

# Auroville Today

APRIL 2001, No.147

## COVER STORY

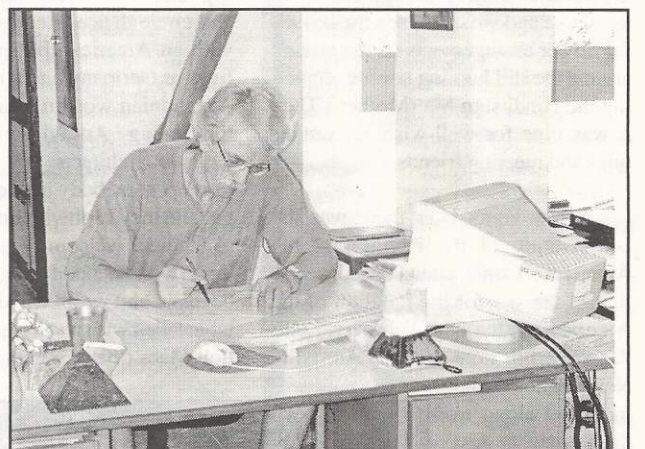
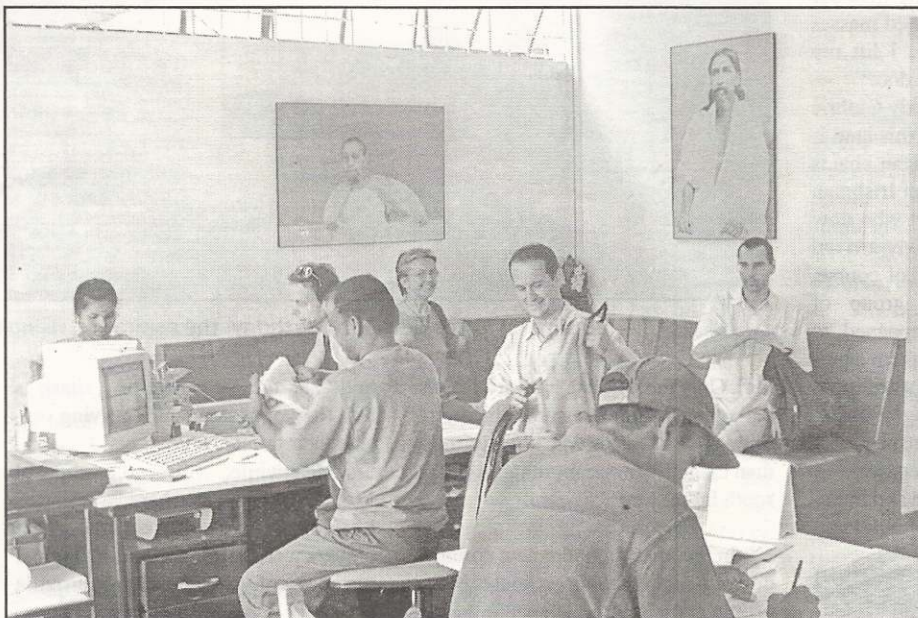
## Economy special

- The Economy 2001 seminar
- The true use of money
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- A brief history of Auroville's Economy
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Many Aurovilians are dissatisfied with the present Auroville economy: the disparities between personal incomes; the stagnation of its business development; the lack of money for building the city; and the inability to realize Mother's ideals such as 'the no-exchange of money' or becoming self-supporting. But the pressure for change which characterizes Auroville also extends to the field of Auroville's economy. Over the last few months many suggestions for new developments have been made. These range from the need to attract capital to stimulate business and develop the city, to ideas for introducing an alternative medium of internal exchange, or doing away with an internal exchange mechanism altogether. During the month of February, the participants in Economy 2001 agreed to unite all these ideas in a wide and comprehensive approach to solving the problems of Auroville's economy.



## United about diversity

### The Auroville Economy 2001 Seminar

The month of February saw the blossoming of the patient work of a group of Aurovilians who had been studying various economic systems, attempting to bring them together to give a new direction for Auroville's development.

It was a busy month. In the field of alternative economy two experts were invited. Gilbert Thiaffey gave a two day workshop on alternative currencies in French. Prof. Margrit Kennedy gave two lectures on the principles of complementary currencies and interest free money. On a Saturday morning in Transition School, a panel of Aurovilians described the state of the present Auroville economy, farming, accounting, and business.

The next Sunday a full day seminar took place in Vérité. The organizing team asked the nearly 60 participating Aurovilians to explore different economic possibilities. The exploration was done on the basis of Mother's symbol, the outer petals representing qualities, the inner ones the four powers of The Mother as described by Sri Aurobindo. Those opting to discuss the Maheshwari aspect were asked to concentrate on the aspect of prosperity, on no exchange of money within Auroville, and on the full surrender to and trust in the Divine. Those opting for the Mahakali aspect were asked to investigate the power of money and how it could be re-conquered for the Divine. The participants in the Mahasaraswati group discussed Auroville as a self-supporting township and, connected to that, the possibility of introducing another means of exchange, complementary to the existing one. The Mahalakshmi group discussed sharing and caring, the promotion of awareness about the each other's needs as a step towards human unity, and the "circle" experiment which has been ongoing

for a year. At the end of the day there was a general feeling that all of the proposed models were valid options for Auroville to explore.

Two days later, on the eve of Auroville's 33rd birthday, the organizing team proposed to a gathering of about 250 Aurovilians and guests that all these models should co-exist, stating that they would enhance and support one another, and that each individual should have the freedom to choose to participate in only one model or in several models at the same time. The present economy based on money would thus co-exist with economic models that experiment with the ideal of 'no exchange of money', as well as with a model based on a new, complementary

means of exchange for internal transactions.

Practically, it was proposed to find means to attract money for business development and for building the city; to create two new circles — a Prosperity circle where all basic needs are met (similar to the prosperity model set up by Mother in the Ashram), and a Maheshwari circle for those who want to do away with money exchange altogether; and, in addition, to start an experiment with a new electronic means of exchange, called Aurose, which would run parallel to the existing system. Aurose, it was said, would stimulate collective abundance, promote the manufacture of goods for internal consumption, and be a means to progressively arrive at a

The Auroville Financial Service  
Top left: Usha, Kumar and Shiva work for the Maintenance Fund  
Top right: Judith, here seen with Alain Bernard, administers Auroville Fund  
Bottom right: Otto, as member of the Economy Group, manages the Central Fund

'no exchange of money' economy in Auroville. These models will have to be further elaborated in the weeks to come, and all interested Aurovilians were asked to join in this work.

After some inner contemplation and a question-and-answer session, it was apparent that most of those present experienced a sense of satisfaction and agreement with the proposals. There was also a feeling of excitement that finally something in the field of the Auroville economy was moving again, even though none present could predict in which way the proposals would ultimately develop. What was truly amazing was the sense of joy and quiet power that the people experienced in the final meditation.

Carel

## The true use of money

"Money is not meant to generate money"

The concept of interest is so common that few people ever give it a second thought. As a rule, an individual puts 'unused' money on deposit against an attractive interest or uses it for speculation on the stock market. If you need money, you borrow it against interest. In all cases, money is used to make money.

"Many of the great political and religious leaders such as Moses, Jesus Christ, Mohamed, Luther, Zwingli and Gandhi have prohibited interest

payments," said Prof. Dr. Margrit Kennedy in one of her well-attended talks in Auroville on interest and the role of money. "The prohibition of interest payments by the Popes during the European Middle Ages shifted the problem to the Jews, who became, at the time, the leading bankers of Europe. While the Jews were not allowed to take interest from each other, they could do so from the Gentiles. In Islam, people do not pay interest for a loan, but the lending banks or individuals become share-

holders in their business and take part of the ensuing profits."

Why was the making of interest forbidden? Margrit explained it was because of the need to reduce social injustice. Another answer is provided by The Mother, who explained to Satprem: "Money is not meant to generate money; money should generate an increase in production, an improvement in the conditions of life and a progress in human consciousness. This is its true use."

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# Auroville's 33rd birthday

Auroville's birthday on February 28th was the occasion, as usual, for many things to happen. Early morning at 5 a.m. a large crowd gathered at the amphitheatre near the Matrimandir. The darkness was illuminated solely by hundreds of oil lamps. The shade of a huge woodpile, the bonfire-to-be, loomed ahead, and people quietly seated themselves. There followed some music by Sunil, then a recording of the Mother reciting from Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*, then her music and, at 5.30 sharp, the bonfire was lit. The atmosphere was one of concentrated silence. Contrary to previous years there were no barking dogs, no people walking around disturbing the atmosphere, just quiet concentration in which the aspiration could rise like the powerful flame of the bonfire. Slowly the sun illumined the scene and we could see the beautiful flower arrangements on the ground around the still burning bonfire, depicting the Hindi sign Ma (Mother.) Then it was time for well-wishing, smiles, hugs and meeting friends.

