

AUROVILLE TODAY

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avtoday@auroville.org.in

The Housing Crisis

Why did the Entry group put Newcomers' applications on hold?

There is an accommodation crisis in Auroville. While nobody is actually living on the street, over 80 Aurovilians with insufficient funds are looking for a house or are living in sub-standard housing (see box, p.2). The Entry Group is so concerned that in September it took a radical step. "It is very difficult," it explained, "to admit (into Auroville) people with little or no financial means knowing that Auroville is not providing adequate housing to all people who are already members of the community... since money cannot be a criterion for admission to Auroville, we prefer to put all new applications on hold, at least until new concrete steps are taken by the community on the economic and housing front in order to solve the present crisis."

Whatever the rights and wrongs of the way the Entry Group took this controversial decision, they succeeded in focussing the community's attention upon an issue which has been bubbling away for years, an issue which calls into question our commitment to the integral development of Auroville. For how can we claim to be the city the world needs when we cannot even provide decent housing for our fellow Aurovilians?

How did we get here?

Gone are the days when one could simply turn up in this corner of India, plunge into work for the community and receive food and accommodation, however simple. Today, housing is rarely available free. Most people have to build or purchase a house or apartment with their own money. Consequently those Newcomers and Aurovilians with limited means often have to shift from place to place as itinerant house-sitters, or to live in substandard conditions, while Newcomers with healthy bank accounts can obtain apartments within a few months of arriving in the community.

How did we come to this? There are a

number of reasons. For one thing we are not building sufficient accommodation to keep up with both the annual increase in our numbers (roughly fifty a year) and the backlog of Aurovilians needing a house. This is partly because we expect a different standard in housing today, and even a partly "pukka" house takes much longer to build than a keet capsule. But it is also due to policy decisions. In the old days there were virtually no restrictions upon what one could build or where. Today temporary housing is banned in the city area, and many communities outside the city area are not open to any further residential construction taking place. This means that the possibility of creating new low-cost, experimental communities on the lines of Aspiration are severely limited. House-seekers—at least those with money—have either to negotiate a transfer with an existing house owner, or embark on the frequently traumatic experience of finding a place to build an individual house. Alternatively, they may decide to obtain accommodation in an existing project in the Residential Zone. However, accommodation here is limited at present as the apartment boom of recent years has stuttered to a halt.

Not only are the possibilities for construction more limited now, but construction itself is becoming increasingly costly. There is an annual inflation rate of 15% for



PHOTO: ALAN

Different versions of housing: Vahula's tiny asbestos clad room in Fraternity...

Less mobility

The fact that many people have to pay highly for their accommodation today, often creating a severe dent in their financial resources, means that there is much less mobility: even if people are unhappy about where they are living, they tend to stay put, either because their funds are exhausted or because they don't wish to re-embark on the

created by me or with my help for Auroville").

As yet, the community is contributing little in the way of funds to house those in financial straits. The Housing Service, which is responsible for constructing and repairing houses for those with inadequate resources, receives one lakh rupees a month (\$2380) from the Central Fund to pay for minor house repairs, but for the rest is entirely dependent on a 10% contribution from the total cost of each new house and apartment being built. In the past year a total of ten lakhs rupees has come through this channel, which is totally inadequate to meet the present need. New apartments in building complexes have been offered free (meaning that they have been subsidised by the other residents of the complex or by a friendly commercial unit) to people in need, but only in rare cases, and even here the opportunity seems to depend more upon having the right contacts than upon the severity of the need.

This raises the most difficult and sensitive area of the housing issue. For, according to the Housing Service list, all those living in inferior or overcrowded accommodation at present are Tamil. Many are already disadvantaged because of inadequate education and language difficulties. For some of them, their poor housing situation is an indication that they are being accorded a second-class status in this community.

Some Aurovilians, in fact, have blamed the present housing crisis upon the Entry Group's policy of admitting large numbers of local people who have few resources, people who they suspect are sometimes motivated more by a wish to improve their material standards at the community's expense than by the ideal of Auroville. It

(continued on page 2)



PHOTO: JOHN MANDEEN

...Individual house in Auromodele

materials and labour. In some projects, escalating costs have also been compounded by poor building practices, inadequate supervision and the ambitions of some architects who "want to make a statement" rather than build something simple and beautiful. There is also the peer pressure factor: with so many people building larger, more luxurious houses it's difficult to hold out against the trend.

time-consuming venture of finding alternative accommodation. The high price of accommodation has also contributed to a situation where houses are bought and sold, or rented out, irrespective of the needs of those with limited means (and in contradiction to the statement signed by all who wish to build in Auroville: "I hereby declare that I shall not claim as my personal property and shall not sell any asset... acquired for or

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may well be that this suspicion has acted as a psychological brake upon improving the housing conditions of local Aurovilians.

Where do we go from here?

Clearly, the present housing situation will take something of a Herculean effort to resolve. It touches not only upon logistics but also upon thorny issues like the unequal distribution of wealth, proprietary attitudes, the individual's right to self-expression, and money power. One suggestion to provide more and cheaper accommodation is to ease the present restrictions on what can be built and where—and, in particular, to lift the ban on temporary construction in the City area. Another avenue being explored at present is to increase the provision of low-cost housing through new settlements like Rêve and Creativity (see box on p.3). Such initiatives have not always been successful: the residents of Prayatna continue to complain about the poor quality of their low-cost houses. In fact, some contractors like Rolf believe that there is no such thing as "low-cost," as it generally means skimping on materials initially only to incur higher maintenance costs later. However, Kathy of the Housing Service, which is the project holder for the Creativity project, is convinced that "collective housing can be simple, low-cost but beautiful. It's just a matter of convincing our architects that it's possible!" David, one of the architects of the Rêve project, claims that they will provide turn-key apartments (no hidden extras!) at approximately Rs 4,000 sq.m., which is low to medium-cost at today's rates in Auroville. (Of course, one way the overall costs are kept down in such projects is by limiting the size of the apartments.)

Innovative funding

If projects like Rêve and Creativity are to succeed in providing moderately-priced housing for those with limited or no resources, they will have to be innovative in



PHOTO: JOHN MANDEEN

Prayatna low-cost housing. Urgent repairs are needed.

how they find funding. At present the project holders of Rêve and Creativity envisage a situation where some of the units are paid for by the people who will occupy them, while other funding would be provided from within Auroville (from the Central Fund, the Housing Service, commercial units, individuals etc.), or from outside organizations like the Housing and Urban Development Corporation of India (HUDCO) and the Foundation for World Education.

Other suggestions for funding housing for those with few resources include requiring those who wish to build houses of more than five lakh rupees to first provide funds for the construction of one or more low-cost units.

However, Kathy believes that the only way to get sufficient funding to solve the present housing crisis is to come up with something "which touches people's hearts and is full of vision". Noting that the world needs

AN ARTIST IN A GARRET

Vahula is a Tamilian from Sri Lanka whose beautiful illustrations are well-known to Auroville Today readers. But these illustrations are created in a tiny asbestos-clad room, perched on top of a workshop in Fraternity (see front page), in which he has lived for eight years. For the past five years he has shared it with his partner. What's it like living here? "It's very difficult. There is no running water, so I have to go to the Youth Camp to wash. We cook in a corner of the room or eat at New Creation. In the summer it gets too hot to stay here between 10.30 in the morning and 5 o'clock in the afternoon, and in the rainy season it leaks badly." He shows me the hook in the ceiling where he hangs the bucket that stops water dripping on the mat where he works and sleeps. "It's a big problem for me as an artist because this room is so overcrowded I can only paint small drawings, and I have nowhere proper to store my work." He points to an overcrowded table piled up with sketchbooks wrapped in plastic. Beneath the table the floor slopes to the corner of the room.

