

# AUROVILLE TODAY

October 1989

Number Ten

Auroville Today - CSR Office - Auroshilpam - Auroville - Kottakuppam 605104 - Tamil Nadu - India

Auroville, like the universe, is expanding fast! As we prepare each issue of *Auroville Today*, we are often aware that for each article we publish, there are many more jostling at our elbows, waiting impatiently to be written. Consequently, in this single sheet issue, we give a taste of some of the new ventures springing up in and around the community. Some, no doubt, will be like meteors, displaying a brief, brilliant trail before falling to earth. Others may release their riches slowly, like giant palmyras flowering luxuriantly after 50 years. In later issues, we'll provide more details about some of these voyages into the unknown.

As for what *isn't* new... Well, we're still awaiting the touch-down of the Auroville Foundation. And that precious precipitation, rain, continues to play hide-and-seek with us, drip-feeding our hopes while our wells dry up. Perhaps we could all concentrate on visualising heavy rains in Auroville during the next few months. Even dreams need watering!

## A Pony-Tale

**Question: What has 36 legs, comes in different shapes and colours and gives a lot of pleasure? Answer: The Auroville Pony Farm.**

Tucked away in a corner of Kottakarai and managed by Achilles and Gaya, the Auroville pony farm is another example of an Auroville enterprise that 'just happened'.

"Nothing was planned", explains Achilles. "We had wanted to ride, so we adopted the pony from Anusuya community. Then Aurovilians going to the West for the summer were looking for a place to keep their ponies while they were away. We got the next two like that. The rest just came!"

There are nine of them now, with names like Magique, Furry, Santan, Parvati and Rih (Arabic for 'wind'), tethered quietly in the shade of casuarina trees. "They're beautiful", says Gaya, "just like children. Each has its own personality and the children have to learn how to handle each one differently. It's really an education for them — and for us!"

The idea of an Auroville pony centre and riding school is not new. For many years the need for a place where Auroville ponies could be well looked-after and controlled (ponies and flower gardens don't mix!) has been obvious. But until now it has not materialized. How does this one operate? "It's very free", says Achilles. "In principle, the children can come at any time — except during the hottest hours of the day — and take a pony for a ride. For beginners, I give riding lessons in the afternoon. The children also learn how to cut and clean hooves, grooming, feeding and general maintenance. About 20 children

are coming for lessons at the moment — and they're very enthusiastic! For the future, we'd like to build a few huts here where children can stay overnight. Then we can do something special, like going out riding on full moon nights."

And financially? "That's the problem. We hadn't planned for this, so when the ponies started coming, we had no pony-shed, nothing. Suddenly, all our money was going on construction and pony food. The kids were great. They went baby-sitting to help pay for the ponies' upkeep, but what they brought in was very small compared to what we need. Now the situation is desperate.. If we don't get help by the end of September, we'll have to stop the experiment. Basically, there are only two possibilities. One is to charge the children for riding. But if we do this, some of them will stop coming. Also, this experiment is a collective thing. It has a social function because the children have to learn how to deal with each other — to agree, for example, who will ride which pony, when the ponies 'belong' to none of them personally. So as many children as possible should be able to participate. The other possibility is to get assistance from inside or outside Auroville." And the children? Do they enjoy riding? "Yes." Do they want the pony farm to continue? "YES!"

Let's hope this brave new venture will succeed.

Alan

For more information, write to Achilles & Gaya, 'Realisation', Kottakarai, Auroville 605101, T.N. India.



Achilles giving riding lesson — Photo Jan v.d. D.

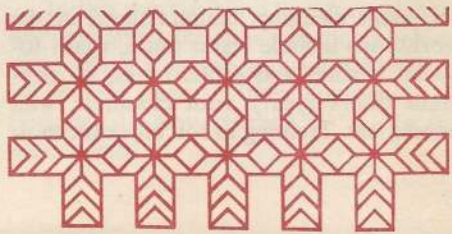
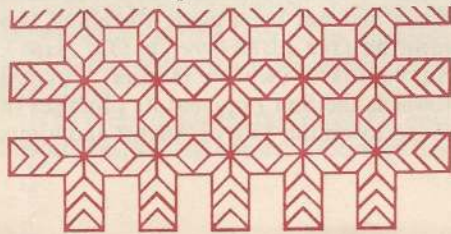
## THE AUROVILLE GREENWORK RESOURCE CENTRE

