

# AUROVILLE

## TODAY

January 1995 Number Seventy-Two

## How 'Collective' Are We?

"AUROVILLE", wrote Mother in 1967, "will provide a model for those who aspire for a better and higher collective life everywhere." But what did she mean by 'collective'? Certainly not uniformity. "To have a life that wants to grow and perfect itself, that is what the collective ideal of Auroville should be: a life that wants to grow and perfect itself, and, above all, not in the same way for everyone—each in his own way." At the same time, Mother indicated that 'collective' implies more than individuals living in proximity but pursuing solitary paths towards self-perfection. Rather, it involves a certain contract, a conscious relationship between the individual and the community. "There, work would not be a way to earn one's living but a way to express oneself while being of service to the community as a whole, which, for its part, would provide for each individual's subsistence and sphere of action."

Certain questions remain. For example, exactly what constitutes service to the community? Nevertheless, Mother's indications are clear enough to use as a basis for examining how collective Auroville is today. The popular view, of course, is that Aurovilians were most united when fighting the Sri Aurobindo Society, and that for the past decade or more we have experienced a phase of rampant individualism. Like all 'pop' histories, this seems like an oversimplification. It's probably more accurate to say that circumstances, like difficult material conditions and an external threat in the late 1970's, united Aurovilians at a certain level while suppressing certain individualistic tendencies. And that when greater material and psychological security was achieved in the 1980's, the centrifugal forces tended to predominate. But even today, in the so-called 'individualistic era', Auroville can boast of a considerable range of community services for such a small population.

In fact, if by the term 'collective' we mean an awareness of, and a caring for, the needs of others, the present Auroville is by no means a failure. The 'Caring Service', for example, stimulates assistance by publicizing individual needs. 'Sahanabhuti' was set up to find 'heart-centred' ways of assisting those Aurovilians in financial difficulties, and Aurovilians can avail themselves of workshops and courses in everything from Hatha Yoga and Reiki massage to language classes and Dream Therapy. Moreover, informal exchanges and sharing remain strong among individuals and within certain communities.

However, if by 'collective' we mean an awareness of, and support for, the needs of the larger community of Auroville, the picture is less clear. For while we can point to the range of community services, by no means all of them feel adequately supported, either financially or 'psychologically', by the community as a whole. The Dental Service, for example, which tries to provide high-quality dental care for Aurovilians, is constantly feeling hampered by inadequate community funding. A similar feeling is shared by many of those involved in collective construction projects, and by those who would like to move Auroville towards a more collective and money-free economy. Of course, there may be some basis for certain reservations, and creative criticism can spur us towards greater perfection. But the feeling remains that, though we aspire to the ideal of collectivity, we often find it difficult to extend it beyond those we know and trust. And even there, self-interest may sometimes prevail. The collectivity, in other words, remains for many of us too amorphous, too abstract. Or, perhaps, even threatening.

Collectivity implies more than individuals living in proximity. What do we mean when we speak of 'collective consciousness'? Does our internal organization reflect an awareness of the needs of the larger community?

Some reflections.



PHOTO IRENO

There may be many reasons for this, including fear of 'institutionalization' and the loss of individual initiative, or dissatisfaction with so-called 'collective' decisions made in General Meetings. But if genuine collectivity remains our ideal, perhaps we should be doing more to smooth its path rather than reacting against its deformations.

One key is clearly information. If we don't understand the needs of the larger collective, we can't respond to them. In this context, the willingness of individuals and groups to use the *Auroville News* and other public information facilities—like the new computer bulletin board system—is an important indicator of how far we can call ourselves a communication culture. At first sight, the signs are encouraging. The *Auroville News*, for example, publishes the monthly budgets, and contributions to those budgets, of collective services supported by the Central Fund, and important work groups, like the Working Committee, the Development Group and the Entry Group, publish weekly reports.

However, sometimes these reports are highly selective of the information shared, effectively excluding wider collective participation. Moreover, the difficulty of obtaining essential community information, like our per capita water consumption or the cash reserves of our productive units, shows that distrust and issues of power continue to prevent us from being a truly communicative society.

Organization is another key component, for the way we organize ourselves as a community both reflects and influences our approach to collectivity. Some aspects of Auroville's present organization would seem to encourage collectivity. For example, the Residents Assembly, which is intended to be the body which decides upon major community policy, is open to all Aurovilians and tries to work through consensus. However,

Residents Assembly meetings tend to be poorly attended, reflecting the impression that they are primarily 'talk shops', that the people with key information often don't attend, and, anyway, that the real decisions are taken elsewhere. The caveat here, of course, is that Mother's definition of a collective organization for Auroville does not at all imply that everybody has to sit together and make common decisions. Rather, she spoke once of an interim organization which would involve decisions being taken by "the most enlightened centre"—those individuals who were most conscious, most aware of the needs of the larger body. But since at present we are unable, or unwilling, to identify these individuals, we have tended to seek safety in a semi-democratic system which ultimately satisfies no one.

A more radical critique of certain aspects of our present organization is that while they may seem to promote collectivity in the community, they are based upon values which are far from collective—at least, in the widest sense of the term. Take, for example, 'Pour Tous', the community's food purchasing and distribution system. In its management, 'Pour Tous' represents the highest qualities of dedication and professionalism. Yet, in the way that it operates, it does nothing as yet to lessen the community's dependence upon food produced outside—food which has often been produced through exploiting the environment and/or the workforce. The same criticism—that 'our' collective benefits at the expense of others—can be made of our productive units and many other aspects of the present Auroville. Mother showed us a way out of this—by becoming, as a community, as self-sufficient as possible. But the willingness to move towards self-sufficiency, both in Auroville and its bioregion, by, for example, supporting our hard-pressed farmers or producing products for the local economy rather than primarily for export, is not at all strong at present.

The key prerequisite for all these changes, however, is the consciousness of collectivity. For none of this can be imposed; it can only be the outflow of an inner orientation and awareness of the larger body of Auroville. How close are we, both as individuals and as a community, to realizing that consciousness? For the ordinary mentality, it's impossible to say. On the one hand, many of the outer signs are not encouraging. In some ways, in fact, the present community seems firmly plugged into the same individualistic patterns as those which are everywhere ruining the planet. Witness, for example, the present dominance of the personal combustion engine on our roads. On the other hand, one takes as granted that every Aurovillian, at some level of their being, is here because they have answered Mother's call. At a profound level, we ARE a collectivity. The problem is that it remains largely unconscious, only glimmering intermittently through our surface separations. Yet this deeper unity, once brought to consciousness and translated into action, is a massive lever for change.

When are we going to use it?

Alan



## Freestore and Nandini Seeds for a different economy?

"He who understands when enough is enough always has enough."  
Lao Tsu

### THE FREESTORE: BEGINNINGS

In the early years of Auroville, the "pioneers" survived, in part, through a system managed from Pondicherry called "Prosperity", which provided the basic needs of clothing and toiletries. Others who did not wish to be part of it or were not accepted by those who managed it, had to be self-supporting. Food was provided in common, collective kitchens and delivered in shared baskets.

About 1972, unofficially and spontaneously, a "freestore" was born in a room in the Auroshika incense factory at Udavi. The system: take whatever clothes you need and/or leave whatever you want to give away. It worked.

During the conflict with the Sri Aurobindo Society in the mid-seventies, all funding was cut by the SAS, including "Prosperity." Pour Tous, the collective food store, became the financial management centre of the community and distributed food and supplies available from a common pot. Not everyone had enough. The Freestore which by this time had two branches for different areas of Auroville, became a more important element in the economy and expanded from clothing to other used items and even new items that were surplus or seconds from the commercial units.

When the Pour Tous common pot could no longer be sustained, the economy began to take an individual turn which has persisted into the present. Hard times hit the Freestore when it shifted underground to the Amphitheatre but years later it could resurrect itself in the Bharat Nivas where it stands today, with longer opening hours, a tailoring service sponsored by one of the commercial units, more support from the productive units, and a small budget from the Auroville Central Fund.

### ANOTHER STEP

"Nandini" (the name comes from the calf of abundance in Indian mythology) started in the early eighties in a room next to the Freestore and tried to provide the needed daily items like soap, toothpaste and the rest. Nandini did bulk purchasing funded by those who otherwise would have had to go to Pondicherry to shop individually and now could save transport expenses, shopping time, and make a collective gesture. This system did not last because of the limited range of items available and the trend away from collective cooperation which continued to grow.

