

AUROVILLE TODAY

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The last fifteen years have seen Auroville develop from a few hundred people scattered over the plateau to a community numbering over one thousand. This growth has simultaneously led to a growth in infrastructure and, increasingly, to the development of common buildings and shared facilities. Yet, while Auroville has grown physically, it has failed, in many ways, to transcend the individualistic mind-set of the pioneering days. This can be seen in the continuing dominance of individual money-power over collective needs and the tendency for many projects to be powered by strong-willed individuals not adept at – or interested in – community process or consultation. It can also be seen in our unwillingness to learn from what has been achieved elsewhere or, indeed, to adequately document our own process, the successes and failures, of the past twenty-eight years.

However, the greatest lacuna is perhaps the continuing inability of the community to have a collective vision of the city or even to agree upon a common set of priorities. This failure thwarts all aspects of our development, and is reflected, among other things, in conflicts between greenbelters and city planners, between newcomers and long-term Aurovilians, between 'idealists' and 'pragmatists', between aesthetics and practicality. In this issue of Auroville Today we look at some of the most recent developments in the Residential Zone and raise some of the key questions that we need to answer if we are to ever achieve that elusive common vision. For the answer to the question 'What kind of town do we want?' is not only of interest to architects and town-planners. It accurately reflects how we wish to relate to our environment, to each other, to the local people and, above all, to Mother's ideal.

Also included in this issue is an update on the visa issue and an interview with Dr. Karan Singh, Chairman of the Governing Board.

How 'developed' are we?

For many people around the world in the 1960s and 1970s Auroville was best known for the Galaxy – the nebula-like town plan which in its sweep and dynamism seemed to reflect the centrifugal intensity and optimism of the Auroville experiment. Although vestiges remain, the Galaxy never materialised (to the evident relief of many Aurovilians who had 'grown into' the local landscape and who favoured a more 'organic', less 'impositional' approach to town planning). Yet, for all its many failings – insensitivity to the land, mega-structures that reflected the triumph of aesthetics over people and practicality etc. – the Galaxy was inspirational and it did represent a unified design that bound together the various elements of the township. Today, on the other hand, the developments in the Residential Zone reflect the more mundane and differing temperaments and designs of a dozen architects. If the Galaxy represents a certain failure to ground vision, the present developments seem to represent the triumph of pragmatism, of 'grounding' over vision.

The reasons for this state of affairs are fairly clear. For many years development of the city area was blocked – by lack of funds and of land, and by disagreements over the status of the Galaxy plan – but when population pressures built up in the mid-1980s and simultaneously it became increasingly difficult to build in outlying areas of Auroville, it was clear that the *tabula rasa* of the city area needed to be written upon. But how? And by whom? Many of the Auroville architects were opposed to the Galaxy plan (although some were willing to keep certain elements of it), but the same architects could not agree among themselves upon a common 'pattern language' with which to replace it. Finally, after long discussions among themselves and with the remaining proponents of the Galaxy plan, a quid pro quo was worked out. Certain defining characteristics of the Galaxy were retained – notably the

Crown Road and the radial links – population densities and the heights of buildings in different areas were agreed upon, and then each architect was handed a section of the Residential Zone to be developed as he or she wished.

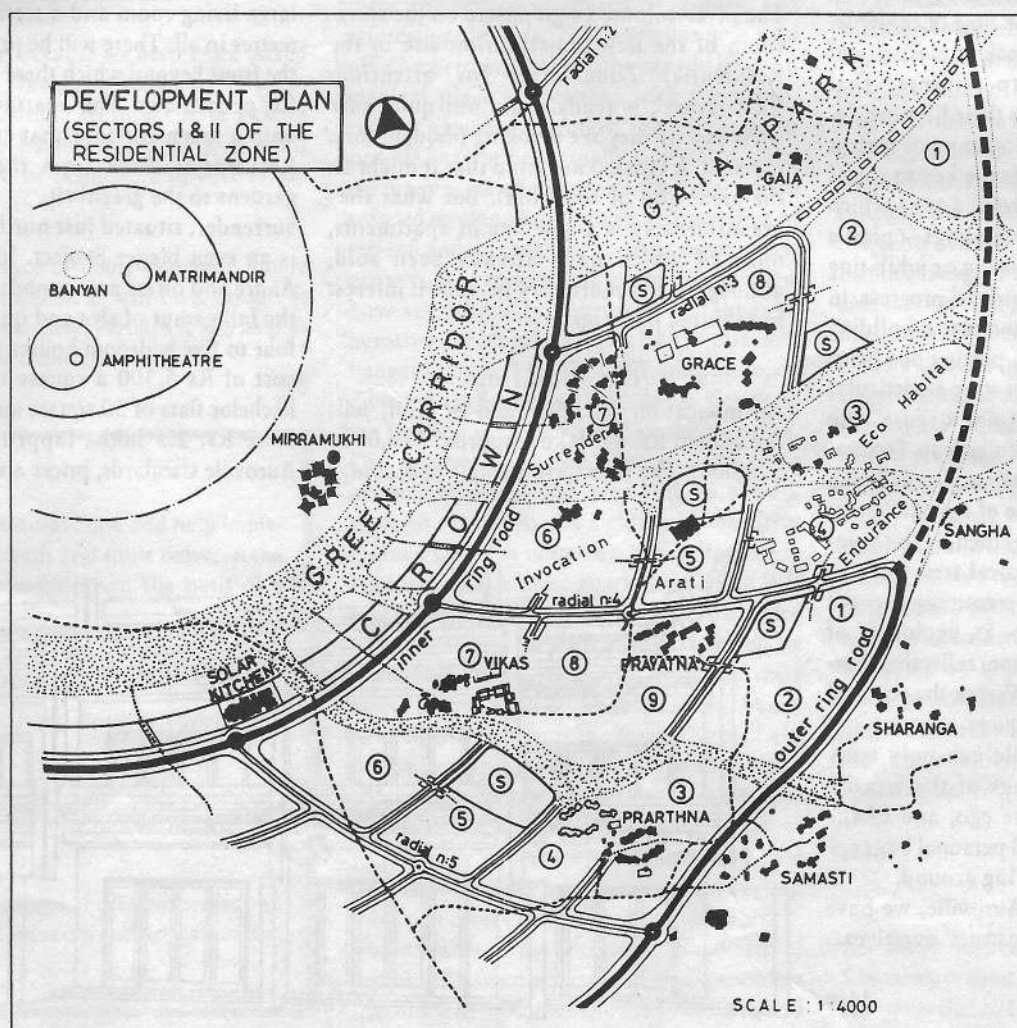
The result? If you cycle today from Samasti, past Prayatna and the half-constructed Invocation to Vikas you encounter, within a few hundred metres, a promiscuous mix of Mediterranean-style villas, squat low-cost 'stilt' accommodation, duplex-type apartment blocks and flowing earth-block and ferro-cement forms.

I have no wish to rehearse the justifications or otherwise of such a situation, except to state that I am yet to find even one 'lay' Aurovillian who feels that this kind of piecemeal development is either an aesthetic success or resonant of the city of the future. But there is a larger point here. For what this particular situation exemplifies is the dilemma which has bedevilled Auroville from the very beginning: the failure to embody vision in matter, to translate, in other words, the ideal into material forms without distorting one or the other. For either the vision attempts to bully matter into conformity with its 'higher' purpose, or the downward pull of matter modifies the ideal into a grey, 'common-sense', pragmatic solution.

At present the latter is predominant in Auroville – not only in architecture but also in our relationship to money and business – partly, perhaps, in reaction to the ideological stance of the 'visionaries'. But if pragmatism runs fewer risks, it bleeds inspiration, excitement, creativity and the energy for transcendence. Now, surely, is the moment to take up once again the eternal challenge – the integration of spirit and matter – and to see how we, as a community, can experiment and find the forms expressive of our deepest aspirations.