"André, who manages New Creation, gave me this room when I was a Newcomer. Later when I asked him if I could move to somewhere better he told me, 'Now you're

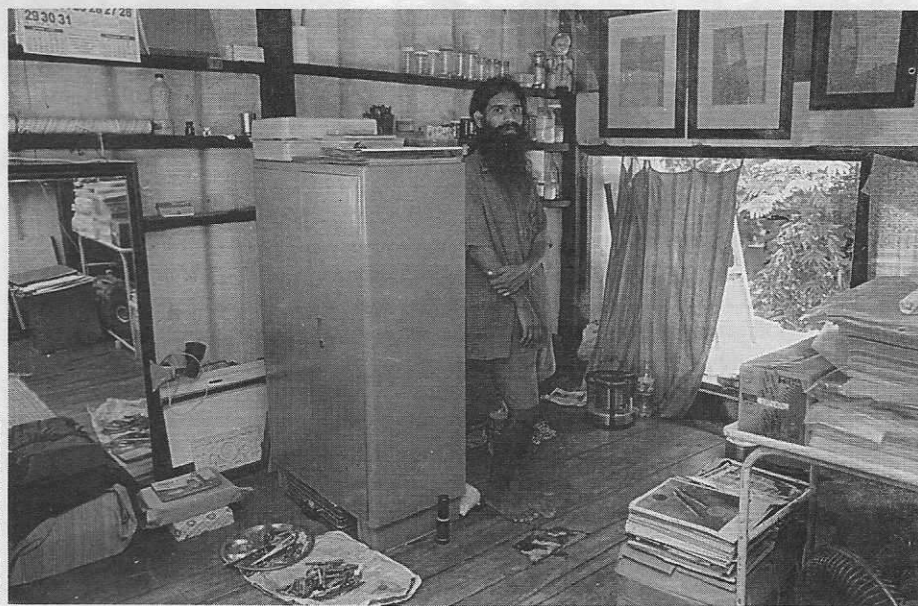


PHOTO: JOHN MANDEEN

Vahula inside his room: "I have nowhere to store my work."

an Aurovillian. Ask the Housing Group'. I've gone to them many, many times, but each time they tell me, 'There's no money. Wait'.

"I can't do anything on my own: I have no money. The little I receive I spend on paper for my drawings."

What kind of place would he like to move to? "We only need a small place, but a place that doesn't leak and doesn't cook us in the summer! It could be one room upstairs with a small kitchen and bathroom below."

models for peaceful and harmonious interaction between cultures, she would like to see Auroville creating settlements where the aim is "to learn to grow into an actual human unity through living in close intentional community with people who come from a different cultural background from our own".

Another approach to the present housing problem has been taken by the Funds and Assets Management Committee (FAMC). They are concerned by the spread of proprietary attitudes, of the tendency of occupiers to assume that their accommodation belongs

to them, to dispose of as they wish. Consequently, the FAMC has come up with a draft for an Auroville Housing Policy which would give the community much more power to decide what happens to its collective housing assets. The Housing Policy (which is still under consideration by the Representatives Gr.) restates that there

can be no private ownership of houses or apartments in Auroville, that the "guardian" cannot sell or rent the residence he occupies, nor can he allocate it, during a long absence, to somebody else without consultation with his community and the Housing Service.

Actually, according to the Housing Service at least, the direct buying and selling of houses in Auroville has virtually ceased. However, they allow transfers, whereby somebody who wishes to move to another house or rebuild in Auroville has money paid into a building account by the person who wishes to move into their house. "It's not perfect," says Stuart of the Housing Service, "but it reflects the present reality where some people cannot move within the community unless they can get the money to build somewhere else." Similarly the possibility to rent Auroville accommodation, however unacceptable in terms of the ideal, does provide a breathing-space for some people in the pre-

sent confused situation.

Moratorium

However, the most radical proposal for untying the present knots in the housing situation would involve the community imposing a complete moratorium on all individual construction. Instead, Auroville itself would construct and provide accommodation for its residents. This, it is believed, would help to abolish proprietary attitudes. It would also prevent further megalomaniacal construction ventures by individuals, and be a means of setting the tone for what is considered an appropriate style of living for Auroville's inhabitants.

Nolly of the Entry Group believes that simple but beautiful community-funded housing could be a key lever in transforming the present climate of Auroville. "If we can keep Auroville closed long enough to get these kinds of projects off the ground, then we can say to potential Newcomers, 'Come, give your money to Auroville, serve the ideal and we will provide housing, food and your basic needs.' This will attract people with a different energy, a different attitude, from the people we are tending to attract at present, some of whom just want to recreate a Western lifestyle in the tropics. It will help us get back to the sharing and serving which are the basis of Auroville."

A different view

Francis and Rolf of the Housing Development Fund, the project holder for many of the large developments in the Residential Zone, agree that no more houses should be built by individuals and that Auroville should be the developer. However, they completely disagree with the approach of the Entry Group in temporarily stopping new admissions to Auroville: "This is totally blocking Auroville's development". Why? They point out that Newcomers—in this case mainly Western newcomers—are an important source of revenue for the community. For example, the Newcomers Housing Scheme—which provides temporary housing to Newcomers on the basis of a cash payment, a proportion of which is later made available to the Newcomers to build a perma-

Is he disappointed that Auroville has not been able to help him more? "I'm sad that many people who came to Auroville after me now have a nice house. Perhaps I don't speak well or people misunderstand what I need... When I first came to Auroville I was happy. I learned art here and now I want to develop that further. But today my life is a little, little down because of this housing problem."

From an interview by Alan

nent house—is totally dependent upon the funds of those coming into the community. Moreover Newcomers often buy into new apartment schemes. "The 10% contribution from the sale of apartments in projects like Invocation and Arati," notes Rolf, "provided the Housing Service with seven lakhs (\$16,660) to build accommodation for these in need. Now the Entry Group's decision to close Auroville is effectively blocking further construction of such apartments. There is no logic in this."

In fact, Rolf does not subscribe to there being a housing crisis—"there was never so much housing readily available as there is now"—which is a view not shared by people with few resources like Vahula (see box above). Both Rolf and Francis believe that Auroville's housing development is ham-

THE SCALE OF THE PROBLEM

At present, according to information collected by the Housing Service:

- 12 Aurovilians do not have permanent housing or the funds to build a house
- 17 Aurovilians are living in seriously overcrowded or structurally unsafe accommodation
- 8 Aurovilians without funds have to move or will have to move soon due to planned development
- 8 Aurovilians live in houses from where they would like to move, but they have no funds
- 20 Auroville youth without funds seek independent housing
- 5 Newcomers without funds have registered their need for housing when they become Aurovilians
- Approximately 15 Aurovilians with little financial resources are unable to find a site on which to build

In addition, there are 20 requests for assistance to renovate or extend existing structures, or to pay for cost overruns on building estimates.

These figures are minimum figures. They don't include those who have not approached the Housing Service.

The Housing Crisis (continued from page 2)

pered by excessive Auroville bureaucracy and ideology. "For example," explains Rolf, "it is difficult to get community funding for big developments: the community is incapable of taking the risk. So one solution would be for individuals to provide the funds—there's plenty of private money around in Auroville—and then rent out the finished apartments to provide for the maintenance of those individuals. But this possibility is refused because we don't allow renting: it is too much like private enterprise and private property, which is against the ideology of Auroville."

