

AUROVILLE TODAY

September 1994, Number Sixty-Eight

Water. No one can live without it. Even Aurovilians, who are masters in evading many problems, cannot dilute this one. For water, or rather the lack of it, is a problem. Mother already commented on it in 1968, and we have not really found any solution as yet. AUROVILLE TODAY has covered the topic earlier. In this issue we highlight some of the present exploitative practices still in use in and around Auroville and glance at one or two new initiatives. We also unveil plans for the first projects in the Cultural Zone, cover some cultural activities of the last month, profile Anandi who revisited the community recently after spending many years and much effort in making Auroville better known in South America, and finally we join Tim as he suffers a rush of blood to the head in the upside down *asanas* of Hatha Yoga.

Eds

When Water fails . . .

"When water fails . . . no man can walk in duty's ordered way", muses Thiruvalluvar. Cities such as the ancient Indian city of Fatehpur-Sikri, and indeed entire civilizations have come to a sudden end because of the scarcity of water. Similarly, lack of water might restrict the future growth and development of Auroville. For instance, plans for the development of the Residential Zone are already underway, but Maurice, who heads the Auroville Water Service, admits that an adequate source of water to supply this densely populated zone has not yet been found.

As there is no river nearby, Auroville, which is situated on a sandstone plateau, has so far depended almost exclusively on groundwater supply for its water needs. The hydrogeological cross-section diagram of Auroville (see next page) shows that the groundwater supply consists of three aquifers in the different strata of porous rocks that underlie Auroville. The top aquifer, sandwiched between the layers of Cuddalore sandstone and Manaveli clay (the names for the rock-strata are derived from the names of the places where the rock outcrops) lies at a depth of 25 meters on the plateau, and becomes shallower inland. The second aquifer flows, irregularly, through Kaderperikuppam limestone at a depth of around 60 meters. Most of the wells in Auroville draw their water from the first two aquifers. Only a couple of wells, like the one at Aurogreen, are deep enough to tap the third aquifer which lies at a depth of more than 250 meters. The third aquifer, formed during the Mesozoic era, holds water that is of a high quality having a high sulphur content and there are serious doubts as to whether it should be tapped at all.

The top two aquifers are replenished by rainfall. Ideally, we should maintain the water-cycle of nature; that is, every drop of water that we take out should eventually find its way back underground to recharge the aquifers. In reality, despite having an average rainfall of 1227 mm a year (much higher than the Indian average), the rate of recharge of groundwater is only about 12.5% to 25% of the total rainfall. The water levels in the top two aquifers have been constantly dropping every year. Measurements show that since 1980, the water level in the first aquifer has fallen by as much as 7 meters and is now in imminent danger of drying up. There is a zone of direct recharge on the west side of Auroville that, thanks to massive bunding and tree-planting efforts at Aurobrindavan and Hermitage,

replenishes the first aquifer to a certain extent, directly and quickly, but rainwater falling on the main Auroville plateau takes as long as 15 to 20 years to reach the first aquifer and perhaps 30 to 50 years to percolate deeper into the second aquifer. It is impossible for Aurovilians to develop the catchment area for the second aquifer as it lies some distance outside of Auroville.

Clearly, management of groundwater resources needs to be done on a regional and not on a local scale. And the situation at the regional level is discouraging. There are no laws in Tamil Nadu to govern the management of groundwater - with the exception of a law prohibiting the drilling of wells within an area of 6 miles from the coast, which is not being implemented. On the other hand, the State Government, in an attempt to boost agriculture and to court popularity with a powerful political lobby makes available to the farmers generous funds for sinking wells and free electricity. Thus, over the years, an increasing number of wells and powerful pumpsets have sprung up in the surrounding villages, particularly on the coastal strip between Kalapet (6 kms north of Auroville) and Pondicherry.

There has also been a shift in agricultural patterns where traditional food crops have been replaced by water-intensive cash crops such as paddy, sugarcane and coconuts. At present, over 750 acres of land in the area surrounding Auroville are being irrigated by groundwater. What's worse is the sheer wastage of groundwater: electric pumps, capable of pumping up to 8,000 liters an hour are often left running for 24 hours a day. Yet perhaps before we start pointing an accusing finger at others, we would do well to look at our own practices.

To begin with, despite repeated warnings from eminent hydrologists like Vasanth Reddy and Harald Kraft and

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When Water fails . . .
(contd. from page 1)

concerned Aurovilians such as Michael Mason, Tency and Tom, Auroville still lacks a scientific and integrated policy of water management. By and large, individuals in Auroville tap into the groundwater as they wish, without even taking into account whether the geology at that particular location is favourable for a particular kind of well or not, or whether they are adversely affecting someone else's supply. This has resulted in a situation where we do not even know exactly how many wells have been sunk in Auroville and how much water is pumped out daily. An attempt to install flow meters had to be abandoned for people were reluctant to invest the money required to install a flow-meter (a gadget that records the amount of water pumped out), or to disclose how much water they were consuming each day. Maurice, who currently heads the Auroville Water Service, complains, "People do not even bother to inform us when they dig a well. They just come to us when they have a problem".

It is estimated that there about 150 wells, ranging from handpumps and windmill-powered wells to electric submersibles in Auroville today. Rod, a visiting environmentalist says, it is "crazy to have so many wells for such a small community. Not only is it a sheer waste of money and other resources [a well, 100 meters deep, can easily cost half a lakh of rupees or more], but also it breeds an attitude of ownership and selfishness. People start thinking in terms of "my well", "my pump", "my water" and resent having to share it with others. By one estimate, in the dry season Aurovilians use more than 3 million litres a day.

There seems to be an equal lack of concern about water conservation. At the individual level, people plan water-intensive gardens, or worse still, leave their gardens under the sole charge of a "tambi" (young unskilled worker) who tends to overwater them. Leaks due to faulty taps, valves, or pipe connections are not always repaired promptly. According to a study by Michael, 288 liters of water per day can be lost by a continuously dripping tap; and as much as 35 gallons of water can be lost from a leaking toilet bowl.

