

AUROVILLE TODAY

November 1994, Number Seventy

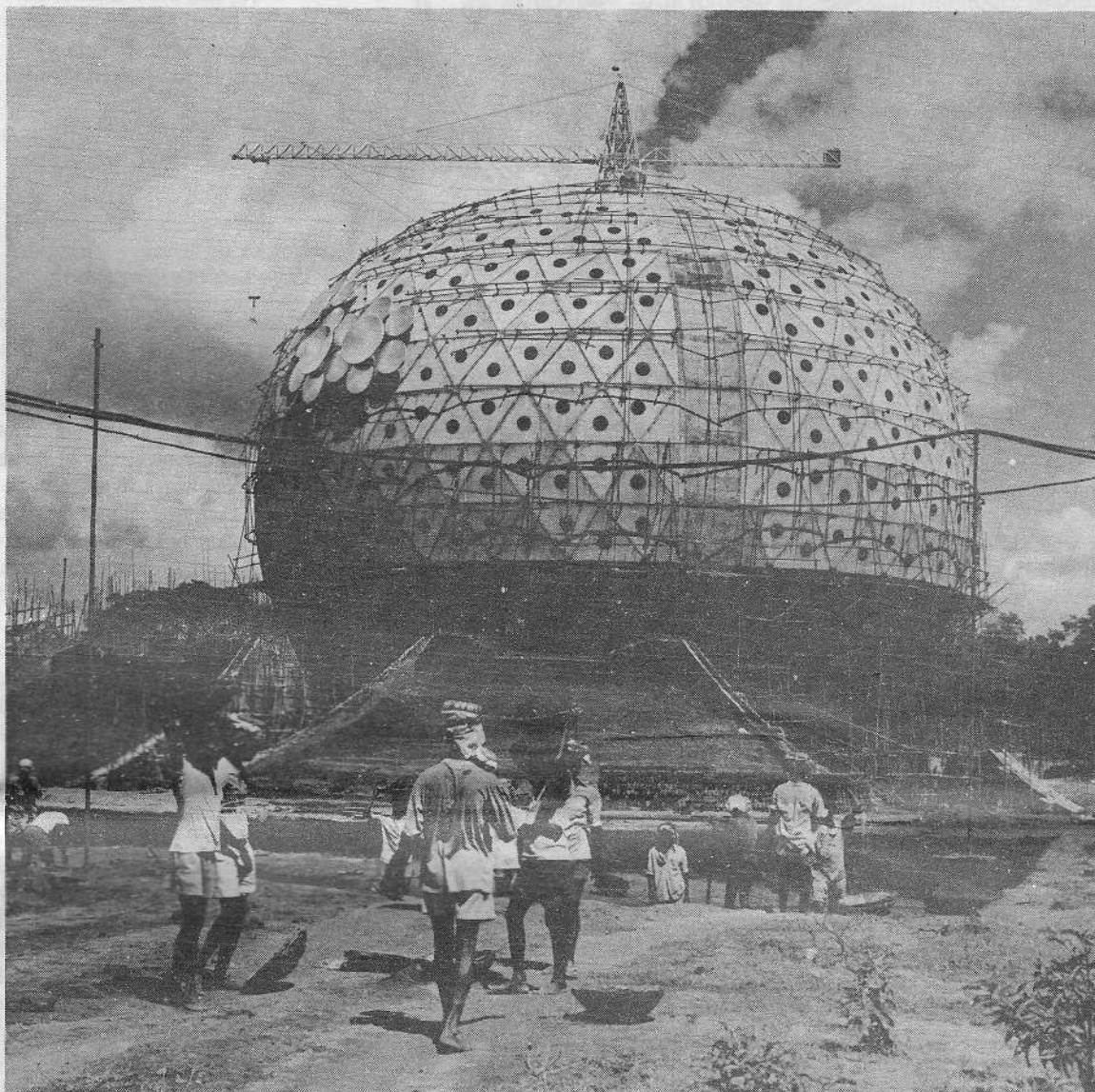


PHOTO JOHN MANDEEN

Photo: The west-south-west side of Matrimandir in May-June 1994. At present, the sphere is fully enclosed by the ferro-cement triangles, each of which has a porthole. At the left a first set of concave and convex discs, which will ultimately cover the entire Matrimandir, can be seen. In front and to the left, two of the twelve large petals are seen rising upwards.

"Recently I was in the process of waking up from my afternoon nap, and in that delicious intermediate world between various realities, I saw the inauguration of Matrimandir. There was the great golden sphere, but rather vague, and there were hundreds of people flocking towards it. The forms were not explicit; more prominent was the certain knowledge that it was the year two-thousand, February 21, 2000. It was clear and sure, just like that, and only after a waking up cup of tea did the reflections come... It's a long way off, almost fifteen years... but then, we have been building for almost fifteen years now, and don't we have the feeling we are about half-way? ..."

The words above are part of an essay entitled "The House of the Third Millennium" written at the end of 1985 by Ruud Lohman, one of Auroville's early settlers who left his body in 1986. Ruud's vision of the inauguration might well turn out to be true....

FEBRUARY 21, 2000?

If we are lucky, we may get all the portholes above the equator closed before the onset of the monsoon in mid-October, and the inside will be free of rain for the first time since the beginning of Matrimandir.

We sit at the top. While Toine explains the various works in progress, my gaze drifts over the green scenery of Auroville, interrupted at a few places by red or white tiled roofs, the only obvious scenes of habitation. We are seated on a raised slab which reminds me of an old people's bench. Underneath is a ventilation outlet. "The idea is that the air which enters Matrimandir through the four doorways, and around and through the center of the central staircase will escape through the roof. That will create a natural ventilation for the entire area inside of Matrimandir, with the exception of the Chamber which is already air-conditioned. The slab you are sitting on is not intended for elderly Aurovilians to admire the sunset after an exhausting climb up, but to prevent rain from entering inside". Oh.

Toine is one of the members of the Matrimandir Coordination team and is involved in most of the day-to-day matters regarding the construction of Matrimandir. Our meeting is accidental. He is here for his work, I to see for myself the progress which has been made during the past months.

To our backs is the heliostat, which directs the steady ray of light onto the crystal in the Chamber. It has two mirrors, one which receives the sunlight and reflects it onto a slightly

concave second one which is located above the chamber opening. It is a prototype in the real sense of the word. "Yes, that is part of a bicycle wheel", confirms Toine pointing at a piece of the intricate machinery. "And these are the computer operated stepper-motors, which regulate the position of the mirror that follows the sun every minute." As if to prove his words the two motors suddenly jump into action, slightly adjusting the mirror's position. "The final heliostat is already here, but we will only install it when the crane on top of Matrimandir has been removed, and that may take quite some time. In the final model the concentration of the ray onto the globe will be secured by a lens of 45 cm diameter, positioned directly below the second mirror in the central opening of the Chamber. By that time also the four artificial lights, which are now situated around the central opening, will be positioned in the opening itself. Another lens will be positioned below the crystal in the opening in the floor of the Chamber, so that the light from the sun which has passed through the crystal will continue to move down through the opening in the floor to the lotus pond underneath Matrimandir. Then the symbolism of the light of the Supreme passing through the transparent crystal before uniting with Matter will be complete".

