

AUROVILLE TODAY

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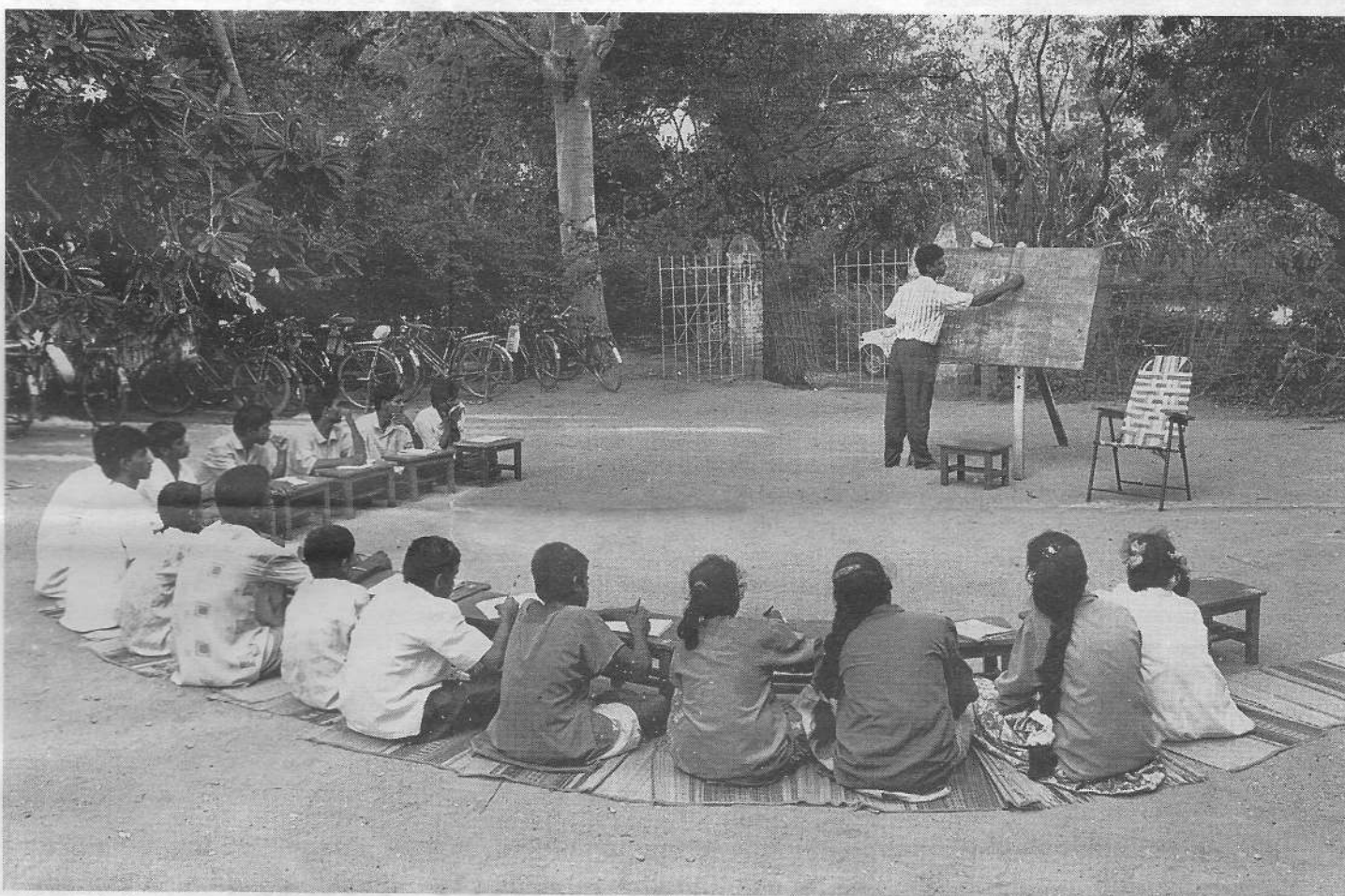
EDUCATION FOR THE VILLAGERS

In this issue we profile some of the Auroville or Auroville-assisted schools that provide education for the villagers. We also look at some of the educational initiatives which may represent a new way forward not only for education in this area but in India as a whole.

For many years, village children and adults have been attending schools in Auroville or, in the case of the night schools, schools run by Auroville in the nearby villages. Meanwhile the government schools in the villages have continued to educate the vast majority of village children through the traditional regime of strict discipline and rote learning. Recently, however, this situation has begun to change. Auroville teachers have discovered a number of promising new methods being implemented in other parts of India for teaching language and encouraging self-directed learning among village children. Simultaneously some local primary school teachers have expressed interest not only in trying out some of these methods but also in having Auroville-trained 'educational animators' assist them in teaching their students. As Anbu of Village Action points out, for the first time there is a real possibility not only that more progressive educational methods will be adopted in local village schools but also that through this traditional attitudes to caste, women, dowry etc. can be discussed and reevaluated at a formative age of a child's development. The consequences could be enormous...

A new way forward

Education for the villagers



Ilaignarkal: evening school and youth centre for young employees (see article on page 3)

Kindling a light

A PROFILE OF ISAI AMBALAM SCHOOL

"Good morning, sir!"

It's a long time since I walked into a classroom to be greeted by twelve young students jumping rigidly to attention. But those were almost the last traces of formality I encountered on my recent visit to Isai Ambalam, the Auroville school run for village children in Kottakarai.

Isai Ambalam began almost twenty years ago. Ivar, a Dutch Aurovilian, was concerned that the young village children who herd the cows and goats receive virtually no formal education and are often neglected by their families. So he created a space where they could feel happy and secure for a few hours each day, singing, dancing and staging plays: Isai Ambalam means "a stage for music" in Tamil. When Ivar left Auroville, the school was looked

after by a number of different people, but it wasn't until Lisa, a German woman, assumed charge a few years ago that an educational policy was developed. Lisa introduced methods and teacher-training based on the educational principles of Rudolf Steiner. When she left, there was a funding crisis and it seemed possible that Isai Ambalam might close down. However, Village Action agreed to help fund the project if Subash, who had been teaching at New Creation, would take over as headmaster. After some initial hesitation, he agreed.

"It's the first time I've been in charge of any institution, so it's a learning experience for me too. When I came to look at the situation here, I saw that the teachers had received a certain training and I felt that something new and useful could

be done through them. So, in a spirit of challenge, I agreed to take up the work."

At present, Isai Ambalam consists of two different groups of students. There are the very young children aged between 3 and 5, and there are the "young adults" (children who have dropped out of government schools or received no education at all) between the ages of 9 and 14 years. Almost all the students come from very poor families; many of them have parents who work in Auroville.

"The idea is to give the very young children a start so that when, after one or two years here, they enter a Government school, they can learn faster," says Subash. No pressure is put on the young children to take up anything academic, but if they wish to, they can begin acquiring

language skills. "Many people oppose the idea of very young children being taught language skills. But for the past few months we've been experimenting with a method—the Glenn Doman method—of language teaching with three- to four-year-old children. This method enables young children to acquire, quickly and playfully, a good vocabulary in Tamil and English without in any way interfering with their spontaneous development. So far, the results have been very promising. Of course, those children who don't show any interest in this are allowed to play, to sing and paint."

But what happens when these young children, used to a bright and progressive educational environment at Isai Ambalam, enter the Government school in their village? Subash sighs. "It's a question which really pains me. I went to a Government school recently and saw how it is. There was one teacher for three grades. When the teacher didn't come, somebody stood in front of them with a big cane to make the children sit in silence. As to language teaching: to learn Tamil, they begin by having to learn every letter of the alphabet (which is big!), and then they have to add them together one by one to form words. No wonder so many children around here never learnt how to read or write their own language."

