

AUROVILLE TODAY

Number 124, May 1999

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Top left: barren land near Utility
Right: erosion control by bunding
Below: Invocation apartments in the
Residential Zone
Photos: Carel

Within the space of one week in March, two separate seminars were held in Auroville on the land. One centred on the need to secure the remaining land that is still required, the other on evolving a land-use pattern and Master Plan for the land already acquired. Why this sudden concentration upon land issues? Because as land prices in the Auroville area continue to increase, and as the Auroville area becomes a more and more desirable place to live, there has been a dramatic increase in land speculation and in unwanted development both within and on the periphery of Auroville, thereby threatening the integrity of its future development.

The seminars, then, were not only designed to concentrate Aurovilians' minds upon the challenges, but also to come up with practical proposals for dealing with them. In the next pages we report on the presentations, discussions and proposals generated by this unique community-wide focus on land issues.



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Towards a land use plan

In 1994, the Development Group presented a paper for a future Master Plan that gave details of the four zones of the city, the crown road and the radials connecting the zones, and defined the Green Belt (see AVT #64). Five years down the road, considerable development has taken place in the Residential Zone and sections of the crown road and a couple of radials have been established. Simultaneously however, urban speculators have bought up chunks of land that lie within Auroville's Green Belt. It was this concern about the sale of

land within the Auroville area to outside developers that led the Development Group to call a two-day seminar in March as the "first session of a concerted effort to draw up a Land Use Plan ... for presentation to the Governing Board in August."

"A Land Use Plan," as defined by Lalit Bhati, a visiting town planner, (see accompanying article) in the introductory session of the workshop, "is the main part of a Master Plan that shows how the land is reserved for specific purposes. The Master Plan is a document that specifies the zoning, infrastructure, density and other rele-

vant regulations required to achieve a planned growth. While the Galaxy Plan shows zoning, density control and broad circulation patterns, a complete land use plan needs to have more details, especially about the physical infrastructure. A proper land use plan can be made into a legal document as the Auroville Foundation Act empowers the Residents Assembly to formulate a Master Plan and the Governing Board to approve the same. Having an approved land use plan for Auroville, we could request the authorities concerned to protect the land for Auroville that has not

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yet been bought from speculation and unwanted development, asking for a Special Area Development Authority status.

"The Special Area Development Authority Status is a recognition by the Government that a given place has certain valued characteristics which need to be preserved from any possible damage. For instance, the city of Hardwar, which is sacred to Hindus, has a special status forbidding the sale of meat and liquor in the city. Similarly, there is a possibility for Auroville to obtain Government protection on the basis of Auroville's educational value (given the fact that Auroville is meant to be a "living laboratory"), its environmental value (given the immense work Auroville has done in environmental reclamation and conservation), or simply under a new category, given its unique character as an international township dedicated to human unity."

A long discussion ensued on ways to seek legal protection. Certain inherent complexities regarding the status of Auroville were pointed out. For example, Ashok Chatterjee, a former member of the Governing Board, observed the catch-22 situation that while Auroville owes its present legal status to the Central Government on the basis of the Auroville Foundation Act passed by the Indian Parliament, the land itself is under the jurisdiction of the Tamil Nadu State Government. To this, Navroz, a noted environmental activist, added that "according to the Master Plan of the Tamil Nadu Government, the land in and around Auroville is designated as agricultural, which essentially means that it should not be used for urban development." In the light of these remarks, it was generally accepted that, along with the Central Government, the Tamil Nadu Government should be kept informed about Auroville's developmental plans. A special working group has recently been formed to pursue this matter and look into



City on the way? Prayathna residential area, with shared water tank in the background

the possibilities by which legal protection for the land of Auroville can be obtained.

The status of the villages situated in the projected Green Belt area of Auroville was another important issue that came up on the first day of the seminar. So far there has been no clarity concerning the relationship that Auroville will have with the villages that lie within its immediate vicinity, and that have a combined population of about 10,000 people. At the seminar representatives of diverse groups among others spoke of the need of cooperation and mutual growth with the villagers. This is no easy challenge, given the cultural and economic differences between Auroville and the villages. However, the immense strides that the community has already taken in providing employment, health, education and social benefits to the villagers was pointed out. Apart from the environmental and developmental work done by various village-related Auroville groups, the community of Auroville provides employment to more than 40% of the working population of the closest villages. "This in itself," said Professor Henk Thomas, Chairman of the Dutch foundation Stichting de Zaaier and

an invitee at the seminar, "is a salient point to be taken up with the Government." In 1984, barely 15 years ago, a Government official had reported that the land was so badly eroded that the inhabitants would be forced to vacate it in the future. Auroville has successfully reversed this trend and thus has earned the right, in Henk's words, "to ask the Government to secure, in some way, the land it needs for its development."

Other issues taken up in the seminar covered land-use patterns in the Green Belt, the canyons and other ecologically sensitive areas, the development of infrastructure in the city area, access and bypass roads, and the need to define and protect areas owned by Auroville outside the city area such as the beaches, the so-called "key-hole" areas (tracts of Auroville land to the East and the West) and the outlying settlements of Annapurna and Hermitage. Those knowledgeable in each of these fields voiced their concerns and plans for development. For instance, Jaap, as representative of the Green Group, spoke about the need for re-establishing a building code in the Green Belt, acknowledging that, now that the forests have been established, many of those living there have taken up other activities. The acute need for promot-

ing sustainable agriculture was also recognized: Jaap pointed out that, taking into account the varying fertility of the land, the western part of the Green Belt should be reserved for agriculture, and the possibility of establishing farms outside the designated Green Belt should not be ignored. Concern was expressed for ecologically sensitive areas such as the Success canyon which, given the limitations of funds, were not a priority in terms of land purchase. On the topic of access, Jan of the Development Group pointed out that over 80 trucks and heavy vehicles passed through Auroville every day, and spoke of the preliminary meeting that he had had with the Chief Town Planner of Pondicherry to identify suitable bypass roads.

The concluding sessions of the seminar witnessed the setting up of twelve separate working groups to examine in detail various issues that had come up, such as our relationship to the local villages, the development of our infrastructure etc. Participants volunteered to serve in one or of more of these working groups, to seek the necessary input of other individuals and the community, and to come up with proposals that could be incorporated into the land-use plan. The work of these groups would be coordinated by the Development Group, which in two months would call another seminar to present their findings to the community. It is hoped that through this process a preliminary land-use plan, as well as a plan for a phased development of Auroville, could be presented to the Governing Board in August.

Last but not least, in contrast to earlier fractious arguments in the community about the Galaxy town plan, this seminar was marked by an atmosphere of goodwill and cooperation. Aurovilians seemed to finally recognize that they needed to transcend their individual preferences and work together in order to protect our young city against the growing threat from speculation and unwanted development.

Bindu

Planning the town

An interview with Lalit

Lalit Kishor Bhati is an architect with a Masters Degree in Urban and Regional Planning from the Centre for Environmental Planning & Technology (CEPT), Ahmedabad. Lalit became acquainted with Auroville while doing a case study on its industries and economy in 1997 in the context of developing the Master Plan of Sri Mayapur, a temple town promoted by the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) in West Bengal. Intrigued by the concept of Auroville, Lalit joined the team at Auroville's Future for a few weeks in the capacity of a town planner. Auroville Today interviewed him about his work.