In July 1994, Nandini was reborn next door to the Freestore with a stock of new clothing, linen and other acces-

sories. This system uses the Pour Tous / Financial Service individual account number (where individuals deposit their funds) to keep track of what they "buy" and after three months the bill is divided up among all the users equally and deducted automatically from their individual accounts in the Financial Service. This new experiment is still in the "let's see how it works out" stage. Computerization gives a complete picture of spending patterns and the "market", which will help determine if it can really work. Two hundred thirty-five shareholders contributed Rs. 145 (\$ 4.75) as their share of the first month's bill. Although the experiment, does not fulfill the aspiration to have no money exchange between Aurovilians, the "cost" is collectively shared. This initiative came from "Sahanabhuti" (Sanskrit for "heart contact"), a group which is looking for collective solutions to the economy and which handles the "bridging fund", a central fund budget for people who temporarily do not have a source of maintenance.

### A COMMENTARY

All these collective attempts toward realizing an economy that is consonant with what Auroville aspires to be, appear as very small steps along a long road. The larger issue and a difficult question shadow the history of these economic experiments and the day-to-day economy that is the present reality in Auroville. The larger issue is the distribution of wealth. The difficult question is "how to share?" Experience has proved that forced giving does not work and is not in the spirit of Auroville, but the spirit of trust needed to utilize and distribute the common resources we do have is also not present. Neither the philanthropist nor the beggar is in any position to create the new world, and the pathologies of both roles are apparent enough when examined. The process seems stuck.

The Freestore is still on the fringe. There are Aurovilians who do not use the Freestore because they believe it is for the "poor". Others feel the quality and selections are un-



The present freestore at  
Bharat Nivas

suitable for them. Some old-timers reflect with nostalgia about the Freestore as the only thing over the years that has remained "free". Others will joke cynically about it or would rather not talk about it at all because it is embarrassingly symbolic of how little we have achieved. Is it part of a process that contains the seed for a new economy that we have to achieve eventually?

In an Auroville that promotes the ideals of fraternity, equality, and a society based on accelerated evolutionary progress, the gap with the daily reality is a disturbing fact that invites criticism. Constructive steps to reach the ideals and realistic proposals to find the way forward, are not sufficiently forthcoming.

Creating a service that can make the economy of Auroville transparent, which naturally encourages a sense of sharing, is still needed after twenty-six years of experiments, and words and arguments at the "official" level. Not to be overlooked, of course, is the "unofficial" sharing that goes on—friends taking care of each other, help and material support coming from known and unknown sources. But Auroville, as such, must dawn in its full sense and it needs not just a system, but a growing spirit of the need to achieve what Mother emphasized: "Auroville is the ideal place for those who want to know the joy and liberation of not having [a sense of] personal possession any more." If a sharing atmosphere is created where the giving and receiving takes place at many levels simultaneously, the sense of fulfillment can be very great—an enrichment of the spirit that goes so far beyond the "bottom line" of economic exchange. Aurovilians know this but have not been able to translate this knowledge into a workable form.

Are the Freestore and Nandini enough of a clue, strong enough threads, to start weaving our real wealth and create "this ideal place [where] money would no longer be the sovereign lord"?

Bill

## Caring for Prosperity

It was perhaps only appropriate that my pen should run out of ink while I was interviewing Ganga. Only appropriate that Ganga should immediately dig into her handbag and present me with a handsome micro-tip felt pen. For, not only I, but the whole team of *Auroville Today* seems to be in constant need of pens. And Ganga, helped by Bhaga and Suzie, runs the Caring Service (also called Prosperity) which tries to meet the material needs of Aurovilians.

The Caring Service (described in AVT No. 28), based on a dream that Ganga had, came into being four years ago. It is founded on the ideal that Aurovilians should dedicate their work, their lives, to the Divine, and in turn, the Divine would provide for their material needs. Thus, the Caring Service tries to be a channel through which the Mother's grace can act. In the material plane, this means that people communicate to the Caring Service their specific needs, be it a bed, a stove, or fare for a trip. Then the Caring Service tries to fulfill that need by approaching the community, either personally or through a note in the *Auroville News* (the weekly internal circular of Auroville). While individuals also put personal notes in the *Auroville News* requesting help, the process of going through the Caring Service allows for the anonymity of both the giver and the receiver.

However, Ganga admits, "we are not always successful. At present, we have over twenty people on our list whose requests we have not been able to meet. Very often, the

**Ganga: "In order to truly give or receive, one has to learn to give up one's ego. And this is what interests me."**

community does not respond to the note that we put out in the *Auroville News*. But then, on the other hand, people often deposit, on Ganga's doorstep, all sorts of goods for the Caring Service. Also, the group, apart from the weekly note in *Auroville News*, never resorts to writing proposals or appeals for donations. Yet, money comes in, from the nearby Sri Aurobindo Ashram and from the faraway Auroville International Centres of France, Germany and The Netherlands.

It would thus be a mistake to view the Caring Service as an institution set up solely to provide for people's needs. What interests the group more is the exchange of energy that accompanies the process of giving and receiving. "In order to truly give or receive, one has to learn to give up one's ego", says Ganga, "And this is what interests me. What matters more than the material gift is the interchange of energy, of love, that takes place. And if one has to wait before one's wish can be fulfilled, there is a lesson to be learnt from that too. It teaches one patience and gratitude".

Though some people mistake it for such, the Caring Service is not a charitable organization concerned with the welfare of the poor. Instead, it tries to view the community as a family. It tries to relate to it as a family—to solve problems together like brothers and sisters. Sometimes, adds Ganga, "we buy a few things or load up the *vandi* (bullock cart) from the stock that we have and distribute them in the community as surprise gifts. It is a small touch, but done in the proper spirit, it can go a long way in creating community".

Despite the fact that the Caring Service plays only a marginal role in the collective life and economy of Auroville today, it could be well be that this group is a prototype for a future non-monetary economic system. For, as Ganga says, only that economic system would be ideal which is ruled by a conscious inner law and not by outer compulsions. "Perhaps that is why", she reminisces, "last year, on Darshan Day (15th August) I received a clear message to call the Caring Service by another name, Prosperity. Prosperity is the name the Mother gave to the goods distribution service in Sri Aurobindo Ashram. And the word, 'prosperity', 'to prosper' connotes that people do not feel the lack of anything, they have enough, they are successful and are thriving. That is what we should aim for, here in Auroville. For when one is free from material needs, one can truly work for the joy of working, for expression and for growth".

Bindu



# A Sunny Future

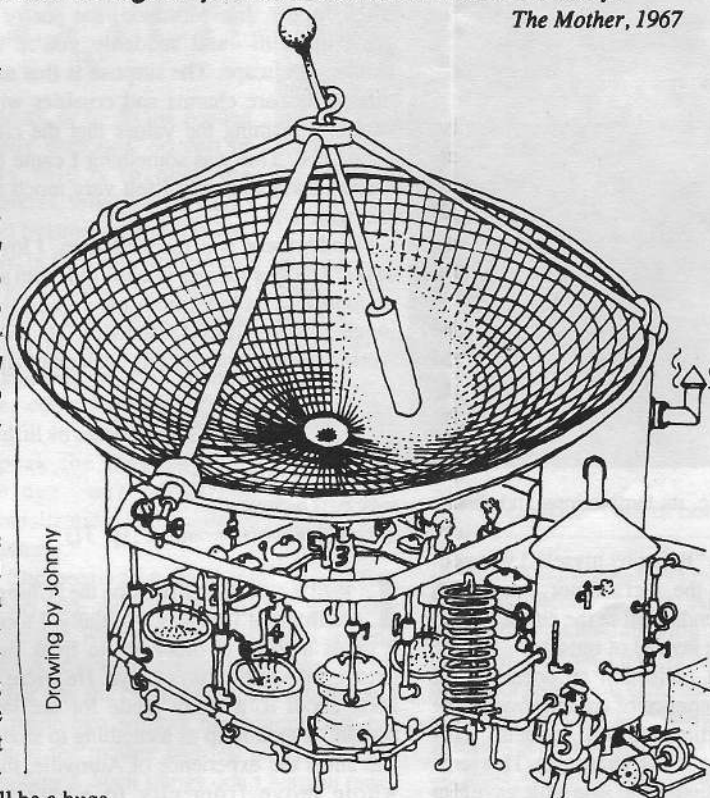
*"Ultimately, (Auroville) must be a town for studies, studies and research on how to live both in a simplified way and in a way such that the higher qualities have MORE TIME to develop."*

*The Mother, 1967*

As mentioned in the previous issue of AUROVILLE TODAY, a central, collective kitchen with a dining room, potentially catering for all Aurovilians' lunches and dinners, is now under construction. Last September, the foundations for the kitchen building were ceremoniously laid. Fund-raising and planning as well as site-preparation have been going on for more than a year. The architect is Suhasini, while her engineer husband Gilles is the moving force behind the idea. The complex will be situated at the centre of town, about 500 m from Matrimandir.