At the community level, houses are being built and whole communities being developed without incorporating comprehensive plans for harvesting rain water or reducing run-off. Technically, it is relatively cheap and easy to channel rainwater, through a pipe, down from the roof into a catchment pond below. Landscaping can also be done so that "kolams" (small ponds), bunds and check dams are an integral part of the garden; thereby the rainwater is checked at every level and percolates into the ground instead of flowing across the land into the sea and eroding the topsoil in the process. And finally, instead of water-intensive gardens, drought-resistant plants can be promoted. The concern, the determination

Troubled Waters

For some time, it has been suspected that certain wells in and around Auroville were becoming saline. But it was only this year that tests could be done to determine the level of salinity in the groundwater. The testing was done at Aurobrindavan by Igor, a newcomer. Rod, a visitor, was instrumental in collecting samples of water from the wells. Later, a chance newspaper article about salt water problems in the neighbouring district of Tirunelveli led Rod to take up a more elaborate project, aptly termed *Troubled Waters*. Here is Rod's description of the project:

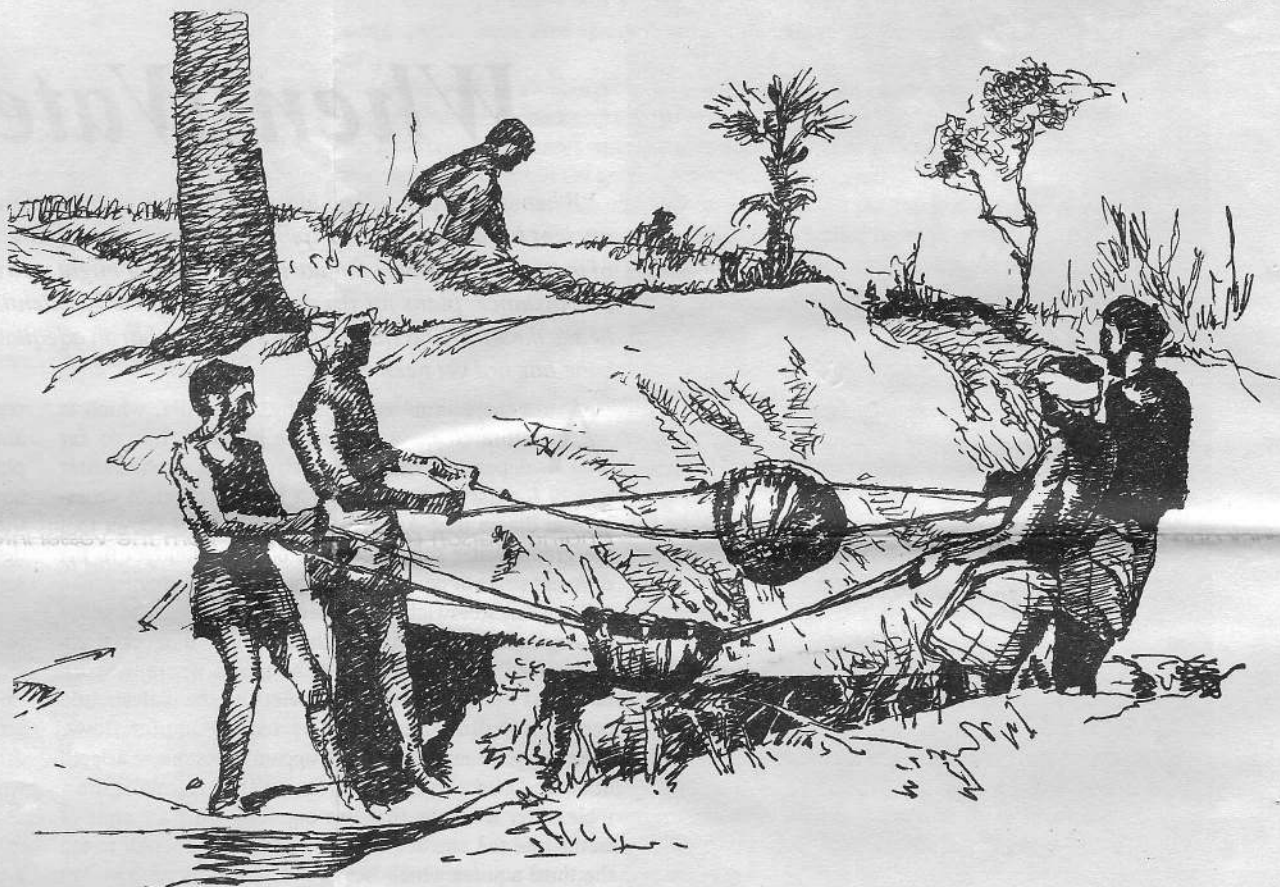
All over the world, the availability of fresh water has become a prime concern today. The concern over the pollution of fresh water bodies has recently shifted to the equally serious problem of the depletion of groundwater. One of the greatest problems arising from the depletion of groundwater in coastal areas is the intrusion of salt water into the underground aquifers. In Tamil Nadu, the problem has reached alarming proportions; most of its fertile coastal areas face the threat of being rendered barren because of salt water intrusion.

Traditionally, Tamil Nadu had a comprehensive and scientific policy of managing its water resources. But with colonization and industrialization, the traditional methods of harvesting and storing rainwater and conserving groundwater fell into disuse. The commercialization of agriculture, the overwhelming dependence on tubewells and electric pumpsets for irrigation, the availability of free electricity for farming; in short, unsound and unsustainable agricultural and water management policies have led to an

almost complete exhaustion of the state's subterranean water resources.

In a healthy coastal ecosystem, there is a constant flow of underground water through the aquifer towards the coast, often going several kilometers away from land under the sea bed. During the last thirty years, the "tubewell revolution" in India [the reference here is to the Indian Government's policy prevalent in the Sixties of boosting agriculture through tubewell irrigation] has led to a situation in which the withdrawal of water from the "pathal gangai" (the underground Ganges) as the phreatic or upper aquifer is sometimes referred to, has exceeded the rate of groundwater recharge from rainfall. This results in salt water moving inland through the aquifer. In areas around tubewells that are pumping heavily, due to the depletion of the fresh water, a

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Yerra-koodai - the swinging way to transfer water into irrigation channels

DRAWING: VAHULA

and the collective spirit required however, to implement such schemes seems to be lacking.

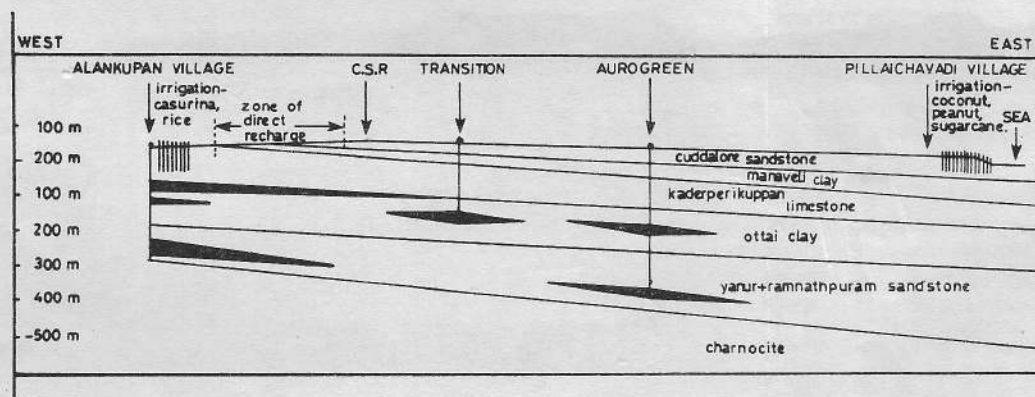
Given the fact that all the land required for the city has not been consolidated, it is at present impossible to implement a centralized policy of water extraction and distribution. Harvesting rainwater is a more viable option for it allows for greater decentralization: each community or even each household can be self-sufficient in water if they manage to collect even a small percentage

of all the water that falls from the sky. Harald Kraft points out that "over the Auroville area of 20 sq km, 24.5 million cubic metres of rain is falling annually; this is ten times what 50,000 people need for personal consumption, assuming a figure of 150 liters per person daily". Michael Mason, in a counter argument, points out that, in reality, "it will be difficult to keep stagnant rainwater fresh and pure enough to be consumed". He feels that "people just have to become more conscious of the water situation and the amount of water that they consume". The alternative of using rain-