They are convinced that Auroville must plan in five year increments, and must raise capital to build houses which will cost between eight and sixteen lakhs (\$19,000 - \$38,000) a unit. Then it needs to work out a pay-back scheme.

Clearly, there are very different views about how to solve the present housing difficulties which, in turn, reflect radical differences about how we should be developing as a community. The magnitude and complexity of the present crisis is an indicator that many issues are intertwined, and that to work on one variable alone will not be sufficient. In this sense, the decision of the Entry Group to close Auroville, however controversial, may provide us with new opportunities for more integral solutions. *Alan*

HOUSING PROJECTS

Rêve

The foundation ceremony for the Rêve project took place in October. Rêve evolved to provide urgently needed housing for Aurovilians with low or no income, and aims to combine elegance, adaptability and affordability with a variety of communal facilities. A flexible price structure means that those with little or no resources will not have to pay for the infrastructure, while those with their own resources are expected to finance the actual cost plus a contribution of 10% to subsidise the others. Four apartments will be provided for eight youth with no personal resources.

The cost of each 60 sq. m. apartment (which includes a 20 sq.m. covered terrace) in this medium-density development will be approximately Rs 2.5 lakhs (\$5,950) subsidised, and Rs 3.13 lakhs (\$7,450) unsubsidised.

Creativity

"Creativity" is a concept for a low-cost, medium-density community housing project promoted by the Auroville Housing Service.



Igor plants a tree at the Reve foundation ceremony.

PHOTO: ALAN

Inspired by the design of housing in Aspiration community, it aims to demonstrate human unity in cross-cultural diversity, to provide affordable but attractive and environmentally low-impact accommodation and centralized common facilities for a wide variety of residents, and to offer a positive alternative to the trend for individually-

funded private housing. No one will be excluded from participation due to lack of personal funds.

While a suitable site is being sought, the Housing Service is inviting artists and architects to come up with innovative designs for sustainable living which cost less than one and a half lakhs (\$3,570) a unit.

OPEN PAGE

Can Auroville Finance the Dream?

by Lyle

In last month's edition of *Auroville* Today, Kireet Joshi stressed that Auroville's economy needs to move closer towards meeting the aims of the community; Carel suggested an approach. Both articles concerned themselves primarily with the distribution of wealth and eliminating the sense of ownership within Auroville. Another, equally important question is how can Auroville generate enough income to finance its services now and in the near future?

The present state of affairs

Currently Auroville's formal economy does not generate enough income to support the community's services. The Central Fund expends approximately three million rupees (\$70,000) per month. Of this amount, Rs 2.3 million (\$53,500) per month is disbursed in the form of subsistence allowances (commonly called maintenance) and food for children. This sustains 530 adults and 200 children. Subsistence allowances, totalling Rs 1.6 million, are disbursed to 100 adults who are working in commercial units and 430 adults working in the service sector. Although the average monthly subsistence allowance received from the Central Fund is about Rs 3,000 (\$70), Aurovilians acknowledge that they need Rs 5,000 to Rs 6,000 to subsist. The difference between what is provided and what is needed, Rs 1.0 to Rs 1.6 million, is 35% to 53% of the Central Fund's current total disbursements. This does not include provision of housing. Auroville's service sector is therefore heavily subsidised by donations, primarily from individual Aurovilians. It is generally thought that the bulk of these funds come from resources that were accumulated outside of Auroville and are still held there. Thus, Auroville can sustain its economy only if Aurovilians are generally people who have accumulated their wealth before entering the community. Such

a condition creates an exclusivity that is not exemplary and a dependency that is not empowering.

Auroville projects that 5,000 people will join the community over the next ten years; to sustain its services it will have to increase monthly outlays from Rs 3 million to over Rs 10 million in today's rupee. This is a conservative estimate. It considers neither housing nor that Aurovilians over this period will increasingly have to cope with the needs of an aging population. Currently, commercial units generate about 50% of the Central Fund's income; administration and services account for 25%; contributions from Aurovilians 10%; guests and newcomers 10%; and government and projects 5%. Of these various income channels, only commercial growth has the potential to meet Auroville's needs in a way that would empower the community and help it to realise its aims. Tourism also offers great potential, but few Aurovilians would like to see the community become a tourist town.

Obstacles to growth

Commercial growth is hampered by several obstacles. Few Aurovilians take business and the creation of wealth for the community as their *dharma*. Most individuals prefer to limit the size of their businesses so that they have time to pursue their spiritual path. But the multiplication of small businesses as a model for Auroville's economic expansion is unlikely to generate enough wealth to support the community. Of the 100 commercial units operating in Auroville, only 30 financially contribute to the Central Fund. Maroma alone accounts for over 60% of the total contributions made by commercial units; the four largest units, including Maroma, account for 85%. These four businesses, which emerged long before the Foundation Act was ratified more than seven years ago, generally rely upon a large local labour force. The contribution of these busi-

nesses to Auroville is needed and appreciated, but they do not provide many Aurovilians with work opportunities.

Medium to large-sized businesses that do not rely heavily upon local labour should therefore be seen as an important economic pillar. What prevents them from emerging in Auroville? As mentioned above, many Aurovilians are not driven to make money for the community. Some Aurovilians doubt that with only 1200 adults a deep pool of talented managers exists. Aurovilians are also disinclined to work in businesses that function with traditional management hierarchies, preferring instead to work for themselves. At the same time there is virtually no collective investment to promote businesses. The Central Fund is unprepared to be a principal investor willing to undertake the risk associated with providing venture capital. The commercial units, all of which are members of the Auroville Board of Commerce (ABC), do not pool their resources to invest in new initiatives. They do not even have a current practice of making loans to each other, although they can borrow from a small revolving loan fund that was set up with an external donation. The only other option for Aurovilians who might be inclined to initiate a large business or rapidly expand a small one is to locate outside investors. Auroville, however, discourages partnerships with outside entities. Investors willing to risk their capital desire a stable, secure environment and want a return on their investment. Auroville's internal decision making process, lacking traditional structures and procedures, may not inspire stability and security to outsiders. Lack of clarity about the independence granted to proprietors under the Foundation Act is another reason that entrepreneurs and investors may have shied away from Auroville. Entrepreneurs want decision-making freedom and they want the security of knowing that only their own Board of Directors can replace and appoint upper management positions. As for returns

on investments, Auroville cannot offer outsiders shares. It could, however, negotiate profit sharing schemes, though it has never done so.

Possible solutions?

But relinquishing ownership rights is an aim of Auroville. How then can Auroville reconcile its economic needs with its spiritual aspirations? According to one manager, "Aurovilians need to acknowledge the need to have friendly businesses that are not managed by Aurovilians. A new category, Business Friends of Auroville could be established." Business Friends would be people who are spiritually inclined, have a connection to Auroville's ideals and Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, but are unable to commit themselves fully to Auroville. Their businesses would have to respect Auroville's principles, be appropriate for the area, participate in community expenditures, and provide employment to Aurovilians. Auroville likewise could provide office space, land, and skilled people. Business Friends would in essence be businesses that retain their rights of ownership, but put more into Auroville than they take out. Another alternative for Auroville would be to overcome its aversion to risk, initiate businesses and invest its funds in businesses initiated by Aurovilians. The Central Fund could encourage the ABC to take initial steps by guaranteeing loans up to a specified amount. These are only two suggestions; there are surely more. But as the discussion proceeds it is important to remember that Auroville's needs are not being met by its formal economy, and available figures suggest that as Auroville expands the gap is more likely to widen than narrow. Economic growth and the equitable distribution of wealth should not be dissociated from one another or discussed in isolation. Unless, of course, we wish Aurovilians to be equally poor or exclusively rich.

