

AUROVILLE TODAY

May 1989

Number Six

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It's Not What You Do, It's The Way That You Do It!

— ON MEETINGS AND SEMINARS —

Those who enjoyed the old 'Pour Tous' meetings—gunfights in the Tripura saloon, fractured egos stumbling out into the sunset—will be disappointed to hear that meetings are quieter and more orderly these days. What happened?

A year and a half ago, a small group of Aurovilians came together to see if they could find ways of improving our meetings. It looked like a labour of Hercules. But as they experimented with different techniques—rôle play, conflict resolution, 'active' listening etc.—they were surprised to find that not only could meetings be bearable. They could even be enjoyable!

It soon emerged that a key concept, which they keep tripping over wherever they went, was 'facilitation'. You wouldn't believe it but this mouthful of syllables means 'to make something easier'. In terms of meetings, this means allowing the creative energies of a group to flow as easily as possible. A good 'facilitator' helps keep the group focussed on the task in hand, and creates a climate of trust and openness that allows everybody to express themselves. The facilitator serves the group, remaining impartial throughout the meeting. His task is not to determine the content of a meeting but simply to keep the 'process' of the meeting clean, clear and creative.

So whereas the old-style 'Pour Tous'-chairman might begin, "I'd like to take this opportunity of saying a few words..." and would then go on to harangue the meeting for 10 minutes, a facilitator would begin, "So what are the topics for today? Let's list them and then decide upon priorities".

Facilitation is as much an art as a science.

Techniques do exist. But each group is a unique entity, and there's no guarantee that what worked with one group will work with another. Because facilitation deals with process rather than absolutes, it is working with complex and subtle energies that shift from moment to moment, and the challenge is, like the conductor of an orchestra, to coordinate those energies so that they are channelled towards the task that the group has set itself. A good facilitator in a conscious group would be invisible; for the group would be facilitating itself - defending its members from attack, keeping a discussion focussed, resolving conflict, evaluating its procedure.

The other major change in our meetings has been in the form of the meeting itself.

Auroville has entered the seminar age! Within the last few months, we've held seminars on the Auroville economy, town planning, and our internal organization. The crucial difference between a seminar and our old-style general meetings is that the latter were generally held to decide upon something, while the seminar is an *exploration*, the first step in a process. This immediately changes the atmosphere. If you know that no final decisions will be taken at the seminar, and that everybody will get a chance to express their ideas, you are more likely to relax and listen to others rather than trying to mow down opposition.

A key element in Auroville seminars has been small-group work. Those who made their greatest speeches on the way home from 'Pour Tous' meetings discovered that they could speak in small groups - and be listened to! Suddenly the creative ideas and wisdom that had only been expressed before in tea-shop conversations and 'raps' with the cat were flowing out into the collective arena. People looked at each other again; they listened. They discovered that some of their 'absolute' differences were not so absolute, or they learned to appreciate better where the other one was coming from.

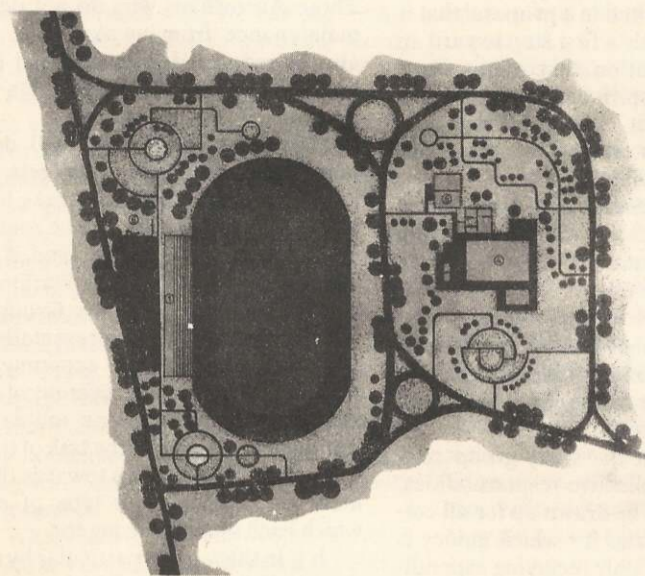
Facilitation. Seminars. They are slowly entering the Auroville vocabulary. There has been some resistance, particularly because of fears of manipulation and loss of spontaneity. And it's true. An unscrupulous facilitator with a lot of knowledge can influence a meeting in the wrong way. But as more and more Aurovilians learn about what makes a meeting work, and where it can go wrong, it's less and less likely that a manipulation can succeed. As to 'spontaneity' - we had plenty of that in meetings of the past, but it generally meant the loudest voices expressing whatever occurred to them at that particular moment.

