and that operation of ADPS would be able to continue much as they had for the last 7 years under the management of the Central Government in the person of the Administrator. This assurance was also independently given by the senior officer of the Government of India responsible for the Auroville file.

These conclusions have proved to be correct so far. Since coming under the Act, several commercial units have secured substantial bank loans and other facilities and any initial confusion there may have been about guarantors for the bank, who should sign etc., has been quickly resolved. The only unit continuing to have difficulties with its bankers is ADPS and this is the direct result of their having put themselves in a legal limbo in which it is impossible for Auroville, the Government of India or their bankers to help them.

We believe that the force and influence represented by the Auroville Foundation will play a positive rather than a negative role in resolving the difficulties faced by Auroville businesses in India.

Of course no one is able to predict with certainty how our lives will be affected by our coming under the umbrella of the Auroville Foundation Act. Problems particular to this unique status will have to be faced both on a collective and on an in-

dividual level. The Foundation is but one stage in the evolution of Auroville and is without question a positive improvement on the stages experienced over the last twenty years under the ownership of SAS, under a collection of legally independent trusts and bodies, and under the direct management of the Central Government. The framework provided by the Act not only provides for a national recognition of the importance of Auroville. It also provides a freedom for development of Auroville and a practical implementation of the Charter undreamed of by those of us who searched for years for a way out of the mistakes of the past.

The practical expression of the Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother that Auroville represents has to include all aspects of life, has to be truly a integral action on the collective level. It is inconceivable that we exclude from Auroville all the myriad forces and powers at play in the word of commerce and business.

- Is convenience and competitiveness with the rest of the world the criteria for including or excluding an activity from Auroville?

- Is the size and complexity of an activity a criteria for excluding it from the Auroville Foundation? A small business but not large? High School but not University?

It is perfectly understood that businesses whose owners wish to be connected with Auroville in some way can exist independent of the Foundation. Many different degrees of connection, from the most loose to legally binding, can be envisaged and no one can be forced to join Auroville or to hand their property over to Auroville. This is not the question today in the case of those units which already are within and have from their beginning claimed that they form part of Auroville. To give the managers of these units the facility to include or exclude at will the unit from the collective body of Auroville does not seem to be in accordance with the spirit of Auroville or the Charter and it is certainly not a practical proposition functionally.

Whatever the problems that the inclusion of ADPS in Auroville under the Foundation may bring, we have to face these together as a collective.

A Crusty Problem

KOTTAKARAI BAKERY has been providing us with our daily bread (and biscuits) for many years now. As people came and people went, as our internal organization changed and new enterprises sprang up and disappeared without trace, the bakery continued, a symbol of dedication and reliability. Until, that is, a few weeks ago, when the bakery temporarily closed. AUROVILLE TODAY spoke with Otto, who was managing this unit for the past 8 years.

AUROVILLE TODAY: *You've decided to step out of the bakery after working there so long. Was it a valuable experience?*

Otto: I wouldn't have missed a single day. When you're working ten hours a day, six days a week, it's a very intense experience. You learn, for example, what your capacities are. Often I felt that I'd reached my physical and psychological limit and then I'd see that I could go further. I'd suddenly see when I was putting up barriers. And I learned to appreciate

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the villagers who work in the bakery. Sometimes we would get irritated by something or somebody, but they have this capacity to laugh, to absorb a lot. After all, we arrived here, in the middle of them, like a bomb!

When you do something interesting in a small team and for a long time, you get to feel where the pulse, the life of that thing is. And you try, as far as possible, to live according to that truth. So when something comes from outside, a bureaucratic directive that feels artificial, it's hard to accept. You don't feel there's a real truth behind it.

Which brings us to one of the reasons why you stopped at the bakery: your problem with Auroville Electrical Service.

Otto: In itself, it was a minor thing. We wanted to make an electricity connection for the new bakery that we're constructing. We had a choice—either to do it through the Auroville Electrical Service (AVES) or go direct to the Tamil Nadu Electricity Board. For reasons of cost and speed we went straight to the TNEB. However, they needed a letter of recommendation from the Officer on Special Duty before they could run the line, and he refused, telling us that we had to go through the AVES. We took it to the Council, and after a few weeks they reached the same conclusion.

Rolf recently took over as one of the new managers of the Auroville Electrical Service. AUROVILLE TODAY asked him to respond to Otto's comments. The following are extracts from an interview with him.

"A monopoly situation is not good. I agree with Otto here. If a customer is forced to use one channel only, it creates resentment and spoils the relationship. For this reason alone, I believe the monopoly of the AVES should be broken and people be given a choice. If you don't have a choice, you take away the dynamic of individual initiative. There are other problems associated with centralization—a bureaucratic structure is created which may get out of control and it puts a lot of power in the hands of a few people.

On the other hand, there is a strength in dealing with the Tamil Nadu Electricity Board through one body only. We have never paid bribes, and we've received very good cooperation from them. If Aurovilians start dealing with the TNEB directly, there may be a temptation for individuals to speed up the services by paying

To us this sounded like a monopoly situation—we had lost our freedom of choice. And this doesn't seem in the spirit of Auroville.

What were the arguments put forward by AVES?

Otto: They said if we didn't go through them that we might be asked for bribes. Also, that if we apply for a connection in the name of the new bakery, and if later the purpose of the building changes, there are some problems in transferring the line to whoever wants to use it next. AVES always apply for a new connection in the name of Auroville as a whole to overcome this. But we were also willing to do this. I'm not in Kindergarten. If I can deal with TNEB directly, and I encounter a problem I can't handle, I'm very willing to use the AVES. But it's a matter of principle—I should be given the choice.