Marketing Malaise

Lack of space hampers sale of Auroville products

There are about 180 commercial units in Auroville, and their number is steadily growing. But the number of Auroville shops that sell the products of many Auroville units can be counted on the fingers of one hand. Only one such sales outlet exists in Auroville, the Boutique d'Auroville in the Visitors Centre, where 95 units compete for the limited display space. Down the road from Kulapalayam to the beach, two Aurovilians recently opened a shop called Aurigal, which now sells the products of six units. In Pondicherry only two Auroville shops endeavour to present the products of many Auroville units: La Boutique d'Auroville in Nehru Street crams the products of 66 units in its sales area, the Auro-sarjan Boutique in Rue Bussy does an identical job for 23 units. Recently, Naturally Auroville opened a shop in Chennai (Madras), selling the products of 58 Auroville units. With the exception of Naturally Auroville, the shops are overcrowded. In what direction do all-Auroville shops need to develop?

Space restrictions

"This place looks like a bazaar," complains Myriam, the executive of the Boutique in the Visitors Centre. "But how can it be otherwise? There are too many units for the space we have available here, and I have used every square inch! I need to double the present space if I am to properly display the products of all the units. The present plans to add a series of specialised shops to the Visitors Centre are excellent, but they won't

any Auroville products, but rather plastic toys imported from Taiwan and ready-made garments from Delhi. In fact, it was run down. Now customers are slowly coming back and a new clientele is being built up. But the location of this place is not ideal. It attracts the French and Indian population of Pondicherry, but no tourists," explains Wolf.

Centralised marketing



A tight squeeze... PHOTO: CAREL

Wolf adds: "I think that the time for a new step has come. We need a centralised marketing organisation in Auroville, with big Auroville shops all over India, in which all our commercial units will participate. None of the small units can market their products individually. Even the larger units, which mainly sell their products abroad, should develop a market in India. The economy of India is

opening up and an affluent middle and upper class is emerging. Pondicherry, for example, is becoming a shopping centre for people coming from places as far away as Madras and Bangalore. And Auroville should not lag behind. But our shops should breathe a different atmosphere. They should not only sell the Auroville products, but also provide information on Auroville, and have a place to relax and eat snacks. Something like Casablanca, but with an Auroville atmosphere." Casablanca is the name of a large shopping mall that recently opened on Mission Street in Pondicherry. Owned by Aurovillian Dilip Kapoor, it specialises in the sales of internationally known brand names such as Levi's, Adidas, Revlon, and of course Hidesign, Dilip's own range of leather products. It also houses a pizzeria, a restaurant and e-mail and Internet browsing facilities.

However, it hardly sells any Auroville products. "We can learn a lot from their set-up and organisation," continues Wolf. "Hidesign has shops all over India, with a marvellous support organisation. In Pondicherry, Auroville should create an Auroville House, a 'Maison d'Auroville' or 'Auroville Bhavan' in one of those old colonial or Tamil houses with Aurovilians serving the clients. In other cities in India, Naturally Auroville can be instrumental in starting Auroville outlets."

Naturally Auroville

Marianne and Bernard, who run Naturally Auroville, agree with Wolf's views though they consider the timing "a bit early." Naturally Auroville started a few years ago



PHOTO: CAREL

as a mail order undertaking, but failed to take off. Two months ago it opened a luxurious boutique, breathing an atmosphere of refinement, beauty and distinction, in a posh neighbourhood in Chennai opposite the five-star Taj Coromandel Hotel. "The response in these first couple of months is good," says Bernard. "Our clientele are the upper classes of Indian society and expatriates who live in Madras. We want to sell all the Auroville products, including the foodstuffs such as bread and jam." Adds Marianne, "The basement of this building will soon be turned into an Auroville Information Centre, where people can learn about Auroville's aims and ideals, and where we will also sell books and brochures written and/or produced in Auroville. It will also host exhibitions on Auroville or on Sri Aurobindo and The Mother and works from Auroville artists,

and perhaps a reflexology centre. Our future plans include a cafeteria on the third floor with all the food items that Auroville produces. But it is still too early to transfer this concept to other cities. We need more experience before we embark on that—to be honest, we have already started some serious thinking about another 'Naturally Auroville' boutique in Bangalore, with the Auroville atmosphere, of course."

"Auroville atmosphere"

Naturally Auroville is obviously in the process of materialising what Wolf would like to manifest in Pondicherry and in other Indian cities. But what is this "Auroville atmosphere" that needs to be represented? Myriam explains: "It is to show by word or by example that we are working to develop our consciousness, as a form of yoga, and that making money is not our prime motivation but a secondary one. The money we make is not used for personal profit, but for the development of Auroville. We show that we sell quality under the brand name of Auroville. And we do that without using child labour and by taking good care of our employees." Myriam acknowledges however that the prices of Auroville products are often prohibitive for Indian tourists visiting the Information Centre on tour buses. "Unfortunately we only cater to the demands of the Indian middle and upper class. But all the others... they cannot afford anything. Even the cheapest thing, a postcard or a packet of incense, is too expensive for them. We have created a kiosk for these visitors where they can buy things that are cheap, such as a little stone statue of Ganesh or a hair-clip, and where they can consume their own food. But it is not nice to have to nothing to offer them. Truly, I do not know what to do."

Wolf demurs: "I think it is a fallacy to think that Auroville can produce things cheaply. Take clothing, for example. The cheap clothing you find on the street in Pondicherry is made of excess material in factory line work, that is rows of tailors sitting behind each other, each of them doing one 'line' of stitching. That is a horrible atmosphere, quite foreign to Auroville. Here, one tailor makes an entire dress... but, consequently, the production costs are higher."

Product innovation

Are the products of Auroville of high quality? The general feeling is that they are. But the prevailing opinion about product design and innovation is less positive. "Auroville lags behind in the areas of research and development and product innovation. The units will have to do

a far better job if they wish to remain competitive," states Bernard. "Much of what we sell at present was already available five years ago and if the units do not innovate, the shop in Madras will be finished in one year. New products, new lines, new designs are a must. Many units in Auroville complain about their products being copied by people from the village, and offered at far lower prices in village shops. But this competition is only possible because they lean back to enjoy the fruits of their past creations! Where is the bold jump 'towards the future realisations' mentioned in Auroville's Charter?"

Change of mentality

Marianne adds: "And the units must upgrade their production. Many products are often not available. Only a few units have a good production potential and can supply on time. But quite a few unit executives make only a small turnover and do not expand. Are they only interested in securing their own livelihood, without much regard for contributing to the development of Auroville? That is really frustrating." Bernard and Marianne point to the need for a change of mentality. Wolf feels the same need: "One of the problems is that Aurovilians are very individualistic, and as a consequence, that many units are working in competition and not in harmony. But this cannot continue. We have to learn to be a bit more broadminded, to exceed the 'small shop mentality' which loves to carp and criticise; we have to actively seek for harmony instead. There is a tremendous creative and business potential in Auroville. Working together will release much energy, and we should stimulate this in the understanding and appreciation that people are different. The future 'Auroville Bhavan' must be a collective endeavour."

Based on interviews by Carel



Boutique d'Auroville in Pondicherry: "The shop is packed and many products cannot be properly displayed."

solve the problem. In the coming years more commercial units will come into existence, and we'll have to expand if they want to sell their products here."

Bhoomi, who runs La Boutique d'Auroville in Pondicherry, echoes Myriam's complaint. "See for yourself how we display the products of over 66 units on a total floor area of about 75 square metres," says Bhoomi. "The shop is packed and many products cannot be properly displayed. We do a disservice to the units. We would definitely sell more if we had more space."