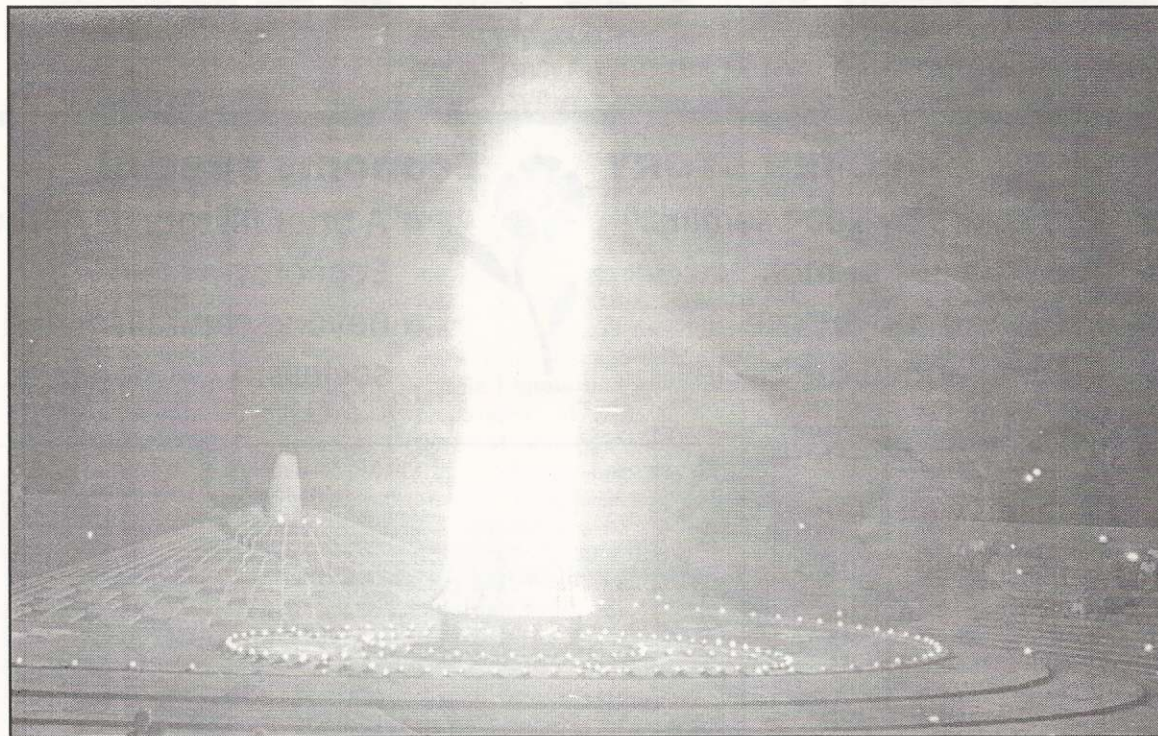
A few hours later there was the consecration of the Pavilion of the Americas. "Come, attend the consecration of the site for the Pavilion of the Americas on the 28th February," said the cheerful note in the Auroville News. Those who mooched along to the somewhat desolate site, expecting a not-so-interesting half-hour of speeches and protocol, were, however, proven wrong. We got the speeches OK, but they were interesting, from the American Consul-General describing his first visit to the excavation of Matrimandir in 1972 — "I asked these guys why

they were digging, and they said they were going to build a huge temple there, and I looked around at the desert, and I looked back at them, and I told them 'Good luck' " — to Jill quoting another Aurovilian, Roy, about the spirit of the Pavilion to be: "I have the impression that the centre of the transformation will be there. A place for the exploration of consciousness, the new, the untried, the miraculous accident, the adventure of the unknown, the forward looking..."

But when the speeches were finished, we didn't go home. Because then we had poetry — "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free... I lift my lamp beside the golden door!" — songs from Brazil and Woody Guthrie — "This land is your land, this land is my land" — native American chants and circle dances (led by an Irishman with an American passport who now lives in Germany and a newly-arrived Argentinian woman). And, of course, this being Auroville, a group of Chilean architects just happened to turn up, somebody handed them a guitar, and they forthwith sang a traditional Chilean welcoming song! Finally, trees were planted in a suspiciously deep pit, and we all wandered over to a table laden with watermelon and imitation Macs (the pumpkin pie was lack-



Planting a tree at the consecration of the Pavilion of the Americas



Bonfire on Auroville's 33rd birthday: the aspiration rising like a powerful flame

ing). Only the ultimate frisbee and softball games didn't survive the fierce midday sun. But it was already more than enough for one morning in sleepy south India.

In the afternoon, the new community of Kailash held open house. Many people came to see the spacious individual and common rooms which will soon house fourteen young people aged between 14 and 21. "Not bad, I'm sure that many students in the world would be quite happy with this," was a common observation about the comfortable rooms with their own covered balconies and collective relaxation spaces. Both the architects and the builder have done a remarkably good job, using compressed mud bricks for the walls and ferro-cement roofing channels, thus manifesting a low-cost collective house for approximately Rs 28 lakhs (US\$ 60,000) all-in. The building is nearing completion and infrastructure connections are being

laid. The unique aspect of Kailash is that the youngsters will be living outside their family context.

Meanwhile, "It's a beautiful Mother's birthday here," reported Larry from the Certitude courts where players were battling it out in the final matches of the annual Auroville Basketball League. This year's tournament saw the participation of over 70 players, both men and women, from ages 12 to 50 something. Eight teams, each proudly named after a Tamil film star, began playing at the beginning of February. Players of all levels were welcome to show their mettle. "It's so encouraging," said Bonty. "It gives the non-players an opportunity to play and test their own skills, however bad they are!" Then again, as David pointed out, "The caliber of the game is much better than 15-20 years ago when we started!" In the end, everyone was a winner and celebrated their triumph at a players' banquet held in Aspiration. As usual, it was a great opportunity to aim

towards human unity through hard sweat and lots of fun.

In another part of Auroville, the Kottakarai Pony Farm had organized a junk sale-cum-fair to raise money for the maintenance of the place and the feeding of the ponies. At the stands in the field, second-hand clothes, books and a wild variety of other articles, including a couple of tape recorders and even a sealed box of Indonesian cigars, could be obtained for a song. Those looking for body decorations could have their nails painted with complex patterns, their shoulders decked out with fancy designs or their hair braided with colourful string wraps. Little children became crowned kings or Red Indians with feathered head-gear. And, of course, there was food and drinks aplenty. In the evening an improvised jam session took place around a bonfire, and an impressive fire stick show spell-bound a young, wide-eyed audience.

## EDUCATION

# Assessing a Visiting Students' Programme

More and more students visit Auroville as part of their curriculum. In January, 18 students from the University of Washington arrived for a three-months' stay.

The visit of international students to Auroville is nothing new. The community has been a fertile ground for students to complement their classroom learning with real life experiences in an innovative environment. As news of Auroville has spread in ever-widening circles, the influx of students has increased. This year saw the commencement of yet another such programme, conducted under the auspices of the University of Washington, a top-ranked institution in Seattle.

Inspiration for the programme came from Professor Karen Litfin, of the faculty of Political Science, who had visited Auroville a few years ago. Her efforts were facilitated by one-time Aurovilian, Bill Leon, who was working as a coordinator at the University. As Karen attests, "the University's willingness to consider a program which would take students to a location where spirituality was a central organizing principle came as a great surprise." After navigating the many snakes and ladders of academic politics, the organizers were successful in offering upper-level, undergraduate students a program jointly sponsored by several University departments.

At the beginning of January, 18 students arrived in Auroville for a stay of three months. The students divided

their day between morning "internships" with various Auroville projects, and afternoon classes taught by two faculty members, Karen and Brigid. The classes, which were open to attendance by Aurovilians, were aimed at getting students to think about the course readings in the light of their everyday experience within the community. In "Nature, Spirit and Political Theory," Karen encouraged students to explore their own assumptions about spirituality. Brigid's class on "Utopian and Intentional Communities" allowed students to understand what they observed about life in Auroville in relation to the history and dynamics of other social experiments.

As was to be expected, some of what had been planned for the students did not proceed as anticipated. Foremost was their work experience. Several students were moved around from one Auroville project to another, before finally settling into a work routine. In the end, however, most regarded their time as productive. Students participated in everything from laying a vegetable bed at Discipline Farm, to helping complete a book for Tamil children on the environment.

On the whole, the students' work programme, once settled, proved beneficial for Auroville as well. For exam-

ple, Santap of the Telephone Service, with the help of student Richard, was able to resolve some computer problems that no-one else could have done as quickly. As he pointed out, however, when welcoming students to Auroville, it is important to remember that their work experience here will be unique. "In the West," says Santap, "you live under the illusion that things around you are reliable. Here, you can't believe it when things work! So the students have the opportunity to see what it is like to solve problems in a context where you can never take anything for granted."

Another aspect of the programme which must be ironed out for the future is the living situation. Since all of the students lived together, their experience of community was primarily with one another and not with Aurovilians. At a wrap-up session conducted in the final week in which the students shared their experiences with American students from the Geo Communities program accredited by the University of New Hampshire, it was clear that few students had had the opportunity to integrate into Auroville.

Among the highlights for the students were their organized trip through Kerala and their interaction with their Tamil teacher, Shankar, who also

served as a cultural guide on the trip. Shankar's bi-weekly Tamil sessions were arranged at the request of the students after their arrival in Auroville. These classes, in addition to the weekend jaunts which students made on their own to nearby destinations in Tamil Nadu, became important moments for students to learn something about the wider cultural context of Auroville. Although the programme was not aimed at teaching about India, it is curious that not more was organized at the outset to educate students about Indian culture and provide them with academic tools with which to think about the relationship between Auroville and its surroundings.

In thinking about how their initial thoughts about the community compared with what they had since observed, there were, naturally, some things in Auroville which puzzled the students. Ben, a physics major, commented, "I really expected much more in the way of innovative technology, you know, more solar panels and windmills and a lot less diesel motors." Samuel expressed doubt about the Aurovilians' attitudes towards their philosophy. "I don't understand why so many Aurovilians always dance around the question of whether or not they are practicing a religion."

Nevertheless, there is little doubt that many aspects of life here amazed the students. Tabitha cited first and foremost her admiration for the environmental work. Sofia, who conducted interview surveys for the new Auroville employment agency, Connections, stated, "I really liked how the different Auroville communities are oriented in an organic way, rather than being so organized. I also came to appreciate the different sense of time that people here operate with in trying to accomplish things."

As planned by the organizers, the programme will take place once a year. Next year will be different, since all the students will be working on the American Pavilion project.

Given the regularity with which such programmes are being run in Auroville, there is a move to create some kind of infrastructure for facilitating the coordination from Auroville's side under the auspices of the Sri Aurobindo World Centre for Human Unity. This would allow for better integration of students into the community's daily life. In addition, it would allow Auroville to better reap the benefits from a pool of bright, interested people, eager to contribute their skills and energy.

Shanti



# Chaos at the centre

**Cristo worked as a civil engineer in countries in Europe and South America before joining Auroville in 1974. Since 1999 he is consultant to the Development Group. One of his concerns is developing Auroville's infrastructure. He sees a need for centralized planning.**

When I joined Aurofuture, Auroville's town planning department, plans for an overall infrastructure for the township did not exist. Aurofuture had only sketchily developed some ideas, and the relevant Auroville services were answering day-to-day demands and had neither the capacity nor the time to do any serious planning. People who needed a plot of land for an activity were told to 'go and look for a suitable plot and come back to the Development Group once you have found it.' Equally, it was up to the individual project holder to create the necessary infrastructure. In other words, the framework which had developed was one of 'do your own planning and take care of your own infrastructure' with no or little guidance from anyone in the community.

