

AUROVILLE TODAY

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Rumblings in the Industrial Zone

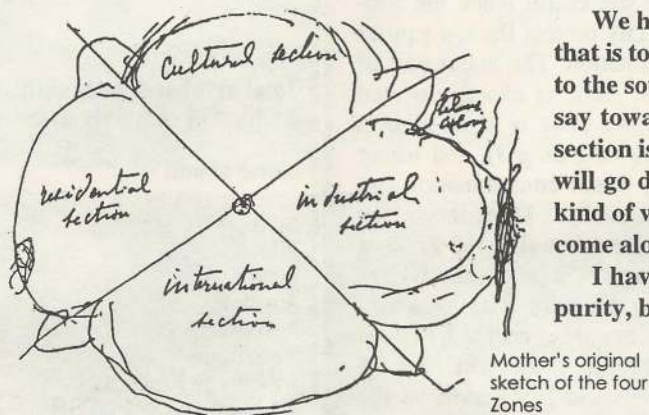
THE LOCATION OF THE FOUR ZONES

When the Pavilion of Indian Culture, the Bharat Nivas, was ready to be constructed, the land in the International Zone on which it should be built was not available in spite of the best efforts to purchase it. The Mother was pushing to start the construction and requested the people involved to "concentrate" in order to solve the land matter. After several weeks, when no solution was found, the Mother requested Roger to bring a map to explain to her the difficulties, since "there is always a solution." Roger explained to Mother how the master plan fitted on the map which showed the plots already purchased. The Mother then suggested to turn the Galaxy plan so that the construction of Bharat Nivas could start immediately on available land. As a consequence, the plan was turned anti-clockwise, shifting the Industrial Zone from the East to the North.

(as remembered by Roger Anger)

"From many points of view the location of the Industrial Zone is unfortunate" says Roberta. "The Zone is not near a main access road, it is very far from Pondicherry, and it is situated on good agricultural land. Last but not least, the Zone is located on top of the watershed. So if we had to do it again, we would not put it here." Roberta is an executive of Auromics, a garment and leather industry located in Auroville's Industrial Zone. Her discomfort with the location of the Zone, however, doesn't prevent her from living in the middle of it—since 1973 she has been living in the Kottakarai community—nor from running and expanding her unit, or being one of the active members of the Industrial Zone Monitoring Group (IZMG). Is this a contradiction? "Well," she replies, "I have accepted the reality of this Zone for purely pragmatic reasons. It exists, and more and more industry is coming in. Other Aurovilians accept the location of the Industrial Zone for the simple reason that Mother put it here, on this spot. And then there are people who won't accept it. But we cannot go on discussing it for fifty years, otherwise nothing is ever going to move!"

Cristo, a retired civil engineer with practical knowledge of new township development, is one of those who disagrees. He is a resident of Revelation and participated in the work of the IZMG for a few years before resigning. In an open letter to the Auroville Council in March 1998 he questioned the suitability of the location of this Zone—without however challenging the original galaxy plan with its four Zones—and made a bitter observation that any attempt to look at this problem in a professional way has so far been thwarted. "We are not dealing here in terms of ground realities but with acts of faith, with religion and fundamentalism," wrote Cristo. The Green Group [repre-



Mother's original sketch of the four Zones

sentatives of Auroville's farm and forest groups which gives recommendations on issues pertaining to the development of Auroville's greenbelt—eds.], though not asking for a shifting of the Zone, recommended in May 1998 "that no further development take place in the Industrial Zone until important environmental and access issues are resolved." The view of the Green Group is shared by about 50 other people living in and around the Industrial Zone.

Angad, who manages "Mantra Pottery" and has been living in the Industrial Zone since 1978, agrees that the Zone's location is unsuitable. But he considers that, suitable or not, the problems that arise can be solved and are in fact a challenge to be taken up if Auroville wants to be true to its ideals. "There has never been a persistent drive," he says, "to move the entire Industrial Zone away from Auroville, for example towards the main road between Pondicherry and Tindivanam-Madras. I think that even those who oppose the location of the Industrial Zone feel somewhere deep within that it won't do to change the basic plan of the Mother's four Zones. So the Zone is here, and we are stuck with it. We'll have to find solutions for the problems, whatever they are. And if we do that correctly, this Zone can become a model for other cities to follow."

INDUSTRIAL ZONE MONITORING GROUP

What are the problems? A major one surfaced a few

We have four big sections: the cultural section, to the north, that is to say, towards Madras; to the east, the industrial section; to the south, the international section; and to the west, that is to say towards the lake, the residential section. ...This industrial section is to the east and it is very big, there is plenty of space; it will go down towards the sea and if possibly, there would be a kind of wharf—not exactly a port but a place where boats could come alongside...

I have no illusions that it [the concept] will keep its original purity, but we shall try something.

Mother on 23 June 1965, speaking about Auroville for the first time.

years ago. "Until a few years back," says Amrit, who lives in another Auroville community situated in the middle of the Industrial Zone called Vérité, "planning used to happen only in the office of Aurofuture, and people who were living in this area felt that ground realities were not being taken into account. After some tumultuous meetings a decision was reached to create an Industrial Zone Monitoring Group, so that there would be a balance between the planners and those living in this Zone. I joined as a representative of Vérité community. The group went through many ups and downs over the years, and consists now of only three people, Roberta, Prema (an executive of the garment manufacturer Auromode—eds.) and myself. Angad and Tency (an executive of the Centre for Scientific Research) act as advisers.

The IZMG's first task is to look at the requests of people who want to set up a unit in the Zone. We inform the neighbourhood, try to find a location for the new unit and try to find answers to the problems a new unit may bring, such as how many workers it will employ; what kind of traffic can be expected; whether there will be sound pollution; what its energy requirements are; what are the waste products; whether the new industry is polluting and the means to prevent it. In short, we endeavour to strike a balance between the requirements of the new unit and those of the people living here and of Auroville in general."

Locating new units is but one of the tasks of the IZMG.

(continued on page 2)

Auromics workshop, Kottakarai



(continued from page 1)

Says Angad, "We have been working on a plan for the Industrial Zone from the very beginning. We realised that the amount of water available would eventually determine the type and number of industrial units that could be housed in this Zone. So we employed two different consultants to design a water system for this area. A 210 m. deep well was dug—that is, into the third aquifer—nearby Silence, and a 3-phase electricity connection and a transformer were obtained. The next step will now be to build an underground water tank from where water will be pumped to the storage tanks of the units. This will ensure that each unit is responsible for controlling its water usage. This well, together with the Revelation well which is at present being used at its maximum capacity, will provide the water for the Industrial Zone."

WATER

The water availability in the Industrial Zone is a concern not only for those who wish to set up new industries, but also for Auroville as a whole. So far, however, the water situation in Auroville has not featured largely in Auroville's town plans. Warnings have abounded, for example from Tom, the executive of Auroville's Water Service [see *AVToday* # 104, September 1997] and from the German water-engineer Harald Kraft, who has been closely connected to Auroville for 25 years. In April this year Harald once again explained his concern. "Auroville is built on top of a low, bare hill of red laterite earth (see drawing on next page). The water table (first aquifer) lies 30 m. below the compacted surface. The second and third aquifers are found at 100 m. and at 200 m. to 300 m. depth respectively. Many pumps in Auroville are dug into the second and third aquifers. Those living around Auroville also dig wells into these same aquifers. With powerful pumps and free electricity at their disposal, agricultural users in the surrounding area extract enormous amounts of water. The rapidly expanding industrial sector of Pondicherry is also making high demands on the water table. The results can be disastrous, as salt water may intrude into the aquifers, which will turn the coastal land infertile. Already various coastal areas in Tamil Nadu suffer from this fate, and Auroville could be next."