"My wish at present is to keep the young children at Isai Ambalam for an extra year so that when they enter a Government school they will have a good educational basis. Maybe then they will become class leaders and be able to assist the teacher."

"In the long term I would like to see the successful experimental methods we adopt here being adopted in all schools in the area. Already some local teachers have shown interest."

The challenge presented by the young adults at Isai Ambalam is somewhat different. Under Lisa's stewardship, they would receive some basic language and maths education through doing project work related to their village situation.

Subash: "In the long term I would like to see the successful experimental methods we adopt here being adopted in all schools in the area. Already some local teachers have shown interest."

.....

Later, a number of them went to Auroville workshops to receive training in particular skills: a few sat for 8th Standard examinations, with partial success. Lisa herself was unhappy with the situation. She didn't feel the teachers could do much for them and recommended that that section of the school be closed down. Subash was not sure about this.

"I felt that the reason why Lisa and other Western teachers could not do something effective for the drop-outs was that they gave these young people freedom without giving them the basic educational foundation which would allow them to make the best use of that freedom. If you don't try to raise somebody one level, you simply give them the freedom to remain where they are!"

Subash wanted to begin by giving these young adults a proper grounding in Tamil, English and Maths, and then to encourage them to pursue other interests through self-learning. But then he encountered another problem. The teachers themselves, none of whom had received any formal training, did not know how to teach the languages properly, and they had no idea how to identify or cope with learning difficulties in the students. "I brought in resource books so they could learn how to cope with learning difficulties and also initiated a system by which each teacher makes a written report each day of what they have done and how successful they have been in

imparting something to the students. Weekly meetings are utilised to discuss what has been done and to evaluate the outcome. Some of the teachers have also received in-service training by attending workshops outside Auroville, and this will continue."

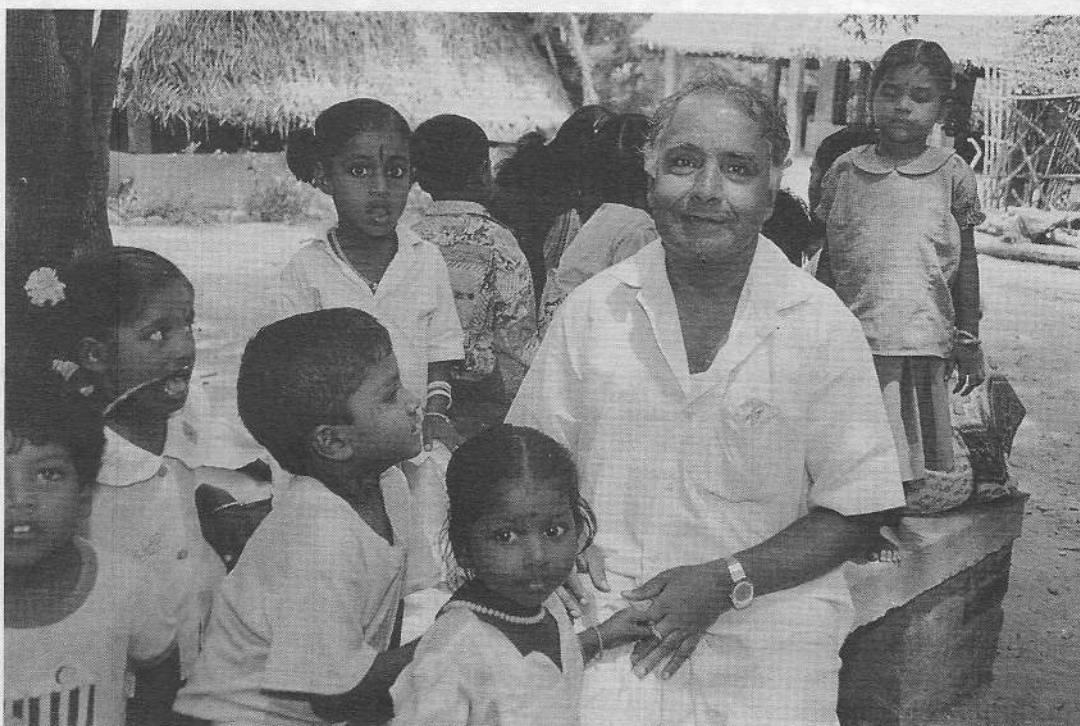
One key problem remained. How to introduce these older children to these subjects in a non-formal way which would develop their thirst for learning? One day, however, Subash and some other Auroville teachers went to visit Rishi Valley School in a neighbouring State and saw the successful Rishi Valley method of education being used (see article below).

"What impressed us when we visited the school," continues Subash, "was how engrossed all the children were in their studies. A few of them looked up when we walked in, but they immediately forgot us again. If we can bring the same spirit of concentration and self-help into Isai Ambalam we will really have made big strides." Next month, after the study cards have been completed in Tamil and the teachers have a grounding in the

method, he plans to use the Rishi Valley method to teach the young adults at Isai Ambalam language and maths.

But where is the Auroville element in all of this? What, if anything, makes Isai Ambalam an Auroville school rather than a school run by Auroville for the villagers? "I think one of the keys is this ideal of unending education. I'm not interested in just preparing these older students for marriage or a job in a workshop. I'd like to enable them to get a little beyond what they are now so that they can make better choices about their future. I want to teach them how to study for themselves. But, above all, my answer would be somewhat similar to what Andre says when he's asked about the true purpose of New Creation school. It's about kindling a light in each individual, awakening something within. If somehow we can help these young people open to the force which is working everywhere in Auroville, and to work with it consciously, I know it will lead them further and further towards self-knowledge."

From an interview by Alan



Subash and children at Isai Ambalam

The internationally renowned philosopher Krishnamurthi established Rishi Valley School in 1931 in rural Andhra Pradesh. Today, the Rishi Valley School ranks among India's best residential schools and it has created a Rural Education Centre to extend educational resources to the neighbouring villages where there were no schools at all. The literacy level in this region has climbed from almost 0% to 70% since the inception of rural "satellite schools" of Rishi Valley. Bindu reports on the innovative approach of a young couple, Rama and Padmanabha Rao, that has revolutionized rural education in Rishi Valley.

Early in their career as rural educationists, Rama and Padmanabha Rao realized that the standard textbooks used in most village schools do not relate to the daily experience of the children and are thus boring. Lack of parental encouragement, of good teachers, of a quiet and stable home environment conducive to study are some of the other problems in rural education that were noted by the Raos. So they decided to do away with textbooks and homework, minimize the need for teaching, and focus instead on self-learning. Over the years, they developed an educational kit they call "School in a Box."

This educational kit, which literally fits into a box, consists of 1,500 illustrated cards (in the early years, the illustrations were drawn by local artists but now are printed due to growing demand) designed to allow the children to teach themselves mathematics, the Telugu language, and about health and environment. The language com-

LESSONS FROM RISHI VALLEY

ponent develops reading and writing skills. The letters and vocabulary introduced to the children are based on their current usage in spoken language as determined by a survey. The mathematics component explains theoretical concepts in terms of concrete examples. The health and environment component of the kit combines nature studies and social studies with emphasis on group projects.

A novel feature of this kit is that it allows both for the free progress of an individual and for a vertically-grouped classroom where students form four to five groups depending on their stage of learning. The students learn on their own from "study cards", reinforcing concepts they learn by activities (such as clay work, educational games etc.) contained in the "work cards." When a student finishes a particular card, he or she goes to the next card as indicated by a chart, coded by colour and pictures of animals, called an "achievement ladder." In short, the students teach and test themselves. Teachers act as facilitators in remedying, when necessary, gaps in understanding and as animators leading the class in singing songs, telling stories and in group projects. Because of the efficiency of the educational kit, local youth with minimum qualifica-

tions such as a secondary education can be trained as teachers at little time and cost. The kit which is shared by all the students is much more economical than individually owned textbooks. Further, unlike textbooks the cards can be easily and individually replaced when damaged as well as revised or upgraded.