The central development of Auroville's infrastructure is hampered by some prevailing attitudes. To mention but a few:

There is highly idealistic thinking, for example about electric cars or "no traffic inside the city area", when the reality is that we have to build a city and that our children are pushed off the roads by heavy building traffic or buses visiting Matrimandir. The idealist's objections prevent the implementation of practical solutions, because they do not fit within the ideals.

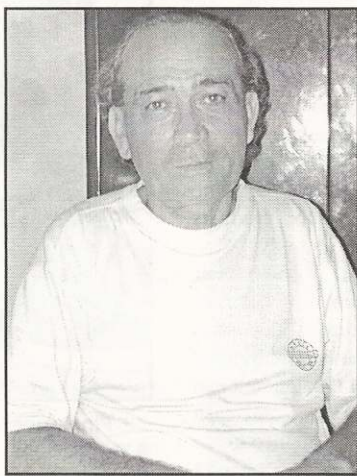
There is a tendency to allow collective infrastructure to be developed and managed by well-meaning indi-

viduals, as any centralized initiative is lacking. An example of this is the big overhead water tank built by the project holders of the Invocation and Arati housing projects, who raised loans for the purpose. While the effort deserves praise, I think this type of development is essentially wrong. The development and management of collective infrastructure should be under a centralized authority.

Then there is a tendency for individuals to block progress based on the fact that, in the distant past, the community allocated them the stewardship of a piece of land, or that the piece of land has been bought with money donated by them. Road access to the Industrial Zone, for example, is being blocked precisely because of this attitude.

Then there is a tendency for groups of individuals to make guidelines — mostly for the reassurance of those who make them — and then we see that the same group who made the guidelines freely allows for exceptions.

Lastly, there is our inability to impose anything. For example, a



Cristo

common waste-water treatment system has been proposed for the Industrial Zone; 80% of the money required for it was secured, 50% by way of grant and 30% through long-term soft loans. The units whose waste-water would be treated by this system had to come up with the remaining 20%, a total of Rs 4

lakhs. They refused. The community has no authority to impose anything upon them, and as a consequence the Industrial Zone still has no proper wastewater treatment system. I find this unacceptable.

Now that, with the expert help of the Town and Country Planning Department, Union Ministry for Urban Development, New Delhi, and Mr. Dattatri, former Chief Town Planner of the Chennai Metropolitan Authority, the Auroville Master Plan has been completed and approved, and the broad directives of the city lay-out have been determined, Auroville has entered a new phase. The town planners will soon start to make more detailed development plans for the various areas. In the

process, many residents and communities and others involved will be asked for their input. But town planners alone cannot plan the city infrastructure. I propose that Auroville creates its own Auroville Public Works Department, a body of experts which, together with the town planners, can work on the town's infrastructure. Later they can take responsibility for the management of that infrastructure, in co-ordination with existing Auroville services, such as the Electrical Service and the Water Service.

While the town planners and the Public Works department would make proposals, the decision-making power should rest elsewhere with a small group who should be empowered to take, and if necessary enforce, decisions.

The need to for centralized planning of our infrastructure will become more apparent if we look at the enormous costs involved. Take roads. Where is the money for our roads to come from? Auroville is not a city where we can expect the businesses or the inhabitants to pay road-tax to lay new roads and improve on the old ones. Auroville will either have to rely on grants — assuming that we can get them — or on loans, which then will have to be repaid from the general income. That surely won't be an easy task...

*From a conversation with Caryl*

## PROFILE

# Auroville at a turning point

**Roger Toll lived in Auroville between 1971-79. Since then he has pursued a successful career in journalism and publishing in the U.S. Recently he revisited the community after 11 years and gave his impressions.**

Auroville is obviously at an important turning point. It had its childhood, full of spontaneity and organic, random growth, but I sense that youthful period is, at 33, coming to an end. The magic is still there, there's no doubt about it, I feel it strongly. The job now is to keep what is true from the earlier times while becoming more focused on materializing Mother's full vision of the city.

That's the new challenge. A city of 50,000 no longer looks like a pipe dream. It is happening. Look at the new developments in the financial area, in education, in the way Aurovilians now talk to each other. These are tremendous developments since they touch sensitive human areas of resistance and ego.

When I last visited, eleven years ago, I found a kind of general depression, even anguish. I felt there were major issues between Aurovilians that were stopping progress. Now it's different. There's a new dynamism, a willingness to go with the energy that is moving Auroville forward towards materialization, rather than working against it by holding onto old ideas and old formations. As a result, people generally seem much happier. I'm delighted to see how much Auroville has grown psychologically. People are ready to do things now that would never have been done 15 years ago. Take the discussions on a new economy. In earlier years, that would have been a screaming match. People would have felt threatened or fearful, they would have reacted from the vital or mental parts of their beings, from everything but their hearts. But in these recent meetings people listened,

they gave space to each other so that each could express what they wanted to say from somewhere deeper. That's a big change.

During my visit I talked with many old friends. Naturally, we have a certain nostalgia for those treeless, wide-open times when Mother was still physically guiding Auroville. But life moves on. From conversations, I see that older Aurovilians are now seeing beyond long-held positions. There is more suppleness, flexibility, and faith in the process and in the divine direction behind the lila.

### A world city

I am also excited to see the people who have come since I left, who have had experience in professional environments, who bring expertise in areas Auroville needs, who even have money they can invest in production units and housing and donate to the city. A greater prosperity will help Auroville grow, give more options, and attract new blood.

As never before, I now sense Auroville will be a world city, and international personalities involved in cutting-edge activities will be flowing in and out because Auroville will be the only city on earth entirely dedicated to experimentation for the future. That's the reality. So there's no point in getting cranky about all those buses pushing us off the roads. The point is to fix the roads or make parallel ones for Aurovilians.

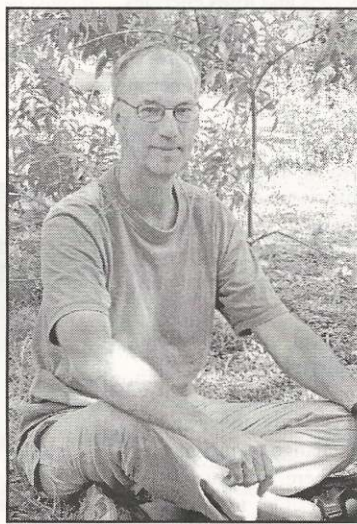
Another challenge is to create space for fresh energy and ideas. I have asked a lot of people whether the 30-year-olds in the community have come into positions of responsibility

where their views and souls can affect the development of Auroville. In general, I gather this hasn't been happening, though I saw signs of young ideas in Aurofuture that could represent breakthroughs from long-held positions. As the young are often the ones to achieve such breakthroughs, it's crucial for them to begin playing important roles.

Another challenge is decision-making. How will Auroville carry out decisions that affect the whole community, beyond the working groups? Community meetings can no longer represent 1,500 people, not to mention next year's 2,000. So who says, "This is what we're going to do"? Outside it's easy: the boss decides. But here there's no boss. Without a solution, Auroville will keep meandering. So Auroville has to decide where the line is between efficiency (the old way) and the ideal (the new way).

### Living in the West

We who live outside Auroville have other challenges. Most of us surely try to infiltrate the lessons of the Mother into our daily lives, just as Aurovilians do. But it can be more challenging in the West because of outer constraints and incomprehension. The biggest difference is that Auroville is permeated with the Mother's presence. It is absolutely concrete and it is a wonderful gift. Also, everyone is here for the same reason, so despite all the cultural abrasion that goes on you are truly one family, united by a very immediate purpose. What a grace that is! But after years of struggling forward, do Aurovilians take it for granted? Are Aurovilians consciously work-



Roger Toll

ing with that presence as much as they might? The Matrimandir chamber is incredibly powerful, but strangely I haven't seen many Aurovilians there.

After this visit, I know I could easily live here again, and my wife and I probably will: I feel an intense pull to return, a sort of inevitability. It's a unique, wonderful place that is going to keep attracting front-line soldiers of earth's evolution to it. I think this process will snowball, and more and more people will arrive as Auroville gets ready for them. I sense the process has been accelerating and will now accelerate even more. It has a long ways to go, but I can see the direction and I think, despite the obvious difficulties, Auroville's finding its way towards its full expression.

*Based on an interview by Alan*

## In brief

### • UNESCO

Auroville recently renewed its connections with UNESCO when Dr. Kireet Joshi, Chairman of the Auroville Foundation and Aurovilians Luigi and Yanne met with Mr. Sayhad, Deputy Director General, and other senior officials of UNESCO in Paris. UNESCO officials were receptive to the idea of Auroville and its progress in the last thirty years. They have pledged greater support for Auroville particularly on international, cultural and educational projects.

### • European Union

On March 20th, Mr. Michel Caillouët, the Ambassador-Head of the Delegation of the European Commission in India, laid the Foundation stone for the Town Hall Annex which is to be built under the Asian Urbs programme. He had detailed discussions with the coordinators of the four EC projects in Auroville and was informed on the plans for the European and Unity pavilion in the International Zone. He also gave a talk entitled "Indo-European Relations and Human Unity."

### • Collector inaugurates new Village Action office

Mr. T. K. Ramachandran, IAS, Collector, Villupuram District, inaugurated the new office and resource centre of the Auroville Village Action Group (AVAG). Built by the Auroville unit, Kolam, the centre is located on the outskirts of Auroville in the village of Irumbai. Among other facilities, the centre has dormitories and a training hall to host workshops for a hundred participants. The Collector commended AVAG's social work in over fifty villages in the Vanur Block of the Villupuram District.

### • Books released

"Immortal India: Towards The Ideal Society" and "The Gnostic Cycle: Towards The Supermind" are two recent compilation of Sri Aurobindo's writings, published by the Sri Aurobindo World Centre for Human Unity. The third and the last book in this series, currently under preparation, will present excerpts from the Mother on the ideal society, and her vision of Auroville as "the cradle of the superman". For further information or to place orders contact: [unity@auroville.org.in](mailto:unity@auroville.org.in)

### • Auroville International Germany Meeting

AVI Germany is hosting a meeting this summer on the topic of "Yoga in daily Life and the Vision of Unity" in Bavaria, South Germany. All are welcome to attend. For more information and registration please contact AVI Germany [wjrs@gmx.net](mailto:wjrs@gmx.net)

### • Equinox Celebration

Auroville joined communities all over the world by celebrating the first equinox of the third millennium. Organized by the Club of Budapest, this international equinox celebration envisaged thirty countries greeting the rising sun on the 20th of March. In Auroville, the celebration entailed a collective gathering at the Amphitheatre, the reading of the Auroville Charter and the text titled, "A Dream" by the Mother, and the lighting of a bonfire and the chanting of Sri Aurobindo's Gayatri Mantra at the time of the sunrise.



