

AUROVILLE

TODAY

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The beginnings of Auroville: acres of eroded land and several poor villages in which about 10,000 people struggled to survive. Today, twenty-seven years later, Auroville has over a thousand members, and the massive effort to restore the land has had the incredible effect of creating a viable biosphere. It took more than two million trees, kilometres of bunds on the fields, and dams in the ravines to check the erosion and reverse the desertification. Today, twenty-seven years later, the massive effort required to reverse the harsh conditions of the villages has not yet taken place, despite some initiatives. Now, these same poor villages shelter about 28,000 people and while some people's standards of living have risen, the majority live in poverty. More and more people may be able to afford satellite television in their houses, but this does not mean that the villages have progressed as alcoholism, violence and oppression of women continue unabated.

In the early years, the first settlers who came to build "the city the earth needs" necessarily came into contact with the villagers in order to do anything at all. At that time, villagers hoped for benefits in terms of village infrastructure improvements, education and employment. They also had expected that the development of the future township would directly improve their situation. Most of these expectations remain unfulfilled and the development of Auroville as a township has tended to go on independently of the villages.

There have been attempts to improve the situation of the villages. The approaches to village development emphasize health, training, employment and mutual understanding. One small example which begun in the early years and still continues, is the community of Fraternity. Named by the Mother, this community is situated at the edge of Kuilapalayam village. Its intention was to provide education, training and employment opportunities for the village. This experiment led to another new development in the same area in the early eighties—an attempt to bring up local children along with the children of Aurovilians. This was New Creation—a complex of modern classrooms, gardens, production units, residential houses, playgrounds and sports fields spread over several acres of land.

While New Creation started with the encouragement and goodwill of Aurovilians, today the residents of New Creation feel that their experiment is not adequately supported by Auroville. This issue of AUROVILLE TODAY reports on what New Creation is doing, and why.



Day-school children of New Creation

NEW CREATION

The community and its aims

A simple and ignorant peasant here is, in his heart, closer to the Divine than the intellectuals of Europe. All those who want to become Aurovilians must know this and behave accordingly; otherwise they are unworthy of being Aurovilians." Thus wrote the Mother in a message to some Aurovilians in 1972. And yet, even after all these years, most Aurovilians tend to forget this, and the only relationship that they have with the villagers is that of an employer, benevolent though it may be, towards an employee. For the 1,000 Aurovilians who live here, there are 4,000 workers from the villages, and, indeed, young Aurovilian kids often experience the Tamils only as unskilled manual labourers. André Tardeil, the creator of New Creation, seeks to counter this attitude by providing a space within Auroville where children, regardless of their origin, can grow up together. Elaborating on the ideology behind New Creation, André says, "We Westerners

came here because we were attracted by the ideal, by the yoga, and we feel the Divine has guided us here. But because of this we should not think that now we are the ones at home here, and the villagers are the people who have to be 'integrated'. In fact, it is as much the Divine's will that they are living here. For as the Mother admonished us, 'They are at home and you are the visitors.' Therefore, in my view, there is no question of 'integration'. We should grow together and go beyond the differences of Aurovilian versus non-Aurovilian. And the best way this can happen is for our and their children to study together and to live together in the same boarding school."

And so New Creation began in 1983 with the opening of a school next to the village of Kuilapalayam. Since then, New Creation has expanded to include training workshops, cottage industries, residential housing, a guest house, a cafeteria and even a taxi service. But the school still remains New Creation's big-

gest feature. Yet André's dream of bringing up children of all climes together so they can spontaneously express a living human unity, remains unmanifest as the number of "white" children who join New Creation School is minimal. And according to André, even when he sent children from New Creation to join other schools in Auroville, they were not readily accepted. André perceives the attitude of Aurovilians towards the villagers as being supercilious, and he fulminates against those who have preconceived notions of Auroville and try to impose their plans for an idealistic city from above, ignoring the existing reality of the villages: "People make the mistake of thinking, 'There is Auroville and there are the villages'... What is called for is a complete reversal of our way of looking at the villagers, and a realization from within that we and the villagers are part of ONE Auroville. Auroville should develop integrally from

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Maheshwari, a day-school student

within with the villagers playing their natural role in its development."

There are many who oppose André's ideas (for reasons detailed later), but the latter refuses to compromise his beliefs and continues to build New Creation with the insufficient funds that he gets. "The Mother said, 'The best way, you see, is education. To educate them [the villagers] not by words and speeches but by example. If you can mix them with your life and your work, they can get the influence of your way of being, your way of understanding, then, little by little, they will change'," reminds André. "All I am trying to do," he continues, "is to build bridges between Auroville and the village children, for the latter have a psychic quality, a joy and an enthusiasm that Auroville really needs. All our development and material power will have no meaning without that."

The school

The school consists of a creche, a kindergarten, and a primary school that provides education unto the age of 14. The 180 children that study there are divided into seven classes roughly according to age. The base of instruction is English, though Tamil is taught at all levels as a second language. The sports facilities of the school include badminton courts, a running track, a playground, and even a small swimming pool. In addition, from the age of 12 the children are trained in one of the local trades such as carpentry, pottery, tailoring, etc. The rationale behind this training is that children who are not academically inclined can learn a trade which will enable them to earn their livelihood later on. Children who show a keen interest in their studies are encouraged to pursue higher studies in other schools connected to Auroville such as Udavi or After School. Besides the school, about 15 children live in the hostel, some of whom attend other schools in Auroville. Though Roy, the principal, is besieged by requests for admission from people from the towns of Kalapet and Pondicherry, he gives priority to village children whose parents work in Auroville.

One thing that distinguishes New Creation school is that the students are all happy to come to school. Paula, a young teacher from Antioch University, USA who has come for a practical training, remarks that she has never seen such enthusiastic students before: "They are so eager to learn, it's hard to keep up with

them." It is perhaps only natural that the children should respond so readily to the educational facilities offered by New Creation, given the conditions that prevail in village schools where fifty or more kids are crammed into a dark and dingy room under the control of a single authoritarian teacher. But Glen, a former teacher at New Creation, claims that there is more to it than that: "For some reason, these children are exceptionally bright. You just have to open them to a new aspect of learning and they pick it up immediately. In my English class, the children had barely had any previous exposure to the language, but in less than a year, they were all speaking fluent English. It is just amazing. It is like planting a seed and watching it burst into blossom. What more can a teacher ask for?"

Besides the usual subjects in Science and Humanities that are taught in the school, Subash, a Tamil disciple of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo gives the children an idea about the spiritual ideals of Auroville. Subash joined New Creation two years ago because he felt that there was something beautiful in the at-

mosphere there but its spiritual base needed to be stronger. Like André, Subash is of the opinion that whoever comes to the Ashram or Auroville, including the villagers who are in contact with Auroville, has been guided by the Divine Grace. And he feels that it is his duty as a teacher to help the children open to this Grace and let it influence their lives. Whenever funds allow, Subash takes the children to visit the Ashram and Sri Aurobindo's room. He does not force anything on the children but finds that a number of them are naturally open to the inner Presence. Subash's work has also interested other teachers in finding out more about Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

Apart from Subash, there are 16 other teachers, a number of whom come from the local villages and from Pondicherry due to the lack of availability of teachers for New Creation in Auroville. Roy who often has to do personal fundraising to keep the school going, feels that Auroville does not support a project like New Creation enough, financially or otherwise. But whatever problems the school may have, for the children, especially those who come fresh from the villages, New Creation School is more than a school. It is a home where they study, play, work, eat, and develop certain essential values in life.

The production and service units

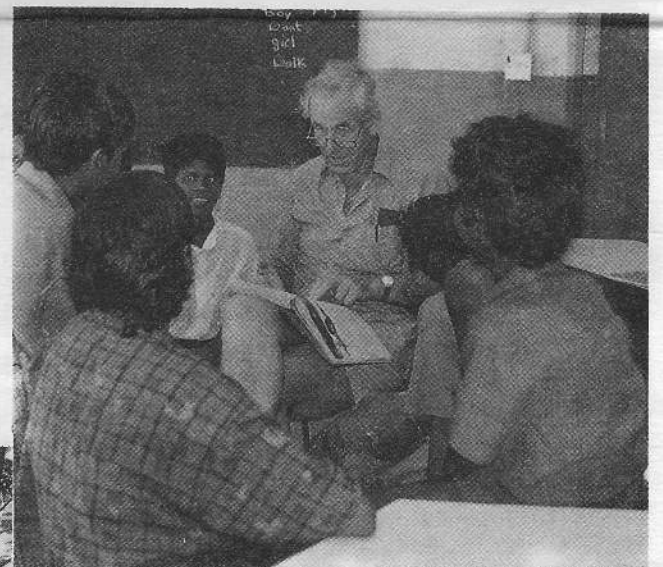
The production units of New Creation include a number of training-cum-production units of pottery, woodwork, metal work, a cafeteria—"New Creation Corner"—and a transport service. These units are located within the precincts of the community and are part of the New Creation experiment in living and working with villagers. Other units that have been set up by André in the Kuilapalyam village under the name of "Arhandicraft Artisan Society" deal in handicrafts such as stone work, hammock making and woodwork. All the goods produced by Arhandicraft Artisan Society are sold locally in two boutiques called Arhandicraft. All the different production units do a limited amount of export. Ideally, the production units of New Creation should generate enough funds to run the school. Unfortunately, for various reasons, the returns are low. New Creation Corner, despite a number of recent promotional activities, just manages to cover its running costs. The transport service and the Arhandicraft Society make a monthly contribution to the school but are unable to cover all of its expenses.