Facilitation is not opposed to spontaneity. Rather, it creates the space and climate in which spontaneity can flower. If you are biting your nails, waiting for the next verbal assault, how can you be spontaneous?

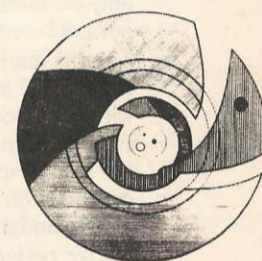
Auroville, in fact, is a great facilitator. It gives us a canvas, some brushes, some colours. Then asks us to do the painting ourselves.

Facilitation, in its widest sense, can help us paint a better, truer picture.

Alan



- ① STADIUM
- ② RUNNING TRACK
- ③ FOOTBALL COURT
- ④ SWIMMING POOL
- ⑤ GYMNASIUM
- ⑥ PARKING



A page of the 'Album'

THE ALBUM REACHES DELHI

On 29th March, some Aurovilians met the Prime Minister, and presented him with a copy of the 'Auroville Development Scheme, 1988-1995'. This album contains detailed proposals regarding land purchase and the first phases of development of the projected township. It includes a map of the four zones, a proposed road plan for the city and details of various projects, including collective housing, an

experimental school and a centre for research into human unity.

The Prime Minister found the Galaxy design very interesting and was extremely impressed by the afforestation work that has already been done.

The contents of the album, the process by which it was formulated, and reactions to it in Auroville will be described in the next issue of *Auroville Today*.

THE AUROVILLE ECONOMY: A Small Step Forward

In the second issue of *Auroville Today* we reported on some of the problems of the Auroville Economy, and allowed exponents of widely diverging views to express themselves. In this issue we wish to give you an update on what has happened since, and in particular on the contents of the proposal of the Economy Study Group which was accepted by the community of Auroville in its meeting on Feb. 28, 1989 for an experimental 6 months. This proposal is now being prepared for implementation.

Work of the study-group

Since the seminar on Auroville's economy held on November the 14th and 15th 1988, a study-group that reflected the diversity of Auroville has been trying to formulate what the next step could be towards a more satisfying economic organisation of life in Auroville.

The work of this group was difficult due to lack of statistical information and due to widely divergent views; the only common agreement at the beginning was that nobody was satisfied with our existing economy and that everybody felt the need to change and improve it. At times it required some determination to stick to the task set, especially when it seemed that the group would never reach a mutual understanding. But that understanding grew gradually.

The first work of the group was to understand that the Auroville economy is not necessarily either an individual or a collective economy (whatever meaning one may give to those terms) but that it should actually be a synthesis of the two systems. Only then can we speak about Unity in Diversity. And following this there dawned the understanding that the Auroville Economy can only develop when the freedom of the individual and of the Auroville-units is respected, within the framework set by the aims and ideals of Auroville.

Conclusions of the study-group

Based on these principles the study group came to a number of conclusions.

The most striking of these conclusions was the realisation that imposition, under whatever form, does not work in Auroville. Auroville history bears witness to the fact that all attempts at imposition have failed, and in the study group the understanding grew that in our internal economic dealings too imposition has no place. Thus the commercial units should not dictate to the non-commercial units about how they should organize their business. And likewise, the non-commercial units should not dictate to the commercial units about how much they should contribute to the 'collective'. Our experience has also showed that we cannot mentally impose a change of economy towards something more collective. The change will probably only be possible when it will be a reflection of our level of collective consciousness.