# Releasing the AUROSE

Olivier, who has been an Aurovilian for the past 12 years and who heads Auroville's cheese factory at La Ferme, explains the scope of the Aurose, the new complementary exchange system to be used within Auroville.

Almost all financial transactions in Auroville go through the Auroville Maintenance Fund. This has minimised the need for pure cash payments within Auroville. Most Aurovilians and Auroville units have an account.

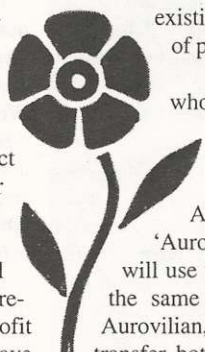
A few years ago the Economy Group introduced for each Aurovilian who receives a community maintenance two types of account, a 'kind' and a 'cash' account. The portion of one's maintenance put in the 'cash account' can be withdrawn. The balance is put on the 'kind account,' which is exclusively used to electronically pay for purchases made within Auroville such as groceries from the Pour Tous stall and meals at the Solar Kitchen, or for services billed through Auroville units such as telephone, electricity etc. Money from the kind account cannot be withdrawn as cash.



Olivier

cost-price (the price of raw material, labour, loan reimbursements and depreciation, but excluding reserves for future developments) and that the amount of the profit they lose by not selling the product outside will be booked in their accounts as a donation to Auroville. Thus, the totality of a unit's donation to Auroville will consist of a cash donation as at present, plus the donation of the 'profit loss' that they have by supplying their products at cost price to Auroville. In this way, there will be no loss for the unit. Rather, there will be a stimulus to gradually produce more for internal consumption as the unit's products will become affordable to the Aurovilians and the unit will effectively contribute to

the ideal of Auroville becoming a self-supporting township. In addition, there will be a study of how interest-free loans can be made available to new or



existing units for the creation of products for Auroville.

The units and projects who choose to join the experiment will be paid for the products they supply to Auroville on their 'Aurose' account. The units will use their Aurose account in the same way as an individual Aurovilian, except that the unit can transfer both the Aurose and cash components of the maintenance given to Aurovilians working for the unit directly into their respective Aurose and cash accounts.

In case the unit accumulates too many Aurose and needs to obtain rupees, the Financial Service will exchange the unit's Aurose for rupees by debiting the Aurose account and crediting the cash account. The parity will be one Aurose for one rupee.

The Aurose can also play a role in solving the problem of Aurovilians who are under-maintained. At present, apart from their regular work for which they get a maintenance, many Aurovilians take up voluntary, unpaid work for the community such as teaching or gardening or supervising the



Final meeting at SAWCHU on the eve of Auroville's 33rd birthday

maintenance of the community in which they live. Although this is a wonderful way to offer service for people who have sufficient means, there is no reason why this work could not be compensated in Aurose for those who struggle to make ends meet, particularly if the extra work could be a means towards a decent maintenance to be spent in Auroville.

Gradually over the next two, five or ten years, we can expect that Aurose will facilitate a lot of exchanges based on the use of Auroville's own resources and thereby promote increased prosperity for all. When we

have sufficient experience with Aurose, we could even consider creating more Aurose to stimulate internal production by sponsoring the creation of new units, or expanding production of old units so that more products actually needed by Aurovilians are produced, and for the building of the city. It is envisaged that in the long run the Aurose will become superfluous because if there is enough for everyone, we can do away with the Aurose. And then we will have that economy Mother spoke of, with no exchange of money, each individual giving of his or her capacities, and the city maintaining them.

## The true use of money

(continued from page 1)

"What I call an improvement in consciousness, a progress in consciousness ... everything that leads humanity towards its future realization. Money should serve to augment that and to augment the material base for the earth's progress, the best use of what the earth can give — its intelligent utilization, not the utilization that wastes and loses energies... it must be used to enrich the earth: to enrich the earth, to make the earth richer and richer, more active, generous, productive and to make all life grow towards its maximum efficiency. This is the true use of money." <sup>1</sup> That

this statement also condemned speculation is obvious. Earlier she had said: "... to say that one cannot make a heap without making a hole is all right for those who speculate, who do business on the Stock Exchange or in finance — there it is true. It is impossible to have a financial success in affairs of pure speculation without its being detrimental to another." <sup>2</sup> That money as a force should flow and not be hoarded, can also be inferred from her suggestion to abolish the system of inheritance — which indeed would free tremendous amounts of blocked energy. <sup>3</sup>

In relation to Auroville Mother repeated her views: "Here is the basis on which Auroville is established. Money is not meant to make money. Money is meant to prepare the earth for the new creation." <sup>4</sup>

Margrit Kennedy raised four practical objections to the principle of interest. The first is that interest, and in particular compound interest, is not sustainable. Based on interest and compound interest, the value of money doubles at regular intervals. For the receiver this creates an exponential growth pattern; but it acts like a cancer in the economic development of those

who have to pay the interest, instead of contributing to a healthy growth. The recent inability of some developing countries to pay their national debts was quoted as proof of such unsustainability.

Her second argument is that the prices of all products contain a concealed interest component. The exact amount varies according to the labour versus capital costs of the product. But on average, states Margrit, we pay about 30% to 50% interest in the prices of our goods and service. Interest is the major cause of rising prices since it is hidden in the price of all that we buy.



Margrit Kennedy

Her third objection is that the interest system has proven to favour the rich at the cost of the poor. The interest system has allowed for a hidden redistribution mechanism which constantly shuffles money from those who need to work for their money to those who have more than they need and therefore can lend out their money and earn without having to work for it. As a consequence, ever larger amounts of money are concentrated in the hands of ever fewer individuals and corporations. In fact, these corporations get so rich that often their earnings on interest exceed their earnings on their normal business activity.

Lastly, there is the role of inflation in our economic system. Most governments in the world borrow to finance their activities, and pay interest. The discrepancy between a government's earnings through various taxes and the interest it pays is one of the causes of inflation. Margrit gave the example of the Federal Republic of Germany. In the period between 1968 and 1989, the government's income rose by about 400%, while its interest payments rose by 1360%. Inflation then serves to diminish the gap between income and debt.

In fact, concluded Margrit, the world economic system has become uncontrollable. Speculation in money alone is now responsible for 98% of all money transactions of the world, while only 2% deals with financing world trade. Many leading economists now foresee a major global economic breakdown.

Margrit's words reminds one of Mother's prediction made in 1956: "The age of Capitalism and business is drawing to a close..." <sup>5</sup>

Mother indicated that money should circulate. Margrit, suggested that a 'parking fee' on money would serve the purpose to keep money in circulation. She gave the example of the small Austrian town of Wörgl. "Between 1932 and 1933, this town started an experiment and issued 32,000 'Work Certificates' or 'Free Schillings' (i.e. interest-free Schillings), covered by the same amount of ordinary Austrian Schillings in the bank. The citizens built bridges, improved roads and public services, and paid salaries and materials with this money, which was accepted by all. The fee on the use of the money was 1% per month or 12% a year. This fee had to be paid by the person who had the banknote at the end of the month, in the form of a stamp worth 1% of the note and glued to its back. Otherwise, the note became invalid. This small fee caused everyone who got paid in Free Schillings to spend them before they used their ordinary money. People even paid their taxes in advance to avoid paying the small fee. Within one year, the 32,000 Free Schillings circulated 463 times, thus creating goods and service worth over 14,816,000 Schillings. The ordinary Schilling by contrast circulated only 21 times. At the time when most countries in Europe had severe employment problems, Wörgl reduced its unemployment by 25% within this one year. The fees collected by the town government which caused the money to change hands so quickly amounted to a total of 12% of 32,000 Free Schillings, or

3,840 Free Schillings. The experiment ceased when the Austrian National Bank, fearing for its monopoly on the printing of money, prohibited the local money. The experiment with alternative currencies, however, did not cease with Wörgl. As of today, many places in the world use alternative means of exchange successfully," explained Margrit.

Would an alternative means of exchange work in Auroville? Nobody knows. Margrit, however, is convinced that it will not only work, but will bring much wealth to the community. Warning once again that the global economic system will break down at some point in time, she advocated the introduction of a complementary, means of exchange which could operate parallel to the existing one. In answer to the observation that 90% of Auroville's requirements come at present from outside — and so will have to be paid in rupees — she stated that the internal system would create awareness, independence and allow the gradual increase in production of products by the city for the city, and would so contribute to the ideal expressed by Mother that "Auroville will be a self-supporting township." And she once again referred to the Wörgl experiment: "The town's mayor convinced all the citizens there that they have nothing to lose if they would start the experiment. The same goes for Auroville. If Auroville wants to take up the challenge to become a research and demonstration site of a replicable economic model elsewhere, an experiment with a complimentary means of exchange is the obvious next step."

Carel

<sup>1</sup> Mother's Agenda I, October 4, 1958 p. 204-205

<sup>2</sup> Talk of May 3, 1951, Mother's Collected Works Vol.4, p. 377

<sup>3</sup> Mothers Agenda X, August 27, 1969 p. 311.

<sup>4</sup> Mother's Agenda I, undated 1958, p. 206

<sup>5</sup> Mother's Agenda I, March 21, 1956, p. 70



# A brief history of Auroville's Economy

Judith joined Auroville in 1971 and has served in many important working groups. At present, she is executive of Auroville Fund and chairperson of the Funds and Assets Management Committee. She participates in the efforts to realise the Auroville 2001 economy. Here she gives a summary of the economic history of Auroville.

The Mother said many things about Auroville's economy and how it should be. Some of her statements have been quite detailed. Through the 33 years of field experiments that have been carried out, a few guiding principles have been respected throughout.

The first of these guiding principles one finds in the first line of Auroville's Charter:

*Auroville belongs to nobody in particular. Auroville belongs to humanity as a whole.*

The implication of this statement as implemented in Auroville is that there is no private ownership of immovable assets such as land and houses. The Auroville Foundation, holds them in trust for 'humanity as a whole'.

