

AUROVILLE TODAY

August 1993, Number Fifty-Five



DRAWING BY FRANZ

Sri Aurobindo

Law and Liberty

Nature does not manufacture, does not impose a pattern or a rule from outside; she impels life to grow from within and to assert its own natural law and development modified only by its commerce with its environment. All liberty, individual, national, religious, social, ethical, takes its ground upon this fundamental principle of our existence. By liberty we mean the freedom to obey the law of our being, to grow to our natural self-fulfilment, to find out naturally and freely our harmony with our environment. The dangers and disadvantages of liberty, the disorder, strife, waste and confusion to which its wrong use leads are indeed obvious. But they arise from the absence or defect of the sense of unity between individual and individual, between community and community, which pushes them to assert themselves at the expense of each other instead of growing by mutual help and interchange and to assert freedom for themselves in the very act of encroaching on the free development of their fellows. If a real, a spiritual and psychological unity were effectuated, liberty would have no perils and disadvantages; for free individuals enamoured of unity would be compelled by themselves, by their own need, to accommodate perfectly their own growth with the growth of their fellows and would not feel themselves complete except in the free growth of others. Because of our present imperfection and the ignorance of our mind and will, law and regimentation have to be called in to restrain and to compel from outside. The facile advantages of a strong law and compulsion are obvious, but equally great are the disadvantages. Such perfection as it succeeds in creating tends to be mechanical and even the order it imposes turns out to be artificial and liable to break down if the yoke is loosened or the restraining grasp withdrawn. Carried too far, an imposed order discourages the principle of natural growth which is the true method of life and may even slay the capacity for real growth.

(From: Sri Aurobindo, *The Ideal of Human Unity*, Chp. XVIII, pp 403-404)

For some time we had planned to quietly evaluate the working of the Auroville Foundation after 18 months of its effective functioning, from the time the Secretary took office in February 1992. But then we had not anticipated that the topic of the Auroville Foundation would become such an emotional issue in the community as it is at present.

It is not clear who is responsible for this. Some blame the Working Committee for being unable to properly deal with the issues raised by the Secretary, and to maintain a good working relationship with him. Some blame the Secretary for contacting local authorities, without reference to the Working Committee and other Auroville working groups, and for

taking a managerial attitude in his relationship with Aurovilians. Some blame the Auroville Foundation Act as being too vague and imprecise, so that divergent interpretations concerning the role of the Secretary are possible. And many blame the Aurovilians themselves who, after 25 years, have still not been able to find solutions for their own internal decision-making processes.

As usual in Auroville, there are many different opinions, and this issue of AUROVILLE TODAY presents a selection. One point of view is lacking, that of the Secretary himself. He has been unable to find the time for an interview due to pressure of work, but has agreed to give his views in a future issue.

The editors

THE AUROVILLE FOUNDATION:

Springboard or Strait-jacket?

Exactly what does the Auroville Foundation represent? Government recognition of and protection for the Charter? A major threat to our spirit of experimentation and organic evolution? An occult link to the timeless spirit of India? A government take-over of Mother's project? A catalyst to launch the community into the next stage of its development?

Speak to different residents and you'll get different answers—which seems to suggest that we are dealing as much with interpretations based upon our different temperaments and experiences as upon hard evidence.

It's worth recalling, then, some of the facts. Although the actual Auroville Foundation Bill only passed through the Indian Parliament in September, 1988, its genesis can be traced back almost 15 years to the community's developing confrontation with the Sri Aurobindo Society, which had legal ownership of the land and which was claiming proprietorial rights over the project. Finally, the community had to request the assistance of the Government of India in protecting the spirit and substance of Mother's experiment. The result was the Auroville (Emergency Provisions) Act, 1980, by which the Government took over temporary management of all of Auroville's assets, and appointed an Administrator and Deputy Administrator to ensure that Auroville was able to develop in accordance with the Charter. A period of security and growth ensued, but as the date for the expiry of the Act neared, fears were expressed that if a new arrangement was not made, the land and some of the assets of Auroville would revert back to the Sri Aurobindo Society—and we would be back to square one. This initiated animated discussions, both within the community and between the community, friends and government representatives, upon the shape of alternative arrangements for guaranteeing Auroville's independence and right to pursue Mother's vision unimpeded.

The final outcome of this process was the Auroville Foundation Act, which passed through both Houses of the Indian Parliament with unexpected ease. A few days

later, three Aurovilians who had witnessed the passing of the Act spoke with some emotion of 'a series of miracles' and of the sense of Mother's hand guiding the process. One of them—Frederick—remarked, 'What I sense is that Auroville has suddenly been propelled into a totally different scale, something which only reminds me of the Inauguration'.

However, as details of the Act became available, certain concerns began to be expressed about the extensive powers of the Governing Board—a non-resident body which would be elected by the Indian Government. But it was pointed out that the Governing Board would never be able to act independently of the residents and, anyway, the important thing was that the Foundation Act provided Auroville with an independent legal status which freed us from the Society's clutches. Krishna Tewari summed up, 'We've been given independence. Let's deserve it now.'

What followed, however, was a resounding silence as the Government failed to nominate members of the International Advisory Council, the Governing Board and the Secretary for over two years, leaving the community to continue as usual. In the meantime Aurelec challenged the Government's interpretation of its relatability to the Auroville Foundation, and took it to court. This action divided community opinion, but it did help focus attention upon possible lacunae in the Act concerning the functioning of Auroville's business units. In particular, certain unit executives questioned whether the framework of the Foundation was appropriate for entrepreneurial activities which necessarily involve risks and rapid decision-making, and whether the perception outside Auroville that it had now be-

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come a 'Government enterprise' would not deter individuals who wanted to set up new businesses in the community.

For the majority of the community, however, these concerns remained academic, the prevailing attitude being 'wait and see'. This period ended in early 1991 with the Government publishing the names of the Governing Board, and with the first meeting of the Governing Board taking place in Auroville on the day before Auroville's birthday. The Chairman of the Governing Board, Dr. Karan Singh, had no doubt about the significance of the occasion: 'I believe that today a new chapter is beginning in the great and noble experiment of Auroville'. Later, in response to concern about the Government's involvement in the Auroville Foundation, he stressed, "The Foundation is not the Government of India. It is an autonomous body set up by an Act of Parliament... so there is no need to fear." He continued, "There is a certain minimum structure that is required within which Auroville can develop. And I think the Foundation is an important step in providing that basic structure... I think we should give it 10 years to work, and then judge."