The effectiveness of the "School in a Box" is borne out by the following facts: the students remain concentrated in their work even when visitors are present in the classroom; the students all pass the Grade Five state examination after four years of this programme with 95% of them qualifying for Grade Six as well (in the standard educational system it takes six years to reach grade six); the dropout rate in Rishi Valley "satellite schools" is less than 2% as opposed to 40% to 60% in most elementary schools. Indeed, the kit has won high acclaim from the Departments of Education of the Central Government and several State Governments, from Central and State Councils for Educational Research and from the UNICEF Educational Advisor for South Asia. At present, local variations of the kit have been introduced by Government and Non-Government organizations in schools in Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

Last but not least the schools, though consisting of a single classroom, are neat, well-organized and contain a flower, vegetable and fruit garden maintained by the staff and students in the compound. The vegetable and fruit generate nearly enough income to make the school self-sustaining while the flowers, says Rama Rao, "teach the children to appreciate beauty."

Bindu

ILAINARKAL

Ilaignarkal (meaning "Youth" in Tamil) was started twenty-one years ago by Meenakshi as a day school for Tamil children already living in Auroville. But one by one, village youth working in Auroville began coming to the school in the evenings as they wanted to improve their Tamil and English. This is how Ilaignarkal developed into an evening school-cum-youth centre that caters to the cultural, academic, recreational and vocational needs of young Tamil workers.

One of the most important aspects of the school is the study of Tamil literature and culture and to that end, Ilaignarkal has set up a good library, open not only to its students but also to Aurovilians, workers and villagers. The students collect local proverbs and folk tales, and learn martial arts, dances and songs, and also compose new songs with themes of social and environmental awareness.

Presently an average of thirty-five students attend the evening classes, nine of whom are girls. The low percentage of female students is due to the fact that girls over the age of fifteen years are discouraged from attending school due to social pressure in the villages not to mix with

The Joy Of Learning

Tineke reports on ILAINARKAL and BHARATI SCHOOL

boys.

A recent development of the Ilaignarkal school is the "satellite classes" where a senior teacher visits several commercial units and work-places in Auroville once or twice a week to teach reading and writing, in Tamil and English, to the workers.

BHARATI SCHOOL

Bharati School (in Tamil Bharati means "child of Bharat/India") started when a few goatherds—all girls under ten—started coming into the school compound of Ilaignarkal. The girls were chased away because their goats were eating up the Nursery plants, but they kept coming back and being a nuisance: they picked flowers, stole fruit and made noise. Meenakshi recognized that, behind it all, the girls were seeking her attention. She made friends with them, first talking to them, then teaching them how to write their names on the blackboard and even-

tually more and more as the girls wanted to learn.

Since these young girls are expected by their families to work, the school hours are flexible. In general, school starts at 8 am and finishes at 2 pm. After that the girls can go home if they have to or stay on to do handicrafts. If these hours are not suitable, there is a provision for the girls to drop in for a lesson any time they like. Meenakshi refers to the school as "Any Time" school! She remembers one girl who was not allowed to attend the school because she had to look after the family goat. But since she desperately wanted to come to school, Meenakshi ended up looking after the goat during school hours. The teachers learned how to feed a goat!

The school responds to the need of the young women in the villages who are subject to male chauvinism and loathsome male behaviour: fathers and brothers who drink, fight and beat up the women in the family. At Bharati school, the girls, in the absence of dominant male figures, feel happy, safe and free. Boys are accepted into the school only if the girls approve of them. At present, three years after its inception, the school has about fifteen regular students, of who only a couple are boys.

Apart from teaching the three R's (Reading, Writing and 'Rithmetic), the daily activities at Bharati School centre around building self-confidence, sharing one's happiness in everyday life

At Bharati School:
Meenakshi and her "sweet little peace makers in the making".

with others, discovering and rejuvenating the local culture, learning a craft or a skill and playing! Playing is important for these girls who are forced to grow up all too quickly having to assist their mothers in household work—cooking, cleaning, fetching water and fuel and looking after their younger siblings. There is a monthly meeting with the students, teachers and parents, usually about problems at home or with menfolk. And a yearly excursion where the students' mothers but not the fathers are allowed to come along! The mothers enjoy such get-togethers for they feel a sense of liberation.

So far about forty girls have "graduated" from Bharati school. Many of them are now employed in Auroville handicrafts (weaving, leather and bead workshops), or they work independently, making paper bags, working in a household provision village shop, tailoring unit, etc. Meenakshi requests Auroville units to take the girls on as apprentices until they are sixteen or seventeen and on the condition that they attend Ilaignarkal evening school after work. "More importantly," says Meenakshi, "Bharati School effects a change in the family life of these girls. They don't anymore easily accept being bullied by their brothers or the quarreling of their parents. They don't hesitate to speak their minds. They are a bunch of sweet little peace makers in the making."

Future Directions

Plans for a new school complex on the border of the Industrial Zone and the Cultural Zone are already taking shape. This complex will host: Ilaignarkal evening school, Bharati day school, Play school and a vocational training section, a training and resource centre for night school teachers, a youth counselling service, a youth hostel, a kitchen, a day-care centre and a Tamil research wing. Because of its location, Meenakshi expects an increase in students and hopes that one day these schools will be the prototype for the Tamil Pavilion or even become a small Tamil university where Tamil people and Aurovilians can study the rich heritage of this ancient culture.



"The primary schools in the villages have so many problems: they include overcrowding, not enough teachers, lack of basic educational facilities and resources, etc. To try to remedy this we have planned a big project—the Primary Education Project or PEP—the first part of which is about to begin.

"The project falls into two main parts. The first aims at improving the infrastructure of village schools by building additional facilities. The second, with which we are most concerned, involves training some of our local development workers as 'educational animators' who will then go to the local schools and supplement the regular education the children receive. Starting from October, each animator will teach two half-days a week in three different local schools: initially, we will cover twenty schools in this way. The subjects will be those which otherwise would not be taught—hygiene, first aid, music, drama, environmental education, etc.—and they will be taught in a way which is innovative and fun. The animators will also be responsible for creating par-

PEP-ping up local education

ANBU of Village Action talks about a new project which may lead to radical changes in the way that children are taught in the local government primary schools.

ent-teacher associations for the schools they are involved with. It is these PTAs rather than Village Action which will be responsible for seeking government funds for the infrastructural development part of the project.

"We have held meetings with the local teachers and the Assistant Educational Officer for this area and the response has been good. In fact, the teachers have asked to meet more regularly together and we are planning to use these occasions to introduce some of the more interested teachers to innovative

forms of teaching like the Rishi Valley and Glenn Doman methods. In future, we may bring together two or three schools for inter-school activities every few months, and once a year we'd like all the schools to come together and make some joint presentations.

"The important thing about this project is that it gives an opportunity to work upon major social problems in India at the local level where many of these attitudes originate. At present, for example, if a six or seven-year old boy is asked to hold hands with a girl he will refuse because this kind of thing is frowned upon in the village. Similarly, if the teacher asks the children to clean the classroom, only the girls will come forward. The educational animators can start changing these attitudes at an age before they are fully established and this may eventually have enormous repercussions upon behaviour in the local villages. But to do this, the animators have first to uncover and deal with their own preconceptions. This is why, more than any other reason, we need at least a year to train them for their new role."

From an interview by Alan

Managing ourselves

The Mother was absolutely clear about how Auroville should be organized: "It is the individuals who have attained a higher consciousness who have the right to govern." However, there is no consensus in the community that such individuals exist at present. What to do then until they appear? How to deal with the problems which have beset our organization for many years?

On these pages we highlight some of those problems, we describe the experience of another spiritually-oriented community, and we introduce a new concept, Sociocracy, which may help us take another step in our organizational evolution.