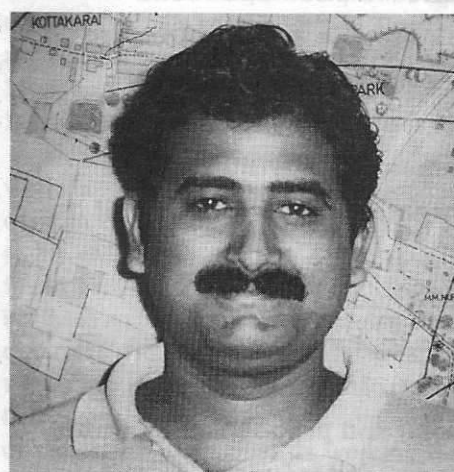
AVT: What is entailed in the formulation of a Master Plan?

Lalit: A Master Plan for a proposed town such as Mayapur or Auroville takes a lot of planning to ensure that development takes place in keeping with the aims and ideals of the town. For the Mayapur town plan, ISKCON hired a team of six planners

specialised in urban and regional planning, in environmental planning and housing, as well as eight architects trained in urban design. This team was guided by two senior consultants, who rank among the best in India in the field of urban planning. Apart from this there were many other reputed professional and experienced people who helped us in different capacities, and in different stages of the planning. The core team worked full-time—and many of us overtime—for almost two years to produce the Master Plan of Mayapur.

What do you perceive to be the biggest challenge in preparing a land-use plan for Auroville?

If I may be honest, the biggest challenge is tackling the fear of the people here in accepting the concept of a city, be it the Galaxy plan or any other plan. I guess most Aurovilians hail from big cities in the West and their image of a city is negative. The concept of a garden city or a green city is something that cannot be visualized by most. It really is a question of communica-



Lalit

PHOTO: CAREL

tion or perhaps even more of semantics. I feel that half the problem would be solved if instead of calling it a city, we called Auroville an eco-village!

It is probably this fear which has fuelled opposition to town planning in the community, with the result that people here have not put in enough effort in this area. To begin with, Auroville must conduct professional surveys and do data compilation in almost all areas, for without a proper data base, decision-making is flawed, if not impossible. The preparation of a master plan is a complex task. It demands the utmost concentration and clarity to understand a particular community's vision and goals and to translate

Lalit: "If I may be honest, the biggest challenge is tackling the fear of the people here in accepting the concept of a city, be it the Galaxy plan or any other plan."

them into real projects in a planned manner.

Some people see planning as a very rigid and non-creative kind of profession but this is not true. We should not forget this: it is a natural extension of people's aspiration to live in a community which gave birth to city planning. Few cities in which great culture thrived began with a plan. They developed by a process of accretion—the growth was irregular in form, sensitive to changes in the habits of people, and dynamic in character. They began as free cities where men settled by voluntary choice.

Colonial cities founded by great states were given a pattern predetermined by a ruling authority. Within these various patterns we find similar social, economic and political habits and customs. As neither the presence nor the absence of geometrical form in cities can be seen to have defini-

7 tively shaped the society which inhabits them, Aurovilians, instead of fearing town planning, should be ready to experiment with different forms of community living.

The present sustainable approach to city planning completes a cycle in the history of urbanization and is a reaction against recent urbanization patterns which led to the breakdown of all systems, both natural and man-made. If we take the human settlement at Kahun in Egypt in 3000 BC as the first urban settlement in the history of mankind, then Auroville as an international and environment-friendly town—recognized by the Government and also international bodies like UNESCO—stands at the apex of 5,000 years in city building. It is absolutely unique in the

world and it demands unique solutions. There is very little expertise in this field of sustainable urbanization but, if creatively approached, planning could offer a set of guidelines for the city to grow and function in a sustainable manner. For it must experiment with and demonstrate sustainable solutions to the major problems of the world, and particularly those encountered in India.

Population and its relationship to land is one of these. Auroville has to address the issues involved with having a larger population and not just a tiny neighbourhood of less than 1500 residents. I know that some Aurovilians question this projected figure of 50,000, fearing a high per-capita density. But I wish Auroville would try and

accommodate at least this number, which in terms of cities is actually pretty small. For, being in India, Auroville should try to come up with feasible solutions in terms of urban density to the whole population problem that is plaguing not just the nation, but the whole of the South.

It's worth remembering that Auroville is a project for humanity and not just for a small group of individuals. The life span of a human being is short, but it takes centuries for cities to mature and for meaningful urban environments to be created. We should understand our role and limitations, and try our very best to hand this place over as safely and as beautifully as possible to future generations of Aurovilians.

Interview by Bindu

Securing the land for Auroville

On 14th March, about 55 people gathered at the Atithi Griha (Bharat Nivas) guest-house to explore how to give an even greater impetus to securing the remaining land that Auroville needs.

In the opening session, Meenakshi reminded us that many great souls have lived in this region of India and that there is still great spiritual power in this land. Then Murugesan from Kottakarai village shared his memories of how this land was before Auroville began. When land was first being purchased for Auroville the villagers "gave" the land for a very low price. Nowadays, he said, people have become greedy and demand more and more money for their land. Would the villagers be willing to work with Auroville to prevent speculators and developers moving in? He believed that if we could create a body which would define the area we would like to protect/secure and then discuss this and our concerns with the local panchayats, it would be possible to work something out.

During the next session, Aurovilians talked about their past and present relationship to the land we live on. One person regretted that his earlier close relationship to the land had become diluted over the years as other work was taken up. Another explained his very close relationship to the land by saying that for him the land is the clearest expression of Mother in matter.

At this point it was mentioned that many of us seem to have become more possessive regarding the land we live on or work, making it difficult, for example, for newcomers to find anywhere to build a house. Why has this happened? One suggestion was that while we have all come for "The Dream", we also have our own dreams and in our attempts to materialise them we become protective. Somebody else regretted that we couldn't freely move around, exchanging houses and living situations, because this might help break ownership patterns.

The session concluded with a reminder that Auroville was a place where the impossible becomes possible. A "miracle" happened once before when the pioneers restored a ravaged landscape. Now it has to happen again. We have to secure the remaining land in the next few years, for otherwise it may be too late.

In the afternoon, the Aurovilians responsible for fund-raising and for pur-

chase of the land made presentations. Among the most important information conveyed:

- If outlying farmland and the beach communities are included, Auroville owns about 3,000 acres of land at present.
- In the city area, we still need to acquire 250 acres, or about 20% of the total area.
- In the greenbelt, we still need to acquire about 75% of the total area. This means that a total of 2,544 acres need to be purchased in the city and greenbelt areas.
- The priority at present is to acquire 100% of the city area.
- Over the past six years, 340 acres, or an average of 56 acres a year, have been purchased for Auroville.
- 88% of the money donated comes from foreign donations (this includes non-Indian Aurovilians).
- It is very difficult to get funds from sources which do not have a close connection to Auroville.
- Although land prices in India are currently depressed, in this area they are soaring. Over the past 10 years, land in the Auroville region has increased in price by 1,150%. At present it increases in value by about 25% a year.
- In addition to inflation, the other challenges are speculation and unwanted development in the Auroville area. It is estimated that about 20 acres in the city area have been purchased by speculators. Unwanted development includes development on the road that leads from Kuilapalayam to the beach and development behind Edayanchavadi village and between the communities of Adventure and Evergreen.

The groups dealing with land are responding in two ways to the present challenges:

- 1) Exploring the possibilities of legal protection for the Auroville area to prevent

speculation and outside development.

- 2) Trying to raise funds to purchase the remaining land. As the only sure way of controlling what happens on the land is to purchase it, and as time is short, the new strategy is to approach major potential donors India and abroad. Approximately 40 crores, or US\$ 10 million, is required at present land rates. A request for this amount has been made to the Government of India.

