

Auroville Today

OCTOBER 2005, No.201

MAIN THEME: Changes in Auroville's economy

- Coming of age
- Some principles from The Mother
- A new Pour Tous – For All
- Letter from Satprem

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Coming of age

Due to two outside interventions, the delay of a government grant and a visit of the Chief Commissioner of Income Tax, the Auroville economy is going through the most important and far-reaching changes since decades.

Over the last year, a new impetus has got hold of the Auroville economy. As usual, outer circumstances pushed the community into action. The first was a growing insecurity about the future of Government of India funding for education. Throughout the years, Auroville has benefited from a yearly grant, which covers a substantial part of its educational expenses. In recent years that amount had reached Rs 45 lakhs (approximately US \$ 100,000). But rumour had it that the grant for the financial year 2004-2005 might not be released, which would result in a big hole in the Auroville finances, as the money was being advanced in expectation of the grant. In August 2004, concerned about the increasing deficit and worried how to fund the education budget in the next financial year, the Funds and Assets Management Committee constituted a new Economy Group with the task to find ways to cover the shortfall. The situation was serious. The number of people involved in education was growing, but for the last three years the educational budgets had not been raised, notwithstanding inflation and an increasing number of students.

Covering the shortfall

The fledgling Economy Group took action and approached the commercial units for their support. The units agreed to fund about 50% of the amount needed, and a buffer of approximately 20 lakhs was created. In order to find the remaining 25 lakhs, the Economy Group announced draconian measures: all community budgets except maintenances would be cut by 15% from November 2004

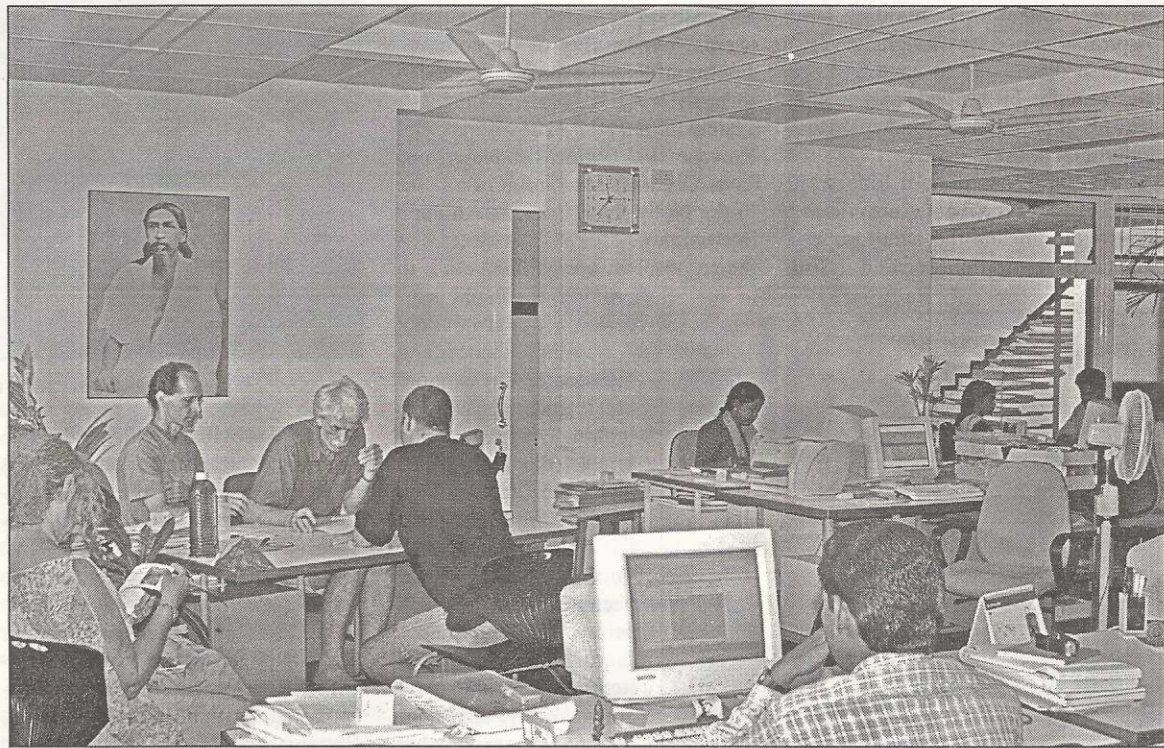
onwards, and maintenances would be "frozen" (meaning, no new maintenances would be granted, except for new-born children, and no maintenances would be increased). Then some miracles happened: a hidden Auroville reserve was discovered to the range of 11 lakhs; contributions to the Central Fund increased slightly; and finally, at the very end of the financial year, the Government of India released the grant, though only to the extent of Rs 30 lakhs. The deficit was as good as covered. The austerity measures were called off, but the Economy Group decided to

keep the buffer for the next financial year, as security in case the government grant for that year would not come. For the dangers of depending on outside sources for the monthly running expenses of Auroville had become evident to all.

A fairer maintenance system

The work of the new Economy group did not stop once the shortfall had been covered. One of its main objectives, said a representative of the Economy Group, is to seek solutions for a fairer maintenance system. For the level of maintenance that is provided by the community to those working for community services, such as education, is considerably lower than what can be taken by those working for commercial units.

"We started laying the foundations for a revised maintenance policy," says Kathryn, one of the members of the Economy Group. "We decided we wanted to create a comprehensive database which contains information about each and every Aurovilian: what kind of work he or she is involved with; where a person is living; what the family situation is; what the financial situation looks like – for example enjoying an income from outside Auroville, or drawing a community maintenance, or drawing



The new office of the Financial Service and Auroville Fund in the Town Hall.

New maintenance policies

Together with constituting the database, the Economy Group decided upon a number of new maintenance policies, as it felt that the present system had deviated from the original intent.

New criteria were introduced for the provision of children's maintenances. "We did not try to impose a bureaucratic and rigid structure," says Kathryn, "but we endeavoured to make adjustments in situations where the conditions had changed over the years, or where we felt the basis for the maintenance was erroneous. We based our policies on the position that people who have other adequate sources of income shouldn't be asking Auroville to support their children.

We looked again at the maximum of children's maintenance a family can get. There has always been a cap on the total amount of children's maintenance a family can receive, irrespective of the number of children, but we instituted a new guideline that for new cases, maintenance will not be granted for more than 2 children in a family. And we also asked commercial units, whenever possible to make a contribution to cover the maintenance of the children of the Aurovilians who work in that unit.

Also the system of additional maintenances was reviewed and recommendations were made to make it more transparent. This system had been devised several years ago to give extra support to individuals who were considered as having a great commitment to the collective life of Auroville in terms of their work.

But the basic problem, that the community provides too little maintenance to those working for community services, was left untouched. "We had to freeze the level of maintenances," explains Kathryn, "as we had only a vague idea of the income we would get. As we were unsure about the funding of the Government, we decided that we needed to prioritize and decide which budgets will be paid from funds generated from within Auroville. Then, in July, we compared the income situation of the months of March, April and May of 2005 with that of 2004. We discovered that the income had increased by about 3,5 lakhs per month. At that point we felt confident that we could responsibly unfreeze maintenances. But many new people had been waiting to be granted a maintenance, so the amount left to increase existing maintenances is still woefully inadequate. However, we are very much hoping that with the increase in transparency of the current maintenance situation and clear guidelines for the future, more funds will come to maintain those who are working with dedication for Auroville and in need of additional support. But the anxiety over the Government of India grant is still there. We do not know if the grant for the year 2005-2006 will materialize, and the buffer, while providing a greater level of security than we had in the past, is still insufficient if it wouldn't come."

Self-managing services

Another function of the Economy Group is to monitor the budgets of the service units. Here it is operating on the philosophy that, eventually, every service unit should manage its own budget. This implies that decisions about who works there, how much maintenance they receive (within defined upper and lower limits), and other details of expenses should be taken within the unit itself.

Service units will therefore have to submit complete budget requests that include all sources and amounts of income and expected expenses, and submit narrative and financial reports. The system is presently tried out with Transition School and Future School, but has yet to be fully implemented. Explains Kathryn: "It is absurd to think that the Economy Group can effectively manage all these budgets centrally. What we hope is that, by making managers aware of what their activity actually costs (including the maintenances), it will encourage both efficiency and, with a bit of assistance where needed, managerial capacities. All service units will be asked to make yearly summaries of intended expenditure. As some units still lack the skills to do so, it will need some time before this system can be fully implemented. But then we will be in a position to make a reasonable accurate expense projection of Auroville's service units."