How, then, to provide water for the city?

A few years ago Harald suddenly realised that the idea of a large lake around the Matrimandir, envisioned by The Mother in her talks of December 31, 1969⁽¹⁾ and January 10, 1970⁽²⁾, which he had earlier considered impractical, could in fact provide the solution to the water needs of the growing city. For the disadvantages of the relatively impermeable laterite soil can be turned into an advantage so that the first aquifer could be used to serve the needs of the city. Says Harald, "Water from a large artificial lake around Matrimandir, the highest point in the city, would slowly percolate into the

first aquifer. The lake would be filled by the monsoon rains, as well as from water catchment tanks in the greenbelt area from where it would be pumped up into the lake. The effectiveness of the percolation would be further augmented by rainwater collecting systems within the Residential Zone area and elsewhere." Harald has calculated that this proposed scheme for rainwater conservation and harvesting will provide for a plentiful water supply for both drinking and irrigation, even if the underlying groundwater tables become completely saline. "But," warns Harald, "the system will only be successful when the residents of the city protect the top aquifer from contamination. The major part of the Industrial Zone is exactly located where the water table is at its highest point (see drawing on p.3), and where consequently water contamination can happen most easily." Does this mean that Harald considers that the Zone is located wrongly? "The lesson I have learned is to be very careful where Mother's visions are concerned," writes Harald. "After all, it has taken me 25 years to understand Her vision on the lake around Matrimandir. There may be reasons which I yet cannot see."

POLLUTION CONTROL

Another major concern for the IZMG, therefore, is to ensure that there are no polluting industries in the Industrial Zone. Says Amrit, "It is obvious to everybody that Auroville's Industrial Zone must be a pollution-free zone, and it is our collective responsibility

to ensure that pollution doesn't occur. I am convinced that at present the groundwater is not being polluted at an alarming rate. The greatest danger comes from badly constructed septic tanks and soakpits—we have to improve this right now—and we want each industrial unit or group of units to have their own sewage treatment and water recycling plants. Next there is the potential threat from pollution by diesel generators. There are two or three generators which are polluting at present, but with a few adjustments you can operate them safely."

It is in this field, however, that the IZMG has not put in sufficient efforts, according to some of the residents of the area. "A serious concern is that the present waste-water treatment plant at Auromode is both dysfunctional and overloaded," says Edzard, who has been living in Discipline since 1975 and was a member of the IZMG before withdrawing in summer this year as "nothing happened." "A report from Auroville's Aurobrindavan laboratory in March this year showed that the characteristics of the effluents after treatment were above the tolerance limits

Total number of commercial units in Auroville:

88

Number of commercial units established in the Industrial Zone:

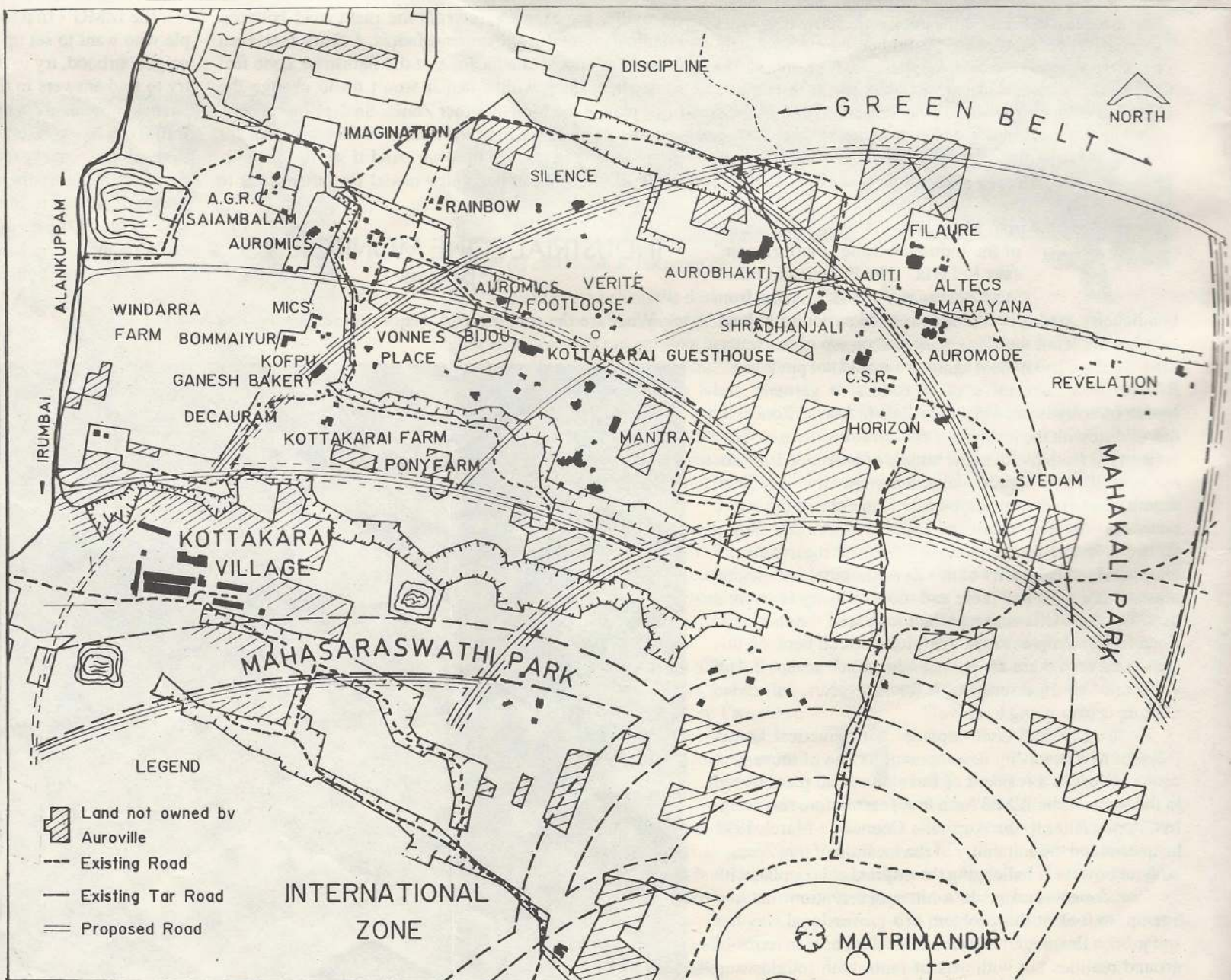
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name of unit	type of industry	approx. no. of employees
Aditi	patchwork bedcovers	13
Altecs	electronic devices	32
Aurobhakti	garments	45
Auromics	garments	50 (on contract: 300)
Auromics	leather products	35
Auromode	garments	92
AV Energy Products	solar energy products	3
AV Building Centre/CSR	ferrocement products	25 (outside: 25 - 50)
Bijou	beads	15
Bommayur	carpentry products	15
Decauram	carpentry products	23
Filaure	garments	38
Footloose	footwear	13
Ganesh	footwear	5
Imagination	handloom products	20
Mantra	pottery	11
Marayana	handicrafts	16
Penta	software	2
Rainbow (Colors of nature)	natural dyed products	15
Shradhanjali	dried flower stationary	35
Upasana	garments	11