Stuart, a resident of New Creation, has recently taken up the task of helping the fal-

André: "All I am trying to do is build bridges between Auroville and the village children, for the latter have a psychic quality, a joy and an enthusiasm that Auroville really needs."

Right: Roy, teaching.
Informal teaching is the hallmark of New Creation.

Below:
Classrooms typical of New Creation



NEW CREATION: FACTS AND FIGURES

Day-students: 180 children (mostly from the local villages) aged 3-14. Study includes vocational training, sports, health check-ups and lunch.

Boarding: 15 students aged 7 to 17, living as part of the community

Teachers: 20 (6 non-Aurovilian)

Levels of instruction: up to grade 7, plus kindergarten and creche

Average size of classes: 15 students

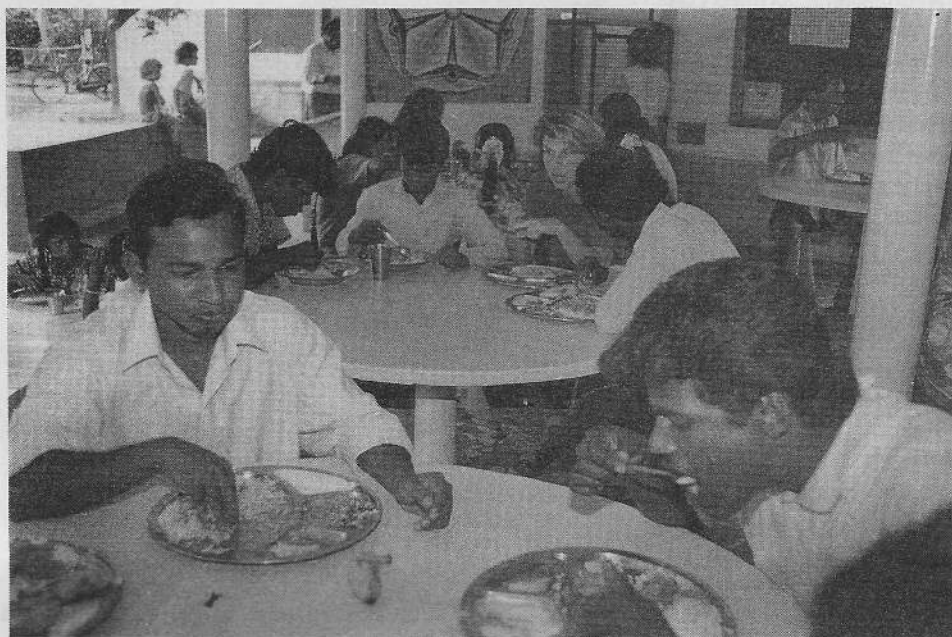
Facilities include a sports field and community kitchen in addition to class and study rooms

Training-cum-production units: 3 (pottery, wood-work, metal)

Cooperative production units in the village: 3 (woodwork, soapstone carving, hammocks).

These form the Arhandicraft Artisan Society and its products are sold in two local boutiques, which also handle packaging and export.

Service units: New Creation Corner cafeteria; and a transport service offering taxis and other vehicles for hire.



Above: In the community dining room

Right: A gypsy girl outside the roadside cafeteria

tering production units of New Creation to be more economically viable. A new business venture of New Creation is the export of handicrafts to Japan. While Paul Pinsonnat, a friend of Auroville, helps by receiving the goods and marketing them in Japan, Stuart assists the units in quality control, costing, quantity, packaging and exporting. "As yet, we have not managed to streamline our production process. Sometimes, it is hard to ensure uniform quality, especially of wood fired terracotta items. We have had shipments of our goods unsold as they were not up to the standard. So far Paul has been helping us financially, although the export is losing money. He is willing to do so because he is enthusiastic about New Creation and this is his way of contributing to Auroville. But I am really looking forward to seeing New Creation goods come up to a certain international standard and for New Creation to be put on a reliable financial footing," says Stuart.

Another goal Stuart hopes to achieve is a complete integration of living, schooling, training, working and funding. New Creation has skilled craftsmen who impart training to the students and the rest of the time manufacture goods for sale. Stuart and others hope that in the future, production units both in New Creation and in the villages will be staffed by those who have benefited from the training. "This would then form an effective network where people help one another out because of mutual interdependence generating goodwill."

The ideals that inspire the community and the school also act as the moving force behind the units. With the units connected to New Creation being run as part of a co-opera-



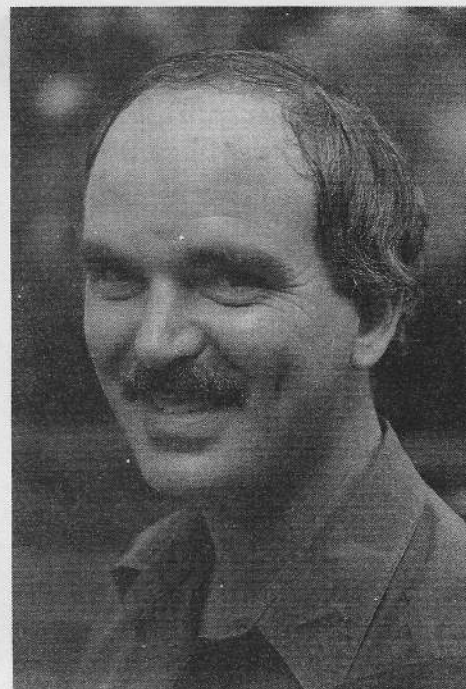
tive, the villagers are not just workers of a unit; they also serve as managers. Stuart feels that the co-operative system is consonant with Auroville's ideal of human unity as it allows the villagers to relate to Aurovilians on the basis of equality and trust. "New Creation is one of the places in Auroville where the villagers feel totally comfortable. We are helping the villagers develop by providing them with a whole set of opportunities in the fields of education, training and work. And by this, goodwill is generated on the part of all involved. We are still far from achieving our aims, but I hope New Creation will one day be a place of international collaboration where local villagers, Aurovilians and guests can live and work together," concludes Stuart.

Challenges for growth

Where then do the problems lie? Why has New Creation, in its twelve years of existence, not lived up to its aims? Why does the school face problems in finding funds within the community? Why does not Auroville support

New Creation whole-heartedly? Such questions are not easily answered given the ever-changing, amorphous, multi-faceted nature of New Creation and the larger but equally heterogeneous community of Auroville. The questions themselves have never been openly raised within the community. There have only been rumours and accusations flying back and forth till the air grows thick with them and stifles further growth.

The crux of the problem seems to be that many Aurovilians feel that André's ideology pressurizes the community into accepting the students of New Creation as Aurovilians. And in general, Aurovilians are apprehensive about accepting local villagers into the community for a number of reasons—the fear that the villagers will join Auroville for materialistic gains; the fear that they may continue with their strong religious traditions and practices in Auroville; and the fear that a preponderance of the Tamil population in Auroville (already one-fifth of the total population) will prevent it from being a truly international community. For André, none of these arguments are pertinent, as he concurs with Sri Aurobindo and the Mother who have often said that Indians are a spiritualized race, and if India is to lead Auroville and the world into a spiritualized future, it is but natural that Indians, especially those who have been living on the soil of Auroville, should be the predominant nationality in Auroville. Roy and Stuart, the other two coordinators of New Creation, however are firm in their belief that the primary aim of New Creation is to educate children such that they have the opportunity to develop a sense of Auroville and thereby assume roles and responsibilities in the development of the Auroville area.



Stuart: planning new initiatives

change for the better, for instead of looking after 15 boarders Roy wants to take just 6 children under his own roof. And Stuart and André would like to set up the business units in such a way that only New Creation graduates work in them.