My impression at the moment is that we are given less and less space in Auroville to make our own decisions. It's fine that the land and assets are taken care of by the new Foundation. But the management of units should be left with the managers, who generally know what's best. We have to trust that Aurovilians will do a good job.

If we centralize everything, superficially it looks 'collective'. But this is artificial. If we're really together in the spirit, we don't need these outer forms. And as long as we are together in spirit, we can find different ways to reaching the same goal. Let those who want centralization be a part of a centralized system. But let others go their own way.

And the future?

Otto: Before this happened, I'd already decided to go to Austria for a few months to get a sense of perspective on Auroville. When I return, I don't know what I'll do. I never thought of myself as a baker. It was just something that needed to be done, and I did it. If you take up a certain responsibility, you have to go through, whatever it brings.

As for the bakery, a new team will begin there next week. I wish them luck! □

something extra. And soon, everybody would have to do this.

Again, standards cannot be controlled if everybody makes their own arrangements about how they will wire their houses. Good circuit breakers are much more expensive than cheap fuses—and some people want to save money. Also, if people do not observe standard colour coding, serious accidents can occur. When AVES signs an application on behalf of Auroville, if something goes wrong, AVES is responsible. So it's important to keep standards high. And centralization makes it easier to control such standards.

The real challenge is to break the monopoly situation of AVES while not losing all the advantages that accompany centralization. How to do this? I don't know."

Interviews by Alan

The Advent of the Super Fungus

IT CAN BE traced to a few centuries before Christ—yes, a fungus. Aurovilians, relentlessly at the cutting edge of evolution, and thirsty, have rediscovered a fungus from which a special drink is brewed. Cheers! Gone forever is the old debilitation of alcohol, the destructive stimulation of tea/coffee, the prison of sugary soft drinks—all thanks to this transforming fungus, this secret mushroom, which can now be found growing in the City of Dawn. At last, something that tastes good and is not only healthy but healing.

The fungus is not yet widespread in Auroville and there are still unconverted people with old drinking habits. But fear not! The fungus can have two 'babies' a month—so it is only a matter of time...

The fungus originally came from Asia. In the year 414 a Korean doctor called Kombu cured the emperor of Japan of an incurable disease by using it. The 'brew' became known as Kombu-cha (the 'cha' means 'tea') and that is the more common name today.

How was the fungus rediscovered? Well, a few years ago, Japanese scientists went to a Siberian village to study some people famous for their longevity and good health. (In the region there are many healthy people of over a hundred years old.) They discovered there was a fungus in this village that was passed from friend to friend as a symbol of love and friendship.

From the fungus a drink was made, known as 'Kargasok' tea. When analyzed by the scientists, the 'tea' contained 17 elements indispensable to the body. When the media picked up this story, the 'tea' spread rapidly over Asia and elsewhere.

Doctors have used Kombucha for treating cancer patients; sports specialists promote it for long-distance runners; it is said to help in metabolic processes and detoxify the system. Kombucha devotees claim that besides improving health and cleansing the system, there are side-effects. But these are pleasant ones: more energy, better concentration, better digestion and the strengthening of glands.

The Kombucha fungus 'digests' two litres of ordinary sweetened tea over a period of about ten to fifteen days. The resulting brew is diluted with water according to taste. If one is tempted to become a heavy drinker then it acts as a laxative.

How did it reach Auroville? A woman in Holland, promoting Kombucha, sent some to an Aurovilian visiting Belgium and another Aurovilian in Holland. Then she sent a batch to Australia, where yet another Aurovilian picked it up. The three Kombucha-fungi independently arrived in Auroville at the same time. This is the first miracle, and probably not the last.

To test the longevity claim, AUROVILLE TODAY will do a follow-up in a hundred years. Here's to your health! — Bill

AUROVILLE STATISTICS

The Visa Service and Entry Group provided us with up-to-date numbers of Aurovilians and Newcomers per nationality. Date: 13.4.90.

Algerian	1	Indian	215
American	27	Italian	19
Argentinian	6	Japanese	2
Australian	4	Moroccan	1
Austrian	4	New Zealander	1
Belgian	17	Spanish	5
Brazilian	4	Sri Lankan	1
British	22	Swedish	13
Canadian	13	Swiss	18
Dutch	37	Tibetan	1
French	134	Tunisian	1
French/Irish	1	West German	100

Total number of Aurovilians and newcomers:

647

(This number excludes 56 Aurovilians temporarily out of station. The total number of children below 18 years is approx. 150)

How many newcomers?

In 1988, 59 newcomers came, 7 left again; this makes a total of 52. This number includes 15 French, 10 Indians and 8 Germans.

In 1989, 90 came, 5 left; total 85 (included 20 French, 18 Indians, 17 Germans)

In 1990 (until April) 18 came, 0 left; total 18 (included 9 Indian, 2 French, 1 German)

He — She

For those interested in the balance of the sexes, it turns out that (strictly in the sense of numbers!) there is a problem of male domination—as on 26.4.90, there are 337 men and 288 women in Auroville.