## The Solar Bowl

In a town like Auroville, where many houses are partly or fully powered by energy generated by solar photovoltaic panels, and where even a large complex like the Visitors Centre runs entirely on the sun, it is perhaps not revolutionary any more to imagine a big kitchen providing lunches and dinners for up to a thousand people using mainly sun power. Yet technologically it will be a 'first', even outside Auroville. Incorporated in the kitchen/dining room building will be a huge tilted bowl-shaped mirror facing the south, 15 metres in diameter, and up to 9 metres above ground level. The sun's rays will focus on a cylindrical boiler which will follow the sun's position by means of an electronic tracking device. Here, water will be turned into steam for cooking. At present there are a few prototypes in the world producing steam, but so far none is actually in daily use. A small experimental solar bowl was constructed in Auroville 14 years ago by John Harper, who, apart from his full-time work at Matrimandir, is now a member of the research team at the Centre of Scientific Research. Working with Sylvie, who used to work as a solar scientist in France before coming to Auroville, this team is carrying out research on the future bowl. The structural design for the Solar Bowl has already been completed by Steve, the Auroville Building Centre's ferro-cement specialist. The basic structure of the bowl will be done in ferro-cement.



## Food for all

In about two years' time, the ready-meal distribution service will start. It aims to provide healthy and inexpensive food for all Aurovilians, school children and some of the 2,000 strong work force from the local villages. There will be a dining room to seat up to 220 persons. It may be a revolution in yet another way. For while in the early years of Auroville more or less everyone ate in community kitchens, now most Aurovilians have opted for or have been forced into cooking for themselves in their own individual kitchens, using bottled gas which is sometimes difficult to obtain and always a hassle to refill. In the circumstances, there being only one foodstore in town, shopping and cooking are chores that gobble up time and energy that could be better used to build the town. And this is precisely what Gilles, project coordinator of the Solar Kitchen, has in mind. "This Solar Kitchen wants to be a tool for a more collective life," he writes in his latest fund raising report. And the feedback received from 85 Aurovilians in an extensive questionnaire supports this idea.

## Possibilities

It could be interesting to have a look at the possibilities a collective kitchen might open up to the whole of Auroville and even to its bioregion.

It will become possible to start up new small-community dining rooms and canteens for staff all over Auroville, as they will become much easier to run. The food can be transported from the Solar Kitchen to these 'satellite' kitchens, obviating the need to store and cook food on the premises. Experience has shown that this work too often falls on a single individual, which is part of the reason why many community kitchens failed or became dependent on ammas (ladies hired from the village).

Environmentally, a functioning collective kitchen would reduce the amount of fossil fuel (gas and kerosene) consumed by Auroville at large.

"The Mother said that we should concentrate our research on solar energy. The sun, she said, is the physical sign of the Supramental, the goal towards which we are moving in our yoga. The sun pours down a tremendous amount of energy, and only a fraction of it is being used and almost all of it goes to waste. Particularly in India we are fortunate in having so much of the glory and blessing of the sun; we should thank God constantly for it, but we do not realise this great boon and sometimes even complain about it.

"She said that one of the signs of the New Age will be when humanity learns to draw energy from above, from the inexhaustible source of the sun - instead of from below by denuding the earth."

*(Reminiscences by Udar, from More Vignettes of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, page 181.)*

Economically, a reduction in the amount of time and money spent by individuals on food will become possible. Aurovilians collectively spend a total of over Rs. 1.5 lakhs (\$ 3,000) every year on refilling gas bottles.

Organic farming in the Auroville area will become more viable for Auroville farmers, and more attractive to local farmers who could start growing organic food under contract, as the collective kitchen could establish purchasing agreements with them. The risk of wasted harvests due to lack of cold storage facilities and marketing problems will hopefully be eliminated. At present this is a disincentive for Auroville farmers trying to grow vegetables and fruits.

## Ways of cooking

Steam will be used to cook most of the food. Steam cooking is healthy, economical, energy-efficient and, if generated by solar heat, environment-friendly. Steam-cooked food suits the food habits of people in South India, for whom the staple food is rice and *sambar* (lentil gravy), *idlies* (rice cakes) and vegetables which, like milk and other liquids, can be easily steam-cooked without risk of burning. The Ashram dining room in Pondicherry has been cooking on steam generated by conventional means for more than 25 years.

Apart from steam generated by the sun, other energy sources will have to be available in this new kitchen too, as cooking on a cloudy day and frying cannot be done with steam. There will be a large back-up boiler powered by diesel oil, and gas bottles as well. But renewable energy sources such as solar cookers and dryers and biogas will be used as much as possible.

The Solar Kitchen, planned to be operational by the end of 1996, is the first phase of a larger complex which will eventually house other collective services including the Pour Tous bulk purchase, transport, storage and home delivery service (presently at Aspiration); the Financial Service; a food research centre; a foodstore for the centre area; a hair cutting salon, a laundry service, and an ironing service.

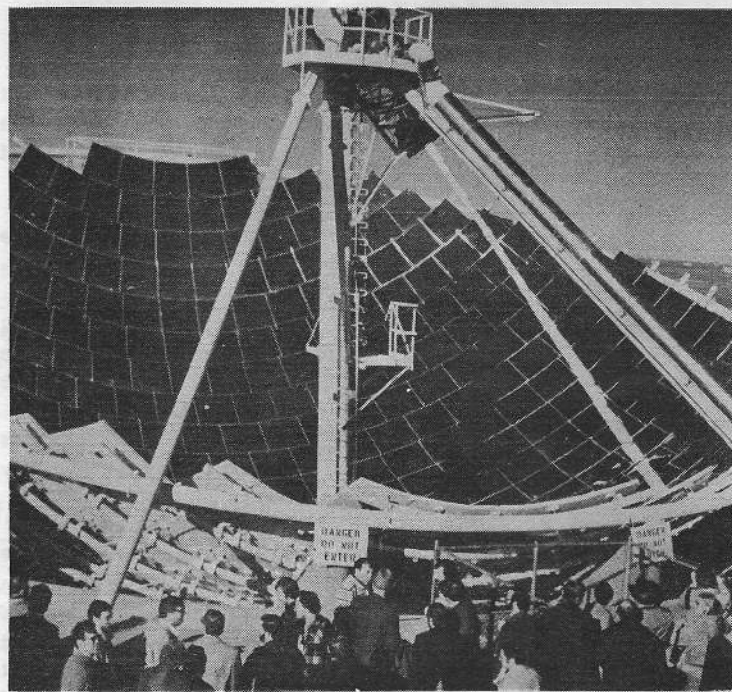
*Report by Annemarie, with thanks to Gilles*

*(Drawing above: an artist's view of the Solar Kitchen)*

A community-wide survey to assess the interest of Aurovilians in a ready-meal service and/or dining room elicited a positive response and many suggestions, and it is clear that Aurovilians are ready for another try at a more collective way of eating.

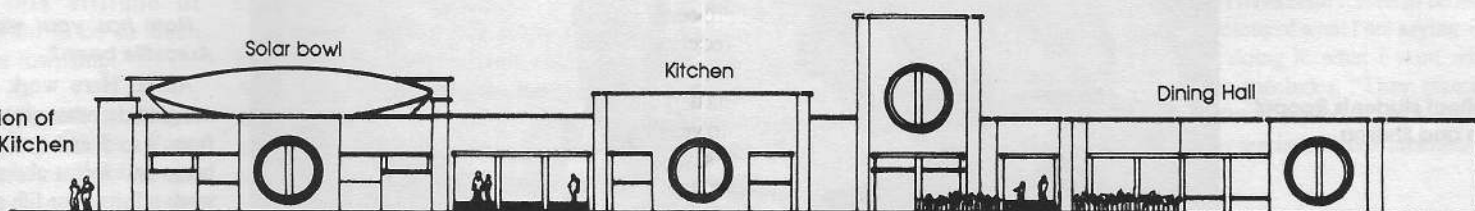
## Some salient points:

- > People support the kitchen for both idealistic and practical reasons. Many people stressed that the collective kitchen is an essential tool for a more collective life and economy.
- > As much as possible, only Aurovilians should work in the kitchen (especially cooking and serving).
- > Smoking should not be allowed
- > Only vegetarian food should be prepared and served
- > The dining room should not be used between meal times for social gatherings, etc.



Above: Solar bowl of 20 m in diameter, built in 1980 at Crosbyton, Texas. The bowl planned for Auroville will be 15 m in diameter.

Right: South Elevation of the planned Solar Kitchen complex.