Then like any other community, New Creation faces internal problems, the more so because of its large and diverse structure. As the majority of the community members are under 18 and as André had been single-handedly running the community for many years, before he was joined by Roy and Stuart, it is he who continues to have the final word on all important matters in New Creation. In the past, there have been instances of people leaving the community because they did not agree with a decision or with the manner of dealing with a problem. Other Aurovilians and Auroville units, including SAIER (Sri Aurobindo International Institute for Educational Research) that allots funds for education, have also had problems in the past, for instance, with the lack of financial clarity. More openness and a more democratic decision-making process would definitely attract more Aurovilians to participate in the experiment of New Creation.

In the same manner, the transport service of New Creation has created a bad name for the whole of the community. Many Aurovilians complain that the service is poorly managed and that the drivers are careless and unreliable.

Finally, underneath the surface of things there seems to be an undefined undercurrent of fear or bias, an instinctive shrinking away from the centuries-old poverty and inertia that still binds many of the villagers. This feeling is accentuated by the fact that the villagers store their 'compost', which is basically garbage from Pondicherry, in fields adjacent to New Creation; and that lately, a group of gypsies, living in extremely unhygienic conditions, have taken to camping there.

The ideals of New Creation—to provide the villagers with opportunities for development and to relate to them on an equal level footing—are noteworthy. Mother's concern for the villagers and her message to early Aurovilians that the villagers "are your brothers in spirit—this should never be forgotten" is still relevant today. Auroville's ideal of human unity must take root in the context of the place in which we live and must take account of the villagers amongst whom we live. With new initiatives being planned by Stuart and Roy, New Creation seems poised for further growth. One hopes Aurovilians can get rid of certain old formations to allow New Creation to truly blossom. For if Auroville is to be "the city that earth needs", it must, of necessity, be "the city that the neighbouring villages need."

Bindu

PARTHA

He is a young man of 20 now, with an intense will to grow and to develop. He is especially interested in theatre and is known for the plays for children that he has written and directed in New Creation School. Always cheerful and popular, he can be found at New Creation Corner where he hangs out with his friends or at Transition school where he now teaches. But back in 1983, Partha was just ten years old and one of the many children from Kuilapalayam village that came to New Creation. He lived there for two years and subsequently attended other schools in Auroville. At present he is working, through their correspondence courses, towards a bachelor's degree at Chidambaram University. Before he joined Transition School, Partha had taught at New Creation for three years.

AVT: How did you come to New Creation?

Partha: When I was ten, I decided I wanted to live at New Creation. My friends were living a communal life there, and I wanted to be part of it.

Can you describe your experience at that time?

It was a big change for me. It was the first time I was away from home, outside of my family. At that time, they asked us to visit our families only on the weekends, but many kids used to sneak away in the evenings to see their parents. I guess they wanted us to have a certain life, and not be split between the village and New Creation. I often got sick, and I wasn't cared for too much. So my parents asked me to

come back. Now, it's different. Even the small children can go back to the village at any time.

What are your thoughts now about the community life at New Creation?

The main thing is, I think the community and the school and the businesses should be separate. When you have them all together, it's confusing. Rather than creating harmony, these different parts of New Creation don't fit together well. They each have their function, but they would exist better by themselves. With the Taxi Service, for example, there is a lot of noise, and to have the noise and the traffic mixed in with the school is wrong. For children at the school, they should have a place to concentrate, they should be concentrated on their studies and not have to hear the taxis or the other mechanical sounds of the repair shop—the electric motors going “tck tck tck” all day. Perhaps the pottery workshop is all right there, but for the rest it should be separate. Now, they are thinking of this idea and planning to have the Taxi Service outside of the school precincts.

What was your experience as a teacher at New Creation?

When I joined as a teacher, there was an English lady, a qualified teacher who had been training teachers and who guided me. She used to test me and really help me to learn. At the beginning I worked with the kindergarten children. Then I went to First Standard. But then this English teacher had a problem with the coordinators of New Creation. She was guiding the whole school, and that was good. But then it became a power struggle. You see, the coordinators of New Creation want somebody to come and help them, but if they get too strong they will kick them out. Anyway, this lady was so upset she left Auroville.

When she left she wrote to me, “You have the makings of a good teacher, so continue your adventure.”

Then a new principal took over. He loves the children and the children love him, but he can't support the education side. It's just too much for him to be a headmaster. Personally, I felt he always looked on me as though I were a boy. He often told me I didn't have enough experience. On quite a number of occasions, I felt myself put down or the suggestions that I made were turned down.

But it was not always like that. There were times when my work was really appreciated. Like when we performed the Wizard of Oz. At New Creation the thing I was most happy about was my work with the theatre. Looking back, I can say I enjoyed New Creation and did my part there. I think it can be a very good school if some things change.

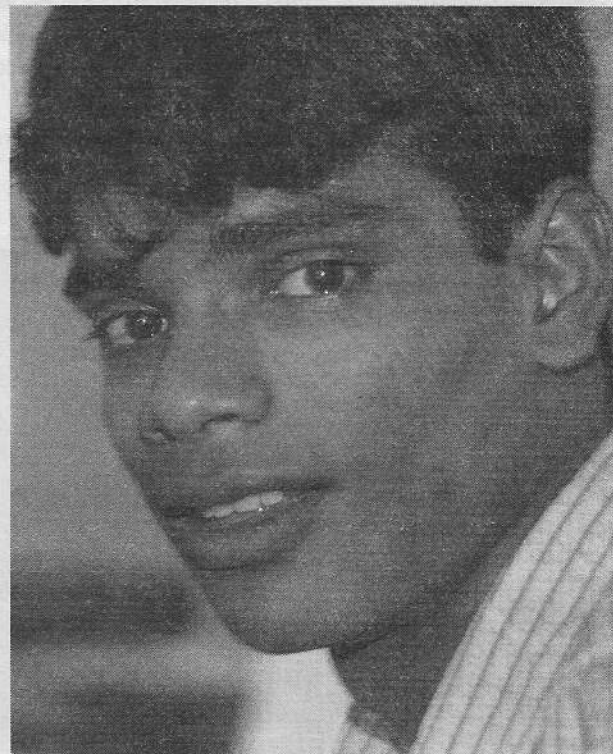
You joined Transition school, last term. Can you describe your experience there?

I wanted to be in a place where I could learn and where people would encourage me. I felt I should be well-trained and at Transition I'm satisfied. One of the teachers at Transition said, “I'm very happy to see you here.” Now I'm helping with math and science projects and doing theatre. I know I still need to learn more. Here at least, when I give an idea or suggestion, people listen and they share whatever

happens at the school. So I feel more happy. It's a good atmosphere for me. People support my studies as well.

You mentioned that New Creation can be a very good school if some things change. Could you be more specific about what needs to be changed at New Creation?

The coordinators of New Creation have to take responsibility for their mistakes and



failures. They have to get more qualified teachers and let them “do their thing” or support them in the best way. Because, in the end, why should the children suffer when there is a personal conflict between two people?

Jill

New Creation: Some Thoughts

I think of the children. Of my ex-students, those whom I met as youngsters at Last School or After School, who live with hope and are trying to balance many things: the idea of a better life and the desire for money and a home and a future and ... the dream of human unity. What inspires them? Certainly not the food at New Creation. The food is minimal and it is not what dreams are made of. Maybe it is the interaction they have with teachers, guests, all those small, daily encounters with new ideas, new faces, different points of view which is part of the life of New Creation community.

I watch the small ones in the pool. They are completely abandoned to the water and the noise and the sheer delight of numbers and noise. It is certainly not a matter of learning to swim. Or read. Or write. Or do maths. It is not this, or that. It is the expression of the collective.

The collective noise. The collective movement. The action. Everywhere you look there is action, like in a Brueghel painting. Everywhere you look there is life. Sometimes it is shooting off in all directions, chaotic, bursting with energy that gets dissipated.

There is a lack of concen-

tration. There is a need for a calm, still, quiet, place. There is instead the noise of taxis coming and going and the dust and fumes. And there is a carpentry workshop and a pottery workshop and a small stage and a sports field and some cows and a lot of flowers. Noise and commotion and a move towards expressing something else and an attempt at beauty.



Vidya, a day-school student

And yes, even some classrooms for many children. There are, of course, too many children because this is still India and not a private boarding school in Switzerland. So it is a mess sometimes and some good teachers despair and leave because there is no order. And maybe the quality of the teaching could be better—would be better. Better books, too, are desperately needed and the lodgings are small and cramped and minimal. Barely minimal and open and the girls and the boys who are part of the community are free with a freedom that often lacks discipline. Inner discipline. And the adults, some adults are there because they love the kids and the kids love them (this is the best part)—sometimes a frenzy of love with the little ones demanding your complete attention and then, you are only a distraction for a moment. Because this is not your world. You are just visiting. And you will never fully understand.