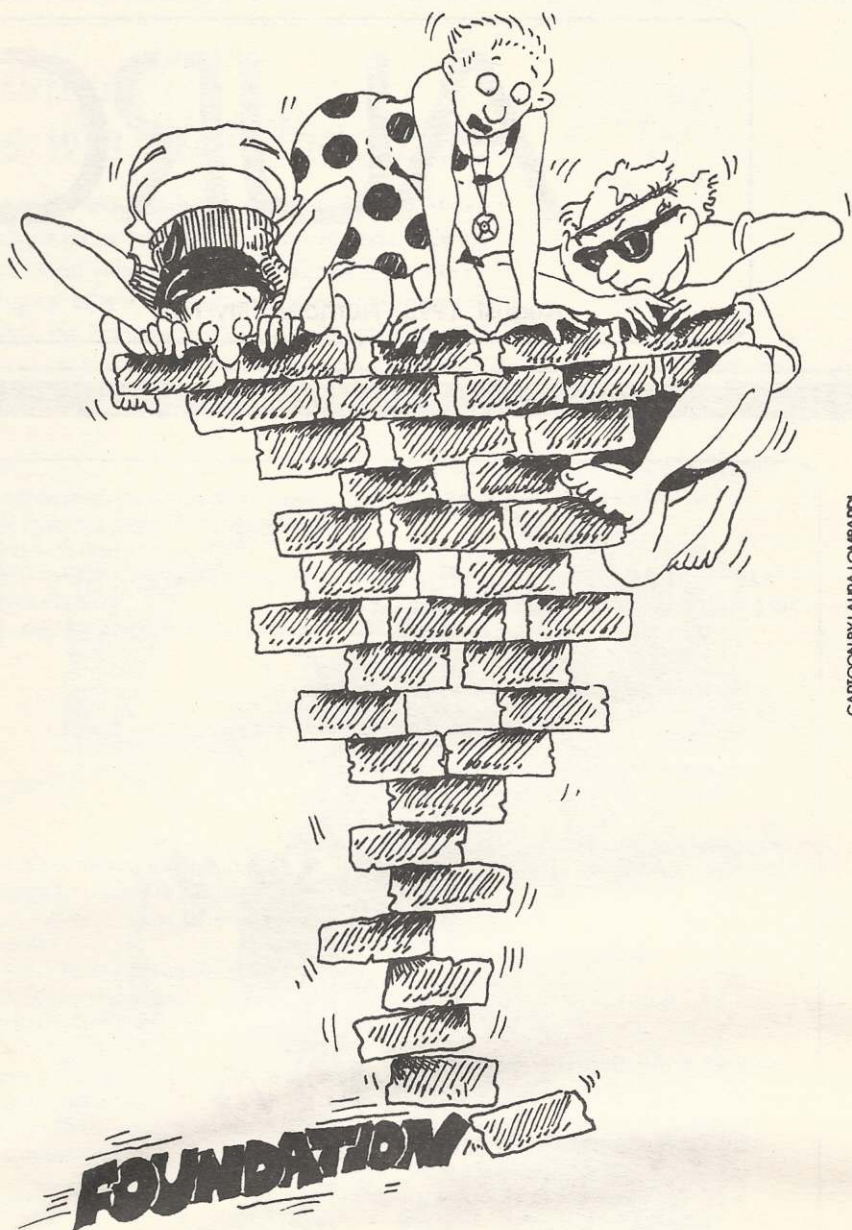
One year later, Mr. L.K. Tripathy took up office as the resident Secretary. And it soon became clear that Mr. Tripathy, a senior Indian Administrative Service officer who had held top positions in the Tamil Nadu Government, was a man used to getting things done. And quickly. Within a few months he had negotiated the purchase of village land required for the Matrimandir gardens—something which had been blocked for years, and he was pressing the community to come up with a practical master plan for its future development. While his energy was appreciated by many, it was felt that his understanding of the Auroville process was inadequate, and the first Working Committee spent many hours

with him explaining its intricacies and seeming contradictions.

All this did not prevent, some months later, a major confrontation occurring between him and some residents over Office Order No. 5. The purpose of this Order was to delegate powers of management to executives of Auroville units and trusts on the basis of certain conditions. Although there had been extensive consultations beforehand with the Working Committee and the Auroville Board of Commerce, and although many unit holders and trust executives signed without protest, certain unit holders objected to the wording and authoritarian tone of the Order, and refused to sign in spite of heavy pressure from the Secretary. A subsequent Residents' Assembly meeting supported the unit holders' right to refuse. It also framed a proposal to be placed before the Governing Board which requested the Board to transfer certain powers to the Working Committee, which, in turn, would delegate them to individual unit executives.

The Office Order No. 5 imbroglio, which even now is not fully resolved, had certain consequences. It focussed attention upon the working methods of the Secretary, who became a symbol for some of all that was suspect in the Foundation Act—namely, the danger of outside interference in the community's affairs. It also emphasised the need for the community to clarify its relationship with the Governing Board and to delineate the respective spheres of influence. But it also threw into sharp relief our failure to evolve, after 25 years, a widely accepted mode of deliberation and decision-making in the community itself.

The result of all this was that the role of the Foundation in Auroville's development came under increasing scrutiny. While some, like Sanjeev, felt that the Foundation "while certainly not the last and final legal



THE AUROVILLE FOUNDATION ACT: A RESUME

- ◆ The Auroville Foundation was created in 1988 by a special Act. All assets related to Auroville—previously held by various legal entities—were taken over by the Foundation for the better management and further development of Auroville in accordance with its Charter.
- ◆ The Act created three authorities: the Governing Board, the International Advisory Council and the Residents' Assembly. It also specified that there will be a Secretary.
- ◆ The managerial powers of the Foundation are divided. The majority rest with the Governing Board, which has to promote the ideals of Auroville, to review and approve basic policies and programmes, to secure the proper management of all properties, to prepare the master plan and coordinate the fund raising. Most of these powers are to be executed in consultation with the Residents' Assembly.
- ◆ The powers of the Residents' Assembly are merely to advise the Governing Board or to make proposals for the approval of the Governing Board. To this there is one exception: it has the exclusive power to decide upon admission of new residents or termination of residence.
- ◆ The powers of the International Advisory Council are advisory only. When giving advice to the Governing Board, the Council will try to ensure that the ideals for which Auroville has been established are encouraged, and the residents of Auroville are allowed freedom to develop activities and institutions for the fulfillment of the aspirations and programmes envisaged in the Charter.
- ◆ The intention of the Act is clear: all powers are to be executed jointly by the Governing Board and the Residents' Assembly. To assist the Residents' Assembly and the Governing Board, the Residents' Assembly chooses from amongst itself a Working Committee.
- ◆ The Act describes the role of the Secretary as performing all duties that may be prescribed by the Chairman of the Governing Board.
- ◆ The Chairman and the Secretary of the Governing Board are responsible to the Indian Parliament for the effective management of Auroville.

form Auroville will take is, at the present moment, necessary for Auroville's existence and survival", others perceived it increasingly as an alien influence that was putting us in a bureaucratic strait-jacket.

Which all goes to show how difficult it is to work out the balance sheet for something as complex and, for some people, multi-layered as the Foundation. Nevertheless, in the past year there have been important new initiatives. The International Advisory Council has been selected, and held its first meeting in Auroville on 27th February this year; the Secretary has begun the process of notifying land in the Residential Zone; and an agreement has been worked out with the productive units by which they are allowed a legally separate identity from the Foundation, on condition that their assets are owned by the Foundation and they adhere to certain basic guidelines. Ironically, this was the substance of what Aurelec had been asking for over many years—and which had been resisted so strenuously by certain elements in the community.

Last September, Mr. Tripathy spoke to the community about how he perceived his and the Governing Board's role. He emphasised that there was "no intention whatsoever on the part of the Governing Board or myself to have any power over individuals or group". The Aurovilians, he stressed, are the managers, while he was a "facilitator, a coordinator". Recent events, however, have caused some residents to question the accuracy of this self-definition. For, after a regrettable incident in which he was verbally abused by an Aurovilian, Mr. Tripathy has taken a number of initiatives—like contacting local officials concerning supposed failures of the community to observe certain procedures—without consulting the Working Committee or the relevant Auroville work groups. Once more, there is a sense of confrontation in the air.

What can we conclude from all this? Firstly, that the Auroville Foundation is

clearly less popular today than it was in late 1988. But it's extremely difficult to identify who or what is responsible for this. In one sense, the present doubts concerning the Foundation are intimately linked with the actions of the present Secretary. Yet, Mr. Tripathy's situation is unenviable. His training is clearly not a preparation for a situation like Auroville—what is?!—and being the resident representative of the Governing Board which, in terms of the Act, is answerable before the Indian Parliament for what happens here, he has a special responsibility for the proper management of the Auroville project. Meanwhile, what have we, as a community, done to make the Foundation a more appropriate vehicle of our aspirations? Haven't we, in fact, through our failure to make a united input, helped shape the situation which is confronting us now? Moreover, before we conclude that the Foundation has outlived its usefulness, we need to see that the Secretary has put his finger upon a number of weaknesses and contradictions in our present organization—and be willing to do something about them.

How far a legal instrument like the Foundation is able to assist an experiment in consciousness evolution like Auroville remains a debatable point. But our experience over the past 12 years seems to suggest that, until we as a community evolve a genuine inner discipline and process based more closely on Mother's vision, outer forms will continue to be imposed upon us. As Kapila Vatsyayan, a Governing Board member, put it in an interview last year, "The moment there is an inner discipline, you probably won't need all this legal framework."

The Auroville Foundation—springboard or strait-jacket? Like so much else, it's up to us!

Alan

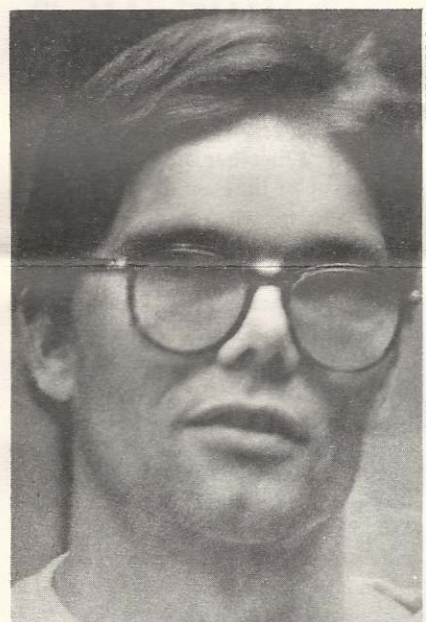
'It's been quite an experience!'