What about the income

If there is one area where data are difficult to get, it is Auroville's income situation. One source of income are donations for a widely diverse range of projects, varying from Matrimandir to wasteland reclamation, or from promoting natural dyeing techniques to tsunami work or building houses in Auroville. Grants come from within India and abroad. A second source of income is generated by Auroville's commercial units, guest houses and professional service providers. Lastly there is income from interest on capital. What makes the situation obscure is that all these incomes are received on many different accounts, held in the names of many different units and activities. Asking for a complete overview of all income has been asking for the impossible.

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*Auroville is meant
not for the satisfaction
of desires
but for the growth of
the true consciousness.*

a salary from a unit. So basically we are creating a kind of personnel file for all residents." As with all good ideas in Auroville, the idea was more easily contemplated than executed. "The work took a long time as much information was not readily available. And there was a certain amount of mistrust to overcome, before people were ready to share information. But by now, after about eight months of work, we have a reasonably complete database. It does indicate which people do not depend on Auroville, but it doesn't go into the details of their personal income situations."

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A new Pour Tous

Pour Tous, Auroville's food distribution centre, began back in 1972. It started at the request of Clare, who asked The Mother for permission to create a proper channel to supply the needs of Aurovilians without an internal exchange of money. "We could begin in a temporary building. If this is the work to do, and money comes for this work, what should be the name of the bank account?" Mother approved of the so-called 'shop project' of Clare and on March 14, 1972, gave it the name "Pour Tous, For All." Work started in a temporary building at Aspiration. Food was bought centrally, then distributed in cane baskets and brought by bullock cart to the various community kitchens and individual houses.

Auroville has gone a long way since. Today, for most Aurovilians, Pour Tous means the small supermarket in Aspiration, located in the

accepted by many Aurovilians. The New Pour Tous Organisation Group, a team of 17 Aurovilians, supported by the Funds and Assets Management Committee, have proposed substantial changes. The occasion is the upcoming opening of a new Pour Tous building.

Pour Tous II, as it is colloquially called, is located behind the Solar Kitchen. The construction of the somewhat austere building is completed; equipment and furniture still need to be installed. But those who expect a second supermarket are in for a disappointment. "We want to use the opportunity of the commissioning of this new building to move towards a more ideal maintenance system for all Aurovilians and Newcomers," wrote the New Pour Tous Organisation Group in a letter in the News and Notes, Auroville's internal newsletter. "The objective of the proposal we are working on, is to provide food and sundries to every Aurovillian and Newcomer in a more ideal manner. We are looking for ways to bring the principles given to us by the Mother into practical life." In other words, Pour Tous II would become a distribution centre for community food and household items. One would not be able to buy anything; one would receive what Auroville provides.

Exactly which items would be distributed, and to whom, are questions that are being studied. Mother has stated that Aurovilians should be provided with their basic needs and not with their desires. But assess-

ing a person's basic needs is a daunting task as needs differ, particularly in a multi-cultural and multi-national society such as Auroville. Moreover, to leave this decision to someone else, or to a group of Aurovilians, might not be to the liking of those who are being taken care of.

A second problem is how the provision of goods is being paid for – individually or collectively – and to what extent the value of the goods supplied should correspond to the money flowing in. One possibility is to obtain central funding, and pro-

vide all Aurovilians with goods up to a certain value. Another possibility is to adopt the cooperative system followed at Nandini, a unit which provides clothing and house linens. Here, participants are requested to transfer a certain amount per month to the Nandini account, in return for which they can obtain a certain number of articles, more or less corresponding to their monetary input. But this cooperative system would create an imbalance as it would only cater to those Aurovilians who subscribe to it, while others would be left to fend for themselves.

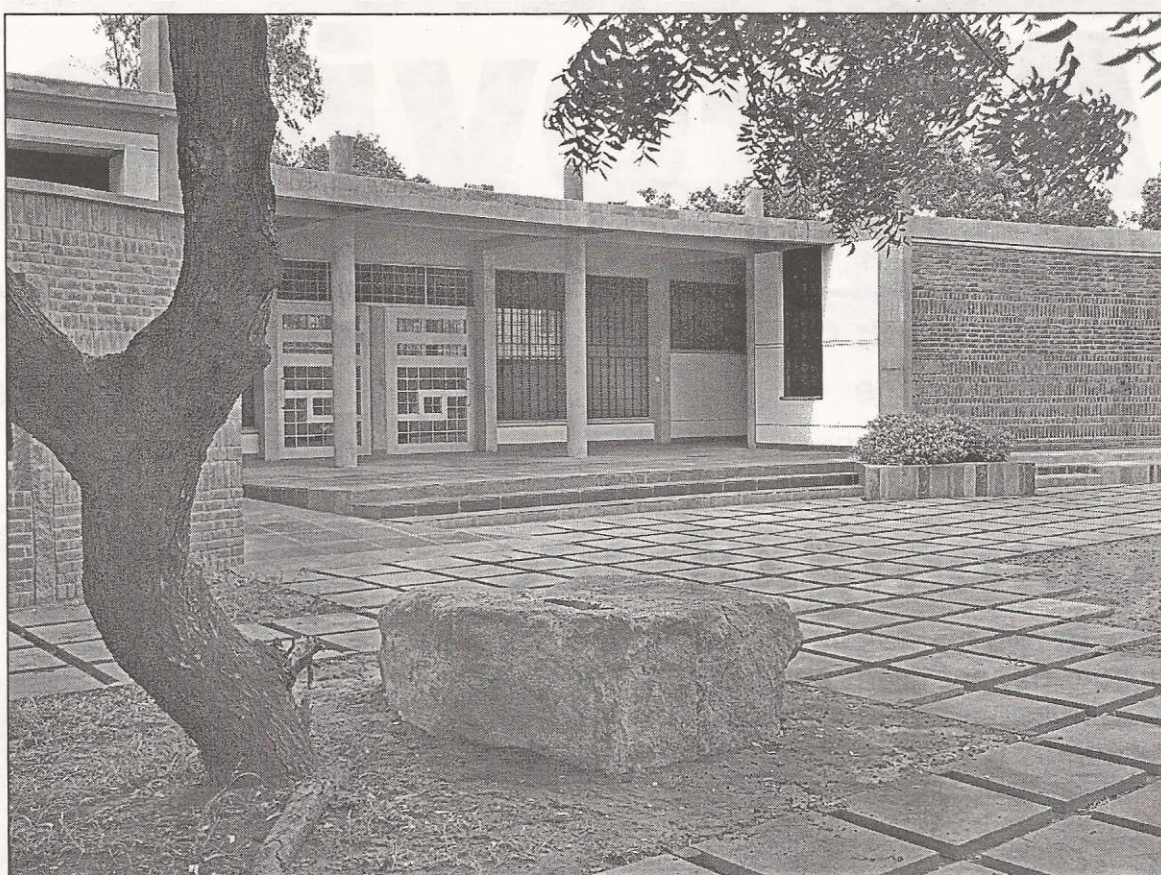
A third problem is that Pour

Tous II would not make all one requires available. Aurovilians would need to visit a shop from time to time to purchase selected items of choice. The New Pour Tous Organisation Group intends to address this problem by turning the existing Pour Tous at Aspiration into an ordinary shop, under the name 'Aspiration Store'.

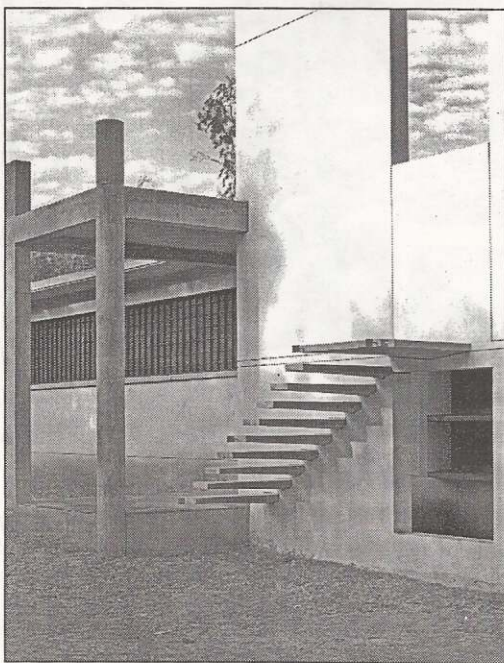
These ideas still need more community discussion. Gilles Guigan, one of the promoters of the new Pour Tous pointed out the main issue: "I find it imperative that we try to come to a common understanding of why Mother was so keen to eliminate

money circulation within Auroville – and with it, an understanding on our freedom to spend 'our' (maintenance) money the way we like. Without common understanding, we would be likely to miss our real target. Auroville needs to remember that it aims at becoming a society which is not based on the satisfaction of desires – unlike the consumer society. Many of our fellow Aurovilians seem to have completely forgotten it and many applicants do not seem to realise at all that they are expected to be committed to the abolition of their ego and desires."