The real life of New Creation is lived underground, so you have the elephant by its tail and you call it a snake, as the old story goes. It is like Auroville, where people come looking for the city and can't find it and go away muttering. So with New Creation, you can ask where is the teaching and what is being taught, but it is happening all around you, every second. And some lessons are tough and even unkind and sometimes there is a muddle and a secrecy on the financial level, or the practical level. And it has not been clear, really, and it is important to be clear when children are involved. Because there are many well-meaning people involved with New Creation and you would like for it to work. And on some levels it does, if you are not too cynical and accept the smiles and the laughter from the

little ones. They are bursting with enthusiasm, and several teachers who have come to teach at New Creation for a while find it inspiring to work with these children. Such a relief after the sullenness and the hostility of children in the West. But from the older ones there is always some dissatisfaction, some disillusionment because there are inequalities in treatment between the residents and the guests at mealtime, for example—and children are sensitive to these differences in treatment and understand them at the same time as they feel powerless to change them.

For others here who feel caught between two worlds, between Auroville and the village, there is a fear for the future, a fear of the unknown into which they have plunged and then what? Not the village anymore and not yet Auroville, but somewhere in between. And this is a challenge to all of Auroville because you should not create false expectations, especially for children—it is disastrous. So the older ones struggle to find their place—these Tamil children from the neighbouring villages—at Altecs, at Decauram Workshop, teaching at Transition School, working at Pour Tous, or continuing their studies at After School. Yes, room has been found for these bright ones; these are the success stories. And the rest? A few adults have helped some children make the transition. More adults are needed as friends, guides, advisers—big brothers or sisters, if you will, who can really take an interest in their lives, spend some times with these kids and watch their progress. This would really be creating anew—and the name New Creation would resonate with the truth of this experiment in human unity.

Jill

Wedding vision to biological waste treatment

Eco-villages as a response to the global dilemma

Last month, two Aurovilians travelled to Scotland to participate in an international conference. The one week conference, which brought 350 people from 38 countries to the community of Findhorn, took as its theme 'Eco-Villages and Sustainable Communities: models for 21st century living'. If sustainability was the theme, sustainability was also the challenge: running from 9 in the morning to 10 (or later) at night, the programme included 21 major presentations and no less than 87 workshops on topics as diverse as straw-bale house construction, renovating inner cities in the U.S and Europe, building collaborative relationships in community, permaculture, interest-free money, geomancy, and weaving a dream carpet. One workshop even offered a tour of whisky distilleries in the area (it was oversubscribed). A number of well-established communities also presented what they are doing. They included The Farm and Sirius communities from the U.S., Lebensgarten from Germany, Crystal Waters and Commonground from Australia, Findhorn and the Centre for Alternative Technology from the U.K. and Auroville.

But what was the purpose behind the conference? And what ARE 'eco-villages'? According to Robert Gilman, whose Context Institute helped organize the conference, an eco-village is "a human-scale, full-featured settlement which harmlessly integrates human activities into the natural world in a way that is supportive of healthy human development and can be successfully continued into the indefinite future." As such, the eco-village ideal is clearly one response to the present global environmental and social crises.

The guiding theme of the conference, then, was how to live more 'lightly' and with a higher quality of life on this endangered planet, and the purpose was to bring together people who had tried to introduce this orientation, this commitment, into different fields—agriculture, economics, architecture, renewable energy systems, biological engineering, politics and community development—to hear what they have done, and how successful they have been: to assess, in other words, the present strength of the 'sustainability' movement.

In fact, on this level the conference turned into something of a celebration. For as Jonathan Porritt, former director of Friends of the Earth, put it on the final morning, "Our ideas, our practices are rapidly entering the mainstream, not because we are suddenly dealing with 'born-again Greenies', but simply because we have the best agenda for dealing with a whole range of local and global problems." That agenda, as it emerged from presentations during the conference, includes:

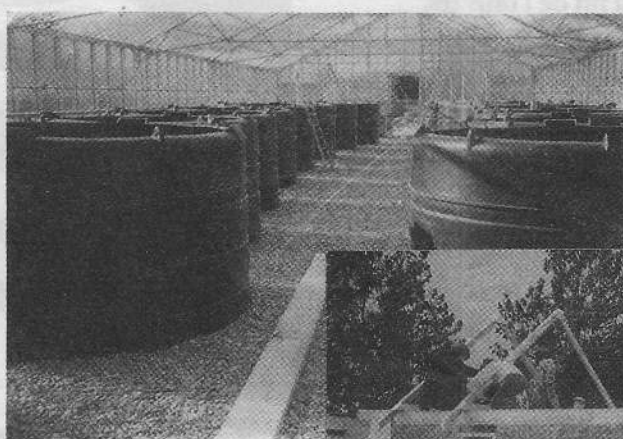
- ♦ permaculture (permanent agriculture) as a means of designing agriculturally productive ecosystems which have the diversity and resilience of natural ecosystems;
- ♦ the resuscitation of inner cities through such practices as traffic control and the redesign of old buildings so as to encourage community and 'social spaces';
- ♦ 'co-housing' initiatives in which people come together to finance and design housing which balances community with privacy;
- ♦ the setting up in many areas of LETS (Local Exchange Trading Systems) which stimulate the local economy through the use of local 'money' and exchanges;
- ♦ the harnessing of natural processes to clean up toxic waste, grow food or produce heat with a minimum of pollution, in what John Todd, their creator, calls 'Living Machines';

♦ community and interpersonal facilitation skills based upon many years of community living.

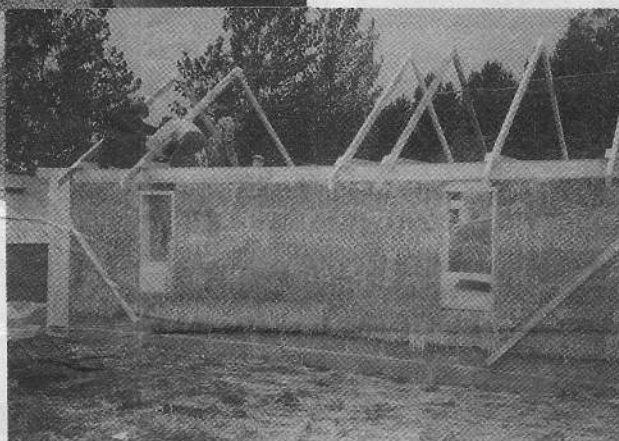
The relevance of Auroville

What could Auroville contribute to this rich brew? After all, it was clear from some of the presentations that Auroville is far behind some other communities in creating a self-sustaining economy, or in evolving an architecture and town planning process which fosters community, or in being self-sufficient in food, or in strengthening the local community. And while Auroville continues to be best known, and respected, for its land regeneration work, some permaculture communities and designers around the world are working

healing therapies, village empowerment policies etc.—and not only our 'unsustainable' failures—lack of community transport, the growth of consumerism, major economic inequalities, the failure to be anywhere near self-sufficient in food—but also the one thing that, potentially, can make Auroville both truly sustainable and deeply relevant: a surrender to a power, a consciousness, immeasurably greater than that of its present inhabitants, the power of a new consciousness without which all the new technologies will represent little more than—as Schumacher so memorably put it—the rearranging of deckchairs on the deck of the sinking 'Titanic'. And even while the Auroville presenters stressed that this reaching for a different consciousness was, at present, more an aspiration than an achievement, the feedback to the presentation was overwhelmingly positive: "You have provided another crucial piece to the puzzle," as one of the participants put it.



Above: 'the Living Machine'; sewage is treated biologically as it passes through tanks containing aquatic plants.



Below: building a strawbale house

PHOTOS: ALAN

The relevance to Auroville

How useful, then, was the conference to the Aurovilians? It was difficult not to be impressed by the overwhelming enthusiasm and positive thinking of the participants, many of whom had been working in relative isolation and against the mainstream for years, but who now felt they were riding the wave of the future. In this context, Margaret Mead's statement, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, concerned citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has", became something of a conference mantra. And it was impossible not to be impressed by both the excellent organization and the very high standard of the presentations, made by such luminaries of the movement as Peter Russell, Dr. Robert Muller, Robert Gilman, Margrit Kennedy and Jonathon Porritt. Undoubtedly, a great deal of excellent thinking and very good work is being put into rescuing both local communities and the planet as a whole from destructive practices. Moreover, many useful contacts were made by the Aurovilians over tea or in the huge tent which served as the conference dining room: future visitors to Auroville may include at least one eminent permaculture designer, and experts in the setting up of LETS and community development, approaches which (along with Findhorn's community-supported agriculture initiative) may well be of immense use to us in the future.