But all that is still for the future. Right in front of me is a beehive of activity. A number of workers are busy applying a waterproof coating on top of the ferro-cement triangles, giving the whole outside skin a milky white colour. "The

choice for the waterproof coating came after many alternatives had been studied" says Toine. "The original idea was to use small white mosaic tiles, but we had many problems to fix the square tiles to the triangular ferro-cement panels." Other workers are busy installing windows in the portholes of the ferro-cement triangles. "That has been a typical Matrimandir adventure story. One of the previous designs of the inner skin prescribed that the interior of Matrimandir around the Chamber would receive its light directly through the portholes of the outer skin. Mother had indicated that the colour of the inner skin would be a soft rose-orange (the supramental colour), and in order to realize that we searched for glass tinted in that colour. But we couldn't find it and it was finally decided that we would have to produce the glass for the windows ourselves. So we bought a furnace and a crucible. But the first crucible broke, and so did the second one, both due to manufacturer's defects. It also appeared that we had really underestimated the complexity of this work. Meanwhile, the design of the inner skin changed. It was decided that the interior of the Matrimandir would receive light not directly, but filtered through the inside skin, which would consist of rose-orange coloured, triangular fibre reinforced polyester (FRP) panels. This eliminated the need for using coloured glass, and normal 6 mm thick float glass could be used. We found a company in Pondicherry who could toughen the glass; the window frames are made on the spot here from white FRP, the neoprene rubber between the FRP and the glass comes from

(continued on page 2)

1 - 12: INNER GARDENS

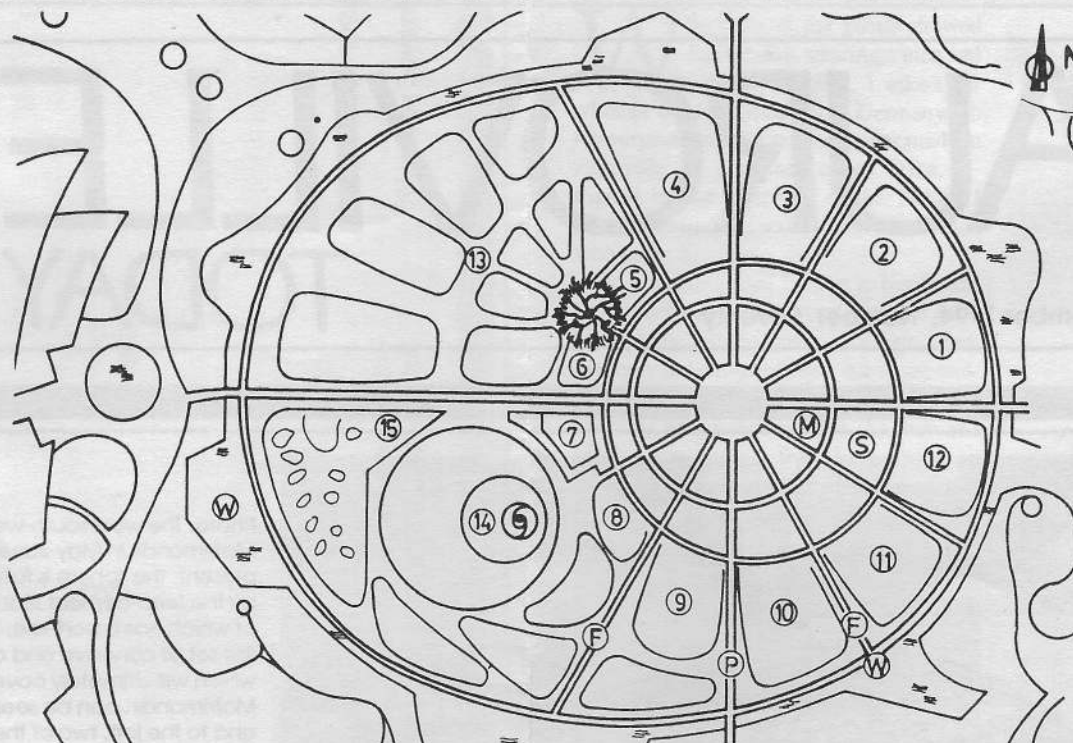
1. Existence
2. Consciousness
3. Bliss
4. Light
5. Life
6. Power
7. Wealth
8. Utility
9. Progress
10. Youth
11. Harmony
12. Perfection

13. GARDEN OF UNITY

14. AMPHITHEATRE W. URN

15. ROSE GARDEN

S. SMALL PETALS



M. LARGE PETALS

Each large petal contains a meditation room for which The Mother has given a name and a colour indicating the quality it is to embody: Sincerity, Humility, Gratitude, Perseverance, Aspiration, Receptivity, Progress, Courage, Goodness, Generosity, Equality, Peace.

P. FOUR MAIN PATHS leading into the Matrimandir
F. EIGHT FOOT PATHS leading down to the lotus pond beneath Matrimandir

W. OVAL PATH AND WATER CHANNEL

(continued from front page)

another company in Pondicherry... and it is all being installed now. We intend to sell the furnace, if it cannot be made useful elsewhere within Auroville."

On our way down Toine points to the first prototype of those rose-orange colored triangles that has been installed on the inner skin. "There is too much blue in it", judged Alain Grandcolas from Auroville International France on a visit some time ago. Now another sample is being made using special pigments recently brought from France. "The special resin has arrived, and we are ready to make the first 40 panels. But our first priority is now to get the upper half of Matrimandir closed and waterproofed before the monsoon, so that we can continue the work inside."

First priority... indeed! For there are many other 'priorities' going on, all at the same time. While the waterproof coating and the window installation continues on top, another team is busy installing the last ferro-cement triangles down on the side facing southeast, between the Maheshwari and the Mahalakshmi pillars. In the inside of all four pillars small ladders are being fitted, next to the air-conditioning and other pipes. The whole will be covered by an inner skin leaving a crawling space between the inner and the outer skin of about 40 centimeters. On the central staircase cone a marble mosaic takes shape.

Outside, the twelve large petals surrounding Matrimandir are gradually growing skyward. The west-north-west petal is the most advanced. The slope that faces Matrimandir has already fully been covered with Red Agra stone, as has the upper half of the slope which faces outward. The lower part of that slope will be planted with green grass, the same which is used on the twelve small petals which will encircle the larger ones. Inside the large petal, the prototype of the first ovoid (egg shaped) underground

meditation room has become ready, so that a number of details (natural light, colour etc.) can be studied by Roger Anger when he comes to Auroville in the middle of October.

Our walk brings us into the garden, past the excavation of the 800 cubic metre underground tank which will be covered by one of the small petals. "The steel for the concrete of the tank is being bent", says Toine. This tank, together with a smaller 250 cubic metre one, situated under the another small petal, will be used for watering the Matrimandir gardens, for which purpose the four wells in the area are being interconnected.

Further away, the outline of the future lake is taking shape. The sloping sides are gradually covered with lime and tamped down. The lake will be connected to the 'channel', so that the 'oval', consisting of the inner gardens with Matrimandir at their center, the amphitheater and the new rose garden, will be fully encircled by a body of water. "Do we have sufficient water?" I ask Toine. "We don't really know", is the answer "we will first try with a number of smaller sections, divided by small land bridges. If it all works, we will break through these land bridges and unite the sections into the channel. Already one section has been completed and is now filled with rain water."

And then we look back, facing the majesty that Matrimandir promises to become. Or actually already is. A set of 17 golden concave and convex discs, arranged in a flower form, was put in place last year as a promise of

what will be. Many Aurovilians still feel that the original model of the discs' positioning was far more beautiful than the present one, but it has been discarded. "Roger felt that the old model belonged to a more artistic expression of his search for beauty, while the present one is considered by him to be more pure."

"We really want to move as fast as possible" concludes Toine. I ask for a time schedule. "We would like to complete all the structural work (at present mainly the petals) within a period of 2 years. In that period we can also make a lot of progress with the fitting of the FRP triangles of the inner skin. Thereafter we can concentrate on all the remaining work: the fixing of all marble inside, the staircases, the ramps, the disks, the finalization of the gardens and the entire infrastructure."

So what about that day envisioned by Ruud? "Well", says Toine, "that actually is very feasible. Two years for the structural work, three for the rest. Yes, it should be possible." Let's hear Ruud again:

"From February 21, 1971, the Day of the First Stone, to February 21, 2000, the Day of the Inauguration... 29 years!"