Wolf recently took up responsibility for Auro-sarjan, an equally crowded shop located on a side street in the former French section of Pondicherry. "Till recently it hardly sold

No disputes, no quarrels

By Maggi Lidchi Grassi

Harmony was very dear to Mother's heart. Often I had to read to her letters from people who wanted Mother's help in solving their conflicts. On one of those occasions, there was a long silence after I had read the letter. Then She said: "Mon petit (1), people do not understand, when there is no harmony I cannot enter. It is like a barrier, disharmony is a barrier which keeps me out. Very few people understand this. They want my help. They want my blessings, but..." and here she pointed at the letter in my hand, "they behave like that. They keep me out. They make no effort." Then She took the letter and wrote that the only solution was to surrender all difficulties to the Divine.

In the silence that followed a vivid image of a closed door formed inside my mind. I had never seen it so clearly before. One invoked a higher energy, the Mother's force, but if one were in disharmony with oneself or others it was like shutting the door in Her face. It was a disturbing realisation, one of those which make such a deep impression that life is never quite the same afterwards. I realised that one must never begrudge the time and effort to try and establish harmony, and that when one fails to achieve harmony, it is because one is awkward and probably not entirely sincere, the attempt coming more from the mind than from the heart...

Human beings are in the habit of basing their relationships with others on physical, vital and mental contacts; that is why there is almost always discord and suffering. If,

on the contrary, they based their relationships on psychic contacts (between soul and soul) they would find that behind the troubled appearances there is a profound and lasting harmony which can express itself in all the activities of life and cause disorder and suffering to be replaced by peace and bliss. (2)

At times, intentionally or unintentionally, we all do fairly hurtful things to one another. How to solve a conflict? Mostly it requires very, very little time or effort. The Mother says that if you smile at your enemy you disarm him. Sometimes years of bitterness and resentment can be avoided if one takes the trouble, if trouble is the word at all, to write a note which says: "In case there was a misunderstanding I want you to know I didn't mean it that way..." or, "if I have offended you I want to tell you how much it means to me that ..." or, "How sorry I am."

It is often easier and more effective to clear things up in writing, which gives the other person time to cool down, to be touched, where as to meet someone head-on, even when one goes with the best of intentions, often ends in a collision. But if one does meet the person before the letter is

"No disputes, no quarrels – the sweetness of a life without clashes." —The Mother

written, a smile is recommended by the Mother, a gesture. In the Ashram the Mother has given us the delightful possibility of communicating in the language of flowers: "Harmony," "Collaboration" with its spicy smell, or that big floppy good-natured looking flower called "Goodwill."

It is astonishing how many people who do yoga, our yoga, still say: "But why apologise if you are in the right, if you never even intended to give offence?"

It's their problem." But it isn't. One reason is that we're told on great authority that when there is an argument, both sides are in the wrong. Another reason is that those who do yoga have a responsibility to make attempts towards harmony.

The Mother bids us to go out of our way to approach others with kindness, gentleness and understanding when necessary. Sri

Aurobindo and Herself have given the example many times, apologising to their disciples for even small things. As the Mother says, there is so much suffering in the world that one should not add a single drop to it, a single tear. But the main reason is that we are closing the door not only on the other person but on something much more important, on Divine help. Even if one deals with people who appear totally unreasonable, one has therefore an obligation to maintain and create harmony.

The Buddha elaborated his eightfold path where it is mentioned that before being able to jump into a higher reality man has to become the noble being. Christ's teaching is to leave one's sacrifice at the temple door and go and make peace before offering it, which derives from Judaic law: you may not enter the temple unless you have first dissolved your quarrels. For it is unlikely that we would be acceptable to the highest Truth-Consciousness if harmony is not firmly rooted in us. For, as Mother said, "when you start a quarrel, it is as if you were declaring war on the Divine's work."

(1) French term of endearment for which there is no exact translation.

(2) Mother's commentary on Sri Aurobindo's aphorism 138 (CWM, vol 10, pp 247-8).

Maggi Lidchi Grassi was for a long time one of The Mother's personal secretaries. Recently she helped to solve a conflict in Auroville, stressing the importance of harmony.

Flying High

Reflections on a fund-raising trip

In August and September, Guy and Shivaya were in the U.S. and Singapore to raise funds to purchase land for Auroville. Here Guy talks to Alan about some highlights of their hectic seven week schedule, during which they gave a total of sixteen presentations, and made numerous contacts through meetings and interviews.

"It's difficult to talk about highlights, because it was as if we were flying high all the time: we felt carried by a continuous flow of grace and gratitude. However, one of the nice experiences we had early in the trip was with Sam Spanier of Matagiri. I gave him our presentation, in which we talk about the vision of Auroville and our wish to raise funds for the land, and I ended by saying that we have to see how it goes: it's all in Mother's hands. He looked at me and said, "This is nonsense. You are here for a specific purpose and you are the ones who have to do it to the maximum of your capability. No more of this wishy-washy 'it's not in my hands'—it's on your shoulders." Asking for money is not easy, but Sam's comment suddenly gave me the strength to do it.

"Another highlight happened at the AUM meeting. Narad (who Mother had told to start

the Matrimandir Nursery) related how, in the early days of Auroville, the community had been divided over buying the land. One group wanted to buy all the land as quickly as possible, while another group wanted to go more slowly, and not buy more than could be taken care of at the time. Narad and some

others went to Mother to ask how they should proceed. She went within, then told them, "Do not underestimate the greed of people. Buy the land now." She saw that if the land was not purchased then, it would be very difficult to obtain it later—and this is exactly what we are experiencing. For Shivaya and myself, Mother's comment was like an affirmation of the work we are doing.

"Our trip was enriching on many levels. Financially, the trip has been above our expectations but below our imagination! For we consciously tried to imagine, to visualize,

the manifestation of the ten million dollars that we need. At the same time, the amount collected is beyond what one can reasonably expect from a first short trip. Also, many seeds have been planted and we hope that they will bear fruit sooner or later.

"I was also deeply touched by the dedication and aspiration of the friends of Auroville and devotees in the U.S. and Singapore. I would even say that it has helped deepen my own dedication to Auroville and to the vision of Sri Aurobindo and Mother. In this sense, the whole experience was soul-touching."

Auroville introduced at the U.N.

Guy made a well-received presentation at the 52nd Annual DPI/NGO Conference on "Challenges of a Globalized World: Finding New Directions" at the United Nations Headquarters, New York, on 17 September 1999. Here are a few extracts:

"I've been asked to speak about globalization from an ethical and religious perspective. However, I've taken the liberty to talk about globalization from an integral and evolutionary perspective. When Edgar Mitchell, the NASA astronaut, returned from his mission on the moon in 1972 and looked at that blue globe, which we call planet Earth, he had a profound inner experience that changed his life. He suddenly experienced the interconnectedness of the vast universe around him and became deeply aware that all life on earth is one. Later he would explain: 'It's rather crude to be standing on the moon, looking back at Earth, and say, "I come from the United States". That tiny little point of light out there is Earth, and we all come from planet Earth!'

"Whether we like it or not, we ARE global! And globalization as the emergence of a global market in terms of labour and commerce is just one facet, one expression of an evolutionary force that is guiding present humanity towards the recognition, the acceptance and the conscious experience of mankind as ONE family..."