The Auroville Greenwork Resource Centre (A.G.R.C.), which is in the process of being built at Isai Ambalam, was largely funded by the "Threshold Foundation" in America, and partly by the District Rural Development Agency in Pondicherry. It is a relatively low-tech building, made with simple materials: stabilized pressed mudbricks and a ferrocement channel roof. It houses an office, a large classroom area, two dormitory type rooms for trainees, and a library which will have not only written information but also samples of each kind of wood that grows in the area. People will be able to actually see, touch and smell the wood, they can look at it and touch it. There will also be samples of different seeds. A

store-room for seed collection programmes has already been built. From her seeds can be disseminated to different agencies, non-governmental organizations and forest departments. A small nursery has been set up, to promote an evolving learning relationship with the villagers.

The centre will be used jointly by the Auroville Forest group and *Village Action* for training programmes in afforestation, social forestry, agro-forestry, agriculture and other related 'green' fields, and for training in handicrafts, trade, health care and birth control. The target groups are tribals, non-governmental organizations, people who actually work with the land and village women.

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item last tuesday ufo's sighted over auroville stop item solar pumps stop item batteries for compost stop item mirramukhi and suryamukhi stop...

### The ABC of Auroville

**A**BC stands for Auroville Board of Commerce, a group of people representing the commercial units of or relatable to Auroville. Apart from its activity under the Revolving Fund, it serves to recommend the creation of new commercial enterprises to the relevant authorities. It serves too as a consultant to those who wish to set up new commercial activities in Auroville, advising on legal, financial and fiscal issues.

In the future, it is envisaged that the ABC will need a secretariat and a professional staff. The ABC is a first step towards an integrated view of Auroville business.

### Solar pumps

**T**he sun is nowadays not only making a lot of water evaporate, it's actually starting to help us pump it! The Tamil Nadu Energy Development Agency (TEDA) has sold Auroville 8 pump sets, each consisting of twelve 30W photovoltaic (pv) panels, and a DC pump. These sets have been given (with a large subsidy) for agricultural purposes. The pumps unfortunately do not have a wide application at present, as the maximum depth from which water can be pumped is only 5 metres.

### Auroville International Sweden

**A**uroville International Sweden will organize an exhibition on Auroville in the city of Linköping. The exhibition will present information on Matrimandir and Auroville afforestation projects, and will also introduce the work of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. For more information write to Auroville International Sweden (address elsewhere in this issue) or to Stefan Kleiner, Arbetaregatan 11, S-582 52 Linköping.

### Auroville Building Centre

**T**he Auroville Building Centre (AV-BC) has started recently as a new unit under the Centre for Scientific Research (C.S.R.). It will be a training centre for masons, architects, engineers and other construction technicians and will take up some of the expanded activities of the C.S.R. Biogas unit. This training centre will be part of a national network of more than 100 "Building Centres", established all over the country. It started with grants from governmental organisations in England and India. Additional workshops for prefabrication of ferrocement elements are now under construction and the existing workshop and offices are getting a second floor to provide more office space, a conference-cum video room, a technical library and a computer room. Additional equipment (including a van) has been bought, and money to give stipends to the trainees has been provided.

The objectives of the Auroville Building Centre are to provide assistance and training to potential builders (Aurovilians and villagers), to design buildings and promote alternative energy applications, such as biogas plants and windmills, photovoltaic panels, solar cookers and solar water heaters. The prefabricated ferrocement elements manufactured in the workshops include water tanks, ready-to-install latrines and septic tanks, ferrocement doors (yes!), roof channels, wall panels, etc. Training in soil block technol-

ogy will be provided by Serge, an architect who has just joined Auroville and who has been trained in mud architecture by the well known French organization CRATerre. The training in mud-construction and the manufacturing of soil blocks will take place on the construction site of the new visitors information & reception centre, about which there is more information elsewhere in this issue.

### A Guide for Guests of Auroville.

**A** new "Guide for Guests" was published recently. Inside its rather funereal front cover, there is a map of Auroville, information about communities and services, good practical advice ("a torchlight is very useful"), contact addresses, and an introduction to the deeper dimension of Auroville through some of Mother's quotations and the Charter. One word of warning. Don't try to reach the 'Anusuya' community using the map. You are likely to end up in the middle of a wilderness of cashew fields!