Yet, a crucial step in this process involves the redefining of what we understand by 'development'. For while most discussions of development projects focus upon the material aspects – for example, the effect of building a dam or highway upon the ecology of an area – far less attention is paid to the 'psychology' of construction or, to put it another way, to the consciousness which is being expressed through the way we build. For as Ralph Waldo Emerson pointed out, the consciousness or 'thought patterns' of a society are expressed in a very direct way through its buildings and other artefacts.

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Development plan of the Residential Zone

Aspects of

A new experiment in city living

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If we attempt to 'read' Auroville's present material development in this way, what do we find? I think the first impression is of immense dynamism and variety: Auroville boasts an enormous range of architectural styles. However, what is frequently lacking amongst all this diversity is coherence, a sense of a unifying thread which relates these individual expressions to one another, to the landscape and to the indigenous culture and traditions of this part of the world. This 'incoherence' takes many forms. It is, as we have seen in the Residential Zone, the clash of architectural styles or the inappropriateness of design, dimension and colour scheme which causes an ugly structure to dominate the natural landscape. It is the prevalence in Auroville of Western or Western-influenced designs (circa 1960) which are not appropriate to local conditions and which reveal ignorance of local achievements (the beautiful houses of Tamil Nadu, for example, with their central courtyards and layered tile roofs).

In other words, the material Auroville is a very accurate representation of where we are as a community at present: highly individualised, closed off from each other and India, and lacking in collective consciousness and direction.

Of course, this is not the whole story. There is the inner chamber of Matrimandir, and there is the very special energy which permeates everything here, allowing us to transcend our present limitations and to breathe a freer air. Moreover, individuals can personalise buildings to a certain extent, and nature, if allowed to, can soften the harshest of outlines. Yet the influence of our built structures should not be underestimated. For not only do they reflect a certain consciousness at the time of construction, but, because of the lack of plasticity of matter, they continue to reinforce that consciousness throughout their lifetime.

What can be done? The Mother made it clear that while the individual is the key to social evolution, the prevailing conditions – which include the physical surroundings – play a very important role in assisting or inhibiting individual and collective spiritual progress. In other words, when we construct a building we are not just engaged in putting one brick on another: we are also creating a particular force-field which will act upon those who inhabit or use it in a particular way, facilitating certain expressions or modes of being and inhibiting others. One of the challenges for architects in Auroville, then, is to explore the psychology of physical structures so that the force-fields they create support the expression of our ideal – an evolution of consciousness – rather than reflecting out-moded fashions from the West or the personal idiosyncrasies of the designers.

In other words, Auroville can only truly develop – in all meanings of the word – through surrender: of the ego, and of the cultural, professional and personal baggage which we all continue to lug around.

If we wish to construct Auroville, we have first to be willing to 'deconstruct' ourselves...

Alan

Just down the road from Grace, the eco-habitat area begins. Madhuca and Victory are the first settlements in this area, and are both attempts to create medium-density residential housing which is 'human scale', thus counterbalancing the more impersonal and dense developments nearby. There is also a stress upon ecological principles. In fact, one of the conditions for living in this area is a willingness to follow guidelines worked out by the initial settlers. These guidelines include using only alternative energy, building with natural, sustainable materials, and respecting the natural ecology of the area. The latter is important since phase one of the project is happening on a plot that has some uncommon trees: 'Madhuca' is named after the rare *Bassia Latifolia* tree that grows in its midst.

"This project started as an eco-habitat, but also as an experiment in an alternative way of developing," points out Felix. "We wanted to see if we could self-design our living space, each cluster of six or seven individuals or families coming together to plan their part of the community." It hasn't quite worked out like that. The inhabitants of Madhuca, the larger plot of this new community, designed their own houses – all different – but within terms of a site plan drawn up by an architect. However Felix, who is building on a separate plot which he has named 'Victory', hopes

the self-design experiment will continue when other nearby plots in this area are available for purchase.

Perhaps the real significance of this new community relates to its position on the very edge of the Residential Zone, sandwiched between future high-density housing developments and the Green Belt. The eco-habitat area is intended to be a 'soft interface' between the two, its residents 'living lightly' on the land (solar energy for electricity, the use of water harvesting and recycling etc.). "We are a kind of buffer," points out Lisbeth, "and it's been an interesting process since we've been battered by Green Belters on the one side – who feel we're planning for too high density housing – and the Residential Zone group on the other, who feel the projected density is not high enough!" In fact, the plan envisages that up to forty-five houses will occupy an area of approximately eight acres (of which only about a third has been purchased at present), which, in terms of Auroville, is medium-density living. However, the future residents are concerned by a proposal to build many apartments on a smaller plot opposite Madhuca because not only is it another interface area with the Greenbelt, but it also includes a canyon and so is particularly sensitive ecologically. "We hope," adds Felix, "that whatever development eventually happens over there will be in the same

spirit as what we are attempting here."

'Here' is still very much in process. The eco-habitat residents started work, one and a half years ago, on creating a solid infrastructure – a well, underground and overhead water-tanks, solar pumps, a common garage etc. – and are now beginning construction of the first four houses. A rain catchment pond has also been excavated, part of the 'commons' area in the middle of the community which will also include a kitchen-pavilion, a Newcomers house and a guest house. Yet, unlike many other start-up developments in the Residential Zone which begin by devastating the landscape, the original 'green' atmosphere of this area has been retained, the track linking the building plots snaking through trees and bushes.

"It's been hard work," says Lisbeth, "not at all like buying a flat off the shelf. We have had many meetings among ourselves to work things out, and we've had talks and walks with everybody in the area, getting familiar with them, explaining our plans, and listening to their concerns. Along the way, a number of people who wanted to build with us have dropped out. There are still quite a number of unknowns – will we have enough water? how will we get on with each other? – but at the moment it feels good because at last something is really happening on the ground."

Alan

Surrender Auroville: Some observations on new developments in the Residential Zone

The silver-coloured sign posted on the store-room of the new construction site in the Residential Zone cries for attention: 'Invocation', it reads. I am not quite sure what exactly they are invoking (though, for a moment, it crossed my mind that it might be the great god of suburbia). But what they are advertising is a new line of apartments, most of which have already been sold, although many more may be built if interest in suburbia picks up.

The Buildings

An Invocation flat, designed by Rolf, sells for around Rs. 6-7 lakhs (approx. \$18,000 - \$20,000). The flats have a single bedroom, a

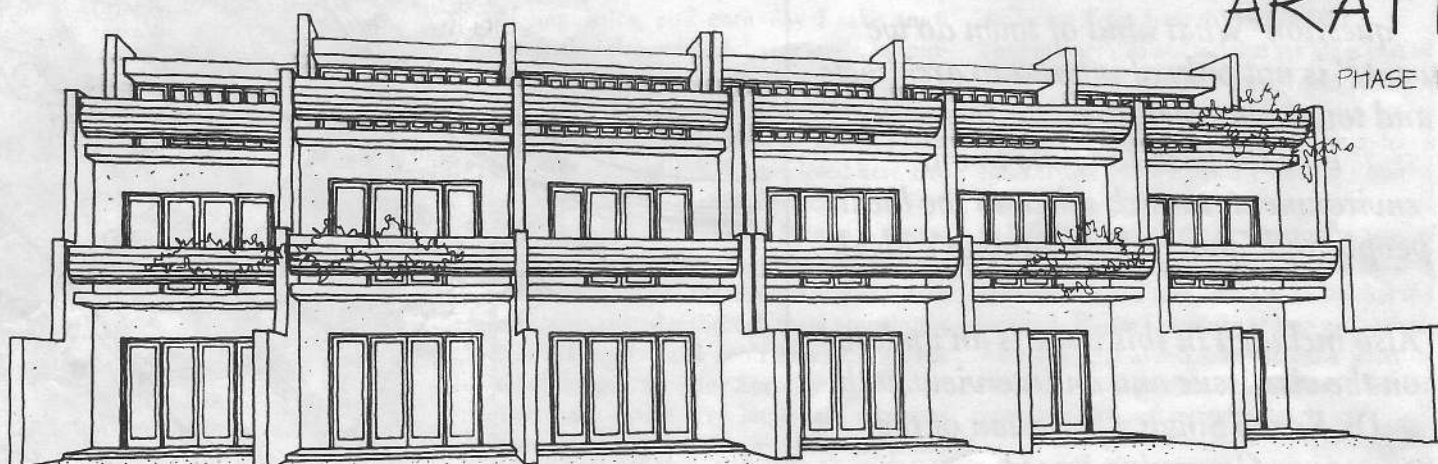
large living room and a terrace; 110 square metres in all. There will be private gardens at the front beyond which there will run a street for pedestrians. The apartments lean back onto a green corridor that cuts through the Residential Zone from the Matrimandir gardens to the greenbelt.