Total: 21 units

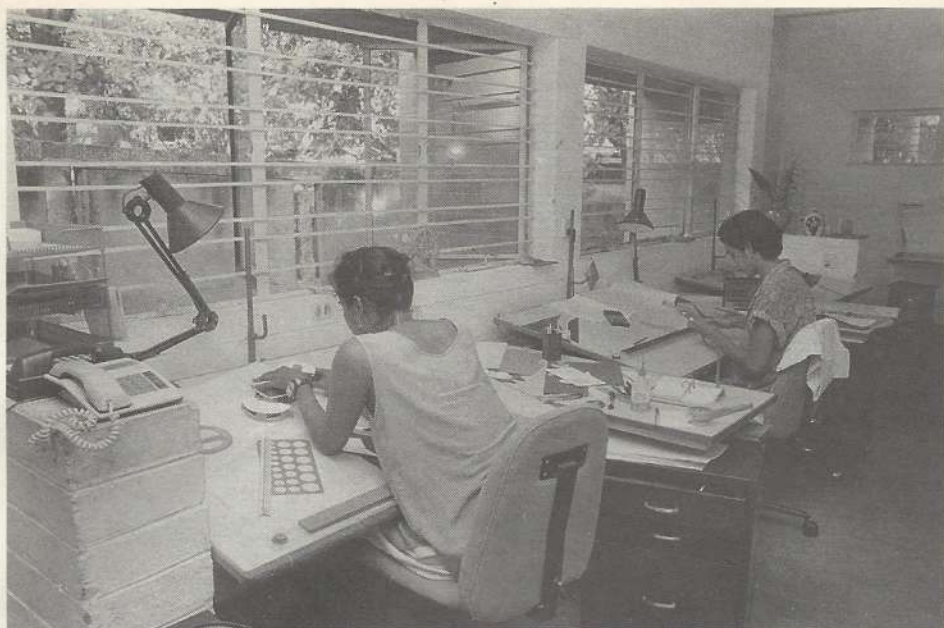
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Map showing Industrial Zone with names of productive units (see box), communities, etc.



(1) Mother's Agenda X pp. 494-496

(2) L'Agenda de Mère XI, p. 37.



Two faces of the Industrial Zone:
AV-BC architects' office (above) and
Aurobhakti (former Aurosarjan)

prescribed by the Indian Standard Institution. An agreement was reached with the Auromode management that a proper waste water treatment plant would be installed in accordance with expert advice given. Till date, however, this agreement has not been honoured. In the West, the authorities would close down the unit. Here we can only protest, and this gives us the reputation that we are against productive units in this area. We are not against units, but we are against pollution and the fact that unit executives do not honour their agreements." Prema, the executive of Auromode, points out that some changes in the present system have meanwhile been effected, and that a report made in October this year by the Pondicherry Pollution Control Committee of the Government of India shows that the pollution is within acceptable limits. "However," says Prema, "we will build a new waste water treatment plant, probably together with some of the neighbouring units. So far it has not been possible to obtain the detailed design. But we are against pollution as much as those living around us."

Vonne came to live in the Industrial Zone a few years ago. Her feelings on the efficiency of the IZMG are mixed, as she found that it has only been partially fulfilling the mandate given to it by the community. "That mandate also included responsibility towards the environment and securing a decent quality of life for the residents of this Zone; in short to create a balance between nature, people and activities. The main focus has, however, become finding locations for workshops and creating the infrastructure. It was because of this—and spurred by complaints against pollution at Auromode, against the absence of proper waste-water treatment



plants of some other units and against the noise pollution of some units—that after several meetings of residents from and around the area, the IZMG became instrumental in the creation of an Environment Group, who agreed to look into the situation." Amrit agrees that the IZMG has not done the best it could. But he explains: "The main problem is that everybody's time is limited. For example, we would need to monitor the water quality on a regular basis. Normally, a city has a Pollution Control Board which does these kind of things and visits industrial units at any time. But Auroville hasn't yet created such a group. I hope, however, that the recently re-vitalised Environment Group consisting of Lucas, Mukul, Stefano, Manfred and myself, will be able to push this. We have also started to study how Auroville should deal with its household and industrial solid waste products. We are trying to find a storage location for products which are difficult to deal with, such as rubber waste and broken mineral water bottles which we then later transport to Chennai [Madras]

where there are facilities to reprocess or destroy them. But this is only a start."

Amrit points out that the protection of the environment requires large investments. "At present the IZMG is studying how five new units (two carpentry workshops, a steel workshop and two garment workshops) can be settled in Horizon. They are all small, but together will employ as many as 50 workers, and we would like them to set up a collective infrastructure including a waste-water treatment plant. However, many potential investors lack the necessary money. Here the Auroville community has a role to play. For Auroville cannot just say to them, 'OK, then move somewhere else.' For if these Aurovilians would be forced, due to lack of money, to rent places in nearby villages, the danger of their pollut-

ing the same aquifer from that location remains. We have to find answers that work for all concerned, and if Auroville wants pollution-free industry, Auroville will have to pay for it too."

THE VILLAGES

Renting places in the nearby villages has, however, already become standard practice. It's nice to have a place to start your unit without having to engage in endless discussions on what you want to do and how you should do it. And while some Aurovilians frown on this development, others heartily welcome it. Says Angad: "I believe it is a healthy development. Our town planners so far have for all practical purposes ignored the existence of the villages in their desire to implement the Master Plan. But we cannot ignore these population centres! The people living there move to Auroville for employment—to houses, workshops or elsewhere. That ground reality forces the creation of roads inside Auroville. The renting of space in the villages forces us to go a step further and acknowledge that planning which does not take the village into account is faulty. For what is the point of trying to protect our aquifer, if that same aquifer is going to be polluted by someone 100 metres further north in the village?" Amrit too sees the development as a positive one. "It will give Auroville a leverage to influence things in the village. It will also stimulate development in the villages, in particular if production centres could be established in the villages themselves. And that would eliminate a lot of the traffic in and out of Auroville."