An interview with the Working Committee

The present Working Committee (the second) was chosen by consensus at a Residents Assembly meeting last October. Many people felt it was time for a change, and, consequently, the new Working Committee was composed not so much of 'professionals' but of long-term Aurovilians who would work more 'from the heart'.

Now their term of office is coming to an end. How successful have they been, particularly in their role of liaising between the community and the Secretary of the Foundation?

AUROVILLE TODAY spoke to three of them recently. ANDY came to Auroville in 1974, and between 1975-1991 worked full-time on Matrimandir. At the moment he is involved in construction work. GOUPI came to Pondicherry in 1966, where he met Mother. He moved to Auroville in 1977 and at present his main focus is body work and massage. JACQUES, a dentist, joined Auroville in 1981 and has succeeded, over many years and in the face of many challenges, in establishing a clinic that provides high-quality dental care for the community.



ANDY

AVT: Has your attitude to the Foundation changed over the past 8 months?

Andy: Yes. At the beginning, it was an unknown and we had difficulty knowing what it was. Was it what the Secretary was telling it was? Because that was a bit scary at times. He sees himself as being in charge of Auroville, and doesn't at all agree with our idea of self-management. He sees himself as a manager with decision-making authority in areas like community policy-making and finance. But then we had a meeting in February with the Governing Board. This was a very good experience because it became clear that several of its members wanted the Governing Board to withdraw more and more from Auroville in the measure that the community assumed responsibility for its own autonomy. This brings us back to our own state of affairs, and the many shortcomings in the community's functioning at present. The fact of our feeling threatened by the Foundation, and our present set-up is very closely linked. I think it's an illusion to believe that we have to fight for our autonomy in

Delhi; it's here, within the community that we have to struggle.

Goupi: Having this contact with the Foundation through the Secretary, we saw that nothing can crush Auroville — there is no real danger provided we are aware of what we are here for, and don't let situations occur where we have no say in what is happening. As a group, we learned how to resist pressure, to say "No, we don't want this because it doesn't fit with the Auroville spirit." However, now we have come to a point where we are being bypassed by the Secretary in regard to community affairs; for example, writing letters to the authorities without informing us or the other working groups concerned. We just want to be and to act according to our own truth. In this sense, it feels as if we are reaching the end of a period of pregnancy — and now something will emerge, an action, that will clarify Auroville's relationship to the Foundation.

You have not been as successful as you had hoped in creating a good communication link with the community — and this pattern of non-communication between the Working Committee and the community and within the community itself is a very familiar one. What do you think is the reason for it?

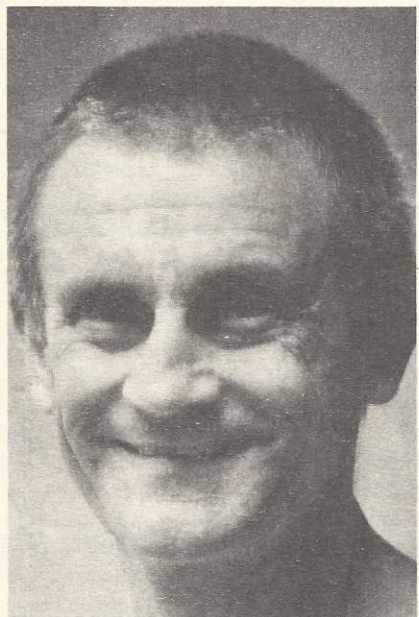
Andy: I think it has to do with the way the community is set up at present. In the early days, sometimes overnight we would overthrow everything we had set up if we felt it was no longer appropriate. There was a kind of lightness in the set-up then which enabled us to grow and adapt to different situations. But, over the past 10 to 12 years, our organisation has become very static, even atrophied.

I feel Auroville needs a strong push at present. I feel we've become content with our little achievements, and this gets translated into a collective *tamas*. And the Foundation is a strong push — through it, a lot of impulses are coming which could be very positive if we respond to them in the right way. For example, the Secretary has made many valid suggestions regarding the organization of Auroville. Now these are very positive as long as they are understood as suggestions and not given as orders.

Jacques: In Auroville, we are very much occupied by our specific work and we tend to lose sight of the whole. Especially in the Working Committee one should have a global view. My dream was that people would come to Auroville and offer their work and, in return, have their basic needs taken care of. I also had the hope that we could relatively easily change things that were blocked in the community in a lot of areas. It was a silly hope to think that one could change from one day to the next things that had been stuck for many years, such as replacing a money-based economy with one based on an exchange of services. Finally I saw these things were much more complex than I thought.

AVT: How do you think we can recapture our sense of common unity?

Andy: I think we have to be willing to talk about many things openly that we don't talk about at present. We have to be able to talk collectively about things that are a problem for the whole community, and to try to find solutions among ourselves.



GOUPI

Goupi: I feel we've got into a system of functioning which is completely governed by the mind, and we've lost contact with the adventure. We have to try to be and to reflect what we are as sincerely as possible, even if it is different from what others expect us to be. Sometimes, when you are showing people around Auroville — showing Matrimandir, a big unit, CSR etc. — you feel like a clown playing a game. The outer Auroville is beautiful, but this way of presenting it is like putting make-up on Auroville to impress people. There's so much joy in just working and giving to the Divine.

Andy: At the same time, and this was my experience in meeting some of the members of the Governing Board and the International Advisory Council, you sometimes meet people from outside who are not at all concerned with the outer aspects of Auroville. They are more interested in the spirit of Auroville, in what makes the community tick. It was a great relief to me when I understood that other people connected with the Foundation do not just want to make propaganda about Auroville.

What have you learned personally from doing this work over the past eight months?

Andy: It's been quite an experience. I found the interesting part was being at the centre of the storm and having to take in all the inputs without immediately judging or reacting. This was my main personal challenge — to maintain my equanimity through all this.

Jacques: I was very much taken by surprise by the complexity of human nature. I must have been in a state of illusion about it. I found it difficult to bear, especially in Auroville. I must say it perplexed me, the difficulty, almost impossibility we have in Auroville of establishing harmony among ourselves and the lack of mutual understanding. It came to a point where for me the state of the whole of humanity was reflected in this.

Sometimes I realize that we stand here before a great impossibility that obliges me to go further and to surrender my mental views. This has turned me more towards Mother.

Goupi: I tried to listen and let the things come. But through this process I discovered the mind is completely unable to find any solution to our problems. We have to think more of the Divine and to go more with the remembrance of what we are here for. We must turn to Her and rely more upon Her force.

Interview by Alan and Roger

Roger

A widening rift

Maybe it was the summer, maybe it was something else, but with the appearance of tax collectors at Pour Tous, with the creation of new working groups such as the Funds and Assets Management Committee, and the expansion of the powers of existing ones to the point that you have to ask permission to build an outhouse in the forest ("Trees are no longer trees but have become assets", someone remarked), and with a widening rift as regards the interpretation and implementation of the Foundation Act, an emotionally volatile feeling of unease was abroad in the minds and hearts of many in the community concerning the issue of freedom and control of our internal workings in relationship to the Auroville Foundation.

The threat of excessive and unnecessary outside interference in the internal workings of the community is for many a real one. It is felt that our freedom as an experiment to grow, to make mistakes and learn from them, the freedom of dissent and spontaneity, the freedom to be outrageous and imaginative, these freedoms are being challenged as Auroville enters a new phase of its growth and becomes a growing concern with a public image to uphold.

However a sense of drift, even alienation, a lack of a clear and shared sense of direction, an absence of collective will to deal with problems that mirror a growing almost pre-urban social complexity, parallels and has perhaps encouraged this growing pattern of bureaucratic encroachment.