In the ensuing open discussion, a number of points were made:

- If we are to appear credible to potential donors, the community itself must be willing to contribute more towards land purchase. For example, the Central Fund could set aside a percentage each month for land purchase, commercial units and individuals could also tithe regular amounts.
- It is essential that we improve our relationship with the villagers. Regular informational material about Auroville must be made available to them, for example through a newsletter, leaflets and videos in Tamil. A bioregional development office could be set up to develop a portfolio of projects. It was also felt that Murugesan's suggestion for regular "Auropanchayat" meetings should be pursued.
- It is also essential to improve our relationship with local and State-level officials. Aurovilians should take up responsibility for keeping up a regular contact with such people, with whom we can be very open about our plans and ideals.
- It was suggested that each project proposal that goes out from Auroville should include a land purchase component within it.
- Concern was expressed about Aurovilians who own land in the township or greenbelt area. Apparently the numbers are small, but it was re-emphasised that for

Auroville Land Fact Sheet March 1999

1. City Area

The total city area of Auroville, a circle of 2.5 km. diameter, represents 1,227 acres or 500 hectares.

Already owned by AV	887 acres	362 ha.
Govt. owned lands	65 acres	27 ha.
Villages*	25 acres	10 ha.
To be purchased by AV	250 acres	101 ha.
Total	1,227 acres	500 ha.

*Kottakarai and its satellite hamlet Bharatipuram, together with the fringes of another village, Alankuppam, are situated within the city area.

2. Green Belt

The Green Belt, which consists of a circular band of a further 1.25 km width around the city area, represents a total area 3,683 acres or 1,505 hectares.

Already owned by AV	878 acres	358 ha.
Govt. owned lands	136 acres	56 ha.
Villages*	375 acres	153 ha.
To be purch. by AV	2,294 acres	936 ha.
Total	3,683 acres	1,503 ha.

*There are 5 villages in the Green Belt. Taking into account their population and land holding pattern, we only target to purchase 2,294 acres or 936 hectares.

3. Larger Green Belt & Key Hole Corridors

Auroville owns some 100 acres or 40 hectares in the larger Green Belt. These lands form a buffer up to the southern border with the nearby city of Pondicherry where rapid developments are underway.

In addition, Auroville owns some 920 acres or 375 hectares, both east and west of the main Auroville area, in the Key Hole Corridors. There is no plan to acquire lands in these areas, save for some minor consolidation purposes related to Auroville's access roads.

4. Lands Outside the Key Hole Corridors

Auroville owns 195 acres or 80 hectares further away outside the Key Hole Corridors, consisting of 38 acres or 15 hectares beach land and 167 acres or 68 hectares farm land.

Aurovilians to hold private land in the Auroville area goes completely against our guidelines and is unacceptable. The situation of some Tamil Aurovilians whose families have inherited land in the Auroville area was noted: it was felt that this was a rather different situation because it belonged to their families rather than to them personally and it was a much-needed security. Nevertheless it was hoped that this land would eventually be related to Auroville.

• We all need to help secure the remaining land, either through making contributions, through contacting or giving the addresses of potential donors, through preparing information materials etc. The present team is unable to handle the volume of work involved on their own and urgently needs assistance.

The workshop closed with an aspiration for a second "land miracle".

Alan

"If there is not a major societal shift, humanity will not survive"

A talk in Auroville by Maurice Strong

Maurice Strong is one of the foremost members of the environmental movement, having been Secretary-General of two global U.N. environmental conferences—one in Stockholm, the other in Rio—as well as a member of the U.N. Commission on Environment and Development which produced the seminal Brundtland Report. At present he is Under Secretary-General of the United Nations and Special Advisor to the Secretary-General of the U.N., and has just been appointed President and Rector of the U.N. University of Peace in Costa Rica.

His association with Auroville dates back to the early '70s when he first visited the community. More recently, he was briefly a member of the International Advisory Council—to be succeeded by his wife, Hanne Strong—and their Baca community in Colorado has hosted a number of Aurovilians.

Recently he revisited Auroville after a gap of many years, and spent the day looking at our environmental work. In the evening he gave a talk, of which the following are extracts.

"I really appreciate being here today because I've always been inspired by the concept of Auroville. I've been able to see the magnificent progress that you've made here since I last visited, not only in terms of the physical environment, but also in the way that you have managed to resolve in a peaceable manner some of the earlier tensions that beset you. I feel that the spirit of Auroville has really taken root.

I'd like to share with you some insights gleaned from my long involvement with the environmental movement. The modern environmental movement had its beginnings in the 1960s when it became apparent that the industrial civilisation, which has produced such tremendous benefits in economic terms also had some unexpected costs. Most obviously, these costs took the form of environmental degradation—the loss of topsoil, the pollution of air and water, the desecration of sites of great natural beauty etc. To put it another way: if you look at Planet Earth as a corporation, then much of what has been called 'wealth creation' has actually been the result of our running down our natural capital. No business which did this would survive for long!

It was the realisation that this was a massive global problem which led the United Nations Assembly to call for an international meeting on the problem. This became the Stockholm meeting of 1972, the first world meeting on the environment, at which I had the role of Secretary-General. The star of that conference was Indira Gandhi, for it was she who made the crucial point that poverty is the key problem. Unless, she said, the industrialised countries tackle environmental issues within the broader framework of helping the development of the emerging nations, those nations would not be able to participate in environmental restoration. For only through changes in our economic life can the environment be improved. This is why, when I visit different countries, I always make a point of meeting their finance ministers and their leaders of industry and commerce: I tell them, "You are the real custodians of the environment. You are the ones who can make a real difference."

As I travelled around the world in the

years after Stockholm, I saw that the planet was continuing to deteriorate. Others agreed, and it was this awareness that led the U.N. to establish, in the early 1980's, a Commission on Environment and Development to examine the challenges and come up with solutions. The subsequent report, which became known as the Brundtland report after the Chairperson of the Commission, made it very clear that we have to take a new and sober look at what we are doing to the planet. Its conclusion? Civilisation could not survive long into the next century unless we change to the pathway of sustainable development.

It was on the basis of this report that the U.N. decided to convene another global conference, twenty years after Stockholm, but this time linking environment and development. It was an amazing experience. Rio brought together more world leaders than had ever met together in one place before, as well as a host of NGO's and peoples' movements. And there were some solid achievements. For example, we agreed upon a Rio Declaration which moved far beyond Stockholm in setting out the basic principles which should guide peoples and nations in their relationship to the environment, and we agreed a programme of action for the 21st century, which became known as Agenda 21. It wasn't perfect—when every single word has to be negotiated by 179 countries there are bound to be dilutions and compromises—but it remains the most comprehensive programme of action for the future that the human community has ever agreed upon. And the fact that it was agreed upon by all the governments of the world gave it a unique degree of political authority.

Now great global conferences do not solve global problems: they do, however, provide a basis for mobilising public awareness and energising the political process. So what has happened since? Too little. A few countries, notably Cuba and Costa Rica, have made a national commitment to following a path of sustainable development and, more importantly, at the local level NGO's and citizens' groups from all over the world are working on the same lines. Over 2,000 local authorities have adopted local versions of Agenda 21 involving, in the

It's important to realise that change will not come from the top. It has to come from a massive people's movement which understands and acts upon the realisation that we are the first generation in the history of the earth which holds the power to determine the future of our species."

process, entire communities in the quest for a qualitatively better lifestyle. You in Auroville are doing something similar; you are planting trees, using renewable energy and experimenting in community building, and this makes you one of the great models for the future.

