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## A wake-up call to us all

### Land developers in the green belt

Why is Auroville becoming an attractive place for real estate agents? What can be done to prevent more such developments in future?

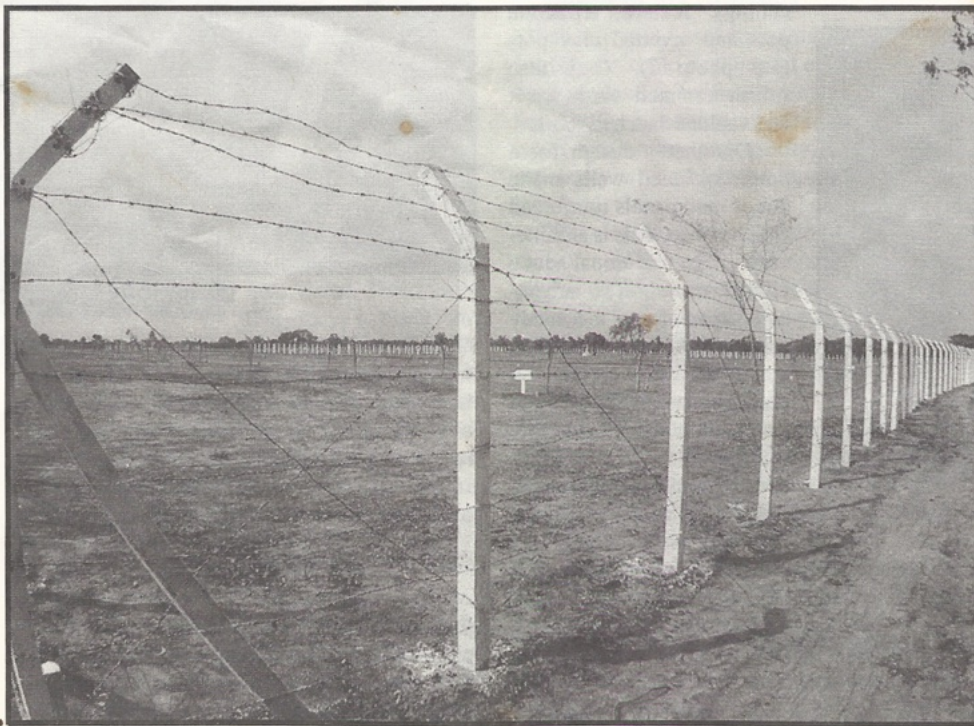
“Beautiful guest house near Auroville. Immediate sale.” “Auroville area, 2000 sq. feet shed with water connection suitable for cottage industries/handicrafts showroom.” “Ayurvedic hospital project near Auroville requires qualified doctors and investing partners.”

These advertisements, trawled from a recent issue of *Pondicherry Times*, make clear that the Auroville area has become a very desirable place both for living and doing business. In recent years we've seen development creeping up the road from the beach towards Kuilapalayam, and there has been an explosion of shops and businesses in the village itself. This is perfectly understandable, given the growth of Auroville and the pressure on land in nearby Pondicherry. However, in recent years two large plots of land have been purchased in the area designated for the Greenbelt (see map on page 4), by Pondicherry businessmen. At least one of these plots is planned to be a housing development. Many Aurovilians see these particular land acquisitions as a major threat to the physical integrity of the Auroville project.

#### "Lush green environment"

One of the purchasers is a Pondicherry businessman, the other a real estate business also based in Pondicherry. The businessman actually bought the land back in 1986, but didn't do anything with it until recently when he erected a big wall, clear-cut the land, built a large house and planted some coconuts.

The real estate business purchased its 50-acre plot more recently. It erected a three-metre high barbed wire fence, clear-cut the land, and then divided it into 700 housing plots of 40 x 60 feet each, which it then they offered for sale at Rs 40,000 a plot. It also had an agreement to purchase another adjacent 50 acres from the same landowner. Many states in India stipulate that any change in land use, say from agricultural to residential which is the case here, can only happen after due and rigorous process. Tamil Nadu, however, has no such provision. Since January 1st this year, local *panchayats* are allowed to give building permission in their



Developers at work: 50-acre plot in the green belt, fenced off and clear cut

areas for plots of up to 25 acres in size. The estate agent divided its land holding into two 25-acre plots, and the local Irumbai Panchayat gave the required building permission.

Other developers have also purchased land in the area. A real estate agent based in Orissa is offering housing plots on land very close to Edayanchavadi village. Each plot of 20 x 30 feet is being offered at Rs. 17,000. Another developer has purchased about 150 acres of land near Hope community (outside the Greenbelt) and is offering 28 x 60 feet plots at Rs 12,000.

Why should people want to live in the Auroville area? The Oriya developer's prospectus provides clues. "Vikas Nagar (the name of its development) is situated in lush green environment and peaceful surroundings at Edyanchavadi ... just near Bharat Nivas and Matrimandir, Auroville ... well connected to Pondicherry city ... free from sound, industrial pollution and hustle and bustle of city life." "Peaceful City" (Amaedi Nagaram), the devel-

opment promoted by the Pondicherry real estate agency, is advertised by them as being "located one kilometre from Pondicherry airport with all basic amenities in a beautiful, clean, good-breeze atmosphere ... Indians can also live in such a clean place like Peaceful City where only foreigners are presently staying". Their calendar for 2000 features a photo of a bonfire at the Amphitheatre with the Matrimandir in the background.

#### Auroville's response

Since the Pondicherry estate agents marked out their land and widened the access to it, events have moved swiftly. Land and Estates Management (LEM), the group responsible for purchasing land for Auroville, ran advertisements in local and Oriya newspapers pointing out that, "a few unscrupulous real estate agents are trying to arrange sales of lands in the Auroville area and claiming high speculative value for such investments". Potential buyers

## Land developments

### Auroville for sale?

Recently Aurovilians were shocked to witness that a piece of privately-owned land in the Greenbelt area had been clear-cut, fenced and divided into housing plots by a Pondicherry real estate agent. It initiated a period of intense activity on the land front, but it also led to the community asking itself hard questions about how and why this had happened.

In this issue we describe the present situation regarding land development in the Auroville area. We also suggest why it's time to wake up to the wider issues involved...

Editors

were advised to contact LEM "in their own interest".

In fact, Auroville had been negotiating some time before with the original owner for the purchase of this land, but certain unclarity in the land documents had complicated proceedings. Meanwhile the estate agent had stepped in. Now LEM began negotiating with the estate agent to purchase the land that had been clear-cut and fenced, and with the owner for adjacent land concerning which the estate agent had a purchase agreement. Some Aurovilians and friends abroad advised we should pay any price to secure such land, but Francis of LEM sounded a warning. Noting that the original asking price was well above the level previously paid for land in that area, he explained "If we agree to their terms, we will have to pay out about \$1 million. This will not only wipe out all our land funds but put us into debt. We will also thereby establish a new price level for land—we'll never be able to buy at the old rate again."

(continued on page 4)

## Auroville Economy 2000

"Circles" pool their resources to create a different economic model.

At the beginning of the year, the Economy Group put forward a proposal to create a more collective economy by encouraging the formation of "circles" or small groups of people who would pool their monthly allowances together. The Entry Group supported the proposal as it would allow them to present a different economic model to newcomers than the one which is functioning at present, one which is

closer to the Mother's ideals. An information campaign was launched where, for two weeks, information desks at public places were manned to answer people's questions. At present, about 250 Aurovilians have signed up for the experiment, which was scheduled to start on February 1st, 2000. For a look at the larger vision behind the proposal,

More on page 2

## New settlement proposed

Low-cost, ecologically sensitive and diverse, it challenges architects to come up with new ideas.

"Creativity" is the name of a proposed new settlement in the Residential Zone. It will offer low-cost, environmentally-sensitive housing, but it is also a social experiment—it aims to bring together people of different ages and from different cultures as a living example of human unity. A suitable site for the project has not yet been allocated. However, to keep up the momentum, the project holders

recently invited architects to submit ideas for appropriate housing, and the result was some very creative concepts. These were subsequently displayed in an exhibition which also included more information about the Creativity project, and important research on building in Auroville.

More on page 2

### Ecological accounting



Brooks Anderson on the true costs of organic agriculture

see page 3

### Martanda returns



A young Aurovillian's experiences in France

see page 8

### "Can it wait till lunch?"



AYA youth talk to Jesse

see page 6

### Fresh wind from the North



Wolfgang on changes in Germany

see page 8



## A crescendo of creativity

### New community concept inspires architects

The project holders for the proposed new "Creativity" settlement invited architects to come up with ideas, then exhibited the results to the community.

"Creativity" is a concept for a new housing settlement. Its aim is to provide aesthetically-designed, affordable housing for those who wish to live in a community with people of different ages, different backgrounds and cultures. Common facilities—kitchen, laundry, storeroom etc.—will form the heart of the community and will be constructed in the first phase.

Although nine people have already signed up for the project, a suitable site in the city area has not yet been offered. To keep the level of interest and energy high, the project holders invited architects to come up with designs for low-cost housing (a maximum of Rs. 100,000 for an individual unit, Rs 150,000 for a family unit) which, as far as possible, should use environmentally 'soft' materials. They then exhibited the suggested designs and invited community feedback.