Carel



The entrance of the new Pour Tous building behind the Solar Kitchen



A playful element of the new Pour Tous building

same buildings that 33 years ago were home to its humble beginnings. Little has remained from the spirit of old – except, perhaps, the basket service which still provides free service to all those who want their food and sundries (toiletries and household maintenance items) home-delivered. The ideal of functioning without exchange of money could only be sustained symbolically: items are bought on account payment; cash is not accepted.

This drift from one of Auroville's major ideals has not been

Auroville's true currency

Letter from Satprem to an Aurovillian, dated 28 September 1981 (1)

I know nothing about economy, because all my life there was a permanent hole in my pocket. Mother was giving me all that I needed, including cigarettes which were forbidden in the Ashram – she was broad enough to understand each one's limits and the need to make mistakes to progress. If one locks up Truth in a small ideal box, beware of mummies. It is the difficulty of any 'system', however wonderful and 'new' it may be – tomorrow already it will be old. So I do not have any panacea for Auroville's economic and financial system.

Truth is simple, as always: we do not need a system but a new Man – and these difficulties, these problems are precisely what is required to shape this new Man, not to confine him in an ideal formula. Let him become what he has to be, then the ideal 'formula' will flow automatically at each second and will change at every second. Surely, before reaching this point, we will need some crutches, some rules and interdictions, but to tune these temporary necessities is rightly part of the working out of this new Man – so, why should I involve myself, like some sort of Pythia or a super professor... oops! I love the Aurovilians, and I love them sufficiently not to pronounce oracles – I am a simple man who tries to become something else, with a hole in his pocket. I am in favour of trying things out.

It is true, without thinking about it, 'like that', I had spoken to Mother of these 'work coupons' (2); because she was looking at the problem, but today I would never suggest anything of this sort. Do you know what I would dream of today? I would dream of a 'Father Christmas sys-

tem', a dozen of Father Christmases who would unite their beards and would endeavour to give to each Aurovillian all that s/he asks for, of course according to the resources available, and I would expect that every Aurovillian would ask only what he really needs, and I would understand perfectly that the needs of one are very different from the needs of another, and that even a futility may be necessary to some, even a mistake. We are completely besotted by egalitarian and moralist systems – nothing is equal, not even two leaves from the same tree. This is why all mechanical systems, however useful they may be, fail in the long run. Money – as cash, or as coins, or as 'coupons' – forms part of the mechanical system: this is worth this much. But how are you going to compare ten minutes of silent and 'useless' meditation with ten cubic metres of earth dug for a well? The only possible 'coupons' is *sincerity*. It is the only trading currency in Auroville. The standard rule in this sad world is: as there are some thieves, put everybody in jail. Let us reverse this pitiful state of affairs.

Indeed, all systems have failed in our world: communism, capitalism, socialism, and even (or especially) Gandhism – and it is very well like this, a holy prison is nevertheless a prison. The only free space lies within the heart of each individual, and as long as this free space won't become the law of the collective body, we shall continue to stumble and fall. In other words, we have to become living souls; there is no other 'system', no other solution. Meanwhile...

Yes, there is this 'meanwhile'. We are growing souls, not all equally evolved, but in each one of us

there is, let's admit it, a basic quality common and equal, which is *sincerity*. There is no need to be an Einstein or a yogi to have this quality. The capacity to correct one's mistakes and the will to see clearly and not to fool oneself – if this central quality is there in Auroville, then the rest is easy. And we know that it is there, these eight years (3) have sufficiently proven our sincerity. So, we come back to our 'Father Christmas system': according to the resources available, some chosen amongst the wisest ones or amongst the most sincere shall decide with the agreement of the collective of the projects which must have priority, and shall try to give to each one all that he needs. A government of wise men. But, we know it, these wise men are not entirely wise, and hence this is the story of the growth and evolution of Auroville. We shall move forward, stumbling and groping and changing until we attain this wisdom of the heart, which is the only free space in this world.

And never forget that the divine Hand is always there to help miraculously and beyond all imagination, beyond all human calculation: a small drop of sincerity will do. We are mistaken if we believe that it is for us to do all the work.

With love,

Satprem

(1) This letter was published in the original French, in Satprem's 'Carnets d'une Apocalypse', at this date. It is translated in English by Gilles G.

(2) Actually, 'coupons for hours of work,' see Mother's Agenda XI dated 25 March 1970

(3) Since Mother left Her body in 1973.

Seven principles for Auroville's internal economy as distilled from Mother's words

I) Auroville will provide for the (real/basic) needs of every Aurovillian – in kind. (30.12.67)

II) Each one has to contribute (work and/or money) to Auroville according to his possibilities. (30.12.67)

III) Auroville is meant not for the satisfaction of desires, but for the growth of consciousness. (16.06.68)

IV) In this place ... the bodily needs of each one would be equally provided for, and intellectual, moral and spiritual superiority would be expressed in the general organisation not by an increase in the pleasures and powers of life but by increased duties and responsibilities. (A Dream, 08.54)

V) For example, the idea is that those who will live in Auroville won't have money – there's no circulation of money – but to eat, for example, everyone has the right to eat, naturally, but... From the strictly practical standpoint, one had conceived the possibility of every possible food according to the taste or

needs of each one (for example, there are vegetarian kitchens, non-vegetarian kitchens, diet kitchens, etc.), and then those who want to receive food from them must do something in exchange. So work, or... it's difficult to organize practically, quite practically... (25.03.70)

VI) When Auroville is a city there will be several kitchens providing different types of food. But even now individuals should not cook for themselves. It is better to organize kitchens for groups. (Notice drafted by Shyam Sunder and signed by the Mother, with blessings, on 20.02.71)

VII) The organisation should be such, arranged in such a way, that everyone's material need should be met, not according to notions of right and equality, but on the basis of the most elementary necessities; then, once that is established, everyone must be free to organise his life, not according to his monetary means, but according to his inner capacities. (30.12.67)

Coming of age

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Enquiries from dignitaries about Auroville's annual budget [the estimate of Auroville's total revenue and expenditure] could never be answered. The only overviews available are the Auroville Foundation accounts as yearly presented to the Indian Parliament, but they offer no easy insight into the budget. It was an extremely unsatisfactory situation, which, in a time-honoured Auroville tradition, nobody really bothered to change. Till one day in summer 2005 an Auroville commercial unit received a visit of the Chief Commissioner of Income Tax (CCIT).

Exemption from Income Tax

Since April 1991, the Auroville Foundation enjoys a rather unique status: it is exempt from paying income tax under a special provision of the Income Tax Act. The exemption is given for periods of three years, after which it needs to be renewed. The exemption includes all Auroville units, service as well as commercial, which, as per the Auroville Foundation Act, are integral part of the Foundation.

The Foundation has made arrangements to manage its assets through various trusts created by it. The accounts of these trusts are consolidated into the Foundation accounts, which are audited by the Comptroller and Auditor General of India.

The CCIT now questioned the set-up, and argued that the commercial trusts of Auroville should pay income tax, separate from the Auroville Foundation. He expressed that the business units are de facto operating as independent entities, as the level of their contributions to Auroville and the decision on how much to keep as reserves and what to do with them, is exclusively made by the unit executives. Auroville answered to these objections that all the activities carried on by Auroville's commercial units are for the benefit of the Auroville community as a whole and are incidental to the attainment of the objects for which Auroville was set up. Moreover, the objective of the Auroville Foundation Act had been to bring everything related to Auroville together under one umbrella, the Auroville Foundation, and that only the Indian Parliament could change that Act. To split off the commercial units would undermine the very fabric of the Foundation itself.