Even a cursory glance at recent issues of Auroville's internal weekly *Auroville News* confirms that decision-making and governance are once again a hot topic. Triggered by a recent decision of the Entry Group which split the community, there have been a series of General and Residents Assembly meetings not only on the entry process but also on other controversial topics like a proposed cellular evolution conference at Quiet, the monoculture planting of cashews on Auroville land, and Matrimandir. The impulse behind this "return to the people" movement is the perception of some Aurovilians that major work groups, as well as certain individuals, have assumed powers and are taking important decisions without reference to the larger community.

There is nothing new in this perception. Almost all cooperatives, councils and Working Committees from the past have been accused, at some point in their precarious tenure, of "losing touch with the community", of secrecy, manipulation and power trips. (They, in turn, have often felt that the wider community failed to appreciate their efforts on its behalf, and that they were being used as scapegoats for all the frustrations that are always awash in this volatile place.) There follows a series of community meetings. A new group is selected by the community with a new mandate. All goes

well for a few months until certain people begin to suspect that this group too is losing touch. And so the carousel continues...

Behind this, however, lies the larger question: how do we wish to organize ourselves at the community level, assuming, that is, that we CAN govern and organize ourselves competently at present. This is not self-evident. Look at some of the obstacles Auroville presents to effective organization: a strong anti-authoritarian bias, a rampantly individualistic culture, an absence of any authority which could enforce decisions, 'shadow' or parallel structures of authority which are not accountable to the community as a whole, the distrust generated by personality-based politics and remembered 'abuses' from the past, poor communication between the community and key work groups, lack of adequate meeting places, embedded beliefs that organization is intrinsically 'mental' and dries up creativity etc.etc.

More than all this, what militates against an effective organization at present is the deep distrust which exists between different individuals and sections of the community. In fact, at the risk of oversimplifying one can say that a kind of invisible fault-line runs through the community (or through that section of the community which concerns itself with such issues). On one side are grouped

Auroville is meant to be here", "Nobody has a monopoly of the truth", "Power always tends to corrupt", "Nobody has the right to tell anybody else what to do here. It is between the individual and Mother."

On the other side cluster attitudes like, "Mother gave very clear directions for Auroville. Too many Aurovilians are not following them at present and consequently Auroville is in a mess", "Those who do not follow Mother's directions should be told to leave", "Some Aurovilians have a better understanding than others of where Auroville should be heading and these should be given authority", and "Truth has nothing to do with democracy".

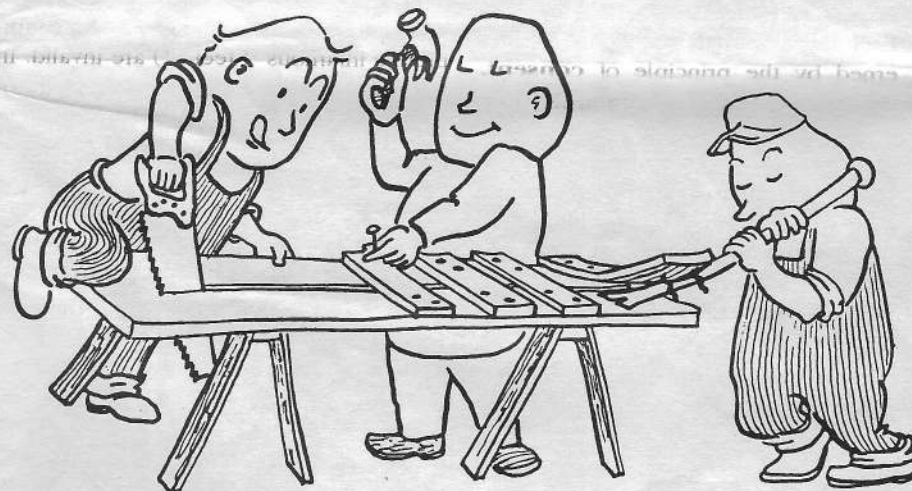
In terms of organizational preferences, the first orientation either tends to reject any form of strong organization altogether or favours the "horizontal" one. The "horizontalists" argument runs something like this. "We know that Mother wanted Auroville to be governed by those with a higher consciousness, but such a species has not yet been sighted on this plateau. Since it would be foolhardy to allow small groups of unevolved individuals extensive powers of decision-making and execution, it is safer at present to opt for a more democratic process by which the community as a whole decides upon

major issues and monitors the membership of key groups." This orientation favours a strong and empowered Residents Assembly. The present Auroville Council, which consists of four bodies which have divided up the work previously performed by the Working Committee alone, also reflects this desire to broaden the base of decision-making, as does the Local Area Meetings experiment introduced two years ago.

The other perspective, while not claiming that we have super-evolved individuals among us, nevertheless believes that some Aurovilians have proved themselves capable of managing community affairs and that they should be given the power and authority to continue to do so. This orientation, which is sceptical of the ability of Residents Assembly meetings to represent the community as a whole (the average attendance at such meetings is about seven per cent of the adult population) and to make informed, non-partisan decisions, favours a strong central body with powers to give a direction to the community as a whole, a direction based upon what are seen as the fundamentals of Mother's vision for Auroville.

This divide is nothing new—it has been there from the very beginnings of Auroville—so we are clearly dealing with deep-rooted differences of perception

(contd. on p. 5) ▽



The Findhorn experience

The Findhorn Community in Scotland is 35 years old now. Like Auroville, it has a spiritual basis. From an organizational point of view, does it have anything to offer us?

One thing that has always been important in the meeting and decision-taking process at Findhorn is the attempt to contact the higher reality, the truth which wants to manifest beyond personal predispositions. A typical meeting would begin with various points of view being expressed but at some point everybody would be asked to make a conscious shift, to put aside their own preferences and, through meditation, to try to "attune" to a higher will. Afterwards, people would be invited to share with everybody else what had "come through". The final decision, which always attempted to reflect a consensus, would be based upon these insights. If no clear consensus emerged, the process would be repeated at a later date.

Such a process could be very time-consuming. In order to avoid inordinate delays in decision-making, those who dis-

agreed with a majority point of view would be asked, after some time, if they would agree to be a "loyal minority"—in other words not to subvert a majority decision in order to give it a fair trial.

If the purpose of the meeting was to choose an individual or individuals for a particular task, and if consensus emerged from the attunement, then the community would consciously empower those who had been chosen, giving them a great deal of autonomy in the carrying out of their duties in the trust that they were indeed the right people for the job. For many years, for example, only two people were responsible for the final decision concerning who could and who could not join the community.

The sense that true leadership requires, above all, skills in harmonising differences and in contacting higher guidance is reflected in the Findhorn terminology: the coordinators of Findhorn

work groups are known as "focalisers".

For many years, this approach seemed to work well. However, as the Findhorn community grew bigger and more diverse, and as different categories of relationship to it were created, strains began to tell. Consensus—even employing the "loyal minority" clause—proved harder and harder to achieve, questions were raised about the competency and high turnover of focalisers in certain key areas, decision-making seemed more frequently to reflect hard-nosed realities or special interests than higher guidance.

In October 1996, a Dutch management company which had made a study of the Findhorn Foundation declared it terminally ill. In particular, it found that the Foundation lacked effective leadership, lacked accountability, that there were no effective assessment and review procedures, and that the Foundation's attempts to sustain itself in the context of

the modern world were amateurish and inadequate (sound familiar?). The conclusion: the organisation had to reinvent itself if it was to survive.

In response the entire Management Committee resigned, the Foundation was restructured and a new "Reinvention Steering Group" was created with responsibility for defining what constitute the Foundation's core activities and for identifying ways in which these could be more successfully implemented. As a temporary measure, a top-down management system has replaced the former process of community-wide consultation and consensus.