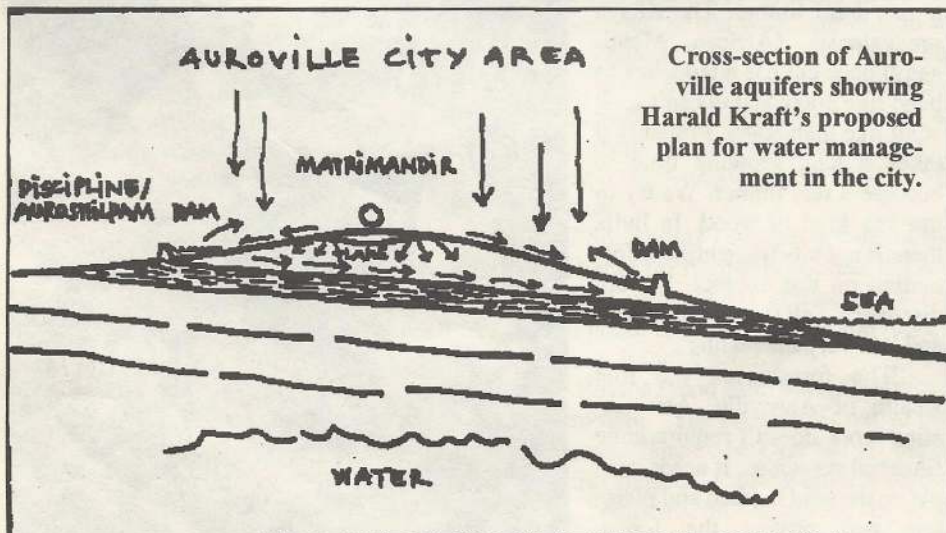
TRAFFIC

Traffic is another bone of contention

between some of the residents of the Industrial Zone, the Green Group and the IZMG. Recently, Auroville acquired 40 acres of prime farm land named 'Windarra', which is located in the green-belt area north of the Industrial Zone, but which also borders the potential access road to the Industrial Zone, the road which runs between Iumbai and Alankuppam. An agreement has been reached between the Development Group, the Green Group and Windarra that the land is to be used for farming, that a stretch of it must be reserved for a future link road to the Industrial Zone, and that this stretch will only become road with the agreement of all parties. Says Vonne: "Our main objection against this road is that it is planned on top of the watershed. We all know how careless truck drivers drive their vehicles, and the ramshackle condition of many of those trucks. The chances of an accident or of a truck accidentally driving off the road are high, and it only takes a few litres of spilt diesel to pollute the aquifer." Angad and Roberta point to the fact that there is no alternative. "If you want to have a city centre free of traffic, then you will have no other option for it simply won't do to have the traffic come all the way from Kuilapalayam or Edayanchavadi right through the centre of the city to the Industrial Zone. The connection with the Iumbai-Alankuppam road is the only option available. The danger of accidents and polluting vehicles also exists on this road, and that too would directly affect the first aquifer." Edzard points to another danger, that the road is planned too closely to the well at Silence. "In the West, according to internationally accepted standards, no road is allowed within a distance of 100 metres from a water source. If we want to be an example for India, we would do well to follow this standard too." Agreement has now been reached with all parties to await an expert opinion from Cristo.

QUALITY OF LIFE

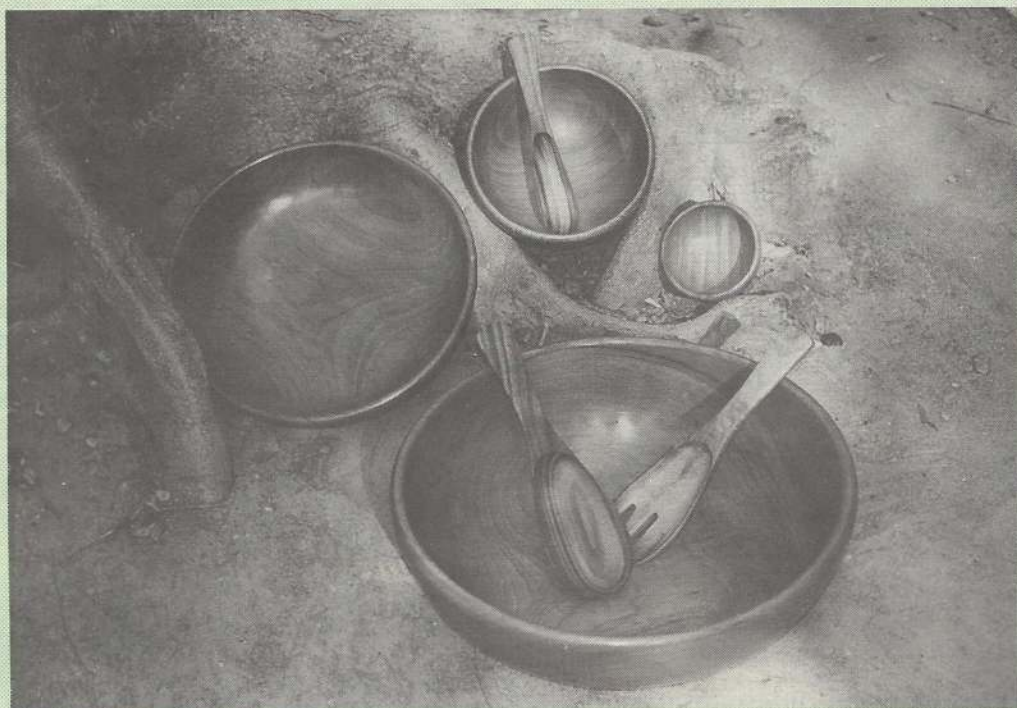
"The other objection against this road," says Vonne, "is that it will bring a lot of traffic into the community, day and night, and will affect the quality of life of the residents." Amrit looks at it from another angle: "It is good that there are residents living in the Industrial Zone, for nobody would like a kind of zone which is ruled by watchmen after five o'clock in the evening. But those who choose to live here have to accept that there is industry and that there is industrial activity around them, that there will be movement, transport, traffic of all kinds, and that as a consequence the living quality will be different from, say, the Residential Zone or the Green Belt. Any resident who moves in here should take that into account." Vonne points out that a balance has to be struck: "Part of the mandate of the IZMG is to secure a decent quality of life of the residents of this Zone, and this needs a lot of work so that the quality of life does not irreversibly go down. For example, unit executives should limit overtime as much as possible, and those who are building or expanding their unit should instruct their contractors not to work or supply materials in the evenings or on Sundays. That would help a lot to limit sound pollution. For example, my neighbour, the Multi-purpose Industrial Co-operative Society (MICS), a village undertaking which produces yarn from cotton, often works till twelve



(continued on p. 7)

Working with Wood

AUROVILLE'S CARPENTERS
SPEAK



Wood. Green, black, yellow, brown, red. Soft, tough, spiky, hard, smooth, rough. It provides shelter, building material, fuel. We use it to create our base: we sit on it, eat from it, sleep on it. It gets planted, cut, burned, revered, destroyed. Trees with soft green spring foliage, clusters of soft smelling summer flowers, yellow-maroon autumn leaves. Trees for climbing, for building huts, for carving initials in when you are in love, for shade, trees for hugging, trees to grow old under: We need them, they need us.

Auroville in 1968 was a barren land-

scape with lone banyans, palmyras and cashew trees scattered like pebbles on the sand. Now, thirty years later, over two million trees have been planted. What was on its way to becoming a desert is now a green oasis which provides firewood for many local villagers and timber for crafting some of Auroville's furniture.

In building the city, carpentry always has been an important element. Hundreds of local village carpenters, with or without formal training, using ancient hand-operated tools, have been involved in making the doors, windows, roofs, tables and chairs of Auroville's

houses, since prefabricated building materials were not available in this corner of the world and are only now beginning to make their appearance. Quality was low, technical know-how absent.

To meet the growing need for quality products, Takshanalaya, Auroville's first carpentry workshop, was started in the early '70s by Ben, a Dutch Aurovillian. A large structure in an almost barren landscape at a community called Revelation provided space for 40 carpenters and helpers.

Tired of working with employees, Ben started another workshop in Kottakarai at his own house, working

by himself. Later on he was joined by two carpenters from the village, and this was the beginning of Decauram.

At present Auroville has around seven carpentry workshops. Most of these use locally grown wood, sometimes even types of wood which aren't traditionally used for carpentry.

Today, Auroville produces furniture of excellent quality, and other wooden items like bowls, toys, massage rollers, lamp stands. In addition, two workshops specialize in restoring and replicating antique furniture.

Here we take a look at some of Auroville's carpentry workshops.

Forest Carpentry

Diego, a tall blonde Swiss, lives in the green belt community of Samridhhi, and this is where he established his Forest Carpentry unit. "When I came to Auroville in 1981, I first stayed at Aurodam. In those days people living in the Centre area were supposed to work on the Matrimandir. But, although I'm originally a mason, I had become allergic to cement. I realised then that I didn't want to work with cement again. And that the alternative for me was working with wood!

"My first experience of working with wood was when, together with Francois from Meadow, we built the first Cretan sailcloth windmill, using locally available material like eucalyptus wood and canvas, and granite for the foundation. Over six subsequent years we built about ten of these beautiful windmills and erected them in Auroville. They required a lot of maintenance, and that was like sailing a ship: one had to go up those twenty-metre high towers and open or close the sails, especially when a storm came in the middle of the night. Eventually a much more high-tech steel windmill replaced all of those Cretans.