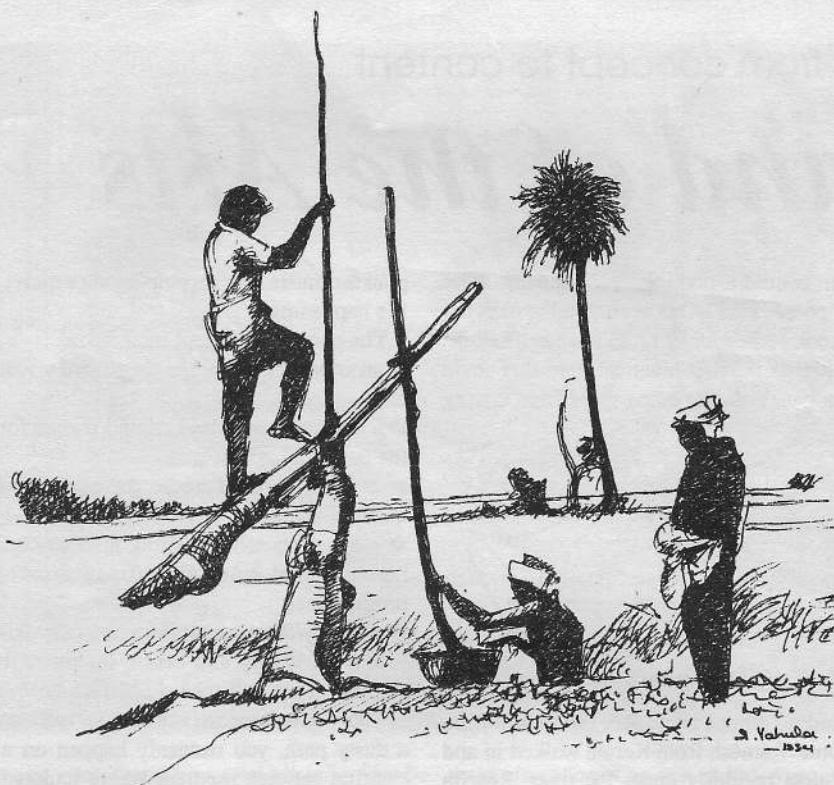
water directly (as opposed to letting it percolate to the aquifer), even if it be just for irrigation, however, is attractive as it makes us self-sufficient without worrying about the depletion of groundwater by farmers in the bio-region.

It is true that there have been notable efforts to improve water management in Auroville: the integrated systems of water distribution at Certitude, Auromodel, Samasti; water conservation through bunding by green-belt workers; the experiment in harvesting rainwater at Grace; and the waste-water recycling plants at Center Field and Samasti. But such efforts have been undertaken only on a small scale by a handful of concerned individuals. As far as the collective consciousness goes, the average Aurovillian does not think twice about the amount of groundwater he pumps out, and if made aware of the situation, he only points to the fact that neighbouring farmers pump out far more water than they do. But this attitude must change, and soon. Perhaps, the very effort to change our attitude will effect a change of consciousness amongst the neighbouring farmers.

Bindu



Hydro-geological cross-section of Auroville



Yetam-people do it with their feet

DRAWING: S. VAHULA

How it used to be done . . .

Today, with the proliferation of tubewells and electric pumpsets, agriculture accounts for approximately 90% of the total water consumption in India. This has not only endangered the ecological balance but also much of the water used for irrigation goes waste as the fields are regularly over-watered.

Traditionally, India has had environmentally sustainable systems for extracting water for irrigation which fell into disuse with the development of well technology. Detailed below are some water extraction systems which were once prevalent in Tamil Nadu and which, according to Rod can still be seen "with a bit of luck and a lot of searching".

The working of the following systems was accompanied by folk songs about water and about those who used it. And this oral tradition, an inherent part of Tamil culture, is rapidly dying out. The project, *Troubled Waters* (see accompanying article) seeks additional funding to collect and publish, in Tamil and English, a compilation of these songs before they are drowned out by the less appealing sounds of electric and diesel pumps.

Kamalai or Kawala: A pulley system made up of granite pillars, wooden supports and two rollers. A team of buffaloes moves up and down the ramp, lowering and raising the "koonai" (a brass vessel with a capacity of 20-30 litres which has a large opening at the top and a smaller one at the bottom with a leather tube attached). The water is lifted from the well and directed to the fields through small channels.

Yetam (see above): A pivot or a see-saw system comprised of a forked tree trunk with a second branch fixed across it. One person moves up and down one side of the yetam to raise and lower the vessel while another person guides the water from the vessel into the irrigation channel. This system can be used to draw water from wells, ponds or rivers.

Yerra-koodai (see left): A lined wicker basket with two ropes on each side held by one person on either side who, by regular swinging motions, scoop the water from a pond or stream and tilt it into the irrigation channels.

Pot-watering: A system whereby women dig small holes, about a meter into the sand, along the coast to reach the fresh water. The water is then scooped out with pots and generally used to water casurina saplings.

SOLUTIONS ?

Solar Desalination Project

In Petite Ferme, a community near Auromodèle, low cost prototypes of solar desalination plants are being tested. Their design is simple: a glass house covering a basin with sea water. The sun heats up the water, which evaporates and condenses against the cooler glass, and then trickles into the catchment area. Manfred, a German scientist, is testing the fourth prototype. The results are encouraging. He has calculated that each 100 square meters of glass can yield 150,000 litres of distilled water a year. During the monsoons the glass house will act as a rain catchment device, which will yield another 120,000 to 190,000 litres a year, bringing the total yield to 270,000 to 340,000 litres a year.