It became evident that the internal transparency has to be increased: this means that regular reports from all sectors of the Auroville economy regarding their activities, their financial situation and the number of people involved should be made available. Only in this way will it be possible to create mutual understanding.

contd. on page 2

THIS ISSUE OF AUROVILLE TODAY is a single-sheet one. From the beginning, we had intended to alternate single and double-sheet issues, due to financial reasons and our wish to publish monthly. However, the last months were so eventful that all our issues, with the exception of the first one, turned out to be double issues. Our next issue will again be a 'double' one, but some of our later issues may also be single. -Eds.

cont. from page 1

Another major conclusion was that till now, the community has failed to create a climate of trust and safety regarding the material welfare of its members. It was felt that a basic minimum maintenance for each Aurovilian should be guaranteed, provided that (s)he will work regularly. Mother indicated that each Aurovilian should have an activity that corresponds to the needs of the community and should work at least 5 hours a day (*The Mother on Auroville*, p. 85).

It was recognized that the criteria for the 'needs of the community' are not clearly defined as yet.

The proposal—a first step

All this has resulted in a proposal that is considered to be only a first step toward an economic organisation that aligns itself more with the true spirit of Auroville. It is a step intended to let each individual participate in decision-making regarding our collective responsibilities.

Should critics remind us of the Charter of Auroville: "Auroville will boldly spring towards future realisations" the answer can only be that, based on our 21 years of experience and the intricacies of money matters, the jump in money matters may have to consist of many small jumps, hopefully within a short time-frame. So what is the small jump proposed?

The proposal of the study group concentrates on our collective responsibilities. Yearly budgets will be drawn up for all collective responsibilities for which money is needed. At present only recurring expenditures will be considered. To name a few of our collective responsibilities: road-repair, administrative expenditures, health care, PR-work, Visa Service, Pour Tous (Auro-

ville's food distribution service), emergency funds.

All Aurovilians and all Auroville units will be asked to contribute to these budgets. The units are requested to pay on top of the maintenance for each Aurovilian an extra Rs 200/- per month directly to a central fund. But it is the Aurovilian concerned who will have the right to determine to what budgets this extra amount will be allocated. (for example Rs 25 for education, Rs 20 for road repair, Rs 15 for culture, Rs 20 for emergency fund, and so on). The central fund will take care that all amounts thus allocated will be credited to each budget. Those Aurovilians who do not depend on maintenance from an Auroville unit will also be requested to ensure that the extra amount is paid to the budgets of their choice.

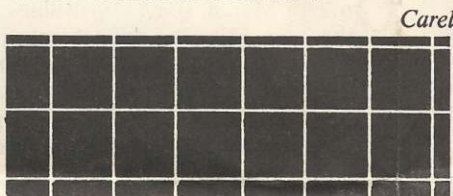
The commercial units will determine how much and to which budgets they will contribute each month. To make long-term planning possible, they will be requested to make a 3-monthly estimate (and, if possible, commitment) of their contributions.

An Auroville Economy Group will be formed, consisting of representatives of all sectors of the Auroville economy, to take responsibility for the execution of this first step, and to secure more mutual understanding. It will also be the task of this group to prepare the next step towards the fulfillment of that different type of economy which each one is aspiring for.

It is in this way, in particular by stressing the freedom of the individuals and the units, that the study group is responding to the spirit of one of Mother's remarks: "There will be no taxes in Auroville".