The second guiding principle is to be found in the Charter's second line: *But to live in Auroville one must be the willing servitor of the Divine Consciousness.* This defines the motivation to become an Aurovilian: the motivation is not personal gain but service to the Divine. We are here to give ourselves to the manifestation of the City of Auroville and we have nothing to ask in return than the joy of serving the Divine.

The third guiding principle is to be found in Mother's Dream, a document that dates from August 1954, long before the founding of Auroville. According to this Dream:

*Work would not be there as the means of gaining one's livelihood, it would be the means whereby one expresses oneself, developing one's capacities and possibilities, while doing at the same time service to the whole group, which, on its side would provide for each one's subsistence and for the field of his work.*

These statements and others by Mother on the Auroville economy, have not only led to intense debates but also to the living research that has characterised Auroville for the last 33 years. As we want to proceed in our efforts to realise that ideal economy Mother spoke of, we have not only to assess where we are, but also to recall where we came from and what has been achieved.

## In the beginning...

In the early days of Auroville there was Prosperity for those who could not support themselves: goods were made available according to one's requests, within a very limited range. The system was centralised, bureaucratic, both insensitive and inadequate to meet the real needs of the people. But it was set up by Mother! We learned to surrender, we learned to be grateful, we learned how little one needed to be a servitor of the Divine. We hauled water, dug the earth and planted trees. We bathed in the Divine Presence. And we got hungry and sick; we wore rags and lived in shacks. Prosperity was one of those inspirational names of Mother because at the time there was true poverty in Auroville. Prosperity was given both in cash and in kind. We used the cash for food but it was wholly inadequate to provide a healthy diet for people involved in manual work.

Then the split between the Sri Aurobindo Society and Auroville came and we were on our own. Even what little we had been receiving was taken away. We had to share to survive. Here is the origin of the Auroville common pot. Whatever you had you put in and whatever you

needed you took out. Food was bought centrally and distributed in baskets by Pour Tous to community kitchens or shared out to individuals on the basis of need. Those needing cash went to the office. If there was money in the safe you got it and if there wasn't, you didn't. It is easy to get nostalgic and romantic about that time. But we should not forget that the pot went bankrupt. All the fledgling units which had sprung up in response to the need of the hour lost all their money and all the people who had put in all they had, now had nothing.

## The decline of trust

By the end of the seventies began the decline towards the lack of trust and confidence in the centralised common pots. (This is perhaps the reason why today commercial units and self-supporting individuals keep their reserves in banks rather than trusting it to the common pot of the Auroville Maintenance Fund.) Then it was decided to use Mother's method of money management and divide the common pot into envelopes. In that way money for food would be kept for food and money for community maintenance would be kept for that. There was no personal maintenance. There was an envelope meeting every month and whoever needed money attended and shared in the allocation of the funds. It was around this time that Nandini was born and received donations 'in kind' such as clothing from the commercial units and Aurovilians, for people to collect on a needs basis. It also developed a wing that collectively bought personal and household necessities, which were also distributed on a needs basis. Until that point everything was available for everyone, there was no distinction between those with means or those without.

A deeper brotherhood, a yet unfound law of love is the only sure foundation possible for a perfect social evolution, no other can replace it.

Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle, CWSA 25, p. 220

But the means were still very inadequate to meet the most basic needs. The envelopes tried to take care of everything, pumps, electricity connections, all the urgent needs of an emerging community in a barren landscape that was being settled and rejuvenated. Even Matrimandir had its budget from the envelopes. The population of Auroville was around 500 at the time and maybe half were children.

As the envelopes didn't manage to fulfil all needs, what began to happen was that those people who had means shared them less and less. They still took what little was available to them in the basket or Nandini but what was not available they would go and buy in Pondicherry and they put less and less in the envelopes. Shortages were so acute that people without means were reduced to cheating the system and begging to put food on the table for their children. At the same time they went on planting and building up small handicraft workshops, trying in whatever ways possible to make ends meet. The food at the community kitchens was back to the same inadequate level as it had



Judith

been under the Prosperity system.

A big meeting was called at Bharat Nivas where it was proposed that those with means would take care of themselves and leave what was in the basket for those without. But it was decided instead that "Pour Tous" means For All. So the people buying in Pondicherry began to give their money instead to Pour Tous, together with their order, and Pour Tous began also to buy and distribute their requirements to them. The rest of the money was used for those without means, who could also say what they needed, as was already happening in Nandini.

## Start of the upswing

In 1984 Auroville got the first grant for maintenance from the Government of India for the Sri Aurobindo Institute for Educational Research (SAIER). At first this money was used generally, and this gave a great boost to the collective budget. But as people were able to specify their needs it very quickly became obvious that the means still did not match the needs. So it was

decided that certain activities, especially commercial activities, should provide the means to meet the needs of the Aurovilians working there, as well as making general contributions. It was also decided that people working on projects funded by donations could and should have their needs covered by the project as it made no sense to treat them as free labour. In this way the maintenance system was born, under which Aurovilians without personal means working for community services (such as schools, water service etc.) would be maintained by the community. (But the idea of receiving maintenance from one's unit was also born at this time as well). In November, 1988, the community held an Economy Seminar. It appointed a working group to study the economy and come with proposals. The group's proposal that yearly budgets for all community services and other collective responsibilities be drawn up and that all Aurovilians and Auroville units be asked to contribute monthly to these budgets, was accepted by the community on February 28th, 1989. It was the beginning of the Central Fund and it heralded the birth of the Economy Group.

This system has prospered. It has brought nourishment, decent clothing, health and dental care and a wide range of goods and services to Auroville for all Aurovilians. Later it also brought the computerised accounting system of the Financial Service into being and with that the potential of the development of a cash-less society.

But the system also highlighted problems and inequalities.

## Never enough money

One of the persistent problems was that the community never had enough money to pay for the full budgets of all the services, leave alone for the budget increases. As a consequence, two serious concerns had to be addressed. One was that the central financing of services did lead to inertia within the services - the more so as the central financing was insufficient. So a couple of years ago it was decided that some of the service units should charge properly for their services, and that their prices should include development costs so that they could determine their own growth. The services that most readily embraced this change in policy, such as Pour Tous, are the ones that have shown the most dynamism in the last two years, with substantial improvements in the quality of the service provided and in their working environment. The changed policy allowed these service executives the financial freedom to use their creativity. But for other services, such as education, such a policy was not feasible, as education is being freely provided.

The other serious concern was the level of the maintenance provided to those working for community services. As there was never enough money for the community to pay all the service budgets fully, the level of these maintenances, which formed part of the service budgets, remained always much lower than the maintenance taken by those working for commercial units or by Aurovilians with personal means. The system linked the means of living to the kind of work and the amount of work one does, while those who depend on their own resources have much more freedom in deciding where and how much they work. This problem was addressed about five years ago. The Economy Group was asked to attempt to de-link work and maintenance, so that it would no longer matter where one worked, only that one worked for the community. In order to realise this, it was decided to take the maintenance component out of each service budget, and put all the personal maintenances into one new 'maintenance' budget instead. However, this by itself did not increase the amount of the maintenance available for those working for community services, as the income remained insufficient to meet demands. Moreover, there was a perception at the time that a number of people were not or not sufficiently giving their energies in return.

In 1997, as part of an exploration of the issues, over 100 people who were clearly working full time for community services were asked what they needed on top of their maintenance. The needs expressed were so reasonable that it was decided to try to find the means to provide for them. As an experiment, this new possibility called 'flexible maintenance' became available for about 60 Aurovilians and their families. This meant that individuals did not receive a fixed amount

as an increase, but rather that there was scope for varying amounts as well as fluctuation from month to month, reflecting the actual needs. The intention was that, progressively, all those who were working in community services could choose this possibility. However, there was an inability to take the next steps to include more people because the atmosphere of trust and confidence needed to continue the process was lacking. It was time for Auroville to make a deeper commitment to caring for Aurovilians and for each individual to be responsible for knowing their own true needs.

## At present

Computerisation had made it possible that pure cash transactions within Auroville have been reduced to a minimum. Each Aurovilian and Auroville unit has an account with the Maintenance Fund, through which payments are made. In August 1998, the decision was made to create two accounts for each individual depending on the community for their maintenance: a cash and a kind account. Part of one's maintenance is put on the 'cash' account, which can be withdrawn. The balance is put on the 'kind account,' which is exclusively used to electronically pay for one's purchases made within Auroville, such as from the Pour Tous stall, or to pay one's telephone and electricity bill through the relevant Auroville units or a meal at an Auroville restaurant. The reason for creating this split in accounts was to stimulate the use of Auroville services rather than using cash to cover one's need from the village or Pondicherry.

Since November 1998, increases in personal maintenance of those who are involved in community services, have been primarily in kind. Included in this, the Solar Kitchen provides lunch under a monthly scheme called "Nutrition for Auroville" which leaves it up to the individual to contribute if they are able. Otherwise, the Central Fund covers the costs. A provision has been made for medical and dental care as well as for passport and visa fees if needed. A wide range of clothing and household articles are available from Nandini, the Freestore, the Tailoring Service and the Mahasaraswati Freestore; and the Housing Service covers minor house repairs, renovation and extension. It is important to remember the beauty and quality of the environment that has been created and are available to all: our forests, farms, schools, cycle paths and roads, as well as varied cultural activities.

But as of today, the problem of providing sufficient maintenance to those who are involved in community services has not sufficiently been addressed while many Auroville projects and activities follow another approach. The difference in levels of maintenance has fostered a sense of "you have to take care of yourself first," starting from day one for Newcomers. In the economy, the sense that we are all in it and that the brother- and sisterhood, which underlies Auroville, should bring a sense of sharing together, has been lost. And it is this loss that makes many people very dissatisfied and which is, next to the ideal to move progressively towards no exchange of money, one of the principal motivations of the attempts to create the Auroville Economy 2001.



## Beyond capitalism and socialism ?

### A perspective on Auroville's Commercial Units

Jean-Yves came to Auroville six years ago, and has been teaching at Last School ever since. His main fields of research are history, economy, arts and literature. In France he was active as a management consultant and advised on the start-up of new businesses.

We often fail to take the time to observe our collective life, but if we do not evaluate our experiment, we don't know where we are. Sometimes we even forget where we want to go.