(The Guide is available from the Boutique d'Auroville, the Auroville Information centres, Auroville International Centres abroad, or by post from The Secretariat, Bharat Nivas. Price: one rupee, plus postage.)

### Batteries for compost

**O**ne of the little surprises of buying compost from the village is to discover that, along with the organic matter, you are the lucky owner of plastic containers, broken bottles, mutilated slippers—and about 20 assorted, used-up batteries from radios and torches. Aurovilians have been equally careless—for years we've simply tossed our exhausted batteries in waste-bins or pits, forgetting that batteries contain highly toxic substances which can leak out and pollute our ground water (the 'button' cells which power watches and calculators are particularly toxic.) But now the light has dawned, and 'Abri' workshop is inviting all Aurovilians and villagers to bring their old batteries and drop them in their special container. Meanwhile Toshiba, one of the major battery manufacturers in India, has agreed to take back their old batteries, and even pay the freight to their plant in Kerala. Ever-ready and Nippo are being contacted in an effort to make the same arrangement. As for those button cells—we'll probably encase them in a block of concrete, unless any of our readers have better ideas.

At the same time, after a successful and profitable experiment in Forecom rs, there is a pilot project to place waste-disposal containers in other communities. Each of the selected communities will separate out their recyclable waste—paper, plastic, metal, whole glass, broken glass—and put it in one of the five containers provided. The waste will then be transported to a recycling yard in Pondicherry. Sounds simple, doesn't it? I'll bring you a progress report after receiving my next load of village compost...

### Mirramukhi and Suryamukhi

Two new educational experiments have started recently. Mirramukhi is located in Dana and has been going for about two months (see elsewhere in this issue). Suryamukhi (which means 'Turned towards the Sun') opened its premises in Sincerity on the 15th of August and wants

to experiment with new educational materials and activities for children of all ages.

### West meets East

New Creation School has entered the Computer Age! A complete computer setup arrived here in June thanks to Aurelec and the efforts of André (who coordinates New Creation) to construct an appropriate workspace: the New Creation Computer Workshop. Since then, the school's group leaders have been undergoing training in computer usage including three types of programmes: word-processing, financial worksheet, and BASIC programming. In addition, as an experi-

ment, two Group Six students (age 11) were chosen to begin training, one on the basis of his capacity for learning and the other due to his capacity for trouble-making! Both demonstrate great enthusiasm and aptitude on the computer. Hence as different group leaders complete their training on a particular programme, increasing numbers of New Creation School youth will appease their fascination with video, in a productive way. The wizardry of the Western mind meets the spontaneity of the village youth...

*Editorial note: New Creation School was started by André Tardeil in 1984, and teaches village children up to the age of 12. It has a boarding facility for about 25 children, and a creche.*

### News about the 'Spirit of Auroville'

**T**he book entitled 'The Spirit of Auroville' which attempts to present chronologically the evolution of Auroville in terms of some background references from Sri Aurobindo, and as many of the messages and conversations of Mother relevant to Auroville as possible, is in the stages of fine tuning before publication and will take some more time. One could say: 'It has taken so many years to put together, what's a few more months?'

The book is now in the hands of the newly formed Publications Group. This is not necessarily bad because they are sympathetic to the strain on the patience of the editors and those of you who have already paid for the book.

The offer of a pre-publication subscription is still open and as the first edition will be only 2000 copies, this is a good opportunity to order the book now. Please make your cheque payable to Auroville Trust (not Auroville Today). Cheques of all types including personal cheques are acceptable. The pre-publication cost is in India Rs. 100, and in other currencies US\$ 10, DM 20, £ 6, FF 60. This includes surface postage. Please send your address with your order to Auroville Trust, Bharat Nivas, Auroville 605202, India.