Surrender, situated just north of Invocation, is an even bigger project. It is designed by André and offers accommodation which runs the full gamut of size and quality from large four to five bedroom houses (at an estimated cost of Rs 5,500 a square metre) down to bachelor flats of 50 square metres going for a mere Rs. 1.5 lakhs (approx. \$4,500). By Auroville standards, prices are low – for some

people, too low to believe. But the clue to the low price lies in the fact that the basic shell will be provided with a range of options available concerning how it could be finished. The Surrender complex looks much the same as Auromodel houses, though in a more suburban setting.

The third major construction in the area is the Arati complex, designed by Helmut and built by Rolf. At present, only one block of flats is under construction, but many more are planned in the same style. They are two-bedroom, split-level flats, and have the same floor space and price tag as the Invocation flats.

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AUROVILLE

development

Towards a Youth Centre

The idea for a Youth Centre has been around for a long time. It really started 12 years ago, and since then various people have been trying to create a place where youth can gather. Recently it received a big push, because the Cultural Zone, the appropriate place for youthful energy, is finally taking shape (see box). Wazo, an adult, has been the motivating force at this moment. AUROVILLE TODAY went to speak to those who are presently working for this transformation of a dream into matter.

Around the table we came, one Sunday afternoon. There was Taranti who was born in Auroville in 1973 and spent her childhood here. At 6 years old she and her parents left for America; two years ago she returned on her own. There was Aurore (19), also born in Auroville, who lived here all her life with her parents. And there was Wazo and later, in and out, but pretty silent, Bobby (24), a young Indian from Ahmedabad who joined Auroville one and a half years ago. The question 'Why a Youth Centre?' rolled like a pool ball around the table, and it bounced here and there and...

"...because of lots of reasons. To mobilise the youth. It can be a place where we can all meet. A place where the youth of the world can be represented in this universal city."

"You can be young both in age and spirit. But in the age between 12 to 25, we are learning to be self-confident. With a place of our own, we will have a chance to participate in the experiment of Auroville. It will be a concentrated space."

"Anyway, our parents and neighbours are a little tired of the noise! One of my neighbours complains about bikes, the other about music. So it should be a sound-proof space, where we can hang out when we're being loud and not get into trouble."

"I mean, right now where can you go to meet other young people? To Certitude at the Sports Field. But you can't really have a chance to talk very much. Or at parties. That's about it."

"It will be a big way for us to link into world concerns, like the environment. Also, a place of

concentration on the arts: music, painting, sculpture, performing arts, photography, schools."

"Auroson and Axel (a young guest architect from Germany) are going to design something like a village with a dynamic street linking everything together. There could be a space for learning mechanics, crafts."

"Anyway, Auroville should become this universal city. And we can help. If Auroville is more known around the world through projects like this, the feedback would be more positive. So this is a way, too, for the youth to speak up and be heard and to create something positive."

"Especially since in Auroville now, the ideas are very far from the reality."

"It's an attempt to create a centre. And in this centre there would be a dormitory, like a guest house, but different. The top floor could be a conference room, a community meeting and working room. Next door would be a tea shop. And a garden everywhere."

"For the Auroville youth, it would offer a different freedom, a new approach to life. Also for students from outside. And people will come and pass through - no one will be there permanently. There will be a flow."

"We need this kind of place. I had some friends who came through here, but they didn't have enough money to stay. Maybe with the youth centre, they can come and work as an exchange for their room and board. There would be a rotating management, with 15-30 youths being responsible for it."

"A sacred place. Because we need more sacred spaces. In the West, you have certain ceremonies of initiation. We don't have that in Auroville. Like becoming officially an adult when you're 18 or being able to vote or get married."

"It will be a place to come together. Where everybody's welcome. It will be a bridge. It will build an awareness. Perhaps it will help us to create an Auroville culture."

Jill

Immediately to the west of the Forecomers community, the land suddenly dips and plunges into ravines as deep as ten metres in the lowest places, and as wide as six metres at its broadest. This is Success - Auroville's largest canyon. Roughly triangular in shape and comprising 50 acres, Success with its narrow meandering gullies and ravines stretches for almost 8 kilometres north to touch the borders of Pondicherry.

(Originally Success was the name given by the Mother to an area located at the mouth of the canyon where a nursery was subsequently started. The name has now been adopted for the whole canyon and the proposed sanctuary.) Like other canyons of Auroville, Success was probably once a bullock-cart trail to Pondicherry. The cart-wheels created ever-deepening ruts which, because of bad land use and deforestation, were subject to erosion by water from the run-off in the monsoons, thereby slowly carving out the canyon.

When the first Aurovilians settled here in 1968, the land was a deep, ugly red scar, dotted with a few palmyra and cashew trees. Over the years, a number of Aurovilians lived there and helped in constructing dams and afforesting the area. This work has now paid off. Once red and barren, the canyon is now a magical place - pregnant with the damp, verdant silence of the forest. Though the water run-off has not been totally controlled, there are many areas where granite check-dams have stopped erosion, leading to an accumulation of top-soil and subsequently to fairly dense undergrowth. There are still dramatic patches, however, where the destructive and the regenerative forces of nature clash - one sees banyans and other trees developing an incredible root-structure and literally hanging on to the face of a red, eroded cliff for their survival. One is never quite sure what one will come across, or where one will end, in a walk through the canyon. A sighting of the Great Horned Owl that nests on a cliff quite close to Forecomers is almost guaranteed... and it is magnificent to watch this huge brown bird that, frightened or perhaps just annoyed by intruding humans, spreads its wings and soars above the red walls of the canyon into the sky to vanish deeper into the forest. There have been times when I have got lost in the canyon while exploring some gully or the other, captivated by the pools of water naturally collected on rock structures which are home to a wide array of water beetles, or by the soft green moss that covers narrow moist crevasses...

The stewards of the Success canyon dream of declaring it a sanctuary, creating wildlife corridors that link it to the forests of Pitchandikulam, and

reconstructing the old indigenous eco-system. Already, the canyon records the highest density of bird life in Auroville and is home to a number of small animals such as hare, mongoose, civet cat, chameleon, monitor lizard and jackal. The greenbelt areas of Newlands, Ravena and Forecomers, act as a buffer zone, protecting the canyon against undue human encroachment.

But the dream, even before it has a chance to be manifested, is under dire threat. For on the

Pondicherry border of the canyon, a

private contractor has started a project for high-density urban residences.

The land there, which supposedly was designated by the Government as 'agricultural land', has already been

marked up into plots with yellow-painted granite stones starting barely

a metre from the canyon and stretching for acres all around. Even

the roads, which have incongruous names like 'Jennifer

Street,' and which are incredibly narrow, giving an idea of the

proposed density of population, are laid out. And there is a section of

a drainage pipe that leads out from the plot into the canyon, confirming one's worst fears that if this residential project is carried out as planned, Success canyon will soon be a garbage dump.