"I continued working with wood, but began making things like food cupboards, stools and tables. At that time there wasn't any carpentry workshop in Auroville

except Decauram and if you did not employ a carpenter yourself, you had no choice but to buy ready-made furniture in Pondy."

Looking for Diego's workshop is like a treasure hunt through the thick forest of Samridhhi in the North-East corner of Auroville. The only sign that you're approaching his workshop is the occasional high pitched sound of electric drilling machines and the tapping sound of chisels on wood.

"I don't want to establish an industry here in Samridhhi," he says. "This place is first and foremost a forest and a farm and should remain so. And any cutting of trees is done in the spirit of creating a long-term forest. We always plant new trees again.

"In my unit I have about 15 carpenters, and for many years the work was all done by hand. Now we have a small generator to run some electric tools. From doing small carpentry work in the earlier days we now build whole houses. This makes it more interesting, because it includes masonry and all the other skills needed to build a house in more or less alternative ways.

"I try to use materials produced in Auroville like wood, mud bricks, shingles and all kinds of reusable old building materials, but one still cannot get around using some steel, cement, plastics etc. The less we bring from outside the better.

"90% of all wood we use in the workshop comes from Auroville. For the last fifteen years, the forest of Auroville has supplied substantial amounts of 'Work' tree, an exotic species called *Acacia auriculiformis* imported from Australia. It has turned out to be an excellent timber that looks like teak and which is good for all

kinds of carpentry work. If we could process it a bit more efficiently with a good sawmill in Auroville we could supply our city with a well-stocked store of milled and seasoned timber."

Diego works mostly for Auroville. "We did some work outside, but in my experience it's more difficult, because people outside Auroville want work to be done fast and cheap as well as of good quality and nice. But fast and cheap cannot go together with good and nice.

"We have to find out which of the wood which we have here in Auroville is suitable for carpentry use. "Transformation" (Indian Cork Tree), for instance, is quite a nice wood. The *Enterolobium* tree is amongst the biggest trees in Auroville and has been considered useless until recently, but it's turned out to be a very hard timber. The *Khaya senegalensis* (African Mahogany) once cut has a tendency to bend like crazy and doesn't look at all like mahogany. Probably it takes a long growing time to become a real timber. We try to use any kind of wood. In India there is not much scientific information on this subject. We are discovering all this by ourselves, and it is very interesting.

"The forests are the true wealth of Auroville. Afforestation work doesn't require huge financial resources. It needs people on the land to plant and maintain and protect the forest. Auroville now has the experi-

ence, knowledge, professionalism and capability to handle huge afforestation projects in the region with the aim of creating a long-term forest. One day, when all the timber that we've planted—like teak, ebony and rosewood—are mature, we may be able to carve wood again like in the beautiful old Chettiyar houses in the south of Tamil Nadu."

Tineke

Diego in front of his woodshed



Decauram

Decauram is one of Auroville's first carpentry workshops, presently managed by long-time Aurovilians Jan and Andy, both former Matrimandir workers. Jan was always interested in carpentry. He used to have a small one-man workshop in his community, Newlands. Andy used to make shuttering for the Matrimandir concretings together with Jan, just enough to get somewhat familiar with wood.

When Jan joined Decauram he never had any intention of running the show, but the people in charge left and he found himself having to manage the workshop. "The atmosphere is quite nice here", he feels. "Most of the carpenters from the village have been here for a long time."

Andy joined the unit about three years ago. He had just returned from a job in the UK. "One morning I ran into Jan

who was looking for someone to help him with the office work. That's when I started working there. And I've never regretted it!"

Decauram is known for its range of products like lamp stands, wind chimes, wooden bowls and spoons which are sold in their main outlet, the Auroville Boutique. This covers about 40% of their production. The other 60% of the work is very much service-oriented, like repairing furniture, fixing mosquito screens in front of windows, etc. They also make built-in kitchen cabinets or beautifully crafted furniture to order. They no longer display their furniture at the Visitors Centre's Crafts Exhibition Room above the Boutique. Jan explains: "If you display furniture, it is likely to get damaged. Most visitors think everything can be touched. They even scratch the wood with their fingernails! It also requires a lot

of investment for us. And our customers prefer to come straight to the workshop."

Because there are several carpentry workshops in Auroville now, there is increasing competition. Andy: "People find our prices quite high. They don't realize how much work and time goes into perfection. A table is not just a few pieces of wood nailed together! Even though we have sufficient work, it is a bit of a struggle to make ends meet. We recently invested in buying planing machines, and in the near future we will have to improve our infrastructure. What we like about Decau-



Decauram furniture (photos Decauram)

ram is that all the people involved benefit in one way or the other. The employees all have a steady job, they get training, they get their provident fund, it covers two Aurovilians to a certain extent and we make nice things!"

Tineke



Jan at Decauram workshop, Kottakarai

Roland

Winding down the tree-lined road that takes you to Kottakarai, you slide past the Bakery and, 20 meters beyond, find a carpentry workshop. If you look more closely you will also discover a modest thatched hut set high above the ground. These are the workplace and living quarters of Roland.

Roland, 40, comes from Germany. He first became acquainted with Auroville in 1979, but only came to live here more than ten years later. "I never had a very special idea of what I wanted to do. I came and then I wanted to find how to fit in," he says. "I became interested in carpentry when I was 24, 25. I did a three-year apprenticeship. But even as a child, I grew up hearing the sound of drilling machines and circular saws because my grandfather and uncle were joiners."

After his apprenticeship, Roland worked for a few companies in Germany, but he didn't like it. "The atmosphere is rough—rough talking, rough drinking. When I travelled with the company, it was always the same—gossiping and drinking. There was nothing else to do at night."

Now, his one-man workshop, stuffed with wood and an absence of chatter, is his refuge. Here, he can work at his own pace and create the furniture of his imagination. "People come to me with ideas, but I like to create from my own designs," Roland says. His work is high quality, low-tech and takes time. He doesn't use nails, but brings his pieces together with wooden joints. His pleasure comes from working with the special qualities of wood. "It's not as hard as metal. It has a much softer vibra-

tion. When you shape it, you know you are working with living matter. Sometimes, there's a resistance—it has a life of its own. It makes it interesting, somehow." Roland uses very few tools, doing almost everything by hand.

"In the West, it's all so mechanized. And you have to work fast. It's never fast enough. There's always overtime, every day. When they hire you, they tell you this rightaway. Here, the rhythm is different. Doing it more slowly, it takes at least twice, maybe three times as long. I even do my finishing by hand. It's also backbreaking," he adds wryly.

TALKING WOOD

"The wood here is mainly hardwood. The wood of the 'Work' tree is tough. And sometimes there's a problem because the grains run in different directions. Another nice wood is 'Patauk', a red wood. It's very red. When I'm covered with wood dust and sweat it looks like I'm bleeding! Some types of old wood are nice to work with—beams from old demolished buildings, made out of teak or 'Pillaimadu' or 'Kalimadu' or 'Vengai'—but you don't find them so easily anymore. Now, the more costly wood is usually imported from Burma.

"Sometimes I buy second-hand wood. It's better for furniture, because it's heavy, durable, with better grains. Jackfruit is also good. It's not so heavy and has a nice colour. It looks good."

Buying wood from Pondy is sometimes a problem. "The plywood is not so good," he says. "The boards are not all the same quality or size." Finding good workers has also been difficult. "There are not so many people interested in manual work. This is a



Roland by his planing table, Kottakarai

problem. If you do this kind of work, you need to apply yourself full-time, not just four or five hours a day.

As to design, even the better local carpenters are using designs from the 1950s. Just recently, I got a catalogue from a new French furniture shop in Pondy making mass-produced furniture—desks and such—using cheap particle board. It looks clean and modern, but the designs are from the 1970s and there's no wood in their pieces!"