Findhorn, like Auroville, is seeking a new organisation more appropriate to realising its ideals without ignoring the present reality: that of a community that is still struggling to achieve a higher consciousness.

Alan

Sociocratic decision making

"We consider a proper organisational model to be of prime importance for the further development of Auroville," judged the board of the Dutch foundation De Zaaier, which has a long time association with Auroville. And to that end, they enabled four Aurovillians, Deepthi, Judith, Guy and Carel, to follow a one-week course in The Netherlands to study the theory and practice of an organisational model called sociocracy, which is applied in a number of commercial and non-profit institutions.

What is sociocracy?

The term sociocracy refers to a model of society which might be regarded as the next step after democracy. More precisely, the sociocratic decision-making model, in which the arguments advanced by the individual are of paramount importance in making decisions, transcends both the democratic model, in which the majority prevails, and the autocratic model where the will of one individual is law. The disadvantage of these systems is that those affected by a decision are defeated, not convinced. They may be forced to accept a decision, but they may also reject it or attempt in other ways to reverse or undermine it.

Four rules of sociocracy

The main principle of the sociocratic model of organisation is its optimum respect for each individual and each group. Each individual has an equal right to participate in the decision-making process and the individual's opinion cannot be ignored. One opinion can only be overruled by a better one.

Sociocracy attempts to guarantee this principle by applying the following four rules:

1. Each decision-making process is governed by the principle of **consent**. Consent means that a decision can only be taken when no-one has any *reasonable* objection to it. Consent does not equal consensus, which often means that an individual swallows his or her objections in order to satisfy others.
2. If the principle of consent is to be applied consistently, large societies and organisations have to be broken down into smaller units, which sociocracy describes as **circles**. In this way a circle organisation is created. A circle is a group of people who are functionally

related, such as a department, a class, a unit, a working group or a community. Each circle has its own purpose.

3. It is important that the circles should be interlinked in such a way that the circle process can continue to operate. Accordingly, each circle is linked to another circle by a **double link** consisting of at least two persons, elected by that circle.
4. People are elected after open discussion by consent.

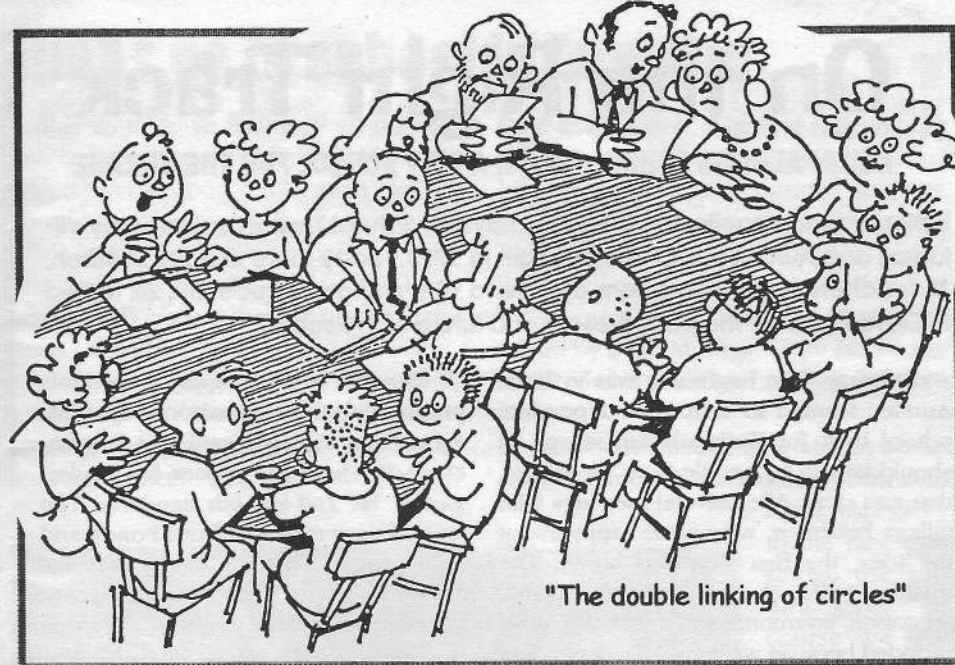
The principle of consent.

The principle of consent means that nobody has any reasoned objection against a proposed decision. All objections must be supported with arguments, and all arguments must be discussed openly.

The principle of consent does not imply endless discussions, but guarantees that all concerns and the views of each member of the circle have been taken into consideration when a decision is reached. Consent does not mean that there is solidarity or unanimity, or that everybody says "yes" to the proposal. It simply provides the opportunity to give everybody a reasoned "no." An individual cannot, therefore, misuse this principle as a veto right. Objections for which no reasons can be given, (for example the infamous "I feel...") are invalid. In case a circle cannot reach a decision, it can decide—with consent—to ask the circle to which it is interlinked to decide upon the issue, or—with consent—to postpone a decision.

The circle structure of society

In the sociocratic model of organisation each circle has its own purpose to realise, its own field of action, and is autonomous. That means that a circle can decide, within the limits set in consent with other circles, its own policies, e.g. the processes it will



"The double linking of circles"

use to achieve its aim and its internal delegation of functions and tasks.

For the proper working of a circle it is necessary that:

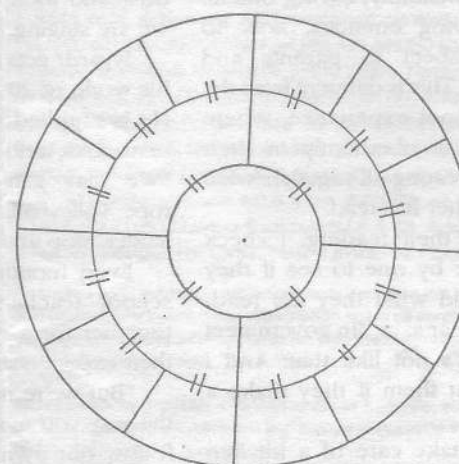
- its objective is clear and formulated, which happens with the consent of the next higher* circle; (see footnote)
- a process to realise that goal is designed;
- functions and tasks are designed to realise the process;
- the functions and tasks are delegated to the members of the circle.

Formulating the goal of a circle defines its *raison d'être*. This sounds simpler than it often is. Criteria for goal formulation are, for example, that the desired result is clearly stated; that the specific quality which distinguishes it from other aims (and circles) is defined; and that the goal is understandable to others who are not part of that circle. Any individual or circle can propose to create additional circles; the decision to do so can only be made by and with the other circles concerned.

Within a circle itself, three functions can be distinguished: the directive, the executive and the evaluative function. Within the circle each individual has a specific role to play, and no one can act independently from the others. The circle member who performs the directive function or the executive or evaluative function, can only do so if the other circle members respect that person and acknowledge that s/he possesses the qualities necessary to fulfil that function. A circle can thus function only if all three components recognise and respect one another and get on together well enough to solve personal problems, as far as possible, within the circle. It is precisely that recognition and respect for mutual differences which is essential to the functioning of the circle.

The double linking of circles

The number of people in each circle,



Circle organization shown in an integrated drawing

the number of circles and the number of circle levels will vary from one organisation to another. In general, each organisation has a number of tasks to perform which will, in the sociocratic model, be executed by various functionally related individuals organised in circles. These circles are connected to each other through the so-called **"double linking process"**: the leader and an elected representative of a circle form part of the next circle. Likewise, the leader and the elected representative of the next circle will in turn form part of the circle that follows.