#### The exhibition

Ten architects—eight Aurovilians and two guests—came up with designs. Some—like Satprem's Leg-Aum houses—have been tried and tested in Auroville; others were new. Of the former, it was interesting to see that artist Rolf's first *pacamaram* (wood lath) and bamboo roof structure, which is lightweight and low-cost, still looks beautiful even after 15 years: "no maintenance, no insects, no fungus, no leaks", he claims. He continues to utilize this technology in

Kalabhum, creating some of the most aesthetically-pleasing forms and spaces in Auroville. (see photo 1)

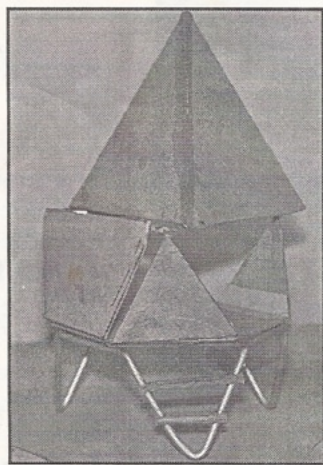
In terms of aesthetics, perhaps the other most striking design of the exhibition came from the Kolam group of designers and architects. Their ceilings feature terracotta pots and inverted clay pots (see photo 2). They also favour rammed earth walls and vault or thatched roofs.

Dorothee's design for a house included walls made out of mud panels reinforced with bamboo. This is a refinement of the traditional adobe village model. The advantage, apart from the ready availability of the materials, is that the walls breathe, so keeping a relatively constant temperature inside the house. Dorothee's roof is of fibre-reinforced tiles (which have better insulation properties than standard cement), and she estimates that construction costs of her design would be around Rs 3,000 per sq.m..

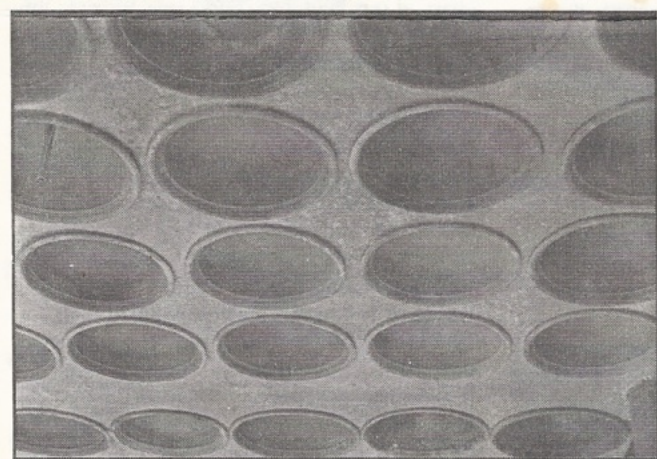
#### The super capsule

Johnny is famous as the inventor of the first "capsule" which housed many of Auroville's early settlers: standing on granite pillars, it had a frame made of casuarina stems, a palm-leaf roof and *pacamaram* floor, and was cheap and easily moveable. His new concept, yet to be built, is the "super capsule" which, while retaining the characteristic triangular shape, utilizes new materials. The base is of tubular steel, and the floor of a lightweight, waterproof composite material. The roof will employ the same material covered with a skin of aluminium sheets.

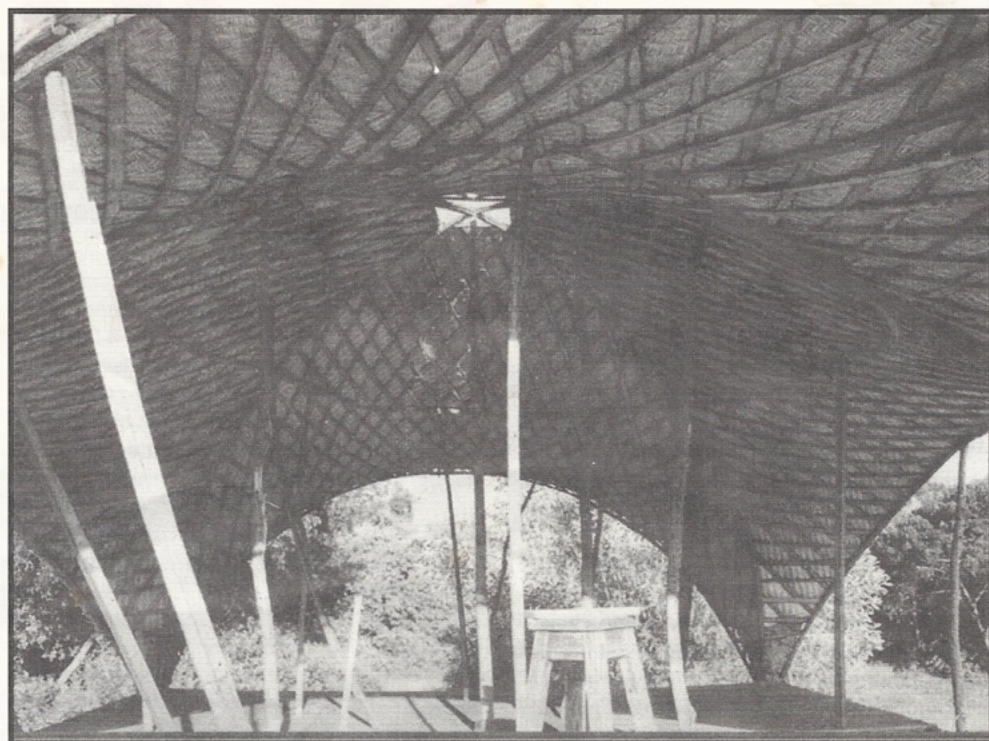
Another building technology new to Auroville, but increasingly popular in the



Model of "super capsule"



2. Clay pot ceiling



1. Bamboo-matted roof structure at Kalabhum

West, is straw-bale construction. André, a visiting Dutch architect, exhibited a design for a house built of straw bales, then silenced the sceptics by building one in Vikas. Straw is a superb insulator, is easily available, cheap, and bale construction is fast. As the bales are plastered on both sides termites don't get a look in...

#### Not just designs

However, the Creativity exhibition was not just about designs. There was also valuable background information about building in Auroville. The most impressive contribution was from Regina. Her *Guide for Builders* is a distillation of more than thirty years of experience gained by

Auroville builders and architects. She mentions, among other things, the need to get to know your building plot thoroughly before you build; she discusses the advantages and disadvantages of different building materials, and she identifies termite-resistant timber. She also provides a first-class explanation of how to ensure optimum natural ventilation within a house.

Although responses to the exhibition were overwhelmingly positive, a few words of caution were sounded in the visitor's book. Francis noted that the choice of site is crucial to the success of the project, and a visitor was surprised "not to find a design where I get the feeling of a city".

Alan

## Matrimandir

### A sea of socks

As I walk around the Matrimandir complex, my eyes are drawn to the Amphitheater. On one side I notice white lines on the red Agra stone. It looks at first glance like a giant *kolam* (a geometrical design in white chalk, traditionally drawn by village women in front of their houses), but not quite. Curious, I decide to have a look. What I see is definitely not a *kolam*, but socks! Hundreds of them! All snow white!

Auroville is built on red laterite soil. Riding bikes, cycling or just walking, one easily collects a thin layer of red dust on one's skin. In spite of their best intentions, visitors to the Matrimandir inevitably carry some of this dust with them. So, as soon as the white marble floor was laid in the Matrimandir Chamber, research began on how to keep the floor clean. Even though the white woollen carpet on top of the marble floor

is covered with a white cloth, that too has to be kept clean. The idea came to give visitors to the Chamber socks to wear. The first batch was made by one of Auroville's garment units.

For those visitors who have never worn a pair of socks in their life, putting them on can be a breathtaking experience. If they put them on backwards or sideways, the life of the socks is definitely not extended, and quite soon they will fall to pieces. So right now the search is on, in Pondicherry and Mumbai, for a durable quality white cotton sock.

Meanwhile, each morning all of the 300 to 400 used socks are hand washed and dried on the sides of the Amphitheater, together with the cushion covers from the Chamber. Keeping them beautifully white is just one aspect of the work surrounding Matrimandir.

Tineke



## Auroville Economy 2000

### A new attempt at a more collective economy

The initiative to create a more collective economy (see AVT #132), now dubbed as "Auroville Economy 2000", has gained momentum due to a successful information campaign. About 150 people have signed up for the experiment, which started in February. Here are the answers to some of the most frequently asked questions about the experiment.

#### What is the larger vision? What are the details?

The larger vision is the materialization of The Dream of Mother, including the manifestation of an economy in which there is no circulation of money. This is rather difficult to envisage, as it has to be created. What is intended at this stage is that, by 15 August 2000, certain basic services will be well established and a clear line of functioning will be visible. Then newcomers to

Auroville would automatically be welcomed into another kind of environment, a society and an economy firmly based on the ideals of Auroville.

#### Why are small circles being proposed?

In July 1999, during the seminar on the Auroville Economy hosted by the International Advisory Council, a suggestion was made to encourage the formation of various groups of 10, 20 or 30 Aurovilians to try experimental approaches to dealing with money, perhaps as a way of coming up with new models and approaches to living a life with no circulation of money in Auroville. With small circles of people it may be easier to ensure good communication, active participation and trust-building. Small circles can be more flexible, more amenable to changes, more living. It is important to remember that the circles are clearly to be seen as part of the

whole. The proposed framework is meant to help unite us and to bring us, in the practical details of our daily lives, closer to the ideals of Auroville. Joining a circle is a voluntary individual step within a larger experimental field where many levels of experience can and already are taking place simultaneously.