One used to feel involved and identified with everything that was going on in Auroville. There was a sense of common participation, and of simplicity which has been lost. Gone are the days of sudden Epiphanies in the steelyard at Matrimandir, or on the structure as we balanced steel pipes from thirty metre heights, and beam after beam was placed, row after row, and concretings brought people together from all over Auroville. Today Auroville has become a drifting collection of particular concerns and specialised interests — and one is lucky to have a particular interest or work, one feels passionate enough about to keep one going — and cling to like flotsam from the wreck in this season of unease.

"Remain pioneering, stay an adventure", India's most eminent industrialist — and adventurer in his own right — told us recently. And yet today it seems that that very sense of Auroville as an adventure is being driven underground and the adventurers marginalized: those outcasts of an impossible dream, those shanghai'd servitors with fire in their souls, replaced from within by the grey functionaries of utopia and the bureaucrats of the ideal.

Auroville as an experiment and hopefully an adventure, cannot be limited and chained to mere legal definitions contained in the Act. A collision of perspectives and approaches as regards the interpretation and implementation of the Act had by the middle of the summer led to a breakdown in the working relationship between the Secretary and the Working Committee plus a sizeable section of the community. This was perhaps the logical outcome of a relationship that was like a marriage without a honeymoon from the start.

But who knows, perhaps this painful phase is a necessary one forcing us to take a harder look at ourselves and our shortcomings as a community, and by so doing forcing us to get back on track and more in line with the ideals that we profess.

SANJEEV'S VIEW

Too Much Politics

Sanjeev came to Auroville in 1981, cutting short a successful career as a High Court lawyer in New Delhi. He was a member of Auroville's first Working Committee. At present he is the administrative head of the Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research (SAIER), helps out at Auroville's Kindergarten, and is also active in a number of working groups. "Too much politics", is the summary comment given by Sanjeev on the recent upheavals involving the Secretary. AUROVILLE TODAY asked him to give his views on the Auroville Foundation and on the present disturbances.

The Government of India created the Auroville Foundation for the protection and benefit of Auroville, in order to help to secure its aims. I believe that, taking into account the Indian legal system, the Foundation provides for a legal framework which could hardly have been better.

The ideal situation, as visualised by many Aurovilians, would be that there should be no involvement of any outsider, and no form of any control on Auroville, and that all the assets of Auroville are handed over to the Aurovilians and they are left to deal with their own affairs. At the present moment this is only wishful thinking. It is not possible in the Indian legal system that assets are taken from one organization and handed over to another set of people. But even if some miracle would happen and we would surmount this constitutional barrier, my observation is that there would be tremendous quarreling amongst the Aurovilians themselves. We all know that there have been many conflicts among us in the past few years, and there is no reason to suppose we would do better now.

I have been living in Auroville for almost 12 years, and I have observed that there is a kind of yearly cycle in our political games. It starts when the new Auroville Council, or the Working Committee as it is termed at present, is chosen. For a few months it functions without any trouble. Then starts a period of dissatisfaction, and there comes a concerted drive to change the group. This has been happening almost yearly since I came here.

There is a need to understand this phenomenon and to deal with it. I believe that a few causes for this recurring turbulence can be identified:

1. the (naïve) belief that by changing the form of the organization, or the people holding the administrative positions, all ills can be cured;
2. the vital need for change, just for the sake of change;
3. the power play of politicians, who are masters at manipulating people who are mostly good-willed.

Insofar as the Foundation is concerned, the first and the third factor in particular have been at play since its inception. Moreover, the Foundation puts a lot of pressure on us to get our house in order on many points, such as financial accountability and transparency, the planning and development of the township, the management of all assets and visa related matters, and, most important, our own internal decision-



CARTOON BY LAURA LOMBARDI

making process. Of course, outside pressure is unpleasant and people react. One obvious reaction is to denounce the Governing Board and the Secretary. But it is childish to believe that any other Governing Board or any other Secretary would do better.

For the present attitude of the Secretary, the Development Group and the Working Committee are to blame. They were not able to be firm and clear in the removal of the road block leading to the unfortunate incident of May, in which the Secretary was insulted; they did not have the courage to take responsibility. It is possible to say that a perfect Secretary would not have filed a police complaint against the Aurovillian concerned. The issue is really about where we focus attention—on our own conduct or on the Secretary's.

On other issues I feel that the special position of the Secretary and the particular

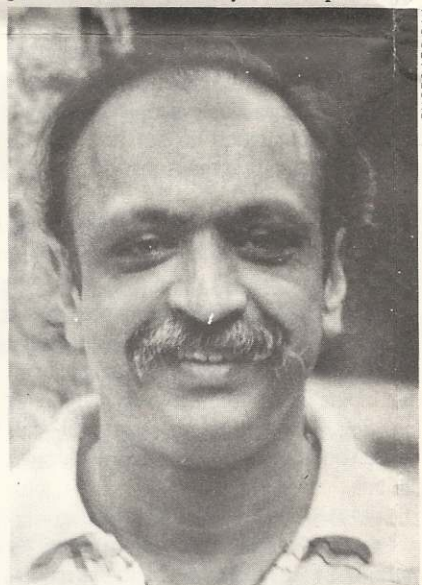


PHOTO LEO RAJ

SANJEEV

responsibilities he has have not been understood by many Aurovilians. Take for example the Office Order no. 5. It was a hot item in the summer of 1992, exactly a year ago.* The Secretary has explained his views, and after all the problems we have had, he has been working very hard to find solutions applicable for all units. All Aurovilians managing commercial units have now entered into formal agreements with the Foundation. Most of the executives of service units have agreed to sign Office Order No 5. Only three or four executives of service units—one of whom is a member of the present Working Committee!—are still objecting. A year has passed during which the Working Committee has not come up with any workable solution. This has created a deadlock. And it should be added here that none of those who have signed Office Order No. 5 or entered into

* see AVToday # 43, August 1992

separate agreements, has encountered any difficulties because of signing this order.

Part of the present tensions are due to the failings of this Working Committee, who have not been sufficiently competent in their handling of many issues. Consequently, the Secretary had to bypass them and deal with Aurovilians and Auroville working groups directly. I believe that this should not have happened. In order to maintain an autonomy of functioning within Auroville itself, the interface with the Secretary should be with the Working Committee only. Other working groups can relate directly to the Secretary, but whenever there is a problem, they should refer the matter immediately to the Working Committee. For one may almost take it for granted that it would be difficult to find a Secretary or a Governing Board who can fully empathize with the diversity of Auroville as well with all of the movements that characterize its growth.

The remedy against the involvement of the Government of India is not to act against it, but to find and implement the solution for our own internal decision-making processes. The Auroville Foundation is seen by me as a privilege. Individual Aurovilians should become more aware of the tremendous advantages that accrue to Auroville on account of the Foundation and not quarrel with it for their own petty reasons. The position of the Secretary who brings with him the arm of the Government can be put to great use for the benefit of Auroville. The Government of India has been invited here, that must never be forgotten, to protect Auroville and that is what the whole Foundation Act is about.

I find that a large number of Aurovilians think that they have to be treated in a very special way, as they have sacrificed their material luxury and affluence or whatever to live this difficult life of Auroville. They feel they have done something extraordinary. I question this assumption very much, as I believe that the experience of Auroville makes one far richer than if one had stayed home. Personally, my experience is of feeling very privileged to be part of this experiment, to be under the protection of Sri Aurobindo and Mother. I feel very very humble when I see my shortcomings, and when I feel the protection that I have, I feel very very grateful.

Aurovilians have become experts at quoting Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, making a screen out of what they say, hiding behind it and doing what they want. We have perfected that art. If someone from the outside just breaks that screen, and sees us for what we really are, we start to scream and shout. I think we need to stop using this screen, and make efforts to start reflecting some of the

glory of Mother and Sri Aurobindo rather than constantly hiding behind words, but this requires a commitment and sincerity on our part. Let us not become like the emperor... who believes he is wearing the finest clothing but is actually quite naked.

Sanjeev, in conversation with Caryl on 10-7-1993

FREDERICK'S VIEW

It's time for a big change

Frederick, a resident of Auroville since 1968, was a member of the special task force set up by the community in 1988, to work with the Government upon formulating a new legal status for Auroville of which the Foundation was the result. Recently he shared his thoughts with us as regards the Foundation and his feelings about where we stand as a community today.

Auroville Today: Four years ago you were quite optimistic about the Foundation. You saw Auroville being granted quite a degree of autonomy as regards its internal workings. Today there is a lot of concern about excessive interference from the outside. What are your feelings today about the Foundation?