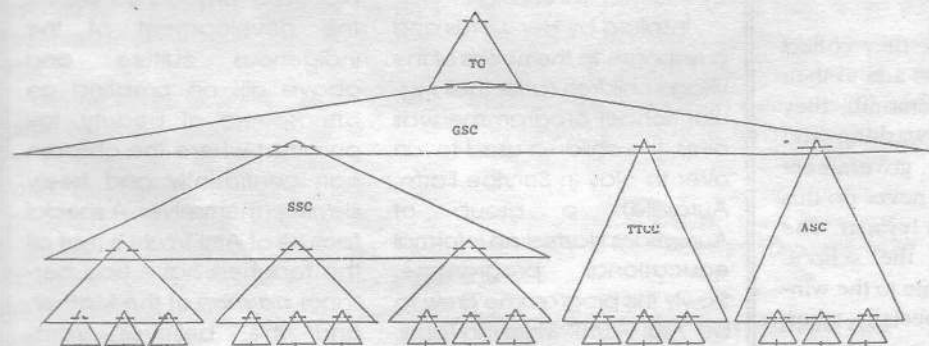
Selection of people after open discussion

This fourth rule is designed to obtain consent on the choice of the "right" person by means of an open discussion which eliminates private gossip, and forces each member of a circle to consider someone's qualities and weaknesses openly. This results in clarity and, ultimately, of the better functioning of the circle and thus of the organisation.

Can sociocracy help Auroville?

The description of sociocracy given above is extremely brief and does not do justice to the complexities and philosophical background of the system. A series of workshops will be required to introduce sociocracy to the community of Auroville, in which it can be seen collectively if the sociocratic model can be used in Auroville as a next step in its organisation.

Report by Carel



Larger circle organization shown as triangles

Managing ourselves, contd. from p.4

and belief. So deep, in fact, that the different orientations even tend to relate to different aspects of Mother—the "horizontalists" emphasising Mother's dislike of professions of moral superiority, her willingness to change plans in the light of changed circumstances, her insistence upon "You must all agree"—while the "hierarchists" place greater emphasis upon the unchanging fundamentals of Mother's vision of Auroville and favour

the more apocalyptic texts like "Truth or the Abyss".

Doubtless the perceived differences are due to our limited consciousness. But the question remains: given that we are so limited, can we conceive of any organization for Auroville which can encompass or transcend such differences? Or are we fated to continue swinging, like a tired pendulum, between the two orientations for a further three decades?

Alan

FOOTNOTE: In a traditional organisation, the words 'lower', 'higher' and 'next higher' or 'top' circle indicate the hierarchical set-up of such organisations. Thus, an organisation which has three levels (e.g. on the lower level those involved with purchase, production and sales, on the higher level the department heads and on the top level the management) would have three levels of circles corresponding to this hierarchy. The system of double linking in such organisations guarantees the proper representation of the views of the members of each circle, as the circle leader and the elected representative will have different functions within their circle and will represent different aspects. In this way, the double linking guarantees that power flows in two directions: from the higher circle down, but also from the lower circle up.

In an organisation which has a non-hierarchical set-up, a double linking is required as the representation by two people instead of one will guarantee a more complete representation of the views of the circle.

On the Right Track

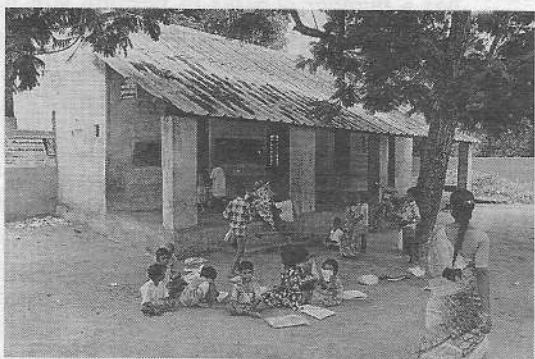
KUILAPALAYAM SCHOOL TRUST: A NEW SCHOOL FOR THE VILLAGE

Kuilapalayam (spelled as Kuyilappalayam) School Trust was started by villagers and Aurovillians of village origin in 1993. Today there are 394 children, 15 teachers and classes from creche to 10th standard. Recently, Jill talked to Selvaraj about the past, present and future of the school.

Selvaraj: "The beginning was in 1993. Aurelec wanted to start an independent school trust for Kuilapalayam village. It should be run by people from the village, that was clear. After several meetings with village headmen, who were happy about the idea, the first step was taken. The trustees were chosen; they are Guna, Srinivasan, Jayamurthi and myself. We were included because we were all independent young people from different corners of the village. Everybody accepted."

Then the building began. A shed was put up with three classrooms. Students came from Kuilapalayam and Edayan-chavadi. There are classes for kindergarten, 1st, 2nd and 6th standards. The teachers are recruited from Pondy and other places. They are paid a reasonable amount—a little higher than other, non-governmental school teachers. The medium is Tamil. They teach English, Maths, Geography, Social Studies and Science, according to the government syllabus.

Why was another school needed in the village? The answer is clear if you visit Kuilapalayam and see the present situation of the village school, run by the government. As Selvaraj reports, many things are lacking. "The teachers don't come on time, they are lax. The classrooms are poor. There is one big hall of 15 x 5



The old village school



The new building for "Kuyilappalayam School Trust"

metres where 270 students sit, and are all taught at the same time. They only teach up to the 5th standard. What they get is simply not good enough, although efforts are now underway to improve the textbooks. They have added playful games and pictures to their material.

"The differences are not so much in what is being taught, as in the management of the school. In the School Trust, the teachers are mostly young, just newly graduated. They have a fresh outlook. Perhaps, especially in the lower classes, they could be trained somewhat like the Rishi Valley project teachers [see article elsewhere in this issue]. I would definitely be happy if the teachers here could learn this method. Right now, the normal programme takes up most of their time. But we have set future goals—to have 1,000 students who attend until

pay a fee which is kept to a minimum. The School is run on this fee, with the help of the organisational and individual donations.

"The land is officially leased from the Mailam Temple Trust for twenty years. It's approximately four acres. We negotiated with the Swami, and finally he was happy to make this arrangement. He even came to give his blessing for the construction.

"What was interesting is that through this endeavour, the village seemed to come together, at least for a while. Everyone agreed there was a need for such a school. We even did a survey before we began, to see who would use the facility, and we found out about 180 children were walking at least 8 kms to school, as far as Muthialpet and even to Pondy, to continue their schooling after 5th standard. So we knew we were on the right track."

A night school teacher

The night school programme for the Auroville area is administered by long-time Aurovillians Sundaram and Meenakshi. The ten night schools are attended by approximately 800 students. IYYANAR, who has completed two and a half years in B. Com through a Madras University correspondence course, has been teaching at Iumbai for three years, six days a week, sometimes Sundays as well.

Iyyanar is 24. He and his wife and child live in Poothurai, near Auroville. Many Aurovillians know him, since he operates the photocopying machine of SAIIR.



Iyyanar

"What I learned I have to pass on to other students. I don't want to waste what I know. This is what I was thinking. When Sundaram got in touch with me to teach in the evening, I accepted.

"There are 40 students at Iumbai. I teach Tamil, English, Math, Geography, Science. Saturday we have singing class. I play tabla. We make up our own songs about Sri Aurobindo and Mother. Yearly, we have three functions where we celebrate: Independence Day, Children's Day and our annual function. We make drama, singing, with prizes to the children.

"Monthly, we go to some place in Auroville, like Aurogreen or Forecomers or Pitchandikulam. We take the students out on tour to Madras, or to Madurai Hills. We show the children how to grow plants and teach them about birds and Auroville life. I teach them about Sri Aurobindo's life."

The aim of the night school is to give the students freedom to

learn—not by rote, but by experiencing the world through their five senses. He also tries to teach with stories that provide role models for the children, with discussions and explanations, so that there is a lively give and take between student and teacher.

"We teach them life education—how to maintain good habits, speak well and not waste energy in foolishness. Helping others, taking responsibility, loving others, not keeping enemies, how to show respect to parents and teachers." This is different from the usual school experience, where students sit obediently in their seats, repeating all together what their teacher has read.