Auroville Today/Aujourd'hui/Maintenant

Auroville Today n'oublie pas ses lecteurs francophones et prépare une édition trimestrielle en Français; toute une équipe s'est attelée à la traduction et à la rédaction de nouveaux articles. Si vous êtes intéressés, donnez d'ores et déjà votre nom, votre adresse et éventuellement celle de vos amis à *Auroville Today*, édition française. Plus amples renseignements vous seront communiqués dans le prochain numéro d'*Auroville Today*.
YANNE



All USA Meeting

The next All USA Meeting (AUM) will be held at the Phoenicia Pathwork Center in the Catskill Mountains, 2 1/2 hours north of New York City, from 29th June till 4th of July. Please contact the Sri Aurobindo Association, P.O. Box 327, N.Y. 12440. Tel: (914)687-9222.

Carel

The Spirit of Auroville

The Spirit of Auroville.

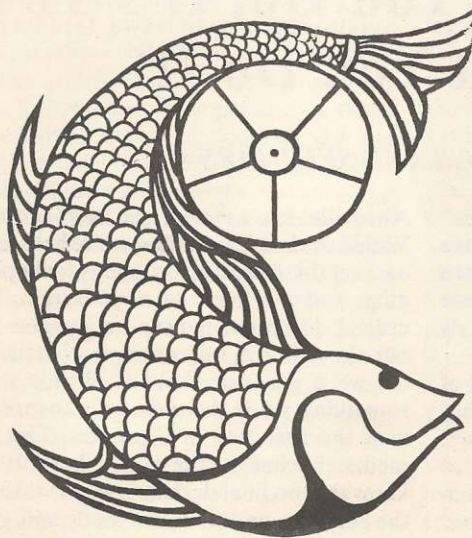
The Spirit of Auroville is a new book soon to come out of Auroville Press. It gathers together in about 550 pages the work-in-progress of many years of research to document the evolution of Auroville from its earliest origins in the vision of Sri Aurobindo and Mother. This edition contains every available message and conversation of Mother regarding Auroville and some background material from the earlier writings of Sri Aurobindo and Mother. It is arranged chronologically from 1918 to 1973 to give the progressive unfolding. Brief introductions to the texts are there to give the necessary context. Readers are invited to give additions and corrections for later editions. This heritage of Auroville, which has never before been organized in a simple form, complete

in a single volume, is intended for residents and friends of Auroville.

A significant part of the printing cost has come through a grant from the Foundation for World Education (New York). The balance is being raised by a pre-publication subscription organized under Auroville Trust. Anyone interested to have copies of the book can send directly a cheque or draft to Auroville Trust. The cost is Rs. 100 in India. In other countries it would be \$10, £6, DM 20, FF60 which includes postage by surface mail. It is also hoped the Auroville International Centres in the various countries will assist in the distribution. The cost of the book will have to be raised after this pre-publication subscription if the book is not sold out already. This first printing is of 2000 copies only.

FISHY BUSINESS

"Golden Tilapia" is the name of Auroville's new fish farm. It is located on a plot of agricultural wasteland opposite Aurobrindavan. The barren landscape, with its scarred red gullies, reminds one of Auroville in its first years. From there you can see the top half of Matrimandir's grey sphere rising above a distant girdle of trees. We went out one afternoon to see Clemens, who manages the project, and spoke with him about its beginnings and goals.



The well was built with Tency's help and a bit of luck. Clemens explained: "Years ago Peter Clarence-Smith had planted eucalyptus and cashew trees on the barren land. After years of growth all the trees remained stunted, except for one eucalyptus tree. 'There must be water near that tree', I thought, and we tried. We immediately struck deep-well water!"

The first phase lasted 7 months longer than expected due to unforeseen problems in sealing the first pond. Due to the rocky porous soil the water could not be retained, even with a heavy layer of black clay added on top of the pond's bed. The problem was finally solved when Clemens installed a plastic layer which was brought in sections and heat-sealed on site. A layer of black clay was then laid on top. It worked.

The next step was to prepare the water so that it had the correct PH and alkalinity levels. Moreover, as the water was soft, minerals had to be added to achieve the correct degree of hardness. Then cow-dung was added as a fertilizer for algae growth (algae provide 60% of the fish's nourishment which is supplemented with rice bran and ground nut oil cake).

