

AUROVILLE TODAY

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RESIDENTS OF EARTH

Even a prophet could be excused a mild dose of future shock, given the accelerated pace of change that the nineties seem to have ushered in across the world. The tremors of change can be felt everywhere, as if a force were at work scouring the depths and bringing to the surface the many long-submerged problems and interconnected issues, whether political, economic, and environmental, that are blocking the way for the emergence of a new world order. An order that is based on the recognition of the common oneness of the peoples of the earth. There is an urgency dictated by environmental deadlines to come up with alternatives to present economic systems; systems that are fuelled by oil, and dependent on the continuing exploitation of the world's dwindling non-renewable resources; there is a need to challenge the myths of unending affluence and economic growth that govern the outlook of the developed world where con-

bat like two brothers in the blood-stained mud of history. The momentum of the historic rapprochement between the United States and the U.S.S.R. has coincided with a resurrection within the U.S.S.R. of long-repressed nationalisms that threaten, or are in the process of tearing apart the old Soviet aggregate. The same momentum has led to a breaking up of the old ideological blocs and has produced an identity crisis in other movements such as the non-aligned one. All this can be seen as part of a larger planetary realignment, as in many areas of the world the political phenomenon of centralization, so dominant in the nation state, gives way to a new decentralized network of regions and cultural confederations within wider transnational frameworks. For this to occur naturally, a country must have fully realised its identity as a nation. This being the case with many countries of Europe, a unified Europe might well see the flowering of regional identities, long-suppressed when

revival of crafts and industries in harmony with the ecosystems of their region, and these villages would be centres of research and education, in tune with nature and where "the adventure of consciousness would be more basic to the way of life than patterns of consumption." Alvin Toffler, in his latest book *Power Shifts*, speaks of the post-bureaucratic era the demassification of society, and in this context points to the resurgence of small and family businesses that have provided most of the new jobs in the U.S. economy since 1977.

Decentralization and a return to regional neighbourhood economics and identities might help provide the necessary counterweight and safeguard against the uniformity that a computerized globalism might spawn. As people the world over begin to shed the myth of their powerlessness, and start acting, change will be initiated at grass-roots levels instead of being dictated from above by governments, faceless organizations and lumbering bureaucratic behemoths.

Many parts of the world are now linked in one electronic grid and McLuhan's global village, thanks to the computer and telecommunications revolution of the last twenty years, has become something of a reality. But it is an ugly one, plagued by the glaring inequality of the distribution, and access, to the world's wealth. Today's banks and multi-nationals preside, like feudal seigneurs of old, over an electronic fiefdom of glass and steel, stretching from Tokyo to New York, while two-thirds of the planet live in rural situations, many of them more and more hard pressed to eke out livings from a poisoned dying soil.

The writing has been on the wall for years as regards the limits to growth, but the trickle-down priests, advocates of unending growth, and those they advise, have either feigned illiteracy, or conveniently looked the other way. The present stand-off/show-down in the Middle East might well be about self-determination, but it is also about oil. And when George Bush talks about defending a way of life—based on the industrialized world's assumption that it has an inalienable right to go on consuming two-thirds of the world's annual non-renewable



Photo Sven

As people the world over begin to shed the myth of their powerlessness and start acting, change will be initiated at grass-roots levels instead of being dictated from above by governments, faceless organizations and lumbering bureaucratic behemoths.

sumerism has become a way of life; and as the gap widens between east and west, north and south, between the developed and the developing world, it becomes imperative to shift our allegiances from the old countries, nations, systems and ideologies to a new vision of ourselves—as the great Chilean poet Pablo Neruda once put it—as residents of Earth.

It is felt by many that it is in moments of crisis that evolution's quantum leaps occur—those sudden shifts of consciousness that recreate the world. What type of patterns might we expect to emerge from a new world-view of 'unity in diversity'? Are there signs of a new awareness, a glimmer of a new geo-political reality emerging amidst the chaos and confusion of today's world, the collapse of its hegemonies and alliances, and yesterday's economic and political catechisms? I think there are.

At first glance it would seem that the forces of the past and the future are grappling in deadly com-

pitted against the interests of an emerging nation state.

In North America—still a melting pot and thus with a less established sense of cultural identity than the 'old world'—this same phenomenon of realignment, linked to a growing concern for the environment, finds one expression in the concept of bio-regionalism, where it is a shared geography rather than culture or language that defines identity. Bio-regionalism already has strong natural and spiritual antecedents in native American visions of the land.

The cultural historian, William Irwin Thompson, in his book *Darkness and Scattered Light* envisages a shift, made possible in part by the miniaturization of technology as well as the electronic decentralization of information, from our present post-industrial civilization to a 'meta-industrial' (his term) planetary culture. Villages and communities would become the focal points of a new cultural transformation. Their economies would focus on the

*"One day I shall behold my great sweet world
Put off the dire disguises of the gods,
Unveil from terror and disrobe from sin.
Appeased we shall draw near our Mother's face,
We shall cast our candid souls upon her lap;
Then shall we clasp the ecstasy we chase,
Then shall we shudder with the long-sought god,
Then shall we find Heaven's unexpected strain."*

Sri Aurobindo, 'Savitri' - XI, 2



resources—he is defending the indefensible.

And nowhere more than in the Middle East do the fuses seem set at any moment to explode the perilous balance of our world in transition. And yet, despite the dangerous complexity and dubious tangle of intentions involved, the unfolding events have raised the possibility of the United Nations, at the behest even of its warring member-states, playing a role on

the world scene that so far it has never fulfilled in its 45 year old history.

This is particularly interesting in the light of the role Sri Aurobindo foresaw for the United Nations in the emergence of a new world order. In his post-script chapter to *The Ideal Of Human Unity* written in 1950, he welcomed the formation of the U.N.—without ignoring its imperfections—as "being necessary as a primary nucleus of



SOLSTICE

In the dark pulse of the dying year
Beats hunger, terror and extinguish'd love -
The ashes of a cooling globe.
In the dark pulse of the dying year
Limps foolery, satire,
The sting of satin tongues
That dart and flicker in the fading light.
In the dark pulse of the dying year
Aches memory,
The midnight streets you walked alone,
and blown hair, scented,
In the small bar at the harbour mouth.
In the dark pulse of the dying year
Leap sparks of golden fire,
Tracers of the sun
That weave and gambol
In the shadow's core.
The dark pulse of the dying year

Falters

Dawn is tapping lightly
On the glass...

Alan

contd. from page 1

that larger institution in which all the peoples of the earth can meet each other in a single international unity." He outlined a number of dangers standing in the way of human unity, one of which, "the divisions of peoples into two camps"—those of communism versus capitalism—, has recently dissolved with the advent of perestroika. Nonetheless, other potential divisions such as those between the north and south, the developed and the developing world, remain. Elsewhere we can also see the stirrings of some of the movements he predicted that might help pave the way for human unity: a united Europe, the resurgence of Asia and the eventuality of large continental combinations.

Blinded by events, caught in the clamor of the moment's uproar, we lose track of evolution's imperative purpose which lies in establishing some form of union of the world's peoples. And perhaps today's tremors of change are actually the tremendous birth-pangs of a new age, the beginnings of a radical phase-shift unprecedented in the world's recorded history.