"This way of solar water harvesting is not new", says Manfred, who points out that in Chile an identical system already existed 150 years ago. Also India has a plant in Bhavnagar, Gujarat, which will be studied before a final design is made and installed. Potential locations include one of Auroville's beach communities and Annapurna, an inland agricultural community which has

Solar desalination by condensation

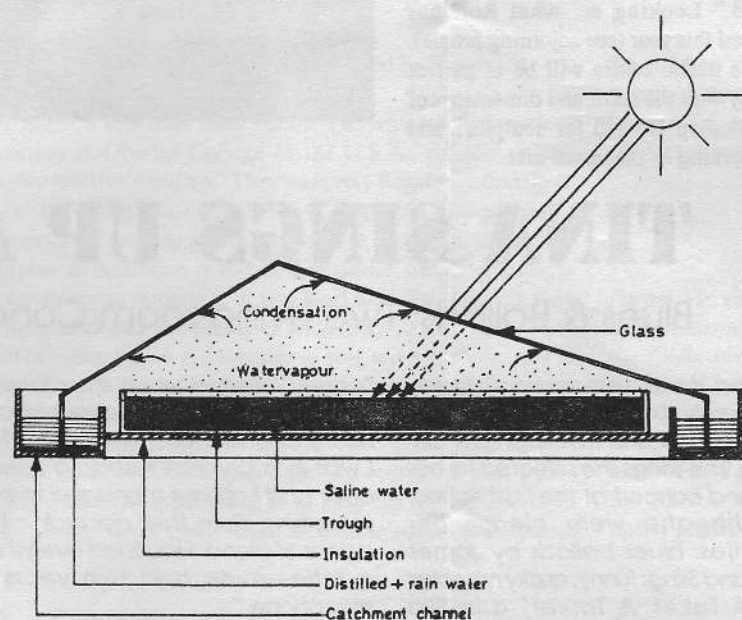
much saline land due to saline wells. The pure distilled water can be mixed with saline well water and then be used for drinking and irrigation, thus diminishing the need to use saline ground water.

Exhibition

Recently, the Auroville Health Center hosted an exhibition on water usage.

Manfred Lehnert and Rolf Brockmeier of Petite Ferme designed the exhibition, hoping to create thereby a greater awareness among villagers about proper water management and simple waste water treatment.

The Village Action group is now taking the exhibition around the local villages on a tour.



Tirunelveli, some 500 kilometers south of Auroville, an area which has been severely affected by the same problem. Of the 19 villages that I visited in the course of one month, 17 did not have access to fresh water from within the villages, and often arrangements had to be made by the villagers themselves to obtain water from elsewhere. Private companies sprang up over the last 5 years, transporting water into the affected area by means of tankers and selling it to the villagers. Women would set off in the morning, covering distances of up to 4-5 km, to fetch water back in brass pots balanced on their heads. Pipeline connections were laid to pumps as far as 7 km away. But with frequent breakdowns and erratic power supply, water would flow out of the pipe at an average of only 2-3 times a week. Without adequate access to fresh water for drinking and bathing, hygiene has become a major problem. People are unable to grow vegetables and the staple diet is fish curry 3 times a day.

Ten years ago, this stretch of coastline was a very fertile area of farming land that produced coconut, banana, and chilli. The worst hit have been the coconut harvests: due to the high level of salinity in the water, trees that gave an average of 80 to 100 fruits per month now yield only 15 to 20 fruits of a much smaller size.

The social structure of the villages has changed dramatically due to these problems. Many of the farmers have sold their land at a fraction of its previous value and left to seek work in cities. In some villages, such as Kuttam, the population has decreased by as much as 50% over the past decade.

The situation in the villages is bleak and the picture is getting worse. The problems have prompted even more exploitation of groundwater since the farmers have adopted the attitude that they might as well use all the water they can before their neighbours do. The villagers are in despair: the Government has done little to help and they have no one to turn to.

The second stage of the DANIDA project is the making of an educational video on the causes, socio-economic problems, and possible solutions. The film has a dramatic plot involving a couple who visit a village, hoping to marry off their daughter. A walk around the village however is enough to convince them of the problems of salt water intrusion; and they depart choosing not to impose such a hard life on their daughter. More traditional documentary-style explanations of the causes of salinity and preventive measures frame the main story of the film.

Once the video is completed and has been shown extensively throughout the villages in Tirunelveli and in the Auroville area, an exchange program will be set up whereby a group of 40 to 50 farmers, businessmen, village elders, and members of youth clubs in the bio-region of Auroville will be taken to Tirunelveli to be shown some of the more visible signs of the problems to emphasize the fact that unless they themselves start to take an active part in rectifying the problems, their own land may become worthless before the end of the decade.

Finally, a similar group of people will be brought up from Tirunelveli district and a three-day workshop will be held in Auroville on basic principles of land and water management. Participants will have the opportunity of interacting with Auroville "green-workers" and environmentalists from outside. One can only hope that by co-operating and by learning not to exploit the groundwater resources, we can reverse the trend of salt water intrusion.

Rod

City Developments: The Cultural Zone on its way from concept to content

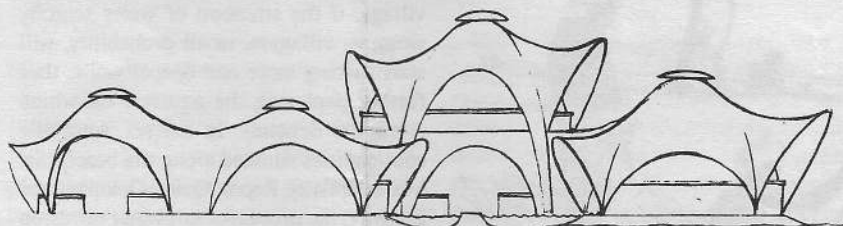
Kalabhummi - Land of the Arts

Twenty years ago, cows and goats grazed freely in Kalabhummi except when a seasonal crop of peanuts was planted. Ten years ago, cashew trees were planted but the cows and goats grazed on. In 1983, a new community in Dana on the northeast border of the zone wanted to pioneer the cultural area, but energy went into the residential infrastructure and into education with the construction of the Transition School campus nearby. This year cows and goats have to be discouraged from entering because there are artists at work. One man and two puppies have moved into that section of the galaxy plan known as the Cultural Zone.

So far, cultural activities and creative expression have happened in the schools, Bharat Nivas and more recently in Pitanga Hall. For years, artists had to set up their

own studios at home. Rolf was one of those who had a studio in his residence and decided that now it was time to work on nurturing the wider vision of developing the cultural zone by moving there as a

run behind it nothing ever happens. A lot of people said NO to everything at first, but I took some money I had from exhibitions and took the first practical steps that could happen: building some spaces and buying



These ferrocement pavilions, designed by Rolf, will host various workshops

caretaker/watchmen and building some first structures. "Twelve years ago there was a plan for a collective artists' atelier, and seven years ago for the Centre for Creative Expression," recalls Rolf, "but unless you

marble. Now I'm in debt but others have come. Ramesh from Kerala walked in and sculpts regularly under the trees. Rosella has made the plan for a workshop to do bas-relief in metal. Holger has his "egg"

plan for music [see accompanying article]. It's happening."

The complete concept includes:

- ✧ an art workshop for the plastic and visual arts;
- ✧ a research centre and a small theatre for the performing arts;
- ✧ a multi-purpose studio for music and audio-visual arts;
- ✧ a guest house for visiting artists under international cultural and educational programmes;
- ✧ a library/documentation centre (a multimedia art library and centre for research studies). This will take a little longer but as you weave between the cashew trees on a dusty path, you suddenly happen on a clearing between the trees where sculpted structures and white marble statues invoke a cultural zone.