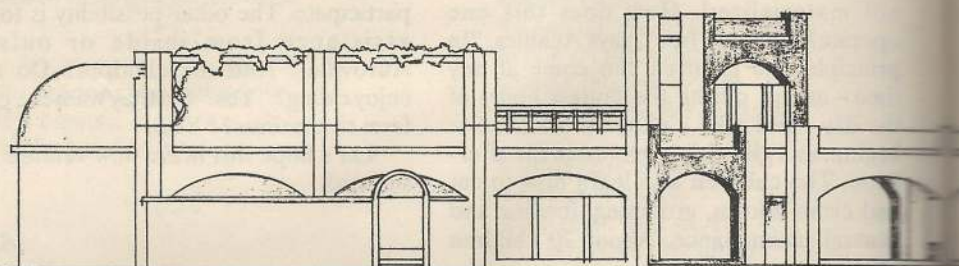
### Two omissions

- Meenakshi and Mr. Usman provided valuable background information for the article on village fire-walking in our last issue. Our belated thanks!
- Also in our last issue, Yanne's name was omitted under the article on Yuri Lepsky, the Russian journalist. At the bottom of the first column of this article, a few lines are missing. The passage should read as follows: He remarks that "Russians learn already in kindergarten to offer their life to the home country and so the personality gets suppressed". He describes Matrimandir as a place where one can meditate and find oneself...

*The editors*

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

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# Mirramukhi

LEARNING SHOULD BE A JOY!

It was one of those pleasant little discoveries. You leave your habitual tracks to find out what's behind a new word, a new name and "yet another experiment in education". When you go away, after a look and a talk, you find the world looks a little brighter.

"Mirramukhi" (meaning "Turned towards Matter") is found in Dana, a little apart from most of the houses. The building is brand new and looks very fresh and light, with one large room downstairs and another one with terrace upstairs. When I enter, a French children's song is playing upstairs. I find 3 or 4 children there, painting and creating with paper maché. Downstairs, Auri (nine) is quietly sitting in a corner with Pascal supervising her concentrated work on maths. Eight-year old Kumar is in another corner, doing something with sugar and milk powder. Sharan, one of the five adults who are present full-time, explains: "He is making *kulfi*" (a frozen sweetmeat which is very popular in Tamil Nadu). The recipe was written on a blackboard: milk powder: 10 gms; sugar: 10 gms., etc. While looking around I had already noticed among the bright-coloured children's paintings on the wall a daily schedule detailing who would clean the premises. "All the children are assigned a

task in keeping the place clean", I am told by Marianne, who had the inspiration to start the Mirramukhi school. "What we value most here is doing things together in harmony, and at the same time learning how to respect each other's space.. We have no *amma* to keep the place clean. We do it all ourselves." The children (at present there are nine, aged between 6 and 11) come at 8.30 in the morning and stay till 2.30. "Once a week we all, adults and children sit together and share experiences, on the basis of which we can proceed into the next week. There is no fixed syllabus; each child is free to choose what it wants to learn. At present there is one adult available for every two children, and this enables us to be fully there for them. 'Suggest, but do not impose', said Sri Aurobindo, and this is what we will try. Whenever the child is ready to learn something, we should respond to that by providing it with the means."

Mirramukhi aims at developing mental as well as artistic capacities. But it includes the development of the intuition, of the five senses and of the body as well. "And through complete integration of life activities at school, we wish to help the child to become aware of his actions."

Annemarie

## Inauguration of Pondicherry Airport

2nd September, 1989

In 1982 a site was selected at Kalapet near the border of Pondicherry and Tamil Nadu state for the construction of an aerodrome. The foundation stone was laid in May '82 by the Minister of Civil Aviation and Tourism. The construction of an aerodrome at this site was not taken up however, giving due acknowledgement to the objections raised by the famous ornithologist, the late Salem Ali, and a few other citizens about the close proximity of the site to the bird sanctuary. It was therefore necessary to shift the airfield to another suitable site.

The present site, which is also controversial, is situated at Karyuvadikuppamat, on the outskirts of Pondicherry, close to Auroville land. The National Airport Authorities took up the development of the aerodrome on approximately 114 acres of land. The construction work was started on the 6th of February, 1989, and cost about 130 lakhs.

The airport complex is equipped to provide all facilities for passenger comfort and safety of aircraft. It is being constructed to cater for 50 seater aircraft, but

for the time being it caters for only 19 seater aircraft. However, the expansion of the airport for bigger aircraft will be taken up later on.