"Almost a generation... But wait, 29 years, there is something interesting about 29. Isn't Matrimandir precisely 29 metre high? I found this always significant, because one gets a strong feeling that 29 is somehow intimately linked to the Supermind, that new and high consciousness which Sri Aurobindo discovered and realised as the next step in the evolution... whose global manifestation took place in 1956, on February 29, as announced by The Mother. . . . Two feelings persist: that 29 years of building sounds just right; and that the coincidence of Matrimandir's Inauguration and the entrance to the next millennium sounds more than just right."

"Each great Age had its great building. In the next millennium evolution may well more massively work out human-after-human, the new intermediate creature; and it is one more master stroke in the Divine's play that the House of that Being will stand manifest in all its glory right at the beginning of the next Age."

February 21, 2000. It sounds right. Indeed.

Carel

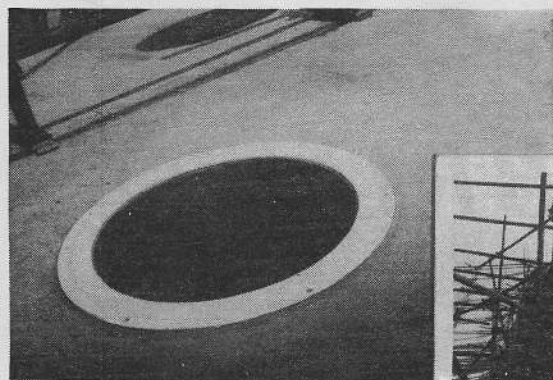
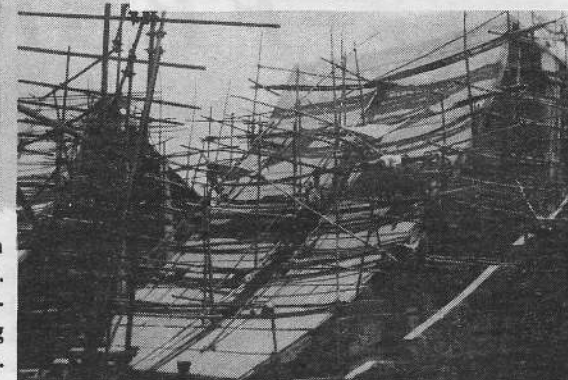


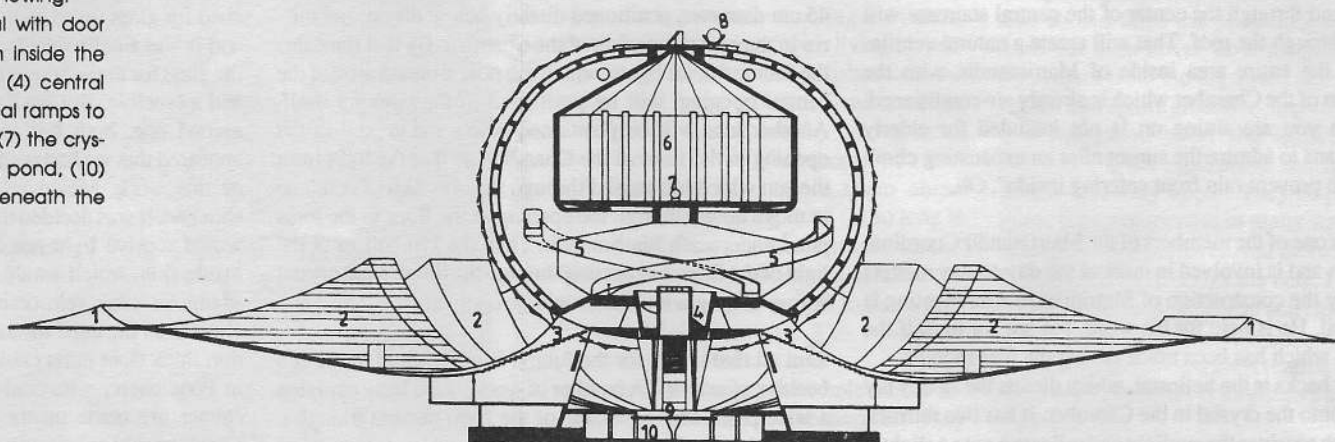
Photo above : An FRP window fitted in one of the portholes of the outer skin.
Photo right: The slope of the west-north-west petal facing Matrimandir is being covered with red Agra stone.

Photos: Lakshminarayan



Cross-section of Matrimandir, showing:

- (1) small petal, (2) large petal with door leading to the meditation room inside the petal, (3) staircase to first level, (4) central staircase to second level, (5) spiral ramps to the Chamber, (6) the Chamber, (7) the crystal, (8) the heliostat, (9) the lotus pond, (10) the tank to collect rainwater beneath the lotus pond.



"The key word is facilitation"

Interview with the outgoing Working Committee

Auroville Today: At the beginning of your year, did the team set itself specific objectives?

Ed: The first Working Committee was chosen from people with administrative skills; the last one was constituted from those with 'heart' qualities. We set ourselves a course to try to synthesise the two.

How?

Bhavana: One thing that was very important to us was to keep up a very open communication with the community through reports in the 'Auroville News'. We tried to present things not dryly, but with some juice, combining head and heart; and we always signed off by trying to remember something higher, by putting everything in the context of the yoga.

Ashok: The formation of the work group 'Sahanabhuti', which was initiated by the Economy Task Group and supported by us, was an example of the heart process at work. 'Sahanabhuti' means 'to feel compassion for others', and this group was a response to the poor accommodation and living conditions of some Aurovilians, an attempt to find out who was deprived, and to help in any way possible.

Bhavana: In fact, one of our policies from the very beginning was to call for sub groups to study particular issues. This was partly to save ourselves from being deluged under different issues, but especially to involve as many people as possible in the community process. 'Sahanabhuti' was one example of such a group; others groups which we have helped initiate or support were the Conflict Resolution group and the Auroville Guard.

However, we have to be conscious of the fact that, from April to August—5 months!—the community is operating at extremely low manpower, and everything that was started up before then seems to fail or go to sleep. The Representatives Group, for example, still exists. But in the summer, only a few people apart from the Working Committee were attending regularly.

Past Working Committees have sometimes felt, or found themselves, isolated from the rest of the community. Have you experienced this?

Gillian: Generally, I feel there is a big silent majority in the community who never come forward to participate, but simply gossip about things they don't like with their friends. This can really block progress.

Ashok: Sometimes we didn't get so much feedback, but I don't think this is inertia from the rest of the community. Rather, I see the community as a joint family which has confidently handed over some of its mundane work to the Working Committee so that everybody else can do something more useful.

Ed: Getting community feedback sometimes involves a 'Catch-22' situation. For example, one of the main things we have dealt with in this Working Committee is Office Order Number 5, which is basically about the relatability of a unit to the Foundation. We had to make draft after draft after draft, each time having to get feedback from the community before making further modifications. It got to the point where people couldn't look at it anymore! So, on

The task of the Working Committee, as defined in the Auroville Foundation Act, is to assist the Residents Assembly and the Governing Board in their work. In practice, this has meant acting, at different times, as a buffer, liaison or bridge builder with the Secretary and the Governing Board, and as a 'sink' for all kinds of problems that the community dumps in front of it. No wonder it is so difficult to find people to take up this work.

AUROVILLE TODAY spoke recently with members of the third Working Committee—Ashok, Bhavana, Ed, Gillian, Juanita and Santo (Raman, the seventh member was ill)—who were just coming to the end of their one year tenure. How was their experience, and what did they learn, both individually and collectively, from it?



PHOTO JOHN MANDEEN

the one hand, we can say that if the community had put its trust in a particular group to do this work without referring back, it would have gone much faster. On the other hand, many of the different inputs have provided real insights and have helped make it a better document.

Did you all feel equally strongly about communicating everything to the community, or were there instances where you were unsure about the right course?