Bill

The arts and the crafts would exist, not for any inferior mental or vital amusement, entertainment of leisure and relieving excitement or pleasure, but as expressions and means of the truth of the Spirit and the beauty and delight of existence.

Sri Aurobindo

Keep it small

Holger, a German musician who has been in Auroville with his family for three and a half years, has presented the Development Group with a plan for a music centre, with facilities for teaching, performing, experimenting and collaborating. This project differs from what we have presently in a number of important ways. Unlike Bharat Nivas, it will be small, creating a sense of intimacy and informality. Very often, the larger the space, the more formal and distant the connection between performer and audience. Holger envisages a multi-purpose centre on a smaller scale, where singers, artists and students of music can come for classes, lectures and workshops. There will be a stage and seating for an audience of approximately 80 people.

Being small, it will have several advantages that performances in Auroville lack at the moment: firstly, it will have no windows, so the performing space can be made completely dark. This is essential for daytime rehearsals and work requiring a slide projector. It will also be air-conditioned, a necessity if there are no windows, thus regulating the temperature and protecting sensitive musical instruments like the piano.

Holger had the idea for this addition to the cultural zone after speaking with Luigi a year ago: "Luigi kept asking me to do something," Holger remembered, "to formulate something. I was always answering, 'I cannot, it's not my business'." Then, on the way home from yet another conversation in the Bakery it came to him... what we really need here is a nice place for groups like the choir or a string quartet to work without feeling lost in a big, anonymous space.

Talking about the shape of this space, Holger spoke of his visit to the Development Group. "They laughed at me," he said, "because I came up with a building shaped

like an egg laying poised on it's side. The idea is to have an oval, because this is the best shape for optimizing sound. To repeat this shape on the bottom makes an egg shape. But I don't have any architectural ambitions, so if this shape is not acceptable, we can do another!"

Holger is optimistic that the music centre of his imagination will be a reality in one and a half years. "What we need," he said, "is a group of responsible people who can help to push it forward." Looking at what Rolf has developed this year (see adjoining article), Holger's music centre will be in perfect harmony with the spirit and dimensions of the workshop created for sculptors and those working in the visual arts.



TINA SINGS UP A STORM

Blues & Ballads: Two Living-room Concerts at Last School

For Tina, it was a dream come true—after nearly six months of rehearsals and hard work, she was singing, finally singing. The songs she selected for her weekend concert at the Last School amphitheatre were clearly her favourites: blues ballads by James Taylor and Sting; funny, quirky numbers like "A Tisket, A Tasket" a la Ella Fitzgerald; and, at the end, one the audience would sing along with: "Longer Boots" (a Cat Stevens gospel number from "Tea for the Tillerman").

The group playing behind her was well-rehearsed and a good, friendly complement to Tina's sweet and down-to-earth style: Andy (guitar), Pushkar (keyboards), Rolf (drums), Stefano (saxophone), Holger (violin/lead guitar). They made a nice, easy cradle for Tina, whose singing

"career" started when she was very young, but then got sidetracked and nearly abandoned. "When I was ten, I was in a children's choir, a church choir and I always managed to play something. Flute, then accordion, half a year of piano. I touched everything a little—even had two years of saxophone."

In Germany, she had a voice teacher, a great big, black lady from the States named Benny Gillette, who gave her lessons for one and a half years. "She taught me about classical singing technique—opening the voice. The problem was I didn't know how to practice, how to work. In Germany, I never managed to sing with a group."

So it was with a sense of joy and pride that she looked out at the

audience on Saturday night. After all, this special weekend had been a long time coming—postponed for a variety of reasons, including four children and her own basic insecurity. "But this time," said Tina, "instead of complaining and feeling jealous of Holger (her musician-husband who was often out practicing or performing), I decided to do something, to take a chance and find out what it was like to turn a dream into reality."

How did it feel, afterwards?

"Friday, the first night, was more the living room atmosphere," Tina responded. "More intimate. Since it was raining so hard, everybody who braved the storm felt like a wet poodle. I had the feeling I was just 'doing it', I was innocent. On



Above: The Secretary and his wife Mrs De, sang devotional songs at the Auroville cultural evening held at Pitanga on the 31st of July. Below: Param Vir worked with Auroville Children. The result was . . .
At the same event Shraddavan read her poem "Remembering" (right) amongst others.



PHOTO: IRENO

The Indian Composer and Conductor Param Vir worked with Auroville Children. The result was . . .

A Chorus of Young Voices

I am sitting outside of Pitanga Hall listening to a rehearsal. It has been going on for two hours and is far from over, but the energy is such that I don't hear any children complaining. The teacher's contact with the young children is evident. "Straighten up" I hear him cheerfully intone, followed by "Who forgot to breathe?". Curious, I peer through the grills of the window and see two rows of Auroville children standing bolt-upright! I must be dreaming, or this teacher is some type of mage! He plays something on the piano. "What is this called?". "Crescendo", comes the answer. "And this?" "Legato". "What does legato mean?" "Smooth and connected" comes the enthusiastic reply from a chorus of young voices. There is a spontaneous easy dialogue going on as he elicits, then listens to one of the children recapitulate a song's story, before guiding them into a discussion about its meaning. Tomorrow's performance will conclude this seven-day workshop for 19 Auroville kids conducted by Param Vir.

Over lunch a few days later Param Vir, who teaches musical composition at Oberlin College in the U.S.A., reflects on his experience with the children. "They were very fidgety the first three days, but the secret lies in challenging them and in expecting a high response. The body and the mind have incredible power and the purpose of education is to free that power. Standing straight and focussing was important. It was hard work for them but they were motivated and are proud of what they've achieved. They learned to listen, which is necessary to sing one long note, and in one week they developed a one-and-a-half octave range. The voice is capable of doing many subtle things, and learning different types of articulation helps in appreciating the beauty of language. I don't think kids mind working hard if there is a result and with music it's right there. The main thing is to keep the atmosphere light and happy and make them laugh at themselves as that creates

On the evening of the 14th of August Johnny entertained a large audience in the outside sitting space of the Visitor's Center with his usual hilarious vision of life in Auroville over the past two months. In his skit called "Cafe de la Blah Blah", a troupe of children and adults improvised, sang and danced to funny and witty texts spoken by Johnny. A week's rehearsal had gone into the preparation of the main

Strange dishes served at the Cafe de la Blah Blah

dishes on the menu of the cafe that evening. These included "Calamity" (described by the waitress Miss Gravy as: bruised egos in Pondy compost), "Catastrophy" (two idiots in prison without permission), "Tragedy" (Kodi fried kids with Lycee Salad and extra

Remembering
Smoothly contoured,
Cool and heavy in my hand,
Its glassy skin pocked and pitted,
This stone speaks
Of rolling and grinding in distant torrents.
One scarred and bumpy surface tells
That once it was torn rough and raw away
From the side of its mother-mountain;
And these encircling veins
Remind how long before
This substance seethed and folded over,
Was kneaded like dough,
Baked in the earth's furnace,
Pressed out to cool and petrify.
Long before that perhaps
Atoms now packed dense inside this lump
Flared out - a cloud in the solar wind.
Long it lay, oblivious;
But now another force,
more resistless than all these
Has carried it far
From that river-carved mountain
To lie here:
Cool and heavy to a human hand,
Questioned by a human gaze,
Remembering...