Yet, on the global scale, too little has been done. I often think, in fact, that when future historians come to write about our era they will look upon it as an era of sophisticated savagery. We have perpetrated the worst crimes in human history, we have used technology to create weapons of mass destruction, and we have built the greatest economy the world has ever seen at the cost of destroying our natural resource base. What's gone wrong? I think it's important to realise that there have been many periods in history when the economy was of secondary importance. In the Renaissance, for example, it was seen merely as the means to sustain a rich artistic and cultural life. Today, however, we have made it the centre of our lives, the prime motivational factor which drives the development of society. Yet economic development which destroys the environmental base upon which human development depends, which exacerbates poverty and the gap between the rich and the poor, cannot be called true development.

What can we do about this serious imbalance? We have to change the present system. For example, a recent study showed that governments at present spend 700 billion dollars a year on subsidising activities which are wasteful or which destroy the environment. Just converting this to providing incentives for

positive environmental behaviour would already make an immense amount of difference.

It's important to realise, however, that change will not come from the top. It has to come from a massive people's movement, a movement which understands and acts upon the realisation that we are the first generation in the history of the earth which holds the power to determine the future of our species. It is such a movement which we are trying to mobilise through the Earth Charter campaign of the Earth Council, of which I am chairman. The Earth Charter (*see below*) is a kind of Magna Carta for the earth: a statement of ethical and moral principles to guide the behaviour of individuals and nations in their relationship to the environment and to each other.

For, ultimately, the way we act is based upon what motivates us. I do not think humanity can survive much longer if there is not a civilisational change, a major societal shift, which makes our higher motivations—our ethical, moral and spiritual motivations—and not our economic preoccupations the centre of our lives, the prime driving force behind our economic and political systems.

This is what you are doing in Auroville. This, on a smaller scale, is what Hanne and I are attempting in the Baca experiment in Colorado. For human unity and respect for the environment will never be realised on a global scale until it is realised first on the scale of individuals and communities. This is why I commend your efforts and why I am so happy to be here, where I feel I am with kindred spirits. *Edited by Alan*

THE EARTH CHARTER (Excerpts) Draft II, April 1999

In our diverse yet increasingly interdependent world, it is imperative that we, the people of Earth, declare our responsibility to one another, to the greater community of life, and to future generations. We are one human family and one Earth community with a common destiny.

The choice is ours: to care for Earth and one another or to participate in the destruction of ourselves and the diversity of life.

The challenges humanity faces can only be met if people everywhere acquire an awareness of global interdependence, identify themselves with the larger world, and decide to live with a sense of universal responsibility. . . . We, therefore, affirm the following principles for sustainable development. We commit ourselves as individuals, organizations, business enterprises, communities, and nations to implement these interrelated principles and to create a global partnership in support of their fulfilment.

Together in hope, we pledge to:

- Respect Earth and all life,
- Strive to build free, just, participatory, sustainable, and peaceful societies,
- Protect and restore the integrity of Earth's ecological systems, with special concern for biological diversity and the natural processes that sustain and renew life.
- Adopt patterns of consumption, production, and reproduction that respect and safeguard Earth's regenerative capacities, human rights, and community well-being.
- Establish access to information, inclusive participation in decision making, and transparency, truthfulness, and accountability in governance.
- Affirm and promote gender equality as a prerequisite to sustainable development.
- Create a culture of peace and cooperation.

(From the Internet)

The problems of the Entry Group

Two years ago a new Entry Group came into being. The Entry Group processes all applications to join Auroville and oversees the entry procedures. In March 1998 it published the guidelines agreed upon by the community in the booklet "Entering Auroville," which contains the basic policy statement regarding entry into Auroville. The clarity of this policy document notwithstanding, the Entry Group has recently faced certain challenges, especially regarding granting newcomer status to people without financial means, and to people who wish to propagate paths of other spiritual organizations.

MONEY RELATED ISSUES

One of the ongoing contentious issues has been to grant newcomer status to people who have no financial means to maintain themselves. As a rule, newcomers are expected to look after themselves and their dependents for at least the first (probationary) year and to find a place to stay and work. Auroville has no means to accommodate a large amount of people who are without financial means, nor can it provide ready-made accommodation for everyone who wishes to join. However, a too-strict application of this guideline would, says the Entry Group, go against the spirit of Auroville, and consequently it has recently granted newcomer status to quite a number of people who don't have any financial means, despite resistance from the Economy Group and the Housing Service.

DIFFERENT SPIRITUAL ORIENTATIONS

"Auroville is a spiritual endeavour" says the first line of "Entering Auroville." Elsewhere in the booklet, the newcomer is advised to familiarise him or herself with the works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, "as their vision is the basis of life in Auroville." Further on, the booklet mentions that "Auroville is not a religious or political organisation, and should not be used as a base for any organised religious practices or political activities."

These sentences seem sufficiently

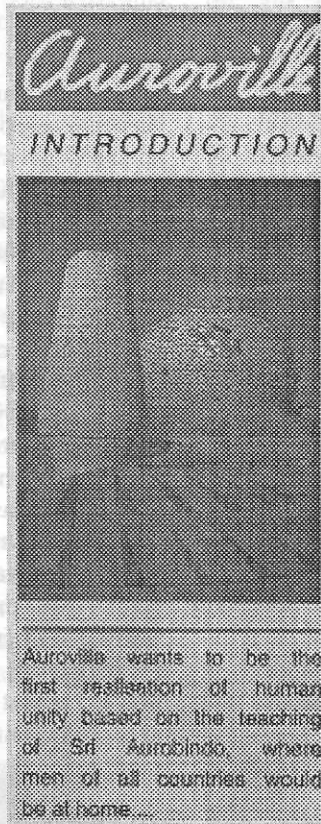
clear. But when not long ago the Entry Group was confronted with two newcomers who were adherents of the Chennai-based Sahaj Marg organisation, and learned that one of them had been initiated as a "preceptor" by their master—which implies the right to introduce new people to the Sahaj Marg system and to conduct group meditations—the Entry Group was momentarily at a loss as to what action to take. The question came up again when two people connected to the USA-based Avatar movement—which is described as a movement teaching self-help techniques—applied to become newcomers to Auroville, and insisted on their right to give courses in the Avatar technique—for payment—to Aurovilians, newcomers and visitors.

Both these issues created a dilemma for the Entry Group. There was a very wide divergence of opinion or understanding within the community, and this was naturally reflected within the Entry Group itself as its members represent a wide range of standpoints. The issues raised a storm of debate in the community. In the case of the Sahaj Marg adherents, the Entry group received many letters both in favour of and against their admission. Some of those in favour expressed their high opinion of the people concerned, and described the actions of those who condemned them as "a witch hunt," recalling the dark period of Auroville's history when a similar witch hunt took place against Aurovilians who visited other spiritual teachers. Those opposed argued that the teaching of Sahaj Marg is incompatible with that of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother and that its propagation should therefore not be allowed in Auroville. Much support as well as criticism was directed at the Entry Group when it finally decided that the newcomers concerned could not become Aurovilians and should leave Auroville. The case caused such a commotion that a family of long-time Aurovilians, one of whom is also a preceptor in the Sahaj Marg (see AVToday # 98, February 1997), instead of renouncing her role of preceptor, decided to leave Auroville as well, though perhaps only temporarily.

In the case of Avatar, the objections were concentrated not so much on the compatibility of that teaching with the spiritual aims and ideals of Auroville—though it was argued that, by granting these people newcomer status the door would be opened to the Scientology Church which is behind the Avatar movement—as on the fact that money was charged for the courses, a percentage of which would be given to the organisation behind Avatar. It also appeared that through a system of percentages, each "master" would financially profit from the courses each "pupil" would give to others. This was considered to be against the ideal of Auroville of freely offering one's service to the Divine, and consequently the Entry Group decided that the people connected to "Avatar" could not be granted newcomer status.