# LLOYD IS . . .

WHO is Lloyd?

Lloyd is... a tall (not too tall), thin (very thin) Dutchman who lives in Fertile Breeze.

Lloyd is... a librarian and is doing a good job at the Bharat Nivas library, in spite of financial limitations and a changing staff situation.

Lloyd is... a poet.

At the back of his latest book of poems *But for the Breeze* it says, "Lloyd Hofman was born in 1952. He travelled Europe and spent time in North African oases between jobs in the Netherlands. After a break with his family in 1978 he made a two-year trek overland to Malaysia. He then worked as a journalist for eight years and did, among other things, reviews of books and concerts in Amsterdam. He also exhibited his fashion photography. He came to live in Auroville in 1988. He is writing an introductory book on the Taoist Book of Changes."

Lloyd is... a guardian of trees and a cat and a dog named Chucky. He lives in a thatch-roofed hut (very neat) and transcribes the lyrics of Lou Reed from his music cassettes. "They stand for what Amsterdam was to me in terms of poetry-human nature in all its city charms and cruelties," says Lloyd.

Or...

Lloyd is a traveller and musician and Auroville is a stop along the way where he has been given time to write and study without the usual interruptions of a more



hectic city life, its temptations and disturbances.

Lloyd says, "Being by myself, I was confronted with the fact of not being with someone. Friends I left in the city started to live inside me instead of outside."

His current collection of poems is all about the experience of coming from a big city and finding oneself suddenly surrounded with nothing but nature. This journey from Amsterdam to Auroville gave him a chance to look at the past, the life he had been leading, the left-over luggage...

Lloyd says, "In the forest of Auroville, the jungle of the city fell away, and there is somehow a surprise in being fascinated by a bunch of palmyra trees."

*Morning light steals  
into the eyes  
diluting the dream  
that floats off in the new day  
where the shade of palms  
has dug caverns in dew (p. 16)*

This surprise at discovering the rhythm of living in nature brought about a confrontation. Lloyd says, "I was confronted by a different kind of passion. There was a movement from a city landscape, where the main drive of a human being deprived of nature is a sexual drive—the jungle of love, Mick Jagger, Jim Morrison, the poetry I grew up with—and suddenly you're in another landscape. The surprise is that nature in its bare charms and cruelties will sustain, renaming the values that the city hands you. This was something I came to see, so that eventually I felt very much at one with it."

Finally, there is a reconciliation. Lloyd says, "The new merges into the old, with an outlook that includes both nature and the jungle of love from Amsterdam. The two worlds are not contradicting each other any more".

*The whisper of waves  
on aimless breezes  
drifts off in directions  
way past memory  
of their turquoise womb ... (p. 37)*

Lloyd is... writing a book on the I Ching, or Book of Changes. "Initially, I took it up as a study in order not to freak out amongst the trees," says Lloyd. He wrote a book about it, a study guide for the lay person. "I took it up as something to study and allow the experience of Auroville, the whole move from city to whatever Auroville might turn out to be, to fall into place in its own good time," says Lloyd.

There is definitely a connection between his interest in poetry and the book on I Ching. Lloyd says, "I Ching is the poetry of a whole civilisation. Considering the importance of the role of poetry in China, it follows that it was a poet who put the hexagrams in the order that we find them in the book. The explanation of the hexagram symbols has its root in mythology. In consulting I Ching the individual draws his own

conclusions from what a whole civilisation has to offer."

"How does the I Ching work?" I ask.

"Like most esoteric works it says, 'Know Thyself'. What is added to this in I Ching is the factor of unpredictability in life, the factor of the oracle. The more precisely you put your questions, the more likely you are to receive precise answers. But there isn't a pre-set pattern that tells you what to do when you juggle with the unpredictable through an oracle."

"And what kinds of questions do you ask?"

"Most people use I Ching when they have a problem and are unbalanced. This is too limited a use of the book and, what is worse, being unbalanced your questions are bound to be unbalanced. Usually you try to look at something that escapes you and you may use I Ching as a poetic means to drag you out of single-mindedness—it enlarges your imaginative approach. But to be imaginative about the mess you have made of things will hardly cheer you up."

"Many New Age scientists are interested in the I Ching," I said. "I read about it in the Tao of Physics."

"Hmmm... well," says Lloyd, "there are those who see it as a mathematical game, which it is. But only among other things. My book is about the poetry of it. Very few books on the I Ching take that angle. In fact, I Ching incorporates many aspects of life, but has its base in the mythological. As such it has a holistic outlook; an accomplishment of people who didn't have a division of sciences, but were still at one with nature in an intuitive way. In fact, poetry and science were one and the same thing. Essentially, the book speaks in very easy metaphors taken from daily life. Which is why working with I Ching is so difficult; it is so easy to bend the metaphor towards your subjective liking. Basically, what I Ching does is to teach you how to ask the right questions."

Jill

## OTHER PERSPECTIVES

# Indian women in Auroville

I met them first on a sunny afternoon at the Students Guest House in Bharat Nivas. I was looking for a cheap place to stay (guest-house prices in Auroville can be hard on the pocket of young Indians) and had been directed to this guest-house which was primarily intended for students undergoing training in Auroville. And there, seated around the kitchen table and sipping tea were these four young Indian women. I was surprised to see them there, for India, though it is fast changing its character, is still steeped in its age-old traditions and dogmas. Women do not have complete liberty yet, and arranged marriages are still the norm and not the exception. By the same token, India is used to the idea of (predominantly male-dominated) "ashrams" for those who seek a spiritual life and the concept of Auroville is yet to take root in the Indian consciousness. As it turned out,

all the four women—Anita, Bharati, Roopal and Shama—were architects who were working for different Aurovilian architects, namely AuroSatprem, Suhasini and Helmut. They were staying in Auroville for a year or two for their work and then planned to move on.

In the course of time, I got to know them better, meeting them at parties in Ami (the youth community of Auroville) or at Indian

get-togethers. Considering that this was the first time that they were away from home and financially on their own, they all seemed to be doing admirably well—making friends, house-sitting for other Aurovilians, and learning to manoeuvre motor-cycles on Auroville's uneven roads. And they all seemed to be falling, more and more, in love with Auroville... (one of them, Anita, recently joined Auroville as a newcomer).

I finally cornered them one day, and got them to talk about their experiences in Auroville. Here are some excerpts from that interview:

**What did you know about Auroville before you came here? Is Auroville well-known in India?**

Shama: I did not know the first thing about Auroville. When I first saw a picture of Matrimandir, I thought it was the architects' office!

Anita: When I told people that I was going to Auroville for my training, they asked me if I was going abroad!

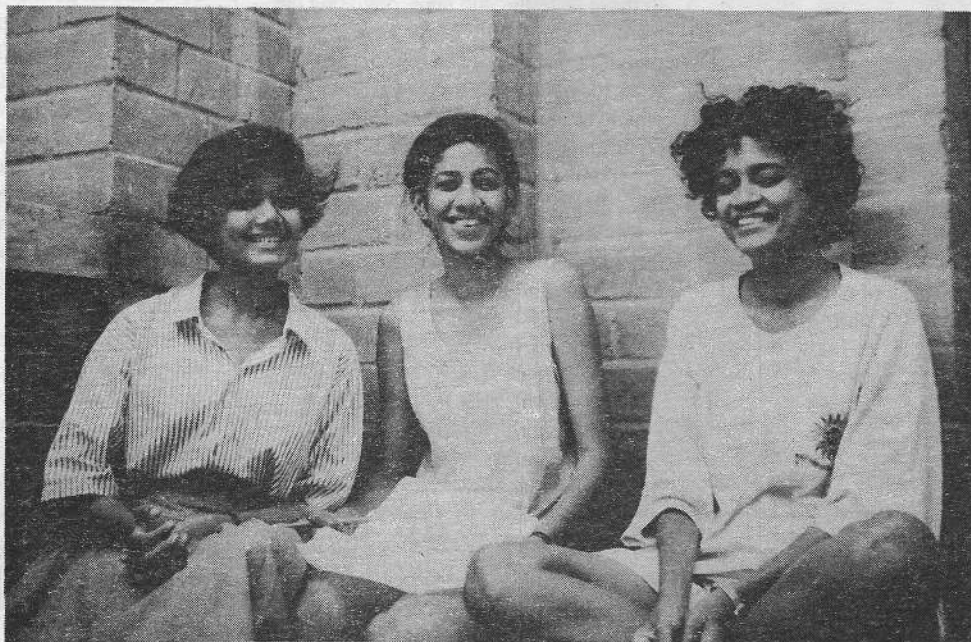
**What struck you most about Auroville when you first came here?**

Shama: The friendliness. I felt I was enveloped in love and affection. People were so open and welcoming. I had never felt such friendliness anywhere else before.