The stewards of Success hope to be able to raise the money for a strip of land along the length of the canyon, but the prices are high and negotiations are not easy. In Auroville, the problem is further compounded by a recent ruling of the Development Group that, given the debts already incurred by the Land and Estate Management, purchase of land in this area is not a high priority of the community as the canyon lies beyond the planned Green Belt area. Needless to say, this decree of the Development Group is extremely short-sighted: given the lie of the land and existing developments, it is practically impossible to create a green belt that is perfectly circular. Instead of rigidly adhering to the master plan, the community should consolidate its holdings and as far as possible create green corridors for the propagation of plants and animals, and protecting Auroville from the risk of being swallowed up by unpalatable and uncontrolled development. Seen in this light, saving Success canyon should be one of the top priorities of the community and of the Auroville Foundation.

Bindu

For more information about the Success Sanctuary project, contact Regina, Newlands, Auroville 605101

WHAT'S HAPPENING IN THE CULTURAL ZONE?

There is a Cultural Zone Group who receive projects for the Cultural Zone and help implement them. They see to it that there is an agreement on standards and spirit between the project holders and the Development Group. The Group is working on the basis of a general concept presented by Roger Anger last year.

Here are some of the projects:

- 1) KALABHUMI (Land of the Arts), where artist Rolf lives and works on painting and sculpture. The space is shared by Ramesh (a sculptor from Kerala) and Rossella (working in copper) who have their workshops there.
- 2) SCHOOLS - Transition and the new Mirramukhi.
- 3) A MUSIC CENTRE, which will be combined with a School of Performing Arts, a School of Fine Arts, and a School of Cinema, Video and Photography.
- 4) SCHOOL SPORTSGROUND.
- 5) A proposal for the relocation of Last School between Kalabhumi and Transformation.
- 6) A proposal for A.A.A. (Auroville Arts Association) to build a museum and art gallery and
- 7) A YOUTH CENTRE.

The Presence of the Grace

Subash, an engineer from Madurai, was accepted as an Aurovilian by the Mother in 1973. After working in Auroville for a year, Subash felt an inner urge to join Karmayogi, a disciple of the Mother, at a 'flower farm' that the Mother had named 'Beauty Land.' He stayed there, leading a more or less secluded life, for eighteen years. In 1993, a desire to practise Karmayoga (yoga through work) brought him to Auroville. He joined New Creation School as he was particularly interested in teaching rural children. At present, in keeping with his dream to bring 'spirituality to the villages', he has started work in Isaiambalam, an Auroville-supported village school. Recently he presented a paper to the community titled, 'Major Trends in the Growing City of Auroville' that delineates some of the ways by which a spiritual force works in Auroville. He also suggests how Aurovilians can actively collaborate with this force. Here are some excerpts.

News, as reported by the media, tends to dramatise only the negative forces prevalent in the world. Similarly, when I came back to Auroville two years ago, much of the news that I received gave a totally negative picture of Auroville. Immorality, dishonesty, dominance of the whites, cynicism, the ignorance of the local people of the teachings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and the mockery by many Aurovilians of the ideals of Auroville, all seemed to be thriving in Auroville. The only achievement mentioned was that of the transformation of the arid terrain of Auroville into a cool and fertile one. But during these last two years of my stay here, I have perceived trends underlying the development of Auroville which indicate that this community is indeed, though very slowly, moving towards the realization of its ideals.

The first major trend, which was so striking, is that mental planning does not work in Auroville. Never does a thing materialize as planned. Always something or the other occurs whereby one is at the 'mercy' of the moment. However carefully one tries to organize the work in the most perfect way, it does not work. 'Something' is equally skilful in getting through that organization and putting a hole in it! The result is that most of the Aurovilians have lost their faith in mental planning and organization, but are at a loss as how to do without it. The second major trend is that all, to some measure or the other, feel the Grace or the Mother's Force behind their activities, even though many do not like to call it so. This force is perceived as receiving an answer to a pressing question,

getting the material, the money, or the right kind of people that one requires, being led through a series of events to discover the knowledge that one seeks, finding the solution to an urgent problem, whether individual or collective, and so on.

Newcomers or guests visiting for the first time often encounter this Grace as finding meaning in each event, however insignificant it may appear, that takes place in their life. It is as if some Presence is arranging everything for them in Auroville.

Further, rooted deep in the consciousness of most Aurovilians is the conviction that if one decides to do something and sticks by it, the work will 'somehow' get done, even if all that is needed for the work is not immediately available. The more one is in a position of responsibility, the more one feels the certitude of this 'somehow.'

The third major trend is that all the people in the Auroville area get in touch with things higher than that they can attain at their present level. For instance, villagers at a subsistence level get good food regularly even though their work in Auroville is menial; village students at Auroville schools partake of the joy and freedom present there which are often denied to them at home; a simple Aurovilian without much mental awakening is exposed to many things that awaken his mental curiosity; and people with some spiritual awakening feel peace, freshness and joy invade their being. It is as though people here are given an opportunity to first get a taste of 'higher things' that they can later permanently attain if they so desire.

There are many more trends in Auroville's development, like the growing environmental awareness, the absence of social status considerations etc. that one can easily observe in Auroville. But for the moment, let us concentrate on the trends delineated above. What use can be made of the knowledge of these trends?

Take the first trend. Since mental plans do not work in Auroville, it is useless to stick to the mental way of working. To do so means that one functions from the 'old consciousness'. To start functioning from the 'new consciousness', one has to deliberately choose to shift one's base of action from mental planning to silence. But one feels a dread at the very thought of such a shift.

Sri Aurobindo gives a vivid description of this in the chapter, 'The Intuitive Mind' of *The Synthesis of Yoga: the transition to the higher principle [for man] means not only a difficult conversion of his whole mind and reason and intelligence, but in a certain sense a reversal of all their methods. . . . If an animal mind were called upon to leave consciently the safe ground of*

sense impulse, sense understanding and instinct for the perilous adventure of a reasoning intelligence, it might well turn back alarmed and unwilling from the effort. The human mind would here be called upon to make a still greater change and, although self-conscious and adventurous in the circle of its possibility, might well hold this to be beyond the circle and reject the adventure. In fact, the change is only possible if there is first a spiritual development on our present level of consciousness and it can only be undertaken securely when the mind has become aware of the greater self within, enamoured of the Infinite and confident of the presence and guidance of the Divine and his Shakti.

Hence one should learn to perceive the guiding light from within to replace the mental guidance. This has to be done consciously and as a matter of fact till it becomes one's normal functioning. One can resort to a mental functioning, but without relying on it totally, till one can avail of the inner guidance at one's will.

The second trend helps immensely to bring about the shift mentioned above. When one becomes conscious of the feeling of Grace or of the Mother's Force behind one's activities, then one perceives the inner guidance more clearly and acts accordingly. A mere change in attitude is sufficient to feel the Grace. Any conscious effort to selflessly do one's best in one's work automatically calls down the Force and enables it to act. It is a common experience with many Aurovilians that when they do not know how to proceed, when their mental and other capacities and skills cease to be of use, then they feel a silent perception that the work is still 'on'... They wait and invariably there is the required breakthrough to enable them to continue the work.

The third trend testifies to the reality of Auroville being a place of 'constant progress' and 'unending education.' One has to aspire to acquire 'higher things' permanently. But it is not easy to have a constant aspiration until one is willing to be rid of the habits of the present level of living. As Sri Aurobindo has expressed, a constant aspiration is possible only when a constant rejection is practised. Thus when one wants to function always from a higher level of consciousness, one cannot do it from the old basis or structure, one cannot do it from the old consciousness; one can do it only from the basis of a new consciousness. All that in the being which is willing to get transformed to accommodate this new way of functioning can be kept; all that is unwilling must be rejected. Here too the Grace acts. When one is truly willing to reject a certain thing or habit and needs certain strength to do so, the Grace readily grants it. One has just to acknowledge the presence of the Grace for it to become operative. When one is able to continuously consent thus, one constantly progresses.