The runway completed at present has a length of 3,500 metres and a width of 100 metres. The terminal building and control tower are temporarily housed in semi-permanent structures to expedite the commissioning of the aerodrome.

The private company Vayudoot Ltd. runs the daily flights, morning and evening, from Madras to Pondicherry and Neyveli. The morning flight leaves Madras at 6.00 a.m., reaches Pondicherry at 6.30, and arrives in Neyveli at 7.10. A ticket costs approximately Rs. 235.

Pondicherry airport has hardly opened its runway, yet a number of projects are already underway, which will considerably change the development of the Pondicherry-Auroville region: a pilot school, an aviation club, an air-taxi service. Of course it makes one daydream, and the progress is not to be stopped, though the Forecomers site, protected by environmentalists, and other Auroville land is only 2 kms away from the runway; something which is likely to cause some inconvenience.

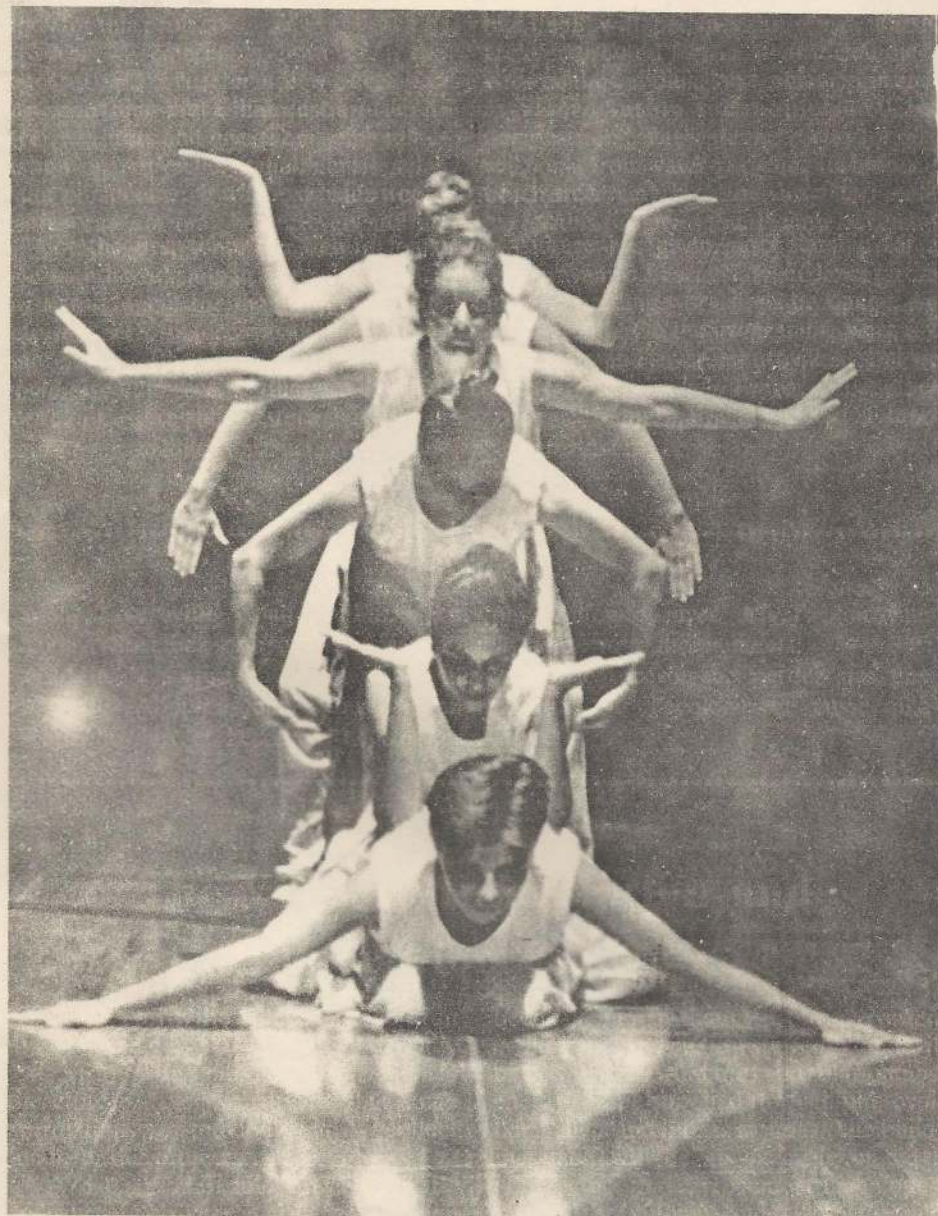


Photo Jan v.d. D.