Roopal: I loved the landscape—the greenery and the mud roads. It is so quiet here, unlike anywhere else in India.

**How has your work experience in Auroville been?**

Anita: Here work and life are intermingled. In other places, you work at a job from 9 to 5 and that's it. You come back home and forget about it. In Auroville, the work affects your life and vice versa. It's a



Architect students Roopal, Anita and Shama.



# Talking with the Eyes

Auroville's playground for disabled village children is situated under the tamarind trees next to the Auroville Bakery, near the village of Kuilapalayam. I had come to meet Angelika, one of those in charge, and to see for myself an aspect of Auroville few Aurovilians are aware of.

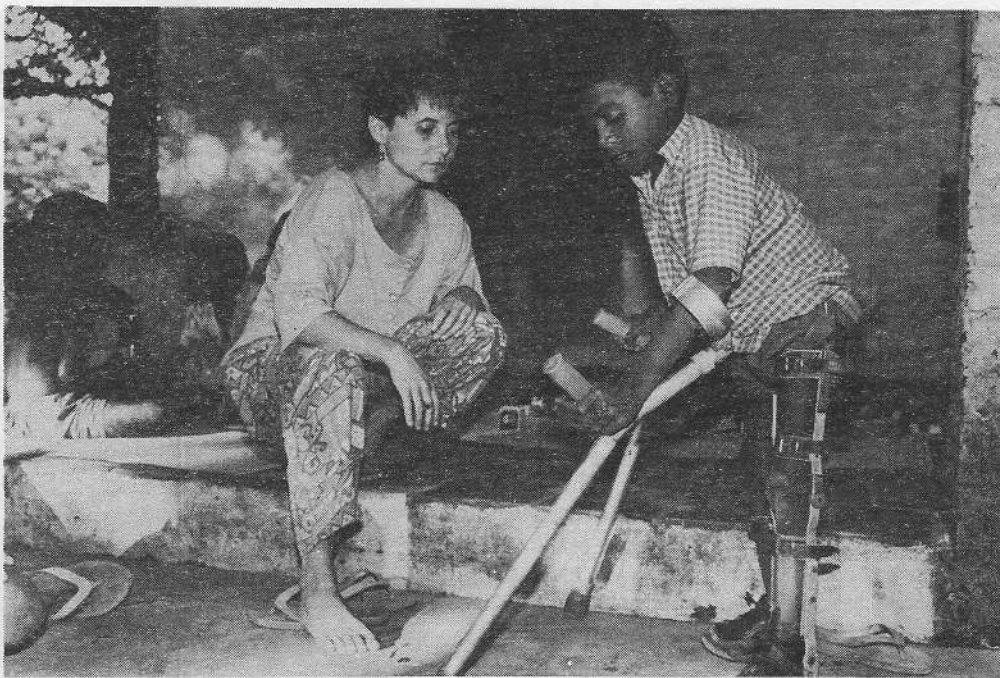
Angelika worked as an occupational therapist with children in Germany before settling in Auroville in 1992. Three weeks after her arrival she joined the project with handicapped village children that had just been started. "When I entered that place, I felt at home and welcomed by the children, who did not ask me 'Are you a newcomer? What do you know about Sri Aurobindo and the Mother? How long do you plan to stay?', but just accepted me."

She kneels to help a child who suffers from the effects of polio to adjust his walking aids, and is rewarded by a heartfelt smile. She smiles back and continues: "It is still hard for me to understand the circumstances in the village. Initially I was shocked, and about my own reaction as well. I am confronted here with the effects of diseases I had never encountered before, and on top of that with an attitude of indifference and neglect for the handicapped children. The parents generally spend little time with them. Nearly all mothers are out the whole day working as there are always financial problems, and the fathers are often sick or drunk. Few of them care sufficiently to periodically take their disabled child to the hospital for follow up tests or aid adjust-

ments, or to do the needed daily exercises. So part of my role is to push the parents. When a child has to get treatment in the hospital, one of the Tamil helpers and I go to meet them and ask them to come along. Parents need to be involved. The Tamil helpers, who themselves come from the village, fulfill an essential role: they speak the language and bridge our different socialization and thinking patterns."

She points at a small girl. "She is five years old, deaf and dumb and generally retarded. We managed to get her a hearing aid. A new world opened up for her. But the other day she came with dead batteries and a while ago without her hearing aid, because the mother had left and locked the cupboard. Such things don't happen once, they happen all the time."

"In all, about 12 children, mainly from nearby Kuilapalayam, attend the playground regularly. They are between two and twelve years old and have different handicaps. Some are physically disabled, some are mentally retarded. For them this playground is a wonder, they get help, attention, toys, snacks: it is really a grace. I've known some of the children for almost three years now and can see that they all made a big progress. They are very happy and that



Angelika: "I felt at home and welcomed by the children"

is what keeps all of us—the team of Susanne, Glenn, Thuriya, Anandi, Shanti and Karpagamm—moving here. All of these children need a lot of human warmth and extra individual care, but that is something we can only give marginally in this situation at the playground. Also the mix of all these different kinds of handicaps and ages is not ideal. But it will change soon."

"Are there no Indian organizations doing this kind of work?" I ask. "I know that a number of very specialised organizations exist, for example those who only work with leprosy patients, but I am not aware of any organizations that work in the villages with the handicapped."

Working with disabled village children is but one part of Angelika's life. She also works with Auroville children. "There was some scepticism when I started work-

ing with Auroville children," she recalls. "There was an attitude 'we don't need those specialists', a kind of suspicion. But it soon changed. One of the teachers at Transition invited me to work with one boy in her class, and the other teachers realised that I had something to contribute. My work here is with children who have difficulties which you normally don't see. Usually there are one or two of them in every group who disturb the class. All these children suffer in some way. Because they naturally want to avoid their difficulties they develop different ways of compensating, for example refuse to cooperate or fool around in the class, in order to be equal to the others. I am trained to observe a child in a group and in an individual assessment. I look if there are motor skill problems, or problems of perception or psychological problems. And once I have found that out—mostly it is a mixture—my real work starts. We have to fill the gaps as it were, the gaps which occurred in the child's past and are the cause of its present problems. It is a very intuitive work to find the key to each individual child. I use all the senses: touch, talk with my eyes, try to make the child understand with the body. I do not only explain mentally. I like to work with them on the ground, go back to the early stages of their development. This work requires a lot of individual attention towards each child, and needs to be done together with the parents and the teachers."

In the near future, Angelika will work in the children's nursing home, a new extension of the Health Center nearby Aspiration that is nearly completed. "When I joined Auroville, the planning of this nursing home had just started, and I was invited to help design a room based on my experience in Germany, which is now tailor-made for my requirements. I want to work here with all the Auroville children in need of extra help. Our project with the disabled village children will move there as well and the playground for the handicapped will be closed. We will then be able to offer individual care to all children, and also to the disabled village children who do not attend any school."

"Since I started to work with children years ago, I have been forced to be increasingly conscious of what I am saying, doing, why I am doing it, what I want with the child," she concludes. "They give an incredible direct feedback. In many ways they are my teachers. I have changed a lot."

Carel



Architect student Bharati

PHOTO JOHN MANDEEN

## Indian Women in Auroville (contd.)

totally different work experience. The informality of the place, the community life—they all affect your work.

Bharati: Here, people are dedicated to their work. They have no material interest in it. They work for work's sake. Because they believe in it or because they enjoy doing it. And I have been very moved by this attitude of Aurovilians. They want to do so much for Auroville, for the township.

Have you had the opportunity to interact with Aurovilians other than those with whom you work? Have you had the opportunity to meet people of your age?

Anita: I think, having been brought up totally in India, a cultural gap still prevails between us and the Westerners. Especially among the youth. I find it easier to interact with adults.

Bharati: I feel it is partly our fault. We all are quite conservative. And somehow, after coming here, I feel I hold on all the more strongly to my Indian roots.

Shama: According to a conversation I had with an Aurovilian teenager, Aurovilian youth are very shy too and since they are relatively unexposed to the outside world, they find it difficult to interact with outsiders. I think both groups have trouble coming forward to break the ice.

### What's your opinion about Auroville? Do you think it is living up to its ideals?

Bharati: I see a lot of conflict and pettiness, even among architects. But, I think it will all disappear for they are all aspiring towards the one and the same goal. After all Auroville is so young...

Anita: The pettiness here is the same as that outside. But in the outside world you take it as a given fact in life. Here, it bothers me because, ideally speaking, such things should not exist in Auroville.