These decisions notwithstanding, so far none of the clearly formulated policies has the support of everyone in the community. A considerable number of Aurovilians seem to feel that while "workshops" of all kinds can be held in Auroville on an experimental basis, people committed to propagating paths based on visions other than those of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother should not expect to become Aurovilians. It is on this basis that the Entry Group at present informs prospective newcomers who are already committed to and would like to propagate other spiritual paths, that the objections within the community are so strong that it will be very difficult or even impossible to accept them as newcomers.

This does not imply that newcomers and Aurovilians cannot visit or learn from



Front page of an introduction leaflet

the teachings of other spiritual teachers. As an individual everyone has full freedom in Auroville to search for the Truth, each in his own way. But Auroville does expect that people who join have achieved clarity about their own aims and see whether these are in consonance with the aims of Auroville. Auroville is not a place where one can come to live if one's spiritual affinities lie elsewhere.

LACK OF SUPPORT

Apart from problems relating to the admission of people to Auroville, the Entry Group also complains about the lack of support from the "Auroville administration" on the level of policy making and of finance. For example, its work on proposals for additional entry policies has so far remained without any result.

Another problem is that the Entry Group's budget is insufficient, as the Entry group is still considered to be a working group, instead of a full fledged service. Since the members of the Entry Group have to put in long hours performing extremely delicate tasks, they experience this repeated refusal of support as painful and discouraging.

DOUBLE STANDARDS

Another major difficulty faced by the Entry Group is an unavoidable result of their position: they are supposed to represent the ideals of Auroville to new applicants, and insist on observance of the conditions formulated in the mandate... but all newcomers very soon become aware of the inconsistencies and double standards prevalent within the community. It will remain impossible for the Entry Group to insist on the high standards set out in the booklet "Entering Auroville," as long as these are not being lived within the community as a whole.

Carel

"The only point raised by the petition (signed by more than 140 long-time Aurovilians) is that preceptors, if they want to stay in Auroville, should renounce the role defined by their own master: to promote the teaching of the Sahaj Marg, create centres, initiate disciples, conduct individual and collective meditations, collect funds, bring back people who left the movement and "clean" those who are prejudiced against it. The same applies to other representatives of similar movements like Avatar which is presently spreading in Auroville. Everyone is perfectly free to experiment with whatever "techniques" he may feel necessary for his own progress as long as it remains strictly personal within the walls of his own house, but as soon as one promotes a spiritual teaching which also involves the interference of an organised system from the outside and whose teaching and aims are moreover incompatible with Auroville's, the activity of this individual becomes unacceptable. In the case of the preceptors of the Sahaj Marg, we believe that there is ample evidence to support the fact that their activities have no place in Auroville." (extract from a public letter from Serge and others to the Entry Group, Working Committee and Executive Committee)

"To develop in Auroville an organisation providing inner peace and some kind of avatarhood in exchange for money will hurt many people, whatever may be the actual content of the

QUOTE - UNQUOTE

teaching. In India, spiritual realisation is given free, for self-giving is the very law of the Divine. Its mixing up with money will appear to many as an impossible paradox. The word Avatar ... is very inappropriate in this country and shows a regrettable ignorance." (excerpts from a letter from the Executive Committee to the Entry group dated 20-10-1998 on the Avatar issue)

"The Entry process and the achievement of the ideals of Auroville would be best served if there was no discrimination based on the abilities of people and trust and faith would prevail instead of fear and protectionism. It would be nice if the Entry group could work in a more stimulating and uplifting atmosphere. The position they have now is more of taking care that no

"false" people come in. To me it seems that the controversy around Avatar is exemplary for a problem that involves the whole community: how much does it want/need to control?" (One of the Avatar masters who was refused newcomer status)

"Although there is no doctrine and no dogma as such, the aim of integral transformation as conceived by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother is the unifying ideal underlying all activities and research in Auroville.

While it is not for us to question the ways of spiritual development or the private spiritual practices of any individuals, Auroville must not be used as a place for recruiting followers to any spiritual or political organisation. Furthermore, Auroville must not be used by an outside movement as a place of convenience for its followers to live."

In summary, the Representatives Group had reached consensus that Avatar and similar organisations have no place in Auroville.

(Reps Group report April 1st, 1999)

"Cinema is an art that is in danger of being lost"

A recent showing at the Sri Aurobindo Auditorium at Bharat Nivas of Neil Jordan's film on Michael Collins, the Irish Nationalist leader, was with its realistic evocation of the violent historical struggle for Irish independence both disturbing and thought provoking. It had the viewer wanting to find out more about that turbulent period whose reverberations remain tragically—despite glimmers of hope—with us even today.

Gérard and his companion Surya who look after Aurofilm—a unit dedicated to film research in Auroville—choose the Western and Indian films now being shown on a weekly basis at Bharat Nivas. Gérard came to Auroville in 1973. He had studied industrial design and although cinema was his main love he became involved in construction work in Auromodèle for a number of years. "There was a spirit of openness then," he remarks, "and one did what was felt to be most useful."

Gérard first began showing films in Auroville in the early '80s. "Obtaining films was very difficult in India and so we started off by showing French films, loaned to us by the Alliance Française. Since we only had a 16mm projector, our choice of films was very limited as 16mm films are not easily available in India, and we'd frequently end up getting a different film from the one we ordered!"

He chooses films using the criteria that the Mother herself had given in 1972 with regard to the role of cinema ("Care should be taken in selecting films to be shown in Auroville. All that encourages the lower movements and actions should be avoided."), and also going by his own feelings about the film's cultural, educational or artistic qualities. Gérard feels that a film can be powerful or even violent, if it is done sincerely to highlight or expose something, but it should not encourage lower movements merely for their own sake.

"The point is to choose directors who are searching artistically as opposed to those who make mediocre films simply for money. This does not mean being limited to intellectual films for cinephiles—for instance Kurosawa's *The Seven Samurai* is both beautiful and artistic and has always

enjoyed a wide public appeal. This was true for many films made in the '40s and '50s, such as Marcel Carne's *Les Enfants Du Paradis* or Orson Welles' *Citizen Kane*, both of which were artistic and popular. The problem today is that most producers, particularly since the '80s, are making films according to what they believe the general public wants—containing sex and violence—and they justify this choice after having successfully conditioned the viewing public's expectations and taste to the point where they are at a loss when anything else is shown. This is particularly true in India where quality Indian films can't be seen, as they are never distributed and very rarely screened, but are shown at festivals abroad in Berlin and in Paris. Nonetheless there are over 400 film clubs in India which points to a public interest in quality films. The problem is that cinema started off as an art form, but has since become an industry."

Again according to Gérard, there are at least forty directors in India today who are making films of great quality that are different from the mainstream commercial popular fare, but many of these films are not distributed. The Malayalam cinema of Kerala, where the connection between literature and cinema is strong, is an exception to the general rule as some producers support artistic films, many of which deal with social issues such as caste. They feature known actors and are sometimes even distributed and shown in public cinemas.

Getting good films for Auroville is a question of making personal contacts and getting to know people. In the early years, sending a film from Bombay to Auroville was like sending it off into some rural unknown. Other problems are that India's strict laws do not encourage films being shown outside the normal cinema circuits and that copies of subtitled films are seldom available. But once you make a personal contact people become very helpful and things work better. Indian directors, unlike their Western counterparts, are quite accessible and many know about Auroville—some have even shot scenes of their films here! Gérard met quite a few of them in January at the International Film



Gérard and Surya in the projector room at the Sri Aurobindo Auditorium

Festival in Hyderabad, and to his surprise he met the Malayalam director T.V. Chandran, winner of the 1998 National Film Award, while he was pasting up posters for his film himself!