Is there spirituality in Auroville?

This question has two aspects to it. Firstly, embedded in it is the conventional assumption that 'spirituality' is recognizable through certain outer forms or conventions. Auroville confounds all these expectations. Why? Both Sri Aurobindo and Mother made it clear that they had no interest in founding a new religion, for religion, with its traditional accoutrements of a priesthood and prescribed forms of worship and behaviour, so often snuffs out the inner flame and kills the aspiration to move beyond. In this respect, the utter simplicity of the inner chamber of Matrimandir is Auroville's statement of spirituality. Within that space, nothing is to interfere with or distract from the most direct contact with... something else.

This aspect of the question "Is there spirituality in Auroville?" is relatively easy to answer. The second aspect, however, is much more challenging. For it stems from an argument that runs something like this. "I understand that Auroville is not meant to be the seat of a new religion. Nevertheless, after 28 years there should be something to show that this place is different, some exterior manifestation of a new consciousness or, at least, of an attempt to reach that consciousness. Yet all I see around me here in Auroville are the forces of the old world - egotism, deceit, politics, money power, male chauvinism, colonialistic attitudes - running riot. It's just like anywhere else, with an additional thin overlay of spiritual dogma." This argument, I believe, is based both on a misunderstanding and on an insight. The misunderstanding is the assumption that a spiritual community will not manifest, at least in its initial stages, the old knots and wrinkles which have tortured humanity for millennia. For it is not by avoiding but through confronting such forces that we gain the opportunity, the leverage, to transform them. But in order for us to confront them squarely they have first to acquire a certain scale, a certain nakedness of outline. This is why, paradoxically, the most potentially transformative works of literature are not the 'moral' tales but difficult, heart-wrenching works like 'King Lear' or the plays of Genet, because they present us with unvarnished truths about the human condition as it is. And this is why the nakedness and scale of certain forces in the Auroville of today could be seen as evidence that another force IS at work, stripping away the disguises, eliminating the niches, where the old forces could take refuge.

And yet... the accusation that Auroville is 'unspiritual' at present, however much it is based upon a misunderstanding, may also touch upon a certain truth. Some Aurovilians have cast away certain norms of conduct - courtesy, refinement, gratitude - in the name of 'Truth'. Yet that 'truth' seems often to be based more upon cultural predispositions and personal fears or ambitions than upon contact with a higher, spiritual force.

Is Auroville on course? Only a Sri Aurobindo or Mother could answer this. If Auroville is, in some respects, representative of all the problems and possibilities of humanity, and if collective transformation can only be effected by a new consciousness permeating all these separate singularities, we might expect progress to be slow here. Yet what is 'fast', what 'slow' in the context of changing the habits of millennia? Is integral transformation susceptible to a 'quick fix'?

Maybe if we enlarge our perspective we may see that, yes, Auroville has a long, long way to go before the gnostic society is born here... but that, as a multicultural society which has agreed not only to live together but to attempt to realize an extraordinary ideal, an important beginning has been made.

Alan

YOU ARE REQUESTED TO LEAVE INDIA WITHIN FIFTEEN DAYS

Three Aurovilians, Gilles Pfeiffer, Alain Bernard and Jean-Jacques Prigent, have received a notice from the Government of India requesting them to leave India within fifteen days. Gilles and Alain were told that the Government could no longer extend the validity of their residential permit, which they had been enjoying for over twenty years. Jean Jacques received a Leave India notice although his residential permit is valid till 1997.

No reasons have been given. No reasons need to be given, judged the High Court, for "the Central Government... can expel a foreigner without any formality beyond the making of the expulsion order." Gilles, who had requested the Court to rescind the expulsion order, was told that the Central Government has the right, after expiry of the period for which permission to stay in India is granted, to immediately deport a person from the country without any further considerations or appeals. On appeal, the High Court instructed the Home Ministry to grant Gilles a hearing (which he had asked for in November last year). But when the Home Ministry, after the hearing, reiterated its previous decision, the High Court upheld the judgment. For Gilles, a further appeal to the Indian Supreme Court seems to be the only option left.

The quit notice served to Alain Bernard also caused a storm of protest. Letters from all over the world were written to the Chairman of the Governing Board, Dr. Karan Singh, as well as to the Prime Minister of India and to the Home Minister. Dr. Karan Singh addressed the Prime Minister and the Home Minister, and even met with the Home Minister to discuss the case, but so far without any result. It seems that for Alain too, appealing to the court is the only option left.

The quit notice to Jean-Jacques Prigent is a puzzle to all persons involved. Jean-Jacques and his family have been resident in Auroville for only two-and-a-half years, and he possesses a valid Residential Permit. The Leave India notice served to him poses an even greater threat to the development of Auroville: if even those who possess a valid Residential Permit can be asked to leave India by the Government, there is no security for any foreign Aurovillian anymore. They all can be asked to leave India at any time. It should be noted here that the Auroville Foundation Act does not contain any stipulations on the rights of foreign Aurovilians to remain in India. Consequently, their rights, or rather the absence of any, are regulated by the Foreigners Act, and no distinction is made between a foreigner residing in Auroville or elsewhere in India. The situation is alarming. As Dr. Thakor Mistry, the vice-chairman of the Auroville International Association, wrote to Dr. Karan Singh: "We believe that immediate steps must be taken to rescind the expulsion orders which threaten not only Gilles Pfeiffer, but Alain Bernard and now Jean-Jacques Prigent. It becomes alarmingly clear that this is no longer an isolated incident against one member of the

Auroville Community but a pattern of arbitrary reprisals taken against Auroville residents. And for those of us watching from the world outside, it has frightening implications for the future of Auroville.

"How can we focus in this moment on developing Auroville projects and safeguarding its properties in keeping with the ideals of its Charter when there is no longer a basic protection for the residents themselves who come in good faith to Auroville from abroad? Projects and properties cannot take precedent over the people whose very lives constitute the development of those projects and properties.

"And how can we out here try to communicate a more positive image of Auroville when its residents are being expelled by the very Government which has extended itself by Act of Parliament to protect and foster Auroville's development in accordance with its Charter? How can we approach the media or foundations and other international agencies on behalf of Auroville when such a fundamental threat to the International Community's integrity is in process?... How can we ever hope to invite larger funding for Auroville from abroad in the light of such basic instability for the residents who constitute the project-holders? Surely, it will raise dire questions and contradictions in the minds of the very people and organisations we would approach for Auroville's assistance."

The prospects are bleak indeed. The Governing Board, in its meeting of August 14, 1996, drew up a resolution. At the same time, court proceedings will have to be initiated. A basic protection for the foreign Aurovilians must be found.

Carel

RESOLUTION OF THE GOVERNING BOARD (AUGUST 14TH 1996)

The Governing Board shares the distress felt by the Auroville community at the quit notices received by some Aurovilians. While the Gilles Pfeiffer case was in court for some time, it seems that his representation has been rejected by the concerned official in the Central Government. Mr. Alain Bernard is an Aurovillian of 23 years standing who has contributed in several ways towards the development of Auroville. To the best of our knowledge his integrity is beyond question. He has suddenly received a quit notice. The third person, Mr. Jean-Jacques Prigent, has been in Auroville for less than three years, and the Governing Board has no knowledge as to why the Quit India notice has been given to him.