### Do you think you will come back to Auroville?

Bharati: I come from a traditional Indian family. I have to respect the wishes of my parents. The decision is not entirely up to me. Besides, I have come here directly after college and I have not experienced anything other than Auroville and the little town where I grew up. I must see more of the world.

Shama: I have learnt such a lot here. It's all been an immense learning experience. I feel I have been "taking" from Auroville all this time and when I come back, if I get to come back, I'd like to be able to "give" back something to Auroville. And I'd like to think out the matter more deeply and make a conscious decision about exactly why I want to come back to Auroville. I don't want to come back just to be an architect.

Roopal: It is different here. There is something special in the air here. I think I will be back.

Bindu



# Flak-catching in the combat zone

The *Auroville News*—the weekly news bulletin of the community—has experienced a sea change ever since Hero came in from the cold and took over at the helm half a year back.

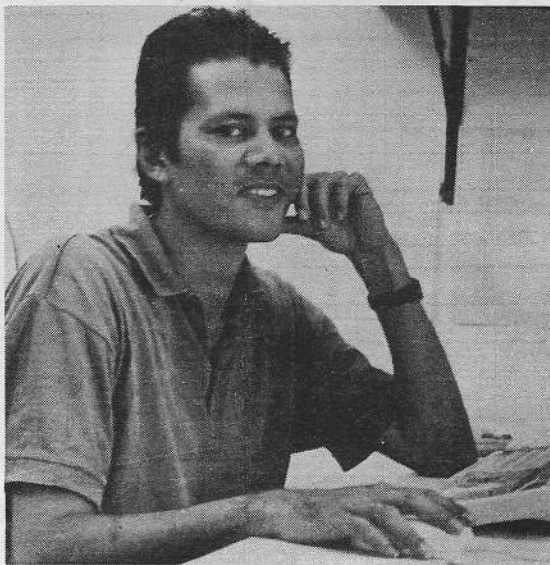
Letters have become shorter and to the point. This has encouraged debate as humorous ripostes have replaced the manifestos and pulpit harangues of yore. And if at times the debates are acrimonious this perhaps serves the purpose of lancing some of our painful collective boils. Humour has also surfaced in the headlines of announcements, which for me always make compulsory reading. These will no doubt represent a treasure trove for historians and sociologists labouring a hundred years from now on their studies of daily life in Auroville at the end of the twentieth century. Basically what was once a leaking half-sunken barge full of sodden goods, has, after a little overhauling in the Cuddalore shipyard, become a trim catamaran actually capable of navigation as it deftly skims the waves and skirts our reefs of rectitude.

This sea change has not however been to everyone's taste (*De gustibus...*) and Hero remains in certain quarters something of a wanted man. He agreed to talk to me, however, and I found him surprisingly relaxed and showing no particular symptoms of the much feared Lithuanian curse. (See Alan below). We met in an undisclosed location near the haunted house and Ayenar horses where the basket weavers ply their trade—somewhere well outside the city limits.

Why would anyone in their right mind ever want to take on the job of editing the weekly internal news-sheet of a fractious community such as ours? His answer revealed a civic sense of responsibility laced with an amateur interest in pharmacology.

"I felt that the *Auroville News* had become a dangerous soporific and the possibility of abuse was serious. You'd pass people leaning on their bikes, News in hand, and they'd still be there two hours later eyes glazed over in a state of

## or Hero at the helm



near catatonic stupor. When approached and gently woken they had no idea what had happened to them except for the fact that they had started reading the development group report. Evidently the News had become something of a menace in a healthy society and I felt it was in the public interest to inject a bit of caffeine into it. I enjoy my work immensely - even if at times I'd like to have more liberty than I do - but I see the job as a civic duty and accept its limitations, even if I try to steer it in a lighter direction. I've been learning about the attitudes of Aurovilians as well as the technical side of putting out a newsletter. Also response from the outside can be quite encouraging. For instance I received a lot of response concerning an obscure quotation from an 18th century divine found in one of T.S. Eliot's poems."

Did he know what he was getting into?

"What was a surprise was the favourable response to the change of key I gave it. Flak-catching was no surprise and that began the instant I started correcting the grammar and syntax of non-native users of English. I was however taken aback by the vehemence with which I was accused of perverting dogma. But everyone has their own version of the scriptures here. The funniest comment I once received, at the end of a lengthy diatribe, was 'Don't try to be intelligent!' I reject letters that I consider spiteful or slanderous as I don't feel the News should be a forum for that. There are also letters I try to persuade people to rewrite or tone down—frequently to no avail—as I know they will offend certain sensibilities. There's a thin line between editing and censorship and it's frequently a damned if you do / damned if you don't situation."

"Nonetheless I was surprised that there still exists a certain good-will in Auroville and people who had been vehement at the outset could see the validity of a critique, and were willing to take it with a sense of humour. Fundamentally we're still Aurovilians despite the acrimoniousness to which we all frequently revert. Old-time Aurovilians are quite willing to laugh at their own spiritual pomposities and have an ironic sense of humour. Newcomers also have a sense of humour—in fact they're obliged to if they want to become old-timers!"

Hero who has lived in Auroville for 23 years holds to his faith in the force that Mother (who gave him his name as a child) put on this place and which he feels is present in the very geography of Auroville. "People can't help being affected and influenced by it, you can feel it in the earth we walk on and it works from the bottom up." And despite the occasional rough sailing he plans to continue with the *Auroville News*, at least until he's fired, or put on an ice-float and set adrift.

Roger

## A SAMPLING FROM THE AUROVILLE NEWS

### AXIS BOLD AS LOVE

Bring your paints and brushes and remember this: "The mystic Muse is more of an inspired Bacchanate of the Dionysian wine than an orderly housewife" (Sri Aurobindo). Ami, Saturday 1000 hours (15th Oct.) Paint Auroville's version of the Sistine Chapel in the Ami dance hall. Pot luck lunch and Himal's Pizza Hut will be open for dinner. —AXIS.

### MALEDICTUM

The last issue of *Auroville Today* makes mention of an intriguing and hitherto unknown Faculty in the Ashram School namely the "Higher Curse".<sup>1</sup> Is this Department still operative? What are its functions? Whom does it curse? What about Lower Curses? Who lifts the Anathemas? Are they ever lifted? The rank and file, we feel, have a right to know. —Ed.

<sup>1</sup> ("In a note... in 1967 she announced the modified rules for the Higher Curse" [*Auroville Today* no. 69, LAST SCHOOL by Carel])

### THE HIGHER CURSE EXPLAINED

Mediaeval Lithuania knew everything there was worth knowing about cursing.

... But first, a little background. Mediaeval Lithuania was a hotbed of political intrigue. Ambitious politicians, jostling for influence at the Lithuanian court, would write scurrilous articles about their opponents and publish broadsides against other political factions. Frequently, however, these machinators lacked a good education—having been expelled from elite Lithuanian academies for offences like smoking or nailing younger boys to the battlements—and consequently they came to rely on a small army of scribes to write up their polemics. But the scribes themselves were easily bribed, or often harboured

political ambitions of their own, and in the process of writing up a client's ravings for larger circulation would often subtly change the argument or interpose opinions of their own, so as to weaken or ridicule what their client wished to express.

It was for this crime—"ngarramakle" or "turning the word"—that the Higher Curse was expressly reserved. ... Interestingly, in modern Lithuania there is a noticeable shortage of editors—the true successors of these scribes—which suggests that the Higher Curse can reach down through the centuries... (respectfully submitted by Alan)

### PARTY POOPER

The sound equipment will not, for obvious reasons be lent out for parties any more. It will be kept in good condition and used only for live concerts on dead weekends. By order. Stephanopoulos Stavrokis

### THE LAST WAVE

The last wave in Auroville was surfed on August 19th 1993. A rumour of waves on the 29th April 1994 at Mahabalipuram was investigated. Unfortunately, the photographers and various Auroville Surf Dogs arrived too late and had to content themselves with paddling around in the brownish froth by the shore while being pelted with banana skins by a tour group on pilgrimage. Thus no waves were surfed. Four surfers burned their boards, one tore out his hair and covered himself in dust and ashes, two went mad and a third wanders around the secretariat muttering and shaking his fist at an image of Poseidon. In summary, an average year.

### COME AND GET 'EM SUCKERS

About 100 pineapple suckers are available at Transformation. Free of course.

### BE ADVISED

Be advised that any person suffering from snake bite, or a bite from an unknown animal (ie. something that stings you in the night) should seek medical advice and not rely on folk remedies, mantras, etc. —Ed

### ALSO AVAILABLE

Leeches for blood-letting. Cures everything. Contact S. Magus.