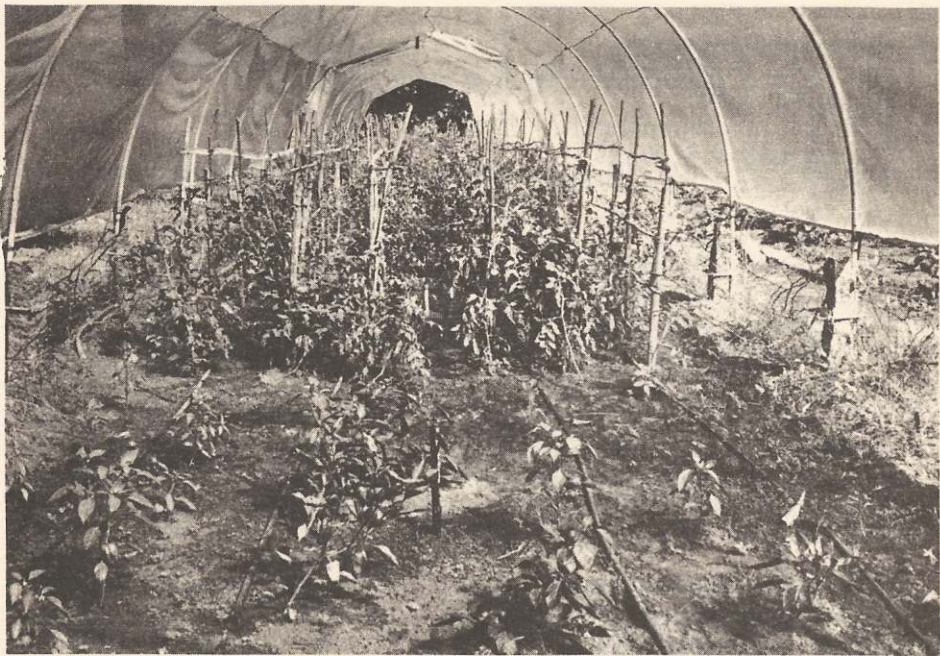
I WOULD LIKE TO RECEIVE 12 ISSUES OF AUROVILLE TODAY.

My name:

My address:

My contribution is to the amount of _____ and is enclosed/has been sent through bank or post*
This is a new subscription/ I am renewing my subscription*

(* please indicate)



Drip-irrigated greenhouse at Udayan

UNKNOWN to most is Udayan, a small one man-woman-and child community in Auroville. Situated near to the main Pondicherry-Tindivanam road, it is far from the centre of Auroville. But the place harbours some unique experiments: drip irrigation, spinner irriga-

tion which has got as its basis NPK (Nitrogen, phosphate and potash), a solid fertilizer easily available on the Indian market. If he succeeds, it will result in a cheap biological liquid fertilizer, and that would be a major breakthrough. The main problem is the fact that the Indian

It Drips and Spins in Udayan

tion, and a greenhouse to create lower temperatures. Auroville's pioneer here is Igor, German by birth, who, with his Indian wife Shrimayee, runs a small farm.

The ever-decreasing amounts of water in his 300 feet deep well forced him to search for water-saving agricultural systems. For more than 12 years now he has been testing, partly in Auroville and partly elsewhere in India, a large variety of drip- and spinner irrigation systems.

THE problem is to adapt the Western or Israeli designed systems to the conditions of South India. LDPE (Low Density Polyethylene) systems with the so-called spaghetti outlets proved to be useless as they were chewed up by jackals or disrupted by wandering animals. Other systems had micro-outlets that clogged up too quickly. They are designed for Western conditions, where water is nearly always chemically and mechanically cleansed. The presence of silt in the water in South India requires that the micro-outlets are larger than normal.



FERTILIZATION is another problem. Drip irrigation concentrates the water around the root-cones, and the tree or plant will adjust accordingly and concentrate their roots in a limited space where the supply of nutrients will soon run out. In India there is no liquid fertilizer available as yet, although experiments are going on. Igor is experimenting with a solu-

farmworkers are basically un-educated. Igor's experience is that the continuous maintenance of the system is difficult for the labourers, even after 2 years of operation. Consequently, the system will have to be as simple as possible.

THE introduction of drip irrigation in India therefore still meets with reluctance. According to Igor, hardly any of the companies in India that manufacture drip irrigation systems are doing intensive field work. As a result, the wrong type of systems are introduced in the markets. They are ultimately rejected by the farmers, notwithstanding the fact that the Indian Government gives subsidies of up to 50%.

The system Igor uses now has come from West-Germany. It consists of double walled HDPE (High Density Polyethylene) pipes of 20mm diameter. The water goes from the inner pipe to a spiral chamber in the outer pipe, and from there to the outlet. This chamber forms the micro-channel and is larger than usual. It is a very easy system, just a black pipe, and no fittings. Even if you run over it with a lorry, it is not damaged. As the pipe is just laid on the soil, it can easily be picked up and removed.

Igor considers this system the best. However, these pipes are not yet made in India. One Indian company wants to manufacture them, but has not yet started.

Like any system, these larger microchannels will eventually clog up, probably within 5 to 10 years. But then the pipes can still be used as supply pipe, for example for the micro-spinner, another development tested in Udayan. These spinners, which are made in India, throw the water out in a rotational way. They can be put on a clogged or functional HDPE pipe or any other pipe and consume only some 36 litres an hour. This system does not require much more water than the normal drip irrigation pipes, and has the advantage that the spinners can easily be cleaned.