After leaving Auroville and spending five years in France, Gérard returned in 1994 with Surya and felt like starting all over again from scratch.

"At first people were a bit suspicious about the films we chose to show—they seemed bizarre or at least unusual compared to the video fare they were used to—but slowly people began to understand what we were trying to do as well as the spirit behind the choices we were making. Recently an audience of about 350 people sat through a 2 1/2 hour documentary on the Ganges that had no commentary and consisted of only images and sounds! I have always felt that cinema is an art that needs defending as it is in danger of being lost."

In response to this threat they have also started a monthly newsletter on film that features articles and reprints of interviews with directors whose films are scheduled to be shown in Auroville. Recent issues have been dedicated to Renoir, the

Egyptian film director Youssef Chahine and the Hyderabad film festival. There is no longer a specialized artistic film review in India—though there used to be one called Cinema India International which was dedicated to cinema as an art—and Gérard feels he might be filling a void in a small way.

For many years Gérard's has wanted to start a film school, which is something The Mother had foreseen for Auroville. He has previously worked on *Le Voyage D'Auremi*—a child's fable filmed using Auroville children in Auroville; a documentary on an Indian couple—both Bharat Natyam dancers—and their performances in France, as well as a short film on the Sri Aurobindo exhibition held last year in New Delhi. In March he organised a two-week workshop for Aurovilians and guests with a visiting director of film photography from Los Angeles. The workshop covered all phases of film-making—from script writing to editing—and resulted in a short 8-minute film shot in 16mm, a comedy on obstacles to meditating in Auroville. Gérard feels that the interest shown by the twenty participants was an encouraging sign that the time is now ripe for the film school to become a concrete reality.

Roger

Creativity and self-sufficiency

A NATIONAL WORKSHOP PROMOTING CRAFTS

In March, Auroville organized a three-day national workshop on the theme of creativity and self-sufficiency for those involved in preserving and promoting the craft movement in India. The workshop, which was funded and promoted by CAPART (Council for the Advancement of Peoples' Action and Rural Technology), was ground-breaking because it brought together people from top design institutions like the National Institute of Design and the Indian Design Centre, Government agencies for rural development, NGOs, a trade union working with tribal craftsmen and women, and those who promote and sell crafts products

through big retail centres in Delhi and through heritage centres like Dakshina Chitra near Chennai. Topics discussed included the nature of creativity and its relationship to traditional culture; the threat of Western cultural colonialism; the limiting effects of conventional upbringing and a "soul-less" educational system which cuts Indians off from their cultural roots; the skewed value system which pays the man operating a machine for making plastic goods three times more than a highly skilled craftsman; the problems associated with technology transfer and obtaining information about the best processes and materials to improve traditional craft

products; and the frequent difficulties crafts people encounter in transporting and selling their work.

Participants visited a number of Auroville units, including Mantra pottery, Shradhanjali, Maroma and the Auroville Press, and were impressed not only by the quality and organisation but also by the feeling that Auroville is vibrant because Aurovilians, while sharing a common aim, have the freedom to express themselves in diverse ways.

During the course of the workshop a number of new ideas for collaborations between the participants were mooted—including a proposal to create beautiful

educational books for children using the designs and skills of traditional craftspeople—and there was a renewed sense of the need to improve communication between the different links in the chain: the craftspeople, NGO's, professional designers and the relevant Government agencies.

For the Aurovilians attending the workshop it was inspiring to meet people who are working, against vast odds and often in relative isolation, to improve the lot of traditional craftspeople and to preserve the best of that culture. The Deputy Director-General of CAPART, Mr. Ashok Thakur, was also impressed by the workshop. "It has fulfilled what I wanted it to achieve, and I go away with a number of ideas for new initiatives which I'll try to get off the ground. I would like a similar workshop to happen in Auroville every year."

Alan

In November 1996 Auroville International Germany lost its tax-exempt status as a charity, because the German federal tax authorities did not recognize Auroville as a project serving international understanding. "The arguments used," believes Wolfgang from AVI Germany, "had their background in a general campaign against many spiritual and non-conformist groups in Germany by Christian churches (mostly Lutheran), the political left fighting their battle against 'spirituality,' and the psychotherapist organizations." (see AVToday #104, September 1997 and #111, April 1998). AVI Germany started a court case challenging this decision.

It took AVI Germany more than two years to regain its former status as a charitable organization and to prove that Auroville is a serious project whose main goals are compatible with the goals of a broader, modern and not necessarily "spiritual" audience which is interested in issues such as human unity, ecological urban environment, "first and third world integration," etc. In the process, Auroville received clear and positive testimonials from UNESCO, the German Government (Foreign Office), the influential German-

Indian Society and some important German federal and state departments. "Today, as one of the many fruits of an extremely unpleasant though also extremely rewarding process we went through," writes Wolfgang, "AVI Germany is better prepared to keep up a dialogue with mainstream society than ever before. It has even taken the opportunity to urge the German government to care 'officially' about Auroville, as a step towards the creation of a German cultural pavilion in the International Zone."

Another result of the process has been that AVI Germany has created an Advisory Council consisting of prominent German personalities. At present it has three members: Karl Heinz Stockhausen, the leading composer of this generation; Professor Ilse Middendorf, founder of an internationally acclaimed school of breathing technique, and Professor Wilfried Belschner, founder of the transpersonal collegium of psychotherapists

at German universities. All of them have been associated with the teachings of Sri Aurobindo for a long time.

"The court-case itself might have been a kind of healthy step for Auroville too, having been asked so strongly to communicate its goals to a worldly power and audience," continues Wolfgang. "Auroville became aware that a comprehensive documentation and communication of its (outer) 'human unity activities' is an absolute must, and that it has to maintain living contacts with organisations such as UNESCO and the foreign embassies in India, as well as organisations in India itself. Public relations is an absolutely necessity. Most of all, Auroville should realise that parts of the world still brand it with the negative words 'sect' or 'cult' and it must find ways to have proper answers to this, in the context of the enormous paradigm shift now taking place in Western societies."

Aftermath of a court case

EXCERPT FROM THE COURT'S VERDICT:

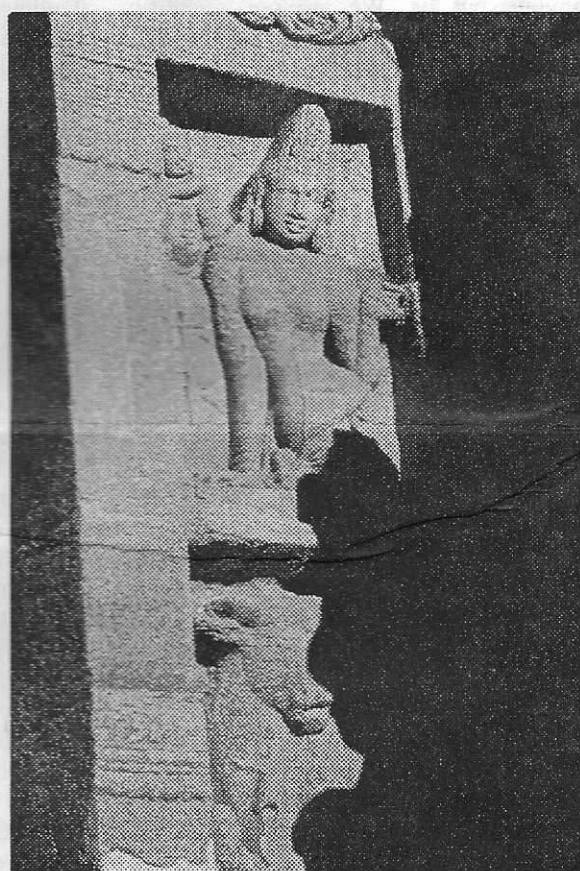
The project of Auroville, according to its ideals, serves international understanding through the harmonious living together of presently about 1,200 people from 31 nations, as well as through the example given by this of the feasibility of such living together.