Ed: There was one issue—it had to do with tax exemption and leasing—where we thought that immediately communicating some information that came to us would unnecessarily complicate the process that was developing. However, it complicated our process not to communicate it! So we released it, and it turned out O.K. Otherwise, we've been very careful to be as transparent as possible.

What has been the Working Committee's main work this year?

Ashok: The confrontation with the Foundation was the heaviest aspect of our work. I think our main focus this year has been to work on structures and processes through which the community can function and interface with the Foundation. In brief, we have worked out ways in which the commercial units, the service units and the community as a whole are linked to the Working Committee, which, in turn, will relate on their behalf to the Foundation. Once these agreements are formally established, I think it will make the work much easier.

Ed: Yes, we have asked, actually demanded, from the Governing Board and the Government of India, that the com-

munity be responsible for its own financial affairs and internal organization, and this will soon be formally agreed. This is a great step. But now we have to show that we are mature enough to take up these responsibilities.

Otherwise, like Ashok, I think our main work was to attempt, when confronted with problems, to set up procedures that the community could work with in the future. For example, after the problems with the Bommaiapalayam villagers, we set up the first Auroville meeting with the local village headmen; our hope is that such meetings will continue to happen.

Gillian: I think our main work came down a lot to human relationships, and to being somewhere where the community could come and share its problems. What interests me is that people would come to us because we were empowered by somebody, we had some kind of external permission to exist. It's an interesting insight into our lack of inner security.

Bhavana: I think the key word regarding our main work is 'facilitation'. In other words, we were trying to help people to interact harmoniously, to understand how to work together and to share responsibilities. This was made easier because these skills are now much more present in the community than they were a few years ago. And the arrival of a very sincere and open new Secretary also helped.

Ed: Dialogue! A large part of our effort was to keep a dialogue going with the Governing Board, the Secretary, the community and the various working groups. Because if you can keep the dialogue going, eventually people can come to some understanding.

How well did you work together as a group?

Ed: We had differences...

Juanita: ...but we could always work them out. We approached this work as a service to the community, and this has helped make it work. There were no big ego-trips.

Bhavana: We had the good luck that on every issue that came before us, one of us felt able to handle the facilitation. And so we'd give it over to them. That's the trust thing; you recognise who can handle something, and you give it to them trusting they will do their best. And it works!

As for the team thing, my role as note-taker made me aware time and again that our seven different voices kept making one common voice. It was not difficult to write those notes!

Ed: It's really surprising how happy we still are to be with each other. We didn't have any problems sitting down twice a week in that tiny room to look at all the heavy trips that were put on the table for us to deal with. I think it's because we looked at each issue and said "What's the most intelligent thing to do here? What's the spiritual thing to do here?"

The (third) Working Committee at the end of their year. L. to r.: Juanita, Ashok, Bhavana, Santo, Gillian, Ed, Raman.

Were there any issues on which you couldn't make headway?

Ed: One issue was the relationship of Shyamsunder to the community (*Shyamsunder was connected with Auroville from the very beginning. The question of his status in the community has been a matter of controversy for many years—Eds.*). We wanted to initiate a process to deal with this, but in the end Shyamsunder himself said it wasn't the right time. The other important thing which we didn't get the chance to process had to do with basic cross-cultural issues in the community.

What we're really talking about here is dusting out some of those areas that, as a community, we don't want to look at. Because until we deal with this stuff, we're never going to be able to make real leaps forward.

Can you give more examples of this unprocessed 'stuff'?

Ed: Our finances. What people do with their money, and how we're going to share it more effectively. It's the question of how the individual relates to the community. What are we supposed to share, how much can we surrender...?

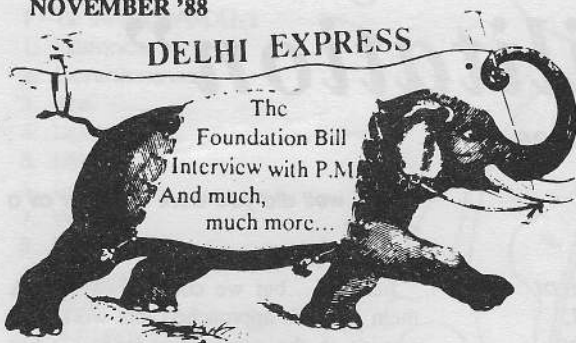
The first Working Committee failed to prevent the polarisation of the community on a critical issue. Were you ever in a similar situation?

Bhavana: There were two occasions on which we did not allow polarisation of the community to happen. One was in our relationship with the Foundation. When we began this work, the community was very angry with the Foundation. But when we met the Governing Board, we made a great effort to be friendly and to build enough confidence with them—so that we could

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NOVEMBER '88

DELHI EXPRESS



What's news? It depends upon whom you talk to—or listen to. The BBC? Voice of America? The New China News Agency? As soon as one begins examining it, in fact, it becomes obvious that 'news', as interpreted by the mass media, doesn't just happen; rather it is selected, 'packaged', on the basis of the perspective of whoever writes, publishes or broadcasts it. As Marx (somewhat simplistically) put it, "The ruling ideas are the ideas of the ruling class".

Which brings us, somewhat abruptly, to April 1990 AUROVILLE TODAY.

For what, exactly, constitutes 'news' for us? After all, AUROVILLE TODAY is not just another newspaper, subject to the whims of a crusading proprietor or of political overlords. Which makes it all the more interesting to ask ourselves if the way we define "news" is also, at times, the result of partiality or unspoken assumptions.

If we begin by looking at the diversity of topics covered in AUROVILLE TODAY—which seems a reasonable indication of how broadly we interpret "news"—then we seem to be doing well. In the last ten issues alone, for example, we have covered topics as diverse as the visit of the Dalai Lama, education, an international seminar, food research, new constructions, cultural events, the Master Plan, Auroville farms, nature, water problems and the new secretary of the Auroville Foundation: and this in addition to interviews and profiles of Aurovilians and friends. If I look more closely, however, at how we handled some of these topics, and I expand the perspective to comprehend the sweep of not ten but 70 issues of AUROVILLE TODAY, I have to admit to some reservations concerning our approach and perspective—even while honouring our achievement, in the face of devastating tropical entropy, in regularly bringing something of the flavour of the Auroville experiment to our readership around the world.

Sometimes, for example, we have tended to repeat ourselves without finding new perspectives upon a topic. The recent issue devoted to water problems is a case in point, for it did not materially deepen the understanding of a topic which had been introduced two years before. Of course, not very much may have happened concerning the impending water crisis over that period—but this in itself is "news", this is important information which should have been stressed and analysed. More crucially, sometimes we don't dig deeply enough into a topic to expose the underlying issues or tensions which are driving it. In earlier issues of AUROVILLE TODAY, for example, a number of references were made to differences that existed in the community between 'environmentalists' and 'planners'. What's interesting about this is that here we have an archetypal conflict which is being played and replayed all over the world. So any attempt to discover what lies at its roots here in Auroville may well have implications for understanding it and—who knows?—defusing it elsewhere. In fact, Auroville, because of its complexity and concentration, is a microcosm of many archetypal conflicts—like those between the differing preoccupations of the developed and developing worlds, between urban and rural values, between the orientations of commerce and service, between the forces of the past and of the future—and so provides a marvellous opportunity to study them in the context of a more 'universal' perspective. But AUROVILLE TODAY with a few exceptions like Roger's article on pragmatists and idealists, has not really dived into this pool, tending to treat such matters as Auroville-specific.

More than this, however, I sometimes question how widely we cast our nets for what we term news. Critics of AUROVILLE TODAY within the community accuse us of bias, of only presenting the 'positive' face of the community, of covering certain topics to the exclusion of others.

What's News?

The first issue of AUROVILLE TODAY appeared in November, 1988. Therefore, this November issue marks the sixth anniversary of this magazine. Birthdays for us are opportunities to reflect upon how well we have been doing and where we want to go next. In keeping with this tradition, the following is a meditation by one of our editors upon the process by which AUROVILLE TODAY selects and interprets its raw material.