ARE the drip- and spinner irrigation systems economically feasible? Igor is convinced that in the future they will be. Men-

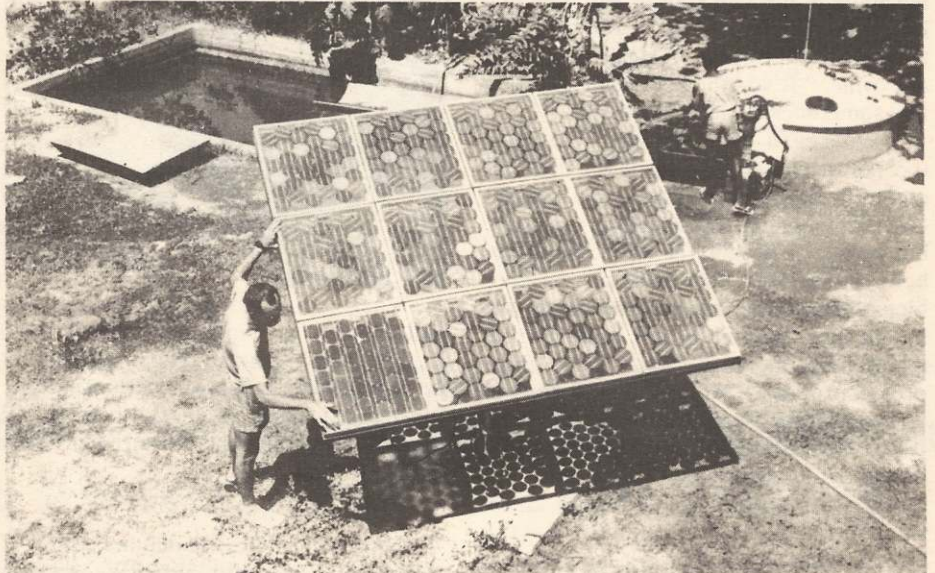
tioning the exceptional quality and quantity of his fruits and vegetables, which he sells also in his sales outlet "The Green Connection" in Pondicherry, he explains that for the future there is actually no economical alternative to drip- or spinner-irrigation. Open irrigation systems will have to be replaced by something else, as water will become one of the more expensive commodities in the years to come. The ground water table everywhere in Tamil Nadu is going down, and saving water is an absolute need.

IGOR's latest experiment is to use drip irrigation in a greenhouse. Encouraged by a study in this field by the FAO (the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization) and with the cooperation of the Indian firm of IPCL, who supplied the ultra-

violet stabilized plastic films, Igor constructed a plastic covered greenhouse. The coolness created by the evaporation of the water causes the temperature inside the greenhouse to become lower than outside. Consequently, Igor expects to supply out of season fruits within a short time.

ASKED about his dreams for the future, Igor replies that he hopes to be able to spend more time on consultancy for drip-irrigation manufacturing companies, and training for farmers. And he adds, "Anybody who does not save water is a maniac. I shall be glad if I can help to get this kind of wrong conception of nature eliminated by helping to introduce drip- and spinner irrigation into the agricultural world."

Interview by Carel



Solar panel arrangement for a solar (photovoltaic) pump. See article next page.

The cow that panicked

Is communication with animals possible? The AUROVILLE TODAY team has its serious doubts. However, Veritas premittur, non opprimitur (Truth can be put down, not kept down) as the ancients used to say. Therefore we decided to publish this story communicated through Suhasini, leaving it to the reader to determine its true value.

It was a normal, hot midsummer afternoon of grazing on the forbidden side of the fence, when suddenly the stillness made me realize that I had been left behind. The others had moved on and even the skinny kid with the stick who prods us frequently was nowhere to be seen.

"Everything is still fine", I told myself. I broke through the fence, but, seeing no other cow around, I panicked and raced down the path. Then, suddenly, I found myself skidding along a moving sidewalk, ventilated by venturi winds and punctuated by landscaped parks. Sliding into the multilevel walkways in the sky, I could just cast a quick glance at the unfinished pink-coloured overhanging volumetric architec-

tural fantasies ("Are they awaiting their promised resources from New Delhi?", I found myself wondering) before I bumped into a number of electric vehicles...and woke up from my ruminating.

"What happened?", I kept asking myself. "What made me lose grip on the reality?" And then I realised that I should not have been so greedy, and eaten that discarded copy of Auroville Today No.15 with its lofty article on "Planning for the Environment". Understanding that its concrete visions of past restructured projects were not digestible, I turned to find the sixty per cent landscaped greens where I can graze in a joy of deep concrete fraternity. □



A Quiet Achievement

Tency speaks about his work in Auroville.

Beginnings

In 1972, Tency visited Pondicherry and had a personal darshan with Mother. "That's what brought me here". But first he went back to the West to complete his studies and earn some money. He finally returned to Auroville in 1977.

Between 1977-83 he worked on Matrimandir, at the same time doing afforestation work and developing a small farm in Centre Field. And that farm was the beginning of something else.

"Since I had some animals, I decided I wanted to have a biogas unit. I knew nothing about it, but Ulli Hauser had built one in Djaima. So we got together to build the first ferro-cement biogas plant in Auroville." It was the beginning of a long and sometimes testing partnership.