"If man is intended to survive and carry forward the evolution of which he is at present the head and, to some extent a half-conscious leader of the march, he must come out of his present chaotic international life and arrive at a beginning of organized united action; some kind of world state, unitary or federal, or a confederacy or a coalition he must arrive at in the end; no smaller or looser expedient would adequately serve the purpose... the question now put by evolving nature to mankind is whether its existing international system, if system it can be called, cannot be replaced by a willed and thought-out fixed arrangement, a true system, a real unity serving all the common interests of the earth's peoples."

Roger

ARE THERE FOREIGNERS IN AUROVILLE?

THE VISA PROBLEM

"Auroville is to be looked upon as a vision which has a great potentiality, and this can be of tremendous service to our country and to the world. Mother had declared that the earth needs a place where the difficulties of human nature can be dealt with in the context of an arduous process of the change of human nature. In such an endeavour, difficulties can be expected, but 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 realizable."

These words were spoken in Autumn, 1988, by Shri Shiv Shankar, Minister for Human Resource Development, in his memorable address to the Indian Parliament when he presented the Auroville Foundation Act 1988. Many wondered why the Government of India had found time and energy to deal with such a small spot somewhere in the south of India. But considered from a deeper level, the answer is clear.

"In spiritual terms, India is the foremost country in the world", Mother once said. It is therefore not surprising that the Government of India has decided to protect and encourage this project, whose purpose, announced by the Mother in Auroville's Charter, is material and spiritual research aiming at the actualization of human unity. The Auroville Foundation Act is a major step in this direction.

However, a series of new steps seem to be necessary if the Government of India is truly to promote the ideals of Auroville. Auroville is an International Township, and thus necessarily has many non-In-

dian inhabitants. All these fall under the description of 'foreigner' of the Foreigners Act 1946. It means that the conditions of their stay in Auroville are regulated by this act and by a series of other acts, regulations and orders, most of which were made before Auroville came into existence, and none of which fits exactly to the peculiarity of Auroville's situation.

what he may have to say, regardless of what he may have invested in terms of capital and work, regardless of his age, regardless of his social and family ties, regardless of the opinion of Auroville. Given these insecurities, one cannot expect people to flock to Auroville.

For we should consider what it means to be Aurovilian. It means

"... the principle has been recognized by UNESCO, they have recognized the principle: everyone becomes Aurovilian, no separate nationality. So that's very good".

The Mother

The 'foreigners' in Auroville need entry visas for their first entry into India. Based on the entry visa, and with the recommendation of Auroville and the recommendation of the Custodian of Auroville—an officer of the Government of India—a residential permit will be given for a limited period of time. It has to be extended regularly.

The recommendations issued by Auroville make clear to the Government of India that the persons for whom the recommendations are given have obtained visas and residential permits with the object of living in Auroville and for no other purposes.

The crux of the problem - seen from the point of view of Auroville - is that in any phase of obtaining visas or extending residential permits the Aurovilian might run into difficulties. Having a residential permit does not give security either. Under the Foreigners Act, the foreign Aurovilian can be removed from Auroville and India at any given moment and without explanation, regardless of

the conscious decision to lead another type of life. For this, old ways of living are broken, it means taking the plunge, uncertain where it may lead. It means the giving up of careers, and of the ties of friendship and family. It means answering that famous invitation of Mother: "Greetings from Auroville to all men of good will. Are invited to Auroville all those who thirst for progress and aspire to a higher and truer life."

For this reason Auroville's recommendation cannot be subject to debate. Concern regarding this is so strong that the meeting of the Residents Assembly held on 23-11-1990 endorsed unanimously the following statement:

"An Aurovilian's visa should always be recommended automatically unless an Aurovilian has been removed from the Master List. An Aurovilian can only be removed from the Master List by a clear community decision, not by any working group. The withdrawal of the visa will be a consequence of this. The

withdrawal or suspension of the visa must never be used as a means for removing or threatening to remove an Aurovilian from the Master List or for any other perceived advantage."

A decision of the Residents Assembly of Auroville does not necessarily influence the Government of India. But having witnessed the serious concern of the Indian Government for the realization of Auroville, and the acceptance by the Indian Parliament of two acts relating to Auroville, we may feel confident that the Government will be prepared to find a solution for the special position of Auroville, and will create for the unique experiment of the International Township of Auroville a unique piece of law to safeguard the position of Aurovilians of non-Indian origin.

The basic problem, of course, is that we are, seen from the angle of Indian law, all from different nationalities living in India. In fact, we have come from all over the world to live in the International Cultural Township of Auroville which aims to go beyond questions of nationality. A lot of research will be necessary to create a special status for those who want to live in Auroville. We may be guided by Mother who indicated what she would like to see happen as far back as 1967. Speaking about the problem of nationalities, She said: "... the principle has been recognized by UNESCO, they have recognized the principle: everyone becomes Aurovilian, no separate nationality. So that's very good". In 1970 She explained further that the Aurovilians of the future will be 'world citizens'.

Carel

FORM, STRUCTURE AND ENERGY

SACRED GEOMETRY AND MATRIMANDIR

Mona Doctor recently decided to work in Auroville, after having graduated in architecture at Ahmedabad, India. Her graduate research thesis is remarkable: It is a study on the proportions of the Great Pyramid of Giza in Egypt, compared to the proportions of Matrimandir.

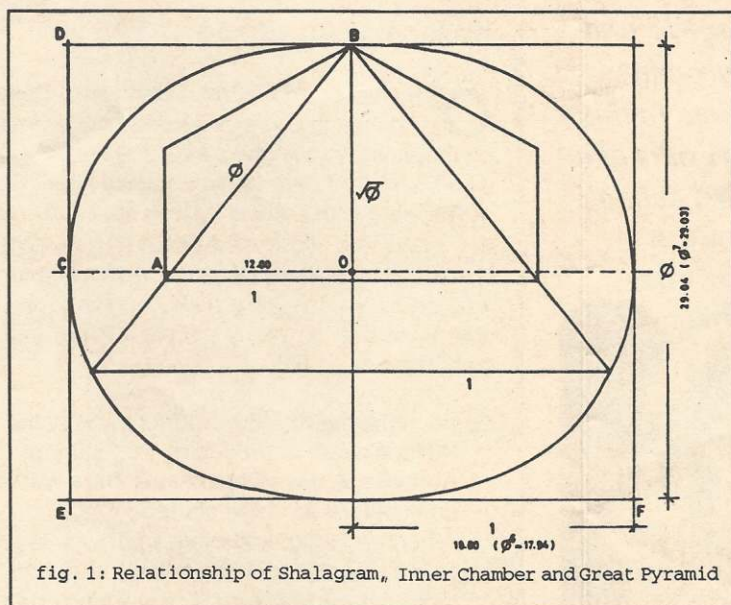
Contemporary architecture sometimes lacks a certain quality. More often than not its emphasis is on function orientated styles, efficient planning, aesthetics, and monetary considerations. On the other hand there are ancient monuments that continue to fascinate us; and these are buildings where one breathes in spirit, where one quickens to the sense of the divine in oneself. Why is this so?