### POETRY:

Let all poets be advised that henceforth their efforts are liable to summary rejection. —Ed.

### MORE VILLAGE DOG NEWS

Excellent Beach Type Village Dog pups (*Canis aureus marinus*) are available at QUIET Beach. Guaranteed to yelp furiously all night and run from all intruders, thus protecting you from any law suits.

### CORRIGENDUM CANIS

The notice on the previous page "More Village Dog News" should have read: "In Quiet are some wonderful plump puppies waiting for a home."

### ANATHEMA

In order to clarify things once and for all, to those whose grasp of English ranges from coalescent to nebulous, the following should be noted: the split infinitive will not be tolerated, it will be rooted out wherever it is found, trampled upon and cast out of the Garden of Language. The misplaced semi-colon and the errant comma will find themselves in dire straits, the promiscuous and vulgar use of exclamation marks, turgid metaphor and the despicable habit of capitalisation for emphasis are hereby pronounced anathema. Those who cannot

do without these crutches must take their offerings elsewhere. Bharat Nivas has Spoken.

### LETTER FROM AMERICA

Dear Friends and Editors,  
As a member of the community "a little more distant than Far Beach", I wish to report my continuing pleasure in reading the unfailingly interesting and educational *AV Notes*<sup>1</sup>. There has been an increased quotient of "readability" that I find remarkable. Humour is perhaps the single most enjoyed element I find sneaking in between the lines, but I think it might be called maturity or mellowing also as I read letters to the editors some of which seem less bombastic and acerbic now ...

All the best, Jack, Auroville International USA.

<sup>1</sup> The unconscious use of the term "AV Notes" in reference to the AVNEWS is a sure sign (Newcomers pay heed) of the genuine Old Timer. —Ed.

### LOUNGE LIZARDS FORCED TO LIE ON FLOOR

Four young men, living in a big empty (mostly) house, are in dire need of lounging furniture to help facilitate after-dinner digestion and discussions. If you can help to ease their suffering, please contact Luc, Sukrit, Satyavan or Anand.

### DESPERATELY SEEKING CASH

Somebody in need of money would like to sell her old and beautiful rosewood desk and chair in excellent condition. Call ...

### DESPERATELY SEEKING FLAK-JACKET

Contact Hero at safe house.

□



## Playing with DEATH

Rosencrantz,  
Guildenstern  
(played by  
Otto and Jeff)  
and their ghosts



PHOTOSVEN

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead, a modern play by Tom Stoppard, had a two-day run at the end of November in the Sri Aurobindo Auditorium at Bharat Nivas. The play is a three-hour footnote to the four hundred year old Shakespeare classic *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*. "Brilliant" and "Bravo!" and such epithets were heaped on the cast and crew for their performance. Seven months of rehearsals for seventeen people paid off—though the whole thing almost fell apart a few times. Jill, the director, brought the best out of her international cast which included little Chris who played Alfred, the child actor specialized in rapid transformation into female roles, and the leads, Otto as Guildenstern and Jeff as Rosencrantz. The motley band of players, with Francis in command, greatly amused the audience especially people who had no idea what the play was all about and could not catch all the verbal play in the long and comical conversations on existentialist dilemmas. The others in the band of travelling actors were Egor, Lisa, Partha, and Sydo who performed the music for the play live, both on stage and off. For the scenes that were taken directly from *Hamlet* using the original dialogue: Moorthy played Hamlet, Tai and Ellen were the King and Queen, Robert did a real Gallic Polonius with Veronique as his daughter Ophelia.

While the performance was excellent, it is Stoppard's play that remains a disappointment. He had the opportunity of using so many levels of plays within plays to bring the action to a meaningful height but always seemed to pun when he could have peaked. Shakespeare's achievement is of such classical proportions that it would have helped Stoppard enormously if he had chosen his selections more wisely and not just to support the absurdist nuances

fashionable in contemporary drama. The famous scene of the confrontation between Hamlet, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in which Hamlet presses them to play the flute when they insist they have not the talent and then Hamlet responds with his "yet you would play with me, who am infinitely more complicated than a flute," Stoppard has entirely omitted.

Audience reaction to the play seems to have split between those who liked it very much and those who walked out muttering: "How can you put on this kind of stuff in Auroville." The Auroville audience where many are familiar with the writing of Mother and Sri Aurobindo on the topic of death especially the powerful passages in *Savitri*, may not have been able to digest Stoppard's treatment of the subject. I asked Jill about this and she described the process of choosing the play and the reasons for performing it. "We looked at six plays and chose this one because it was funny, it fitted the actors in the group, it brought up many intriguing questions and there is a quality and richness in the language. It is also a play about the nature of theatre, the fascination of death acted on stage, and the role of the audience because you have all the links between the plays within the play." Jill continued on the relevance in terms of the fears people have in Auroville about security and other things which are ultimately the fear of death: "The characters were caught up in circumstances they felt were beyond their control and when you choose not to be in control you are not. They faced moral decisions and lacked the courage or the faith to say 'no' before it was too late."

Hamlet's dying words: "... and the rest is silence." Rosencrantz's: "Now you see me, ..." (stage lights go out).

Bill

Chuck! The mummy blade slices into damp earth, then sucks it back to create a wedge-shaped hole. Squatting down, I balance the plastic seedling bag in one hand, stripping away part of the plastic with the other. Then changing hands, trying not to let the earth mould round the seedling crumble, I work the thicker tap root carefully out of the crumpled bottom plastic. Then gently, gently into the hole, couching the earth mould, keeping the seedling upright, while the other hand drags in the soil around it, tamps it firmly down. Finally, I cup my hand and pour in a little water. It spills out around the fragile stem, sealing it in against this evening's storm.

Nine o'clock on the first day of the monsoon, and I'm tree planting again. Working through the morning in an open field, slowly everything gets reduced to the slip of plastic, to the smell of soil and sweat. Moving quietly from pit to pit, bending, digging, unwrapping, planting, watering, straightening up, I'm washed clean to the first faint breeze of the morning, to the dank smells of earth, to the subtle variations in topsoil and slope, to the lift and drift of my energy, to the character of different seedlings: squat, perky, aristocratic, quietly dependable.

## Monsoon Planting

Connectedness. As the morning wears on, I'm closer to the villager ploughing the neighbouring field, to the sacred forest of Puttupet, just up the coast, from which the 'Miracle' seedling in my hand has come, closer to an India which is still integral, unhurried, earthwhole. Closer to a neglected part of myself.

Eleven thirty: the last dip of the morning. As pain jerks the back of my legs and eases into my back, I breathe deeply, trying to draw upon a larger energy that is weaving me into this sedate dance with soil and plants. I start counting off the remaining seedlings. Five, four, three... The last few are planted quicker, less consciously, the hands hardening up again, the body anticipating rest and a shower.

Walking back through the planted field, I'm aware that something has already changed—the seedlings shivering in the noon breeze no longer part of my process but separate, complete in themselves, preparing to strike root where I may rarely visit. Caked in mud and sweat, I'm also rooted deeper now, touched by older, cleaner rhythms of the earth.

Time for a shower, clean clothes, and the luxury of a hot, sweet cup of tea...

Alan

## BRIEF NEWS

### Land Purchase 1964 - 1994

The first plot of land purchased for Auroville was registered 30 years ago on 8th October, 1964. Although 190 acres (75 hectares) have been purchased in the last three years, the need to purchase the remaining land—380 acres in the city area, and at least 1,000 in the Green Belt—has never been so urgent.

We take this opportunity to thank everybody who has helped over the past three years, and to ask for the continuing support of all those who can contribute towards this effort while recalling Mother's message of May, 1970:

"The lands for Auroville are to be bought and can be bought. The money is needed. Will you help?"

Contributions can be sent to Auroville Fund, Secretariat, Bharat Nivas, Auroville 605101, Tamil Nadu, India, specifying for land purchase.

Land Service

### Weather Aftercast

December surprised us with cold nights (20° C) and a frantic search in the cupboard for woollen items such as socks, undershirts and extra blankets. The monsoon, which appeared to have ended worryingly early this year, returned with a vengeance a few days before Christmas. All in all, it has been a slightly above average year for rain, statistics showing rainfall of 1165 mm, 480 mm of which occurred in 19 days in November. Last year's total rain fall was 1606 mm. Over the past ten years there has been an average annual rainfall of 1250 mms.

### New Projects in Kottakarai

The Village Action Group recently acquired a full-fledged Desk Top Publishing unit through a donation from the Government of Japan. The unit will initially be used to publish Village Action's leaflets and brochures both in Tamil and in English. The unit was inaugurated by a brief ceremony on 7 December. And it was perhaps only appropriate that the first leaflet to be photocopied on the new photocopying machine was one requesting local farmers to sell turtle eggs to the Turtle Conservation Project of Auroville at Quiet.