"We began with nothing, no special tools or machinery. We made the first unit under the Banyan Tree here — and it wasn't easy! The digester was simple to construct, but we had to rebuild the gas holder twice before it worked." They made several more biogas plants in the same 'home-made' way before they decided to seek funding from the DNES¹⁾. For that they had to write a project proposal. "And, of course, none of us had any experience in proposal writing. It was all very vague and I made a wrong calculation somewhere. I claimed we would make a biogas plant for Rs. 2,000, when the actual cost was double!" But the DNES sent a technical mission to Auroville to see what they'd achieved so far — and they were sufficiently impressed to award them a grant of 7½ lakhs to manufacture small-scale ferro-cement biogas plants.

"They come here and they're astonished. They say, 'you actually use these techniques? Wow!'"

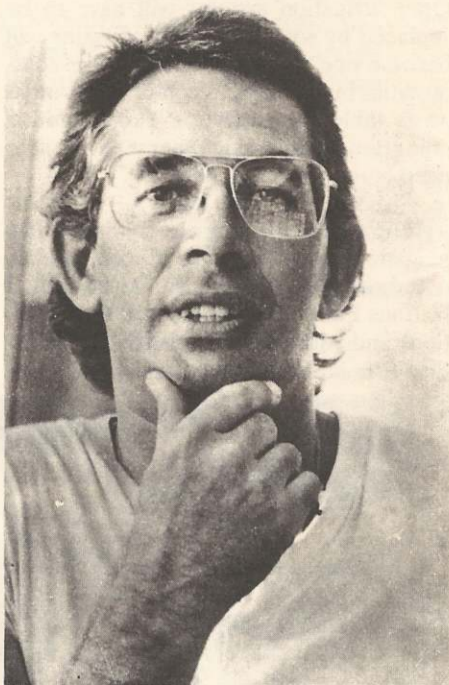
"It's the ferro-cement that's the important part. Biogas plants are manufactured from brick and steel all over India. But ferro-cement has advantages. It's about the same cost as the conventional design, but unlike that design, it doesn't corrode. This is a big advantage as the normal steel gas holders, without regular maintenance, are finished in 3 years."

The adventure

Everything seemed to be going well. Ulli had some interesting design ideas — and a large workshop with an adjacent office was under construction, thanks to the D.N.E.S. grant. But then the problems began. "The last year of the D.N.E.S. project," recalls Tency, "I hardly got one good night's sleep. I just didn't know whether we could make it or not. The first year was spent in constructing the workshop and office, and this was my responsibility. But when that was finished, it was up to Ulli to deliver the product. And he had nothing on paper, no design, no plans! On top of that, in that final year he had to return to Germany! When he left, not one biogas unit was ready—I had to finish the first one — and the DNES was expecting a report. I had to keep asking them for an extension while Ulli and I corresponded with floppy discs, fax messages and letters — which frequently didn't arrive. At the end, it was O.K. But it had really been an adventure!"

1) Housing and Urban Development Corporation, Ministry of Urban Development, Government of India.

2) Department of Non-Conventional Energy Sources, Ministry of Energy, Government of India.



When the D.N.E.S. project ended, they had hoped to get funding to build 30 to 40 biogas plants in a local village. This has not yet materialized, but since then they've constructed about 15 biogas plants, and most of these are in use in Auroville. They are all working well.

Branching out

At the same time, in a manner typical of Auroville's organic, intuitive growth process, another avenue had opened up. Ulli had developed a ferro-cement technique for manufacturing doors. "A technique", as Tency puts it, "which, as far as we know, is not being used anywhere else." The first products of this technique were thin, ferro-cement doors for houses and store-rooms. These doors have many advantages. They are easy to make, durable, termite-proof, fire-proof and they don't warp. Above all, "they are the cheapest doors on the market at the moment" — even if they win no prizes for beauty! "India has huge housing schemes", explains Tency. "Recently, there was a project to build 1,000 houses, which would require 2,000 doors. The contractors estimated that the cheapest, flimsiest wood door would cost a total of 12 lakhs. In ferro-cement, we could have done it for 7½ lakhs." And those ferro-cement doors opened other doors as well. HUDCO²⁾, the organization responsible for massive housing projects in India, were impressed by them and agreed to fund a training centre for masons in appropriate building technology (ferro-cement and mud) — the Auroville Building Centre. The first training course has just been completed.

We are used to Auroville being something of a showpiece for afforestation. But for ferro-cement? "Auroville is one of the most outstanding examples of the use of ferro-cement", points out Tency. "Apart from projects like Matrimandir and the biogas workshop, almost every house has some ferro-cement elements within it. And what impresses the experts most is that in Auroville we're not simply setting up one or two model demonstration projects which don't have much relevance to our daily life, something that happens often in India. We're actually living it. They come here and they're astonished. They say, 'you actually use these techniques? Wow!'"

Tency himself has been something of a one-man testing ground for some of the appropriate technology and renewable energy systems that are filtering into Auroville. Apart from biogas and ferro-ce-

Operating in Auroville:

- Over 50 houses equipped with photovoltaic panels
- 8 solar pumps (photovoltaic)
- 27 water pumping windmills
- 2 small power generating windmills
- Over 15 biogas plants
- Over 70 solar cookers
- Over 10 solar water heaters
- Several solar food dryers
- Solar curing hoods for ferro-cement prefabricated elements
- One Sterling engine (for pumping water)

Manufactured regularly:

- Ferro-cement housing elements (doors and roofing sections)
- Ferro-cement biogas plants (floating drum type).
- High performance multi-blade windmills (made of steel).
- Low-tech "Cretan" windmills (made of wood).
- Electronic devices for use in photovoltaic systems.

ment construction, he was one of the first Aurovilians to have a solar panel, a solar cooker and a biological waste-water recycling plant. Today, Auroville has in use about 30 windmills, over 305 photovoltaic panels, many solar cookers and a number of biogas units (see box). Tency believes that Auroville now is one of the major centres of renewable energy in South India.