Historically, the commercial units have developed mainly as a response to the shortage of funds generated by the crisis between the Aurovilians and the Sri Aurobindo Society in the early years of Auroville. They have not developed as an organic response to internal needs. Some of them have succeeded. The advantage is that Auroville now has a stable source of financial support through donations; the disadvantage is that we have not created ways of responding to internal needs because we mainly export what we produce and mainly import what we consume, thus maintaining the need for using money. In other words, we have increased our monetary resources more than we have induced an internal economic development. An Auroville economy based on another movement than the exchange of money still has to manifest, and is only now beginning to be explored. Nevertheless, when we examine the performance of our commercial units, some interesting features appear. But we must first remind ourselves of the context of their activity.

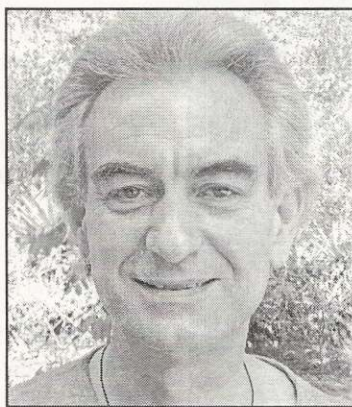
Everywhere in the world, the economy is powerfully structured by two elements. Firstly, the right of private property, which is often presented as an essential condition for free enterprise, risk-taking, progress, wealth creation and competitive innovation. Secondly, the enlightened Welfare State taxing the economy in order to redistribute and re-allocate the wealth created. The first element is at the basis of capitalism, the second one at the basis of socialism. They generate two types of tax, one on capital, in the form of interest, the

second on the collective, in the form of sales tax and income tax. These are the pillars of the world economy, and you will find no expert in the world ready to say that they are not essential for wealth creation and distribution.

Yet, these two pillars have been removed by the Mother at the outset of Auroville: no private property, no state, no tax. What will fulfill their social function?

What is happening is that in the financial year 1999-2000 the Auroville commercial units had a turnover of 254 million rupees (US\$ 5.5 million), generating profits of around 20% of the turnover. Around 50% of the profits are allocated by the units as donations to Auroville, either to specific projects and needs (they are then called 'specified donations'), or to the Central Fund for collective use (the so-called unspecified donations). The tendency, as shown over the last six years, is that donations from the profits are on the increase and, equally, that there is an increase in donations given unspecified to the Central Fund. Looking at the balance sheets we note good solvency, an almost total financial independence (few loans), and a cash situation representing 3.5 months of turn-over. This cash, which is accumulated from net profits after donations, is the financial resource for future investments.

These figures tell us two things: firstly, that the absence of ownership and of profit-distribution to owners of capital does not seem to be an indis-



Jean-Yves: evaluating business performance

pensable ingredient for commercial dynamism and profit-making. Secondly, that the absence of a tax system does not prevent the units contributing to Auroville's collective life, and at a rate superior to many income tax rates in the world. The sacred pillars of both capitalism and socialism have been removed,

yet still there is commercial and financial development that could satisfy, to a large extent, those who believe in free enterprise and those who believe in state regulation.

One could conclude that Aurovilians are really great! But some scientific prudence is needed here, for we know very well that we are not so great. Firstly, it should be noted that the majority of the commercial units are small and the profits can hardly do more than support the unit holder and his family. One unit is far ahead of the others, representing 30.5% of the income, 69.8% of the profits, and 44.5% of the donations. Small units tend to contribute more out of their profits (between 60% and 80% or more), but big units tend to contribute more through unspecified donations. Then there are some weak points: Auroville depends on a few units

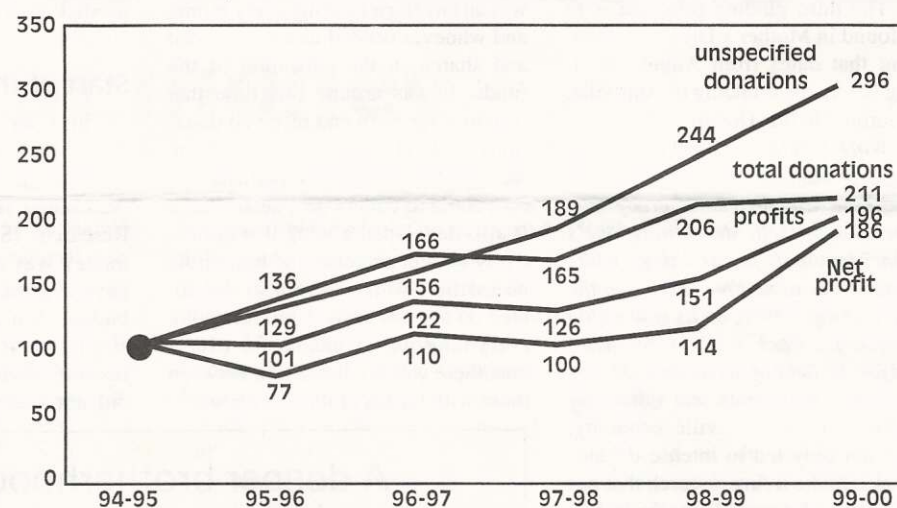
for its financial resources. It is true that we often have a high contribution rate but the specified contributions are not clearly known and cannot be studied and interpreted.

Also, cash reserves are kept as a security when they could circulate more if more transparency and mutual trust existed. I would rather credit the systemic effect for what is positive in our performance: when you remove private property, interest, dividend and state-tax from an economic system and replace them by a set of values centered around self-giving and service, something is bound to happen. If the units can allocate around 50% of their profits toward the collective without hampering their development, it is for macro and micro-economic reasons. On the macro-economic side, the absence of private property has a direct consequence on the capacity of the units to contribute, for when no dividends have to be paid to share holders and no loans taken (the assets do not belong to the unit

and thus cannot be used to mortgage loans) then no interest has to be paid and you get more available profit to contribute to the collective. On the micro-economic side, the readiness of the unit holders to contribute is greater when their contributions are not fixed under a compulsory tax system. But these technical features do not work on their own. Their final outcome depends on the social system of which they are part, organized around a specific set of values, oriented to service and giving, which have been accepted by the community and thus arbitrate more or less the collective life and the individual decisions in a manner which tolerates even defects in its application. The creative role of values in economic mechanism has thus begun to be illustrated here in Auroville, and this is already a useful contribution in the present economic context of globalization.

Jean-Yves

### Auroville's Commercial Units Allocation of profit over the last six years (index of evolution - 100 = 1994-95)



## Circling above the circles

The economic experiment of the "circles" attempts to change the economy of Auroville. Don, who has been instrumental in the creation and the administration of the circles, gives a bird's-eye view of the experiment after one year.

About 100 Aurovilians came together in November 1999 to share their aspiration for an economic system where there would be "no exchange of money" within Auroville; where services, largely staffed by Aurovilians, would provide the basic needs of all; and where trust, love and sharing among Aurovilians and the loss of the sense of personal possession would be encouraged. It was also felt that economic decision making should be decentralized, that work should be de-linked from income and that the maintenance system should be eliminated.

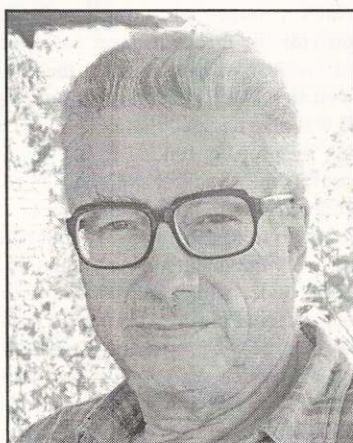
To see if any of these ideals could be realized, the circle experiment was born. The 100 Aurovilians were divided at random into four groups, called circles. At present, more than 300 people, belonging to nine circles, participate in the experiment.

### Challenges

The biggest immediate challenge that the circles confronted was the fact that many Aurovilians living on a community maintenance were actually under-maintained: they could not

make ends meet. To deal with this challenge each circle created its own common pot. The income of each member is put in that common pot, and each member draws from the pot whatever s/he deems necessary. Members are not held strictly responsible to use only "their" income. Thus Aurovilians who had been under-maintained are now taken care of a bit better. On the other hand, participants with sufficient personal resources in the circle not only cover their monthly expenditures, but also contribute additional funds to the common pot to help cover the shortfall. In this way one of the purposes of the experiment was manifested, namely promoting an atmosphere of knowing, trusting and being concerned with each other's welfare. The common pots of the nine circles together are considered as one pot, which means that a surplus in one circle pot would compensate for a deficit from another circle pot. A contribution of Rs 100,000 a month from Maroma, a commercial unit of Auroville, serves as an additional buffer to cover deficits.

After one year, we find the circles developing an inner cohesion based



Don: helping to supervise the circle experiment

on love and trust and holding the promise for future initiatives. Evaluating the experiment at this point in time, positive developments as well as difficulties have been observed.

On the up-side the circle participants have started to become aware of their individual and collective role in the movement to change Auroville's economy. Within the circles, a new experiment is now taking

shape called pre-monthly budgeting. Each individual will be requested to estimate his or her monthly needs. These individual budgets will then be pooled and form the circle budget. By pre-monthly budgeting, it is hoped that each participant, while considering his or her own expenditures, would become more conscious of basic needs in the context of living in Auroville. Furthermore, pre-monthly budgeting would allow the participants to respond to the funds available as well as the economic condition of the entire community. Ultimately, it is hoped that through the experiment of a collective budget, the individual maintenance would simply cease to exist.

On the down-side, two important lessons are being learned. About 80% of those participating in the circles are those who live on a community maintenance and are largely under-maintained. The pooling of individual maintenances has been insufficient to provide the basic needs of all circle participants, notwithstanding the fact that some circle participants with personal resources contribute more than just their own expenses. The support

given by Maroma has proven essential for the experiment to be successful. Obviously, a more broad-based and permanent resource is necessary.

### New service units

Another fundamental aim of the experiment has been to stimulate the community to improve and create new service units. Although this goal remains largely unfulfilled, a little progress has been made: an improved Nandini for clothes, Solar Kitchen tiffin dinners, a purchasing service, and a job service have been organised. And it is hoped that steps will soon be taken for a construction supply depot, an improved house-repair service, and there is even talk about developing a shuttle service around Auroville, perhaps using non-fossil fuel vehicles. But let there be no mistake, there is much yet to be done in the way of developing the Services.