"This work is important to me, and people seem to appreciate the quality. I get many more orders than I can fill. I do only furniture and work with a handful of clients. This way, with less clients, I can concentrate fully on the task. I have to be physically fit to do two, three days of planing work. But I like it. I identify with it.

You can see, my house is not as nice as my workshop!"

Roland makes tea in a small kitchen next to the workshop. Another Aurovillian, Carlos, is there to make a bed for himself. We sip our tea, surrounded by the smell of wood shavings and dust. "When I had more workers," Roland says, "I didn't like it. All the time, you have to do the accounts. I had very little time to do something myself. I found you can either be a manager or a craftsman. And the craft is important to me. Sometimes, it's a question of a half millimeter—you can see the mistakes immediately in carpentry. It's also a question of balance: to find a balance between doing for myself what is fun and what I do for a living. I'm all the time balancing between the two."

Interview by Jill

The New Dawn

Ricardo, from Cordoba, Argentina, joined Auroville almost two years ago. He's been a carpenter for the past fifteen years and, before that, an airline pilot. In Auroville, he spent six months working on the Surrender residential project, supervising 15 employees. "It was a very nice experience," he says. "I learnt to work with Tamil people and also with other Aurovilians. I learned a lot about the Tamils: about their skills and

Ricardo (left) and Dhanasu at The New Dawn.



their life. They don't respond at all to arrogance; I get much better results with sweetness and patience. And they are really proud working with the new techniques I taught them, such as how to use a planer, a rotor, or a planing table.

"My present workshop The New Dawn is in Kottakarai village. I rented a house there, and kept the best people who worked with me in Surrender: five carpenters in all; two from Kulapalayam and three from Edayanchavadi. We make all kinds of things: furniture, tables, cupboards, doors, chairs. Sometimes people come to me with a design, and sometimes they trust me to design something. It's nice to have the opportunity to create.

"In Argentina, I made furniture from recycled wood. I had stopped working with rain forest wood because of the large-

scale deforestation that's happening there. Rain forest trees take hundreds of years to grow, unlike the 'Work' tree here, which takes only fifteen years. But some of the wood I use, like red cedar and cong, is also banned in some countries because of over-cutting. I would like to stop using banned wood, but what can I do now?

"I enjoy working with my hands. With your hands, you're close to the wood. You can be precise and can give a better finish. You can get many shapes by hand that you can't get with machines. But the customers

have to be patient. People don't realise how much time it takes to make furniture. In the monsoon you face problems with things like transport or electricity; sandpaper and other finishing products become unreliable. You have to make a fire and dry everything out first.

"One day I hope to have a chance to teach carpentry to young Aurovilians. But for that, you have to have enough space and work so that young people can learn."

Interview by Jill

Bommayur

Just a short walk away from Decauram lies Bommayur. Once this carpentry workshop made beautiful wooden toys, but at the moment it produces wood pieces for hammock chairs. Siegfried, a newcomer, is its manager.

"In Germany I used to be a businessman with my own shop. At one point I was so fed up with having to deal with profit margins, banks, and personnel, that I decided to leave the country. I was tired of the grey houses and the grey people in Berlin. A few years ago my wife and I came to India. It was almost love at first sight. I felt immediately that this was a country where I could see myself living one day. Then we came across Auroville and it was: yes, this is the place! So finally in January this year we came here as newcomers. I just came to the toy factory to do some carpentry work which is my hobby, and now I find myself in a manager's job again!"

Bommayur is a carpentry workshop very well equipped with modern machinery—one of the best in Auroville, accord-

ing to Siegfried. "We are making these wood pieces for hammock chairs, mainly for a German customer. But I'm also looking for other carpentry work. We've started making a few food cupboards and tables for Aurovilians, and we're trying to make wooden bowls. This job is totally new for me. I know less than the people working here, just the reverse of my managerial role in Germany. They have to teach me everything, but I've learned already so much in a few months. In the future I would like to expand our production, and even make a small show room. If people have ideas, I welcome them.

"We are right now building a new storeroom with space for an office. Once that is finished, I would like to start on the garden, plant a few fruit trees, and maybe some vegetables. And lots of flowers.

"I love it here. The place is beautifully located, next to the open fields of 'Windarra'. Every evening before going home, I watch the sunset from the roof. And then I realize that I am happy, very happy to be here!"

Tineke

Vinayakashakti

"I was 14 when I joined a technical college in France. In 1968, I got my B. Tech in carpentry/cabinet-making, and I started to work in a small company. Soon after, a master artisan asked me to work with him, and I stayed with him for four years. Then, in April 1972, I left for Auroville."

Paul Vincent is talking about his early days as a carpenter. It is a Sunday morning, and I have found Paul comfortably seated in his house in Centre Field with his family all around him. He continues:

"In Auroville I soon started a company at Takshanalaya, the huge carpentry workshop which had been built by Dutchman Ben. We had up to 40 carpenters, working 95% for Auroville. But in May, 1976, in order to continue, I was asked by Navajata, chairman of the Sri Aurobindo Society, to legally register the workshop in a trust under the Society's control. I accepted under threat of visa cancellation. But when I explained this agreement at a Pour Tous meeting, I was told it was better to refuse and fight it out with the S.A.S. In the end, closing the workshop rather than being a servant of the S.A.S. was the only solution. Mind you, the Trust offer was attractive,

but I chose to be in the middle of this battle against the S.A.S.

"I continued a carpentry service for Aurovilians, working with a few people, but I had to stop for financial reasons. After that, there was a long gap until 1995. Eventually I decided to create my own small workshop because I was mainly interested in working for Aurovilians.

"I started next to my own house in Centre Field, but it was not the proper place for a workshop. In October 1997, I moved to Horizon. Now I'm doing work for Auroville, for the Caring Service, Prosperity—for Aurovilians. I have nine people: four carpenters, four helpers, one painter. I have no intention of becoming a big unit. It is rather a service. I charge a lower rate for those who cannot afford to pay much.

"Carpentry is creative work—you create with your hand and your mind. I think it is important that we put a proper value in our schools on the work people do with their hands. I like Roland's work very much, for instance. It's beautiful work. He puts much more of himself into his work



than I do. My capacity is more to create the design and the finishing and see to the quality of the work. I have no problem selling my work. People are quite happy with it. The only problem I have is with the timing. I have trouble delivering on time. I know it and I'm trying to change. It's not easy. We depend on outside transport and workers and unreliable electricity. The workshop is basic and we have no financial support for investments. Often, I face a lack of stock and basic equipment. Still, I'm able to create some objects such as furniture which are appreciated."

"Until recently I was working mostly with wood from Auroville, but due to the high cost, I am now obliged to buy elsewhere. The quality is reliable and overall



Two tables made by Vinayakashakti workshop (photos by Paul)

it's cheaper. It's also dry and ready to be planed. Most Aurovilian carpenters now buy wood from the local timber merchant, which is a shame, but it's because we're not properly organised.

"We have to organise ourselves and create a store for construction material, to purchase everything in bulk. We should cut all the wood in our own sawmill and it should be subsidised. How else are we going to build a city?!"

"To realise this idea, we need an investment of 30, 40 lakhs. Then we can purchase directly from the factories, the way Pour Tous operates now. It can be done—why not? The money is here, it's a decision we all have to make. If we don't do it in Auroville, somebody else will do it in a neighbouring village. Then forget it, it will be too late.

"I guess we have spent more than 50 crores in the last 20 years building in Auroville. About twenty crores have gone into hardware, paint, wood, all that. Economically, 10% of that has been wasted on personal transport to and from Pondy. Figure it out. We could save a lot if we had a central store."