## Dance-dance-dance

For the first time, the Centre for Indian Culture has given a scholarship for a one-month workshop in Auroville. Shangita Namasivayam, a Bharat Natyam dancer from Sri Lanka, spent the month of August teaching and holding workshops on dance. An informal performance was the highlight of a joyful month. On the programme were not only classical Bharat Natyam performances by Shangita and several Aurovilians, but we could also enjoy seeing Bharat Natyam danced to Igor Stravinsky's *Tango*, and another blend of Eastern and Western dancestyles set to a piece of music by Nadaka and Stefano.

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## A.V.A et A.V.T

A.V.A: Auroville Aujourd'hui. A ne pas confondre avec A.V.T: Auroville Today. Spécifiez "Auroville Aujourd'hui" pour vos abonnements. AVA n° 2 sortira en Octobre. Si vous voulez le recevoir ne perdez pas une seconde. Abonnez-vous! Vous découvrirez tout sur l'écologie et aussi qu'à Auroville l'art et l'écologie ne s'opposent pas.

## The Visitors Information and Reception Centre

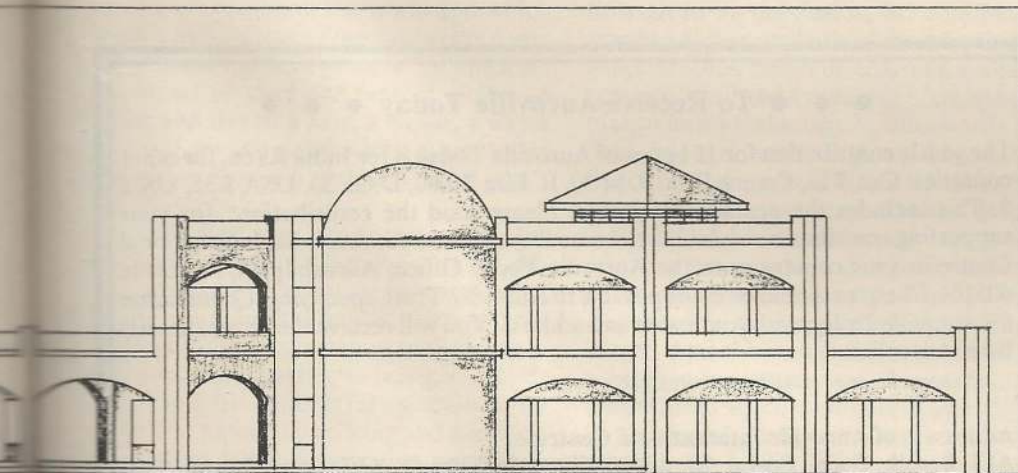
That Auroville needs a reception centre for the hundreds of daily visitors is a well-known fact. And it is therefore not very surprising that some Aurovilians started long ago to collect funds for this project.

What is remarkable, however, is the concept of the centre, which developed into something more than just a place to receive visitors and give them some information on Auroville. It has developed a wider perspective. It will be a place where visitors can not only be received and informed about Auroville, but where they can also see the variety of technologies Auroville is using. In addition, there will be information on the Auroville business units, a shop selling Auroville products and a cafeteria.

The preparation for this project is now almost over, and the construction work has

been taken up by the AV-BC (see elsewhere in this issue) and has just started. Water will be provided by windmills and solar pumps; energy will be supplied through photovoltaic panels and biogas systems. The building itself will be an example of earth architecture and ferrocement techniques. Around the building, land reclamation and re-afforestation techniques will be demonstrated. The water necessary for this will come from water-recycling techniques which are already in use in Auroville. Funding for this project is jointly undertaken by Indian, Dutch and American organizations.