Nevertheless, the CCIT's observations did shake the foundations of beliefs held. Is it justified that Auroville continues on the same road? Are changes in order? Questions were raised on what grounds a commercial unit executive has the sole right to decide on the allocation of its profits. "When a unit is in trouble the community must bail them out. When they are in profits, shouldn't the community have a say in that?" was one of the arguments voiced. Others pointed at the ideals: "Mother's guidelines have revealed that after all the expenditures have been met, a unit's surplus should go to the community. That's not happening today. If a commercial unit decides for itself, it does not necessarily take a decision in the interest of the community. Let there be a collective take on the matter."

The Auroville Unity Fund

In the ensuing brainstorming sessions, the Funds and Assets Management Committee together with the Working Committee proposed a dramatic change from the past: to set up an Auroville Unity Fund. This Fund would centrally receive all income, channel all income

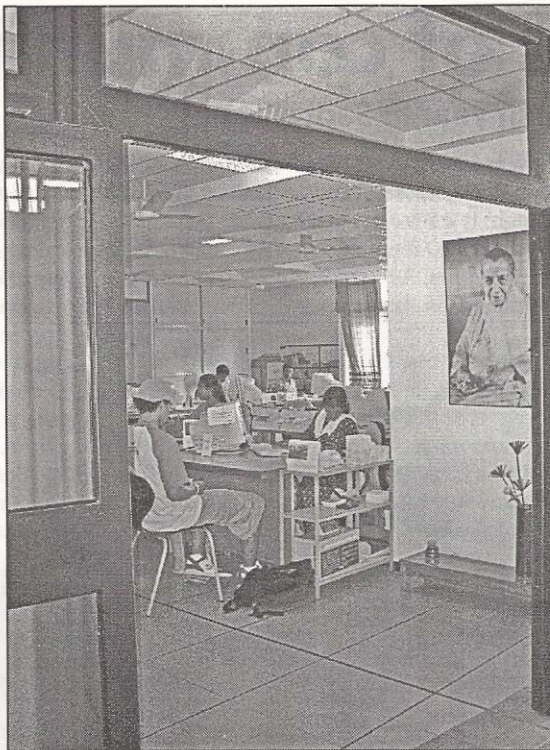
to the respective units and projects and create a comprehensive overview of all Auroville's income and expenditure – in other words, an Annual Budget. The Fund would operate under the direction of a Budget

Coordination Committee (BCC), a group that would work in a spirit of transparency, responsibility and mutuality, and have wide-ranging functions. No longer would any unit be able to operate completely independently; all units would now be required to make a budget, which is to be approved, and the allocation of Auroville income would only take place in accordance with the budget. The BCC would set priorities and take decisions for allocation of Auroville's reserves, excess incomes from commercial units, and unspecified donations in consultation with all concerned groups, keeping in mind the direction and aims given by the Mother. It would also be responsible to maintain an equitable Auroville maintenance policy. The membership of the BCC would mainly consist of representatives of various activity areas, but also have representative members of the community. The Auroville Unity Fund would therefore not only demonstrate the collective economy based on Mother's vision for Auroville, but also convince the CCIT that all Auroville funds are regulated centrally, and that hence there is no reason not to grant the renewal of the income tax exemption to the Auroville Foundation or to tax the commercial units separately.

The Auroville Board of Commerce (ABC)

The commercial units rose to the occasion. The idea of the Auroville Unity Fund was well received, though with the reservation that it should never be used as an instrument of absolute control. The executives of commercial units should continue to have the freedom to manage their enterprises, without undue fears of imposition. To provide a better understanding of the operation of each unit, the units proposed that every unit would not only provide an operating budget, but also submit a development plan. Operating budgets and development plans would be approved by a peer group of business unit executives, the ABC Budget Approval Group, before being submitted to the BCC.

Serge, the executive of Auroville Press and Auroville Papers, explains that this would dramatically change the dynamics of the ABC. "So far, the ABC was a rather loose-knitted group of business executives. Membership was optional, and the way it functioned was not very convincing to all business executives. But when the Unity Fund starts operating, each commercial unit will have to be part of the ABC. For the ABC Budget Approval Group would make decisions on each unit's budget and development plan, and would insist that the unit follow the ABC guidelines: commitment to Auroville, observance of Auroville business ethics, make proper contributions, and ensure proper accountability. Moreover, once a budget has been submitted, there will be a certain monitoring of the unit by the ABC to see how well it functions within the budget. If an aberration occurs, the ABC would be able to check that at an earlier stage and advise the unit accordingly." But he adds that no decision has yet been taken on how it



Cash transactions at the Financial Service counter

all could possibly work. "We have merely focused on how the ABC could relate to the concept of the Auroville Unity Fund which is to be presented to the forthcoming meeting of the Governing Board. If the concept is accepted, then we will go into the operative part. That includes the way decisions on the allocation of a unit's reserves would be made and the way the extra income of the commercial units would be dealt with. The composition of the BCC is another major issue. It will need to consist of people who understand business, but who also have the global development of Auroville at heart. They must be able to stimulate the overall development of Auroville; they should not be bureaucrats who only approve or disapprove, but they must be creative." In this respect Serge disagrees with the suggestion that the Secretary of the Auroville Foundation or one of the Foundation's officers could be part of the BCC. "As long as the Secretary is defined in the official Rules of the Auroville Foundation as 'the principle executive officer' (a definition you don't find in the Auroville Foundation Act) his inclusion in the BCC is undesirable as it might lead to difficulties in its operative functioning. If he is just one member of the group, there would not be a problem. But if he would try to impose his views based on his position, the purpose of the BCC and the Auroville Unity Fund would be defeated."

members of other working groups. All working groups are responsible to the Residents' Assembly, but not many people turn up for its meetings. This brings the danger that a kind of oligarchy develops. While Auroville should be able, after 37 years of existence, to identify reliable and competent people to be part of the BCC, it should also work out a mechanism where the BCC and other working groups can effectively shed responsibility, for example to a group of responsible members of the community. For in the present circumstances, being responsible to the Residents' Assembly is tantamount to being responsible to nobody in particular.

Turning the titanic

"When we started the proposal of the Unity Fund, it seemed to us like turning the Titanic, for the Auroville economy had developed into a capitalistic, individualistic, and profit oriented one," says Kathryn. "I would hope that our commercial units would become 'cutting edge,' concentrating on the 3 P's of profit, people and planet, to be counted successful, a concept presented at the recent 'New Business and Global Consciousness' seminar. [see the article 'Transforming business' elsewhere in this issue, eds.] This will help to change the internal economy into a service and giving economy – meaning one gives his or her work and is in turn provided for. For that is what I believe The Mother wanted for Auroville. Carel

PASSING

Deep Asher

Deep Asher, an Aurovilian hailing from Bengal, passed away on September 8th in his room in New Creation Field. Deep was 35 years old and had joined Auroville in March 2002. He worked in Last School, teaching mathematics, physics and English. Deep's remains were cremated at Adventure's mandapam in the evening of September 9th, with his father, brother, colleagues and friends attending the quiet event. A collective concentration for Deep was held a few days later around the Super School Banyan Tree in the Last School Campus.

To my dear friend Deep

You have given me a hard time trying to understand why you chose to leave the Auroville you loved so dearly. Now I just accept whatever reason you took, and send you in Peace. I'm sure the Mother will carry you gently onto your next journey.

You have shown a model of how a teacher could become a real friend of his students. I can never appreciate enough your Deep and Deep reaching compassion towards everything.

You were always staying in the background and not known in detail even to me, but your soul always radiated its fragrant warmth. I will miss you very much. Farewell, for the time being, my friend.

Namu

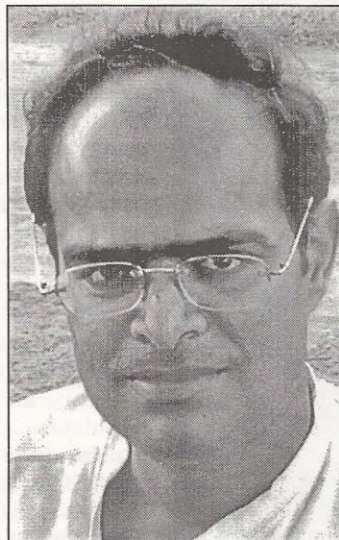


PHOTO COURTESY MR. ASHER

In brief

New Visa Policy

The Indian Government has issued a new policy for foreign nationals living in Auroville. The salient features of this new policy are that permanent residents are entitled to long term entry visa with 5-year validity and that short term entry visa up to three years can be granted to temporary residents of Auroville. In both types of visa and respective extensions, the individual foreigner is eligible for three entries in a year. All applications for visa and residential permits need the recommendation of the Secretary, Auroville Foundation.