Sri Aurobindo mentions in his book *The Foundations of Indian Culture* this presence of the invisible.

"Architecture, sculpture and painting because they are the three great arts which appeal to the spirit through the eye, are those too in which the *sensible* and the *invisible* meet with the strongest emphasis on themselves and yet the greatest necessity of each other". (Italics by Mona)

What is it that creates this spirit which is so difficult to rationalize? Do forms, by virtue of their proportions, geometry, colour, orientation

** The Golden Section (ϕ) is obtained by dividing a line AB at a point C in such a way that $AB/AC = AC/CB = 1.618$. Plato described the Golden Section in his *Timaeus* as the most binding of all mathematical relations, and the key to the physics of the cosmos.



and materials and techniques used, have the capacity to influence the human being at more than just the physical and intellectual level?

It is well known that the Great Pyramid has a profound effect on man and matter. Experiments carried out in the last two decades have shown that the room inside the Great Pyramid, known as the King's Chamber, influences the physical, chemical and biological processes of any object brought into it. Research has shown that this is due to the proportions of the pyramid, to the location of the room in the pyramid, and to the proportions of the room itself. The geometry of the Great Pyramid is based on the Golden Section** and it is said that it was built by people who had an insight into cosmic movements, and that it was intended to be a space and form through which Knowledge on Man's place in the spiral of Evolution could be passed down to future generations.

Analysing Matrimandir in this light led to some interesting results—especially because it is not a conventional building in any sense. It is the concretization of a vision of The Mother, built on the

faith and conviction of people of diverse backgrounds who believe in its importance.

What in terms of 'architecture' makes the Inner Chamber a special place?

It was ten years after Mother first expressed her vision of the Inner Chamber that it was found by chance that the Golden Section and the proportions of the Great Pyramid are precisely incorporated in its cross section (fig. 1). It was also discovered that Sri Aurobindo's symbol fitted exactly into the Shalagram, the form in which Matrimandir has been built (fig. 2). (A shalagram is an ancient symbol described in Hindu Cosmology as "the Egg of Brahman" from where the creation has sprung forth.) In other words, there are two triangles with the same proportions as the Great Pyramid inside the Shalagram.

The energy field inside the Great Pyramid is located at 1/3rd of its height (the place where the Kings Chamber is situated). If we project this to the two triangles inside the Shalagram, we get a band of about 110 centimeters where the energy field will be concentrated. This band will be in the Inner

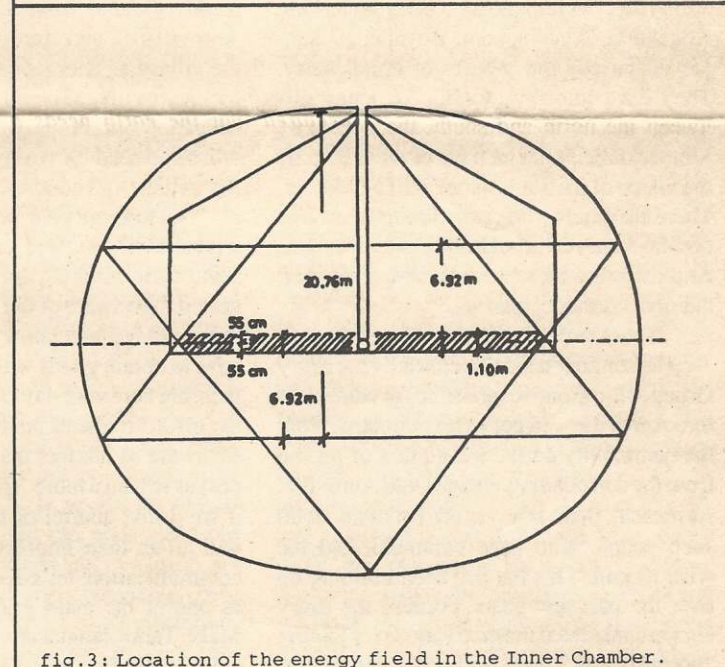
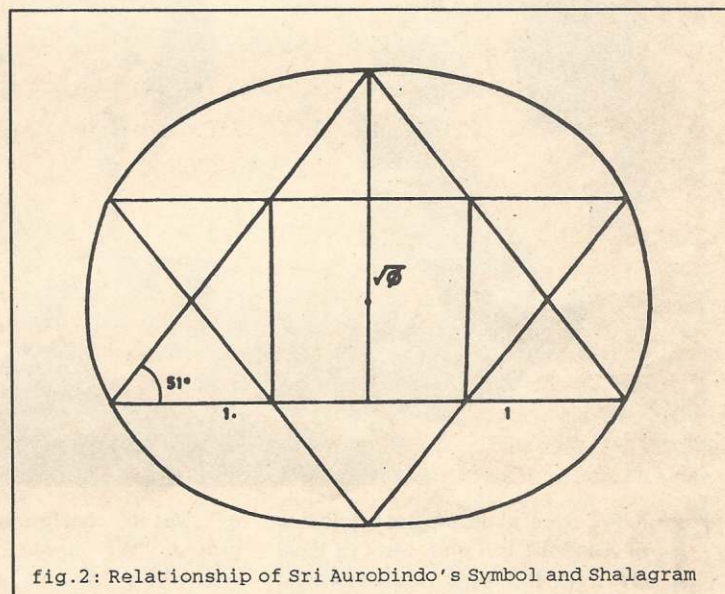
Chamber, precisely where the people will sit. (fig 3.)

The question immediately arises if the effects on man and matter, as experienced in the King's Chamber, will also be experienced in the Inner Chamber of Matrimandir. And what will be the effect of the crystal globe in its centre, with the ray of sunlight descending on it, in itself already a powerful object to behold? How

many people have already felt overawed by this space, embodying the soul of Auroville?

We can expect that, in due time, a lot of fascinating answers will be given to these questions, and that the theory of form and proportions and their energies, which as yet is not generally accepted as not many "scientific" proofs can be given, will be re-discovered.

Mona



The 'Last Fair'

The tradition of holding an end of the year fair at the Last School campus was triumphantly continued once more on the 29th December, with lots of people attending an abundance of attractions, including an exclusive Radio Auroville broadcast, the traditional Bonger Spronger Trial of Strength, the Dunker Shern Dip in the Pond, the Vaval Flier turning people into flying bats, and the Gyrocharla motorcycle show. You could get your T-shirt printed on the spot and even browse through old Auroville Today issues... Towards the afternoon, more and more children and adults appeared with their faces painted, metamorphosed into cats, clowns and other fanciful designs. Cash flowed well in the form of

Whoopies, especially printed for the occasion. In the evening, a Tamil play was acted to the great interest of not only the Tamil speaking part of Auroville. And later...