"With their reading, I check them one by one to see if they understand what they are reading," Iyyanar says. "In government school, it's not like that. And I don't beat them if they make a mistake."

They take care of a kitchen garden, and on Sundays they plant, weed and tend their plants.

On their field trips, they collect plants and flowers to add to their collection. Once a month, they clean the school—washing and sweeping. "In the government school they would never do this kind of work," says Iyyanar. "The parents also visit the school. Sometimes, they come to the window and look, especially when we are singing."

Iyyanar gets an honorarium for his work, of 200 rupees a month. He is supplied with some books, textbooks, and sports materials. "We play games like jumping rope, volleyball, football, catch the leader, stop and go."

Every month, all the ten night school teachers and staff get together for a meeting, to share their experiences.

"But we're never told, 'This is the way you must teach.' We can follow our own way. This is my way."

Interview by Jill

ARUL VAZHI: The Way of Grace

In the early seventies, Varadharajan, an Aurovillian, asked the Mother how Auroville should relate to the villagers. She answered:

"The best way, you see, is education. To educate them not by words and speeches but by example. If you can make them mix with your life and your work and they get the influence of your way of being, your way of understanding, then (the Mother whispers) little by little they will change."

Inspired by Her words and in response to the needs of the village children (after their regular school programme was over, the children used to run over to play in Service Farm, Auroville), a group of Aurovillians started an informal educational programme. Slowly this programme grew to be "Arul Vazhi" which, in Tamil, means "The Way of Grace." Arul Vazhi offers at Promesse an educational programme in the light of the teachings of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo to about 125 children of the neighbouring Morattandi village. It comprises a morning kindergarten for 22 children in the age group 4-6 years, an evening school for 100 children in the age group 6-15 years, and a leadership training programme for girls aged between 16-18 years. Students of the evening school attend

other local schools during the day. Some of them walk a few kilometres daily just to attend Arul Vazhi. About sixty percent of Arul Vazhi's student population is girls. Varadharajan, who coordinates the programme, explains that their programme targets girls for it is they who in their later role as wives and mothers can effect the necessary change in individual households.

At Arul Vazhi emphasis is placed on physical culture, on the development of the indigenous culture, and above all, on creating an atmosphere of beauty, joy and trust where the children can confidently and freely develop themselves. A special feature of Arul Vazhi is that all the teachers have had personal *darshan* of the Mother, and this, believes Varadharajan, "goes a long way in providing the children with the right environment." Other aims of the school are to expose the children to the international culture of Auroville and to their own culture through yearly trips to Chidambaram, Mahabalipuram, Tanjore, etc.

"These village children have an inherent psychic gift of joy and simplicity to offer to Auroville. It is this that we try to nurture," concludes Varadharajan.

Bindu

ALL USA MEETING AUM '97

Each year in America, there is an open gathering of people who feel an involvement with the work of Sri Aurobindo and Mother. Naturally many of those attending have strong affinities with Auroville and this year's group offered a spontaneous donation toward the purchase of the lands for Auroville. This "fun" raising effort had two enthusiastic cheerleaders, June Maher and Paula Murphy, who on the first day of the meeting proposed a target of \$3,000 and kept all informed of the progress by various ingenious ways until the target was surpassed three days later with \$3,333 (about one lakh of rupees).

Participants came from all parts of the USA and Canada to the forest setting of the Pathworks Conference Center in the Catskill Mountains of New York State. About 125 people joined in the various sessions with talks, workshops and cultural activities—enough for everyone.

The 125th Anniversary of Sri Aurobindo was commemorated throughout the conference. Devan Nair, Manoj Das, and Debashish Banerji spoke on aspects of the Integral Yoga. Elizabeth Hin, a spiritual teacher, presented two sessions on Sri Aurobindo and Mother that were remarkably inspiring. Prof. Robert Thurman, author of numerous books on Tibetan Buddhism, gave a dynamic and provocative address on his version of "super" Buddhism.

A group from the conference journeyed to the nearby Matagiri Center and hiked to the top of "Mother's Mountain" where the proposed multi-million dollar Sri Aurobindo Retreat Center might be built, and installed a bench. The idea of the bench came independently to both Margo McLeod and Larry Seidlitz. The group took turns carrying the bench pieces up the mountain and when all the parts arrived on top, it was assembled and duly dedicated. Among the many meetings, events and exchanges, a few must be noted: the unexpected appearance of the legendary Ananta who lived on Ananta's Island (Pondicherry), Seyril's dramatic reading of her play "Hiawatha" meant to symbolize the nation-soul of America in the American Pavilion destined for Auroville, and Chitra Neogy's presentation of her latest film, "Journey to India."

The conference did not come ready-made, but required the tireless coordination of members of the Foundation for World Education, Matagiri Center for Conscious Evolution and on-the-spot locals like Wendy and Julian Lines. I am still wondering how they arranged for a big black bear to come down to the kitchen during dinner.

Bill

"Fun-raiser" June Maher



Tamil Aurovilians go to school in England

Three young Tamil Aurovilians from After School have been chosen to spend two years at a school in England. Sponsored by the Pestalozzi Children's Village Trust, Murugan, Bala and Suresh left in September for a village in East Sussex, where 20 students from around the world—Thailand, Nepal, Zambia and India—are studying for their International Baccalaureate. This is the first time Pestalozzi Village has accepted students for this diploma course. The programme is run in cooperation with Hastings College, where they will attend classes, while living and taking their meals outside.

Actually, the invitation came as a result of a small article about After School students in Auroville Today. The school got in contact with Auroville, and then Julia Ponsford came to Auroville to administer an exam. Thirty-five students were tested in English, Maths and Science. "English was hard," says Murugan. "We had to listen to a tape recording and then answer questions. I had trouble understanding the accent! Then they gave us a Chemistry test, plus

problems to solve in Physics. This was much easier than English. Then there was a brief interview with each student about his or her family background and plans for the future. One month later, we received a fax that three of us had been selected. We were very happy to have been chosen."

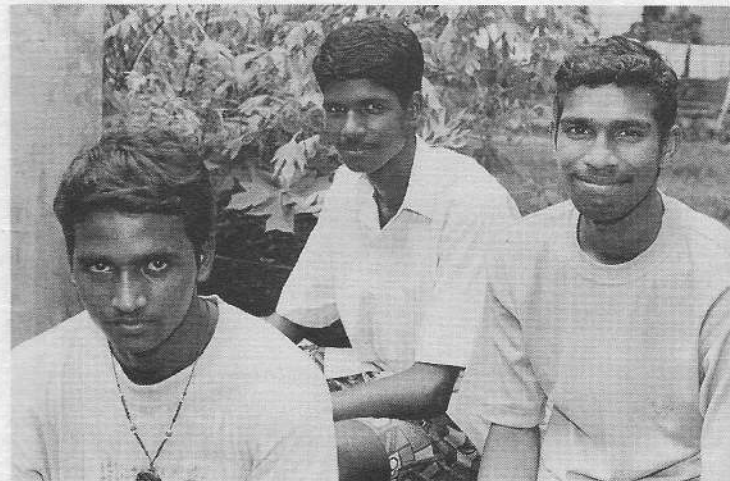
Besides taking classes, they will, according to Murugan, also "teach kindergarten, plant trees, play games like soccer, cricket and basketball. And

Brighton is close." The first visit will last nine months; then they will return next July for two months of summer holidays.

How do their parents feel about this? Bala: "My mother is sad. She doesn't know where England is. I told her it is nine hours away, and she thought I meant by bus." Murugan: "My father was shocked and scared at first, but now he's okay."

The boys plan to take videos about Auroville and other items from India with them, especially music tapes, to bridge the culture gap. "Of course we will tell the kids about Auroville!"