The first 150 x 15 metre pond went into operation in May 1988. Electrical connections were made and a generator purchased in order to ensure the aeration of the pond at night. (During the day the necessary oxygen is produced by the algae through photosynthesis, but at night oxygen has to be blown in through a system of paddles.) The inaugural harvest took place on the 26th of September, in the presence of Mr. Vaithilingam, Public Works Minister of Tamil Nadu, and Mr. P.N. Ojha. Two ponds have been harvested so far and two more are presently being stocked. Due to the uncertain water situation the fifth pond presently being dug out will not be filled until the next rainy season.

In order to break even, and supply the existing demand in the Pondy area, five operating ponds are needed. The project has cost seven lakhs so far and two more are needed. The money raised within Auroville is presently being rechannelled into the community and, of course, in the future the project will help to generate funds for Auroville. At least so Clemens hopes!

The scientific and agricultural side of the experiment is of particular interest to Clemens, as he had studied biology and chemistry at the University of Bochum in Germany before coming to Auroville.

The 'Golden Tilapia' project shows that business and research can go hand in hand in Auroville. It is a good example of how agricultural wasteland can be put to productive non-polluting use.

Construction started with a 280 foot borewell, an office building, and the first half-acre pond.



Photo: Susan

At the fish farm 'Golden Tilapia'



ITS O.K. HE IS JUST CRACKING THE DRIVER BEFORE CATCHING HIS PLANE.

"It's Nice to be Cracked!"

A CHIROPRACTOR VISITS AUROVILLE

CHIROPRACTIC = Manipulation of spinal column as method of curing disease.

(Oxf. English Dictionary)

There came a bone-cracker from Mainz Who liked to correct people's spines They came from afar, by rikshaw and car, Not once, not twice, but many times!

It is busy at Afsaneh's. Now that's nothing new. It's always busy in this part of Auroville. But February was special because Afsaneh's father, one of West Germany's foremost chiropractors, was coming for a visit. Staying in Auroville, he was so incautious as to offer some help in his speciality. In this way he began a kind of holiday practice in Auroville.

As always happens in Auroville, the news spread quickly. But since it is common knowledge that the grapevine doesn't always get it right, we were sceptical about the reports. "It took only five minutes! I went to that bone cracker, and he looked at me, and then he said 'Bitte setzen Sie sich' (= please sit down), and then he took my head in some judo-like grip, and then something cracked awfully, and afterwards I felt soooo much better". Too simple to be true, we thought. But when we saw the large number of Aurovilians that went for treatment, three of the editorial team decided to visit Mr. Mohebbi and find out more.

We arrived. We shook hands - quite normal - and were rather taken aback when Mr. Mohebbi immediately remarked that all of us had an ailment in some part of our bodies. "But I feel excellent", each of us answered. "That may be so, but still there is something wrong in your spine; people who do not feel any problems realise after the treatment that there was something", was the quiet and rather unnerving answer. It felt like entering the ring and receiving the first punch before the match had started.

He explained: "Chiropractic is an ancient art which probably originated in Persia. The system is developed to free nerves that, due to accidents, physical strain or even psychological tensions have come under some kind of compression. It cannot be compared to something like acupuncture or acupressure; these healing methods can give a temporary relief, after which the nerve can release itself in due time; but with chiropractic you can touch the central problem immediately. I do not think you can call it a spiritual healing method, but it is certainly a holistic one. I started this work after having finished my medical studies, studies in various manual therapies and the study of chiropractic. You cannot do this work without a detailed knowledge of the body, in particular of the nerve-system. I have been doing this work for some 30 years now, with something like 80 patients a day,

and I am happy to say that I have not had a single case in which something has gone wrong. Chiropractic is still not an officially recognized healing system in West-Germany... but it is more and more difficult to ignore it."

We inquired into this ability to see or 'sense' the ailment already on shaking hands. "I cannot really say how I do that, it is a kind of intuition which I have developed over the years."

And the health of the average Aurovillian?