The Governing Board appeals to the Government of India to urgently reconsider the whole matter and meanwhile to keep in abeyance these and any other such notices to Aurovilians that may be under consideration until the entire situation is thoroughly reviewed. The Chairman, Dr. Karan Singh, has written to the Prime Minister and the Home Minister in this connection, and the Governing Board reiterates the request made by him on humanitarian grounds and considerations of natural justice. The Governing Board strongly feels that the unique experiment of Auroville as a multi-national, multi-linguistic and multi-racial experiment in collective consciousness must be nurtured in the spirit of the Auroville Foundation Act 1988.

In this connection a delegation of members of the Governing Board and some Aurovilians will seek an urgent meeting with the Prime Minister at his earliest convenience and also with the Home Minister, Shri Indrajit Gupta.

[Signed]
Dr. Karan Singh.

'A very drastic change of consciousness is needed':

INTERVIEW WITH DR. KARAN SINGH

AVTODAY: What has been done by the Governing Board regarding the quit notices issued by the Government of India against three Aurovilians?

Dr. Karan Singh: Auroville, even before the Foundation came into being, has always been plagued by visa problems. Only now it seems to have intensified. Gilles' case has been going on for nearly a year now and the latest case of Jean-Jacques Prigent, who has been asked to leave despite having a valid Residential Permit, has naturally created a great deal of insecurity and concern in the community.

I acted on this issue even before the Governing Board meeting. As soon as I came back from a trip abroad in June and learned that two more quit notices had been issued, I wrote letters to both the Prime Minister and the Home Minister. I even met the Home Minister and other concerned officials personally. I moved at the very highest levels, but ultimately this matter is outside the ambit of the Foundation. The final decision as to whether a foreigner has the right to remain in India or not lies with the Government of India and the Home Ministry. All we can do is try and convince the Government of India that there is not prima facie enough justification for these drastic actions. It is a matter of considerable distress. And I do understand that it is a very unsettling experience for foreign Aurovilians who have decided to settle here, liquidating their assets and basically burning all their bridges back home. But I really don't know what more I could do.

Should not the Governing Board which, after all, is appointed by the Government of India, have a greater mandate to act on such issues? Should not Aurovilians, being residents of an international township, have more rights than those enjoyed by foreigners residing elsewhere in India?

The problem is that, in recent years, the security concern of India has deepened tremendously. The Sri Lankan civil war has been going on endlessly and Auroville, being situated in coastal Tamil Nadu, lies in a highly sensitive area. And so, even though the Foundation has been created by an Act of Parliament, there is little that the Governing Board can do in this matter. All I can say is that I will do my best to try and see that Aurovilians are safeguarded from any such drastic action as being asked to leave without sufficient reason.

I would like to add here, which is not directly related to the issue but which I feel is pertinent, that from the very beginning, ever since the Foundation came into being, I have been making the point that the Foundation must be looked upon as a partner. The Governing Board consists of a group of people who wish to help Auroville. Unfortunately, there has been a substantial group of Aurovilians who have always been hostile and negative to the



Foundation. This attitude, on the part of some Aurovilians, has generated a lot of resentment. What Aurovilians do not realise is that the Foundation is not the Sri Aurobindo Society. The Foundation has been created by a special Act of the Parliament and has the backing of the Government of India. So any kind of negative attitude can, in the ultimate analysis, be counter-productive towards the community. This realisation is perhaps slowly dawning in the community now. But at the same time a lot of harm has already been done. All sorts of statements and articles against the Foundation have been printed in various publications. And they have all added up to creating a negative image of some Aurovilians. I regret this. I have kept saying

that you will never get a more positive group of people in the Governing Board than you have now. But let's see what we can do from now on.

Why do we constantly get the feedback that Auroville has a very negative image in Government circles? Why has India not fully accepted the Auroville experiment?

I don't want to put it starkly. But perhaps it is because Auroville has not accepted India. I know it sounds very startling. But Aurovilians seem to feel that they live in some sort of enclave and not in India. Of course, nobody in India is questioning the right of Auroville to be some kind of enclave, but psychologically this feeling of being separate reinforces a negative image on both sides. You will remember that at the meeting with the International Advisory Council in February, Ervin Laszlo pointed out that the image of Auroville in the world was not good. Very simply, if Auroville's image in India is not good, it is unlikely to be good abroad.

I think a very drastic change of consciousness is needed to correct this situation. The problem is deeper than a lack of awareness. Aurovilians just do not have a welcoming attitude. They are always saying, "Take us off the tourist map, don't let buses come in." Honestly, such statements are typical of Auroville's attitude. This inherent negativity in the consciousness of Auroville is responsible for a lot of misconceptions.

Interview with Carel and Bindu

The Annual Auroville International meeting

This year, it was an intense, charged and very Aurovilian gathering in a youth hostel setting in southern Sweden. Some forty participants took part from AVI centres in Austria, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, the U.K. and U.S.A., from possible new contact centres in Denmark and Romania, and from Auroville itself.

The hosts for the meeting – five members of AVI Sweden – did an excellent job in creating the framework for the gathering, providing the opportunity for the development of group sensitivity and personal appreciation over the first part of the week while keeping the 'business' for later. Field trips were made to national parks, the countryside and beach, and the Swedish custom of working with candles (whenever a person or group was focused upon, a plate with little wax lights was placed before the spokesperson) provided a lovely, golden touch to the meeting. A walk one day included a visit to a beautiful Stonehenge-like formation where we sat for some time. The same evening, with a lego-Matrimandir (made by one of the children) and a portrait of Mother in our midst, members from various countries tried – through stories, poems, slides and songs – to communicate something about the fundamental aspects of their culture's soul. The openness, sincerity and almost childlike courage displayed was very touching and showed how close and trusting the group had become. Over the years, the exchanges between the centres have gradually deepened, and this time the theme of the meeting – human unity – swiftly became less and less abstract and more and more alive and tangible as the days unfolded.

Woven in amongst the leisure part of the meeting were the discussions of various sub-groups which prepared presentations of topics for the 'business' part of the week. AVI Germany informed us about Expo 2000, the next World Exposition to be held in Hannover, which will take as its theme 'Man-Nature-Technology'. The AVI Germany team believes that it would be wonderful if Auroville could make a beautiful, carefully designed presentation at this Expo – a proposal that was enthusiastically endorsed by the other centres. It was seen as a good opportunity for working together as a group while closely collaborating with Auroville on the considerable work involved in pulling this off. Other topics discussed included:

MATRIMANDIR – deep concern yet appreciation was discussed regarding the present process and the meeting directed encouragement and trust towards all those involved.

BIOREGIONAL OUTREACH AND LAND ISSUES – these were recognised as two very important issues, and the general commitment is that when Auroville gets a realistic fund-raising scheme together concerning the above, the centres will participate.

TOWN PLANNING – it was felt it would be useful to have a seminar in Auroville on the development process in general, and the International Zone in particular, to which could be invited city planners and other people with relevant expertise. Taking the vast pool of knowledge that already exists in Auroville as a starting point, the invited participants could possibly provide a fresh look at things.

FUNDING REQUESTS – the AVI centres reiterated once again that they can only accept funding requests from Auroville that have been recommended by the Project Co-ordination Group. **AVI SECRETARIAT IN AUROVILLE** – the centres appreciate that Auroville provides maintenance and other running costs for an Aurovilian to work full-time in linking Auroville with the various centres; the experiment has proved successful and will continue.

THE FORMAT OF AVI ANNUAL MEETINGS – due to the success of the longer meetings, it was decided to adopt a five-day format for these meetings in future, with the very strong request that all centres should be present and as many Aurovilians as possible.

The presence in this meeting of eight committed and motivated Aurovilians of both Indian and Western origin was widely appreciated. Among the highlights were Bhavana's update on Auroville's increasingly bio-regional approach, Peter Clarence-Smith reporting on the land situation, and Suhasini's slide presentation on architecture in Auroville. If Auroville is to work more closely and effectively with the AVI centres, an increased Aurovilian presence at these meetings will greatly help the process.