In this way we hope to inform visitors not only about the aims and ideals behind Auroville, but also about what Auroville in its present phase of development, is attempting to demonstrate as "a city the earth needs" □



AUROVILLE INFORMATION AND RECEPTION CENTRE  
SOUTH EAST ELEVATION

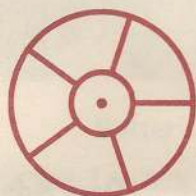


# AUROVILLE TODAY

CSR Office - Auroshilpam - Auroville  
Kottakuppam 605104 - Tamil Nadu - India

Address Correction Requested

Secretariat  
Bharat Nivas  
Auroville



Inside: A selection of new ventures and experiments.

October 1989 / Number Ten

BOOKPOST

By Airmail



The Banyan Tree

Photo by: Mohan Mistry

## THE AUROVILLE REVOLVING FUND

From the minutes of the AV Revolving Fund committee held on the 10th of July 1989:

"The Cheese Research Unit has been functioning for one year producing cheese from Buffalo milk. The demand for the product both in Auroville and in Pondicherry Town has shown that the market exists for a large production. For the unit to meet this demand and to function economically it is necessary to invest in additional buffaloes. Since the contribution is required for assets which can be easily reconverted to cash, since the unit shows all indications of being a commercial success and since the product is one which is useful within the community of Auroville, it was decided to grant the contribution".

A new light has dawned on the precarious and often difficult financial situation of the commercial units in Auroville. Struggling with problems of cash flow and unwilling bankers who request securities that Auroville units cannot give – for example a mortgage on the immovable assets, as all those assets belong to Auroville, and to humanity as a whole – it was often difficult, if not almost impossible, for a commercial unit to develop its business. Now, thanks to donations from the American Foundation for World Education and Auroville International United Kingdom, a Revolving Fund has been created, with at present a total capital of some Rs 4,50,000 (US \$30,000). This capital is managed by a team of Aurovilians, most of whom are also members of the Auroville Board of Commerce (see elsewhere in this issue).

The aim of the Fund is to give up to Rs 50,000 for a limited duration of time (at

present 6 months), so that commercial units can expand their production, safeguard a commercial output, or simply improve their cash-flow position.

The contributions will be repaid by the unit with a donation to the fund.

The Fund is still very fragile, as there are no absolute guarantees as yet for repayment of the contributions, though the conditions under which they are given are such that repayment is fairly certain.

At present, ways in which the capital can be increased are being studied. One way might be that all the commercial units of Auroville would guarantee the repayment so that more people and organisations might wish to give donations or loans to the Fund.

For more information write to the Auroville Revolving Fund, Bharat Nivas, Auroville 60501.

## SAMASTI

An experiment in collective living

Realising the Dream... a challenge.

Realising the building of our International Cultural Township. Though the word 'town' implies a nightmare for some, two years ago a number of us decided to pull our energies together to see if it is really possible, with our so diversified population, to build something with high density, with streets, pavements and so on – something contrary to the major part of Auroville where houses are built widely apart.

It meant many meetings, in which we talked about the ideals behind living closer together and harmonising the different attitudes. When some clarity was reached, it meant again deciding on topics like buying land for the access road, the choice of energy supply – Tamil Nadu Electricity Board or solar – water supply, water consumption

and re-use, general lay-outs, detailed lay-outs, the main construction materials to be used and so on. In all, it is the largest actual construction site in Auroville, and is a beginning of the Residential Zone.

At present, fruitful cooperation between Aurovilians of Indian, French, German, Dutch, Brazilian, Italian and Swiss nationality has resulted in the building of eight houses and one multi-purpose studio building.

Studies are in process to incorporate a newcomers housing complex, a complex for collective living and other individual houses. The costs of infrastructure are shared by all participants.

The name? Samasti, a Sanskrit word meaning collectivity....

Carel

### • • • To Receive Auroville Today • • •

The yearly contribution for 12 issues of Auroville Today is for India Rs 66, for other countries: Can \$ 18, French F. 96, DM 30, It. Lira 21000, D.Gl. 33, USA \$ 15, UK £ 9. This includes the postage by airmail. Please send the contribution\* (or your supporting contribution of double the amount) either to the Auroville International Centre in your country or to the Auroville Today Office, Auroshilpam, Auroville 605104. Cheques should be made payable to Auroville Trust, specifying: *Contribution for Auroville Today*, with your name and address. You will receive the issues directly from Auroville.

\* cheque, money order, bank draft all accepted

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