#### What will be the first visible signs of a change?

The first sign for those who join a circle will be that "their" income, whether it is maintenance from the Central Fund, a unit or a project or self-generated, will not appear on the individual's account. Only the expenses will be shown. Another sign may be a few new and several reorganized, upgraded services.

What if we need some cash for things not available in Auroville, or to pay wages?

Cash may be drawn as long as there is a need. How are the circles connected?

The circles are connected by the vision, through daily life in Auroville and with the buffer fund. The circles are an experiment in how to organize the larger whole. It is felt that they will lead to easier responses to change, more possibilities for rapid growth. And the circles can offer different levels of experiences simultaneously.

#### How will the buffer for the circles work?

There will be one main buffer under the responsibility of the Central Fund. The total amounts for the income and expenditure for each circle will flow in and out of the buffer fund.

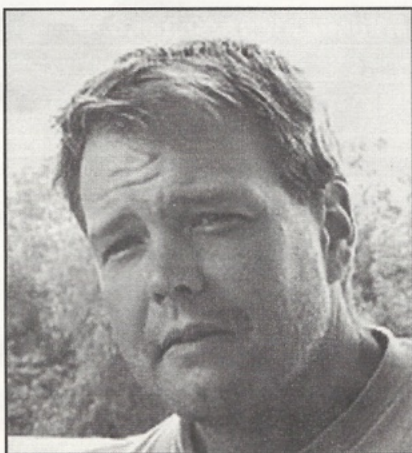
The Economy Group hopes that funds that are not available for an ordinary economy will become available for an economy based on the ideals of Auroville.



# Ecological accounting

## Brooks Anderson on the true costs of organic agriculture

Organic farming still tends to be a hit-or-miss affair because farmers lack essential information about the true costs of producing organic food. Brooks Anderson, who works at Annapurna Farm, is attempting to remedy this by setting up a system of ecological accounting. Here he explains more about it.



Brooks

Today, much discussion of agriculture is occurring outside of a scientific framework. By scientific framework I mean the use of rigorously tested empirical observations to substantiate conclusions. Instead of scientific discourse, one increasingly finds faith-based discussions unsubstantiated by research results. For example, guesswork, wishful thinking and prejudice have clearly replaced well-reasoned and informed judgement when people claim that biotechnology will increase

food production to meet future demand. This is alarming because such conjecture is now coming even from people who have had a scientific training, and who are able to influence policy-makers.

One reason why people have trouble scientifically assessing agriculture's performance and prospects is that the scientific method is perceived as being too slow, considering the urgency of the present global predicament. So people are willing, despite the unfavourable odds, to gamble that biotechnology, economic liberalization, and the continued application of agricultural chemicals will produce enough food for the future.

Another reason is that, at the insistence of entities such as the World Trade Organization, the World Bank, etc., we have largely relinquished to market forces the responsibility for shaping society. Now market forces disallow many of the things that science tells us should be done, for they function as a filter. Essentially they offer us only those possibilities that are likely to be profitable, and which do not require a significant redistribution of control over productive resources.

### An agricultural Chernobyl

This is particularly apparent in the case of agriculture. Agriculture, as it is practised today, is almost entirely shaped by the imperative of profit generation; that is, farmers must produce food as cheaply as possible if they are to have any chance of realizing a return on their investment. This means that they exhaust the natural health and fertility of the soil because it

is prohibitively costly to make and apply compost, rotate crops, leave fields fallow, or grow green manures. Genetic diversity also erodes because diversity deprives farmers of economies of scale. The economy does not demand that farmers produce food which is safe or healthy, nor does it reward farmers for producing food in ways that conserve or enhance natural resources. In other words they learn, as ecologists Judith Soule and Jon Piper put it, that "environmental degradation is monetarily cost-effective".

The severe degradation of farmland in the Punjab illustrates the environmental consequences of a market mentality. The picture that we are getting from the Punjab after 30 years of market discipline and chemical dependence is of an agricultural Chernobyl.

It is clear to me, then, that in the time available to us we must scientifically assess what it means to farm in ways that are not only economical, but ECOLOGICALLY economical. (In fact, a truly ecological agriculture will be modelled on the processes that one finds in a mature ecosystem; such as increasing biological diversity, tight

nutrient recycling, water and soil conservation, and the efficient conversion of energy into biomass.)

### Ecological accounting

In my study at Annapurna Farm I want to identify the ecological impact of our approach to food production by monitoring changes in soil life, fertility and structure, our impact on groundwater availability and quality, and the overall efficiency with which the inputs are converted into food.

It is clear to us who manage Annapurna Farm that such an ecological accounting is needed to give us a complete picture of the costs and consequences of our approach to food production. We suspect that the farm's present financial accounts provide us with a highly misleading assessment of our performance as natural resource managers because the price of our products is determined by the market rather than by the effort we have invested in the production process. We suspect, in other words, that Paul Ekins, Professor of Economics at the University of London, is correct when he states that "practically every marketed activity or product that uses environmental resources is underpriced". Our study intends to tell us by how much the market undervalues our conservation practices and products. It should also help us identify the agricultural practices that are both ecological and productive, as a means to shaping Auroville's future agricultural policies.

*Brooks Anderson has lived and worked at Annapurna Farm since 1995. Recently he presented papers about his research at the first meeting of the Indian Society for Ecological Economics, and at the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics in Hyderabad.*



# EM in Auroville

## Experimenting with magical micro-organisms

EM, discovered by a Japanese scientist, Dr. Teuro Higa, is a mix of selected species of compatible micro-organisms—bacteria, yeast, and actinomycetes—in a liquid culture. When applied to soil, these micro-organisms function co-operatively to break down organic matter and enhance soil quality by producing vitamins, enzymes and antibiotics. Due to this EM has many environmental applications and can also be safely used in homes as a natural cleanser or disinfectant. EM has gained international acceptance and is distributed in Asia through a non-governmental organization, Asia-Pacific Natural Agricultural Network (APNAN).

EM came to Auroville last year when Kanda, a Japanese man who works for APNAN came at the invitation of AuroAnnam to give an introductory talk on the benefits of EM. After a few months Kanda sent 10 litres of active EM inoculant to Auroville. Margarita, who had received 6 months training in Colombia in micro-organism composting, now actively experiments with EM at AuroAnnam. Margarita's first step was to reproduce the micro-organisms by dilution from the master culture provided by APNAN. The master culture is made up of a mix of four ingredients, two of which are not available in India. So mass production of EM is not possible yet.

### Treating waste with EM

"Everyone," says Margarita, "produces toilet waste, kitchen waste and gray water from bathing, washing and other domestic uses. All of

this waste goes into the ground where it is decomposed by beneficial micro-organisms. For every unit of waste produced by a person, 5 units of soil are needed to decompose the waste. Due to the population pressure on land, enough soil is no longer available to properly decompose the waste. Moreover, harsh chemicals in toilet cleansers and detergents, as well other chemical pollutants in air or water, destroy the beneficial micro-organisms in the soil, resulting in greater pollution and a loss of soil fertility. EM reverses this trend by killing pathogens or harmful micro-organisms. It also hastens the composting process."

Normally, kitchen waste is just heaped or dumped into a pit where it turns into compost through a process of putrefaction by bacteria. This process takes time, generates unpleasant odours and is a natural breeding place for flies, maggots etc. Besides, most of the energy in the garbage is released into the air, detracting from the quality of the compost. On the other hand EM works under anaerobic conditions, and by a fermentation process, akin to making curd from milk, changes garbage to high quality compost. For EM composting, Margarita recommends use of a sealed tank with a small tap at the bottom. The tank is filled with a layer of EM mixed with sawdust or mulch, and a layer of kitchen waste. The tap at the bottom opens to a container, which collects the water that has seeped through the garbage in the tank and is rich in EM. This solution can then be re-used.

Experts frown upon the use of washing powders and chemical cleansers, but given the lack of alternatives available in India, they recommend that people should nevertheless add a diluted solution of EM to their washing and regularly flush it down their toilets.

### EM experiments promising

Initial experiments with EM at Auroville have been extremely promising. The compost produced by EM has induced faster growth in trees and revived ailing trees. Experiments at Quiet and other places have shown that wastewater plants—septic tanks, treatment tanks, IMHOF tanks, etc.—treated with EM work more effectively where foul odours, mosquitoes and flies are also controlled. Experiments in treating industrial wastewater have also been undertaken at the "Colours of Nature," a dyeing unit.

Other experiments with EM in Auroville include treating sick cows successfully in Discipline farm, and using it as a biological pesticide for controlling pests in maize and peanuts. One Aurovilian intends to try EM, instead of chlorine, as a disinfectant in a swimming pool. "This is just the beginning," says Margarita, "AuroAnnam is still at the experimental stage of documenting and standardizing EM processes for a range of uses, and we hope that with a successful education campaign, EM will become a common household and agricultural product."

Bindu



### Straw bales

An intriguing invitation for the first Auroville plastering party appeared in the *Auroville News* of Feb 12th. Was the huge blue box in Vikas hiding a megasweet for Lord Ganesh? A supramental starship? Or a cosmic dance floor? No. Auroville's first straw bale house was ready to be plastered with red mud. The plastering of the 12 sq.m. house—built during a two-day workshop in straw-bale construction techniques led by visiting architect André—was a mud-slinging success.

### 24-hour concreting

The roof of the new meeting hall of the Sri Aurobindo World Centre of Human Unity (SAWCHU) at Bharat Nivas was cast in concrete during a 24-hour non-stop "concreting" at January end.