Next year's meeting will be hosted by AVI France. See you there...

Mauna

SOME OBSERVATIONS FROM THE AUROVILLE INTERNATIONAL MEETING

"It's very important that Aurovilians participate in these meetings. Here they have time to share – in Auroville they are always running! Somehow we received this time something essential out of the wide diversity of inner and outer work and research done in Auroville."

"The more you're getting into integral yoga, the more your old patterns of life, and old friends, fall away. These kind of gatherings keep us here in the West going. Please, go on with this!"

"There is a real close connection between Auroville and the centres now, a very big difference from before. We now feel part of the Auroville experience..."

"A meeting like this is a spiritual experience. There's a special spirituality at this time on earth. The ego is breaking down, because we are finally recognizing how much we 'need' each other. No one of us could possibly hold all that is coming down, it's so much. We are learning to share that realization with each other. I can't thank Sweden, the whole AVI, enough. It's so wonderful. Each time we do this, it's a definite drop among many drops, a step among many steps. There was a definite change when the meeting switched to the working stage. We also took on some of the 'hard' parts of Auroville. We integrated that energy. Now that it has happened, we can see how important it is that we do this. It's another part of human unity, a part that we need to work on. We need to concentrate on our soul. We here have touched our soul."

Aurovilians at ISTANBUL

What, one may well ask, would Auroville, a small community of 1,000 odd people, have to offer to the world's discussion on megacities? Even if it were fully developed with 50,000 people as planned, Auroville would still be a far cry from the megacities with populations numbering millions, such as Tokyo, Calcutta, Lagos, and Shanghai, whose problems formed the main agenda of the United Nations Habitat II Conference held in early June in Istanbul. In an interview given before the conference Dr. Wally N'Dow, Secretary-General and Chairman of Habitat II spoke in desperation of the need of new visions for mankind.

And this is where Auroville, even though it is still in its infancy, has something to offer to the world. Aurovilians participated in three non-governmental forums of the conference which, symbolic of Auroville's aspirations, focussed on both the practical necessities and the spiritual needs of man.

Aurosatprem and Suhasini of the Auroville Building Centre had been invited to share their knowledge of earth-technology as a cheap, environment-friendly building technology. Apart from giving well-attended presentations on earth-technology and on Auroville, they constructed in Istanbul a 9 square metres house made of mud-blocks – the mud-compression

press having been flown in from Auroville. The house which was designed by Aurosatprem and which is resistant to cyclones and earthquakes is simple. It can be assembled in five weeks and does not require much masonry. It is thus a self-help unit, ideal for people or institutions with limited resources. Though the Auroville architects went through a lot of trouble in constructing it – having to work with a Kurdish construction team who spoke neither English nor Turkish, having to get the mud for building from out of the town and transport it at night due to traffic regulations on trucks entering the city etc., their efforts were commended by all. Indeed the house was one of the few on-site demonstration projects in the whole conference. Dr. Wally N'Dow was impressed by the low environmental impact of the house (mud-blocks do not need firing and can be produced on site) and representatives of a number of countries have asked to borrow Auroville's mud-compression press.

The spiritual dimension was represented by the Wisdom Keepers II gathering. Hanne Strong, member of the Auroville International Advisory Board, had been instrumental in forming this group of eminent spiritual leaders, indigenous spokespersons, environmental and social activists, youth, and statesmen. The UN

conference on environment in Rio in 1992 had seen such a gathering, but this was the first time that the forum had official recognition from the United Nations. Marti of Auroville helped Hanne to organize the gathering. Other individuals connected to Auroville included Dr. Karan Singh, chairman of the Auroville Foundation. The Wisdom Keepers were asked to draft a Declaration for Habitat II with specific suggestions to promote sustainable development while maintaining human values. Accordingly the Declaration prepared by them states, "Wisdom guides us to live in harmony, and when wisdom is held collectively by communities, it helps to prevent community fragmentation, violence and despair." Among other things, the Declaration affirms the necessity of restoring and revitalising villages and of satisfying cultural and spiritual needs in tandem with material needs. While Marti was inspired by many of the messages of the Wisdom Keepers, she felt that "the time was too short and the energy was focussed too much on words in artificial settings."

The third forum which Marti and Suhasini attended and which synthesized both practical and spiritual needs was the Global Eco-Village Network, sponsored by the Gaia Trust of Denmark. The Gaia Trust had helped to

sponsor the Eco-Village Network in Findhorn, Scotland in November '95 (see AVT # 83). At this gathering in Istanbul of a number of well-known alternative communities, Suhasini gave a presentation and workshop on earth construction while Marti spoke on human values and the environmental concerns of intentional communities. They also mounted an exhibition and showed videos and slides of Auroville. In response to the haphazard and destructive development of megacities, the Eco-Village Network presented their ideas and expertise on forming smaller communities that were sustainable in their development and had a strong spiritual base. Auroville has been approached to formally join as a member of the Eco-Village Network and some representatives of different international communities that form the network plan to meet in Auroville next spring.

While it is questionable how much of the knowledge gathered at such high-profile international conferences is translated into the material development, the positive response and international recognition that Auroville, 'The City the Earth needs,' gets for its efforts is notable.

Bindu (based on interviews with Marti)

continued from page 2

Suburbia

If the French have a word for 'suburbia', neither I nor André Hababou know what it is. Yet that's what he seems to be aiming for in Surrender: something that is "harmonious, private but close together". Rolf, on the other hand, understood the connotations of the term and so, while he wouldn't classify Invocation as 'urban', he wouldn't call it 'suburban' either: "it's something in-between". What makes the Auroville architects build these 'in-between' things? It is hard to imagine that it is a direct response to the clients' wishes, or that the architects want to recreate the feeling of suburbia in what is to be the Residential Zone of the city. When I asked Rolf, he paused for a moment, and then explained he had become tired of living in a large house far from the centre – with the burden of having to employ watchmen, gardeners, ammas etc. – and wanted to move to an apartment where he would have more time to do things like design houses. "But for this experiment you need other people to join in." Then why not build a real urban centre which would have some of the energy of a city? "In the beginning," explains Rolf, "we wanted to build so closely together that there was upheaval in the community. You see, in Auroville we are afraid of development."

The result is a kind of compromise that benefits none as clusters of buildings, all focused around their own centre and thus incapable of being incorporated into any larger context, are now beginning to populate the Residential Zone. In this way, one by one, the options for genuine urban development in the city are disappearing.

Are Aurovilians afraid of development?

The ones I spoke to were not against development per se. Rather, there was a hint that everybody subscribed to the familiar attitude, "We are not against development as long as it doesn't happen in our backyard." In other words, a fierce territorial attitude. Yet this attitude is shared by the architects, too. As one of them admitted recently, 'I am actually for denser development. The main problem, however, is that the different architects are building their own kingdoms. There is no common concept.' Many Aurovilians have become weary of architects because this attitude has spawned a whole legacy of dysfunctional and ugly buildings. There is nowhere in

the world, in fact, where artistic ego has so much free reign, although things are changing now, due in part to financial constraints.

And it is precisely in the lack of a common concept, in the lack of coherent formulations, that the real danger lies; there are so many groups and committees taking charge of so much and doing so little at present that there is bound to be confusion. It could begin innocently enough with an architect only wanting a reasonable area to develop, but with the territorial imperative being so strong, that area may become further and further extended until Zone One of the Residential Zone, which is supposed to house 1,500 people, could end up housing only half that number. Yet the three architects that I spoke to who are involved in new developments in the area did not seem highly perturbed, pointing out that this was a low density area and that 'higher density could come over there' (with a carefree sweep of the hand towards the eucalyptus grove near Certitude).

The shape of things to come?