Frederick: If I have to reflect on the expectations I had and what I feel about it today, I would say the hopes that were expressed at the time have not been fulfilled, and you could even say that some of the worst potential dangers have come true. How much this is really a fault of the Foundation and how much it is a personality conflict is very difficult to gauge. I might see things differently again in four years but I think the Foundation might only be an instrument on a very specific level—and that would be very practically the services and infrastructure of a town in the making, a municipal corporation. It would hold all the assets but the assets have to be used for experiments in Auroville whether in education, town planning or whatever. These assets would be put at the disposal of the experiments going on in Auroville, but it might be necessary to de-link the experiments themselves from the Foundation. They should become independent legal entities.

At a recent meeting the present situation was described as a collision of perspectives as regards the Foundation Act. Don't we

ULLI'S VIEW

Contradiction

Ulli (Ulrich Blass) is one of the three managing trustees of the Aurelec Trust, a computer manufacturing industry. We asked him for an update on the present position of the Aurelec Trust vis à vis the Auroville Foundation after they refused from the beginning to join the Foundation on the basis of there being no provisions for businesses in the Act. He also gives his comment on the Auroville Foundation.

Aurelec: Legal work is going on at present to clear the court case so that the Aurelec Trust can join the Foundation, to then immediately leave it again like the other Auroville business trusts have done after April 1st. Now the Secretary has agreed to all the Auroville business trusts going separate from the Foundation because it is more practical and the assets remain with the Foundation. It is more or less what Aurelec proposed from the beginning.

The Foundation does not give any advantage to us at present. The only real benefit would be if income tax exemption would be granted. Then it will be easier to contribute a third of the profits to Auroville, as is now specified in the trust deed and the agreement with the FAMC*.



ULLI

The Foundation: My understanding of why the Auroville Foundation came into being is not primarily to solve the problem created by the (Sri Aurobindo) Society—that could have been taken care of by a special trust in which all the immovable assets would be vested, a proposal which would have given Auroville all the openness to grow. What happened, I think, was that a group of people in Auroville felt they had the right vision of the direction in which Auroville should move. And as they did not feel they had the authority and power to enforce it, they were hoping to achieve their vision of Auroville's future through the

medium of a government act and a secretary who would basically do their bidding. There are still people around here who think they know what's best for the rest of us, and then try by whatever means to impose that. This is the malaise. And it's not the fault of the Government; they would not have stepped in like this, but for our having begged them on our knees, "Please take over"! Now we are facing the consequences. It's not the Government, not the Secretary, it's our inability to live the experiment truly.

The problem we are facing now vis à vis the Secretary is not a personality problem. The problem is the post as such. With the Foundation Act, a position has been created in which all the powers that we need to function are vested. Something like a 'super-father' institution has been created, which is ultimately in charge of the experiment. For me that is in total contradiction to the basic idea of the experiment. We should have the option to make mistakes, to experiment, without having to seek the permission of a non-participant in the experiment. So even if we have a Secretary who has a good understanding of our ideal, it might work on a level of day-to-day activities, but deep-down it would still be in contradiction to the basic ideal of the Charter or Mother's Dream.

I think it would be good to have the Government as a partner, to get to know each other better, to work out difficulties, to integrate into Indian society, but not as the ultimate authority. Then this becomes a

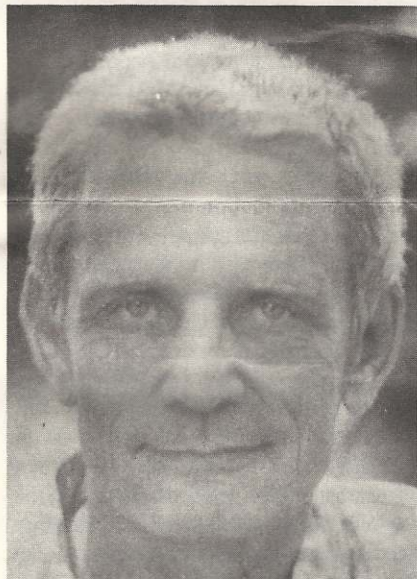
project of the Government of India, and this is precisely what's happening now. Look at the Secretary's van: under the words 'Auroville Foundation' it says now 'Government of India'! (see below)

We have to take stock, and ask ourselves if this is the way we want to go. A legal confrontation, a physical confrontation is not what is called for. It is something else. That has to come from inside the community.

Based on an interview with Annemarie,

1.7.93

*Funds and Assets Management Committee—a recently created semi-official committee of the Auroville Foundation, responsible for the management of Auroville's funds and assets. It consists of 12 Aurovilians and the Secretary to the Auroville Foundation.



FREDERICK

an obstacle and its constricting effects are suffocating. What is wrong with the Foundation is that it assumes that it is Auroville—it acts as Auroville and yet it doesn't seem to fit the experiment. It not only limits Auroville but actually falsifies Auroville by forcing it into a closed system that leaves no room for fresh experiments.

Isn't it a bit early to come to such a conclusion?

Frederick: Not really. The struggle with the Society blew up in 1976 and lasted until 1980. Although the Foundation officially came into full existence only with the formation of the International Advisory Council, the Auroville (Emergency Provisions) Act, 1980, was a forerunner of the Foundation, so things haven't changed that much—we've been in this type of relationship with the Government of India for thirteen years, which is a long time. It's time for a big change.

But the Foundation nonetheless grants Auroville a legal recognition.

Frederick: Yes, it has already done something, but it is an international body we must aim for now. We must register an international body with international participation with the Foundation as its municipal part. The Foundation was an inevitable step on the way, an incredible occurrence—a recognition by the Indian Parliament of what Sri Aurobindo and Mother want to manifest. Auroville's 25th anniversary was also a beautiful experience with the people who came and encouraged us to carry on and I felt as if the beginning of something else had already begun. It might not just be a continuation but a quantum leap and we are now struggling to understand what the new forum and frame for our functioning might be. We as a community must now become a bridge between India and a much larger dimension. There is an accelerating movement at work and perhaps we are lagging behind.

Auroville seems to have become quite splintered. What is it that could bring us back together?

Frederick: It seems so because the real level where we are united often gets obscured. It's not necessarily a question of taking a common stand on things—that's something I used to believe in, even pray for—but today I feel that if you are in search of your soul and if this is our motive for being here, then we are united. Whatever we believe in even if it is very different doesn't break that unity. We have to have the courage of our diversity. But that's where it becomes puzzling. When we're in a psychic state Auroville seems blessed, it is there; but when we come down to the Foundation, the two seem incompatible: they don't fit. It reminds me of the conversation Mother had with Satprem where she wonders how the old body will be transformed into a new one. Will it go through annihilation? But she actually comes to the experience that there co-exists simultaneously an old and a new form of matter and that somewhere there will be a substitution.

How are you feeling about Auroville these days?

Frederick: I oscillate between moments of intense gratitude, moments of great beauty and moments of pain and darkness. On one level I feel Auroville is in great danger and yet at the same time there is a great reality coexisting with that.

In danger from what?

Frederick: When you read Mother's words and then see what we concern ourselves with, it has become so small! An ordinariness has crept in. I don't see much of an adventure or experiment, or a willingness to let go of what's been established. A sense of Auroville as an establishment is actually taking over. It wants to keep intact what has been established—the businesses, the contact with the government, the fences. It is not an adventure anymore in the sense of new frontiers. I'd like to stimulate the sense of not settling down. We have to see that Auroville isn't meant for ourselves, our concerns must be much vaster. The Matrimandir is the key, it's a centre of force and this has something to do with the cry-

tal. It can take us to the other side if we're willing to jump—but we always hold one foot back. I'm continually drawn there but for instance right now I have difficulty going. There is something the mind cannot comprehend. I see the Matrimandir as a gate into another world. I don't know how to describe it, but it's like the two coexisting bodies, that Mother talks about in the *Agenda*. I'd like it if we could get back to working there as a community.

We have to outgrow and transcend a certain element of establishment which is externally symbolised by the Foundation. Only when we do that will the Foundation find its true place from within. Auroville will always be like a field station, a geographically limited field station, a laboratory if you want, where we are all researchers.

Working out what?