### Dry tropical forest workshop

A one-day workshop on the topic of tropical dry evergreen forests and medicinal plants was held in Auroville on February 1st. In the morning session, chaired by the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, Tamil Nadu, Joss gave a presentation on community involvement for conservation and sustainable dry tropical forest use.

The afternoon session was chaired by Father K.M. Matthew, noted author of the *Flora of the Tamil Nadu Carnatic*, who gave a talk on the uniqueness of this type of forest as well as other forest types in the Eastern Ghats. Dr Ravi Kumar provided an analysis of red listed medicinal plants, a presentation was given on sacred groves, and Paul spoke on the dynamics and the present status of dry tropical evergreen forests. The event was well-attended by both Aurovilian green workers and outside experts.

### Baby Boom

Despite the Entry Group's recent decision to temporarily close Auroville, about 50 children have been born in the community in the last two years. The old crèche at Transition has been re-opened on a trial basis to provide a collective child-care service.

### News from the Economy Group

As compared to last year, the Central Fund has increased its disbursement for children's education by 28% and for children's education by 21%. Partly to cover the increase in expenses and partly to adjust for inflation, the Central Fund has raised the requested contribution from Aurovilians by Rs. 100 (10%) per month.

The Solar Kitchen experiment of providing lunch to all Aurovilians, whether they can pay for it or not (see AVT #132), is operating successfully.

### Aurovilians passing

After a long illness, Krishna passed away on February 10th at his home in Darkali. Originally from Morocco, Krishna joined Auroville in 1969 after travelling overland with the "second caravan" from France. According to his wishes, he was buried quietly, without ceremony.

On February 22nd, at the age of 86, Eleanor died peacefully at Verite, in the presence of her daughter and community members. Eleanor, from the U.S., was one of Auroville's oldest but most vivacious residents. She lived in Ami when it was truly a youth community, and her laughter and smile always made her seem young. A memorial gathering was held for her at Verite Hall a few days later.

# A wake-up call to us all....

(Continued from the front page)

Subsequently new terms were agreed upon, and it looks as if the deal will go through.

However, this only applies to the land owned or promised to the Pondicherry estate agent—about one hundred acres. While most of the remaining land in the Auroville area is in small plots with different owners—making them relatively unattractive for big-time investors and developers—it doesn't completely remove the danger of further large-scale acquisitions by developers. (Francis notes that many small landowners have approached the Pondicherry estate agent, offering to sell their land.) So what other strategies are being pursued?

### Other strategies

For some time now Auroville has been exploring various channels. These include legal options like notification and land use protection. Notification would involve the Government requiring local landowners to sell their land to the

Auroville Foundation at a predetermined price (which is always above the market value). Apart from the incendiary nature of such a step, getting approval for the land notification is an extremely lengthy and complex procedure. The other option of land use protection would make it impossible for land use to be changed without a rigorous process. This, of course, would apply to Auroville as well. Both notification and land protection require Auroville to come up with a Master Plan for its future development, a first version of which was recently presented to the Governing Board. But land use protection may also be a very protracted process.

Another idea is to make informal agreements with local farmers not to change the use of their land, and to offer Auroville first refusal on purchase, but this has not happened as yet. Land purchase, therefore, appears to be the most viable option at present to deter unwanted development. Francis believes that while we can control



Site for "Peaceful City"



**அமைதியை விரும்பும் மக்களுக்கு ஓர் அரியவாய்ப்பு!**

புதுவை விமான நிலையத்தில் இருந்து ஓரே கிலோ மீட்டரில் "அழகுசெளி சித்தி" வார்த்தை முனித பூமியில் இதுவரை மக்கள் கண்டிராத அளவற்ற அழகியடைவாய்வுகள் அழகாகவும் கலாநாயகன் வந்தோட்டத்தையும் எல்லாம் மாற்ற திறமையுடைய குழுவில்.

**'சரவணா நியஸ் ஏஜென்சி'**

நிறுவனத்தார் மிக பிரமாண்டமாகவும், அமைதிப்பூர்வாகவாகவும் உருவாக்கியுள்ள நகரம்நான்

**அமைதி நகரம்**

**PEACEFUL CITY**

40'x60' மற்றும் 20'x60' அளவுள்ள மனைகள் மிக குறைந்தவிலையில்

**அமைதி நகரத்தின் சிறப்பு அம்சங்கள்**

1. "அமைதி நகர"தான் புதுவை இரண்டாம் மைல் நீண்ட அமைதி பூமியில் இரண்டு கிலோமீட்டர் அகலம் கொண்டிருக்கிறது. அமைதி நகரம்.
2. ஒரு பில்டிங் கெட் RCC கெட் மேல் அமைந்த எண்ணூர் குடியேற்றம் "Pondicherry".

Newspaper ad for the "Peaceful City" housing project near Adventure

unwanted development in the city area, where we already own most of the land, the Green Belt is much more porous. LEM attempts to purchase land wherever it becomes available in the Auroville area, but now it is particularly interested in acquiring larger plots, and in purchasing land bordering the main roads within Auroville so as to restrict access to potential development sites.

At present, however, Auroville doesn't have anywhere near sufficient funds to realise this policy...

### Internal and external factors

Why is Auroville facing this land development problem now? There are many reasons for this. Developers and speculators are always on the look-out for a good return on investment, and Auroville at present offers them a perfect opportunity. Some of this is due to factors beyond our control, some are our own responsibility. External factors include Pondicherry's rapid expansion during recent years—fuelled partly by the economic liberalisation of the 1990s—which

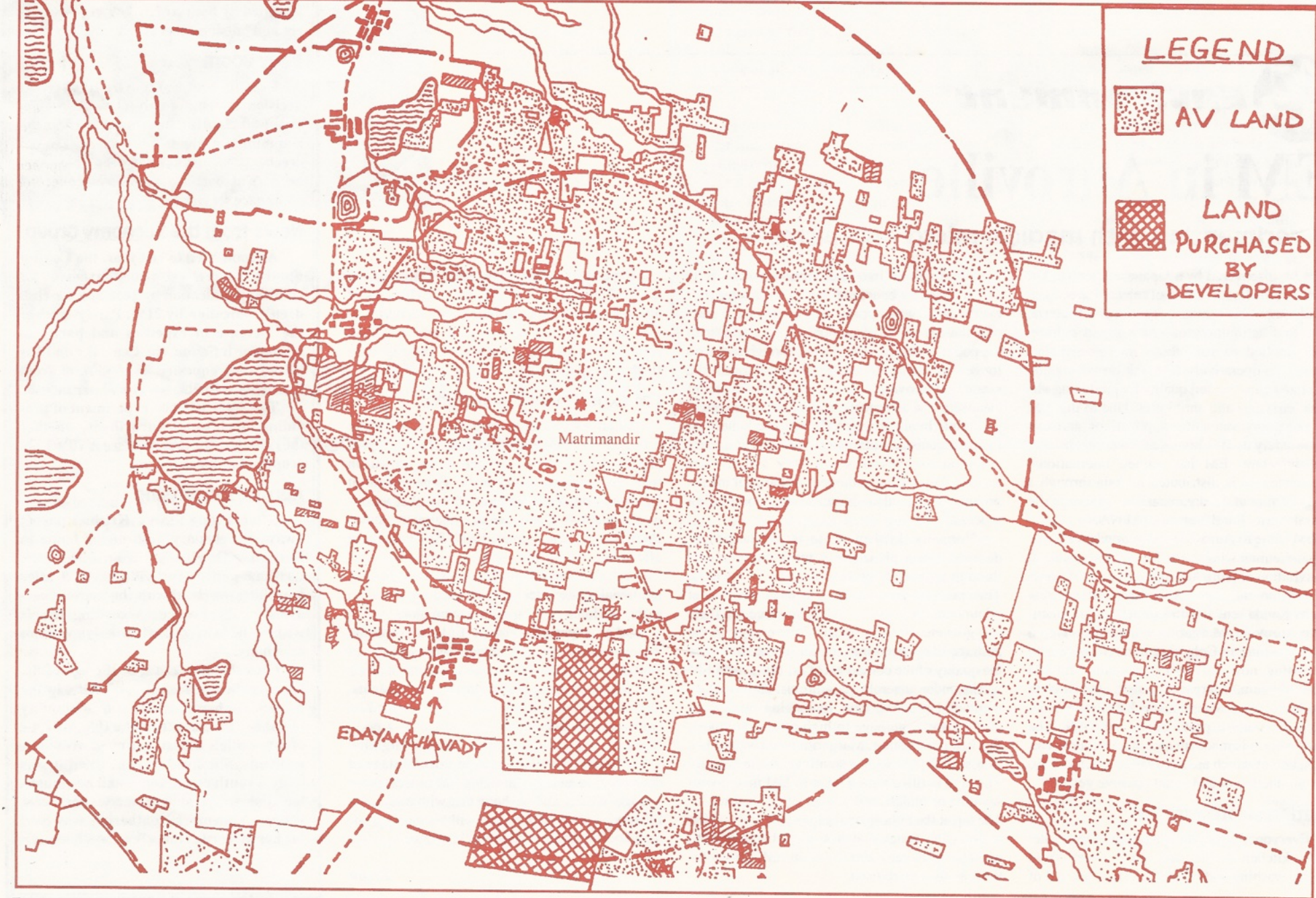
led to a dearth of land for development there, forcing people to look further afield. And Auroville, with its forests, Matrimandir and easy access to Pondicherry and Chennai (which is only two and a half hours away by the East Coast Road) inevitably became an attractive option.