Jill



Heading for England:
Murugan, Bala
and Suresh

BRIEF NEWS

Beyond Man

The book *Beyond Man, the Life and Work of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother* by Aurovilian Georges van Vrekhem, originally written in Dutch, has now been published in English. The book has been well received. The author's thesis is that Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's mission has succeeded, not only because of the Supramental Descent on February 29th, 1956, and because of the descent of the consciousness of the surhomme (the intermediate being between man and the supramentalised being) in January, 1969, but also because, as he puts it, of the Mother's "realization of her supramental body, in a 'true physical substance', as the mould of all future supramental bodies in what will then have become the true physical substance of the Earth". Hardcover, Rs 495. Published by Harper Collins, P.O. Box 7041, 7/16 Ansari Road, Daryaganj, New Delhi. (E-mail: del.harpers@access.net.in)

Old files on Sri Aurobindo discovered

PHOTO: BILL

It was just another ramshackle almirah gathering dust in the store-rooms of Calcutta's Alipore Judges Court. Till jurists and researchers discovered it contained records of famous cases between 1900 and 1915, including those relating to Sri Aurobindo. The crumbling papers are throwing up interesting nuggets of information about the early indepen-

dence movement, as for example about sister Nivedita's close links with the freedom fighters. A bonus has been the recovery of an unpublished poem written by Sri Aurobindo on the occasion of scientist Sir Jagdish Chandra Bose's marriage. The twelve volumes of files and papers that have been discovered will be housed in a new Sri Aurobindo museum in West Bengal and are presently being researched.

(from: *Outlook*, October 13, 1997)

Award for CSR

On the occasion of its 10th anniversary, the Indian Renewable Energy Development Agency (IREDA) has awarded a prize to the Centre for Scientific Research, Auroville, for being the best non-governmental organisation in all sectors of renewable energy (wind, solar and biomass) in India. The prize

was handed to Auroville's Centre for Scientific Research by the Minister of Non-Conventional Energy Sources (MNES), at a function at the Vigyan Bhavan in New Delhi on October 24th.

Matrimandir Solar Power Plant commissioned

On September 29, 1997, the solar power plant for Matrimandir was commissioned by officials of the Indian Renewable Energy Development Agency IREDA. The plant will provide electricity for all the lighting required within and around the Matrimandir.

Our website

Please note that there is a slight change in the address of our site. We can now be accessed at: <http://www.auroville-india.org/whatsnew/journals/avtoday.htm>

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, Lit. Lira 61,000, D.Gl. 65, US \$ 38, UK £25. This includes the postage by airmail. Please send your contribution (or your supporting contribution of double the amount) either to the Auroville International centre in your country (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.

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IN THIS ISSUE:

- EDUCATION FOR THE VILLAGERS
- MANAGING OURSELVES
- PORTRAIT OF A FAMILY

November 1997
Number 106



Click! The family with some of the menagerie

Snapshots of a *newcomer* family

Wreaths of jasmine flowers strung up in a newly-made mud cow house. The cow, a young Jersey, mooing in the small orchard in Gaia. Karen, cycling back from her work in the Health Centre, changing from her elegant "shalwar-kameez" suit (an Indian dress) into an old skirt for milking...

Camera ready? Click!

Shrieks of joy as Skanda challenges his friends to jump higher and higher on the trampoline that the Coffield-Feith family brought all the way from Australia...

Click!

Six-year old Rufus with his adorable grin and grown-up ways, parading his, or rather his brother's, menagerie of animals: two baby squirrels, one field mouse, one sand-boa, and two glistening garden lizards (one big, one small) at the last count. Not to mention three-legged Barney, the russet-coloured Border Collie, the newly acquired cow, the dour Siamese cat, and another furtive stray cat that got adopted by them when no one else wanted it...

Click!!

And yes, chickens: David shooing the pesky hens back into their coop and returning with half-a-dozen newly laid eggs...

Click!!

Huge mugs of hot tea, biscuits and Indian sweets laid out on the table under the trees as Karen Coffield and David Feith, their tasks done, finally sit down to relate their story:

"It's India that fascinated us. The films of Satyajit Ray and the work of Mother Teresa have always interested me. And long before we actually travelled to India I studied Indian culture, history, religious thought, literature and architecture at the Department of Indian Studies at the University of Melbourne," explains David.

Karen, who is a trained midwife and nurse specializing in women's health and family-planning, got interested in Indian dance—the Bharat Natyam of Tamil Nadu—in 1980, and studied it assiduously (later teaching and performing) for eleven years. "David and I had travelled through India in 1979 and 1981, but it was in 1983 that we decided to come back for a longer stay. We stayed in a suburb (thankfully green) in Madras for a year—I learning Bharat Natyam and he studying the role of temples in South Indian society."

They toyed with the idea of settling down in India then, but finally decided to go back to Melbourne. And the kids were born, first Skanda who is now almost eleven and then Rufus. Karen worked part-time as a nurse and was the primary care-giver to the kids while David worked as a tutor in Indian studies and as an administrator for Aid and Development in the Overseas Bureau of Australia. At the back of their minds, their fascination with India remained but thirteen years passed before they could come back for a visit to India and to Auroville.

"We had visited Auroville in 1981, but we weren't too impressed with it then. It did not seem to be in India at all and the attitude of the foreigners, seemingly neo-colonialistic, bothered us. The ideals, of course were profound and attracted us... Actually I remember coming across a book on the Mother many years ago and being struck by her visionary ideals: she was talking of the need for sustainability,

for human unity, way back in the thirties, long before these ideas gained the currency that they have now...

"Anyway when we returned in 1996, again with the idea of settling in India, Auroville made a more favourable impression on us—the regeneration of the natural environment was just amazing—and we realized that it was a place where we could bring our kids up. To subject the boys, who had spent all their lives in Australia, to the chaos of urban India and to its archaic educational methods would have been too harsh. Auroville served as a good meeting place of India and the West," says Karen. "Actually," adds David, "Skanda did not want to come. He did not want to leave Australia. We had to cajole him into accepting the idea of our settling here, by promising him that he could have snakes for pets! (He has always wanted to catch and keep snakes but in Australia most snakes are poisonous).

"It wasn't easy for the boys, the first couple of months. Some of the Auroville children are quite closed to newcomers, and there did not seem to be any systems in place in the schools or communities to introduce new kids, to make them feel welcome... It is okay now, for Skanda especially who relates well to his teacher, Mary, in Transition and has made lots of friends at home and school. Rufus, who goes to the Kindergarten, is still a bit lonely. Of course, one of the disadvantages of growing up in Auroville is that there are so few children in any particular age group.

"As regards me," continues David, "I can't help feeling somewhat disappointed with Auroville, or rather some Aurovilians. They seem quite closed and unwelcoming to newcomers, at least on one's first contact. And many don't seem to realize or particularly care about the fact that they are living in rural South India! They carry on their western lifestyle, and often have a superior attitude to the Tamil workers from the villages that they employ...and even, among themselves, the lack of collaboration, the petty quarrels and bickering—even among members of the same community—is just bewildering. One expects more out of a place like this. The reality seem so far removed from the ideals.

"I must add however that at present I am in the process of adjusting not just to Auroville but also to changes in my personal life. I was used to working, in an organized office set-up, eight to ten hours a day. But here I am still in the process of defining and organizing my work [David works in the Project Coordination Group and the Auroville Bioregional Coordination Group] and, according to a decision that Karen and I took, I am more involved in the role of bringing up our boys. These are important changes in my life-style."

"For me," says Karen, "the process has been much easier. I heartily enjoy my work at the Health Centre—the contact with the villagers, training and supervising village health workers; the one-to-one relationship that I have developed with pregnant Auroville women, etc. And it has been fun, going over to Fertile, getting to know Johnny and Paul and learning how to milk the cow. I agree with a lot of things that David has mentioned about Auroville, but still, and I believe that is true for both of us, this place somehow holds the possibility of change, the promise of a better future."

Bindu