Paul shows me a small, decorative table he has made. It is a beautiful, classic design and is most suitable for holding a vase of flowers. "There are two kinds of wood here," he says. "The round top is of Patauk wood and the base is Work Tree." We go into his children's room and there is a small, bright yellow chair with a sunny, smiling face on the back. "I made this kind of chair on order for a children's hospital." And he smiles. "It's nice, no?"

Interview by Jill

The World Cup came belatedly to Auroville for a week at the end of October, when a good portion of the community came daily to Certitude to watch or play something akin to the global game of football. It's been a long time since Certitude had such a gathering of people—and it was good to see some life added to the otherwise monotonous games of ping-pong that happen every day just across from the sports field. In fact, the tournament was worth it if only for the comment of one of our politicians who, in non-conspiratorial mode for once, noted, "What you have to write is that this is much more important for human unity than any CIRHU PAPERS."

This first-ever inter-Auroville tournament brought together 114 players from all corners of the community to make up ten teams of seven a side (plus substitutes). And with crowds of 60+ every day, this was by far the single biggest adult sporting event ever.

Most of the teams, with typical Aurovillian modesty, named themselves after the great football clubs of the world. After five days of battling it out, P.S.V. Eindhoven easily made the top spot in Group A. Strong in defense, and with a goalie who eventually won "the player of the competition award", there was no one to challenge them. They were followed by Liverpool who, after an initial good showing, lost impetus when the cow of their star striker died and he missed a crucial

match. In Group B three teams—Real Madrid, Boca Junior and Aurozidane—were vying for second place behind Ajax, a team packed with young Tamil boys who generally ran twice as much as anybody else, and barefootedly outshone most of the regular Sunday stars.

While some of those players might have made a new name for themselves, others ended their football careers. Though none so dramatically as Juval, from the team that wistfully called themselves 'Boca Junior' (they were all the wrong side of forty). Needing a three goal win to make the next round, it was time for the Bocas (or "Tatas" as the crowd had renamed them after the Tamil for "grandfather") to do something as drastic as attacking. It was an all or nothing situation for the Tatas, and Juval, one of the few Tatas with spirit, was determined not to lose. However by the time, to everyone's horror, he refractured his leg his team was already one goal down due to a back pass which, travelling with minimal velocity, slipped through Jerome's legs.

The first semi-final on Sunday morning was

a strange combination of sleepiness and hesitancy. Real Madrid looked as if they might get the better of P.S.V. Eindhoven, until a beautifully struck own goal ended Madrid's hopes. Meanwhile Ajax cruised through their match against Liverpool, for whom the bovine trauma still hung in the air. The afternoon's final proved a bit of an anticlimax: both teams were tired from the morning's semi-finals, and were too worried to push forward and lose the game to a counter-attack. It was the only game of the whole tournament to end at 0-0 even after extra-time, and so it was off to the penalty box for the bit of excitement that the game had hitherto lacked. What ensued was a penalty shoot-out right out of some bizarre Italian final. The unlikely candidate Enea struck first for P.S.V. Eindhoven, netting the ball in the upper-right corner. Then Ajax shot completely over the goal, something they managed to repeat, with admirable consistency, three more times.

At the ensuing celebration all the medals were awarded. And Certitude settled down again to another year of ping-pong.



Industrial Zone (continued from p.3)

o'clock at night and sometimes also on Sundays. Their attempts to limit their noise have not been quite successful, and it would be much better if they would stop working overtime. If we really don't want this area to become a dead Zone but one with residents, then the living atmosphere has to be protected."

GOODWILL

Would it do, then, to create regulations for those who wish to settle in the Industrial Zone? So far there are none. Once the building permission has been issued, the workshop executive is free to do what s/he feels is right. "Essentially this is OK," says Vonne, "but only in so far as the executive is aware of and takes responsibility for the impact of his workshop on the environment and on the quality of the life of the residents of the Zone. Some of them do, but often they forget and then the freedom is taken for granted and used only for the benefit of production. It requires a lot of goodwill."

Goodwill, then, is the major ingredient for a successful development of the Industrial Zone. Amrit: "Auroville goes at times through rough phases where people believe that ignoring the other person or abusing others because they have a different point of view is going to help to solve the problem. Some people have a tendency to be very judgmental and there is a lot of harsh, often completely unwarranted, criticism of individuals, industrial units and working groups. The community has done itself a tremendous disservice by allowing this type of criticism free expression. Many competent and qualified individuals now refuse to join working groups, simply because there is too much free targeting and abuse going on. Gratitude or appreciation or even respect for a professional opinion seem to have no place. But as long as we cannot come together and try to create a supportive attitude we will not get anywhere. One has the right to criticise and demand transparency. But severe criticism is self-destructive and only hardens the opposition. The more you exclude people, the more you delay the very thing you want to bring about: openness, transparency and discussion, although seemingly slow and often painful, are the only way towards a secure future."

Carel

Shuttle-SCM Merger/Gateway Trust

On October 22nd 1998, an agreement was signed between Shuttle Technology Group Ltd., and SCM Microsystems covering a company merger. Shuttle's head office is located at Wokingham near London. Its subsidiary in Auroville is headed by Ulli.

As a consequence of this merger the shareholders and employees from Shuttle have received shares and options in SCM Microsystems. Ulli has offered a sizeable portion of the shares assigned to him to Auroville to support projects centred around Education, Communication and Community Building. The initial number of shares made available to Auroville will be about 11,000, valued at approximately US \$ 500,000. More shares may become available in future. Ulli has requested a special trust called Gateway Trust to be created under the Auroville Foundation to manage the donation.

Aurelec

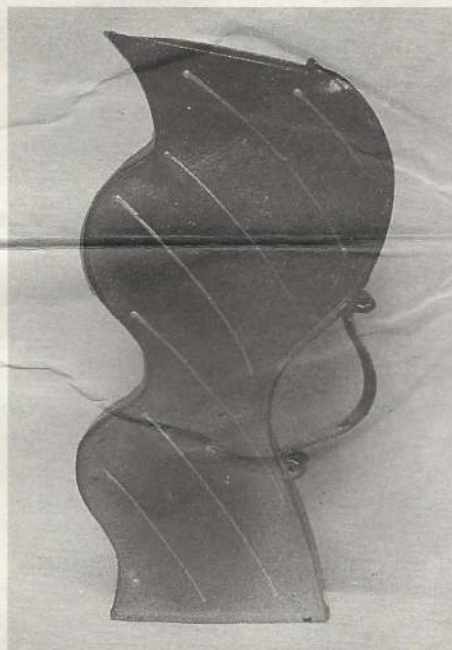
After years of struggle the various disputes regarding Aurelec have finally been settled. The stories are too complex to be recounted. Suffice it to say that the mediation effort under the guidance of the senior Madras lawyer Sriram Panchu, which lasted for two days, finally resulted in the agreement that the old trustees will resign, that new trustees have been appointed and that all court cases will be stopped. In addition, Ulli offered his entire shareholding in Nexus to Auroville. It is hoped this development will end the strife and bitterness which have surrounded Aurelec for many, many years and will usher in a more harmonious future.

Auroville potters exhibit

Small jugs, large jugs, funny jugs, crazy-shaped jugs, some of them looking like anything but a jug, were exhibited in Pitanga in early November. They were made by four of Auroville's potters, Anamika, Chinmayi and Kratu. At the end of November almost all the Auroville potters participated in the "All-India Studio Potters' Exhibiton" in New Delhi.