But what responsibility do we bear for the present situation? To Francis it is clear that at some point we got our priorities wrong. "After about 1974 we went to sleep on land purchase. In the 1980s we became a wealthy community, but the need to secure our entire physical base was ignored. We're trying to remedy that now—over the last four and a half years LEM has purchased more land than Auroville did in the previous twenty—but meanwhile land prices have skyrocketed."

### Larger issues

But there are larger issues involved here. Land notification or land use protection require Central Government and State approval, yet the image that Auroville has acquired in some quar-

(continued on page 5)



## A wake-up call...

(Continued from page 4)

ters—that of a middle-class Western community bent on preserving a privileged lifestyle—makes such support difficult to obtain. There is also the matter of our relationship with our village neighbours. Some of those who sold land to Auroville in the past were promised things like employment in the community, but these promises were never fulfilled. Local Aurovilians like Selvaraj and Raman also point out how little we have done to explain the real purpose of Auroville to our neighbours, or to include them in discussions which may affect their future development, thus forfeiting another source of support in our present difficulties with land developers. In fact Edayan-chavadi, the village nearest to the lands purchased by the developers, has been comparatively neglected by Auroville. With the recent closure of the Ashram incense business there, which was a mainstay of the village economy, it now suffers from high unemployment. So it's not surprising that some of the villagers welcomed the proposed developments as a source of employment and village income—and viewed

Auroville's opposition to the land deals as unwarranted attempts to block their development.

"We've become a bubble, and we're totally ignorant of what is going on around us," says Francis. "This is very dangerous for the future of Auroville."

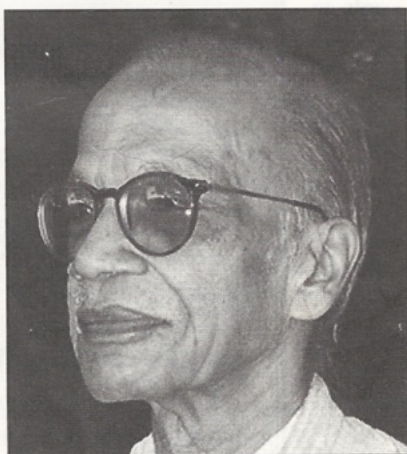
If he is right, the present difficulties we are facing with land developers in the Greenbelt area are a radical wake-up call for all of us. For not only are we being asked to focus once again upon preserving the integrity of our physical base, we are also being challenged to review our attitude to our neighbours. We can no longer afford to ignore, or look down upon, the needs and aspirations of those who have lived here for generations. Human unity has no meaning if it does not involve the development and co-evolution of all the people in the area, if it does not involve all of us sitting down together to share our visions and to work out our problems. Ultimately, this may be the real key to achieving the land protection that we are seeking so urgently at present.

Alan

## Land purchase

From 1964 to the present day

In his well-researched paper "Geographical Extent of the Auroville Project", Gilles Guigan, an Auroville engineer and the driving force behind the Solar Kitchen project, points out that the first plot of land for Auroville was bought in October 1964. In those days, the project was located near Ousteri Lake, west of the Pondicherry-Tindivanam road, close to the Lake Estate owned by the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. Then, in early 1965, the centre of the township was shifted eastwards to near the place where "Promesse" community stands today. This meant that the Pondicherry-Tindivanam road passed right through the centre of the city. Towards the end of that year, Roger Anger, the chief architect of Auroville, presented a fresh town plan. His first point was that the centre of Auroville could not be located on a main road. He convinced the Mother to shift the city centre even further east, i.e. between the road leading to Chennai, namely, the Pondicherry-Tindivanam road and the beach road, which today is known as the East Coast Road. (\*)



Shyam Sunder

### Early years

Shyam Sunder was in charge of land purchase in the early days. "I always thought that the real reason for the shift of Auroville was the French love for the sea and Roger's dedication to the Aspiration and Auromodèle areas," he says jokingly. "Of course, when Mother approved of the shift, we concentrated our land purchase efforts in the new area, but by that time 'Aurogarage', 'Auro-orchard', 'Promesse', 'Service farm' and 'Aurobrindavan' had already been bought." Shyam Sunder was working together with Navajata, the chairman of the Sri Aurobindo Society to which Mother had given the responsibility for purchasing the lands for Auroville. "Mother was from the beginning very insistent that all the land should be bought as soon as possible, and Roger shared that opinion. There is not the least doubt about that," recalls Shyam Sunder. "Navajata would purchase whatever he could, and bring the 'difficult cases,' e.g. whenever a landowner asked too high a price, to Mother for Her decision. The land had a special atmosphere at that time. In 1968, shortly after the inauguration of Auroville, I wrote to Mother my observation that 'even the lands of Auroville are aspiring', which She confirmed. But the real boost only came after 1970, when I discovered

that we did not yet own the land on which the Matrimandir was to be built. I then suggested to Mother that we go full-speed ahead, and She approved, asking me at the same time to become more involved with land purchase.

"In 1971 She also gave me a larger responsibility, appointing me as her Secretary for all Auroville work. I would visit the Mother every morning for Her decision on various matters. She asked me to report on the progress made in land

purchase each day! At the time we used to organise meetings with villagers. We were making groups of friends who had sold their land. They, in turn, would approach others. It had become very necessary for us to create the confidence amongst the villagers that they were not being uprooted. We even were purchasing land at other places to give in exchange for future Auroville land. That helped a lot. Most of those who sold their land were well aware of the fact that they were truly selling it to The Mother, and that the land was intended for a 'divine use', and that something good

was happening. Still the progress was slower than we wanted. Once, when I reported a particularly difficult case to Mother, She spontaneously wrote a note.

*For those who have some land to sell*

*There is a Supreme Divinity witness of all our actions and the day of the consequence will come soon. The Mother*

"She asked me to keep this note on my desk. I think it was charged with a special power, for from March 1971 till 1973, the majority of the 2,000 acres (816 hectares) spread over an area of 24 sq. km was bought.

"Earlier, in the late sixties, with Mother's approval, we once made an application to acquire the land through Government notification, but for some reason it never materialized—as if there was no backing from higher forces. In 1971, when the finances were short, Mother approved taking a 2.5 million rupees bank loan, a huge amount in those days. This too was a novelty as the banks would not lend money to purchase land. But the loan came through. After Mother left her body, the land purchase continued for some time, but when the struggles between the Sri Aurobindo Society and Auroville became critical, the land purchases stopped."

## PURCHASING LAND IN THE AUROVILLE AREA?

### BUYERS BEWARE

It has come to our Notice that a few unscrupulous real estate agents are trying to arrange sale of lands in the Auroville area claiming high speculative value for such investments. Auroville Foundation is an autonomous body under the Government of India, created by an Act of Parliament. Buyers are advised to consult the Land and Estate Management (LEM) of Auroville, in their own interest, before they enter into any agreements for purchase of land in this area. Executives of LEM, Auroville can be contacted at

Bharat Nivas, Auroville Between 8.30 a.m and 12 Noon, Monday to Saturdays or at Telephone Number: 622657

Advertisement put by Land and Estate Management group in local newspapers

## The power of greed

Narad remembers

Probably in 1971, the Aurovilians had a meeting on land purchase in the Matrimandir area. Two divergent opinions were expressed. One group felt that, as the Tamil people are very poor and their only possession is their land, we should give them whatever they ask. The other group's opinion was that we should buy all the land as soon as possible at reasonable prices, and that paying "what they would like" would only inordinately increase the prices. The question about how we should proceed was put to Mother through her son André, who had come out to attend this meeting. He later gave us Mother's reply: "Buy the land now. You do not know the power of greed."



### Later phases

Thus, the years from 1964 to 1973 form the first phase of land purchase for Auroville. The second phase—the years between 1974 and 1991—could certainly be described as a period of thin activity. According to a leaflet published by the Auroville Land Service in 1992, only 200 acres (81 hectares) were purchased in those 18 years, mainly for expansion of already existing settlements or to establish specific projects. From 1992 to the present we are in the third phase, during which a momentum to secure the remaining land within the planned Auroville township and greenbelt area has been built up. It started with the purchase of the land needed for the Matrimandir gardens, out of a large sum bequeathed by an American lady named Blanche Sherwood. During this third phase, thanks to an increasing inflow of donations, particularly over the past three years, about 650 acres (265

hectares) have been bought. The Auroville Land Service has also sold almost all of the unutilised, outlying lands in order to generate funds for the purchase of land within the township area. (\*)

"Do you have the impression that the recent land purchases in Auroville's prospective greenbelt by third parties are to be seen as an indication that Mother's presence has diminished?" I ask Shyam Sunder. "No," is the firm answer. "I do consider these land purchases as a negative development for Auroville. But that does not mean in the least that Mother's Force or blessings for Auroville have been withdrawn. The question has to be asked how open we are to receive Her guidance."

*In conversation with Carel.*

(\*) Auroville Land Fund Newsletter, No. 9, December 1999

## "A long term project"

Francis on his job at the LEM

**AVTODAY:** You've been working for the Land and Estate Management Group (LEM) for four years now. What has it been like?

Francis: For some reason I've always felt that I've gravitated to doing difficult jobs in Auroville—but this one is the most difficult of them all!