"This force is a force of unification, which is embedded in the evolutionary design of planet Earth itself! This force doesn't look at globalization from an ethical or religious perspective. This force just knows that the planet IS global and that we, human beings on this planet, ARE one! And it works through human history and through all of us at present to manifest and materialize this oneness..."

"Standing at the threshold of the 21st Century, humanity is faced with the global challenge to move into the next cycle of its evolution: the creation of a truly global, gnostic society that integrates matter and spirit, unifies science and religion, and embraces all aspects of life, including economy and trade, as an exploration and manifestation of the oneness that we fundamentally are..."

"In this context, the world needs R&D stations, laboratories for the future, where volunteers from all over the world consciously dedicate themselves to the challenge of an inner, spiritual transformation and, at the same time, embrace all outer activities and material aspects of life. Volunteers who are dedicated to the manifestation of that unifying force on this planet by creating relevant collective models on a significant scale for the world at large.

"Auroville, the "City of Dawn", an emerging international township in rural India, is such a laboratory..."

Butoh Dances

Butoh is sensual. Butoh is dangerous. Butoh encompasses the ideas of destruction and creation, like Shiva. To watch a Butoh dance is to watch a dancer clear the decks of prejudice, letting go of the dead formulae of dance in a rigid box, "one, two, three... one, two, three." Butoh has its own time. It is hypnotic and unnerving. It speaks to us about life and death and the discomfort, the terror of the spaces in between. Butoh is about transitional moments, when we are the least secure, the most disoriented, unsettled, panicky.

Butoh master visits

In September, Darja, Johan and the Butoh Dance Group (an Aurovillian core group of about ten members) invited Masaki Iwana to Auroville to give a performance and a one-week workshop. Masaki, a Butoh master living in Normandy, France, has been working with Butoh since 1974. In 1979 he presented his first dance piece entitled *Improvisium Continuum* in Tokyo. From 1979 to 1984, he presented 150 experimental performances in which he stood completely naked, straight and perfectly still. In Auroville, Masaki danced a solo piece called *Namanari* (Demi-Daemon), which he first performed in Tokyo, Paris and Kanazawa in 1985. It is the story of an old woman who remembers her past as she faces the moment of death and makes the transition to the other



PHOTO: JILL

Masaki Iwana in the forest of Anusuya

side. Since 1991, he has been working primarily in Europe and Asia, but returning regularly to perform in Japan. Masaki Iwana is the founder of the Research Institute of Butoh Hakuto-Kan ("House of White Butoh").

Masaki says, "What has made Butoh so significant is that not only has it opposed

rigidly prescribed forms such as traditional dance and modern dance, but has demanded a philosophical uprooting which categorically refutes all modes of ready-made 'culture'. The body does not occupy time and space, but produces time and space; Butoh's objective is not a crystallization of a dance pattern which must be learned, as in the field of contemporary dance, but an opening of the body to possibility, a progress or expansion, not a regression or limitation. This consciousness of the body is called 'shintai'. 'Nikutai' is the body as it resounds with the desire for individual life, one which encompasses individual history and experience. The word *butoh* can be translated literally as 'dance' (*bu*) plus 'hit' or 'strike' (*toh*)."

Exploring inner landscapes

The workshop at Pitanga drew fifteen participants from the fields of dance, theatre, martial arts and music. People used their bodies in a new way, moving through space to another rhythm, changing the space as they moved through it. In one group exercise which included the audience, they had to move through the space as if the water were up to their chests, and their objective was to move without making waves in the water.

Besides expanding the awareness of his students, Masakai also wanted to understand them and had many questions about Auroville. "How to understand this community? You are living in Paradise, why do you want to learn Butoh?" he asked the group at the beginning of the workshop, because Butoh is about touching the essence of the

body, exploring such themes as death, pain, loss, grief and disappointment as a part of the investigation of the whole spectrum of life experiences. But after a while, he understood that, for the group, their inner work here includes the exploration of all aspects of life. The dancers go from the "small body"—that which is shaped and distorted by society—to the "large body"—that which is sustained by nature and the cosmos. Teaching and learning, the experience was, on both sides, one of opening up, revealing, using inner time while expressing a present necessity, an "inner landscape".

Some members of the group described their experiences during the week with Masaki. "The influence of the workshop shows in the work," Darja said. "It has sharpened our sensitivity, our awareness, and made us stronger as a group. Masaki was very demanding, very precise as a teacher, and his way of working made our response more intense." Johan added, "We often move in very small, conditioned patterns—this came awake in myself. But my body wants to free itself from these patterns, and to get rid of all the negativity, bad vibrations and 'stuckness'. With my work on Butoh these patterns can disappear." Shuba continues, "The workshop widened my view of Butoh. I realise there is no separation between the work here and the rest of my life. Rather than compartmentalising—this is my life, this is my work—I understand that it's all a continuum." Philippe concluded, "We can really see our weaknesses now. And we understand that the work is ultimately touching something deep inside." *Jill*

Genetically modified food

Does Auroville need to act?

by Priya

Genetically modified (GM) foods have been around for less than ten years. Yet this year there are 40 million hectares under cultivation, mostly in America, where GM food is now widely eaten.

So far there has been little debate about GM food within Auroville. Yet much of our food comes from outside Auroville where it is not necessarily grown organically. Without the information about where this food comes from it is quite likely that, unless we take steps quickly, we will soon be eating GM food.

What is GM food?

Plants, like any other living organism, inherit their physical appearance and other features from the genes of the parent plants. Genes are chemicals which carry the coded instructions of how a plant (or any other living organism) will grow. There are thousands of genes in each plant cell, each one determining a characteristic of the plant such as the shape of its leaf, the shape of its flower and structure of its fruit. Not only can these genes now be identified but they can also be put together in a laboratory to produce new types of plants with whatever qualities are considered desirable. Traditionally plants were bred to bring out desired characteristics but using genetic modification techniques genes from different plants can be combined to produce plants with unlimited possibilities - bananas that includes vaccines, tomatoes with extra vitamins or shrubs that can produce chemicals needed for industrial processes.

Plants have already been developed which are resistant to insect and viral pests and will grow in adverse conditions. There is a genetically-modified rice which will grow in salt water and soya that will grow despite being sprayed with pesticide, making it easier and cheaper for the farmer to grow it. Some people would say such innovations are the best (some would say only) way of solving future food security problems, especially in the developing world.

The downside

The technology of genetic modification is based on the assumption that certain genes equate with certain characteristics. It has been found, however, that it is not necessarily as simple as this and that genes also interact with each other in unexpected ways. Thus plants could be produced with undesirable characteristics that only become apparent after a period of time. Then it may be impossible to change them because they will go on being reproduced in future generations. GM plants could also be cross-pollinated with ordinary plants (it is impossible to control the insects that do this) with possibly very negative results.

There has been no research and it is very difficult to see what effects GM plants will have on the whole food chain. Various plants have been developed which are resistant to certain insect pests, but if these pests have no food, what happens to the rest of the food chain that depends on them?

Concern has also been expressed at the way in which viruses have been used both to introduce certain genes into plants and into the plants themselves to protect them against pests and provide low-cost vaccinations. Viruses are known to mutate very easily; supposing they mutate into some kind of new disease which could affect plants, animals or humans?

What is the effect on humans of eating GM food? Research has been carried out on

CARTOON BY EMANUELE



NEW YEAR'S EVE 3000
DINNER WITH FRIENDS

this subject but has focused only on finding out whether GM food has toxic effects in the short term. In fact there has already been at least one case of a genetically-modified nutritional supplement leading to the deaths of 37 people and the illness of many more in the USA.

Who owns this knowledge?