Farewell group

The Auroville Council has called for a new group to be constituted to handle the issues involved when a person leaves his/her body and take responsibility for the further development of the Adventure Cremation Ground.

Dogs nuisance

The Auroville Council has received a number of complaints related to nuisance caused by both stray as well as pet dogs in Auroville. The Council called for people who can look into ways of controlling the dog population as well as ensuring minimum health care for the stray dogs, the main related problems being the spread of rabies and noise pollution.

Auroville Health Park

The concept of a Health Park, which would house all medical and related services on the Crown road, is being studied. The buildings would manifest all the latest research in terms of healthy building materials, energy saving technologies, natural ventilation and power, electromagnetic fields and their biological effects, a healthy outdoor-indoor relationship and other such factors.

Avipro

Auroville International Prose editors is a new Auroville unit, developed by Lloyd of Creativity. Avipro aims at composing creative texts for various purposes and at editing prose, essays and poetry. The unit offers a variety of services for creative writers, such as manuscript critique, coaching and tutoring. For more information visit www.avipro-editors.com

Dealing with conflicts

The Auroville Council and the Working Committee have called on all residents to respect and participate in the Auroville internal process of conflict resolution instead of approaching the Auroville Foundation and/or the Indian authorities, stating that "Though solving problems within our community might sometimes be (or seem to be) more time-consuming and difficult, there is no other solution if we ever want to succeed in finding a path towards an alternative society based on the ideals given by Mother. We all have to accept the hardship of this experimental stage."

Roads

The Government of Tamil Nadu has re-tarred the road from Bommaiarpalayam to Edaiyan-chavadi. Gone are the days of the potholes. The road from Kuilapalayam down to the beach still awaits repair.

Learning the ropes of community living

The Kailash youth residency celebrates its fourth year in September.

"According to what I see and what I know, and generally, after fourteen years of age, children must be left independent and they must be guided only if they request it. They must be aware that they are responsible of the direction of their own existence".

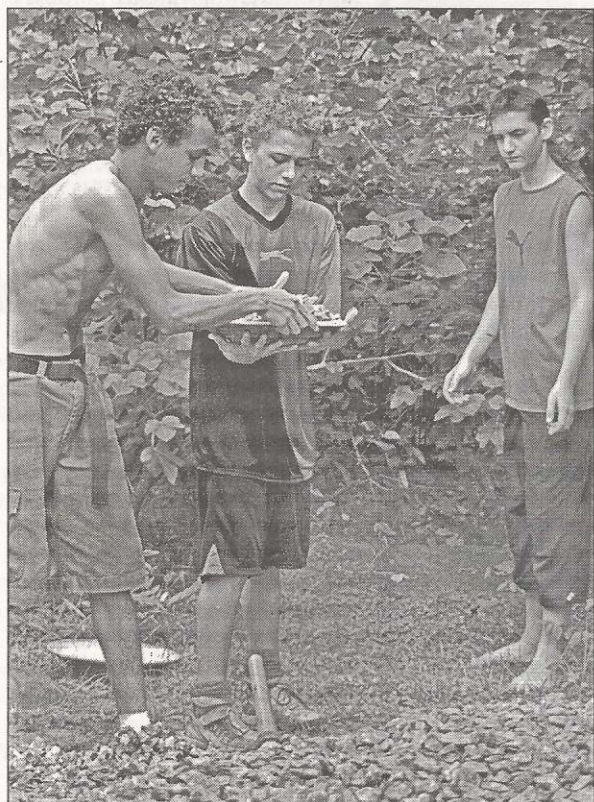
*The Mother, July 10, 1968
(Mother's Agenda)*

These words of the Mother inspired Kripa and Jean François, both trained as youth educators in France, to work towards realizing a dream and a need of the moment: opening a youth residency in Auroville. They had been approached by a group of enthusiastic teenagers who had expressed the wish to have a new community for the youth, like 'Ami' had been in the 1980s. So from this common interest, plans were drawn, budgets estimated and fundraising began. From the beginning, a lot of people from the community, be they teachers, parents or others, were very supportive of the idea, as they felt there was a real need for such a residency in Auroville.

When the project was presented, however, some members of the community expressed fears regarding the fact that no adult would be residing in Kailash. "There was quite a lot of pressure to have an adult caretaker," says Kripa, "and we really had to defend our project and explain why we didn't want an adult there. We wanted to give the youth the space to go through their own experience and learning process. We, as adults, would be reachable and available at all times, if there was a need. But we felt if an adult actually resided there, that whole educational angle would be gone."

One of the greatest difficulties in the beginning was to find a location to build. "The Development Group wanted to have Kailash as far from the centre as possible," explains Kripa, "Fortunately, though, at that time, Kireet Joshi kept repeating: 'You have to put the youth at the centre of the city!' So finally we were allotted a piece of land in the Residential Zone, right opposite the Solar Kitchen."

The funds to build Kailash were received essentially from within Auroville itself. The greatest part was funded by Gateway, and there were donations from individuals and unit holders. On the 28th of February 2000, the foundation stone was laid and the construction work began.



Working on the Kailash waste-water catchment area

"Near the end, it was a real struggle to get the money together to finish the building," remembers Kripa, "Each week, we wondered how we would pay the workers on the site their salary... But then someone would come forward and make a donation. There was a lot of good will from a lot of different people, there

was a lot of input and contributions. There were some really difficult times, but somehow we managed to pull through. It's a project that wanted to be realized in Auroville. There was a real need and it was the right time. As I see it, we were just active instruments in its realization."

Kailash opened its doors to the youth in September 2001. The building has three levels. The ground floor is collective, with a common kitchen, dining hall and social room, while the fourteen bedrooms and bathrooms are on the first and second floors. Ten of the bedrooms are for Auroville youth; two of them are reserved



Dinner in Kailash. Clockwise from left: Julian, Inge, Vikram, Arseny, Anadi, Kalrav and Yashasa

for young guests; and there are also two 4-bed dormitories, for when there are youth conferences or student exchange programmes. Over the years, some twenty young Aurovilians have lived in Kailash, for periods of six months up to four years.

Kailash, which doesn't receive any budget from either SAIER or the Central Fund, runs with the funds contributed each month by the youth living there (1000 Rs. per person). Those funds, as well as part of the guest contributions, cover the running expenses such as water, electricity, food and telephone. The other part of the guest contributions is put aside for future repair jobs and building maintenance.

"We have a few basic rules," explains Kripa, "and when a young person comes to live in Kailash, he/she has to sign a contract, agreeing to respect these rules."

The rules are: to be between 16 and 21 years of age; to have a daily activity (either studies, apprenticeship or work); no drugs; to participate in the collective life – this includes attending the weekly meeting, joining a cooking team and preparing dinner once a week, and participating in collective work such as cleaning and maintaining the building and gardening; then there is everything that is linked to respecting the other, especially as regards to noise; and no loud music or noise after 9 P.M.

"It is our job to make sure these basic rules, which are the foundations of life in Kailash, are respected," explains Jean François "Then within these rules, each group of youth comes up with their own guidelines and regulations. They

also take up different tasks, like keeping the accounts, being in charge of the guests, filling up the water tank, etc."

"We consider those basic rules like the frame of a picture," adds Kripa. "The frame is there, and inside, the youth paint the picture they want. Each time, Kailash is different

according to the group which is living there, and of the collective life that they decide to lead. But they, the residents of Kailash, are responsible for the running of the place."

During the first year, things were a little bit difficult at times. "Quite a number of the young people who came to stay in Kailash during the first year were in revolt against something, whether it was against the family, against school, against a system... They were in a dynamic of revolt, so it wasn't always easy," Jean François explains. "For the first two years, we had to keep repeating the same things, over and over again," continues Kripa, "We had to

running the show on his own, but Kripa hasn't lost interest. "I'm still very aware of how things are going on in Kailash and I'm always asking Jean François questions how things are evolving," she says.

Jean François sees to it that everything runs smoothly in Kailash. He goes there every day, in the evenings, it has even happened that he had to go there in the middle of the night. He also works as a counsellor in Future School, where some of the Kailash residents also study. There are certain youth he plays rugby or football with as well, and he also sees them at parties sometimes. "When working with the youth,

one has to enter their world, to a certain extent. One can not remain too distant from it. One has to find a certain equilibrium, though, as there is also the danger of becoming 'omnipresent'," he says. "I feel that my work doesn't stop at the gate of Kailash, or at the gate of Future School. I have also auto-nominated myself 'street educator'. So I'm involved in my work all the time, I'm present in a lot of different places, there's a real follow up. And because they see me in a lot of different places and contexts, I've also developed a special relationship with them. I also have a different approach according to the context. For example when at school, I don't talk as the one responsible for Kailash. Though of course everything is linked somewhere. We may be able to speak of certain problems in Kailash through the consequences that it has in school."