On the very practical level, however, there was not so much that could be immediately applied in Auroville. One reason for this was

that the vast majority of participants came from the developed Western nations, and the problems identified and solutions offered tended to be influenced by that particular environment: what would be possible in terms of inner city redevelopment in Los Angeles or co-housing in Sweden would scarcely apply in Bombay where the housing regulations and social mores are so different. The predominantly Western perspective of the conference was thrown into high relief on the closing afternoon when a Hawaiian woman stood up and made an emotional speech, pointing out how the forebears of some of those present had been responsible, either directly or indirectly, for the rape and destruction of a once beautiful land and culture, and pleading with the participants for the healing of the earth. And the African lady beside her added, "We don't want you to come and show us how to build mud houses. We want to be empowered."

Another lacuna at the conference, as the American architect Bob Berkibile pointed out, was the failure to seriously work on building bridges with the mainstream culture. "There are plenty of people in that world who want to take a different path. But as long as you continue to shut the door in their faces, you make it more difficult for everybody to move to a different level. We have to take the best that we have and reach out to this other world, to have, like the water hyacinth, 27 miles of root connections: there just isn't time for anything else."

Two other shortcomings of the movement as they manifested at the conference are worth mentioning. Firstly, the almost unquestioning acceptance of modern communication technology as an unalloyed good—"we have to ensure that information travels farther and materials less far," as one presenter summarised it—in spite of research that points out that it may substitute 'virtual' culture for actual culture and, in the wrong hands, be an instrument for a new form of cultural colonialism. And secondly, the continued failure of many in the movement to wrestle with the money problem: significantly, one of the least well-attended workshops was on how to finance eco-villages. Yet, as John Todd pointed out, "The ability to manage finance is essential to getting good ideas into matter." One positive upshot is that next year's conference may well take this as the major theme...

Overall, however, the conference was undoubtedly a success as a rallying cry and recharging point for those dedicated to realizing a safer, saner world. And if one theme emerged more strongly than others, it was the need to integrate—head and heart, vision and matter, the local with the global—and to use and learn from as many different perspectives and approaches as possible in healing the planet. As Jonathon Porritt put it, while inaugurating the first 'Living Machine' in Europe in the Findhorn caravan park, "May this project, which represents the wedding of vision to biological waste treatment, be symbolic of the new, inclusive approach of this movement."

Later, as I walked along the pebbly, wind-blown shore of Findhorn Bay, a statement of Teilhard de Chardin quoted earlier in the conference reverberated within me as a kind of distillation of the spirit of the week. "Today, something is happening to the whole structure of human consciousness. A fresh kind of life is starting. Driven by the forces of love, the fragments of the world are seeking each other, so that the world may come into being."

Alan



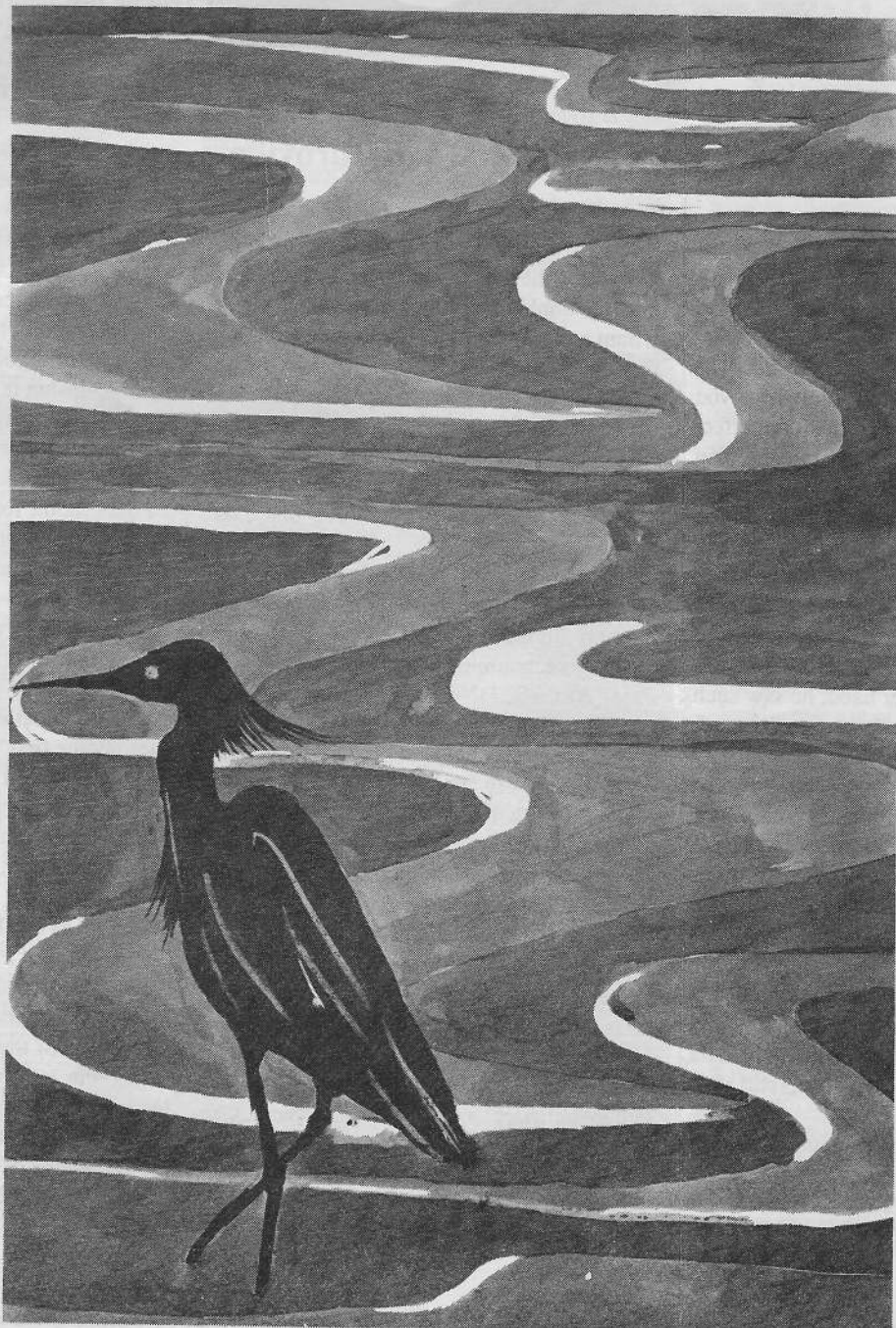
Un palpitement lent fait vibrer mes idées.
 Tout dégringole, je suis au ras du sol.
 Aujourd'hui c'est le vide ; j'ai plongé sans hésiter
 dans le rien qu'accorde ce palpitement non rythmé et
 inutile.
 Une lune et deux soleils sont passés.
 Quelque chose a changé.
 Le palpitement s'éveille, il ne trébuche plus.
 Une idée me touche et m'asperge de sa logique.

A slow quivering makes
 my ideas vibrate.
 Everything collapses, I
 am close to the ground.
 Today it is the empti-
 ness; without hesitation
 I dived
 into the nothingness
 evoked by this arhythmic
 and useless
 quivering.
 One moon and two suns
 have passed.
 Something has changed.
 The quivering awakes,
 it doesn't stumble
 anymore.
 An idea touches me and
 splashes me with its
 logic.



Il y a deux collines
 couleur de lune.
 Rythmes d'oiseaux
 Formes de mer
 Sens de lumière.

There are two
 moon-coloured hills.
 Bird rhythms
 Sea forms
 Senses of light.



ô mer magnifique
 qui garde les délices.
 Toutes les couleurs,
 toutes les vies,
 toutes les gaietés.
 Laisse-moi venir vers toi,
 entre mer et ciel,
 dans l'infini bleu de si-
 lence.

O magnificent sea
 keeper of delights.
 All the colours,
 all the lives,
 all the cheer.
 Let me come to you,
 between sea and sky,
 into the silence of infinite blue.



Tout noir!
 La mer, les nuages.
 Le ciel gris!