"Upturned tables, unmade beds..." went the refrain as the coup de grace for the programmes of the Last Fair at Last School in the last moments of last year enthralled the jam-packed audience of a sardonic 'symphony in twelve movements'. In this 'musical mannerism' the last schoolers hung out much of Auroville's laundry, with some emphasis on the seamy side, according to an elaborate allegory on the condition of the planet in general, and humanity as a hole in the ozone layer in particular. Through the hole everything

from the Auroville Council to Aurelec toppled into the 'mess' of 'Allawreck'. Exotic costumes, brilliant cameos of acting, and immaculate imitations studded an orchestration according to the unique warp and woof of Fertile Johnny. Critics could not agree if he surpassed his glorious tradition of *Damn Boring Man* and *Sleeping Dogs Don't Lie*, but the quest for the solution to pollution by Mr. Ozone Layer attained new heights, and depths. The audience missed much of the subtlety either through the intricate English or the mumbled lines. Ever since the play, Aurovilians continue to interpret for each other what the play was all about. "Really, is that what you thought they said?"...

□

AUROVILLE HAS 30,700 INHABITANTS

A report on the 'village' seminar

In the beginning of 1990, in Auroville Today issues #13 and #14, we gave you information on the villages around Auroville, and the work of Auroville's Village Action. In this year's first issue we want to inform you about the results of a two day seminar on village integration, held in Last School in the middle of December last year.



Thirty percent of the present population of Auroville is Tamil. Most of them are from the local villages around Auroville: Kuilapalayam, Edayanchavadi, Kottakarai, Alankuppam, Royapettai, Sanjeevinagar and the suburbs of Pondicherry. They have joined Auroville for many different reasons: some have been accepted by Mother directly, some have come drawn by the vision of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother. There are others who came through marriage or who followed an elderly family member. And there are those who came in for other, mainly economic, reasons.

The seminar had been called by the Entry Group—the group responsible for admission into Auroville—to get a clear directive from the community on the integration of people from the surrounding villages into Auroville. At present, there is a waiting list of about 80 such people who have communicated the wish to join. This list has been building up over the past few years, because the Entry Group considered the motivations for joining “not sufficient”. Another hurdle was the fact that many of the applicants have only marginal education and the attachment to traditional religious beliefs is still strong.

But the seminar turned out to be wider in scope. The problems facing the Entry Group were discussed in depth, but as part of Auroville's overall relationship with the villagers. What did Mother actually mean when she called them “the first Aurovilians?” This was one of the questions to which the seminar sought an answer. During two days, a group of 50 to 60 people sat together, divided themselves into subgroups to address specific questions, and made a visit (see separate box) to the village adjacent to Aspiration, Kuilapalayam.

“We should consider them to be part of

us”, was the conclusion of one of the subgroups. “We should consider the wider Auroville as having a population of 30,700 people (30,000 from the villages and 700 Aurovilians), and start upgrading the life in the village as energetically as we are doing for Auroville. Give them health, water, education and employment and then there will be no need for villagers to ask to become Aurovilian for economic reasons.”

“Get to know your workers' family, trade with the village, and endeavour to understand their culture”, another subgroup suggested. “Be aware of the economic problems in the village, and know when your workers have to obtain goods with ration cards, when there are kerosene shortages and so on. Make the effort to attend festivals and marriages. Be aware of the fact that most villagers expect us to lead a more ‘spiritual’ life, and that if we drink, quarrel or have rock parties, it will affect their impression of us. Improve communication: let's declare learning Tamil as one of the main priorities in Auroville. Make Tamil-language video tapes, and circulate them free in the villages. Stimulate a newspaper for the Auroville workers. Work through the women for changes which they can see to be beneficial for them.”

“The proximity of the villages is an asset”, a third subgroup stated, “It gives Auroville access to a large labour pool, which in reverse feeds money back into the villages and helps them to develop. This gives Auroville a unique possibility: to achieve its own growth not by drawing manpower from the villages into the city, but by helping the development of the villages.”

A more coordinated (which does not mean uniform) labour policy is essential. An employment resource centre should be set up. We should aim at creating more facilities for workers, such as fair-price shops.”

Kuilapalayam village

On the second day of the seminar on village integration, the participants were surprised to find a visit to Kuilapalayam on the agenda. But it turned out to be the most meaningful part of the seminar. For many Aurovilians, even those who have lived here for years, it was their first real visit to a village. Groups of 4 or 5 went with a small task to do, such as find out how many tailors work in the village, get information about how much milk and kerosene is available, see the village school, get information about types of houses and trees etc. Everyone was struck by the very poor conditions in the village and felt it was understandable that so many people wish to join Auroville to better their material conditions.

Some of the information brought back by the participants:

- Kuilapalayam is producing 200 litres of milk daily and selling 150 litres to Auroville. A few villagers said there was more milk to make yoghurt and to drink before Auroville started.
- A hundred thousand rupees per year is spent on insecticides.
- Drinking water is only available very early in the morning from a few street taps with low pressure. The washing of clothes and bodies (and of cattle and insecticide barrels -eds.) is done in the village tank.
- Most houses have electricity, but wiring is of poor quality and often dangerous.
- None of the houses have toilets.
- Most houses have thatched roofs but new houses seem to be mostly made with tile roofs or cement channel roofs which are made in the village. The standard of housing is improving and influenced by building techniques in Auroville.
- The village school has a daily attendance of 150 children from 5 to 11 years. There is one room available, which also serves as a storeroom for sacks of grain and broken furniture. The children get rice, dhal and vegetables daily and twice a month there is an egg. (Information courtesy of Auroville News)



Managing hygiene... with a limited water supply

A fourth subgroup concentrated on education. Not surprisingly, they stated that Auroville should aim at 100% literacy for all villagers, children and adults. “We should talk to parents who take their daughters out of school when they come of marriageable age.” The need for environmental education was stressed, and so was education on sanitation, health care and nutrition. “Relate education to their life experience.”

This and much more was expressed in the seminar. But where does that leave the Entry Group?

The seminar decided that a group of Tamil speaking Aurovilians be the first con-

tact for those villagers who want to join. The responsibility of this group would include giving information on various aspects of Auroville, and where possible also seeing that they get education and training to prepare them for life and work in Auroville. To know—or at least to be prepared to learn—English was considered a priority for understanding the international aspect of Auroville.

It was generally felt that integration into Auroville should not be for material reasons, but for joining a process towards a higher and truer form of life. To come to know about Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's yoga was considered another priority. The motivation to come and live in Auroville should not be to lead an easy life. In Mother's words: “I would like people to feel that coming to Auroville does not mean coming to an easy life—it means coming to a gigantic effort for progress.”

Report by Carel





Monsoon rains periodically destroy mud dwellings.



A village grocery store.



Erosion remains one of the problems in the village.



Lunch-time at the Kuilapalayam creche, run by Village Action.

At this time of the year, hundreds of men from nearby villages, dressed in distinctive colours, charter buses and disappear for up to 10 days. Where are they going and why?

Om, Swamiye Saranam AYYAPPA

It's in the Western Ghats of Kerala. As night is falling and you start driving up the mountain, thousands of cars, jeeps and buses line the road, carefully parked on both sides.

Long queues of men dressed in black and blue walk barefeet, staff in hand, chanting something you cannot yet catch. And when you reach the top, there are a hundred thousand people milling around, looking higher up the mountain as if already in ecstasy - and all singing, again and again, the same words: "OM SWAMIYE SARANAM AYYAPPA"...

You thought that the Kumbh-Mela in Allahabad with its half a million people was a record, but you're wrong there: the Lord Ayappa festival in Sabrimalai attracts 15 million people in a month and a half; and on the last three days, which are the most important and auspicious, there must be around 800,000 devotees praying on the sacred mountain.