The judgment of the Financial Authorities that international understanding is only a minor secondary aim of Auroville, is incompatible with the facts established on the basis of the Auroville Charter, the Indian Legislation and the statements from the Consulate General in Chennai and the Embassy in New Delhi.

Human unity, the purpose of the project of Auroville, is furthered through the harmonious living together of people from as many nations as possible and through the example given by this. When the aim is to strive for international understanding, then it is inevitable that an appropriate infrastructure is created, without which a peaceful living together in a city is not possible. All donations with all allocations have served the development of the project and therefore international understanding in a direct way.

THE GENIUS OF INDIA

An exhibition, conceived and realised by the Auroville Press under the title The Genius of India, was held at the Visitors Centre last month. The many beautiful photos by Olivier Barot—landscapes, temple sculptures and portraits of people—with accompanying extracts from Sri Aurobindo's essay The Renaissance in India, captured a variety of moods of eternal India. The exhibit effectively highlighted the theme of India's role in the world and its spiritual destiny.



A letter to the Editor

Repression of Women

The problem of repression of women in a patriarchal society at the rural level (AVToday no.123, April '99) is only a concentrated form of what is happening in urban India and all over the world—perhaps even in Auroville itself. Education and confidence-building of women can help only upto a point. Beyond that, a woman is not allowed to rise in the social or professional hierarchy—not because they are not good or lack confidence, but because there are very few men who can accept a woman as an equal or superior, principally owing to their upbringing and environment. A certain image of women has been created over the centuries if not millenia, and those who do not fit in are not seen as 'normal'. How many women head world-wide corporations or even nations, unless of course a daughter, wife or widow of a famous man? And at that level the men are far more 'ready' to accept women than in a village.

So how about an activity for the

men in the villages which will make them open towards and ready for the 'liberated' women? Otherwise, intelligent and capable women will become increasingly isolated in a male-dominated society, termed as aggressive even if merely assertive, and less acceptable in the marriage market. And how many women have the courage to accept alienation? If Auroville can evolve such a model for men [or rather a combined model for men and women], it could be replicated elsewhere also—in urban India and other countries as well, where the problems women face are only of a more refined form. This could be one way in which the reaching out to the villages from Auroville could be different from and more integral than rural / social / women upliftment undertaken anywhere else. This could also be a way for Auroville to connect to India and the world and show its relevance as a pioneer of social change with a deeper perspective.

Kosha Shah, Baroda, India

In Brief

New Governing Board

The Government of India has nominated the new Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation. Shri Kireet Joshi (Chairman), Dr. D. P. Chatopadhyaya, Dr. Subhash Kashyap, Dr. L. M. Singhvi, Mr. Roger Anger, Shri Gajapati Maharaja Dibyasingha Deb (Maharaja of Puri), Smt. Jyoti Madhok, Shri Sudhir Nath (ex-officio) and Shri D. P. Singh (ex-officio) will be members of the Governing Board for a period of four years, with effect from 11th March, 1999.*

Visit by Kireet

Kireet Joshi, the new chairman of the Governing Board, visited Auroville from April 17-21 to become more deeply acquainted with the many aspects of Auroville. During his visit he met many groups and gave a lecture on Human Unity on the roof of the solar kitchen.*

Capsule in Bombay

Auroville architects Anupama and Satprem guided over 100 students into experimenting with ferro-cement forms and building an Auroville-style palmleaf capsule in the heart of

Mumbai during an architectural conference organized by the Mohile Parikh Centre for Visual Arts, as part of their presentation on Auroville architectural trends and building technologies.

Shakespeare in Transition

Students from Transition School staged excerpts from Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet" on April 13th. The audience was touched to hear the 13-14 year olds declaim phrases charged with meaning such as, "That I must love a loathed enemy."

Art exhibition

At the Pyramids Arts Centre there was an exhibition of the sometimes extraordinary work of students of Transition school (8-14 years), the Last school campus (12-18 years) and free students (7-22 years).*

Watsu

Aqua balancing, also called aqua relaxing or Watsu, (meaning "Water Shiatsu") has been introduced as a new healing technique in the Quiet healing centre.

* More in the next issue of Auroville Today

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 air-mail. 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, CSR Office, 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.

The following Auroville International centres will accept subscriptions:

◆ **Germany:** AVI Deutschland, c/o Wolfgang J. Schmidt-Reinecke, Mainstrasse 75, 28199 Bremen, tel.: (49)-421.594220/705289, fax: (49)-421.594240; e-mail: wjsavid@aol.com ◆ **France:** AVI France, 6, rue du Cail, 75010 Paris, tel/fax: (33)-1.40364367, email: avifrance@compuserve.com ◆ **The Netherlands:** AVI Nederland, c/o Wim de Jong, Zwanewater 51, 2715 BH Zoetermeer, tel. (31)-79.3210671; email: wimdejong@girnet.nl ◆ **U.K.:** AVI U.K., c/o Martin Littlewood, Canigou, Cot Lane, Chidham, W. Sussex PO18 8SP, tel. (44)-1243.574099; fax: (44)-1243. 576792 email: aviuk@compuserve.com ◆ **U.S.A (1):** AVI USA, P.O. Box 877, Santa Cruz, CA 94966, tel. (1)-831 425 5620; email: aviusa@aol.com ◆ **U.S.A (2):** Auroville Information Office, PO Box 676, Woodstock NY 12498, tel: (1)914.679.5358, fax: 5853; email: avinfo@aol.com

* Auroville Today carries no advertisements and does not receive funds from Auroville. Your subscription helps us continue the work. We gratefully acknowledge the generosity of our supporting subscribers. Those for who the subscription rates are an obstacle are invited to contact us for information on reduced rates.

Auroville Today provides information about Auroville, an international township in South-India, on a monthly basis and is distributed to Aurovilians and friends of Auroville in India and abroad. It does not necessarily reflect the views of the community as a whole.

Editorial team : Alan, Annemarie, Bindu, Carel, Jill, Roger, Tineke. Layout & DTP: Annemarie. Proofreading: Barbara. Printed at All India Press.

BY AIRMAIL
BOOK POST

AUROVILLE TODAY

CSR Office
Auroville 605101
Tamil Nadu, India



IN THIS ISSUE:

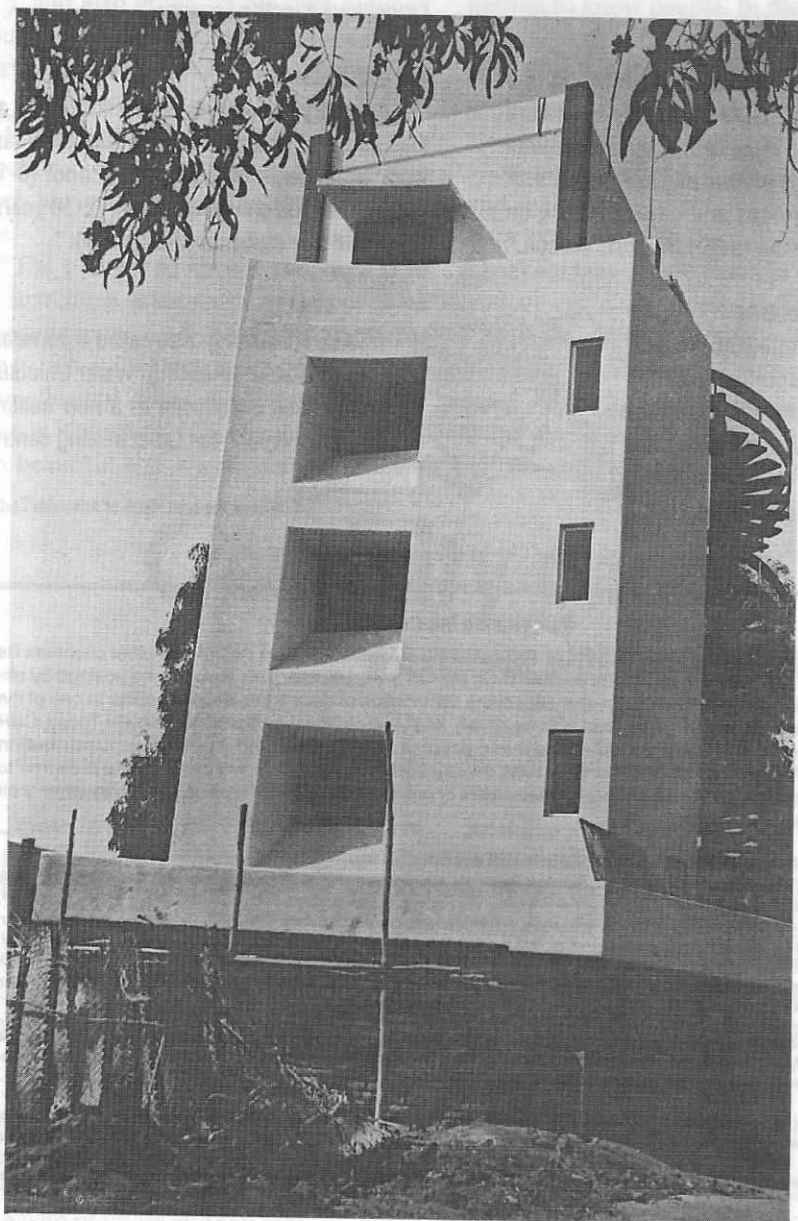
- LAND ISSUES
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- VISIT OF MAURICE STRONG
- A NEW OFFICE FOR AUROVILLE TODAY

AUROVILLE ARCHIVES
C/O KRISHNA T.
BHARAT NIVAS
AUROVILLE

May 1999
Number 124

Received May 99

AUROVILLE
ARCHIVES



Nearing completion: The Auroville Today Tower at Surrender

The Auroville Today Tower

May 1998. Scene: an Auroville Today editorial meeting. Place: Samasti. Temperature outside: 38°C. Temperature inside: *ibid.* Topic:

'An office?'

'Yes.'

'For Auroville Today?'

'Come on, we have been talking about it for ages. Jill even wrote an article once asking our subscribers to contribute.'

'Yeah, I remember that one. Back in 1997, wasn't it? Which gave us that lone donation of Rs 100 from our faithful reader Aryadeep.'

'Right. We should see that as "seed money". Occultly speaking.'

'High time it starts germinating then. But jokes apart, do we really need an office? We have managed for ten years with half an office at the Centre for Scientific Research, all of us working at home and we meet in Caryl's house.'

'Well, Caryl wants us out of his house. And Tency wants us out of CSR too. CSR is expanding their office and they need the space for Scientific Researchers. That is anyone but us. We are not scientific enough.'

'I told you we should have given them more publicity.'

'Well, we didn't. So, we need an office. With air-conditioning, preferably.'

'Oh yes. Please. And, uh, the money? Hmm?'

'There is none, sadly. We are just able to break even. You can't make money with a magazine that doesn't carry advertisements. So we'll have to do some intensive fundraising. And we might succeed, for there are after all quite a number of people outside who enjoy our publication.'

'You're sure about that?'

'Some issues at least. Well, let's say some articles. Some of them even write to us to tell us how much they like *Auroville Today*. You know, that bunch of letters we never published. And many others keep renewing their subscriptions. It's worth a try....'

'But where could we build an office? With the required building permissions and so on, it will take two years to find a place and build the office, even if we have the money tomorrow.'

'It could go quicker. There is that leaking water tower in that new community 'Surrender.' It has three floors of about 20 square metres each below the water tank which would suit our needs well. The folks over there would be very happy if we would take it up. The entire structure needs to be finished.'

'You want an office below a water tank? What about water leaking into the computer?'

'They should be able to do something about that leaking, presumably. But this raises another point: our computer is old and tired and hardly sufficient to do the work. A new office is not enough, we'll also need state-of-the-art equipment: new computers, a laser printer, a scanner, internet access, in short: professional stuff. If Auroville Today is to keep up with the times, we'll have to think about becoming more professional, image change, expanding the subscribers base, and so on...'

It was more or less like this that in one of Auroville Today's weekly meetings in May last year (when it was really hot) the topic of an office for Auroville Today was once again lively discussed. A visit to the water tower confirmed its suitability though the impressive drizzle down the northern façade underlined that "leakproof" was one of the yet unrealised ideals of the builders of Surrender. "You'll never get it done," advised Francis cheerfully, "leaking water towers either stop soon or leak more. This one is going to leak more. You bet." Hoping for the best, the fundraising campaign started notwithstanding. And whether it was because many individuals have warm feelings for Auroville Today, or simply because of Mother's Grace, the campaign was a complete success. Carlos started the construction with admirable speed and Tency, delighted that Auroville Today would move out of CSR, manufactured the new staircase, designed by Suhasini.

The leaking, in accordance with Francis' predictions, continued unabated and increased when the tank was loaded to maximum capacity. Loading halfway provided no solution either, as it resulted in no-water-when-most-needed scenarios, such as when members of the Surrender community, looking forward to a nice bath after a hard day's work, discovered that there was no water in the tap. A few of these irritations proved to be sufficient for them to take a collective decision to abandon the Surrender water tank, and connect to the big new landmark water tower nearby. The empty tank was offered to Auroville Today for its fourth floor; additional fundraising ensured that this offer could be happily accepted. With herculean efforts, Carlos' team broke through twenty-five centimeters of reinforced concrete to create space for door and windows, allowing us to construct the highest office in Auroville with an unobstructed view of Auroville greenery, Matrimandir and various windmills.

Auroville Today will move into its Surrender office by the end of May.

To say that we are satisfied is an understatement.

Caryl

A DUTCH TREAT

Auroville Today's funding request was sent to subscribers in many countries. But it was in The Netherlands in particular that people responded enthusiastically and generously to our request for funds for the office. In total an amount of nearly Rs 12 lakhs (approx. US \$ 27,000) was donated, of which over 90% came from the Netherlands—giving new meaning to the phrase "a Dutch treat"!

From the Auroville Today team we extend a BIG THANK YOU to Mia Berden, Martine Busch and Henk Thomas of Stichting de Zaaier, to Guy Rijckaert, Jan Lohman and Georges van Vrekhem of Stichting Aurofonds, to Anneke Teulings, to Gerd and Jannie Scherpbier, to Wim de Jong, to Mien Veenhoven, to Harrie de Koning, to Guus Brokaar and to Niek and Mechtild van Setten. We also thank Georges Kalifa and Robert Laurin (Canada), Laura Cavicchi (Italy), Doris Stockhausen and Uwe Scherf. (Germany), David Widdicombe (U.K.), Lakshmi Vadapalli (U.S.A.), Mr. A.C. Ray (India) and Nancy Whitlow, Mary Aldridge and Wil van Vliet from the Sri Aurobindo Ashram.

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