With a huge projected market for genetically-modified food it is not surprising that businesses have quickly entered this field. So far there have been no limits placed on the patents which companies can take out for any genetically modified plants which they produce. This means that they have a monopoly on distributing the seed and with it the huge profits that go with having any kind of monopoly. Using patents, they can also

effectively cut off any further research on 'their' seeds and plants. Furthermore Monsanto, one of the market leaders, has not only developed a wide range of genetically-modified plants, but has also used the technology to ensure that farmers only use their products.

Do we want GM food in Auroville?

Monsanto is already carrying out GM plant tests in India and has distributed a range of GM seeds. It is also buying up a lot of seed companies. Since much of the food we consume in Auroville comes from outside, we may soon be eating GM food.

What can we do about this? Of course one of the most important things we can do is

A walk in the Matrimandir Gardens

On my early morning walk I come across a slowly rising mountain of red soil. An excavator hums and groans, digging into the laterite earth. This is the excavation of the first section of a water channel which will surround the Matrimandir Oval, making it into a small island. In previous years earth digging was done entirely by manpower. The image of workmen carrying a flat cane basket filled with red earth from one place to another is engraved in many people's minds. But recently "Harvest", an Auroville water service, acquired two excavators which are being rented out, thus speeding up such earthwork tremendously. The first 120 m. long, twelve m. wide and four m. deep stretch of the water channel has been dug in twelve days, a record time by Auroville standards.

Already the next step of experimenting with various methods of sealing the channel has started. One stretch is covered with a mixture of tar, clay and cement. Another stretch is done with a mixture of brick lime jelly. Research is going on to find a special

kind of plastic foil which could also be used. A fourth option is reinforced concrete.

Over on the opposite side of the gardens, near the gilding workshop, a large area has been cleared, where the next section of the water body (50m wide and 70m long) will be excavated. "Careful, you're walking on water!" Walter grins, as I slide over the mud, which has been softened by last night's rains on the place where in future there will be water. Just a few weeks ago a drawing made by Mother in 1965 came to light, showing a lake around the Matrimandir. In that sketch the water body looks to be around 50 meter wide. The excavated soil will be used to continue the hilly landscaping which was started in the '70's. Before Auroville began, Mother talked about the necessity of securing water for the new

township, and some people feel that such a lake, which could be rainfed and not depend on groundwater, might be used as a water catchment pond to store rainwater.



Digging a water channel in the Gardens

Using the excavator again, this new section of the lake will be dug in three to four weeks, weather permitting, making the future park and gardens that much more tangible.

Tineke

Voices of the Village

Voices of the Village is a new documentary video made by Raman, a local Aurovilian who has been in Auroville for over two decades now but has never abandoned his roots in the village. Raman interviews residents of Kulapalayam, Kottakarai and Edayanchavadi, three of the major villages that witnessed, right in their midst, the gradual emergence of this strange phenomenon called Auroville.

Raman encourages them to talk about Auroville and they are very open and frank in sharing their wide-ranging opinions. Many of them had attended the balcony darshans of the Mother and they show some understanding of the purpose of Auroville. From the 13 hours of footage (in itself excellent archival material), Raman created an interesting 34 minute documentary, with narration in English by Roger and music by various Aurovilians. The video was edited and produced with help from Palmyra.

Some excerpts from Voices of the Village:

Lakshman (Kulapalayam): "After 33 years, my village is like a small America."

Pattu: "Thirty years ago, people were more simple and honest."

Rasu (KK): "They promised our village would be taken care of, but that is not the case today."

Shanti (KK): "You people are all selfish now. In the '80s, people were motivated to work for Auroville's progress. Now they just work for their own interest."

Selvarani (KK): "Women have become more free. They ride cycles. Auroville has built a Health Centre... If we still had our land, we could grow our food."

Kasirasu (KK): "At the beginning, the Banyan tree was a resting place for Masimagan pilgrims. They used to rest in its shade and were given water. Auroville is for peace. It is a city the world can marvel at."

Govindaraju (Ed.): "I have done earthwork for the Amphitheatre. I was there at the inauguration. In Auroville wonders are taking place. Afforestation going on. My village could not exist without Auroville... It has brought education. Man without knowledge is like a flower without fragrance."

A LETTER

Reading and discovering the contents of Auroville Today's latest issue (September 1999) gave me goosebumps all over! And I felt a great sense of gratitude and joy. A joy that brings new possibilities for all Aurovilians and beyond.

I had always missed any kind of word on how much and in what intensity Aurovilians worship the Divine. It always seemed to me that the priority was or still is to struggle for raising funds for all the different projects. And that the Divine is somehow to be achieved when all other conditions are fulfilled. My prayer for Auroville is therefore that this would change and that a body would come into being that would have that kind of "authority" to point out and foster the direction of Aurovilians to take up foremost the worshipping of the Divine. My prayer has now materialized by fresh encouragement especially from the Maharaja of Puri.

When we enter a new place or situation, we usually bring with us old ways of thinking, and the only way to eradicate this is when deep in our hearts and in all sincerity we think in all we do foremost of the Divine in an attitude of offering. Answers and guidance will come, energies of consciousness will vibrate high, and people who persist in their old ways will automatically feel that they cannot bear the intensity of the transformative power of the Supramental pushing forward.

Auroville is blessed to experience this particular time!

Dieter Teise, Canada

GM Food (continued from page 6)

grow more of our own organic food, both on Auroville farms and on farms in the surrounding bio-region. Auroville farmers are committed to farming organically and recently wrote a mission statement about how they saw the farms developing in a way that supports biodiversity and indigenous foods.

This means, of course, that Aurovilians will have to be willing to eat local food. Unfortunately this isn't the case at the moment and one of the things which the Farm Group is doing is educating Aurovilians about local foods and how they can be cooked.

Another initiative is a vegetable seed bank, to be based at Revelation Farm, for which funds are being sought. Seeds will be collected from the local villages, stored and then distributed in order to revive the growing of local vegetables. Yet another project, run by Water Harvest, is encouraging local farmers to go organic by providing them with a premium market for their food in Auroville.

Subscription Information

Subscription rates for 12 issues of AUROVILLE TODAY are the following: for India Rs 250; for other countries Rs 1250, Can \$ 51, FF 195, DM 60, It. Lira 61,000, D.Gl. 65, US \$ 38, UK £25. This includes the postage by airmail. Please send your contribution (or your supporting contribution of double the amount) either to one of the Auroville International centres below (add 10% for admin. and bank charges) or directly to Auroville Today, Surrender, Auroville 605101. Cheques should be made payable to Auroville Fund, specifying: 'Contribution for Auroville Today'. You will receive the issues directly from Auroville. Personal cheques are preferred to bank cheques. Please do not send postal money orders or cash. Subscribers will receive a reminder when their subscription is about to expire.

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NEWS IN BRIEF

Jewelry and painting exhibition

Shells, pearls, coral, fishbone and ropes—these simple objects, collected from all over the world, were turned, with a skilful touch of gold leaf, into designer jewelry by Nadja. They were recently exhibited at the Visitors Centre.

Also exhibited were paintings by Dominic and Ganesh. Titled "Nature's Imprints", the paintings, made of applied bronze and silver leaf on a black wooden background, depicted cotton pods from various angles.

Daughters of the Ocean

Daughters of the Ocean was a contemporary Dance Performance by Anita Ratnam and the Arangham Dance Troupe from Chennai. Skilfully choreographed with dance, theatre and narrative elements, "Daughters of the Ocean" explored through personal stories the Hindu myths of the Goddesses, particularly Lakshmi, Saraswati and Durga. Aurelio, an Aurovilian musician, accompanied the dancers on drums and cymbals.