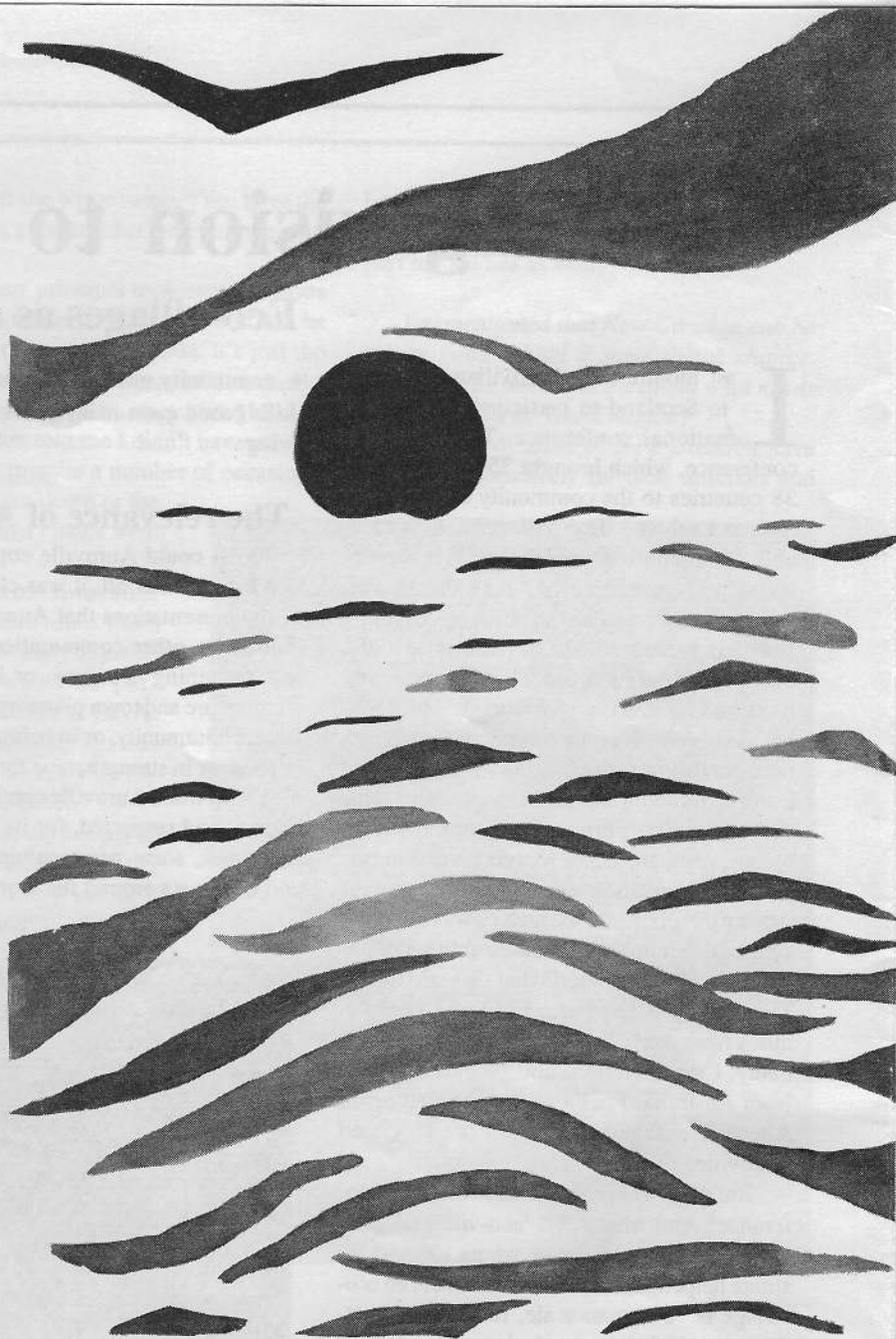
Mais là tout au loin,
 à la fin de l'univers.
 Après le noir et le gris
 La lumière dorée!

Mais il faut vaincre
 le noir

All dark!
 The sea, the clouds,
 The gray sky!

But there far away,
 at the end of the universe.
 Beyond the black and the gray
 The golden light!

But we have to vanquish
 the dark



Le soleil sait conduire dans le rire
 la fleur qui veut fleurir et jaillir
 pour nous aider à grandir.

The sun knows how to guide to laughter
 the flower that wants to blossom and burst forth
 to help us grow.



Un papillon me frôle la tête, et me guide vers une fleur
 à l'odeur d'hirondelle.

Je me sens mal, un cri de fureur prend mes talons
 et les arrache du sol dans un bondissement nerveux.
 Aussitôt me voilà sur le dos d'un éléphant en sanglot.
 Il me dit tout en larmes qu'un lézard lui a grimpé
 le long de la jambe et l'a chatouillé. . .

Quel malheur!

Je me dis que c'est sûrement ce lézard-là qui m'a
 chatouillé le cerveau et depuis j'ai des illusions.
 Les illusions continuent, pourtant moi je suis parti.

A butterfly brushes against my head, and leads me towards a flower
 with the smell of a swallow.

I feel sick, a cry of fury grabs my heels
 and pulls them off the ground with a nervous jump.
 Immediately here I am on the back of a sobbing elephant.
 Crying it tells me that a lizard climbed up
 its leg and tickled it. . .

How unfortunate!

I tell myself that it is certainly this lizard which
 ticked my brain and I have illusions ever since.
 The illusions continue, but me, I have gone away.

POEMS & PAINTINGS FROM THE JOURNAL OF
 MIRRAMUKHI SCHOOL

You'll appreciate that it is very difficult to create an international city if the residents are subject to expulsion without assigning any reason," wrote an irritated Working Committee to the Chairman of the Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation, Dr. Karan Singh, on the 3rd of November 1995. The issue: Gilles Pfeiffer, French national, who has been living in Auroville for more than 20 years, received a 'Leave India' notice for the second time within 6 months. The notice did not contain any reasons why his routine request for extension of the residential permit was not granted.

The first notice was issued last June. It resulted in a well-attended Residents' Assembly meeting wherein the supposed reasons for the issue of that notice were discussed: Gilles' hobby of building and flying ultra-light flying machines (for which, at that time, no license was required in India); the reported appearance of an aircraft over a government building in Madras and the suspicion by the Tamil Nadu Government that an ultra-light aircraft could be used by an enemy such as the Sri Lankan LTTE group for a suicide bombing missions; the linking of the two by the previous Secretary of the Foundation, Mr. Tripathy, who also happened to have problems of a personal nature with Gilles, and refused to recommend Gilles' extension of residential permit on these grounds. Gilles' house in Sri Ma was regularly besieged by officers from the police, notwithstanding the fact that Gilles could prove that he was out of the country at the time the aircraft was sighted in Madras. Frustrated that the "visa card" was again being used, the Residents' Assembly decided to send a delegation to Delhi with a petition to the Prime Minister, Mr. Narasimha Rao (a former chairman of the Auroville International Advisory Council). As a further sign of protest it was decided that, since the Governing Board had been unable to do anything about the visa problem following the setting up of

VISAS AND RESIDENTIAL PERMITS and the uncertainties thereof

With the exception of Indian nationals, all the residents of Auroville are foreigners who have the right to stay in Auroville provided they obtain a proper Entry Visa that is issued by the Indian Embassy in their home country. On the basis of this visa, the Foreigners Registration Office in India grants a residential permit which allows for prolonged residence in Auroville and has to be renewed at regular intervals. The process, however, is not as infallible as it seems. The prescribed Entry Visa is sometimes not granted by the Indian Embassy, and a residential permit does not guarantee one's stay in Auroville, even if one has lived here for the better part of one's life...

the Foundation, there would be "no further dealings with the Auroville Foundation except in matters relating to visas until such time as the whole problem of granting and extending visas has been satisfactorily resolved."

The delegation was unable to meet the Prime Minister. [The statement to the contrary which appeared in the short news column of our August edition # 79 was incorrect]. But representations were made to the Minister of State for Internal Security by the Chairman and other members of the Governing Board, and the delegation left the Ministry with the verbal assurances that the case would be cleared. However, the promises notwithstanding, nothing changed. A second visit to the Home Ministry, some months later, ended unsatisfactorily with, "The matter is still under consideration, and nothing is known about the decisions of the Ministry of Internal Security". Two weeks after this last visit, the second "Leave India within 15 days" notice was served.

The alternatives, at this point in time, were limited, as the representations had not worked. Consequently, the Working Committee felt it had no other option but to ask the Governing Board to initiate legal proceedings against the Government of India in the name of the Auroville Foundation on this issue. In a sepa-

rate action, Auroville's Residents' Assembly requested the Home Minister for a hearing on Gilles' case. The request was accompanied by a petition signed by over 500 Aurovilians. Shortly afterwards, Dr. Karan Singh, who had earlier declined to initiate court proceedings against the Government, since in his view, the Auroville Foundation is part of the Government, supported the request for the hearing.

On November 14th, the High Court in Madras granted a "stay order" for three weeks on the "Leave India" notice, and gave two weeks to the defendants (principally the Indian Government but also the authorities of the Auroville Foundation) to file their affidavits.

Other visa problems

This case is not as isolated as it might seem. A "Leave India" notice was also served to Ilia, from Ukraine, on the charge that he arrived (in 1993!) with a Tourist Visa instead of the required Entry Visa. Similar "Leave India" notices are now expected for 13 other Aurovilians from Russia and Ukraine, all of whom came between 1991-1993 and have been living in Auroville ever since. Initially, the Indian Government granted them residential permits on the basis of their Tourist Visas; but, oddly, for eight of them these per-

mits were never extended.