And the future? "We have some immediate projects that we want to develop and finish. There's the Auroville Reception and Information Centre next to Bharat Nivas. There's also a project for installing windmills, smokeless stoves and solar cookers in a neighbouring village. There's the training programme for masons, sponsored by HUDCO. And there are on-going projects like 'Verité' community and 'Quiet' healing project. Later this year, the University of Roorkee — who have the most experience in India with ferro-cement techniques — are sending us someone to conduct a higher-level training for engineers, architects and entrepreneurs. When the new C.S.R.³⁾ conference room is completed, it will really facilitate such training.

Further ahead, if I allow myself to dream, it would be fantastic if every household in Auroville had a solar panel! It's difficult to predict, however. The pattern so far has been one of a gradual unfolding of possibilities. In CSR, we've never sat down and planned anything! It's just that there's a dynamic here which drives the people. And above all, I enjoy my work."

Interview by Alan

3) C.S.R.: Centre for Scientific Research, situated near Revelation.

DIVINE ANARCHY OR THE NEW ARCADIA?

*In this land
Of swallowing plains
Baked red ochre
Years for the rains
Her yawning ravines
Witness the desperate refrain
More water, more feed, open fields to seed
To be clawed and scalloped
By impossible Need*

*A flash of vision in '68
Mao, Lenin, Che, Verité
A small knot of seekers
Starts the caravan
To Eu Topos, the good place
A new communal élan.*

*Pregnant promise
Lush green thighs
Bounteous forests
Life force arise!
A sickness cured
By these crazy-eyed whites.*

*Through the shimmering haze
A colossal grey moon
Bites the sky
As played girders bloom
Atop arches expectant
We're here to stay!
Cries the pen of Anger
The soul of the City, this space bouquet.*

*Aurobindo, the Mother, divine anarchy
Provide their own brand
For the yearning free
Man after man
The conscious sublime
A oneness society, Arcadian galaxy
Where we can, at last, more truly Be.*

*Clustered survivors
Scattered seeds
Viva la revolution!
No it doesn't matter
Vitalists, pragmatists
Her Dream doth shatter.*

*Cynicism, egotism, choked revolt
The cosmic dice rolls
Rolls the planned result
Yet here lives a chance
A third eye of being
For co-evolution
Or harmony unseen
A perpetual Experiment
Of dimensions undreamed.*

Julian Dahl.



Birthday greetings... to who?

These are extracts from an article sent to AUROVILLE TODAY by Ariel Browne from USA during her visit to Pondicherry and Auroville.

THE Auroville Birthday, 28th Feb. 1990, was beautiful: Mother's symbol in flowers on the central terrace area below the urn, a restrained bonfire with supple hands of light sending up bunches of golden powdered sparks—a childlike response to the supramental heart of the Matrimandir and little candle lights—hundreds of them—representing our eager and innocent souls surrendering to unity in the early morning velvet dark.

What a shock, then, to this tender inner overture of unity, to hear the Auroville inauguration message recited in Tamil, Sanskrit, Hindi, French and English by all male voices except for the French version recited by the Mother. To double the offense, we also heard that "This is a greeting for all men..."

But I also felt an encompassing sadness at the lack of sensitivity among Aurovilians to the effect of language on consciousness. Whether these are historical messages or current, our consciousness is always in the NOW...

Thorough researches have been conducted in the U.S. which clearly indicate that most people picture a male human being when the words "he-his-man-mankind-men" are used even in a context where the word is intended to denote a mixed gender group.

Most American and European publishing houses... have now a proof team which corrects for inclusive language. This is in response to the great hue and cry which is being raised by the reading public in these countries...

Evidence is strong, that psychicism of the being leads to partnership in all things. Because this is an absolutely new way for humanity as a whole, does it not make sense to thoughtfully, carefully support that new potential in what we do-say-think? In this case, the inauguration message to Auroville wants a one-word amendment, in keeping with the Mother's beautiful benediction for Auroville of 8.9.65:

"Greetings from Auroville to all [people] of goodwill. Are invited to Auroville all those who thirst for progress and aspire to a higher and truer life."

NEW PUBLICATIONS

THE Auroville Publications Group continues to try to meet the demand for information on Auroville. The leaflet series that includes *Introduction to Auroville* and *Guide for Guests* is being expanded to include several new leaflets on other major work areas. One entitled *Matrimandir* is now printed and available, as well as a new introduction called *Introducing Auroville*. In preparation are leaflets on greenwork, renewable energy, village development and education. The leaflets sell for one rupee each, exclusive of mailing. *Introducing Auroville* is translated into German and French and will be printed soon. Auroville International Quebec has printed in French a new leaflet called *Auroville*..

The Spirit of Auroville has a new title

The chronological index of Mother's messages and conversations about Auroville called *The Spirit of Auroville* now has a new title, *Auroville in Mother's Words*. Publication has been delayed because of copyright permission. This book has been through a very long process that seems to require still more time. It is a book for Aurovilians and friends of Auroville.

Brochure

A new 40 page brochure on Auroville has just been printed. It is available at fifteen rupees a copy.