Some time ago, Aurofuture, the town planning service, received the worst rating in the Services survey. Around the same time, they got rid of some dead wood in their organization and changed their name, and this seems to have taken some of the community pressure off their backs. When I went to see Luigi of 'L'Avenir d'Auroville' about the Residential Zone, he was already poring over a map of the area, which I must admit bore more resemblance to ground realities than earlier ones. The all-or-nothing idealism of a few years ago has been overtaken by a more pragmatic functionality. As Luigi puts it, "The process of Auroville has taught us many lessons. Idealism and pragmatism have to go hand in hand. The present function of this group is concerned with infrastructure development... We are not part of any decision-making process regarding the city."

So the more one looks, the more one finds that the controls that held development in the city in check for so long have been removed, and consequently there are no safeguards against what appears to be unfolding in Zone One of the residential area.

Whether Luigi's parting words – "You know, New York began with huts" – reflected a resigned pragmatism or were suggestive of a more radical concept of change is anybody's guess.

Auroson

HOW TO SUBSCRIBE

To cover our costs, the subscription rates for 12 issues of Auroville Today are the following: for India Rs 250; for other countries Rs 1250, Can \$ 51, FF 195, DM 56, It. Lira 61,000, D.Gl. 63, US \$ 38, UK £25. 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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BRIEF NEWS

Special issue on Auroville

Ahana, the newsletter of the Sri Aurobindo Centre, New Delhi, has brought out a special 200-page issue on Auroville. The issue contains articles on many aspects of Auroville (some drawn from past issues of Auroville Today), and is prefaced with messages of support from the President of India, the former Prime Minister, P.V. Narasimha Rao and the Lieutenant-Governor of Pondicherry. Sri S. C. De (the former secretary of Auroville Foundation) and Sri B. R. Bajaj are the editors of this issue.

In Sympathy

Our condolences go out to the family of Tina Piacentino who passed away on 17 July. Tina, her husband Guy and daughter Circe, who live in Switzerland, are well known to Aurovilians and she will be missed. Guy and Circe plan to visit Auroville again next year.

Flute concert at Pitanga

A blue moon (the second full moon in a month) in July provided an occasion to hold a classical South Indian flute concert. The audience packed into Pitanga's main hall were enchanted by Shri Raja Vingadessin's renderings of 'ragas' on flute to the accompaniment of a violin and a mridamgam (an Indian percussion instrument). The mridamgam solo was also highly appreciated.

Vocal Concert

One Sunday in August in Pitanga, two Dutch guests, Sonja Feenstra (soprano) and Jeroen Riemsdijk (piano) treated us to a concert of songs by Schubert, De Falla, and an aria from 'La Boheme' by Puccini.

Concert by the Youth

The Auroville youth put on an absolutely scintillating and original soft-rock concert in July. Despite being rained out the first night, and despite the make-shift audio arrangements on the second rescheduled night, the performance of the young guitarists and singers was brilliant. Suryan and Amrit were the main lead singers.

Exhibition in Pitanga

'L'Atelier d'Elie', a small tapestry workshop run by the French weaver Elie, exhibited for the first time its beautifully produced colourful wall-hangings.

Preparing for the Food Summit

Bernard and Brooks of Auroville participated in a global conference held in New Delhi as a preparatory meet for the Food Summit that is scheduled to be held in Rome in September. The conference brought together many eminent environmentalists and representatives of non-governmental organizations from all over the world who spoke of the threats to human health that accrue from an increasing industrialization of agriculture. The declaration drafted at the conference states the necessity to return to the sustainable methods of organic farming.

Apology

In our last issue (No. 91), inaccurate maps of India were published. We deeply regret this inadvertent error and sincerely apologise for it. The official map of India is published herewith.



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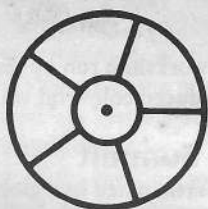
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IN THIS ISSUE:
PERSPECTIVES ON DEVELOPMENT;
THE VISA ISSUE;
AUROVILLE AND SPIRITUALITY;
PORTRAIT OF BORIS.



Historic shot of Utility canyon (around 1975)

PHOTO: AV Archives

PORTRAIT



photo: Anita

Ruminations of a romantic...

*I will speak of the things which are best in this existence...
(The Hymns of Zarathustra: 45,4)*

Near my house this winter I often see a couple of paradise flycatchers (Terpsiphone paradisi). The male of this species has an incredibly long tail, but the female's tail is quite short. Naturally, a wife-bird fell in love with her partner who has this remarkable tail. But why on earth does the husband like the wife with her ordinary tail?

Each creature has its own preferences. For example, according to Shakespeare (Othello, Act 1, Sc. 3) "She lov'd me for the dangers I had pass'd and I lov'd her that she did pity them."

The above is one of Boris's contributions to the Auroville News. Boris frequently publishes his aphorisms, thoughts and philosophical tidbits in our weekly newspaper. Boris might be our only philosopher – at least the only one to publish in the News – but at the moment his place in Auroville is a bit precarious. He has a problem renewing his passport and extending his visa. But this doesn't seem to daunt him. In fact, when I spoke with him, he was eager to share (in Russian-English) his daily discoveries, which he described as "the water of life".

"It's like I haven't for a long time seen water, and I now drink this water and this water is not simple water. It's the water of life, and now at 59 I feel as though I'm only 9 years old", he says, ending in laughter and a smile that seems oblivious to Auroville's less kind forces.

AVTODAY: What is your philosophy?

BORIS: My philosophy is not special... Maybe there is some practice of Integral yoga, and the yoga of nature, maybe that, and maybe some influence from the Russian condition. For a long time I was without contact with the larger world – I knew of Indian nature only through Kipling and his story Riki Tiki Tavi and such. To me, it is the most interesting that there is the theory of Integral Yoga in the world, and Auroville is not one university, but a series of universities. A university of spiritual knowledge, a university of nature, a university of linguistics, and each day I take some interesting element of different levels, in spirituality, in nature, in language. As I was a biologist in Russia I was interested in these, but that was platonic love. Only in Auroville I feel that I was... am full. I have lived here five years, and maybe in these five years I received more than in all my previous life and, although it is impossible for one person to register everything, I try to share something of it with others, to record it through these notes in the News. I hope that I don't only receive, but that I do something for Auroville as well.

There are many very important elements concentrated in Auroville, and I am very proud to be a part of this experiment.

Would you say your life is like a fairy tale?

For me Auroville is that chain of miracles, many miracles, and these miracles have very different aspects. For example, I met here two Italian people that were guests and they each presented me with a book. One gave me one book about butterflies and the other person another book about butterflies, and now for me it is possible to identify butterflies. Before it was impossible.

Are you religious?

No, my father, my mother, my brother were communists – but I was a dissident, and so they told me to leave work after almost a quarter of a century in the scientific academy. And I became interested in yoga – first in Agni yoga, which is very similar to Integral Yoga, but of course Integral Yoga is more full and more new. When I was in Siberia, Vladimir Petrov brought books of Mother and Sri Aurobindo... and I took these books in my hand and I understood, and knew my life was in Auroville.

Do you think you are a romantic?

Yes of course I think that I am a romantic, that is right, that is correct. I lived without money in Auroville for so long. My friend in Urkutsk, an economist said: "Ah, you will not be in India long. You don't have a lot of money, some weeks or months only". But I have lived here five years, so that's a good base for a romantic.

And now if you have to leave India?

I live in Auroville and feel that my life is part of Auroville, and if it will be my fate to be in another place, Auroville will be with me in any case. But, of course I do not want to leave India. There are two possible variants – maybe I can change my passport in Delhi, or I must go to Russia. But with the new system in Russia, the wall is growing back, new documents and bureaucracy are born, and I'm afraid that if I return to Russia I won't be able to get back to Auroville. I'm afraid, but I wrote a letter to Mother and hope that she receives it. In this town possible new miracles.

Interview by Auroson