The first thing that strikes you when you pass the Sabrimalai village is a board which says: "women between ten and fifty years are strictly forbidden beyond this point". The truth is that the Ayyappa disciples have to endure 41 days of *tapasya* before they can start on their pilgrimage; apart from fasting, eating only vegetarian food and abstinence from alcohol and smoking, strict refraining from any sexual relations, in deed or in thought, is enjoined. Hence the black dress to warn women to stay away and the forbidding of their presence on the mountain.

Below, in the beautiful flowing river, thousands of men are bathing in the golden light of the early morning, purifying themselves of the sweat of the journey and shedding the last remnants of their worldly life. Then, after a preliminary puja in a temple at the foot of the sacred path, it is up the mountain, towards the 1000 year old abode of Lord Ayyappa. And thousands and thousands, all looking alike under the centenarian pine trees, climb towards God, a small mysterious bundle carried on their head, chanting endlessly the sacred mantra: "Om Swamiye Saranam Ayyappa". Who is this Ayyappa, who whips up so much fervour and devotion from these souls?

The legend says that Manikhanta, son of Shiva and a feminine form of Vishnu, born to rid earth of the *Asurin* (female demon) Mahishi, was found near a river by King Rajashekhara and adopted by him. When Manikhanta became adult, the queen, made jealous by her minister who told her that her other natural son would not get the throne, sent him into the forest to get tiger's milk to cure a rare disease, thinking he would never come back alive. Manikhanta goes into the forest with his father's blessings, who gives him, to sustain him during his arduous journey, a small bundle which contains a coconut

filled with ghee and rice (hence the bundle carried on the heads of all true ayyappas). There he slays Mahishi, and comes back with an army of tigers. Seeing this, the queen and king understand his divinity, and fall on their knees, imploring him to take over the kingdom. But Manikhanta, taking an arrow, shoots it in the air: it falls on the sacred spot near Sabrimalai, which he chooses as his abode and where his father constructs the present day temple. Saying goodbye to all, he promises that every year he will appear to them as light (*Jyoti*) and vanishes in the mountains to become for ever Lord AYYAPPA...

At last, the faithful arrive at the foot of the eighteen sacred steps made of five different precious metals, which lead to the sacred abode. After symbolically breaking their coconuts, they climb the stairs, rapture written on their face. And there, on top of the mountain, it's an incredible show: men ecstatic with joy, rolling themselves on the ground, or else dancing and throwing yellow and red powder on themselves amidst the banging of the gongs, and the smoke of a million coconuts which are burning in a huge bonfire. Finally, on the last day of the pilgrimage comes the *Jyoti*: As Manikhanta had promised to his father the king, every year, on the same day—the 14th of January—at the same hour, between 6.30 and 6.45 p.m, two white eagles circle around the temple a few times, and then a light, like a fire, appears for two or three seconds on the mountain facing the abode. Then 500,000 throats, all at the same time, shout the magic mantra: OM Swamiye Saranam Ayyappa, making the whole mountain vibrate and shaking the souls of all men present. Numerous are those who have tried to discover the source and reason for the light: is it a trick or an illusion of the eye? But nobody was ever able to explain the mystery.

Then, for another year, the mountain is returned to its peace and to the wild animals. But in the dark forests, amidst the chanting of birds and the roaring of tigers, there where the soul of Manikhanta roams, one can still hear, as if whispered by the wind, the enchanting words: OM SWAMIYE SARANAM AYYAPPA...

François Gautier

Auroville Today tries to appear monthly and is distributed to Aurovilians and friends of Auroville in India and abroad.

Editorial team: Yanne, Tineke, Roger, Carel, Bill, Annemarie, Alan. Photo's: Sven Design: Franz (Prisma). Typesetting on computer: Annemarie. Printed at Auroville Press.

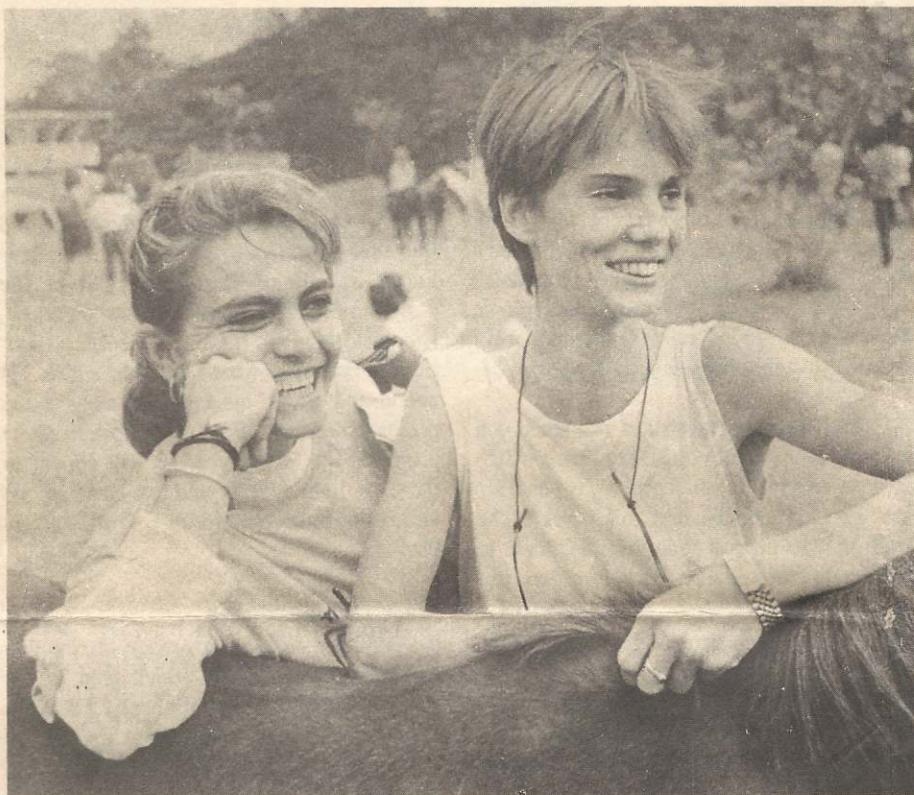
Women at the helm

From the very beginning of Auroville, women have had an important role to play in the setting up of this new-born society where everything needed to be organised and where often enough money was lacking for the most basic necessities. One of the strongest motivations to start a business was, for many of them, to meet the needs of their family or to generate enough money to be able to stay in Auroville. We all remember Janet trying to channel money to the Matrimandir by doing crochet with village women. Later, when she had her first child, she needed money for herself. *Aurosarjan* was started by Lisa, a Dutch woman, artist and mother of three children. Valerie of

Out of the 24 units which form part of Artisana Trust, 10 are managed by women—40%. For those who have the gumption and feeling for business, Auroville seems to be an ideal place where they can express themselves fully. Few of them have encountered male chauvinism, rather the opposite. But... 'let's keep our fingers crossed!' All these women are managing their business ventures while often being a mother at the same time, and they create beautiful things which convey and symbolize an aspect of Auroville and form a large part of the development of the whole project.

position in a domain where women rarely occupy an important place, or is it due to the country in which she lives? "No, I have seen as much male chauvinism in America as in Europe or India. On the contrary, the more I go east, the more there is a kind of respect and even admiration for my capacities in the business world." Does she have, in this merciless and especially competitive world, the possibility to use her, particularly feminine, qualities? "In the work I fight the masculine tendency to have 'ego-wars'. I believe that I bring, without being really very conscious about it, a kind of harmony, of friendship; I try to maintain the balance, and I do my best to integrate more women in Aurelec."