Shraddavan

energy."

Param Vir is very critical of the reliance on technology and computers in music. "The natural quality of the sound of the human voice and of instruments is very therapeutic and healing for both performers and listeners. The qualities you get from natural sounds can't be synthesised. Machines depower children and much of our modern technology violates the natural power of our bodies."

Param Vir regrets not being able to stay longer and would have liked to work with the older kids as well, but hopes local musicians will continue with the children. He also hopes between his many commitments to return again to Auroville to stage the musical "The Demons of Bara Tooti" with the children of Auroville. In what was one of the highlights of the cultural evening at Pitanga two songs from this musical written by Barry John were performed by the children's choir, along with the song Old Abraham set to the music of Benjamin Britten, the old English poem Summer is Icumen In, and Flocks are grazing on the Hillside, that was conducted in four tones to the surprise of all those present.

Roger

Param Vir won the first prize in 1992 for two one-act operas, *Broken Strings*, based on an old Buddhist tale, and *Snatched by the Gods*, inspired by a short story of Tagore. Both were commissioned by the city of Munich for its Biennial and performed with Kathakali masks by the Netherlands Opera in Amsterdam later the same year. At present he is working on finishing an orchestrated piece, *Horse Tooth, White Rock*, based on the life of the Tibetan yogi Milarepa, to be premiered soon by the B.B.C., and is planning a major opera on the life of Buddha.

Saturday I was very conscious of all the mistakes of the previous night. It made me more nervous. What I liked the most was the variety of reactions to the same songs on the two nights—I discovered there is a huge range of possibilities for the audience."

Despite her nervousness, the happiness she felt in performing was evident to the audience which crowded into Last School on an overcast (but dry) Saturday night. It was an infectious joy, with Tina often breaking into laughter when something went wrong technically, or exchanging jokes with Holger and the other band members, and the audience responded with enthusiasm.

For Tina, the decision to "do it" was part of a larger process. "It was really a way to look at myself. That's what it was about. It was a kind of therapy." And she plans to continue. "The next program will be jazz. What I want now is to improve my whole musicianship. To keep on working and learning about myself."

Jill

With a Fire and a Rose

Anandi speaks about Auroville and Argentina

Anandi, who is Auroville's contact person in Argentina, lived for a year in the Ashram before moving to Auroville in 1980. She lived here for six years teaching at Centre School and working at Matrimandir, before returning to Argentina in 1986. She recently returned for a short visit and reflected on her experiences of the last few years.

"Buenos Aires is a hard place, it would have been difficult to deal with if it wasn't for Auroville", says Anandi remembering her return there in 1986. "But Auroville had made me stronger. I knew who I was and what it was to be inwardly free. At the same time I felt more alone, but there were times that I felt the presence of Sri Aurobindo and Mother very strongly there, stronger than when I was here."

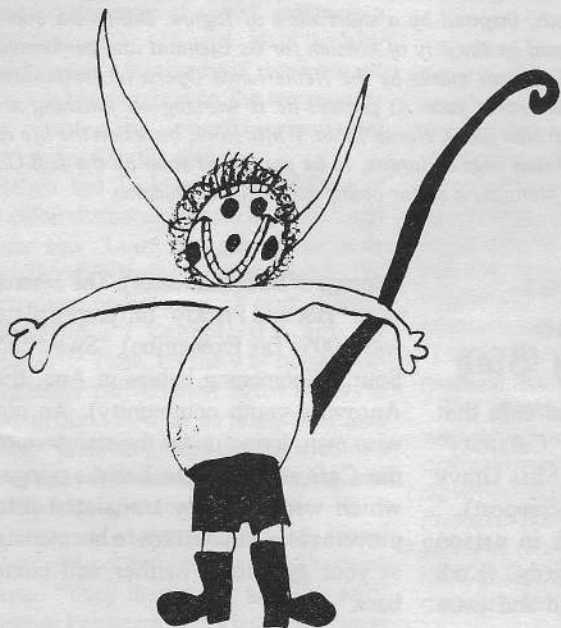
Democracy had just returned to Argentina, and a creative ferment was in the air. She began writing poetry again (her fourth book of poems, "Cantos con Presencia", has just been published in Auroville) and started giving hatha-yoga and Tai-Chi classes. Soon after she received copies of "Monoso", a book of her poems written for children with drawings done by the children she had worked with at Centre School (illustrated on this page).

Things fell into place when she went to The Foundation of the Arts to see if they would be interested in using her children's book. The woman whom she met was so enthusiastic about it that she immediately offered her a job.

As a result, under the auspices of the State Ministry of Education and Culture, Anandi, who trained to be a teacher in Europe before coming to India, became a coordinator for teacher training courses as well as reading workshops for children and adults under a programme called Leer es crecer (To read is to grow). Working together with a group of poets, artists and writers she criss-crossed the country. The group would sometimes make up to 200 workshop-related trips a month between 1987 and 1993.

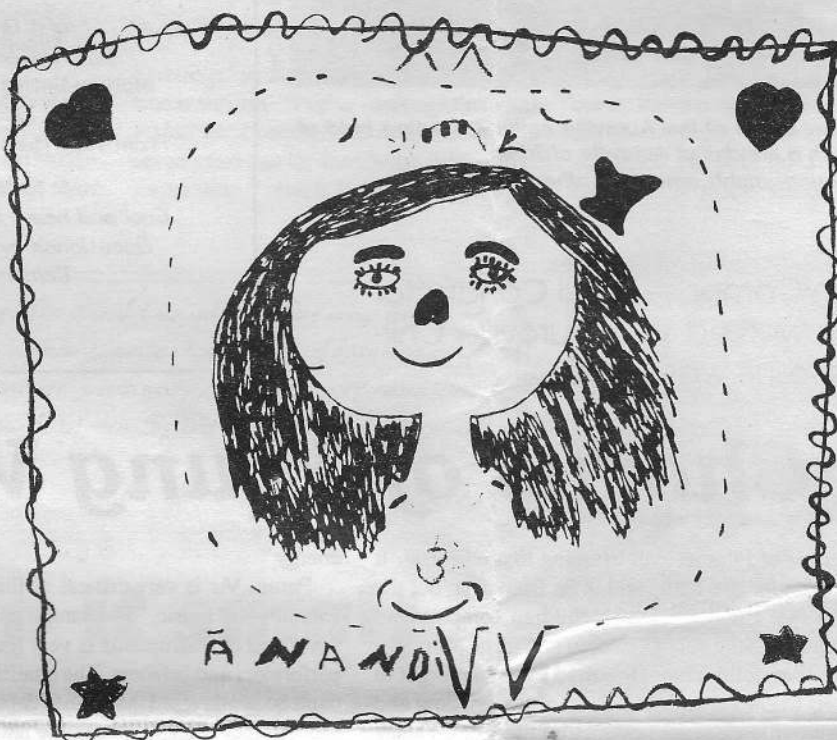
"We visited places where no white person had ever been before" and remembers in particular an island called Parana with one small school in the north-east of the country. "I went there with three well-known writers and we used poetry, body movement, and singing. It was incredible how quickly the kids got into it!"