For the circles to continue to progress there is an underlying prerequisite that everyone who participates remain alert, aware, flexible and involved. This is not a system to lean on, but a field for experimentation and constant creation.



# Theatre on the move

Playing for a new audience is a challenge for any performer. This year, Paul and Wazo have loaded up a bullock cart with props and set out to try their dramatic luck in the villages surrounding Auroville.

The idea for creating the piece (referred to as the "Vandi Theater", after the vehicle which transports the show), came about one and a half year ago, at around the same time that Paul and Wazo began regularly staging (for Aurovilians) their popular, improvisational act, the Academic Genius Brothers. At that time, the only thing that was clear was the desire to one day be able to perform for local Tamil people as well. "When the project got under way," explains Paul, "we simply came up with a framework for what was the easiest for us to do." Since Wazo does not speak Tamil, they created for him the character of Bapoune, a haplessly lost and culturally clueless velakaran [white man, foreigner] who avails himself of the assistance of Muthu, a Tamil tea shop owner who rescues him and offers him employment. The idea for Muthu, played by Paul, came from his own experience some years ago in Auroville, when he himself ran a mobile tea shop.

The two then sought the participation of long-time friend, Rajappan, a shadow-puppet theater performer. Paul and Wazo felt that as a practitioner of traditional Tamil village drama, Rajappan would add a kind of credibility to their efforts to hold village

audiences. So, while continuing to work with some traditional puppet characters, Rajappan also decided to include puppets which represent Bapoune and Muthu.

The show, which has taken on shape and length over the course of the five performances held to date, alternates between shadow-screen scenes and live acting by Paul and Wazo. All of the acting is supported by simple, yet well-crafted props made by Emma. Using aspects of classic slapstick comedy, the story line begins as Muthu instructs Bapoune in the ways of local life, including laying bricks, wearing a lungi, and shopping in Pondicherry. The narrative builds as Muthu arranges a marriage between his sister and the unsuspecting Bapoune.

Uncertain as to whether villagers would "get" the show, Paul and Wazo solicited feedback from Tamil Aurovilians. While many were supportive of the idea of such an endeavour, some seemed nervous when they realized that production was actually going to go forward. In remembering his initial apprehensions, Paul relates, "At first it felt like we were on the edge, because no one had ever done this before. I didn't even really realize who our audience would be." Now it is clear that the primary audience is

children. Says Paul, "The little kids love it. They get totally involved, and laugh from start to finish."

Through the experience of successive productions, the two actors have learned something about the cultural relativity of humour. They have found that when Europeans watch the show, they are more engaged in analyzing the parodies, and less moved by the slapstick. In addition, Paul and Wazo have discovered what moments "work" by carrying a kind of force which heightens communication with Tamil people. "When I dress Wazo for the marriage scene," relates Paul, "it's when I finally place the tundu [scarf, towel] on him that everyone roars. It's like suddenly that act creates the classic image of a man getting married."

In introducing the show, Paul and Wazo take care to present themselves as individuals, and not as Aurovilians promoting Auroville. Indeed, they envision that future audiences might include villages in outlying areas where people have little contact with the community. Whereas it is good that the show is not being used as any kind of a propaganda vehicle for Auroville-village relations, this does not eliminate a series of other interesting problems which the show raises. Using stereotypes as the basis for humour can be tricky: it can serve to

affirm the confining, narrow perceptions which people have about those others. This is true not only for stereotypes about cultural or racial difference, but gender as well. From the perspective of one Indian woman social worker, for example, the show unwittingly presents Tamil village women in a one-dimensional way. Muthu's sister, in her repeated clamoring for a husband, suggests that women's lives in the villages are wholly oriented around their relations with men, and that obtaining the status of "wife" is the only valid aspiration for a girl.

These complexities, however, are in part what make this effort so compelling for thinking about the relationship between Westerners and the local Tamil populations. The fact that communication, via the powerful medium of theater, is being attempted at all is encouraging. Moreover, in addition to its unquestionable entertainment value, the production serves as a reminder of the importance of the Tamil language for establishing a richer dialogue with the inhabitants in this region. Paul and Wazo should be commended. And as the show will continue playing for some time, Aurovilians shouldn't miss the chance to catch some of the fun.

Shanti

## BOOK REVIEW

# The Gita of waste

Generally speaking, there is not much to commend about waste management in India. For there seems to be very little understanding amongst the public about the issue, and waste management, especially in urban areas, is abominably poor. India produces 0.5 kgs of waste per person per day. Of the total waste, less than 20% is collected by ragpickers, about 65% is collected by the municipality, and the rest is just left lying on the roadside. Given this pathetic state of affairs, it is a pleasure to recommend to the young and old alike, *The Gita of Waste*, a book recently published by the Auroville Health Centre on the issues of waste and waste management.

Creatively designed by a team of Aurovilians and Auroville-friendly NGOs, the book, as its title suggests, has as its central character Krishna who befriends twelve year old Gopi and Indu and educates them about various aspects of waste. "The three R's of waste management," instructs Krishna early on in the book, "are Reduce, Re-use and Recycle." Subsequent chapters take up these and other issues like: the generation, collection, processing and final disposal of urban waste, the different kinds of potentially harmful material that are commonly used and disposed in urban households, and the danger of pollution by unsorted and hazardous waste that is not properly disposed. Particularly informative is the chapter on plastic that

classifies different kinds of plastics and discusses the many uses as well as the drawbacks of plastics. As the book tells us, with India producing "60,000 tonnes of plastic carry bags per year enough to fill almost 1,000 truckloads per month," we may well be living in the 'Plastic Age'.

One of the salient features of the book is that it does not merely identify the problems but also offers practical solutions for effective waste management. Hopping in and out of the main chapters is another character, the crow Narada, who gives the reader more detailed information and playfully encourages young readers to sort their waste, to recycle materials, to make vermicompost and handmade paper. For instance, in the fifth chapter, after Krishna has introduced the children to the concept of handmade paper, the succeeding section, "Play with Narada" informs us that "using recycled paper instead of 'virgin material' decreases: energy use by 23 to 74 percent; air pollution by 74 percent; water use by 58 percent; and water pollution by 35 percent."

Though it provides many such nuggets of pertinent information, the authors did not intend the book to be a comprehensive treatise on the subject of waste management. Their central aim was to get urban children interested in the issue of waste management.

As the preface tells us, "If coming generations are to deal more intelligently, more considerately and ethically more responsibly with these issues, education of the general public and schoolchildren ought to form an essential part of the solution....If awareness and interest can be generated and sustained, the student will find ways to go more deeply into the subject." Consequently, solutions for waste management are directed at young individuals and not adults or communities.

Any review of *The Gita of Waste* would be incomplete without mentioning the delightful drawings of the Aurovilian artist Emanuele. Already well-known for his animal cartoons in the *Shikra* journal, Emanuele enlivens this book by illustrating each of its seventy-seven pages with imaginative drawings. Especially endearing is his rendering of Narada the crow who with his "I love Waste" T-shirt becomes a leit-motif for the whole book. Last but not least, *The Gita of Waste* is printed on recycled paper and explicitly states that it does not have a copyright on the material.

Bindu

## THE GITA OF WASTE

Published by the Auroville Health Centre, Auroville, with a grant given by SPF/GTZ, New Delhi, India.

Limited copies: Private distribution only. For more information e-mail lucas@auroville.org.in

## OBITUARY

# A tribute to Sylvie



Dr. Sylvie Rousseau passed away at the young age of 47 after a heroic battle with cancer. Sylvie had come to Auroville around 1987 and was a talented colleague, dedicated Aurovilian and a trusted friend to all those at the Centre for Scientific Research with whom she worked. She had a doctorate in sciences and had worked in a reputed research team in Paris on designing criteria for choosing reference climatic data for thermal design of solar and building systems. She guided a research thesis on the subject for a visiting student from AIT, Bangkok, with the consequence that now we have properly-designed radiation statistics for Auroville. Her crowning achievement came with the thermal design of the solar bowl of the Solar Kitchen and the associated heat-transfer equipment. She worked till the end, in spite of a painful and crippling battle with her advancing cancer, and presented a paper at the International Solar Energy Congress held at Jerusalem in 1999.

Mother beckoned us to be Her hero warriors and surely Sylvie has joined the immortal legion of our Commander to bring a step closer the realisation of Auroville's destiny.

Chamanlal Gupta  
Tency

# Short news

## City in the Making

Meenakshi of Illaigarkal and Varadharajan of Arul Vazhi hosted a series of workshops to share the Tamil culture with the Aurovilians and the Mother's Vision of the City with the villagers.

## Wall Murals

Well-known Parisian painter, Jerome Mesnager, has brightened many bare, brick walls in Auroville with his delightful brush-stroke, monocolour murals. Mesnager, who was briefly visiting, Auroville also offered a workshop for Auroville artists to create a wall mural together on the subject of the Galaxy Town Plan.

## Salon De Musique

Eugeen, a composer and conductor from Amsterdam, who is currently staying at Auroville as a guest of the Auroville Choir, is taking the amateur musicians and music lovers of Auroville to new heights by offering a series of classes on singing, composition and history of music.

## Salle Auropax

Salle Auropax, the name of a small studio in Aurmodelle where Heinrich and Shanta regularly host concerts of classical western music, was the scene last month of piano recitals and performances of chamber music.

## A taste of India

Aurovilians had a taste of Indian culture from other states when visiting artistes gave performances of the Chhau, the marital dance form of Orissa; Kalaripayat, the marital art from Kerala; and percussion improvisations inspired by Koodiyatham, a traditional theatre form from Kerala.

Even more singular was the rendering of devotional songs by the Baul sect of Bengal. This mystic sect of the Bhakti (devotional) tradition of Yoga, dates from about the 15th century AD. They live outside the pale of the society and wander from place to place singing devotional songs to the accompaniment of the ektara, a one-stringed drone instrument, and dugu, a small drum hung from the shoulder.

## Contact-Improvisation

Jutta, a professional dancer from Germany, gave workshops and a performance on a modern form of dance called Contact-Improvisation. As the name suggests, this form of dance is not based on choreography but is improvised on the spot according to the music played and the contact with other dancers. Accompanying Jutta on the piano was Auroville pianist, Pushkar. Aurovilians were delighted at being exposed to this new form of dance.

## Savitri Studies

Dr. M. V. Nadkarni, a "town-crier for Savitri" offered a study camp on Book Ten of *Savitri* with the concluding session of the camp being held at Savitri Bhavan.