One of Jean François' regrets is not having anybody available to assist him in his work. "Sometimes, there are things one overlooks, sometimes it's also interesting to have feedback from another professional on the work one is doing. Having somebody with a different personality and a different approach working with me would be good," he says.

"Since the beginning, we've been looking for people to complete the team," says Kripa, "Then, when we left to Europe for a year, we worked on forming a team of three people who had experience in the field so they could replace us. It didn't work out, though, and five months or so before we returned, the youth in Kailash were left to run the place and organize themselves with no adult assistance. The group living there at that time were a little older, and quite mature, and they managed quite well on their own. When we came back, however, we were welcomed with open arms. They were happy to have gone through their own experience, but now they really understood and felt the necessity of an adult assistance. It was a great experience for us, but on the other hand, we also realized how little we could count on others to support us in the work we did."

"I feel the Kailash project is very much in line with the ideals of Auroville and the Mother's concept of education," says Jean François, "We're talking about an education based on trust and mutual respect, on a living experience as opposed to a theoretical experience."

"The Mother talks a lot about leading by example, about adults being living examples for the youth. There is no need to preach, one's acts are the most important," adds Kripa. "There's also a real focus on collective life, in Kailash," Jean François continues, "The youth put in place a community life, and live within it. They participate in collective work, or it's happened sometimes that a couple of youth couldn't pay their monthly financial contributions, and the others just took it on. Of course, everybody doesn't always agree, there are arguments sometimes, but things are solved by discussing them, they communicate openly and with respect for one another. There's a real community spirit! Sometimes I find it really amazing."

"People should be aware," concludes Kripa, "that Kailash is like a small Auroville within Auroville. It's like a learning process the youth go through to understand what life should be like in Auroville."

Emmanuelle

"Like a real family"

I joined Kailash in the beginning of July this year, after returning from my summer holidays. I had been thinking about it for a while, and this summer felt ready to take the step. It's not that I got fed up of living at home. No, not at all... it just felt like the right time to move towards living independently and discovering a new aspect to my life.

When someone wants to participate in the Kailash experience, he/she is asked to come to one of the weekly meetings and express reasons for wanting to join, and how he/she would contribute to the project. The members together decide whether or not the person can move in. This prevents any uneasy feelings amongst the people living there.

As soon as I was accepted I got assigned the task of accounting, which consists of paying the *sambalam* (salary) of the amma, paying the milkman and the newspaper boy, and comparing the monthly estimated expense statement with the total amount spent at the end of each month. Like any real community, tasks in Kailash are shared amongst its residents according to the capacities of each one – pump supervision, accounting, guest care, etc. Dinner is cooked six days of the week, prepared by a team of two residents, and guitar classes are offered to students of Future school five times a week. Kailash helps us all to get in touch with our more responsible side without sapping our youthful energy.

Most of us who live here have parents who are not living in Auroville. There are some like myself, though, whose parents live just around the corner. I enjoy a very strong bond with my entire family – they all helped me move out in different ways – and I go 'home' every other day to see what's up! Recently, when I fell sick, I was taken care of by my parents and occupied the couch in their living room, a luxury not available to those whose parents live outside.

Life in Kailash has already taught me many things, such as responsibility towards myself and the others living in the building. It is the first time that I live with people other than my parents and brothers, and I have learnt to respect the privacy of others as well as respecting my own need to spend time with myself without being constantly interrupted.

I'm not the only person whose life in Kailash has brought changes; 21 year-old Vania, a Russian, is a resident who has lived here longer than anybody else. He moved in a few months after the project opened its doors, and has been here ever since. He says that living in Kailash has taught him to "live as a team member in a collective way, becoming and living like a family."

When I ask him to remember a memorable moment he laughs and says, "Can't remember. It's been so long," but admits that he is constantly having positive experiences and

brought a new atmosphere, a new vibe, new rules; Kailash became something else." He tactfully points out that the age difference between the residents can definitely have an

Arseny, another Russian, 17 years of age, moved into Kailash when he was 15, "simply by hanging out there with my best friends." He thought life in Kailash was the thing for him and after a few meetings with the community members he decided to try it for a while. He tells me that Kailash taught him to think for himself. "That I don't need my parents to take decisions anymore, I can do things alone." He says with a broad ear-to-ear smile that he has greatly improved his cleaning and cooking skills ever since he moved in, and that his most difficult experiences of collective living so far are the fights and arguments that he gets into with other residents.

I'm starting to realize that Kailash is definitely a special place with a truly enjoyable atmosphere, because all of us residents are surrounded by friends. This contributes to our well-being and the well-being of the entire community. We youth in Auroville are so lucky to have such a place, like an intermediate half-way house between home and the outside world.

Inge

16 year-old Dutch Inge studies at Future School and lives in Kailash. An avid horse-rider, she hopes to pursue journalism in the future.



Working together in the garden of Kailash

feels that all the residents are living happily together, "Like a real family." He shares that the initial years at Kailash were the most rewarding for him; the first residents really regarded Kailash as their new home. In time as people moved out and others moved in, he tells me that Kailash lost this quality. "New residents

impact on the harmony of the 'family'. Vania's most difficult experience at Kailash has been the response to his "constant efforts for improvement of the community, but some don't cooperate but instead, resist and take criticism personally, while it's only for the benefit and welfare of all of us here."

Outreach

Update on the Tsunami Rehabilitation Project

The Auroville Tsunami Rehabilitation team has been active since the day the tsunami hit

During the last seven months a wide range of activities has taken place and many more are planned. The first three months were devoted to immediate emergency



Students learn welding

relief activities. Most of these activities, like the distribution of food, cooking materials and school materials, providing emergency psychological and physical healthcare and the cleaning of affected villages have now come to an end.

Approximately 55 people, both volunteers and salaried, are directly involved in our activities. These include a dedicated group of rehabilitation workers, program and project coordinators, trainers, teachers, product designers, researchers, forest specialists, accountants and administrators. As more projects are started, more people will be needed to make effective implementation possible.

Our projects are partly funded by the generous donations we have received from Indian and foreign donors. We have formed a working partnership with Concern, a large Irish charity with an office in Chennai, which has been and will be financing considerable parts of our Livelihood and Eco-Restoration projects. For other components of our Program we are still negotiating with potential partners, such as the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) for the Knowledge Centre, the NGO

Coordination and the GIS capacity building among other NGOs along the coast.

Aim and target area of the Tsunami Team

We have made an overall program plan for the next 24 months. Our central aim was and still is to assist communities to quickly rebuild their lives to the level that existed previous to the disaster, or, preferably, to a higher level than that which existed before. To avoid creating imbalances between tsunami-affected villages and indirectly affected villages, we have decided that for selected projects, inland villages will be included in our program as well. Concern, who will fund a large portion of our program, has agreed to this. We are working now with 34 different hamlets or communities, all located along the coastline and in and around Auroville. Not all our projects necessarily cover our full target area.

The following is a summary of all the projects and activities we are currently busy with and have planned for the next 24 months.

Village involvement

In each of these 34 hamlets we will form a so called Paalam, meaning 'bridge' in Tamil. Each Paalam will consist of village representatives, appointed in consultation with the local Panchayat. To ensure full participation and a need-based approach, all our activities are first introduced and discussed in the monthly Paalam meeting in Auroville. Already in 17 villages the Paalam have been functioning very well for quite some time. The members have attended leadership training programs, information meetings about, for example, sanitation, legal issues, shelter construction, village infrastructure and many other issues. In 17 other villages Paalam are

being organized right now. Additionally, each village will also have its own village-oriented development group, which will meet monthly to discuss development issues and then carry out appropriate activities. Currently, the Working Committee is motivating Aurovilians, and especially Tamil Aurovilians, based on the experience with the Kuilapalayam



Preparing seed beds

Development Council, to form such a Council also in other neighbouring villages. To avoid duplication, wherever a Development Council is functioning, our team will fully cooperate with this Council. To reach our aim, we work in five separate but closely interlinked project fields:

Community Strengthening

In order to strengthen the general community fabric and stimulate co-operation between villagers, a wide range of activities is being planned, such as: building up the Paalam, night schools, formation of youth groups and women groups and the organisation of twice yearly Bio Region Wide events, such as Womens Day or Earth Day. In 11 villages Community

Centres have been constructed.