"Generally speaking I would definitely say that the Aurovillian is a very healthy - and I think also happy - person. It seems that the continuous pressure of the mind on the body is less here than elsewhere. The climate here is also very beneficial. But I am afraid it might not stay like that. There is the danger that Aurovilians might also fall into the trap of the West, hunting after luxury goods. For example, when I visited Auroville for the first time, I did not see many motorcycles; now I see plenty of them, and I even see some cars. The lifestyle changes gradually, and that brings its automatic consequences for the health. My wife and I try to cycle for 1 hour a day, and we notice how beneficial it's effect is on our bodies."

"I definitely feel that the Aurovilians are, on average, more healthy than the Europeans. But I do not think I can say that for the Tamil villagers around. I need to study it more, as the bodies of the Tamil villagers are, due to environmental and cultural causes, very different from the Europeans'."

"There is not a particular type of disease prevalent in the Aurovilians I have treated. Ninety percent of what I have seen were problems with an old history that were waiting to be corrected. Most problems I could deal with in one treatment. Some only had to come back one more time. I advise everybody to have a swim in the sea immediately afterwards, as that contributes enormously to the treatment and to health in general."

And so ended our talk. We were asked to come to the treatment table, and to "Please lie down". There followed some awful sounding cracks, and some surprised looks. You feel good? You feel better than you did before? Really? Yes!! One more treatment? Perhaps in the future, when Mr. Mohebbi comes again to visit his daughter!

Interview: Carel; Limerick: Paddy

Five Years Later

There are people, good friends of Auroville, who visit Auroville from time to time. One such person, Mireille, was willing to share with us what she thinks of Auroville today. Since her first visit to Auroville five years ago Mireille is working hard for the establishment of the French pavilion.

I came to Auroville for the first time five years ago for a six weeks' stay. I found that these six weeks were one of the most interesting experiences of my life.

At the beginning, the whole idea of Auroville seemed crazy. And yet, after fifteen years, the few hundred people who started from scratch, on miles of red desert, managed to build what we can see today: forests, flowers, kitchen gardens, farms, and a great variety of houses.

Through numerous difficulties, through pains and tears and probably desperation, Auroville has become a reality, with the beautiful Matrimandir, its heart and source of energy, standing proudly.

When I went back to France, I was happy, because I had seen a place where people had managed to make the seemingly impossible come true. And it became true because these people believed in what they were doing. They were fighting to accomplish Mother's wish, they followed Mother's teachings, they asked for her help, they connected with the Divine Energy. They were confident, they brushed away their doubts.

What I had seen in Auroville helped me very much in understanding what the aim of life should be, and that certain things had to be changed in my way of living, in my way of thinking, if I wanted to approach the ideal of human unity. A drop in the sea, I thought, but so what, the sea is made of myriads of drops! One can try and be an Aurovillian even outside Auroville, although it is in a sense more difficult, as few people outside Auroville can understand what you are talking about!

After five years, here I am once again, happy to be back. I can see and feel that in the past five years a lot of changes have occurred. The material conditions are better, and rightly so. There should be some reward for all the work done, all the efforts put in to build Auroville. But the biggest change, I find, is in the way the Aurovilians are talking about the future. It is as if they suddenly want to run on all sorts of different paths, firmly convinced that only their path

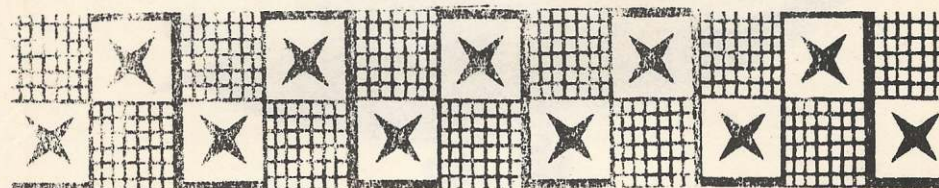
is the right one! Meetings, seminars, endless arguments, boiling down to nothing positive. Many are unhappy with this situation. I've even heard that "twenty years have been wasted" which of course is an outrageous remark! Some even think that Auroville is at an end, and that they might just as well go back to their home country. Some others are sincerely upset, or even depressed.