**Has doing this job changed your perspective on Auroville?**

Francis: I realize now that we should have concentrated more on getting the land than putting up all this infrastructure and develop-

The other thing I notice is that we attach a philosophy to the simplest things that we do. There is a total lack of common sense in many of our meetings because we inject our philosophies and moralities into areas where they don't pertain. And then there are our internal dissensions that seem to make it impossible for us to come up with a coherent policy about anything.

**Are you pessimistic about the future of Auroville then?**

Francis: No. In terms of the land, I see Auroville as a long-term project. We might lose some of the chances to buy land now, but in the next 50-100 years we may be able to get it back. Also the fact that Auroville has lasted so long with all our in-fighting is obviously a miracle. But what's happening now with the land should be a wake-up call. We've been experiencing too much chaos for too long, and individuals and groups in Auroville have fomented this chaos to protect the status quo. This has to change.

We also have to change our way of living, to get away from our present status symbols of cars and annual vacations to the West, and return to something simpler. Our present lifestyle is counter-productive for the project as a whole, for it attracts people with the wrong motivations. Only when outsiders see that they will not benefit materially by being here will we be protected...

*From an interview by Alan and Roger*



ment. It's also made it clearer to me that Aurovilians' total ignorance of what is going on around them, our isolationist attitude, is a luxury we cannot afford.

# "Can it wait till lunch?"

Jesse meets AYA

Breaking into the ultra-hip youth clique operating as the Art Youth Atelier (AYA) required some courage. Stories of unredeemedly sneering wild youths filled my mind. Not knowing where to start, I bit the bullet and headed for the Kalabhumi sound studio where AYA bands Osmose and Les Paysans, along with other Auroville groups, jostle and bristle for rehearsal time.

The underground Kalabhumi studio complex rumbled with low frequency sound as I approached. Opening the first of two doors sealing the underground audio bunker seemed to treble the volume. Before me a concrete staircase descended between graffiti-filled walls towards subterranea. Graphic art-quality images of aliens, beanie-clad homeboys and girls and skateboarders hinted at hip-hop-ism, albeit carefully and well-expressed. The second door, almost hummed off its hinges, lay at the bottom of the stairs. Beyond this I found total audio immersion.

Olga, Osmose's Ukrainian-born vocalist, was absent.

I waited for a break in the music to ask if they knew anything about the Art Youth Atelier. The group froze. A silence bordering on the violent followed. They looked at each other, they looked at me and said: "What?"

"AYA, Auroville Youth Atelier?" I repeated, my confidence fading.

"No, don't know," one replied, and all three returned to their instruments. This was going to be tough, but I had one last chance. In late 1999, these guys had been involved in the multimedia performance, Liquidizer Art Club. In a last-ditch attempt to communicate, I mentioned the show:

"What about Liquidizer Art Club?" The response was instantaneous, like I had uttered a password.

"Oooooooh, A Y A, sure, What do you want to know?" All three focused squarely on me.

"What is it?" I asked

"What, you want to know now?"

"Yes."

"Can it wait till lunch?" they asked. It could, so I left and they returned to playing.

It would be easy to dismiss these cowboys and girls as wild dreamers, but they've built a reputation for action. When Auroville Today asked if AYA had any information on the group's activities, it provided a press release and the draft version of a 50-page mission statement complete with budget, photos and drawings of and by the group.

Over lunch Osmose explained the AYA to me. The

group plans to stage a major performance à la Liquidizer Art Club every year. Along with this, exhibitions and concerts will make up a busy cultural calendar. The next project under discussion is an avant-garde fashion/theatre performance. Marjorie explains that standard wearable fashion will feature in the show alongside designs incorporating plastic, wire, tubing, computers,



Hanging about... Some members of AYA

electronics, motorcycle parts and original cartoons. At the end of the show, garments will be auctioned to raise funds for other AYA events.

But these activities pale in comparison to the group's megaplan—to develop an area of Auroville into a dedicated youth arts complex. The mission statement describes an enclosed, sustainable community to support AYA's existing pursuits. At one level AYA is a school, where students teach themselves. Fire-performer and singer for Les Paysans, Fanny explained: "We want to teach ourselves. We want to choose our own teachers and learn what we want. We want to learn where the teacher is your friend."

The architectural model of a central building design has already been discarded for a new improved version. The ideal space is a versatile open-plan building, designed for serious artwork and serious socialisation. The building would also include another sound studio.

"Another sound studio?" I asked.

Julien used passionate words to describe this part of the AYA vision.

"Yeah, one for us," he said. "The one already there is used all the time."

Ideally the sound studio would sit beside a larger space for other arts, they

explained.

"It should be like a garage," Julien said, "...for an art company, where all youth can come and do whatever they want and express themselves."

"What do you define as youth?"

"Let's say up to 25," said Julien.

"No, let's say 30," Mayeul interjected.

"Anyway, AYA has to work as a team, so we won't just accept anyone who comes," Julien specified.

"What'll you do when you guys get to be 35?"

"Ah, by then, we'll be so rich it won't matter," said Nicola calmly.

Jesse



Osmose in concert at the Youth Centre

Inside, I found Osmose rehearsing for their next concert. With every slap of the bass guitar, I felt my skin vibrate like a drum. A chest-shaking bassline accompanied fierce charges down the frets on a lead guitar. In the corner, a bare-chested drummer kicked out rhythms on a kit. Mayeul, Julien and Nicola I knew from their performances; three members of a foursome. Only

## **Auroville and India**

# Building bridges

Aurovilians attend a peace conference

In December last year, five people from Auroville went to attend an international peace conference in Solapur, Maharashtra. The conference brought together religious leaders and others to discuss a peace agenda for India and the world.

Selvaraj and Bhaga, two of the Aurovilians who attended, were disappointed at first that the conference did not live up to its international billing. But other things happened which made it a very valuable experience for Bhaga. "For example, I really enjoyed being with a group from Pondicherry University who also attended the conference (actually they invited us: we were their guests). I'd never had the experience before of travelling and living with educated Tamilians. They were intellectually bright, but they also had the warmth, the qualities of the heart, which I've learned to appreciate in the local villagers."

Aurovilians do not usually queue up to go on such conferences: they know too well how boring they can be. At first sight this conference looked the same: a big hall and the usual conference speakers delivering endless speeches to each other. Except for the rare but brilliant interventions by Shri Justice Mishra, head of the Human Rights Commission, there was nothing exceptional. However, on the afternoon of the first day

a session was held in another conference venue—a huge colourful tent. "The stage was full of saints, *sadhus* (wandering monks), *swamis* (holy men), *sannyasis* (religious renunciants) and leaders of different religions who had come together to discuss peace and unity. And not just, as usual, men but also women: a good sign. Each in turn recited a mantra or prayer from their own congregation, then gave a short speech. The atmosphere was very powerful—they spoke with such fervour, such a fire! It was really all the beauty and depth of traditional spirituality, but at the same time there was a shared aspiration to make India and the world a better place. After Dharma (a German newcomer) had sung a spiritual song in German, the two of us were invited to sit in the middle of the stage among all the *sadhus*. I silently sang Sri Aurobindo's Gayatri Mantra... I felt there was such goodwill that it only needed a small push to orient them towards the future."

The next morning Bhaga got her chance when she was invited to talk about Auroville. "I spoke about how Sri Aurobindo and Mother had

pioneered a new purpose for spirituality—it is no longer about escaping life but about transforming it. And I explained that while the spiritual aspect of Auroville is not very apparent at first sight, it is there nevertheless. For the Integral Yoga aims at more embracing results than traditional spirituality: all aspects of life should be lived in a different manner through being brought into contact with the inner being and a new evolutive force. I read out Mother's 'To be a true Aurovilian' and Mother's invitation to Auroville for all people of goodwill; then I invited them all to visit us here."

The audience responded well to the speech, to another short presentation given by Dharma, and to the small Auroville exhibition Selvaraj and the others had organised. Three young students from Pondicherry University were particularly interested. "It's astonishing that our neighbours don't understand anything about what is happening here," says Bhaga. "Auroville is so unlike anything they know or can relate to. To them we look like a big mass of white people who are not very welcoming. Some of them have tried to visit, but because they didn't know anybody personally, they encountered closed doors everywhere."

Selvaraj agrees. "I feel Auroville is too shut in on itself. We really need to bridge out more

## **Inspiration**

# Auroville, beloved

Groping through night with the flickering lamp of mind  
Too puny for the monumental task  
To rise beyond our elemental kind  
We seldom see the Person for the mask.

We seek without for the harmony hid within,  
Impose a collective communality  
On souls descended here, for ages kin,  
Unknown, unguessed, yet married secretly.

To open once a window on the soul  
And bow in recognition of the One  
Ever the dawn before us as the goal  
Ever the love as a burning inner sun.

Auroville, cauldron and crucible of fire  
Force of the godheads' plenary desire.

Narad  
On reading Auroville Today  
January 22, 2000.

into India if we are to grow." Bhaga feels that if Auroville is to become better known in India—"hardly anybody at the conference knew about us"—it will be through Aurovilians overcoming their initial resistance and attending conferences like this. "This way people come to know about Auroville in their own context. They don't have to travel to this strange place with its Western ambience. Through this conference I feel deep links have been forged with the people we met there and with our neighbours at the University."

Alan

# Creating community

## The concept of Sanghas needs to gain greater acceptance

Expressing dissatisfaction with the present community process, Bindu suggests a new way to organize work and life in Auroville.