A brief perusal of recent issues demonstrates that we are far from being uncritical about certain trends in the community. Moreover, our critics are sometimes themselves preminent examples of bias and selectivity when it comes to deciding what the 'important issues' are, and what should be ignored. Nevertheless, a study of six years of AUROVILLE TODAY does reveal that we devote quite a lot of space to certain items or points of view and much less, or no space at all, to others.



In this issue: Moscow Forum; Prague; Auroville's economy; etc.

For example, the environment is well represented, as is the Auroville economy, matters relating to self-government and the Foundation and—somewhat surprisingly!—things Tibetan. We've devoted far less space to, for example, the villages, or to individual struggles with the sadhana of self-perfection or collective yoga. And we've devoted hardly any, or no space at all, to topics like loneliness in Auroville, inequalities in the community, the frustrations of Auroville youth, violence, addictions, the role of different spiritual 'gurus' within the yoga, broken families, Auroville 'casteism', the commercialization of Auroville etc.

Now, it's not that the economy is not 'News': clearly we should continue to cover it. But if "news" is also that which is of daily concern to many Aurovilians and Newcomers, then I think we should not only trawl deeper, but also change the mesh on our nets so that we can capture other types of fish. In other words, there is a danger that, as journalists, we may become hypnotised into thinking that certain high-profile issues, which tend to dominate the pages of the weekly Auroville News, are the only, or even the most important ones, worth communicating to our readers.

Of course, it's not as simple as this. For example, absolute objectivity is an illusion. However much it may strive for it, any editorial team tends to reflect the predispositions of its members. At its simplest level, this manifests in the fact that our team, in spite of its diversity of viewpoints, cannot hope to reflect all the orientations in Auroville, so that covering certain topics or points of view requires us to search out those who can—and who are willing—to express such perspectives. We don't always find them. Or look hard enough.

Again, the reason that AUROVILLE TODAY has not covered some of the topics mentioned above is because the topics are very sensitive, or at a sensitive stage of their 'process'; the implication being that if they are dealt with clumsily or precipitously—and the time gap that exists between the gathering of news and its final publication on a monthly periodical is a significant factor here—AUROVILLE TODAY may end up exacerbating the situation rather than healing it. And this points up a cardinal distinction between what we are trying to do with AUROVILLE TODAY and the motives of traditional tabloid journalism. For the latter, a "good story" is everything, the more shocking and revelatory the better. As William Randolph Hearst pithily (and cynically) put it, "News is something somebody doesn't want you to print. All the rest is ads". Whereas we in AUROVILLE TODAY are not a faceless team in an anonymous city, but are members of a small family. We are a thread in the fabric of a collective experiment that remains, at least on the material level, still fragile and easily torn. Recognising this, and recognising that, for all their

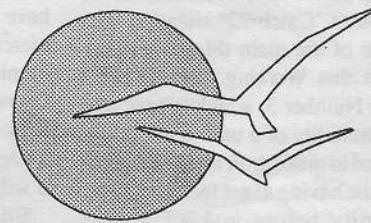
faults and weaknesses, the present Aurovilians have offered themselves—at some level of their beings—to a process of change, AUROVILLE TODAY tends to be wary of touching certain issues which are in process, unless it feels able to do so in a way that will assist. This may lead, at times, to us being silent on issues which are vehemently exercising the community as a whole. It may also result in a certain lack of journalistic "bite" when we do deal with some issues, since the effort to understand a complex process and to assist it forward requires giving up simplistic black and white positions and the easy apportionment of blame. However, such considerations should not be used as an excuse for avoiding difficult or controversial issues, or for eschewing strong statements when they are called for.

For me, however, the most subversive thought is that the 'real' news is elsewhere, and that we are often caught looking in the wrong direction. This may well be an illusion, an admission of insecurity. But, somewhere, it links with Sri Aurobindo's aphorism about the yogi on the mountain-top who 'dreamed' the French Revolution many years before it occurred. In other words, if we see Auroville as a field of energy within which certain forces are active, and if we understand that these forces can use anything or anybody as instruments for the fulfilling of their purposes, and if we further admit that we have little understanding of how these forces work, then it's more than possible that what we conceive of as decisive or momentous events may be peripheral, and that the real pivotal moments may be disguised within the most mundane envelope. For example, some Aurovilians feel at the moment that leaving the Auroville Foundation is an essential step on the path to us realizing Mother's Dream. They may be right. But a more essential step may involve one individual conquering a movement of anger or pride; or in becoming, as Satprem put it, "naked and real". For a journalist, the problem is obvious. How does one know what is really going on? How can one weigh the importance of any act in terms of the grand design, in terms of a developing pattern? What is positive, what negative? And how can one communicate through the clumsy medium of language the paradoxes, the subtle shifts and sudden epiphanies of the force field that is Auroville?

This seems to leave us in something of a cul-de-sac. But the prescription does not have to be quite so absolute as "enlighten yourself or shut up". The very awareness, for example, that we cannot grasp all and, perhaps, not even the most important dimensions of many topics, may make us less absolutist, more willing to tease out the complexities of an issue, to examine the peripheries, the unexpected angles. The realization that, as journalists, we tend to attune to language—and to the language of reason—should not blind us to that other unpredictable dynamic which is termed "Grace". In fact, our task as journalists in Auroville may finally be less to do with trying to direct and interpret events, and more to do with keeping possibilities in play, with creating a space and a spirit of openness to the unexpected, in both ourselves and our readers, so that that Something Else can act more powerfully. If we should succeed in this, well, that would be news!

Alan

OCTOBER 1994



In this issue. Aspects of SAIER; portrait of an artist

GOING THERE at night from Certitude I have time to study the stars and feel the vastness of open space before entering the canopy of trees lining the road that takes me to Bharat Nivas Auditorium. A ramp at the rear takes me to an iron gate that opens onto a dark, cavernous room that becomes a stage (with the flick of a light switch) that asks from me another kind of widening—a widening of energy and expectations. At the moment the room is under repair: it feels cold and disrupted... the beautiful wood floor has been removed, exposing the grey concrete underneath—ladders, ropes, poles, piles of lumber and bricks are strewn about: an auditorium in transition, and not easy to “warm up”—in the theatre sense a space has a warm or cold feeling and this feeling very much affects the work that you do there. This is not the first time the auditorium has been renovated, I discover. It has a history, and I listen with interest as Gilles describes this history not only of the auditorium but the whole Pavilion of India: office space, library, restaurant, freestore and auditorium. (Of course, it was the auditorium that I felt most closely connected to. I have mounted two shows there, and am presently working on a third. It's my second home. A place of bone-weary evenings and late night elations.)

As a civil engineer, Gilles sees Bharat Nivas as a structure in (never-ending) progress, and the story, extending back thirteen years (and more) can best be described as historical-tragical-serio-comical, with a cast of... hundreds and... a happy ending? Well, not quite yet!

IN THE BEGINNING... Let us start with 1971. There is an all-India architectural competition. Three finalists for the design of Bharat Nivas get to work on their concepts. One is chosen—the concept of Mr. Chakrapani from Madras. Mother said, (remembers Gilles) “It is the simplest. Easier to modify.”

CUT TO...

(This is not exactly *Gone With the Wind*, yet I can't help using the language of film to describe this love story between man and matter).

...1972. E.C.C. (Engineering Construction Corp., now Larsen and Toubro) are the contractors. They will work day and night to be ready for Sri Aurobindo's Centenary in 1972. But, money runs out and the everything remains unfinished.

KEEP TRACKING...

Working Committee, contd. from page 3

function in an ongoing way. The other occasion was when a group of Aurovilians presented a petition to the Governing Board without consulting us. We didn't react negatively to this, but just observed. Later, when they were forming themselves into the Auroville Sangha, one of the group came to see us and explained they were not against the Foundation, but wanted to come together to share ideals and take up certain work in the community. We could easily respect the sincerity of their position, and communicated this viewpoint in an ‘unpolarized’ way in the Auroville News.