Learn Sanskrit in 10 days

A ten-day Sanskrit Shivira (Sanskrit Camp) designed to give Aurovilians a nodding acquaintance with this ancient language was held in October. One hundred Aurovilians participated in this course which was conducted by Sanskrit teachers, some of whom had come from South Indian universities specially for this purpose.

Nutrition for Auroville

Starting from this month, the Solar Kitchen is going to make an experiment. It is going to offer lunch to 800 Aurovilians (its current capacity) regardless of whether they make a contribution towards their meals or not. Under the earlier system, Aurovilians had to pay Rs. 500 per month for six meals a week, or Rs. 35 for an individual lunch at the Solar Kitchen. Now they are asked to make a conscious choice of how much and in what form they want to contribute towards their meals. The Central Fund has agreed to back this experiment for at least two months, in response to the wish of many Aurovilians that food should be offered for free.

World Centre for Human Unity

The foundation stone for the Sri Aurobindo World Centre for Human Unity was recently laid in the Bharat Nivas complex. The World Centre has been made possible by a grant from the Government of India. It has hosted diverse projects such as documenting research undertaken by Aurovilians, disseminating their work in Auroville and abroad, inviting scholars to present talks in Auroville, mounting exhibitions etc.

Ayudha Pooja

Aurovilians and workers recently celebrated the yearly Ayudha Pooja—the worship of Goddess Saraswati who represents perfection in work. Houses, toolsheds and vehicles were cleaned and decorated.

Order your Calendar now!

"Mandala-like forms occur everywhere: in the ripples of a pond, the shape of a rain-drop ... in the structure of an atom. They are the circularity of energy, the coherence of the crystal, the mystery of the maze, the shaping of chaos."

Natural shapes forming mandalas, photographed by Ireno, are the theme of the Auroville desktop calendar for the year 2000.

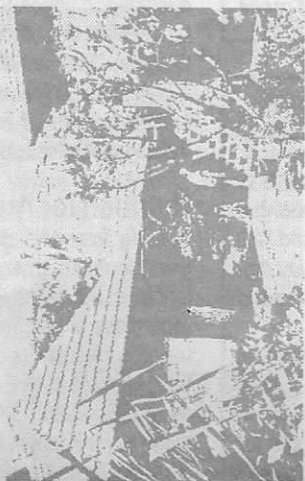
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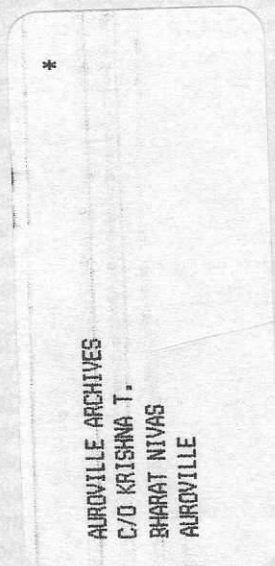
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AUROVILLE ARCHIVES
C/O KRISHNA T.
BHARAT NIVAS
AUROVILLE

November 1999
Number 130

A Cosmopolitan Couple

He looks the older of the two, with his hair gone silver. She belies her age with her smooth, brown skin. He endears all with his goodwilled charm and effusive nature. She is more demure with a determined set to her mouth. It is only when you get to know her better that you are rewarded with a smile, her eyes twinkling behind her gold-rimmed glasses. He is passionate about music and books. She is enthusiastic about cooking, especially baking. He is American, of Jewish origin. She was born in Haiti and raised as a Roman Catholic. They met and married in New York City in the early sixties when George Harrison was getting to know Ravi Shankar. And shortly after their marriage, they left America and spent 30 years in the Asian culture of Japan working as English teachers. Last year they joined Auroville as newcomers and, in this city of mingled cultures, Donald and Marie-Ange are probably one of our most cosmopolitan couples ever.



Don and Marie-Ange

PHOTO: JOHN MANDEEN

"We don't think of ourselves in that way however," says Don. "We were looking for something to do after we retired. We did not want to settle either in Japan or in the USA with their materialistic cultures." "And Auroville," adds Marie-Ange, "fitted us like a glove."

"Actually," continues Don, "I had originally been thinking of joining the M. S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF) in Chennai as a volunteer. I heard about Dr. M. S. Swaminathan's work when I was in Japan. I was so inspired by it that I wrote to him asking if I could help in his work. He invited us to come and visit. And at the same time, I was asked to help out as an interpreter and tour-guide in a package tour of South India for some Japanese tourists. The tour included a visit to Auroville and Pondicherry. I looked up the Auroville homepage on the Net and had e-mail correspondence with some Aurovilians before we arrived here."

This was in 1997 and it was Marie-Ange's first visit to India. Don had visited New Delhi and Calcutta briefly in 1996. "But India," says Marie-Ange "had this unexpected way of cropping up in our lives. Don was into Indian music and culture. And I remember, on our first date, he had asked me out to watch a performance of Indian dance! And later, in Japan, one of our daughters opted to study Indian dance."

"We spent a few months in 1997 touring South India. We also met Dr. M. S. Swaminathan, who then happened to be the Chairman of the Auroville Foundation as well, and spent some time at MSSRF in Chennai. But it was clear that Auroville was our place."

"You see," says Don, "both of us have been doers in our lives. In Japan we used to work, on an average, twelve hours a day. And we could not bear the idea of retiring, of building a house somewhere and doing nothing. What I like about Auroville is its philos-

ophy of *karma-yoga* (the yoga of works). I still need to read more of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, but to me it is clear that we are here to act in Auroville, we are here to *do*, and there is plenty to be done to build the City of the Future. What I also liked about Sri Aurobindo's philosophy was that evolution has a Divine purpose behind it. In my philosophical searches, I read Genesis as well as Darwin's theory of evolution, and somehow I wasn't satisfied by either. Sri Aurobindo really appealed to us."

"Another thing that I like about Auroville," says Marie-Ange, "is its freedom. I never felt at home in Japan, and I think it was partly because society there places so many expectations on you. Here in Auroville, the individual is free to develop as he or she likes... Though," she adds quickly, "sometimes Aurovilians carry the concept of freedom too far. I would also like to see a greater sense of community, of individuals caring for one another."

The couple is also keenly aware of, and critical of, the lack of harmony amongst many of its residents. Says Don, "We fail to understand why people harbour such bitterness and enmity for years on end. That's the one thing that I would like to see changed in Auroville. I wish people would just drop their feelings of dislike and prejudice. Surely one can have a difference of opinion with others without bearing hatred and ill-will towards them! How will we ever progress towards a better humanity if we continue with our petty squabbles and unforgiving attitudes?"

Don and Marie-Ange are highly individualistic and yet are a close-knit couple having been married for 36 years. "You know," Don says philosophically, "romance between newly-weds lasts for four years or so, and after that you have to commit yourself to keep the relationship going and be good-willed about it. Marie-Ange and I disagree with each other a lot but we never bear grudges. We are never angry with each other for more than 30 seconds."

True to their desire of building a greater sense of community in Auroville, Marie-Ange, along with a team of a few other Aurovilians has been instrumental in making the Coffee Shop atop the Solar Kitchen a lively meeting point for Auroville residents. Don has been looking after collective issues in Parthna where they live. Don also works for Village Action where he has set up, with technical know-how from MSSRF, a pilot mushroom cultivation project. At present both are busy, settling down in their new home in Parthna and opening themselves to the experiment of Auroville.

Bindu

Children at the Kindergarten making a kolam from flowers
(Photo by Ireno, from the Auroville Calendar 2000)