Some time ago there was a frustrated and impassioned cry in the *Auroville News*, Auroville's internal weekly newsletter: "Is anyone out there? Did anyone read the on Planning and Development Restructuring Proposal? Does anyone have any comments? We can only move to something new through collectively 'being with it.' We have movement on the economy; we have a housing crisis; we have major and relatively horrifying development occurring in the Green Belt; we have a locked front door (except for guests bringing their money); we have a very alienated commercial unit sector; we have an again empty Central Fund and subsequent increase in taxes...."

The crux of the matter is this: on many fronts, Auroville is facing an impasse, and yet the community at large does not seem to care.

It is perhaps a mistake to think that things are not evolving as they should. One should have faith, despite appearances to the contrary, in the working of the Mother's force. And yet, within me (and in such matters one can only speak for oneself) there is a dissatisfaction with the community of Auroville. "If you don't like the way things are, well, work towards changing it," I would once have told prospective newcomers.

But now, after six years of trying to foster change, I feel somewhat tired. I am tired of the emotional outbursts that mark our community meetings, tired of the incredibly long community process that we go through in order to make a collective decision, and tired of the hypocritical attitudes prevalent in the community where our acts do not support the words we utter. For instance, as mentioned above, the Entry Group has stopped admitting new people into Auroville, and yet there is no restriction on tourists coming to Auroville. There is a housing shortage and yet the proposal to convert guest-houses into newcomer housing has not been seriously pursued by the community. There is an outcry about land in our proposed Green Belt being bought up by real estate speculators, and yet there is no collective movement to mobilise all of the community's funds for land purchase.

In all fairness, I should admit that my dissatisfaction with the community of Auroville stems from dissatisfaction within myself. Coming to Auroville six years ago was an adventure, an opening out towards the great Unknown. Today, the adventure has fossilized into following a tight daily schedule and carrying out routine jobs. The once-alternative lifestyle of Auroville is becoming increasingly commonplace and alarmingly similar to urban lifestyles elsewhere. I feel that at an individual and a collective level, we need to re-discover and commit ourselves anew to the Dream.

### Creating "sanghas"

"To live in Auroville, one must be a willing servitor of the Divine— everything follows from that," a friend once told me. Yes indeed, that should be the basis of work, life and community in Auroville. The collective should not be comprised of a diverse group of people, acting from their egos, who somehow come to an agreement on an issue, but of people who form a "sangha" because of their common aspiration for the Divine. Work and life in Auroville would then be organized by such "sanghas". The small groups thus formed, while remaining transparent in their processes, would bear the sole responsibility for carrying out the work and manifesting something new.

At present, perhaps following the dictates of the Auroville Foundation with its legal empowerment of the Residents' Assembly or persuaded by the New Age movement that strives for consensus, we try to involve the whole community in all major issues. This has proved to be not only impractical, but a mistake. Democracy, for that is what our current process amounts to, should not be the basis of community-life in Auroville. There is evidence already in Auroville of many small working groups, but the deeper principle behind it, the principle of the "sangha", needs to gain greater acceptance and support.

\* A sangha is a community held by a common purpose or principle, generally religious or spiritual.

### A blast for the land

Eliane and friends belted out upbeat versions of 70's favorites in a concert for the land that had youth of all ages dancing at the Visitors Centre Jazz Café on February 6th.

During the intermission Shivaya gave a brief presentation on the present land situation and nine thousand rupees were raised for the land through pledges and sales of tee shirts to guests and Aurovilians.

### All that other jazz

Other events at the Jazz Cafe recently have included popular cabaret-style shows by the Academic Genius Brothers (Paul and Wazo) who commented upon everything from the Auroville Economy 2000 proposal to the delights of the Freestore, and comic juggling by Mikael Reistrom, a visiting actor and juggler from Finland. There was also, now and again, some jazz...

### Auroville artists exhibit in Pondicherry

An exhibition of Firooza Aubry's paintings on silk was held at the Alliance Francaise during February. Kratu displayed his latest sculptures in a show entitled *The Birth of Venus*, at the Aurodhan Gallery.

### Indian Cinema Workshop

Under the auspices of Aurofilm, a three-day introduction to Indian cinema was given by Mr. P.K. Nair from the National Film Archive of India, at the Bharat Nivas.

### Children's Festival

A full-day festival for local school children was organised by Auroville's Village Action Group, and held at the Visitors Information Centre on February 18th. 1200 children from thirty schools and villages in which Village Action has been conducting ongoing night school programs over the years, participated in the event. Children from each school performed dances and short plays and enjoyed themselves at stalls hosting educational activities and games. The event was attended by the Secretary of the Auroville Foundation and the District Education Officer.

### Birthday week events

Cultural events during Auroville's birthday week included a concert of Schumann song cycles, an Indian classical concert, and the setting up of a new art installation by Pierre Legrand, called *Light Station*, in the Matrimandir Gardens.

On 29th February, the Auroville Theatre Group performed "Nishta", a play written by Seyril Schochen. The play is based on the true story of U.S. President Woodrow Wilson's daughter, who was accepted as a disciple by Sri Aurobindo in the 1930s.

### Pony Farm In crisis

The pony farm is facing a financial crisis and is appealing to the community for help. "Please don't forget that we are taking care of your ponies and provide a beautiful space for your children".

### Seed bank

The Farm Group have submitted a proposal for a seed bank for Auroville farmers. This would enable the farmers to improve the quality of their crop and experiment with different types of seed.

### Lectures on the Tamil heritage

A series of lectures on the Tamil heritage, organized by Meenakshi and Tapas, will begin in March in the Centre for Indian Culture.

# Back to the Future

Rauf Ali

Auroville has decided not to accept any newcomers into Auroville for the time being. The reason given is that there is a lack of housing, and this causes all kinds of strains within the community, while being unfair on the newcomer. This state of affairs is obviously untenable. Auroville needs new people and fresh energy that can only happen when an inflow of young and dynamic people takes place.

To my mind, the present situation has been caused by two factors. The first has been the creation of a guest economy. In this, keeping guests is seen as a relatively painless income supplement. Housing that would otherwise be available to newcomers has been converted into guest facilities. This has several ramifications that I do not propose to go into here.

The second reason is that with the development of an economy that is increasingly based on money, Auroville has become an expensive place to live. With the guest contributions, the "contributions" for house upkeep and the increasing cost of living, it is no longer possible for young people without personal means to come and settle here. There is an impression from reading the Entry Group reports over the last few years (and I might be totally wrong) that the number of young people coming in has dropped, and that it is increasingly people who have "made it" in the West who are coming here. For anybody who is interested, the data can be dug out and looked at. I wish to share here a possible solution. As solutions go, it is at best temporary, and will only be relevant for a very short time.

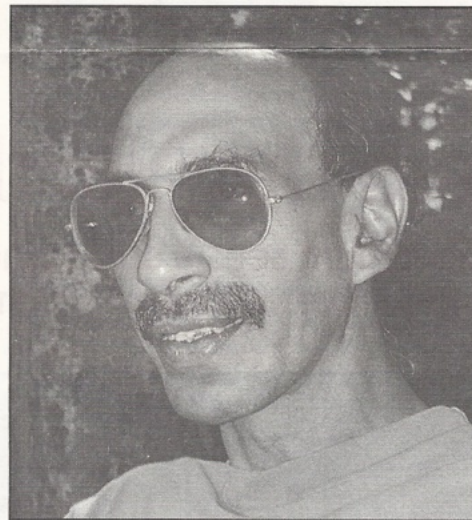
My understanding is that Land and Estate Management is in charge of 249 acres. Of these, 152 acres are in the Green Belt. These lands are under cashew or casuarina cultivation, leased out or fallow.

Consider identifying suitable plots among these of, say, four acres each. Incentives would be created to get newcomers to build a keet capsule on each, fence them off, and do some basic protection and planting. Money for basic infrastructure would also have to be obtained: we're back to the basic principles of fundraising that worked so well for us a couple of decades ago.

Perhaps the 'internal' financial agencies could take a look at possibilities.

I'd be the last person to suggest that we need only greenbelters as newcomers in Auroville! However, this would create an opening for at least those people who are prepared to work on the land for a while. The Catch-22 scene that exists today, where no temporary housing is allowed in the city area, and capsules in the Green Belt are allowed only for those who live there, obviously needs review. Here, as usual, we seem to have made rule after rule to try and fit all situations, and we've ended up with a mess that we need to think about again from a distance.

I see a lot of positive spin-offs from this. Newcomers would have housing, and newcomers who are attracted to the "Club Mediteranée" image of Auroville would be discouraged, allowing the idealists a space. Newcomers would also have to learn Tamil, as they would need to interact with the locals.



On the down side, until alternative housing arrangements are made in the future, this would interfere with the town plan. We need to think about whether the town plans are really sacrosanct or not, and those elements in it that can be altered to make Auroville people-friendly. After all, towns are about people, and not about buildings.

## Dear Auroville Today,

I have a few suggestions to make, but first of all I would like to say that I like the new look of your magazine (Jan.2000). It is more dynamic, giving at once the contents of the month. Thanks for striving for perfection in your own way.

I like also Aurovilians' interviews talking of their own experience, but I find there is not enough emphasis on young people. I believe young people should be interviewed not only when the theme of Youth comes up, but in every subject, just like any other Aurovilian.

My suggestion is to include them in your themes whatever they are. The same could be done with Tamil people, including them in whatever theme you have chosen, and not waiting for a "Tamil issue".