My feeling, for what it is worth, is that all this is normal, and odd as it may seem, positive!

A different work is starting. The past years were devoted to the ecological aspects, and building the basic structures of Auroville. Now has come the time for the building of the city. Now has come the time for an opening to the world. This is not easy to accept because it means that a lot of new people will come, and that instead of being 700 inhabitants, there may be 7000... It may be that these 700, as they have worked so hard to make Auroville what it is today, do not feel inclined to be invaded by hordes of newcomers. Although these 700 know that Auroville belongs to nobody in particular, they must have a feeling, perhaps an unconscious one, that Auroville belongs to them. And this is very natural.

What is happening is a terrific transformation - the birth of a new era - and it can be frightening for those who have done so much, and feel they are entitled to rest a bit, relax and enjoy the results of their toil. But instead of doing that, the time has come for more hard work. Instead of enjoying a bit of peace, meetings have to take place, and important decisions made for Auroville's future. If this seems difficult, maybe impossible, it's time to remember Mother's permanent presence. As She said, "In the present condition of the world an indispensable faithfulness to the Divine has become an indispensable need." And "It is good to read a Divine Teaching. It is better to learn it. The best is to live it."

One way to live it could be to have large meetings, just to sing the Mantra.



LETTERS

All the way to Sweden

My congratulations and appreciation for the new wind that *Auroville Today* is blowing all the way to Sweden.

It seems to hold both the facts and fiction of everyday life in Auroville. I like that - as a true communicator - it has the flavour and taste of the manifold dish that is served in Auroville. It's nice to be able to participate - though at a distance - in the Aurovillian drama.

Spring greetings from Eveline, Sweden.

Exclusivism

Auroville Today has an exclusivist outlook, which one finds abundantly in Auroville publications. According to the exclusivist conception, Auroville is the only place of Mother's action, the only place where the supermind's action would happen; Auroville becomes the centre instead of the Mother. Thus, a separation is created between Auroville and the rest of the

world. There is a supposition that Auroville can develop without it, only depending upon it for material necessities. One does not see that the opening and the resistance of Auroville on one hand, and of the world outside on the other, influence each other (and are probably the same thing).

Generally speaking, for some time now the Aurovilians have gathered that "Auroville is a phenomenon in the world, not outside it", but this remains superficial. One has not yet become conscious of the interdependence, nor of the true value of what is outside Auroville.

The supramental manifestation is underway and not limited to Auroville, even though it has its particular rôle, destiny, etc. In Auroville as elsewhere it is a question of opening oneself to this action and to act accordingly - and not simply busy oneself with the building of Auroville.

J.F. Duédal
Paris, 20-1-89

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AUROVILLE
TODAY

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Address Correction Requested



Aztec Goddess of Water



This summer many Aurovilians are packing up and going — for a few weeks, or a few months. It is the yearly 'exodus'. The remaining Aurovilians have by way of compensation the possibility to 'house-sit'.

Our bard started to feel lonely and had a creative outburst....

EXODUS

The Israelites began it
Many years ago
They upped and left old Egypt,
They didn't like the show.

And now it all begins again
In 1989,
For Aurovilians pack their bags
When steals in summertime.

For months we've watched them practise
With knife and fork and spoon,
So mummy won't be shocked again
And fall down in a swoon!

Their clothes are rather rumpled
From lying in a trunk,
They hope the fashion still remains
For middle 80's punk.

They clutch their shiny tickets
From Pan-Am, Thai and BA
And hope they'll get the chance to drive
Daddy's latest car.

The few that are remaining,
They steal out from the trees,
They wonder who will milk the cows
And who'll eat Charlie's cheese.

But they cluster round the fridges,
They lie beneath the fans,
And soon they hope their absent friends
Will stay in distant lands!