Frederick: Her alchemy, a new matter. I think Satprem's latest book *Evolution II* says it when he speaks of a new matter that is both fluid and yet hard as diamond. Something in the line of what Mother is describing in the *Agenda*. The *Agenda* is like a work manual for the experiment we are meant to do in Auroville. There has to be a consciousness that says that there is another opportunity and I feel if more and more people choose as their primary aim in Auroville to discover their soul, if that becomes an overriding cry, then we will be on our way.

What do we have to learn from the present situation in Auroville?

Frederick: Years ago when the first Auroson died I was devastated, but then I received a letter from The Mother who said, "To look always in front to the realisations which are to be". Originally the first version of the last para of the Charter said that Auroville was to be a place to seek the knowledge of new ways of living. Let us have the courage, the freedom and the joy of always seeking that knowledge of new ways of living.

Interview by Roger, 21.6.93.

have a problem of approach between an interpretation of the Act based on its spirit and one that is based on the letter of the law?

Frederick: I've always felt that role of the Secretary should be a monitoring one, an observer status—the eyes and ears of Parliament so to speak. He should have the possibility to alert and call our attention to situations that really go off, but he shouldn't have an executive position. Whatever power he has is by delegation. The Act leaves the roles and powers of all authorities deliberately unspecified and therefore the letter of the Foundation does not prohibit him from taking an executive role—so we are not protected in the Act against this type of action—but the spirit of the Act has definitely provided for another form of cooperation. In retrospect there should have been safeguards against its misinterpretation, but the Foundation Act allowed for such shortcomings and we are suffering for it. But if we assume that there is an accelerating movement at work, perhaps we are being propelled forward by these mishaps into recognizing a wider dimension of Auroville. In short, I believe that the Foundation was a help but has now become

GILLES' VIEW

We need to organize ourselves

Gilles Guigan came to live in Auroville in 1980. He is a civil engineer and has been continuously involved in Auroville's development. His main project at present is the building of a large collective kitchen for Auroville.

I had high expectations which have not come true, but I still support the Auroville Foundation Act as I believe it provides Auroville with a good legal framework for the present. One of the main problems we are now faced with comes from the fact that according to this Act, all the powers are with the Governing Board which delegates most of them to its Secretary. But the first (Auroville Emergency Provisions) Act, 1980, gave even more powers to the Administrator, and for the 11 years during which the management of Auroville was vested—in theory—with representatives of the Government (first the Administrator and later the Custodian), there was always a good cooperation between them and the community. The experience was positive and I looked forward to the establishment of the Foundation which was supposed to provide Auroville with a tailor-made legal environment that would enable its ideals to flourish.

People objected to the first and the second Act, quoting Mother and saying that to hand over the management of Auroville to any government or other big organization such as UNESCO is an absolute impossibility. Well, yes, the management was handed over in theory, but in practice it was still with the people who have given their lives to this experiment.

What we experience now, however, is that the Secretary is exercising a power that is maybe in the letter of the Act, but that no Aurovilian wants a Secretary to have. And that is a very big problem. We were told, when we accepted the Foundation Act, that we would have less Government interference than in the first Act, because in the first Act we were directly under the Government. The Auroville Foundation was supposed to be a truly autonomous body, but we seem to have become purely a Government undertaking with an officer who acts as managing director, basically, and this is definitely not the understanding we had of the Foundation. The Foundation can only work if there is collaboration, cooperation between the Secretary and the Working Committee. And for a number of reasons, which are not necessarily on one side only, this has collapsed, failed, and now there is no collaboration. This is an enormous problem.

One thing that has become clear is that a man of the rank of the present Secretary* cannot be expected to simply be a rubber stamp. If we don't move forward and keep him busy with the development of Auroville, and really seek his help in removing barriers and opening new doors, he might get busy looking at and finding our faults. And this is what he's doing. But then, instead of blaming the other party, we should have a look at ourselves. I must say, in defence of the present Secretary, that I find that the Aurovilians are not always sufficiently aware of the responsibility or the accountability of the Secretary. We have lived for years in a society where we are not really accountable. And somebody in the position of the Secretary is accountable; he is accountable to the Governing Board and the Indian Parliament. The Working Committee and the Residents' Assembly are

often not enough aware of this and do not see the problem in this light. The previous Working Committee was probably more sensitive to that aspect than the present one—and they were termed legalistic and 'mental' by some Aurovilians. But it is necessary that the Working Committee and the Secretary understand the difficulties of each other's role and co-operate. We need a Working Committee which is able to understand that, and is also able to communicate it to the Aurovilians.

To be frank, I find that our community has a big problem formulating a plan of action for the years to come, uniting itself behind this plan of action and supporting the persons most capable of implementing this plan. For me this is really very important.

During the visit of the new International Advisory Council (February 1993) the Working Committee somehow hinted at the difficulty of administering Auroville and expressed the fears within the community of its being subject to the autocratic rule of the Governing Board and its Secretary. They all responded by saying that of course this should never be the case. Actually, it is Erwin Laszlo's answer that I found the most interesting. He said that the autocratic rule that still prevails in many countries and most companies in the world is now being slowly phased out. The management of the future will be—as Mother also stressed—based on consensus and collaboration at every level. Laszlo himself has worked as a consultant for a number of large companies to help them to adopt management procedures that work with the co-operation and active participation of all those concerned.

I think that we have to ensure community participation in the decision-making process, and we have to find ways for this. It is amazing to think that we actually have in our International Advisory Council an expert who is actively promoting the new management techniques we so badly need. Auroville is a place for experiments, for trying out things, and why not ask specialists—like Erwin Laszlo or other people with knowledge about new ways of management—to help us? We need help! We need to try out different techniques for decision-making and if after six months or a year something doesn't work for us, then we can try something else! There is no harm in trying, experimenting in different working groups or on an all-Auroville level. Though Mother told us to decide by consensus, we are stuck because people have always used it to block the system and none of us knows how to unlock the procedure. We can somehow handle consensus with small groups, but have almost always failed at an all-Auroville level. This is a field where some other communities in the world may be doing much better than we are. If we are sincerely ready to learn from them and are honestly willing to try, I am sure we will get somewhere. Seeking help to improve our decision-making process is at the top of my priority list for the plan of action we need to draw up now for the next five years.

You see, we can't tell the Foundation authorities, "You please behave in the proper way by consulting us and deciding together", if we ourselves are not doing that. Individually and collectively we are often putting each other in front of *faits accomplis*—first we do something and then

*The present Secretary was Secretary of Industries of the Tamil Nadu government before joining the Auroville Foundation.

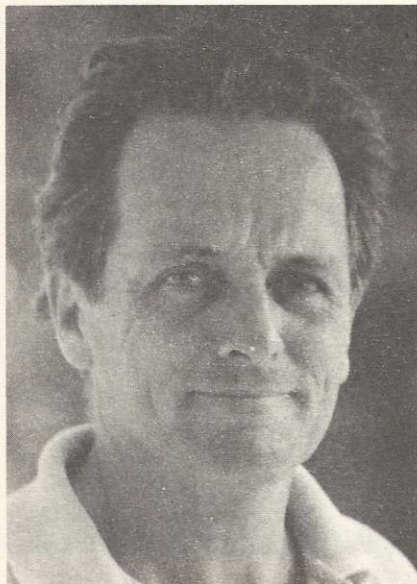


PHOTO LEO RAJ

GILLES

we say, "I did it, and that's that, and you just have to swallow it". We also need to acknowledge that we have a problem with authority and discipline; most of us are born rebels, and because we haven't solved it on an individual level, because we haven't yet disciplined ourselves, it has serious repercussions in our collective life. A real collective progress can only take place if we do our home work: we have to change ourselves first.

The problem we have with organization is obvious: we like to quote Mother when she says "don't try to organize, you will fossilize the whole thing" but conveniently forget that she also said that "organization and discipline are the necessary basis for all realizations" and that her project required a "tremendous" organization.

As a result, when we appoint our Working Committee, we don't want it to "manage" our affairs, we just want them to keep the "outside world" outside. But Auroville needs to be governed, and if we don't even intend to do it, of course the Secretary—or others—will be tempted to fill the vacuum.