The crux of the problem seems to lie with the Indian Embassy in Moscow. Before the USSR disintegrated into separate states, Russians were only given Tourist Visas. Those who wished to come and live in Auroville were simply not able to obtain the prescribed Visa, even after the Government of India relaxed its visa policy towards Auroville in 1992. Letters of recommendation from Auroville notwithstanding, the Indian Embassy in Moscow repeatedly asks for additional information, or sends an applicant off with the wrong visa. "Ludmila from Moscow, Lena from Sakhalin Island, Igor from the Kamchatka peninsula all brought recommendation letters from Auroville to the Indian Embassy in Moscow. In the end they all received Tourist Visas," reported Boris, a biologist from Russia, in the Auroville News. And no one knows why.

It is understandable that the Indian Government would refuse entry to persons accused of criminal activities or of activities detrimental to the security of India. But if one's only wrongdoing is to have arrived with the wrong "rubber stamp" in their passports, not due to any fault of their own but due to the fault of the Embassy concerned, the Indian Government should acknowledge their right to remain in Auroville. The community of Auroville has requested the Home Ministry to review all 14 cases, pending which Ilia, who is married to an Indian woman and has a son by her, should be allowed to stay. "The Government is determined to help the process of development of Auroville in such a way that the aims and goals of Auroville are made more and more realisable," said Shri Shiv Shankar, the Minister of Human Resources Development then, in October 1988 to the Indian Parliament when presenting the Auroville Foundation Act. For that, protection in the matter of visas and residential permits would seem to be a fundamental requirement.

Carel

TREE PLANTING AT ARANYA

Come the monsoon, and greenworkers pick up their "mumtys" (spades) and set about planting trees. Planting trees can be hard, back-breaking work, but call in a bunch of friends, organise a pot-luck lunch, harvest your own tapioca for dinner and... the whole thing becomes Fun with a capital "F." Ask Johnny, Agnes, Nevi or any of the others who got together a couple of times this season to plant trees at Aranya, a new community near Hermitage. Reminiscent of Auroville in the early days, the land there is severely eroded forming deep ravines. Krishna, Eiko and Sarvana serve as land stewards there.

DIWALI CELEBRATED

Diwali literally means the "festival of lights." This Indian festival, which falls annually sometime between October and November, is celebrated with the lighting of countless lamps and is seen by most Westerners as the equivalent of Christmas. In North India, Diwali marks the homecoming of Lord Rama after having vanquished the demon-king, Ravana. In the South, it is believed that on this day Krishna killed the evil Narakha Asura with a mace of light. In Auroville, however, it is simply an occasion for the community to get together to light little earthenware lamps, try one's hand at "rangoli" (traditional patterns made on the floor with coloured rice powder), set off fireworks, and sit around a bonfire feasting on the traditional fare of "idli," "vada" and sweets. The celebration held at Aspiration on 22nd October, the eve of Diwali, was a great

success with more than two hundred Aurovilians attending.

NEW PLAYGROUND

The Diwali party continued the next evening at Certitude with more fireworks, snacks, and juggling acts by clowns. This time the occasion was the inauguration of a small new playground for kids. Certitude, the sports grounds of Auroville, offers a wide variety of facilities for older children and adults, but until now it had nothing for children of kindergarten age. Thanks to Dilip, Erisa and others, tiny tots can now enjoy themselves on swings painted in wild colours, a jungle-gym made of rope, a log bridge that is suspended by chains, and a wooden playhouse. The stars that evening were Stefano, Paul, Claire and Gemma who pretended to be silent monsters as they chased the kids all over the playground.

ART GALLERY OPENS

While the artists of Auroville, and there are a number of them, have mounted numerous exhibitions in Auroville and Pondicherry, they have not had the opportunity to display their work on a permanent basis. Now thanks to the efforts of Louis and Veronique, there is a gallery for exhibition and sale of Auroville's art including interior design work and luxury furniture. The gallery called Nymphaea is located not in Auroville but in Pondicherry at the Satsang Restaurant. Nymphaea was formally opened in October with a live concert of classical Indian music. Among the highlights of the opening exhibition

BRIEF NEWS

were Christine's lampshades, hand-painted on silk, Louis' furniture and paintings by Louis, Nele and Christine. It was a special pleasure to see the work of Nele and Christine as they had never exhibited in Auroville before. The displays at Nymphaea will be periodically changed. The gallery is open during the business hours of the restaurant. One hopes that some day it will be possible for Nymphaea to reside in the Cultural Zone of Auroville which is currently being developed.

PIANOS FOR AUROVILLE

"Next incarnation I'll settle for flute", groaned a piano teacher, while helping to lift seven pianos weighing 264 kg each, that had arrived from Singapore. They were part of a \$30,000 donation for the future Performing Arts Center. Two more electronic pianos and a variety of state-of-the-art electronic equipment for audio recording were also purchased with the help of this donation. As the Arts Center is still in the design stage, the electronic equipment is being looked after by Holger and used meanwhile to make a Compact Disc of the children's opera "Beyond Awake and Asleep." (see

AVT #77 & 78). The pianos have found a warm welcome in various individual homes, on the express condition that all Auroville children be allowed to practise on them. Needless to say, more and more little fingers are touching the keys and any piano tuner who wishes to settle in Auroville is requested to come immediately.

AUROVILIANS EXHIBIT

Ireno Guerri's paintings and Kratu's sculpture are jointly exhibited at the Chitram Gallery, Cochin, from 5th to 12th December.

SCULPTURE BY HIMAL

The young Aurovilian Himal, who until recently had just worked with soft stone to make delicately carved dolphin pendants, has started sculpting in marble. The November exhibition in Pitanga shows his dexterity with this material. Small statues in flowing forms display signs of a budding sculptor. At the opening of the exhibition, Himal played his favourite instrument, the dijeridu (a musical instrument made of bamboo and of aboriginal Australian origin). He was accompanied by several of his friends on tabla, bells, flute and banjo.

SITAR CONCERT

The announcement of a sitar concert by a German musician Uwe Neumann, accompanied by the Indian tabla player Manoj Bardham aroused curiosity, and some 60 Aurovilians came to hear this international duo perform. Uwe Neumann has studied music at Shantiniketan (West Bengal) for the

past six years, where he completed his Bachelor degree in music. After beginning with several classical ragas, Uwe continued with some beautiful folk melodies and a song by Tagore. The concert ended on a different note: an African musical instrument, a dried and polished coconut fitted with small metal pieces and filled with beads, created soft or funny melodies, bringing smiles to the faces of the audience.

As an encore, Uwe sang a blues song to an apple worm that he had composed himself. An evening well worth remembering.

1996 AUROVILLE CALENDAR

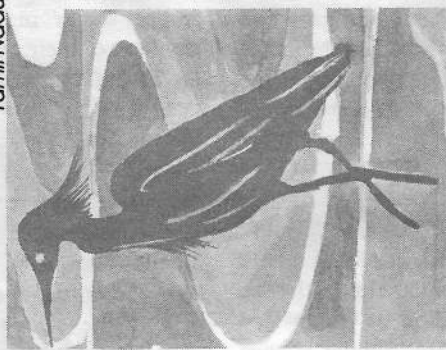
The 1996 Auroville calendar—described by all who have seen it as "the best yet"—is now available at the Auroville Boutique and at AGRC (Auroville Greenwork Resource Center). A number of Auroville International centres also have them in stock. The calendar, produced by AGRC, consists of 13 full-colour pictures taken in and around Auroville. For details or orders, write to your AVI centre, or to Ed, AGRC, Isaiambalam, Kottakarai, Auroville 605101. Rush now to fill the months ahead with tropical scenes from Auroville!

AND LAST BUT NOT LEAST...

The Auroville Today team sends you warm greetings for the new year.