Let's have a look at the youth right now. Two young women recently took on the responsibility for two important units. Kali grew up in Auroville and Manou settled here when she was 17. They both live in Sharmga. How does it feel to be launched into being 'businesswomen' with all the responsibilities that this brings, when one has not had any type of formal 'commercial' education? Kali: "I started to make shoes in *Amadi* with Gillian. When she left for the U.S., the management of the workshop just fell on me." Kali speaks perfect Tamil, which helps her enormously in the relationship with her employees. "I am sometimes too intimate with them, I have lunch with them, we have fun, but I have sometimes to re-establish a hierarchical situation, otherwise it's a mess." In 8 months, and in spite of the difficulties with basic materials which are very difficult to get regularly, Kali manages the business so well that she will soon have the possibility of constructing a new space, which will, she says, encourage the employees. "I have not had the time yet to do market research, for I have still too many orders to fulfil, but I will try it out as soon as it will be possible." The



Manou and Kali

Abha arrived at Auroville in 1980. It was during a difficult period. She was 21 years old, lived at Aspiration and her hobby, together with her friend Radhika, was making postcards decorated with dried flowers. Once again there was the need for survival. "And since then, it became a far out adventure", Abha tells us. "It was very exciting. I especially liked working with my hands, but very quickly I had to organize the work for the employees. In the end I adapted myself well to the marketing aspect, but where it concerns investments, I don't think I have much feeling for business. The major difficulty is our location. We are too close to the village. For years our flowers were eaten by goats or plucked by little girls. Now that we have a good fence, it is much better. Another problem is the watering of our plants. Our true place is in the industrial zone." Has she experienced resistance? "No! In general we have had only help and encouragement, but I have to admit having sometimes felt a slight arrogance and a feeling of superiority from the Europeans." Abha has a little girl of six months, Smiti. How does she combine her work with being a

Filaure Atelier confessed, "I never saw myself as a businesswoman, but I wanted to stay in Auroville. This is how I came to start a business, and since then I have been able to maintain myself and my family for 15 years, and gradually it has become a real joy."

Most of our businesswomen who started their business out of necessity have learnt a lot, especially about themselves. They have discovered the fun of creating, they have become independent and the really successful ones have tasted the satisfaction of being able, through their profits, to actively participate in the development of Auroville.

There is no restriction whatsoever on a woman doing business in Auroville. A businesswoman has every opportunity to be successful. Prema of *Auromodel Atelier* acknowledges: "Every day again I feel very happy to come to the workshop, because doing this work helps me very much to grow." Valerie likes to surpass herself, likes the challenge a business represents. "I haven't come here with a missionary ambition, but I very quickly realized how much the local population was in need of jobs. We started together: there are people here who never left me. I see it as being partly thanks to them that my units have succeeded."

Valerie chose to build, with the profits from her unit, a factory in the industrial zone, next to *Auromodel Atelier* and C.S.R. She now employs more than a hundred people in three units—one in Auroville, one in Pondicherry and one in a village. "Although I feel very fulfilled with having perfectly

adapted myself to my role as a manager, I have never forgotten my role as a mother which is at least as important for me, if not more..."

For those women whose primary interest is in doing handicrafts rather than being businesswomen, the problems are different. Lila and Susan work alone or with very few workers. For them it is being creative, making beautiful things, playing with materials which inspires them: Lila in her unit *Sunlit Lane* works with beads and Susan, at *Joy II*, with cloth decorations. But the units have to survive and this is why they are, in spite of themselves, compelled to get involved in the adventure of business. Neither one wants to start a factory, for the difficulties that are already there would multiply themselves. What are these difficulties?

For Susan the challenge is to break even with the budget while selling her luxury products, which are expensive because they are unique. Lila feels that "the women who work for me do not show enough creativity or initiative, and I have to constantly stimulate or 'mother' them. And, without generalizing, I had to face a kind of competition from other Auroville businesses operating in the same field that I had not thought possible."

Also two Indian women have assumed the role of manager—one of them set up *Shradanjali*, a small unit that makes flower-cards and other stationary; the other is a managing trustee of *Aurelec*.

"In the work I fight the masculine tendency to have 'ego-wars'. I believe that I bring, without being really very conscious about it, a kind of harmony, of friendship; I try to maintain the balance..."

mother? "I am backed up by two other Aurovilians, François and Flore. I now and then look in, just for fun or when it is absolutely necessary. I will take my place again when my daughter will be less dependent on me."

Nini, who grew up in the Ashram, is presently one of the managers of *Aurelec*. How has she got into electronics and consequently into business? "Very simply, by following Mother's advice. And then the team I worked with decided to manufacture a computer. That was in 1980. We sold it immediately, and this is how we began our enterprise." When the industry developed, Nini became responsible for the production. Why? "Again, it was not my personal choice, but in this department I could use my intelligence, my precision, and a certain efficiency." What difficulties does she encounter? "To be accepted by the men in the industry, to be seen as equal to my male partners by the employees coming from other firms. For there is, so to speak, no hierarchy at *Aurelec*." Nini is the only one who has to deal with real male chauvinism. Is that due to her

day we spoke to her Kali had a cold, but in spite of this she radiated joy: "To do dyeing, to find new colours, to give the work for the next week, it's all joy, play and fun."

Manou has just passed her French 'baccalaureate' exams by correspondence course, and is now doing a commercial study. She was looking for work that would challenge her capacities. After having worked at an Auroville service for some time, she wanted to be more free. A conjunction of circumstances put her at the head of *Bijou*: "I've got a wonderful chance! I go on taking courses to pass my exams in commerce, and this will help me in my present experience. It is thrilling, I feel such a joy going to work every morning. The difficulties? The lack of basic materials and perhaps a bit of experience in administration, but I'm very much helped by the accountants of Artisana Trust. Marketing? No problem: good quality and not expensive equals success! I love what I'm doing. The dynamism and, moreover, success, it's energizing."

Yanne

Chacko: "I believe that Auroville's strength should be in innovation."

Chacko, we hear many times that doing business in Auroville is more difficult than doing business outside of Auroville. Do you agree with this statement and is this the reason why Aurosarjan is still established in Pondicherry?

No, I do not agree. I do not think that there is any difference, it depends completely on the people who run it. The manager should have a business interest, and if he or she does not have it, they'd better not start. Many Aurovilians have attempted to start a business, and many have failed. I do not know why this happens—perhaps they were frustrated with the work, or perhaps it was due to inner or domestic problems. An absolute commitment to the business is necessary, otherwise it will not be a success. You cannot start a business like a hobby. You need an 8 hour a day presence, and if you want to do sports or something in the afternoons, you will have to work with more people to make certain that there is always someone present. Aurosarjan is for historical reasons established in Pondicherry. But I intend to move a large part of Aurosarjan to Aurobrindavan, and will probably also keep a smaller set-up in Pondicherry. As many of my employees come from the area near Cuddalore, I will have to organize some form of transport. When I move to Auroville, I expect some manpower assistance from Auroville as I cannot split myself completely up between the activities in Pondy and in Auroville.