On the same day, there was also a "bhoomi-pooja" (a small ceremony) to mark the laying of the foundation for a new building to house the Kottakarai Organic Food Processing Unit. This building is being built with a grant from Association Himalaya, Italy.

### Sir C.P.N. Singh

As we went to press, we learned of the passing of Sir C.P.N. Singh, a great supporter and well-loved friend of Auroville.

□

## Tribute to a Friend

In Madras at the end of November 1994, Dr. Malcolm Adiseshiah, an old friend of Auroville passed away at the age of 84. The Prime Minister of India referred to him as an eminent son of India whose contributions in the field of economic development and education would be long remembered. Dr. Adiseshiah, as the Deputy Director-General of UNESCO, delivered an inspiring address at the inauguration of Auroville on February 28, 1968. He continued to support Auroville throughout the years. In 1969 on All India radio he called the Aurovilians "the astronauts and cosmonauts of this new city of hope... that will assure the peace we are looking for in the world." In 1970 on French television, he commented on the world situation saying it was at the point where "there is no way forward except a conscious spiritual development. . . In our great universities—Oxford, Cambridge, Sorbonne—and also in the monasteries of Roman Catholics as well as the temples of Islam, of Buddhism, etc.—we have tried to develop simultaneously the inner and the outer life but in its application the ideal has not gone deep enough, nor become integral. However, the genius of Auroville, based on Sri Aurobindo's vision, is the concept of a new man with a new consciousness who will unite Spirit and Matter. I believe that in Auroville we shall have a true democracy which does not exist anywhere in the world, which has never existed before..."

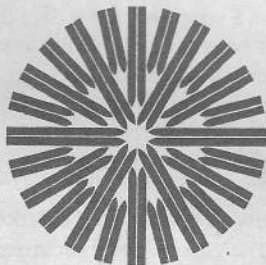
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# AUROVILLE TODAY

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

By Airmail  
Bookpost



In this issue (8 pages):

Collective Living (p.1 to 3);

People: Lloyd, Angelika and three architecture students (centre pages)

Reviews: the Auroville News and a play.

January 1995

Number Seventy-Two

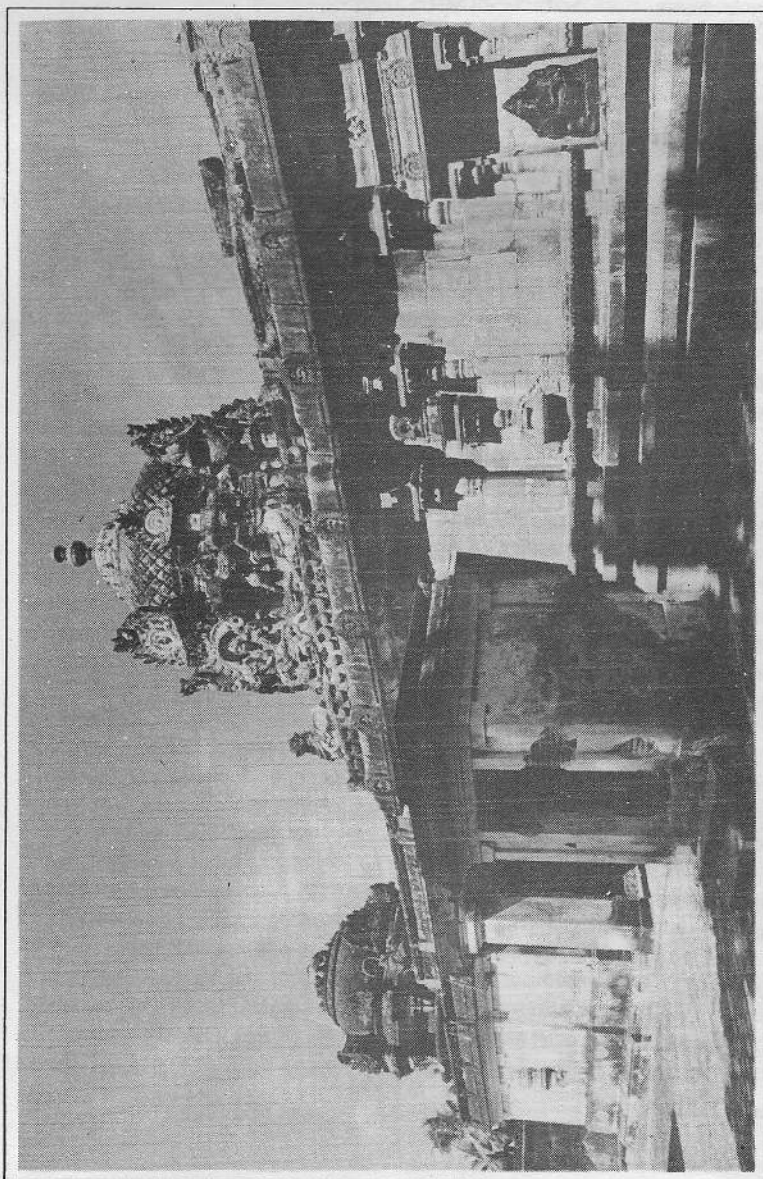


PHOTO JOHN MANDEEN

Ancient temple at Irumbai

## ANCIENT INDIA

# IRUMBAI

Just off a quiet country road a statue of Ganesh under an old neem tree faces east in front of the entrance of the ancient temple of Irumbai.

The main entrance of the small temple faces South, which is unusual. The central section of the temple is extremely old and was mentioned in the hymns of Sambandar, a wandering fifth century Shaivite, who referred to the temple's shrine to Kuil-Morli—the Goddess with the voice of a Kuil bird, and and Shiva-Mahakalesh-wara—Lord of Infinite Time. No bricks are used in the interior of the temple which is built of large granite slabs, and the main lingam of the temple is a natural uncarved one which rises out of the earth. It is slightly chipped. Legend has it that it fragmented—pieces hurtling in different directions—when Kadivelli, a famous yogi, after having been publicly mocked for leaning over to reattach the anklet of a lady temple dancer implored Shiva to uphold his innocence of intent. He had predicted that where the fragments fell the land would become waste, but when the local people asked him to spare them, he relented and mitigated the effects of his curse by saying that when people came from far-off lands the land would become fertile again.

Today buckling outer walls enclose an overgrown courtyard that feels dilapidated and abandoned and yet one can't help but simultaneously feel something mysterious and powerfully immanent about the site. And perhaps after years of neglect something here is starting to change.

Last year a man in Pondy had a dream in which the Ganesh of the Irumbai Temple appeared to him and gave him a name which means "Ganesh who can divine for water." Since then this man has been coming out and offering prayers to the Ganesh at the temple entrance. Simultaneously another man from a distant village had a vision in which he was told to search for a place where he could establish a Shaktipidam—a Shakti centre. His inner voice guided him to Irumbai. He realised that the temple's power had gone away and he took a vow to

help to remove the effects of the famous and partially mitigated curse of Kadivelli Siddha. This was in order to bring back the temple's original charm and atmosphere so that the people could again return and worship there. He moved into a small hut in the village and for the last year has been offering pujas (ceremonies) on full moon nights to the Durga of the temple who faces North.

As I wandered around in the late afternoon four well-dressed men, joined by three young orange-clad Ayyappa devotees, were ushered into the temple grounds by a man who proceeded to light lamps and melodiously recite mantras with an intense devotion in front of the shrines to Shiva, Subramanian, Ganesh, the planets, and Durga. "Jaya Jaya Devi, Jaya Jaya Devi, Durga Devi Saranam!" The devotional emotion was intense and carried over into the inner sanctum where the lingam and a shrine to the Devi shakti are situated. Following the offerings and lighting of the flames the temple priest beckoned us to sit as he explained the story of the temple in Tamil.

So perhaps the Shakti is finally returning to this ancient site that is located barely two kilometers from Auroville. Plans are now afoot to restore it, and preparatory work will begin in mid-January. A committee has been formed in the village to organise and collect funds and a delegation from Auroville led by Meenakshi attended a recent meeting. The Auroville group offered to take up the task of landscaping the temple garden with sacred trees, herbs, shrubs and flowering bushes. This offer was received with enthusiasm and Meenakshi would also like to see Auroville take on the job of building a small platform and roof for the large statue of Ganesh that exists in the middle of the village. She is also concerned that the restoration work be tastefully and delicately done—and would like to see the Indian Archaeological Survey and the Indology Department of the French Institute in Pondicherry become involved in this.

Roger

We wish all our  
readers a  
happy 1995!

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