How does it feel to be so close to laying down your Working Committee responsibility?

Bhavana: I'm looking forward to paying more attention to my inner work as I felt that the Working Committee work was externalising me so much.

Santo: There's still so much to be done that one feels a bit guilty, because we've not

finished anything, actually, we're just leaving. But after one year of so much pressure and responsibility I feel it's somebody else's turn now.

Ed: This job requires a lot of time and energy, so now I have to pick up all the loose ends that I've been leaving untied this year. But I've noticed that the more I devoted myself to the work, the more satisfying it became. It's been a great opportunity to learn about the community and, above all, myself.

So is one year too short? Should the Working Committee have a longer tenure?

Ed: It takes a long time to get to know the ropes. To leave now may seem premature... and continuity is also an important issue. Yet each Working Committee represents a certain quality of the community's evolutionary process. Each one has been determined by whatever was in the forefront of the community's consciousness at that moment. So I think it's good to frequently get a new update from the community on where it's at, and a new

representation of that feeling through a new Working Committee.

What has it meant to each of you to have participated in this work? Has it changed you in any way?

Santo: It's difficult to express. I think there was progress, I made a step forward.

Gillian: I had to learn detachment, continuity, endurance. And the work has given me an awareness of the different levels of the community which I had never considered before.

Juanita: I learned to listen to what people were really saying, to listen, to see their side and not judge.

Bhavana: I guess the progress I am making is to have more compassion for myself, which also means compassion for everyone else who is inadequate to their work (laughter).

Ashok: I feel that for many years I had been working at the mental level. I tried always to remain rational, and being rational I didn't really see the other person's problems, except through my own glasses. Now, one big change that has come into my

life is that I see there is always another point of view, and I can appreciate it, respect it, without judging. Also, interacting with a large number of people, not only Indians but also Westerners, I begin to understand their aspirations, why they have left their homes behind, and it has made me so much more happy to be part of this experiment. It would have taken another couple of years for me to get this experience if I had not been part of this Working Committee.

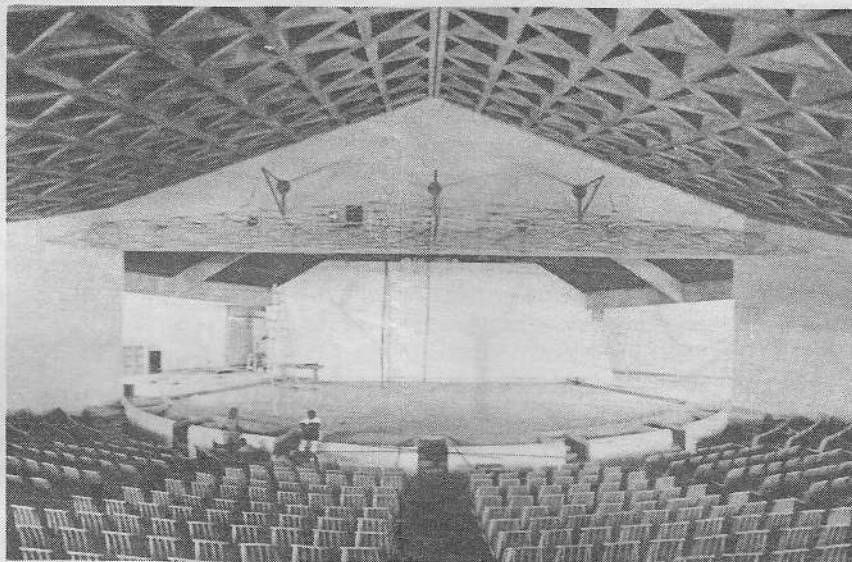
Ed: I constantly fell short of knowing how to deal with what was in front of me, and this forced me more and more to surrender to the process and to ask Them for help. And the more you get used to calling for help, the easier it becomes. Also, the more honest I became with myself and with everything else, the easier the process became; at the same time, the aspiration to find Truth became stronger, more pressing. So through this experience with the Working Committee, I learned a little bit about how to surrender more and more to ‘That’. And I learned that the less you hold on to, the more you can give.

Interviewers: Alan and Annemarie

BHARAT NIVAS

In Panavision

Bharat Nivas (“House of India”) was the first of the cultural pavilions to start the International Zone of the future city of dawn. The pavilions are meant to represent the unique genius of each culture in a living way. The story of Bharat Nivas has been deeply connected to the history and development of the larger Auroville. A large complex of several unfinished buildings, it stood for many years as a symbol of the struggle with its early occupants, the Sri Aurobindo Society. After the Auroville Act in 1980, it became a centre of many activities but remained unfinished, until a new impetus came when Gilles, an engineer involved in several major projects, began the arduous task of completing the large auditorium. JILL, who as a stage director presented several plays there before the recent inauguration, felt motivated to script Gilles' story about the Pavilion's tangled past.



The recently inaugurated Sri Aurobindo Auditorium

...1974. The E.C.C. comes back to cast the roof.

In 1976, Prabhat Poddar, nephew of the then chairman of the Sri Aurobindo Society, drastically modifies the seating and staircases inside the auditorium. Originally the stage was to be “everywhere”, with four sunken cylinders for seating in front and three in the back.

FAST FORWARD TO...

...1980. Complete change of cast after the Supreme Court Order—exit SAS, enter Mr. P.N. Ojha, Deputy Administrator, Government of India, and Aurovilians.

...1982. Gilles enters the scene with Poppo, who, as the appointed architect, asks to be in charge “without inter-

ference”. Many estimates later (six crores as per the original design)...

CUT TO...

...1985. The International Youth Year (IYY): A Seminar on Youth and Human Unity is to be held at Bharat Nivas. A Very Important Event Somehow, enough money seems to be available to make the place presentable. Gilles, who is living on the site, helps Poppo and when Poppo suddenly has to leave, he gives the project to Gilles. But, money is not coming through! Suddenly, when the Prime Minister accepts an invitation to inaugurate the Seminar, more money is released... (the Bandwagon Approach?). Sub-plots include: squabbles among Aurovilians over policy and organization. Poppo returns in time to give the finishing touch.

FLASHBACK TO...

...1982. The Era of Mr. Ojha. Gilles is staying in Sincerity, expecting his daughter to visit, but he also has been put in charge of “Watch and Ward” at Bharat Nivas, and the community requests him to live on site. So, does our hero move to centre stage? No. “All the employees of the Society were still there,” Gilles remembers, “the vibes were really bad.” Later our hero moves into a hut on the compound. Soon enough, some of the ‘vibes’ change on the set when a big hut there is transformed into a Guest House. Enter three new actresses in the form of architecture students who need a place to stay. One of them, Suhasini, becomes the heroine when Gilles later marries her.

PAUSE FOR ROMANTIC INTERLUDE. CUT TO...

...1987. Gilles and Suhasini exit to Sharnaga. Enter Jaya and Nico (with four children and several dogs) to take care of everything for a while. When they leave for Europe, Gilles and Suhasini return.

FAST FORWARD...

...1989. Several other caretakers follow. Gilles and Suhasini start building Samasti and move into their own house there.

...1992. Gilles is asked to prepare a new estimate to finish the Auditorium. It is 30 lakhs. Five lakhs come from the sale of 40 tons of steel which had been lying there for 20 years.

HAPPY ENDING?

1993. Twenty-five lakhs come from the Government of India. This is possible through the Foundation. “Before this time,” sighs Gilles, “no civil servant was willing to allocate any money, because there was litigation and the status of Auroville was unclear. Then all the money was there at once and the work had to be finished.”

CREDITS...

The Sri Aurobindo Auditorium is inaugurated on August 15th, 1994. “It was quite a job, and for some crazy reason I was the one to do it” comments Gilles on his role as supervisor of the construction.