Livelihood

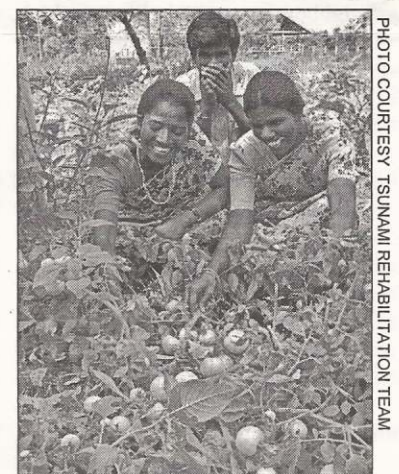
The Engine Repair Service has repaired almost 200 fishing boat engines and is still busy training a group of youths in engine repair and welding. Another group of students from tsunami-affected villages is receiving training in computer software and hardware. Our Educational Loan Scheme is enabling more than one hundred 10+2 standard students to pursue further practical studies. We have started an Enterprise Development program, with the basic aim to form new small sustainable businesses or improve existing ones. Training and production workshops for women, working with waste materials, such as cloth (TsunamiKala!), plastics and paper are functioning.

Ecological Restoration

Within two years a total of 100,000 trees will be planted along the coast in six villages. Three forest-dedicated Auroville nurseries are busy taking care of the seedlings. This year approx. 15,000 seedlings will be planted, next year the remaining 85,000.

Knowledge Centre/NGO-Coordination

Auroville has been officially appointed as the central point for knowledge resources and NGO-coordination for Villapuram district. Regularly most of the NGOs active in our district meet for coordination of activities and discussion on tsunami-related issues. We are also coordinating our activities with the Tamil Nadu Government Office of the Relief Commissioner and other NGO Coordination Centres along the coast. These include the NGO Coordination & Resource Centre (NCRC) in Nagapattinam, Bhoomika Trust and UNDP in Chennai and Kanniyakumari



Checking the first crops

Rehabilitation Resource Centre in Kanniyakumari.

Shelter and Infrastructure

A total number of 100 temporary shelters have been constructed, 20 more are in process. Auroville-based architects have created nine shelter designs, all fitting the dimensional and financial conditions for new shelters. Many meetings have taken place to ensure maximum input and participation in plan making from the future residents. In coordination with the Villapuram District Collector, two villages, Chinnamudaliarchavady Kuppam and Bommaiypalayam Kuppam, have teamed up with us. Here a maximum of 350 shelters, including infrastructure, will be constructed. However, the residents of both villages have expressed a strong preference to be relocated, whereas the availability of suitable lands to build on is very limited. Until a solution has been found, construction activities will be pending.

For more comprehensive information, visit www.auroville.org/tsunami.

Auroville Tsunami Rehabilitation Project, August 2005

Tsunami reflections

"The local needy people are also waiting to be touched by the spirit of that wave of compassion which flowed in the wake of tsunami."

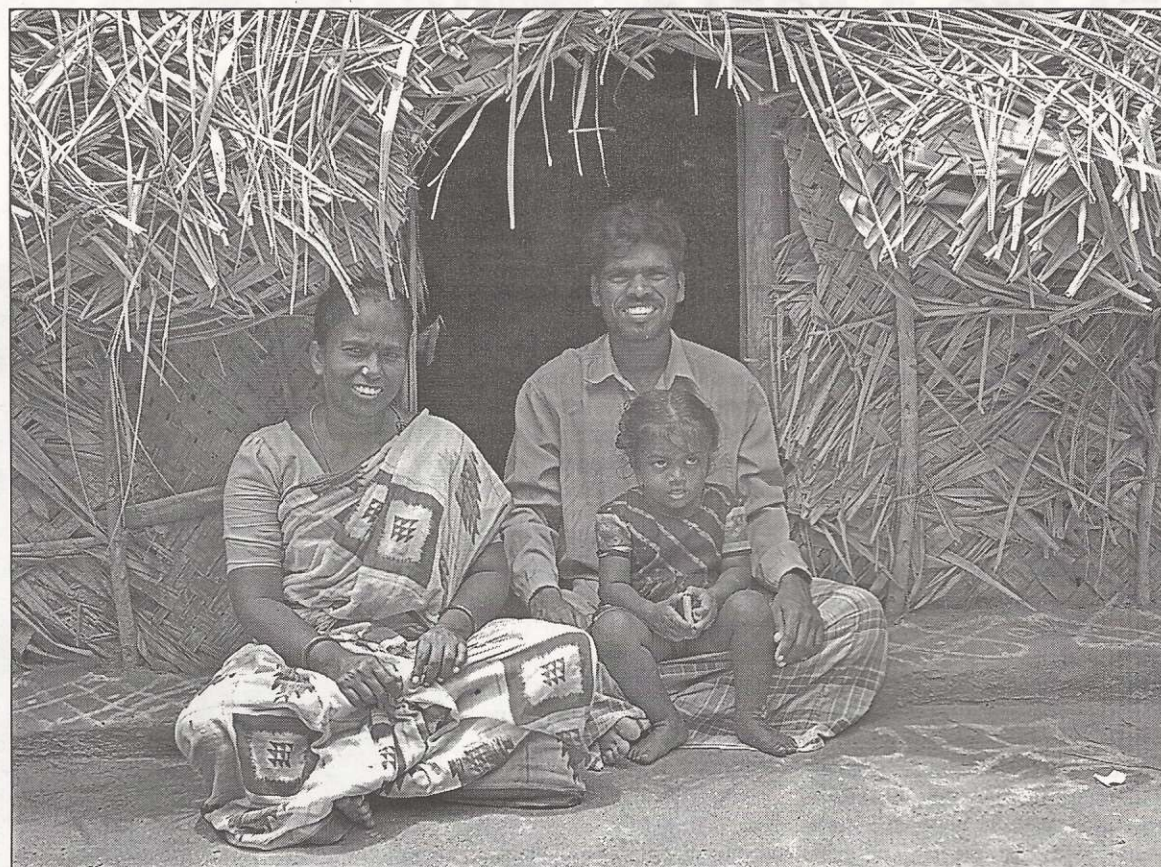
Ten boys from tsunami-affected villages were on the van coming back from welding training at Auroville. The Kulapalayam youth took the occasion of a minor accident to have a scuffle with them. Later, at a meeting the Kulapalayam youth complained bitterly: "You are paying all the attention to these fishing people, forgetting us. We helped during the tsunami, but what do we get now? We are still unemployed. So much money and things are going to the fishing villages, but what about our village? We also need help to develop."

When Moris, our coordinator for village relations, reported this at the Auroville Tsunami Relief team meeting we were not surprised – it was obvious that there was an enormous imbalance growing in the area. Following the tsunami there had been a wave of relief activities. They were successful in that none went hungry, there was no one without a temporary house and there was no outbreak of disease. But we saw also an influx of individuals and agencies – some of them with experience in disaster relief but many coming to photograph themselves with banners showing that they were first to help. They brought piles of used clothes that the fishermen didn't want and there was duplication of supply. Many fisher families got over five cooking stoves and the beaches are now so full of boats (over twice the number of boats than before the tsunami), that everyone has become an owner and there's a big difficulty in finding crew. And all this bounty is viewed by the neighbouring coastal villages which, while they may not have been directly affected by the wave (the tsunami caused damage to only those people living nearest to the sea shore or in low-lying areas), are surely affected by seeing all this attention and aid going to a section of the community which is not relatively poor. For fishermen earn well when they fish, and they have an assured source of employment. Everyone knows that Dalits, the handicapped, deserted women and the poor of all the villages are as much in need of aid as the fisher people.

The obvious focus in the first phase of relief was towards providing material relief to the most affected – "most affected" was the obvious qualification to receive the good-

social requirements, from distribution to development. Large doses of free goods pose a high chance of making people dependent. We need to be alert to the signs of relief-addiction.