Another suggestion about young people. In order to put Kireet (Joshi)'s remark into practice ("Children in Auroville are well-looked after, but have not been put in the centre of our activities."), my suggestion would be to offer a place in your team, on a regular or irregular basis, for a few youths living here and to see what comes up. Invite them to write articles, make photos on particular themes, or drawings. Have a youth page entirely designed by them? It is a challenging work because it needs patience, flexibility and an open heart which offer all. We all have come to develop those qualities and more... Anyway, that is all I have to say. Thanks again. Love,

Aruna  
Auroville

# Martanda returns

## Profile of a young Aurovilian

Martanda was born in Auroville. Recently he was in France where, among other things, he experienced the French army.

The first time I left Auroville was in 1995, for Geneva, Switzerland. I went to work at the International School through the programme organised by Gioia. I was alone and it was damned scary. I was hitchhiking on the road with my sack and a signboard saying "Geneva" in four different languages. I waited for hours and hours. Finally, some Sri Lankans stopped and picked me up. I tried to speak to them, but their Tamil was fast forward!

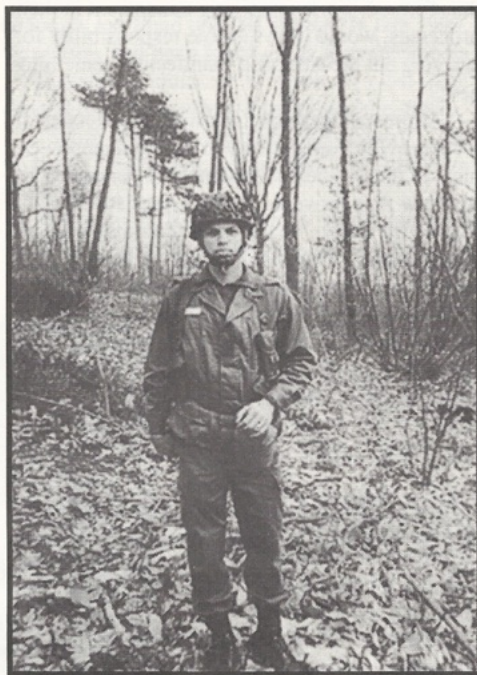
### Earning

I left Auroville again in June 1998 with my mom Claudine and her sister. It had been at least five years since my mother had been back home in France and she wanted me to come with her. So I said, "Sure, why not?" The family reunion was on a weekend. Afterwards I arranged with some Aurovilian friends to work in St. Tropez. I actually found a job fairly quickly, even though I didn't speak the language very well. I worked for a three-star hotel on the beach. It was the first time I was really serious and determined. I had to work from 8 am to 3 pm, then from 6 to 10pm, six days a week. I was making salads, all alone. I would come in early, cut the parsley, make the decorations. Then I attacked the tomatoes. The FF 5,000 per month was the first pay of my life. And since I was so much in the kitchen I got so fat, man, because there are lots of desserts and leftovers and we could eat as much as we wanted. I got cheeks in no time! After rice and dhal it was

a great change.

### In the Army

I knew I had to do my military service if I stayed more than three months in France, so I wrote to the army and they let me arrange my

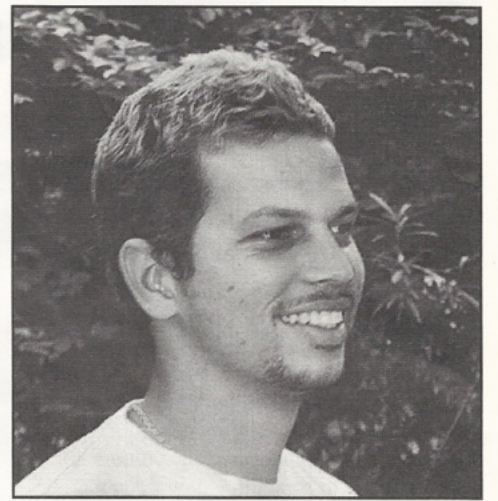


schedule conveniently. Somehow, I welcomed the army, because I thought it would be good for me. The first month was very intense, I was very nervous. In the army they motivate you by fear. I had to get up at 5 every morning, shave with cold water. Cold water is a sad story! Five degrees Celsius, ice cold. I had to shave, brush my teeth, get my bed ready and jog to breakfast. If you didn't get there in five minutes, there would be no breakfast!

They put me in an armoury, underground. I was actually supposed to go elsewhere, to be a kind of "handyman"—to repair fans, carry ladders, help out people. But they put me in an armoury because I was very good with weapons. I could dismantle a weapon and put it together in 40 seconds. So, there I was ... a watchman. Guarding weapons, which were nicely locked. And once in a while they would come and get the weapons but, all and all, there was nothing to do the whole day. There were three beds and a television. Sometimes our superior would tell us to go and take out the weeds from the roses. One nice thing was that I won two watches. Me and this other guy, we came in first out of 400 people in the "Games" and it was unbelievable, the respect that I got from my superiors after that. The Captain presented us to the Colonel, the Papa of the regiment, and he gave us both watches. I was happy because I had proved to the others I wasn't just this lost French-Indian in France who wasn't capable of coming in first.

### Life in France

In France I felt Aurovilian. I said I came from India, and they said, "Oh yeah, the land where they drive elephants and where they respect cows and all." There were a few Indians there, and when they asked me where I was from and I said Auroville, I had to explain it to them. And I didn't really want to go into it. It was a funny experience, really. So much miscommunication, misun-



derstandings. So human, really. Luckily, I could go out every weekend, and I had 75% military reduction, so I took the opportunity to go everywhere. I tasted every part of France, which I'd always wanted to do.

### Back in Auroville

Now that I'm back, I'm very happy here. There's a lot of energy. I went to the new Youth Centre, and I was happy to see young people meeting together. I feel optimistic about the way the young people are getting involved in Auroville. I think I matured more quickly because of my time abroad.

I went to work with Kireet on the soil erosion in the canyon. I've got a lot of strength and energy now, so I'd also like to travel. Because I don't really know many places here except in the South, I want to discover my Indian side. I've lived in India for twenty years, but I don't feel Indian. I feel Aurovilian.

*From an interview by Jill*

# Fresh wind from the North

The beginning of the new millennium sees a strengthening of Auroville's international standing. Wolfgang Reinecke writes about changes in Germany.

Two years ago at a Residents' Assembly meeting someone informed the Aurovilians that at that moment, in far-away Germany, a court case was in process against Auroville International Germany. Why? Because Auroville was accused of being a sect. A negative judgement would not only have been very negative for Auroville's reputation in Germany: it might also have had repercussions in other European countries.

At that moment something happened. The assembly used a powerful tool: the purposeful focalization of the awareness of a whole group. At the very same time, 8,000 kms away in the German town of Bremen, the committee representing AVI Germany noticed how the serious proceedings in court were suddenly uplifted. For they witnessed a judge talking about Auroville as if he was being prompted by The Mother. The verdict went in favour of Auroville...

### Auroville not a sect

The process leading to the verdict turned out to be an immense stimulus for the development of AVI Germany and, consequently, for Auroville. The German Foreign Ministry, the German Consul in Chennai, the President of the very influential German Indian Society in Germany, and the then General Secretary of UNESCO had all given very positive and encouraging statements about Auroville. They mentioned, among other things, that Auroville is clearly not a sect,



even if there is a spiritual dimension to the project, and that the Auroville project is truly serving the aim of international understanding and human unity.

### Results of the verdict

The positive verdict had a number of practical consequences for AVI Germany. A first result was that the tax-exempt status of AVI Germany was restored, prompting an immediate increase in the flow of donations. In 1999 more than 200,000 DM (more than 40 lakh Rupees) were received in the form of donations, membership fees, income from economic activities. Another consequence was that AVI Germany could inaugurate an

Advisory Board of well-known German personalities. The composer Karlheinz Stockhausen, the therapist Ilse Middendorf, and the psychologist Wilfried Belschner agreed to be the first members. Auroville International Germany also began making press releases in regard to its and Auroville's activities. The first press release, which announced the inauguration of the Advisory Board, was well-received in German alternative newspapers and magazines. The next step will be to reach mainstream newspapers and magazines through these press releases.

Another result of the verdict is that the relevant German Federal Ministry has accepted Auroville's status as contributing to the goal of international understanding and world peace. This implies that Auroville will be included in its scheme of alternative work-places where young Germans can do peace-oriented service instead of entering the army. In the year 2000 the first young Germans will come to work in Auroville units such as the Health Center and Village Action under this scheme. Last but not least, AVI Germany is once again able to apply to German government ministries for grants for Auroville projects. The next application will be for a big

training center for Village Action with a budget of about 150,000 DM (about 30 lakh Rupees).

### NGO status for Auroville International

The positive developments in Germany can also help the development plans of the umbrella organisation, Auroville International. AVI is aiming to obtain the status of an International Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) recognised by one of the bodies of the United Nations, the Department of Public Information. This status, which would indirectly include Auroville, would allow Auroville and Auroville International to participate in major international conferences on topics like urban development, international understanding, health, ecology, science and research in all fields. Moreover it would provide Auroville with relevant information in all these research fields. The application for accreditation was made in February 2000.

### New centres

Auroville International also aims to establish new centres and liaison contacts in countries where there are no Auroville International centres as yet, for it is felt that Auroville has to reach out to the world more and more in the same way as Auroville itself is expanding.

*Wolfgang Reinecke is a committee member of Auroville International Germany and Chairman of the Auroville International umbrella organization.*

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