...

Alan

EDUCATION FOR A BETTER
ENVIRONMENT

The Children and Trees Project

Education has an important role to play in creating a widespread awareness of the consequences of the ecological devastation being wrought on our planet today, as well as in providing solutions that could help stem this tide of destruction. *The Boy and a Tree* is a 52-page illustrated booklet published under the auspices of S.A.I.I.E.R. and aims at developing environmental awareness, particularly amongst school children, of the importance of trees and forest cover in nature's life cycle. It shows how deforestation results in soil erosion, increased flooding and the depletion of aquifers. The story is a simple one. It tells how a little boy's favourite tree is cut down half-way between his home and his school. As more trees are cut down around his village he notices how floods and droughts increase, canyons form and topsoil disappears. He goes to his school-teacher who explains to him the role of trees in nature's life cycle and how deforestation results in soil erosion and flooding. The boy explains what he has learned to his father, and with his help and the agreement of the village elders, a tree planting programme is started that eventually results in the land's regeneration.

In 1986 an article appeared in *India Today*, describing the deforestation of the Himalayas and other areas of India, the resultant growing desertification and the increased flooding of the Gangetic plain. The article mentioned that children are some of the strongest militants in the Chipko (Hug the Trees) movement, and that over fifty per cent of India's population is under the age of 19. This inspired Marti Mueller, an American writer and photographer living in Auroville, and Forrest Corkery, an Englishman with a background in education, to create and produce a booklet for use in schools that would, in simple yet graphic terms, and in a language that children can understand, bring home the seriousness of the problem. They discovered that environmental education materials were almost non-existent in India. Therefore they decided to produce a booklet that would fulfill three criteria: 1) It should be entertaining; 2) it should relate to people's actual lives and 3) the text, accompanied by clear illustrations would be simple to understand.

Neither Marti nor Forrest were trained illustrators, so they had to learn how to produce pictures appropriate for the Indian context. Marti explained, "We studied posters in the villages, Indian comic books and Tamil newspapers which became the sources on which we modelled the style of our drawings. When the first edition came

out there was a strong critical reaction to it within Auroville, particularly from Western artists. The reaction of many Indians, however, especially from the villages of the area, was very positive."

S.A.I.I.E.R. funded the first three limited editions in English, Tamil and Hindi. According to Forrest, "We showed it to teachers and interviewed them, we watched it being used in the nearby village schools, and we found out that merely reading it was not enough. We realized that the children needed help from the teachers to understand its concepts and ideas, so we went back to the drawing board and developed a 12-page teacher's pack, consisting of questions, environmental terms and definitions, as well as practical hints about tree planting and follow-up care." To evaluate the book and teacher's pack they are working with *Co-Evolution* (an Auroville-village relations group — Eds.) in five local Tamil schools.

Going into the villages was something of an eye-opener for Forrest and Marti. What surprised Forrest was "the sense of joy and togetherness we found in the schools despite a lack of materials — there were no desks, no chairs and few books. Contact with the villages has made me appreciate the intricacies and subtleties of Tamil culture of which I was unaware before." Marti was struck by the sense of wonder amongst the children at seeing a book that reflected something of their lives. She was also surprised by how the children almost sang certain passages in the book, which, she feels, reflects a strong oral tradition that exists in the villages.

Response to the first editions of the booklet has been unexpectedly good. Pondicherry has taken copies for distribution in every primary and secondary school as well as in 150 adult learning centres throughout the Union Territory. The Department of Education of Annamalai University is testing it in their adult literacy schemes. Translations into Bengali, Telugu, Sinhalese and Orissi are underway and funding has been received from the New Zealand High Commission for the printing of the Bengali edition.

Marti and Forrest are presently at work on the second booklet of the series entitled "Mala the Mongoose", which is about water and land management. The most interesting aspect of the project lies in its innovative, down to earth approach to rural education. The approach could be taken up and applied to many other subjects such as rural development, air pollution, health and family planning.

Roger

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