So far we have had the equivalent of 'ministries'—the ministry of the Entry Group, of the Development Group, of the Economy Task Group; but we don't have a 'council of ministers'. The 'ministries' don't meet; they don't have a common policy and don't move together. There is a fear that if we would really create a of Auroville, our freedom would be lost. But Mother told us to organize free services to provide for the needs of all the Aurovilians on a minimum basis. And for that we need to find the will to organize ourselves and call people who have a proven record of management capacities, who really have the ability to put together the kind of overall organization that Mother spoke of. To provide people with what they need requires a tremendous organization.

We have to discover our own discipline. Not the discipline that a military commander can impose—it's a different discipline, a self-discipline to achieve a higher goal. And before drawing up plans for a new organization, we have to understand why for so many years the old organization has failed. A new organization of Auroville has to bring together those people who need to agree and work together—the tough nuts here without who nothing would work and who can by their simple withdrawal sabotage any attempt to come to an agreement. And once we agree on something, then we have to stick to the agreement; this is part of the discipline. And I think if we can do that, nobody can bother or harm us, we will not be vulnerable. But we have to learn...

Based on an interview by Annemarie,

1.7.93

THE MOTHER ON

True organization

The first thing that should be accepted and recognized by everyone is that the invisible and higher power (that is, the power which belongs to a plane of consciousness which is veiled for the most part but which can be attained, a consciousness which can be called by any name, it doesn't matter, but which is integral and pure in the sense that it is not false: in the Truth), that this power is capable of ordering material things in a MUCH TRUER, happier and better way for everyone than any material power. That's the first point. Once people agree on that...

And it's not something that one can pretend to have; a being can't pretend to have it: either one has it or one doesn't, because (laughing) on any occasion in life, if it's a pretence, it becomes obvious! And into the bargain it doesn't give you any material power (...)

And the second thing is the power of conviction. That is, the highest consciousness brought into contact with Matter has... (what shall I say?... it's not an 'influence' because there is no question of trying to influence... perhaps we should say it this way:) spontaneously it has a greater power of conviction than all the intermediate planes. By mere contact, its power of conviction, that is, its power of transformation, is greater than that of all the intermediate planes. That's a fact. These two facts make it impossible for any pretension to last long. (I'm seeing it from the standpoint of a collective organization.)

As soon as you come down from this supreme Height, there is all the play of the various influences (*gesture of mixture and conflict*), that in itself is a sure sign: even a very slight descent, even into the domain of higher mind, higher intelligence, and the whole clash of influences starts. Only what is really at the top, with a perfect purity, has this power of spontaneous conviction. Consequently, whatever one tries to do to replace it is an approximation, and is not much better than democracy,—that is, the system which wants to govern by majority and minority (I mean social democracy, the latest trend).

If there is no representative of the supreme Consciousness (that can happen, can't it), if there is no one, then perhaps this could be replaced (it would be an experiment) by the government of a few—which should be decided between four and eight, something like that: four, seven or eight—who have an INTUITIVE intelligence. "Intuitive" is more important than "intelligence": an intuition manifested intellectually. (...)

The only thing which could be adequate is the Truth-Consciousness, which would choose some instruments and would express itself through a certain number of instruments, if there were no one ("one" isn't enough either, "one" would inevitably need to choose a group).

[Mother added later:] And those who possess this consciousness may belong to any class of society: it is not a privilege of birth but the result of personal effort and development. In fact, that is an outer sign, an obvious sign of a change from the political viewpoint; it is no longer a matter of classes or categories or birth (all that is obsolete). It is the individuals who have attained a higher consciousness who have the right to govern—but not others—regardless of their social class.

(Mother's Agenda, 10 April, 1968)

Getting it right

Some 19 years ago, I had an inspiring conversation with a man called George McRobie—who was then right-hand man to Ernst Schumacher of 'Small is Beautiful' fame—regarding the relationship of Auroville to the surrounding villages. Essentially, what he was conveying was enormous enthusiasm regarding the opportunity Auroville represented for humanity to get right, for the first time in the history of the world, the role of a town in relation to the villages around it. "Historically," he said, "every town or city that has ever been created has come up at the expense of the surrounding culture and villages, attracting and drawing from them all that was best within them to feed the ever-growing needs of the city. Auroville represents a chance to reverse that destructive role. Auroville must become a *centre of excellence*, able to feed out to the surrounding countryside all the resources, skills, know-how and help needed to bring the villages up to a similar standard of living, and make them as attractive to live in as Auroville itself."

I have never forgotten these words, and have ever since held that vision of Auroville's ideal role in relation to the villages. Meanwhile, there have been clear signs that many Aurovilians feel similarly,

even if we have so far achieved less than we would have liked to in practical terms. Apart from the Health Centre, which was more or less there from the beginning, only the Village Action group has successfully taken up the challenge on a wide front and achieved results.

Of course, it can be argued that for a long time there was a need for Auroville itself to become strong enough to have the surplus energy and resources to feed outwards. Now however, 25 years after the founding of Auroville, we are in a better position to work more expansively towards implementing McRobie's (actually Schumacher's) vision. One sign of this is the school now under construction on the outskirts of the nearby village, Kuilapalayam.

Because of its close proximity to a number of Auroville settlements and units, whatever happens in Kuilapalayam has an inevitable spin-off on Auroville itself. This had been a matter of concern from the beginning, and Fraternity community was started with the prime purpose of providing employment opportunities and an interface with the local population. Later, New Creation took this further with its school and workshops, and Aurelec followed shortly after. All made their contribution, but the impact upon the village was not dramatic.

More recently, Aurelec's management began to feel the need for a more fundamental contribution towards improving life in the village. In the belief that the real hope lay with the next generation, they focussed on the need for better educational facilities, and began by providing financial support for two social workers attached to Auroville's Village Action group. These two, with much dedication and energy, succeeded in organizing the construction of a first creche for approximately 30 of the youngest children, aged 3 to 5. It was a start, but it barely scratched the surface of the greater problem, which was the widespread lack of adequate formal educational facilities for the local children.

Finally, last year the Aurelec Trustees, in conjunction with some concerned Aurovilians, decided to build a school which could eventually cater for the needs of all Kuilapalayam's children plus others from nearby villages. They formed a Trust, the 'Kuyilappalayam School Trust', with Aurelec Trust acting as Settlor and some Kuilapalayam-born Aurovilians and others acting as Trustees. They then approached the Mailam temple authorities regarding four acres of land owned by the temple on the outskirts of Kuilapalayam. To their delight, they found that the authorities were equally enthusiastic about the idea of a school, and the land, which is sufficient for the construction of 40 classrooms plus

sports facilities, was made available on a low lease.

The foundation stone was laid on the 12th of February this year, and construction is now in full swing. Two classes have already started on July 1st, using temporary keel roof structures while the initial cluster of four classrooms is being completed. Next year, two more classes will begin, the following year two more, and so on until standards 1 to 10 (ages 5-14 years) are covered. Later, as the project picks up momentum, it is also planned to add a library and workshops for traditional local skills such as carpentry, weaving, masonry and handicrafts.

Basic funding for the construction and licensing of the school, estimated at 20 lakhs of Indian rupees (about 666,650 US \$), is being provided by a number of Auroville commercial units. Once functional, however, all the running costs will be covered by charging fees of around 25 to 50 rupees per student per term, depending on the standard (like other non-government schools in the area). The aim of the fee-paying system is to make local people feel more directly involved in the school and its functioning.

What is so nice about this school is that, apart from the obvious benefits in educational terms, it feels like another step towards 'getting it right' in terms of the ideal envisioned by McRobie and Schumacher.

Tim

L E T T E R S

CRITIQUE OF A CRITIQUE

It was very interesting for me to read Ulla's critique. (*Auroville Today* no. 51 on national pavilions) Especially that Ulla reduced Germany to a level of beer, sauerkraut, Goethe and Schiller. Poor Germany! But I think Ulla would emphasize that Aurovilians fight the real fight and some of them are on the way to their 'gnostic soul'.

I have the impression that this theme of the national pavilions touches deep emotions, even anger, aggression etc., because no nation has realized sincerity or has found its true being. Many greetings from the 'Lord of the Nations'; he has his fun. But I believe there is a call today to take some steps in the direction of the true being of the various nationalities and to find ways to realise Mother's ideal of the national pavilions. It is a necessary stage and we cannot jump at once to our 'gnostic souls'. I found this quotation of Sri Aurobindo which I think is appropriate:

"Nationalism is an avatar and cannot be slain. Nationalism is a divinely appointed *shakti* of the Eternal and must do its God-given Work before it returns to the bosom of the Universal Energy from which it came."