## Passages

Aurovilian Manfred Mande, who has been working for the Bommaiur workshop designing beautiful and original wooden toys, passed away on Friday March 23rd in the Auroville Health Center after a period of suffering from a brain tumor. His body was buried in the burial ground near Adventure.





# Living on Light

Jasmuheen is a 44 year-old Australian lady who stopped eating in 1993. Since then, as she describes it, she has been "living on light" or cosmic energy, a practice she claims is now followed by some 10,000 people worldwide. Recently she visited Auroville to talk about her planetary work and provide guidance for those who wish to follow her method.

Jasmuheen is energetic, vivacious, beautiful — something of a shock to those who imagined that someone who hadn't eaten for 8 years would look emaciated and prematurely aged. During her brief stay in Auroville she gave an introductory talk on her work, and led a two-day workshop for those who wanted to learn more about the rationale and process of "living on light". This, as she describes it, "is not about fasting, it is about allowing, trusting, clicking into an energy pattern of knowing that our true sustenance is provided by cosmic light". Pointing out that "the only thing we are truly limited by is our beliefs", she talks about the need to rewrite the computer programme which is our thoughts. "When reprogrammed, the body will absorb the pranic forces directly and sustain and nourish us completely once we eliminate all other belief systems to the contrary." However, the 21-day process of fasting, which she recommends as the means to such reprogramming, is much more than an exercise in mind-control. It is "a high-level esoteric initiation" which "allows the higher self to take full residence in this (physical) vehicle".

Both the talk and the workshop were well attended, and a number of Aurovilians seem interested in follow-

ing the process. Reasons range from the practical — "Just think of all the time I can free up if I don't have to bother about eating" — to the spiritual. Noting that Mother had referred to the need for the body to discover alternative means of nourishment as a step towards transformation, one Aurovillian remarked, "I definitely see this as part of my sadhana".

However, some Aurovilians have reservations. They note that neither Sri Aurobindo nor Mother put great emphasis upon this particular *siddhi* which, after all, is well known and documented in Indian spiritual traditions. Interestingly, when Mother referred, in a conversation with Satprem in 1965, to having gone without food and water for ten days, she suppressed this reference when it came to publishing the talk in the Bulletin. Presumably she feared that Ashramites would embark upon a similar practice without preparation or knowledge, something which could lead to tragedy. Bhaga summed up her reservations as follows: "If 'living on light' can be achieved in such a relatively easy and quick manner (just follow the 'recipe' as Jasmuheen calls it), how come Sri Aurobindo and Mother didn't use that recipe, or any other existing system? The answer is simple: the kind of transformation

they wanted to open the possibility to was not to depend on any recipe...What we need is not to imprison the body-consciousness in yet another programme, however wonderful it may seem compared to its present downright crippling 'normal' conditioning. What we need is the total freedom of a body fully conscious of its own divinity."

Annemarie had another view. "During the workshop Jasmuheen made us do some guided meditations, visualizing light coming down into us in various hues, reinforcing various qualities, such as light, love and power. I think it was then that I began to experience a sense of an expansion of bodily awareness and to really believe that one can gradually learn to experience the *prana* in and around the body and allow it to be nourished and strengthened by it. This belief, coupled to Jasmuheen's example showing that it is true that one can ask and be given, gave me a big push! A push that meant much more to me than just the belief that one can live without eating. It was a push on all levels: a renewed faith (did I ever really have faith before?) that one is capable of living more and more in and through the spiritual Force that is everywhere around us."

Alan

## MATRIMANDIR

# Sunrise on the Crystal

April 4th is a very special day for those connected to the yoga. On this day in 1910, Sri Aurobindo came to Pondicherry. It also is the only day when, in the early morning, the sun hits the crystal in the Inner Chamber directly from the east.

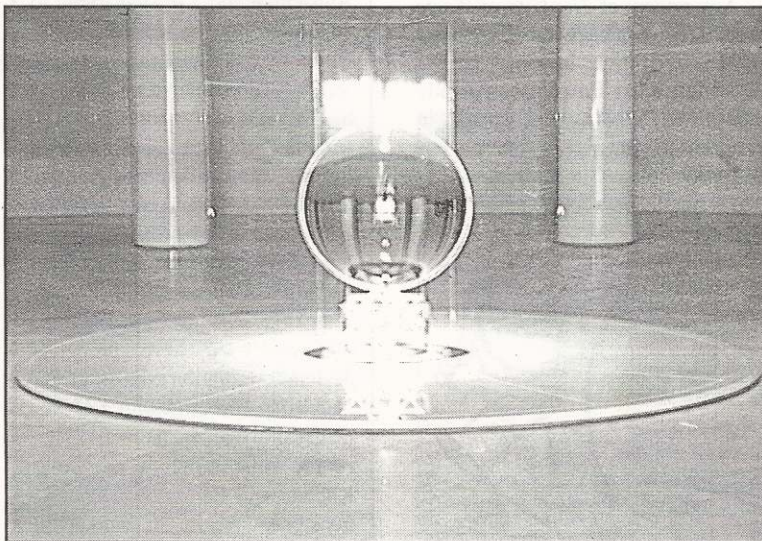
This is not coincidental. When Roger Anger was working on the lay-out of the Matrimandir Gardens, two factors were known: the position of the Amphitheater and the Banyan tree. The Matrimandir was supposed to form the third leg of a triangle. Then the idea was born to let the beam of the rising sun strike the centre of the Inner Chamber on a certain day. But on which day? Auspicious dates were proposed, like the 21st and 28th of February (Mother's and Auroville's birthday), March 29th (the day Mother came for the first time to Pondicherry), April 4th (Sri Aurobindo's arrival in Pondicherry), or April 24th (the day Mother arrived in Pondicherry). Mother chose April 4th. Then students from the Ashram school were asked to calculate the orientation for Matrimandir which would ensure that the sun struck the centre on that date.

Once the golden discs are in place, one will be fixed in such a way that in the early morning of April 4th, it can be removed to let the sunlight pass through the east entrance door to illuminate the Crystal.

The present axis of the building is 5 degrees west of the original North-South axis. Mona Doctor-Pingel, an Auroville architect, wrote her architectural thesis on the form, structure and energy of the Great Pyramid and Matrimandir. In her thesis she writes that experiments with a biometer

have shown that by shifting the axis of any form by 5 degrees east or west of the magnetic north (depending upon the time of the year when it is oriented), its energy is increased many times.

Tineke



The sun illuminating the Matrimandir crystal through the open doors from the east (archive photo by Laxminarayan)

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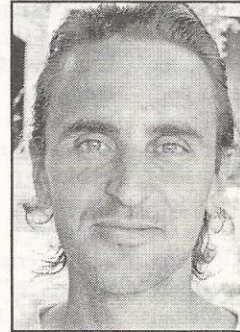
# A sacred initiation

Seven months ago Jem Friar did the 21-day fast as an initiation. Since then, except on two brief occasions, he has not eaten. Yet, on a recent visit to Auroville, he looked fit and clear. What lies behind this phenomenon?

**Auroville Today: How did you prepare for living on light?**

Spiritually, I hadn't been following any particular path. Although I had learned different types of yoga and meditation, my practice was sporadic. Some people I know had no spiritual preparation at all: they just plunged in from a mainstream lifestyle. Of course, it's impossible to know how far people's past lives have prepared them for this step...

Physically, I followed a colonic cleansing diet for one month before the 21-day process. This made the process much easier because there wasn't so much toxic release to deal with.



Jem Friar

**Was the process itself difficult?**

I stopped all my usual activities during the 21 days and stayed on my own in a friend's flat in Portugal so that I could remain concentrated upon the work. The first seven days you don't eat or drink. Around the fourth day — which is sometimes a crisis point in the process — I felt flat, empty, but when I came through this for the rest of the time I felt comfortable. The key is in understanding that it's a process of surrendering to the divine, that it's a sacred initiation and not a new way of losing weight. If you try to do it with your will alone, or for the wrong reasons, you either don't make it or you completely miss out on the profound internal shifts that can take place.

**What shifts took place for you?**

One of the fundamental rules I grew up with was that you have to eat to live. Now I know that's not true, and it's made me start questioning some of the other 'fundamental truths'. Suddenly, anything seems possible, and the mystery and magic have returned to life.

Another thing is that now I don't have to worry about food I wake up feeling I already have everything I need. So I have more time to attend to the needs of others. Above all, I've become very aware of how I am sustained by the divine.

**Many people return to eating after the 21-day process. Why?**

I think the most important factor is social pressure. I experienced this just after the three week fast. I'd returned to my work at a diet and cleansing clinic and the director was so inspired by what I was doing that he told

the guests. Suddenly I was getting a lot of subtle pressure from these people to start eating again, partly because people didn't want their belief systems challenged, partly because I was pretty thin and they were afraid I was anorexic. This experience taught me not to publicize what I'm doing.

A few weeks later I was with friends who put a lot of energy into food. I felt alienated, miserable because I excluded myself at mealtimes. Also, I was worried that I wouldn't be able to replace the weight I had lost during the

21-day process. So I ate lightly again for four days. I put on 8 kilos, but physically I didn't feel well, and I lost my sensitivity and clarity of mind. Now I've learned a few tricks that allow me to be around food but not eat. For example, at buffets I fill my plate, then spend the evening just moving the food around. Nobody notices!

I thought the biggest challenge would be telling my parents what I was doing. In fact, my mother understood so well that she didn't eat for three days after I explained it to her, and now she only takes soups!

**Do you think you will eat again?**

The point is not whether I eat again or not, but knowing that I don't have to. Recently Jasmuheen asked me if I had reached the "point of trust", at which you are absolutely clear that you don't need to eat. I realized that I had reached it about a month ago. It's very important to reach this point because then you have the freedom to choose whether you wish to eat or not. Otherwise you can just as easily become addicted to not eating as to eating...

**Do you feel that the widespread interest in 'living on light' is evidence of a new force at work in the world?**

Very much so. I think everything is speeding up, making it possible for individuals to make huge shifts in their lives. Even the 21-day process is getting easier for people now: at the beginning many people who followed it found it very difficult.

One way of looking at the 'living on light' phenomenon is to see it as part of a divine plan to show people that if you can let go of old belief systems and really trust in the divine, then anything is possible.

From an interview by Alan