AUROVILLE TODAY

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



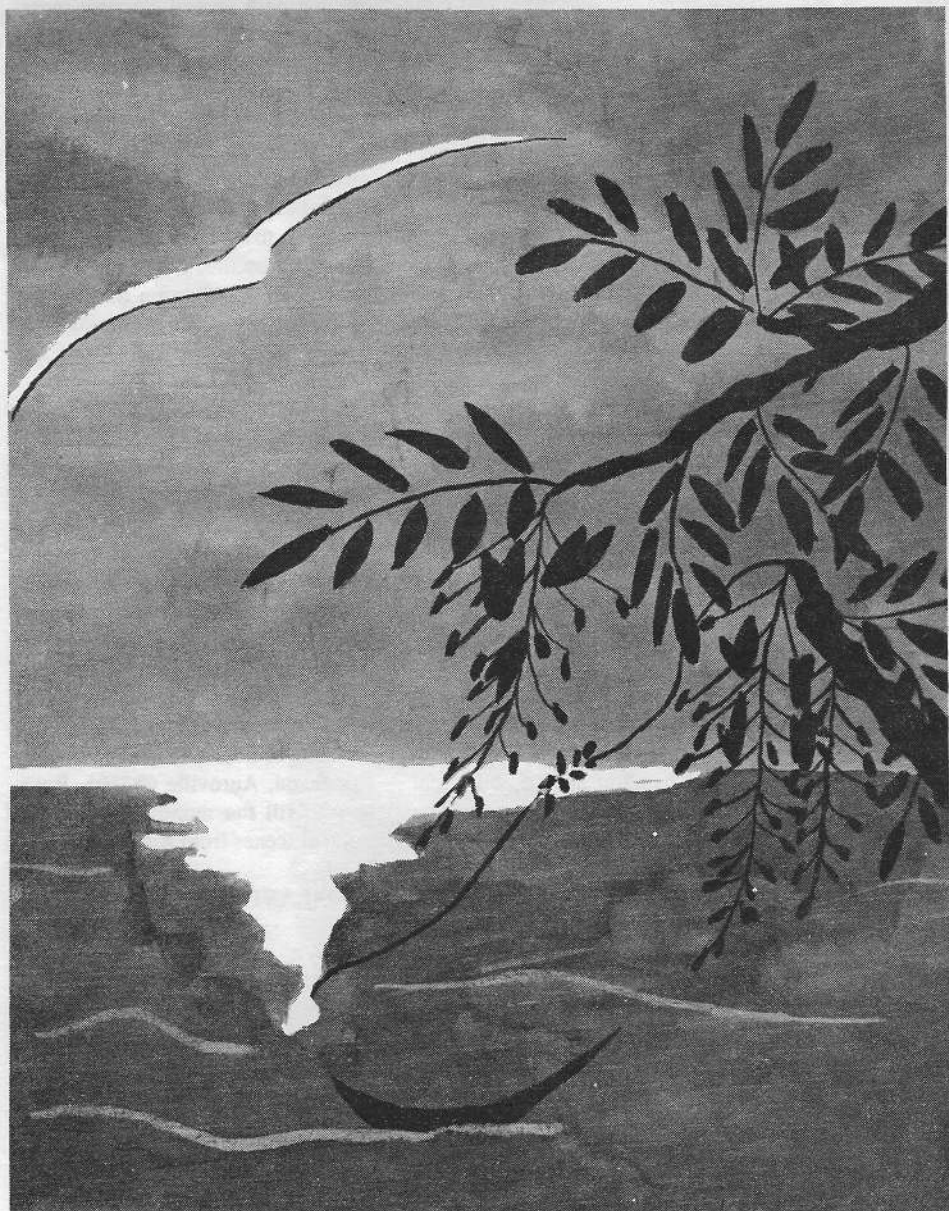
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December 1995
Number Eighty-Three

By Airmail
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AUROVILLE ARCHIVES
C/O KRISHNA T.
BHARAT NIVAS
AUROVILLE



Painting by a Mirramukhi student

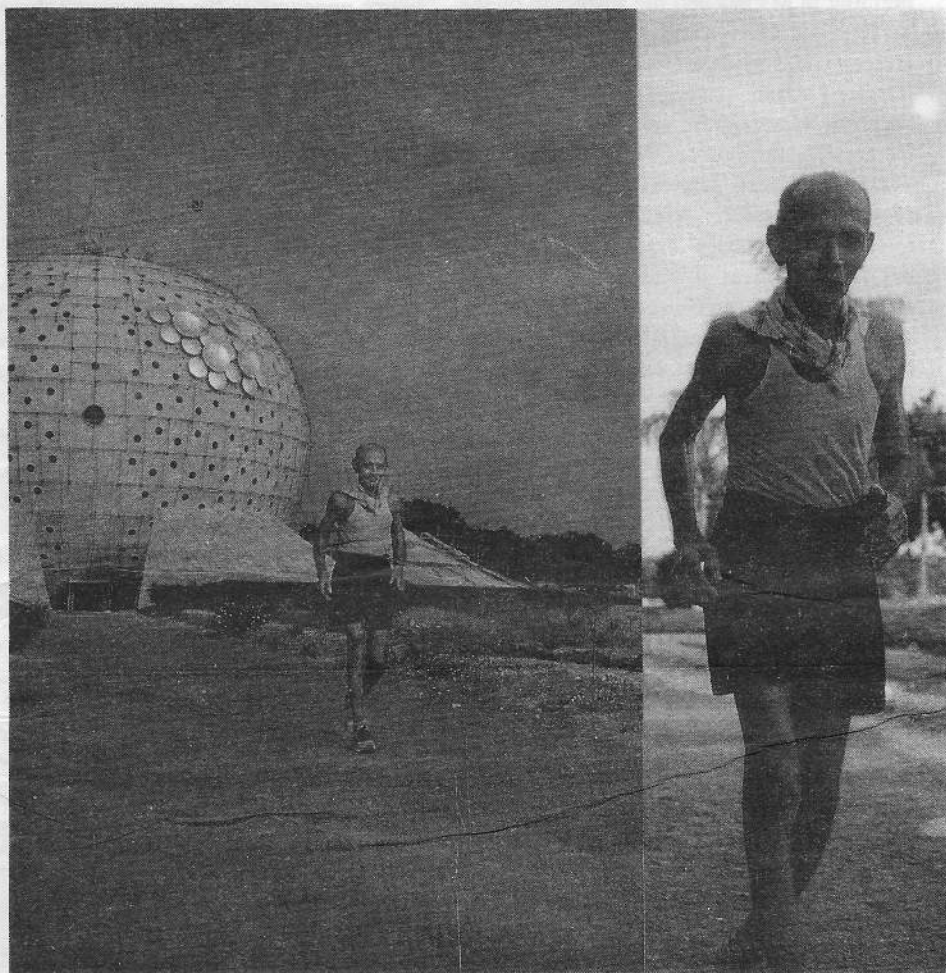
The Happiness of the Long-distance Runner

Every Sunday afternoon, a lone runner comes up the Auroville road, circles the Matrimandir and returns to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. Those who have eaten in the Ashram Dining Room in Pondicherry will recognize him as Keshavji, the quiet, gentle man who is in charge of food distribution and selling the meal tickets. Although 71 years of age, he seems far younger. Keshavji is always ready to reminisce about how the Mother gave prime importance to the development of the physical. He enthusiastically paraphrases Mother: "The physical is the basis of yoga. If the base is strong, everything else will be strong."

Joining the Ashram in 1947, he had the personal benefit of Mother watching over the physical training of the ashramites in those

with timings under 4 hours, Keshavji tried running long distance. In 1990 he did 90 km and later 160 km (100 miles). Even after a long run, his work schedule remains the same. He gets up at 3:30 am to begin his day with exercises and a 20 km run and then goes to his extensive duties at the Ashram Dining Room where he has worked since his arrival in Pondicherry.

For his nutrition he depends fully on the food served in the Ashram Dining Room. For long distance runs, a friend on a bicycle accompanies him carrying lemonade, some glucose and a packet of biscuits. He makes light of all his feats and attributes everything to the grace of the Mother. "When you decide to do something, She is always behind us to help and it is only because of Her help that we can



Keshavji: "Age has nothing to do with running. . ."

PHOTOS: BILL

days. He started out a frail youth. In his early trainings he managed only 85 push ups, while the others could do a hundred. However in the final competition he managed 267, while his nearest competitor finished at 162.

Only at the age of 46 did he begin running by spontaneously joining a 10 km race and finding to his amusement that he came in second. After that, Keshavji never turned back, regardless of his health or the weather. He even ran during a cyclone! Inspired by reading about a 97 year old man who had run a marathon and a woman who had run 700 miles and could run 12 marathons in 12 days

do such things, otherwise nothing is possible." Should anyone claim that he is in the privileged position of having had the Mother's personal guidance, he is quick to point out that much more can be done today because the presence of the Mother is even stronger now than when She was physically present. "Always behave as if the Mother is watching you, for indeed She is always present," he exclaims quoting Sri Aurobindo. "Physical education is as much of a basic instinct as are food and sleep. There can be no excuses for not improving and excelling," he concludes with a smile.

Bill

Subscription rates

To cover our costs, the suggested new 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 56, It. Lira 61,000, D.Gl. 63, 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. Subscribers will receive a reminder when their subscription is about to expire.

AUROVILLE TODAY provides information about Auroville, an international township in South-India, on a monthly basis and is distributed to Aurovilians and friends of Auroville in India and abroad. It does not necessarily reflect the views of the community as a whole. Editorial team: Tineke, Roger, Martin B., Jill, Carel, Bindu, Bill, Annemarie, Alan. Photos (unless otherwise specified): John Mandeen. DTP: Annemarie. Proofreading: Barbara. Printed at Auroville Press.