Frank Weber, Germany

ONE AUROVILLE

Dear Auroville Today... for ever

Thank you for your issue on the 'first Aurovilians' (no. 53). I have been specially touched by the interview with Varadharajan.

You have tried to shed light on the problem of integration by showing the different aspects of it, and this is all right. But what

have we actually achieved and what is there to be achieved?

We Westerners came here because we were attracted by the ideal, by the yoga, and we feel the Divine has guided us here. But because of this, we should not think that now we are the ones at home here, and the villagers are the people who have to be 'integrated'. In fact, it is as much the Divine's will that they are living here and as Mother admonished us, "They are at home and you are the visitors".

Therefore, in my view, there is no question of 'integration'. What is called for, is a complete reversal of our way of looking at the villagers, and a realization from within that we and the villagers are part of ONE Auroville. Instead of a few villagers being accepted as Aurovilians (and naturally they are also attracted by the materially more attractive life in Auroville) we should grow together and go beyond the difference of Aurovilian versus non-Aurovilian. And the best way this can happen is that our and their children grow up together, live together in the same boarding school.

"The world is going towards a great change—will you help?" Mother said. But there are still people here who want to keep Auroville a small village!

"Auroville wants to be a bridge between the past and the future. Taking advantage of all discoveries from without and from within, Auroville will boldly spring towards future realizations", runs a part of our Charter. But... with the villages as they are now, untransformed, right next to it? We will be able to really change only if everybody, everything is included in our aspiration. With love,

Andre Tardeil, Auroville

INEXPENSIVE ACCOMMODATION

I enjoyed the issue (no. 53) on the integration of the local villagers into Auroville which highlighted some of the difficulties experienced by them in entering the community, but I'd like to point out that Auroville is not always very warm and welcoming to Indians who come from other parts of Tamil Nadu and India. For an Indian to get liberated from religious, marriage and other family institutions is a very difficult thing. But still some Indians do achieve this and come to Auroville. Many of them are educated, and have read Sri Aurobindo and Mother. But they find it difficult to get accommodation and work here—unless they have money, and more money, and plenty of money. Many stay for only a few days, and then leave in frustration.

In fact, compared to people from other parts of Tamil Nadu and India, the people from the local villages are fortunate in having such a good access to Auroville, and the entry process is easier for them because

they are living near Auroville, and often have friends and relatives among the Aurovilians.

My feeling is that many university students, professionals and devotees of Sri Aurobindo and Mother in India are waiting as 'outside' Aurovilians to join us here. What can we do to make it easier for them to come here? One possibility would be the construction of student hostels and cultural exchange centres which would offer good but inexpensive accommodation. This should get top priority in our city planning. We may also have to revise our entry process to enable such deserving people of goodwill to join Auroville without difficulty. What are we willing to do about this?

Finally, Auroville should not become either a Tamil village or a Western society. We should find the right balance in everything; an international community located on a Tamil plateau in India and aimed towards the future!

Meenakshi, Auroville

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AUROVILLE TODAY provides information about Auroville, an international township in South-India, on a monthly basis and is distributed to Aurovilians and friends of Auroville in India and abroad. It does not necessarily reflect the views of the community as a whole. Editorial team: Tineke, Roger, Carel, Bill, Annemarie, Alan. Typesetting on computer: Annemarie. Proofreading: Barbara. Printed at Auroville Press.

To our readers,

Please note that our September issue will be sent to you a little later than usual to enable us to include reports on the meeting of the Governing Board and the events around August 15th, the anniversary of Sri Aurobindo's birth.

The editors

AUROVILLE TODAY

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

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ANNE AND MICHAEL
BRACE
AUROVILLE



In this issue:
Views on the Auroville Foundation; a school for Kullapalayam; letters etc.

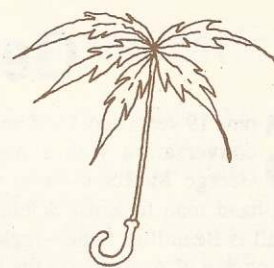
August 1993
Number Fifty-Five



PHOTO SVEN

KEEPING COOL

Palmyra: the wish-fulfilling tree



And now for something completely different... When we talk about sustainability, it's worth remembering that the local villagers have shown great ingenuity in making use of their immediate environment. Take, for example, the Palmyra tree which grows abundantly in this area. At the latest count, this tree is put to almost 300 common uses! Here are some of them, collected by Tim and inspired by his friend Ramalingam.

FOOD

- » Panam chaaroo—non-alcoholic drink made from the juice of the flower-stem mixed with lime
- » Toddy—slightly intoxicating version of 'panam chaaroo'
- » Kalkandu—a crystallised candy-like



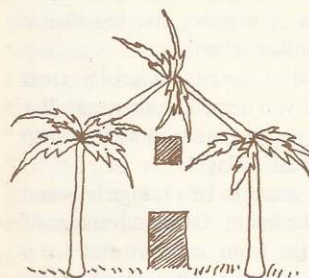
- form of the above (without molasses)
- » Karuppatty—jaggery (containing iron, sugar, vitamins A and B and other minerals)
- » Nungu—the inside flesh of the seed, eaten before it matures
- » Panam pazham—the roasted outer part of the fruit
- » Tawan—the sweet interior of the sprouting seed, eaten raw
- » Palmyra barbi—sweets, made by boiling juice of the ripe fruit.

MEDICINE

- » The creamy coloured covering of the 'nungu' (see above) is used to treat stomach disorders and cure diarrhoea
- » The sap of the tree trunk is used to antidote stings and insect bites
- » Kalkandu (see above) is used to:
 - » reduce excess phlegm
 - » as an antidote against extreme heat in the body
 - » against reflex vomiting
 - » to treat nervous cough
 - » to prevent sunstroke (soak a piece in water, then drink the water)
 - » to treat hepatitis and inflammation of the bile duct
 - » as treatment for prickly heat, boils and eruptions.



HOUSE CONSTRUCTION



- » The full trunk of the tree is used for pillars.
- » The split trunk is used for:
 - » beams and rafters
 - » door frames (using old trees, cut and planed)
 - » forming walls to domestic compounds
- » The leaves are used for thatching.
- » The fibrous exterior of the leaf stalk is used for binding.
- » The hollowed-out split trunks are used for water gutters and conduits.

FURNITURE

- » The wood is used for making cots and benches.

- » The skin of the stalk is used for 'cane' seating and the stringing of cots.

MATS

- » Tender young leaves are used to make soft indoor mats for sleeping or sitting on.

CONTAINERS

- » The leaves are formed into cups for drinking water or for holding ragi or rice porridge in the fields.
- » Small and large pots are made using strips of green leaf in basketwork fashion.
- » Containers to hold knife, blade, etc used by tappers, are made from the hard outer skin of the cover of buds.

OTHER GENERAL USES

Leaves

- » Hand fans
- » Children's rattles
- » Umbrellas/raincoats for use in the monsoon
- » Hats
- » Brooms for mainly outdoor use, from the long spines of leaf
- » (spines of leaf) Blades
- » Until the last century, for making Sanskrit, Grandha and Tamil script books (the palm leaf was inscribed with a fine steel spike 'pen')
- » Spoons and ladles
- » To line the sides, back and front of open vandis
- » 'Ropes' to bind twigs and firewood for transporting home, using leaf blades tied end to end
- » Small outdoor enclosures for kid goats or lambs out in the fields.

Leaf stalks

- » The saw edge of the mature leaf stalk is used to cut up soft fruit.
- » Walking sticks
- » Safety belts for climbers of coconut trees
- » The fibres of the thick end of the stalk are used for the bristles of scrubbing brushes, toilet brushes, etc.

The wood

- » Spokes of country-style carts/vandis
- » Handles for all kinds of brushes.

Fibrous material

- » Moisture-holding 'compost', like that made from coconut fibre
- » The fibrous mesh inside the end of the leaf stem, where it grips the trunk, is used for filtering liquids.

The flowers

- » Dried flowers are burnt to a charcoal-like state, then powdered, wrapped in cloth strips on the end of a cord, set alight and whirled around in the night air during the 'Kathi' festival.

Such is the bountiful nature of the Palmyra, it's often referred to in this part of the world as 'karpaga tharu', the wish-fulfilling tree that gives people whatever they need...