The business units in Auroville have an important role to play in the financing of Auroville's infrastructural maintenance needs. What kind of new businesses would you advise to be set up in Auroville?

The easiest way is to enlarge the existing industries, instead of going for new ones. For example, I see an enormous growth potential for the garments industry, and I do believe that we will be more successful in the coming years. German unification has opened up new markets, and I expect a further increase of our turnover due to the unification of the European market in 1992.

There are other potential fields: for example that of wooden toys and handicrafts, and that of interior design. For the latter I see an enormous market. Here in Pondy that

Aurosarjan is the oldest of Auroville's garments industries. Started in 1972, initially as an attempt to give work to the villages, the unit has been managed since 1975 by Chacko. The factory and a sales outlet are located in Pondicherry, and the unit's yearly turnover has grown to 1 crore (10 million rupees, approximately US \$ 600,000). Aurosarjan gives work to some 120 people, of which 70 are employed on a permanent basis. Nearly all of its products are exported.

market is already growing like anything, and that is very profitable.

Do you agree that businesses working for Auroville should contribute a large part of their profits to Auroville?

Absolutely. Aurosarjan intended originally to give 70% of its profits to Auroville, and to keep 30% for re-investment and so on, but that was not really feasible. Based on my experience I would say that at least 50% of the profits should be transferred to Auroville.

One of the mistakes I have seen many times in Auroville is that someone starts a small business, and immediately wants to spend large amounts on the creation of fixed assets like working space and so on. This results in large overhead costs, and brings them in the position that they cannot really give to Auroville. I think that every unit should give a certain amount of their profits to the Central Fund, for the benefit and development of Auroville. The unit holders should have the freedom to do with the other 50% what they deem fit, also in view of the fact that some units may not succeed in getting bank loans. They might need to keep some money in fixed deposits, towards future purchase of assets like buildings and equipment or for the lean periods, for stock investments and so on. But still, they should give.

How do you think Aurovilians could solve the problem of having to work in a unit to 'gain' their livelihood?

We have discussed this problem for the last 15 years. It was never resolved. One of the steps towards a change might occur when the Central Fund could guarantee that all the services would be maintained—which is only possible when all the units would put money into the Central Fund—and one or

more central kitchens could come into being. Perhaps then the need for payment of maintenance could—partly at least—disappear.

Do you think that Auroville businesses have something special to offer to India or to the world?

I believe that Auroville's strength should be innovation, in offering continuously new products. Many will copy.

Chacko, you are managing one of Auroville's most successful units, but you are, technically speaking, not an Aurovillian. Why did you stick to Aurosarjan and to Auroville?

I am very concerned with the people working in Aurosarjan. And, what is more, I like the spirit of Auroville, and I like to work for Auroville. I may perhaps not have the same in depth motivation as many Aurovilians, but I feel as if I am an Aurovillian!

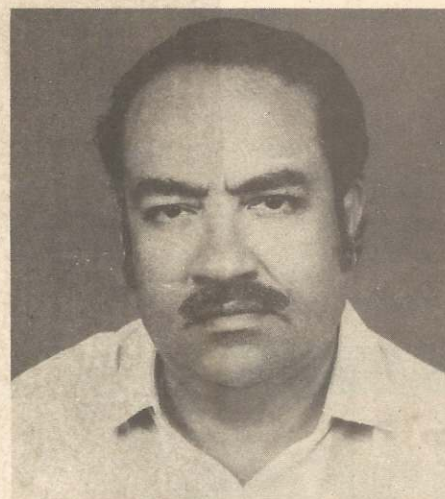
Interview by Carel

This interview with Chacko was made over a month ago. In the evening of 29th December, Chacko was tragically killed in a car accident. We feel we have lost a true friend, a true Aurovillian.

>>> SHORT NEWS <<<

□ The Centre for Scientific Research (C.S.R.) unofficially inaugurated its almost finished conference and training centre recently. The occasion was a state level workshop for Pondicherry as part of the All India Co-ordinated Project on Cost Reduction Techniques and Low Cost Materials for Rural Housing. This was sponsored by the Government of India Departments of Science and Technology (New Delhi) through the Housing and Urban Development Corporation (HUDCO). C.S.R. begins to host more and more training programmes and seminars as the interest in ferrocement and earth building techniques grows. Through HUDCO, professionals from South India come for two days every second month for training. And recently the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements brought twenty-one professionals in housing from Africa as part of their training programme in India to research building materials and technologies.

□ The video *Auroville, the City the Earth needs*, a 42 minute introduction to Auroville, has been translated and dubbed in French and Spanish at the request of the French and Spanish AVI Centres that provided the funding for this work. Copies are available from these centres directly, or from *Auroville Video*, Bharat Nivas, Auroville 605101.



Chacko

THE LARGER ECONOMY

When we talk about the Auroville economy, we tend to refer to money, to the generation and distribution of rupees and paisas. But if we go back to the derivation of the word 'economy' - from the Greek for 'managing the house' - we begin to sense a much larger definition. For managing a house means much more than paying the bills. It means, for example, creating a feeling of beauty and orderliness, an inviting ambience, an atmosphere of security and well-being. In other words, it's as much to do with managing energy as with managing materialities.

If we can think of the term 'economy' as being, in the broadest sense, to do with the circulation and management of energy, it opens up new perspectives. It becomes obvious, for example, that money is only one manifestation of that energy. There are many other forms of energy exchange, ranging from barter to, at its most fundamental, love. The more subtle aspects of the Auroville economy, like a sense of community caring, and the spontaneous pooling of energies which erected our first rickety windmill towers, were perhaps better understood and more active in the early years of Auroville, when there was less material prosperity and a more collective lifestyle.

Today, we are more likely to define the success or otherwise of our economy in terms of its crudest unit—the rupee—and to neglect the less visible contributions to our energy field.

Yet there are ways of determining the health of that larger economy. If we are talking essentially about energy, we can note the quality of the energy, and how well it flows and where it gets blocked. Which means, among other things, we are talking about the quality of our relationships with each other, about our communication and about the level of our individual and community openness and creativity. And it returns us to a critical realization, which Mother stressed time and time again: that the success of Auroville, of our larger economy, is finally not dependent upon the profitability of our units, but upon our drive toward the future and our openness to That which is wanting to materialize. For this will create the energy field, the 'economy', in which everything is possible!