They made amazing drawings and started writing songs for Monoso with the rhythms of Chamame - the traditional music of the north-east. Generally I have found that even in a three-hour workshop kids will start writing their own



songs after only half an hour."

On another occasion she returned to the town of Rio Negro in Patagonia in the far south of the country for a follow-up programme which had the Provincial Governor's support. They managed to get the whole community of the small town involved. Kids were creating libraries in the laundry spaces of their homes. On one day classes were



stopped in the schools of the town for an hour between 10 and 11 so the kids could go from door to door asking for books.

One local member of Parliament - who was also a lawyer and a poet - was so amazed when he returned home to find his child with a book in his hand for the first time that he was instrumental in having legislation passed for the province supporting her programme.

For the next 2 years workshops were held throughout the province that stressed the importance of reading and brought together teachers, librarians, parents and kids and other members of the communities.

Looking back on her Auroville teaching experience she feels that despite the atmosphere of freedom that exists, kids here aren't really free: "In a set-up that concentrates on self-education and discipline you can't be permissive and the rules of the game should be clear. Permissiveness is not freedom. There's still too much of a Sixties influence here in Auroville. We haven't developed a real discipline from within, which is something that has to start in Kindergarten. Everywhere in the world kids don't have role models, don't respect people. And we don't have new models. The new education is a real challenge for the teacher. It's important to create an atmosphere of mutual respect - trusting the kids is important. Real discipline is not to forbid things. Kids should make their own classroom policies and rules. In Argentina I let the kids make their own rules. We meet, talk and decide what class they want. They then impose the discipline themselves. You have to deserve your freedom. Doing anything is not freedom, to know what you want to do is."

Anandi is also Auroville's contact person in Argentina. She has given radio and newspaper interviews as well as



talks, and has shown the Auroville video "Earth Needs" in schools, libraries, book fairs and yoga centres all over Argentina as well as in Bolivia and Brazil. In particular she mentions an international educational and healing community called Janajpacha in the Bolivian Andes that combines ecology with Incan sacred teachings. She stayed there for a week and met a number of Amer-Indian leaders and teachers from different traditions.

The community uses both the Auroville and Peace Trees videos and has joined Peace Trees - an annual environmentally oriented student exchange programme. Anandi has been in touch with the programme's organiser Danaan Parry and hopes to be able to bring some Auroville youth to Brazil and Argentina next year as a first step to put the Auroville youth in touch with the Amer-Indian cultures.

"It's as Mother said, we are 'on the edge' and have a few years to find ourselves and enter a new space of light."

"There's something going on all over the world. People are fed up and much more aware. They are getting ready for the Auroville experience elsewhere." She refers to the powerful feeling shared by many in South America that a new Pachakuty (a Quechua term for a 500-year cycle of time) began in 1992. This new Pachakuty is characterised by a resurfacing of the sacred aspects and ancestral teachings of the Indian cultures of South America, teachings that had been driven underground for five hundred years, and which emphasise the need of re-establishing a connection with the earth consciousness. "We don't have much time. It's as Mother said, we are 'on the edge' and have a few years to find ourselves and enter a new space of light." Anandi feels strong similarities exist between India and South America and looks forward to a link being established between Auroville and the Amer-Indian tradition through the pavilion of American culture.

"If we want to be a universal township the knowledge of these traditions should be represented here."

Looking back on her recent stay here, she remarks that she was shocked at first by the financial situation linking money to work in Auroville and by the amount one needs simply to come and live here, but she is philosophical about it: "I feel it's a momentary phase, part of an ongoing process. There are a lot of newcomers and old-timers who don't want the situation to continue as it is and are looking for another way. We'll find it. We can get on the right track and make it. I'm happy and grateful to have been able to return. I needed to be here physically, to walk barefoot on the red soil, and be in the Inner Chamber. When I arrived I felt as if I had only been gone three days. Reconnecting with people was a very strong experience and I felt immediately at home."

Finally she is enthusiastic and grateful to the youth of Auroville who recently set up a guard to patrol the roads at night and organised the February 28th bonfire: "It was like the manifestation of a new Pachakuty! They came with a fire in one hand and a rose in the other. They should know that they have a role to play, not only in Auroville, but in the world, and it is they who will build the Auroville that Mother dreamed".

Roger

By Airmail
Bookpost

AUROVILLE
TODAY

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Exp. # 74

ANKE AND MICHAEL
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AUROVILLE



In this issue (8 pages):
Water: Problems and Solutions?; Culture: Projects and Performances;
Hatha Yoga; News etc