Please address all inquiries about publications to the Auroville Publications Group, Auroville Press, Auroville, Kottakuppam 605104, India.

L e t t e r

Bureaucracies East & West

After reading Roger and his team's adventures in the maze of Madras bureaucracy, "Of Columns, Docks and Sphinx-like smiles...", perhaps your readers might like to compare it with bureaucracy, British style.

Would it be true to say that Roger and his intrepid friends come from the western world? Then they are indeed used to bureaucracy working well for them. Unfortunately, the same system is used to "destuff" the immigrants from the third world

I have lost my family, house, money and occasionally my liberty too, all because I followed the official guidelines and made a complaint against the police. And when that was turned down, more regulations x,y, subsections a,b,c, para n... were consulted. A miracle or two has saved me from further wrongful imprisonment or from being certified insane. For a people that pride themselves on their humorous sense (sic) they are rather miffed at my still smiling through it all.

So why do Roger and his merry band need a Virgil in Madras? Why not learn the local language, have another cup of tea and observe the passing scene. For hell it is to be in Christian/Jewish lands and your skin is not white like them.

Jiten Bardwaj,
England.

AUROVILLE TODAY tries to appear monthly and is distributed to Aurovilians and friends of Auroville in India and abroad. Editorial team: Alan, An-nemarie, Bill, Carel, Roger, Sonja, Sven, Tineke, Yanne. Design: Franz (Prisma). Printed at Auroville Press.

Janet: One of the pioneers — and still going strong!

WHILE SHE was still a very small child she was fascinated with India. Later, when she was in her twenties, she came to India and spent almost a year travelling before she arrived in Pondicherry in June 1968. It was supposed to be a one-day stop-over between Tiruchy and Madras but then she met a lady in the Auroville office whom she had met one year before in Kyoto, Japan. This woman said to her: "Janet! You have to meet the Mother and I can arrange it."

Within a week she met Mother. "And after that meeting I simply forgot to leave, whereas before I was determined to go back to the man I was in love with in Canada".

This was in 1968, a few months after the inauguration ceremony. At that time there was a daily Landrover trip from Pondy to Auroville, which served as a transport service both for people who wanted to come to work and to carry supplies, especially water, to the people in Forecomers—the only pioneer settlement in Auroville at that time. Janet often came to Auroville in this jeep, but mostly she spent her mornings in "The Indian Coffee House" in Pondicherry—which was then the gathering place for most of the young foreigners—and her afternoons in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram library, reading *The Life Divine*. Finally she had enough of this rather aimless way of living, and asked Mother for a job in one of the Ashram Departments. But the day before she was to begin this job, a friend said, "I am going to Auroville today to start building my house there. Would you like to come?" She said, "Yes", she spent her first night in Auroville—and she stayed. Soon she requested Mother's permission to build her house and for Rs. 1000 (then about 100 dollars) she built the most beautiful house she could imagine. "It was very basic then. There was no electricity and we had to carry water from more than 100 metres, just to water a flower bush. But we were young and Auroville was a great adventure, so we didn't care about the material inconvenience."

At that time it was extremely difficult to make anything grow, because the ground was completely devastated and the sun was beating down in the treeless desert.

"During those early days we didn't do very much except keep things together."

But how did they survive?

"We were provided by the administration with bread from the Ashram and vegetables from the market, plus wages for our workers and spending money to cover the rest. I got Rs 20 per week. Others were more simple in life-style than I was and asked for only Rs 5 or Rs 10 a week. I also had some personal money which covered things like staying in Pondy, where I used to go twice a week for classes on *The Life Divine*. It also covered extra's like a cycle, tools, repairs etc. It was a very simple life. I remember craving for ice-cream in that



time because we had no milk-products at all." After a year she went to Canada for two years, to earn money to live in Auroville. During this time the Toronto Branch of UNESCO accepted the water project she had written on developing water resources for Auroville.

When she left in 1970, there were less than 20 people in the Centre area and nobody was living in the Greenbelt. But when she came back, everything was different. The administration under Shyam Sundar was in place, Matrimandir had begun and there were communities starting up all over the Greenbelt. Her old house was occupied but she was given another

house where she still lives now.

In 1973, she began to clean scaffolding pipes at Matrimandir. At that time there was an idea that Aurovilians should earn some money for Matrimandir. The Auroville women began to train some girls from the village to crochet. "Not much came of it at that time, but I learned a lot and started Tamil lessons with an educated girl in the village." After a year or two, however, a few small orders for crocheted lamp-shades came and in 1975 a small hut was built as a workshop. The workshop was successful in giving regularly to the community and provided Janet with a very basic maintenance until 1983. "Initially I was not very interested in earning money for myself, but when my children were born everything changed. I needed to be able to live properly—without any luxury—and take care of them."

"However", Janet points out, "there came a point when a business has to make a big jump to remain successful. I was not ready to make that big jump because I became more interested in Auroville's overall development." For the last two years she has been part of the Auroville Council. "When I came to Auroville, there was nothing and everything was possible. But over the years, the feeling grew that less and less was possible, because of the bureaucracy that grew from being involved with the Government, and some of the directions we had gone in seemed harder and harder to reverse. Yet since I have been working in the Council, I experience again that everything is possible, just as I did in the beginning. I feel we should not limit our possibilities and should evolve a form of government that involves every single Aurovillian."