What can we make of a saga like this?

MORAL...

A lesson in perseverance, fortitude, just plain stubbornness? Maybe all of the above, plus the feeling which many here have that for some reason, which we don't fully understand, we have been chosen to do something, to realize something, and the task is to let it happen through you with as little interference as possible. And it's not over yet.

"No army, no police"

Now that the population of the "city" exceeds a thousand, and areas of infrastructure have been built up over the years, the question of security is a priority. In fact, after some attacks on the road at night, a group of Auroville youth spontaneously started the Guard last year with informal night patrols. During July 1994, two incidents further highlighted the need. One was the mob violence from Bommayapalayam village in which all the roads and communities on the northern side of Auroville were blocked and mobs indulged in vandalism, harassment, and theft during a full day. The second was the death of a notorious thief in a fight with an Aurovilian. The escalation of bolder and bolder criminal acts in the Auroville area needs to be countered by a preventive force that creates a zone of safety for the development of the township and a climate for realizing Auroville's aim.

The proposal for the Auroville Guard was presented and supported at a community meeting last July. The proposal includes setting up a central office with a "hotline" and direct communication links to all appropriate sources of assistance in case of any emergency situation. The Auroville Guard needs a large number of Aurovilians

After twenty-six years, Auroville is getting around to implementing the security and crisis management plan given by the Mother when she founded "the city the earth needs":

**NO ARMY, NO POLICE,
THEY ARE REPLACED BY A BATTALION OF GUARDS
CONSISTING OF ATHLETES AND GYMNASTS**

committed to ensuring that Auroville is safe and secure and who, in the event of an emergency, are prepared to do whatever is necessary to restore that security.

Already in the town planning of Auroville, the decisions have been taken for the permanent location of the zones and for certain buildings that are a permanent part of the infrastructure for the city. Now seems the appropriate moment to build the permanent headquarters for the Auroville Guard so that it can effectively function in the life of the town henceforth. That process has begun and funding is being organized. Meanwhile, a temporary headquarters is being set up in the old meteorological station.

During the last three months, the night patrol has expanded to include more volunteers and there is a regular, organized patrol operating daily. Our reporter gives us a first hand account of his first patrol.

Last night I set out in the pitch black for my first night patrol. My bicycle light is pretty dim and I hit a few bad ruts in the back road from the Greenbelt and I'm wondering who's going to protect me while I'm on the way to Protection where the patrol is supposed to start from? Come on, I tell myself, nobody going to attack an Auroville Guard and besides I have my sport shoes on. But am I an athlete or a gymnast? Definitely not a gymnast but I do play badminton!

A dog barks in the cashew field and I think I hear voices so pedalling a little faster I arrive in Protection. My assigned companion has an ear infection and a woman I don't know is taking his place. No one else is going with us because some people are away and the others are tired from patrolling the night before. "But," I protest, "this is my first time." "Come on," says the woman behind me, "I've done this

many times before. It's just symbolic anyway." We pedal off into the night and I remember I forgot the banana I was going to bring for a midnight snack. The woman turns out to be from America and lived in Auroville during the early years and so we have many common friends. We stop for a watch at the Pitchandikulam Bridge (site of some notorious holdups—it connects to a direct backroad to Pondy) and it is already staked out by another Guard, Kannipapan from Pitchandikulam, and it's nice to talk with him. Traffic is surprisingly heavy along this road for a late Tuesday night, many lorries and Gypsies (a Maruti car). Narayanswami stops with his new taxi for a chat. He's returning from delivering someone to the Madras airport. We push off again to the next stop at the four-way crossing past Matrimandir. It's much quieter this side but still a flow of motorbikes and cycles. The time goes very fast as we discuss about the history and future of Auroville before it's time to pedal on, on patrol. I'm home sometime after midnight having had an enjoyable evening experiencing a new and different nightlife. I didn't miss the banana.

Bill

News in Brief—News in Brief—News

COLLECTIVE KITCHEN FOUNDATIONS LAID

On the morning of September 24th, about 50 people gathered at the construction site to lay the foundations of the collective solar kitchen; 'solar' meaning that the energy for cooking the food will be provided by a large solar bowl. In a distant echo of former Matrimandir concretings, the participants passed chetties of pebbles from hand to hand before pouring them into the foundations. More about the solar kitchen in a future issue.

NEW AUROVILLE VIDEO

A new Auroville video, entitled "Two Dreams, One World", has just been released by the Auroville Video team. The twenty minute video takes the recent visit of the Dalai Lama—whose dream of a future Tibet as a spiritual sanctuary for mankind echoes aspects of Mother's Dream—as the starting point for a brief introduction to the history and some of the present activities of the community. The video weaves together images of the past and present with original music by Gopal and Krishna and a commentary by Roger. Proceeds will go towards the construction of the Pavilion of Tibetan Culture. The video is available from Auroville International centres, and from Claude Arpi, Pavilion of Tibetan Culture, Auroville 605101, India. The price in India is Rs. 300, and for other countries US \$15 plus postage.

COURSE FOR TIBETANS

Coincidentally, at the same time that the video was being released, a group of Tibetans from settlements in India, including a contingent of monks and nuns, was participating in a one-week course in Auroville on the topic of a sustainable future for Tibet. The course was organized jointly by the Pavilion of Tibetan Culture, Auroville, and the Department of Information and International Relations, Dharam-

sala, and was the second such collaboration in the past two years.

ALL'S WELL

The plague epidemic received wide media attention which may have alarmed families and friends of Aurovilians. However, we would like to reassure everyone that the health situation in Auroville is normal, and daily life has not been disrupted by the epidemic which has largely been confined to the western and northern parts of India.

MATRIMANDIR THROUGH THE EYES OF CHILDREN

The latest exhibition at Pitanga Hall is of drawings of Matrimandir made by Auroville children during 1986 and 1987. Mauna, who used to work at the Matrimandir office, described how the children would come there on Saturday mornings, and how it became "a place charged with laughter and inspiration, child-deep conversations about Mother and Sri Aurobindo, their visions and symbols, and of course Matrimandir. Simultaneously, the kids were bent over tables, desks and chairs while drawing the most beautiful images of Matrimandir." Many of these drawings have been sent out to donors. About 150 are still in Auroville and may be published in the future.

1995 CALENDAR

Don't buy imitations! The Auroville calendar for 1995 will be ready very soon. Details in our next issue.

OVERHEARD

And finally... overheard from a visitor looking up at a cluster of prototype discs on Matrimandir:

"Do they put up a gold disc whenever another Aurovilian becomes enlightened?" Coincidentally, two days later all the discs had been removed!



The Auroville Today team after six years: still smiling... L to r. back: Roger, Bindu, Bill, Martin. Front: Annemarie, Carel, Jill, Tineke, Alan.