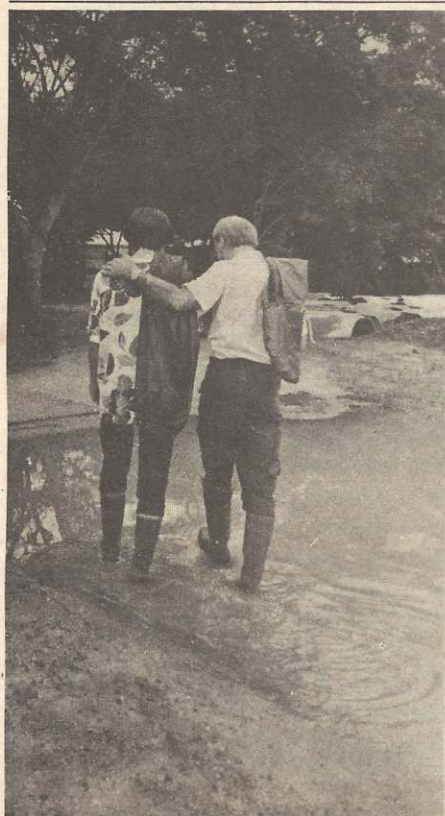
Alan

Water, water everywhere...

The area around Auroville had the best rains for 5 years, here are the figures:

	Average (over 15 yrs.)	1990
January	2	1
February	0	0
March	1	2
April	1	0
May	4	20
June	6	21
July	11	9
August	17	33#
September	18	25
October	24	52
November	36	22
December	21	10

includes 16 cms in one day.



Correction

In our previous issue, an inaccuracy appeared in the data about the 'Lotus' unit at Fraternity. The unit has its market not only in Auroville and Pondicherry, but also in India and abroad. It also produces bags. Recently, the making of rugs has been taken over by another unit.

AUROVILLE TODAY

Auroville
Kottakuppam 605104
Tamil Nadu - India

BY AIRMAIL
BOOKPOST

KRISHNA TENARI
AUROVILLE
AUROVILLE

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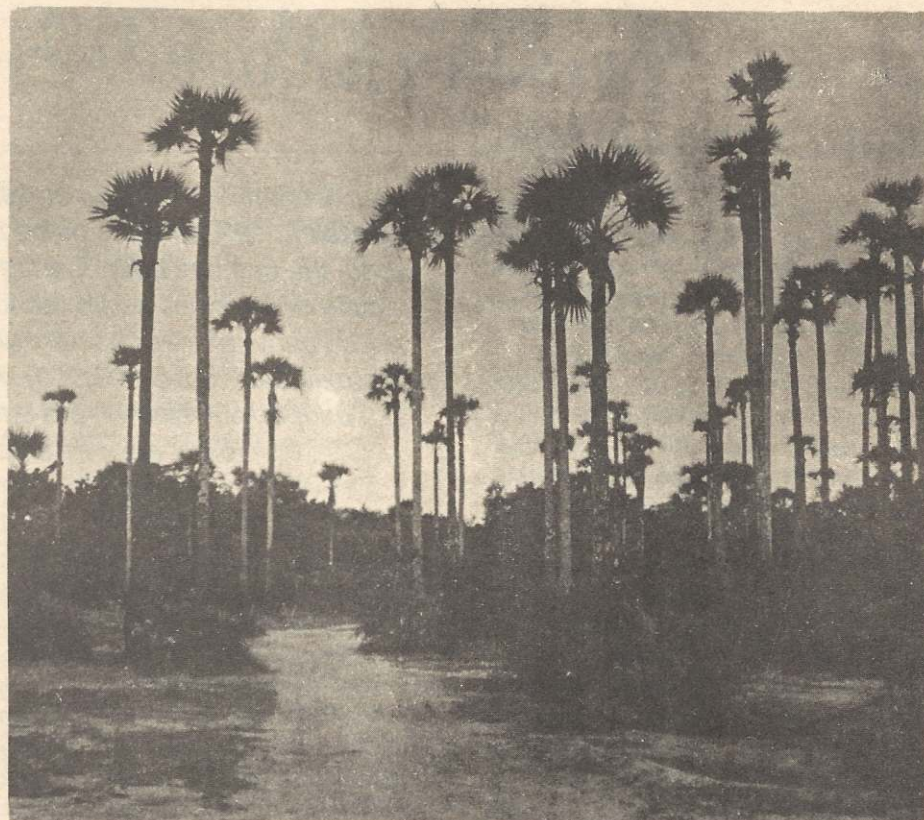


In this issue: Residents of Earth; women in business;
seminar on village relations; etc



Photo Sven

Aurovilians laughing at 'themselves' during the Last School play.



Our Coromandel Beach of Time

Historical glances

Three thousand years ago, people with skin the colour of new mango leaf played with gold, silver and copper and buried their dead in large pots amongst Albizia and Neem trees on a thorny Coromandel plateau. After the rains, the scrub jungles would be covered by a blue haze, the flower which later was named by Mother "miracle".

A thousand years later, homesick Roman masons made bricks from the laterite soil, and built watchtowers from which they waited for their boats to bring news of the far away imperial dream. Or were the ships on the horizon Carthaginian, Arab or Abyssinian? Five hundred years later, the king told his mason to carve into a wall in Irumbai village that the lands to the north, south, east and west—thousands of acres—were given to Shiva. For a week the honied voice of the poet-saint Thiruganasamandar sang the praises of the Gods, the people and nature in the temples of Ozianpet, Thiruvakarrai and Irumbai. The paradise fly-catchers danced in the miracle scrub lands on the Coromandel plateau.

Seven hundred years further on, as ecstatic gopurams rose with the chola dynasty throughout the plains of Southern India, it is said that the 'great achiever', Raja Raja Chola, formed the massive miles and miles of bunds that created the four great lakes that catch and channel the water flowing northwards from our thorny plateau. Migrating flocks still wade and rest amongst these

reedy, misty water acres, that still feed grain lands that brought plenitude to the region.

The tides of peoples, creeds and dynasties have left their marks on our Coromandel beach of time. Muslim villages, Telugu dialects and marvellous statues of Mahaveer are close to our dry plateau with its soaring palmyra trees. Amongst these currents, a dynasty of *swamis* established and maintained the Hindu ethic from the seaside palace at Bommapalayam to the hills of Mailam and Perumukkal.

The most untouched by invasions, developments and social impositions were those drum beaters—now designated low caste—who usually managed to sidestep the mainstream, staying on the fringe with their wild plants, their music and their dance. Still in touch with the beginnings.

Travellers, traders and soldiers, Portuguese, Dutch, French and British came and went collecting spices, fragrant timber and taxes. More and more of the scrub forests of our lateritic plateau were cut and cash crops like indigo were sometimes grown for the master's mills. The last elephants were seen here at the beginning of the 19th century. Forty years ago, bears could still be found in the last wilderness near Edayanchavadi.

Today, girls with skin the colour of new mango leaves pick roses near to where the ancients were entombed, and on a misty morning, over land given to the temple thousands of years before, blue-eyed, fair-haired children gallop ponies into forever.

Joss

♦ ♦ ♦ To Receive Auroville Today ♦ ♦ ♦

The contribution for the next 12 issues of Auroville Today is for Auroville Rs. 94, for India Rs. 100*, for other countries: Rs. 450**, Can.\$ 27, French F. 145, DM 45, It.Lira 31,500, D.Gl. 50, US \$ 22.50, U.K.£ 13.50. 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%) or to the Auroville Today Office, Auroville, Kottakuppam 605104. Cheques should be made payable to Auroville Fund, specifying: Contribution for Auroville Today. You will receive the issues directly from Auroville.

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