One has to live each day as a challenge, one has to face each situation with the confidence that everything can be solved. Sometimes I do worry about the future of my children, for example, but then I remember not to believe anymore in impossibilities of any sort."

Interview by Yanne

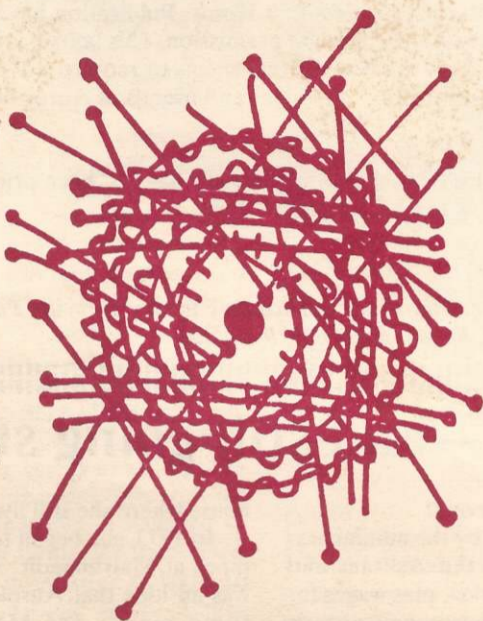
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In this issue: Aurelec and related issues; Kombucha; Drip Irrigation; etc. May 1990 Number Seventeen



Photo Sven

Light and shade in Auroville...

"Nature abhors a vacuum"

Like last year, approximately 125 Aurovilians will be "temporarily out of station" this summer. As the temperature rises, bullocks go berserk, birds plummet from the trees. And the Aurovilians who remain are sometimes overwhelmed by strange fantasies...

BRIAN'S first surprise was the welcome. Over the years, dark rumours had reached AVI Ireland about an accommodation crisis in Auroville. So he had expected the worst. But as soon as he stepped out of the battered auto-rickshaw at Bharat Nivas, he was accosted by a furtive character with dark glasses and an "I'm the Future" T-shirt. "Wanna house? Two fridges, stereo, pop-up toaster, fax, tame mongoose. Three months. Maintenance. No questions asked." It seemed too good to be true. Soon, however, he had settled in. True, his friend had omitted to mention one or two details, like the bullock with the bad temper, the dry well and the local pesticide war—but he didn't want to appear ungrateful. After all, this was Auroville, the future.

Next day, he was offered a job, working in the food store. It seemed a bit premature—he hadn't yet mastered the Indian currency—but it was a good chance to meet more people. The first afternoon, he was arranging 2-Minute Noodle packets when a bony hand clutched feverishly at his arm. "Where did you learn that?" "Pardon?" "Why didn't you tell us you were coming?"

Brian allowed himself to be led into a large office full of maps, models and plastic tea-cups. In a moment, a group of people were sitting at his feet. "Look, I think there's some mistake..." His guide removed his hand. "No mistake, my dear friend." He turned to the others. "It was beautiful. The Galaxy arranged in Maggi Noodle packets." There was a collective sigh, a long, low tremor of excitement, that made Brian feel suddenly prickly. Perhaps, after all, he shouldn't have come in May...

Soon, he was in his new routine. Selling vegetables in the morning, designing the Township in the afternoon, settling village disputes in the evening (he'd also agreed to help Village Action while their coordinator was taking a rest-cure in Kashmir.) It didn't allow much time for sleep, but he hadn't come for that. After all, he could sleep anywhere in the world.

One afternoon, while he was redesigning the Industrial Zone with soup cubes, his telephone rang. The Council wanted to meet him. A few minutes later, he entered the sanctum sanctorum. Twenty immobile forms surrounded a huge circular table. A pale light suffused the room; harp music

teased the ear. He prostrated himself on the coir matting.

"Sit."

Somehow, he found a chair. There was an intense silence. Suddenly, a small woman opposite him spoke. "We have a slight problem. A Minister from Delhi is visiting next week, and according to the Visa Service you'll be the only one left by then. We'd like you to show him around."

"But..." Brian gazed around. "Are you really all leaving?"

The woman laughed. "Take a good look round this table."

Brian stared at the others. True, they looked a little glassy-eyed and stiff—but that's what you'd expect of Council members. It was only when he spotted the termites that he guessed the truth. "They're dummies!"

"Correct. There's only me and the dog left—and he's often asleep. But it won't do to give the impression that there's no-one here. Come."

Brian followed her into a huge room. It was full of plywood cut-outs of Aurovilians. Aurovilians at work, drinking tea, meditating, riding motorbikes, attending meetings. Brian began to feel dizzy. He'd noticed that nobody had spoken to him for some time. But AVI Ireland had prepared him for this. "They won't even look at you for the first two years", they'd warned.

The woman explained. "The cut-outs belong to nobody in particular. But each Aurovillian who goes out temporarily hires one in his or her most characteristic pose. A small service crew move them around every so often to give a sense of dynamism. Auro-image is one of our most successful enterprises."

A week later Brian, dressed in his best suede Safari-suit, was showing the Minister around. He made a few mistakes—he referred to Aurolakh, and confused the Health Centre with Aureka—but all was going well until they reached the Auroville Academy for Higher Research. As the sun sank low, winking off the Gothic windows and burnishing the marble domes, the Minister, deeply moved, turned and grasped Brian's hand. At that moment, a whisper of wind shivered the evening stillness. And the Academy...fell flat.

Alan

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