Exhibition of Savitri illustrations

In 1961, The Mother began working with a



One of Michel's jugs shown at the pottery exhibition

young Gujarati sadhika, Huta, on illustrating Sri Aurobindo's poem *Savitri*. Mother and Huta would meditate together upon the chosen lines until an image emerged, and then Mother would sketch it. Huta would then, on the basis of the sketch, make a painting of the image. In all, Huta produced 468 paintings to illustrate the epic.

Thirty of these pictures illustrating the first five cantos of Book One, along with Mother's sketches for them, were exhibited in a special exhibition in Pitanga last month, marking the fourth anniversary of the Savitri Bhavan project.

New slide show

On the evening of 15th November, there was the first public viewing in Auroville of a beautiful new slide show, The Genius of India, about the spiritual and cultural heritage of India based upon texts of Sri Aurobindo. The slide show, which was created by Aurovillians, had already been shown to enthusiastic audiences in the Indian International Centre in Delhi.

AV farms increase output

In spite of setbacks suffered by our biggest farms because of the TNEB tariff hike, Auroville farms produced 5,163 more kilos of fruit last year than the previous year, and 2,326 more

kilos of grains and pulses.

Cuisine Solaire

The Solar Kitchen announced it served its 200,000th meal in November. Many congratulations to all who have made this possible!

Auroville Calendar 1999

Like last year, the Auroville Fundraising Group developed next year's calendar to raise awareness and funds to purchase the remaining land for Auroville. The theme chosen for the calendar, illustrated by 12 photos taken by John Mandeem, is Auroville as an emerging city.

In Auroville, the calendar is available at Pour Tous, the Boutique d'Auroville and the Wild Seagull for Rs. 175.

Copies can be ordered in India by cheque or DD in favour of "CSR Main - Auroville Calendar" sent to Auroville Calendar, CSR Office, Auroshilpam, Auroville TN 605 101 (phone: 0413 622168/622277; fax: 0413 622057; e-mail: csr@auroville.org.in). Please add Rs. 25 for packing and postage. Outside India, copies are available with the various AVI Centres.

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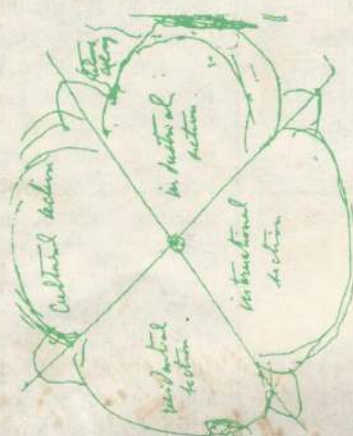
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KRISHNA TEWARI
AUROMODELE
AUROVILLE

Exp. # 121

December 1998
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Restarting the clock of Evolution...

an interview with Alan Watson

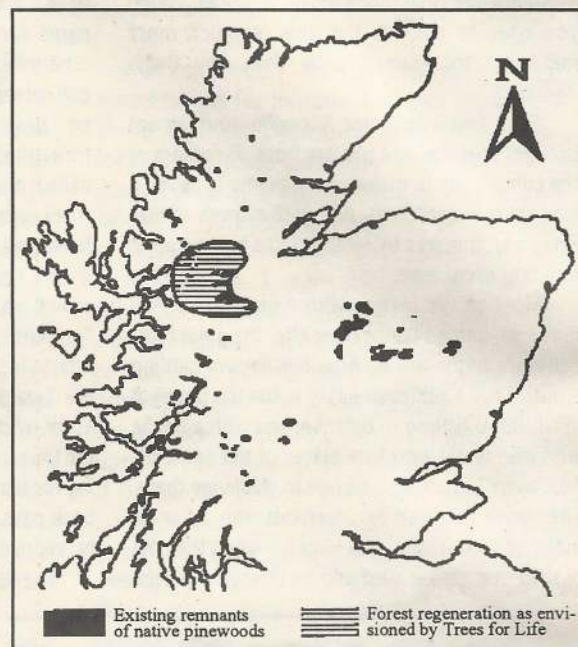
Alan Watson is a member of the Findhorn community in Scotland. He is also the founder of "Trees for Life", an organisation dedicated to the regeneration of Scotland's natural forests. Alan first visited Auroville in 1985. Recently he revisited and gave a number of slide presentations of his work to enthusiastic audiences.

"I've always had a connection with trees and nature. I went to live in Findhorn because I wanted to work with nature, and I spent my first four years there working in the gardens before I became involved with the Foundation's education programme. Then, in 1985, I began visiting this place called Glen Affric, one of the last remnants of the Caledonian Forest. I felt the call of the land there, a land that was crying out for healing. At the same time I felt called to visit Auroville, largely because of what I had read about your reforestation work. I came and stayed seven weeks, working in Shakti nursery with Walter and Tina. Seeing what you'd achieved I was inspired: I felt that if it was possible to bring back the forest here in Auroville, it was possible to do the same in Scotland.

"The Caledonian Forest originally covered much of the Highlands of Scotland as a vast primeval wilderness of trees, mosses and lichens which was home to animals like the wild boar, beaver, lynx, brown bear and wolf. Deforestation actually began thousands of years ago, so the Scots are pioneers in this! More recently large areas of forest were felled to satisfy the needs of the timber industry, and the widespread introduction of sheep and a large increase in the numbers of red deer ensured that the forest, once cleared, was never able to return. Today only about 1% of the original forest survives in isolated pockets, and all the large mammals, with the exception of the deer, are extinct in this region. Evolution in this part of Scotland has run into a brick wall.

"The aim of the Trees for Life organisation is to start the clock of evolution ticking again in this part of the world. We are trying to reassemble the biological components which we know were there in the original forest, and then to let nature do the rest. Already we have fenced about 300 hectares of land to protect seedlings from the deer and we've planted around 250,000 trees. There's a good chance that the European beaver will be reintroduced in the near future. The wolf would be the next logical candidate, although I recognise that this will require a massive educational campaign to allay people's superstitious fears. Our overall vision is of a protected wild forest covering 600 square miles, for large mammals like the brown bear require huge habitats.

"From the beginning of the project we've had close links with Auroville: it's as if the two projects have been cross-pollinating each other. For example, our first baseline data was provided by an Edinburgh University student, Paul Blanchflower, who subsequently came to live in Auroville. Working with us he learned about the



importance of planting native trees. Now he is one of the champions of indigenous tree-planting in Auroville. Subsequently other Aurovilians have also helped us plant and fence in Glen Affric.

"But there are other links between Auroville and Findhorn, for the work that they are doing has global as well as local relevance. In fact, I think they are the pioneers for what will be the major task of humanity in the next century, which is that of restoring the earth. At present, the thrust of Western culture is what I call the enslavement of the planet; it is trying to take over every square inch and use it. This is a recipe for total breakdown—economic, social, ecological. Most of the present environmental campaigns involve trying to stop the environmental destruction. This is essential. But even if all the destruction stopped tomorrow it wouldn't be enough: for we've also got to engage in massive ecological restoration to correct the present imbalance.

"I have this idea. I'd like to get the United Nations declare the 21st century the Century of Restoring the Earth, because only something on this scale will allow us to access the large-scale funding we would need to accomplish this task. As a start, I would like to see 10% of every nation's military budget allocated for this purpose...

"Ultimately, however, the only way we can reverse our appropriation of the planet's resources is by simply doing with less, and handing back to the tiger in India and to the forest in Scotland chunks of land which will enable them to survive and prosper. And here Auroville and Findhorn have an incredible role to play, not only because of their model restoration work but also because both communities are trying to live more simply, more sustainably on the Earth.

"The challenge is enormous. But I'm optimistic that we will succeed in turning the present disastrous situation around."

From an interview by Alan



Another face of Auroville.... from last year's Christmas fair. (Photo: Ireno)