TO SUBSCRIBE

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

Addresses of Auroville International centres:

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AVI Espana, c/o Arjun and Anand, Apartado de Correos 36, 31.610 Villava, Navarra, Spain
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AUROVILLE TODAY

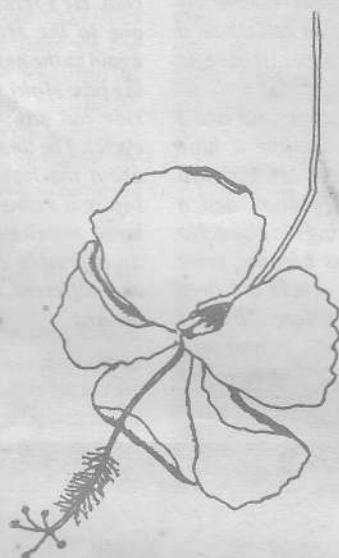
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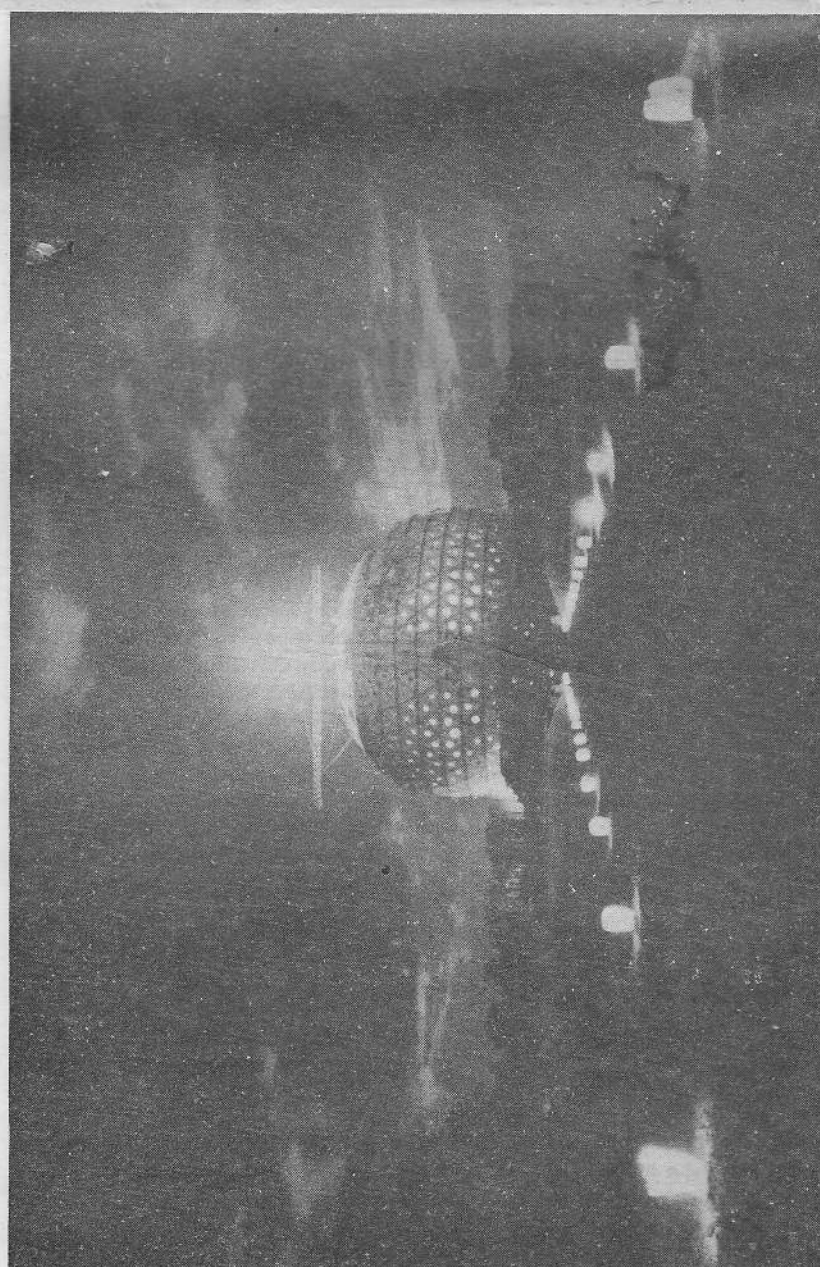
Exp. # 74

ANNE AND MICHAEL
GRACE
AUROVILLE

November 1994
Number Seventy



In this issue (8 pages):
Matrimandir; an interview with the outgoing Working Committee; a reflection on six years of Auroville Today; Axis, a new youth magazine; the Bharat Nivas Story refold; a miscellaneous page; and a backstage portrait.



A special occasion: the way to Matrimandir illuminated by candlelight

PORTRAIT OF AN AUROVILIAN

When one of my guests showed up one day, wearing a nice and colourful T-shirt, I asked her whether she had bought it in Germany. To my surprise she told me that it was made in Auroville, by a woman called Erika. Intrigued by the creativity of the T-shirt, I decided to find out more about the woman who made it.

On a winding road I drove to Newlands, a greenbelt community near Abri and Ami, completely hidden among cashew trees. The only indication of some life in the middle of all those trees was a tall windmill towering above the tree tops. As soon as I entered the gate, it felt like entering an island of peace and beauty. Fruit trees and flowering bushes hide the houses of the



Erika

three families who form the core of "Newlands".

I make my way through the greenery, looking for Erika's house. When I arrive, a woman in her early thirties with dark hair and deep brown eyes greets me with a big smile on her face. "Hi, Tineke! What a surprise to see you here!"

I tell her that when I saw one of her T-shirts, I got interested in getting to know her a bit better. She shows me her T-shirts, serves a cup of coffee, and we make an appointment for an interview.

When I return a few days later, her house is full of children and adults. Erika is in the middle of instructing the tailor on how to mend all the clothes of the whole family, while a visiting mother and several children take me to the small swimming pool of the community. Too bad I did not bring a bathing suit with me!

After a few minutes Erika comes along. We go to her house where she shows me around. The kitchen used to be an old wood workshop, but has now been transformed into a nice space with a large covered terrace in the front.

Erika came to Auroville three years ago with her husband George and their two children, Filip and Peter (at that time they were 5 and 6 years old). Before that they had lived eleven years in Goa, where one of her sons was born. They lived very simply near the beach with a river in front of the house, where the boys went swimming and fishing every day. They earned their living by selling articles made out of polished coconut pieces and hand painted T-shirts at the weekly flea market, and by baking bread and cakes for local coffee shops.

A friend of theirs told them about Auroville. After having lived for so long in Goa, feeling neither tourists nor "locals" (the whole family has German nationality), they were looking for people to share their lives and interests with. The concept of Auroville appealed to them.

So three years ago, the whole family arrived in the middle of the summer. They

Looking for Erika's T-shirts

first lived in Forecomers as guests, and then moved to Newlands. "There was a small place for us, actually an old workshop, which could be turned into a living space. We had almost nothing, so in the beginning we lived very basically. I like it very much this way, and now I sometimes miss it".

Erika began teaching immediately in "Transition". "The first year I helped out with mathematics. The second year I shared a group of students with another teacher and taught them the basics in a variety of subjects. The year after I taught crafts. But then I decided to do my work here in Newlands. My husband George takes care of the green-work and forest of the place".

What work does Erika do? "I am amma, and mother, and fruit picker!" she laughingly replied before going on to explain that she sun dries the surplus fruits from Newlands such as chikoos, jackfruit, mangoes, which she then sells in "Pour Tous". She also gives juggling classes to the children from "Transition". "I started juggling four months ago. I was inspired by this young juggler—she was about 18 or 20 years old—who was very good! I quickly made some balls, and then I started practicing every day. It was very satisfying to see myself improve. Now I do it with the school kids. We crochet the balls and fill them with tree seeds. And we make sticks from water pipes which we paint in bright colours. I feel it is a very good exercise for concentration and to calm down high-strung children".

"We like to make things ourselves instead of buying them ready made. It is more satisfying for us. George did most of the building around the house, and is now in the process of constructing a house for the children. This is the way George and I worked all those years. We made toys for the children by collecting garbage like cardboard boxes, and tins; we made shoes and clothes. It was very easy for me to work like that. I still like to do it this way in Auroville".

"I see in Auroville that parents like to entrust their children fully to the community without being really part of their education. I prefer that our children are part of the daily life of the place and do some work like repairing their cycles, or collecting some wood to make a fire in the oven, or repairing the holes in their shorts. They also should have the possibility to determine for themselves how to spend their time, apart from the organised activities in school and sports ground".

When asked what she thinks about Auroville, Erika replies that she finds the people here very open. "They help you to make your experiences in many ways. The energy is very positive. And there are still so many things to do for me here. I can see an endless line of ideas and activities".

Just before sunset as I cycle home, thinking of this enterprising and creative woman, I suddenly realized I'd forgotten the T-shirt I'd come for!

Tineke