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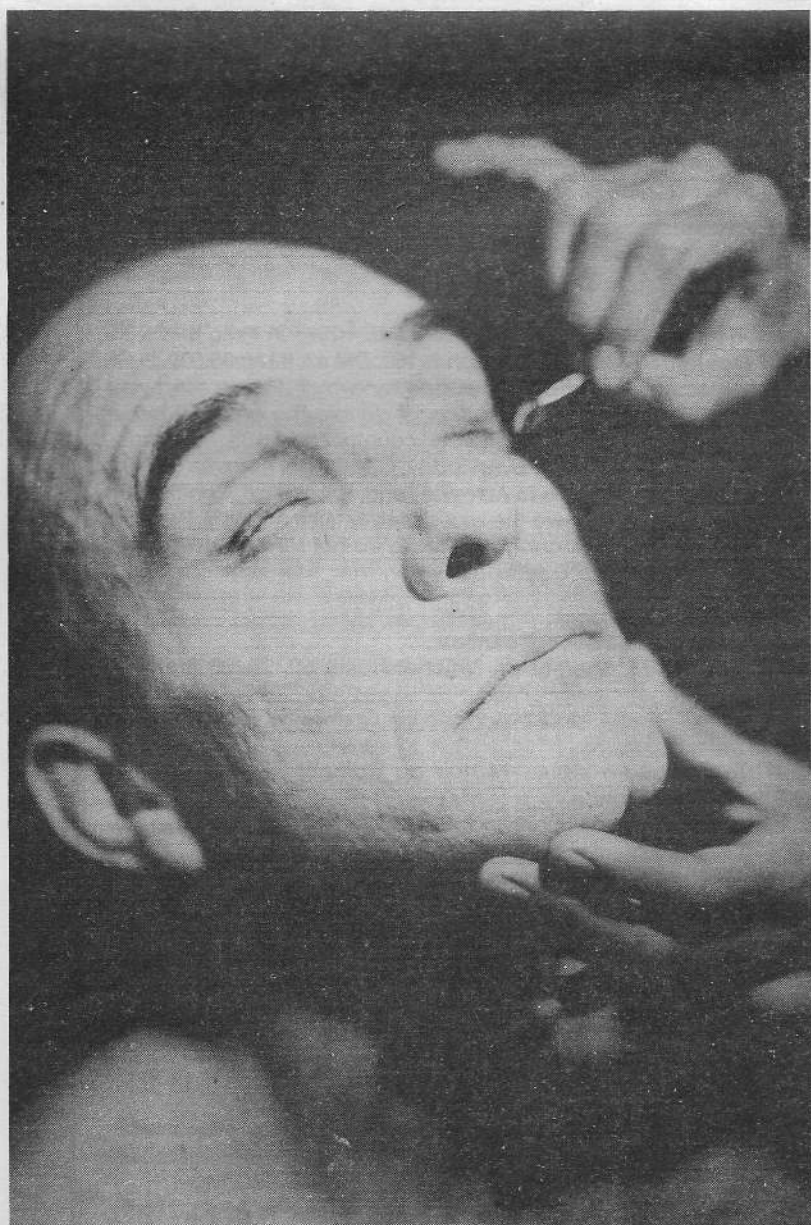


PHOTO: IRENO

Hanging About

"You just fit the loop of the rope round you at waist level, lean back, and walk up the wall," she said.

"And then?" I asked.

"You hang there upside down against the wall, suspended above the ground."

I have a horror of being upside down at any time, and have assiduously tried to avoid it all my life. But that dislike is nothing compared to the apprehension I now felt at possibly incurring the wrath of Nolly, our Hatha Yoga instructor, if I didn't do what she said. It's not that she's ferocious or inflexible (she's one of the nicest, most compassionate beings I've encountered), or that she's insensitive to the physical body (she seems to know better than the owner exactly what each muscle is doing at each instant), it's just that, well... she has a purposeful way about her, and an outer strength so formidable that one doesn't argue! If she—who knew how much I disliked emulating bats—was telling me to hang upside down, then upside down I had to go!

And so, without audible protest, I just did what she said. Four paces up the wall, threw my head back, and there I was: upside down maybe 1 or 2 feet above the ground, clinging to the rope loop for dear life, calling Mother and wishing to God I'd stayed at home!

"Now open your legs and bring your heels back over the rope, hooking your upper foot under the rope. Then you can let go" (pause...) "no, not that way you nincompoop: you'll fall through the loop," she remonstrated, at the same time grabbing my feet and correctly placing them for me. "Now let go of the rope with your hands."

"Impossible; she's joking," I thought.

"Go on, do what I say!"

"But I'll..."

"No you won't. Go on, let go of the rope!"

And so I did. Slowly at first, not believing I could do so safely, I gradually relaxed my grip. A bit more... a bit more... and I found I didn't slip to the floor; I really could hang there. But quickly I put my hands down to the floor to take my weight, just in case.

"Take your hands off the floor; fold them around your head," said Nolly. And so finally there I was, suspended like some giant fruit bat, or a strange new work of art mounted on a gallery wall, in silent company with two others, both ladies.

A minute or two must have gone by, then...

"Are you OK Tim?"

"Fine" (liar!)

"Comfortable?"

"Well, the rope's cutting into my left side a bit."

"You're hanging at a slight angle. Put your hands to the floor and take your weight for a moment." I did so, and she yanked at the loop, pulling it further round.

"How's that?"

"OK."

"No pressure in the head?"

"No... not so far."

"Good. Just relax. I'm going out for a couple of minutes."

'Relax? A couple of minutes? What happens if I need to get down?' I thought. 'Oh Mother, why did I ever let myself in for this?' I heard the door open, and she was gone.

'Rum-tum-tiddle-um-tum'. For some ridiculous reason thoughts of childhood and the books about Winnie-the-Pooh started coming into my mind. I remembered the

story of him suspended from a balloon, trying to get at some honey near the top of a tree...

"How sweet to be a cloud

Floating in the blue

It makes me very proud

To be a little cloud"

Thus, my thoughts wandered, and I even found myself comparing his predicament to my own. What would a passing bee—or worse, a wasp—make of me hanging here upside down against the wall? Would it recognise me as human? Or would it see me as a convenient object on which to place one of its mud nests, or a roll of cut leaves full of dead caterpillars? And how about the visitors who sometimes pass by Pitanga? I imagined them asking what we were doing, and us all answering "Just hanging about", "Waiting for Godot!", or some such inane reply.

"Stop it Tim; relax!" I told myself firmly.

I was sure Nolly would reappear at any moment, though I felt she had already over-extended her original "couple of minutes."

From childhood thoughts, my mind next switched to my mother and all those thousands of pounds she must have spent on giving me a 'sensible' upbringing. What would she think if she could see me now, 55-plus, living in a strange 'commune' in India, hanging upside down against a wall because of some mild digestive problem? I could think of no reasonable explanation, or how to reassure her that all her efforts had not been in vain.

"What happens if I sneeze?" was my next thought. "I mean, can one sneeze upside down?" And so on and so forth. Finally, feeling that at least 5 minutes must have gone by, I asked one of the other 'Fruit Bats' where they thought Nolly had gone.

"Don't know. She went out for something."

I knew perfectly well she was out, because I could see for myself that she was no longer walking around upside down on the 'ceiling' as she had been before. So I thought of getting down myself, but quickly realised that it was no mean feat to do so unaided. Then Nolly reappeared.

"How does it feel?" she enquired.

"It's uncomfortable on my feet, where the rope cuts," I said hopefully.

"Spread your legs.... (then) Better?"

"Well..."

"Good." And she went out again.

It was at this point that a hungry mosquito arrived on the scene. It was now 6.30 pm, the hour of peak mozzzy activity, when most sensible people retreat indoors behind meshed windows. Not only was I in an open room where mozzies could freely enter, but I was in the worst possible position to fend them off or swat them. My tormentor seemed to instinctively know this, and whined around me trying a succession of juicy spots, mostly beyond my reach.

Finally I had had enough, and was about to loudly call Nolly when she re-entered the room and came to my rescue. With strong arms and calm words she got me down, and I collapsed on the ceiling-alias-floor, feeling distinctly weird and swearing to myself I'd never do anything so stupid again.

But idiot that I am, one week later I was back for more. I can only think that all that blood to the head must have addled my brain and deprived me of my senses!

Tim

About Hanging