It's not only at the local level that this is becoming clear. Recently the Disaster Emergencies Committee (DEC), a UK-based consortium of donor NGOs, wrote in their mission report that NGOs should "immediately widen the definition for the appeal to cover 'Tsunami-affected districts and people' (rather than just people)". One of our major funding partners, Concern-India (who are part of DEC), has agreed to include neighbouring inland villages in a project for tsunami rehabilitation, realising that if they were not included the imbalance and resulting social tension could seriously impede the rehabilitation effort. People in the field and donor agencies are more and more realising the need for a comprehensive development action which could include the whole of a coastal district in tsunami rehabilitation. But there are many more that need to be convinced, and we need to get a broad-based consensus between



A family in front of their temporary shelter

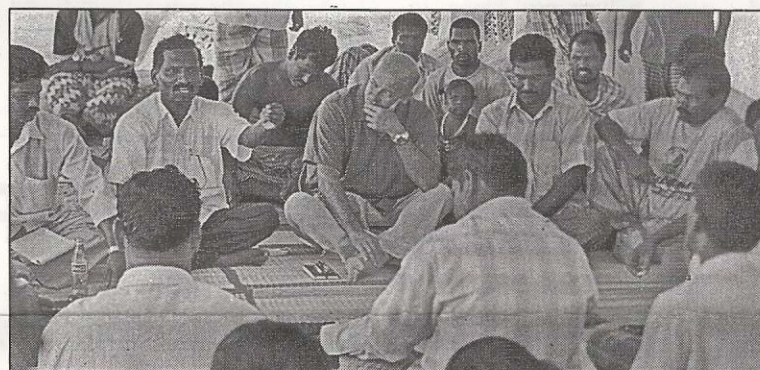
tional opportunities from pre-school to vocational training and higher education, and providing a variety of avenues for children to follow. Without access to education and

increase in the need for eco-restoration, environmental awareness, and protection of water, forest, and wildlife resources. The ground water table, the fertile topsoil, the forest fruits and firewood, the air we breathe are shared by us all, and raising the awareness and motivation to act in our collective best-interest is of prime importance.

Water, sanitation and village infrastructure is another area of concern – as populations increase and crowd together, the need for organised management of solid waste becomes urgent. Toilets in homes, drainage in the streets, garbage collection, provision of safe drinking water and many more communal amenities – the need for these is becoming overwhelming. Auroville has worked consistently in partnership with the local authorities to find and apply new technical solutions such as earth construction, ferrocement roofing, toilet units, bio-gas fuel production, and renewable energy alternatives. Linking the govern-

the NGOs are working more closely than anytime in the past. In fact, it seems to be more challenging to forge NGO to NGO partnerships, but we are exploring building consortiums as a way to rise above the 'banerism' and work for the people.

The tsunami revealed to the world the strong sense of human bonding and generosity in disaster. As the weeks rolled by, the resiliency of the fisher people as well as the limitations of the communal systems were also demonstrated. Over the months, the attempt to coordinate the activities of different NGOs has made some progress, but the competition between them to spend the money still tends to overrule accepted developmental policy. Now all of us involved in the rehabilitation activities have to display some commonsense. Although the fisherpeople would like to have all the donated money come to them alone, a sense of fairness has to prevail among the providers. The local needy people are also waiting to be touched by the



Village meeting to discuss eco-restoration

donors, NGOs, the government and the communities themselves for an integrated coastal development plan.

Here in Auroville, where we have been in close contact with the affected villages and the neighbouring villages since the morning the tsunami hit, we are well aware of the growing imbalance as more and more NGOs come to spend their money here. For us it is clear that not just the relief phase, but also the immediate rehabilitation phase (other than housing) is over: it's time to move on to development. This has been

affirmed by Concern and also Save the Children who have drawn up projects with us for long-term development in the area of livelihoods, eco-restoration, community development and pre-school centres. As soon as the communities and government are clear on the location we will have support from Concern for

rehousing tsunami-affected people in two neighbouring villages as well.

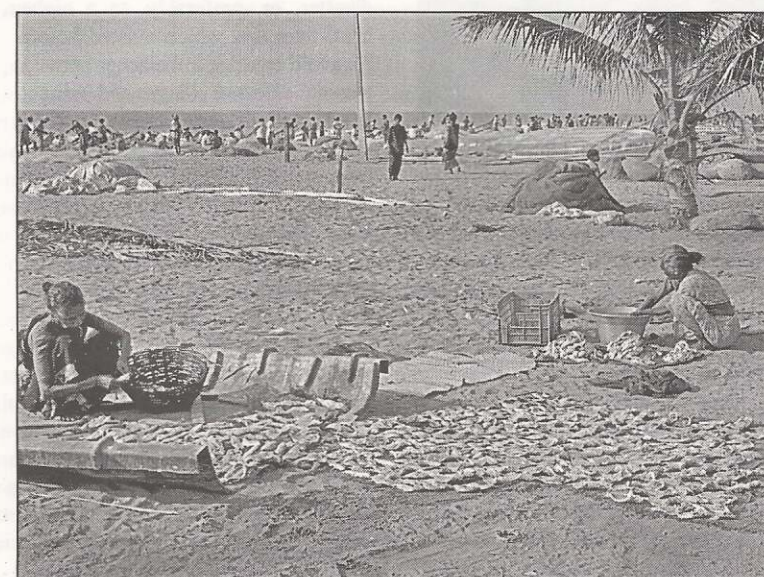
What is clear to us on the Auroville Tsunami Team is that there remain areas which could be well addressed with the remaining money in the Auroville tsunami fund.

The first priority is education. There needs to be a comprehensive plan for the area, identifying and linking up all the available educa-

training, these children will flounder in the backwaters of a more and more complex socio-economic milieu. The educational initiatives of Auroville's Isai Ambalam School and Pitchandikulam's Environmental Education programme, supported by European Union grants, have been recognised and adopted widely in the Tamil Nadu school system, but now we've also started an Educational Loan Fund, lending money to children of poor families whose marks show them deserving of support. Most of the applications are for technical training (plumbing, electrical, motor mechanic, etc.), and there is a great deal of appreciation and gratitude from the villagers for this initiative. Vocational training is also available at a number of Auroville sites, and they are beginning to consolidate.

Equally important is microfinance and enterprise development. There is a growing awareness among the new generation of villagers of possibilities to start small businesses, and in many cases credit is the missing factor. Encouraging groups of people to save together and lend to each other (microfinance) is by now a proven method to fill this gap in the formal economy. A resource centre which would help budding entrepreneurs with designs, organisation and administrative training as well as marketing assistance, would also seed a healthy prosperity in the area. Microfinance can also facilitate individuals improving their housing situation.

Environmental restoration is an on-going requirement. As the human population and its material needs increase there is a commensurate



Women sort-out the catch – fishing has resumed

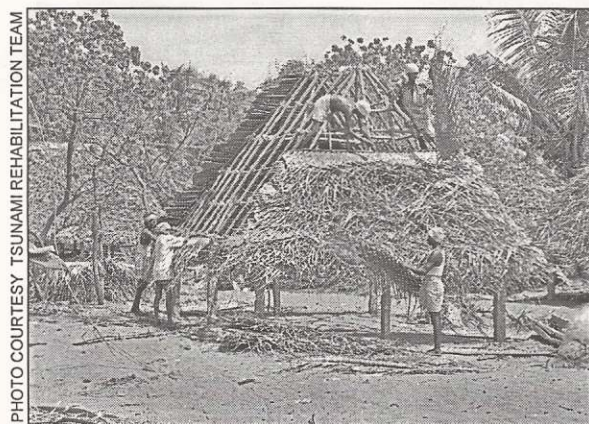
ment programmes with technologies developed by NGOs and Auroville, along with small doses of investment, can be the recipe to fulfil the long-standing needs of the people.

Partnering with other NGOs and the government is a mechanism which could help us plan better. Already the hub of the NGO Coordination Cell for Villupuram District is in Auroville. Normally governments and NGOs operate in a mode of mutual suspicion. In the case of tsunami, a change is visible to many for now the government and

spirit of that wave of compassion which flowed in the wake of tsunami.

For this reason, we who are involved in the Auroville tsunami relief and rehabilitation work are now asking the Auroville International Centres and other donors who collected money for tsunami relief to sanction the use of the funds collected for the benefit and development of all the villages around Auroville, as well as the directly tsunami-affected.

Bhavana



Making keet roofs for temporary shelters

ies. Seven months after the disaster, people in the so-called non-affected neighbouring villages, struggling with their every day tsunami of poverty, are left wondering, "Were we lucky or unlucky not to be hit by the wave?" This inequality of distribution is ripe ground for breeding social unrest.

There is now a need to move from focussing on material needs to

Transforming business

Between 2nd – 4th September, a seminar was held in Auroville on the topic of 'New Business and Global Consciousness'. It brought together Aurovilians and some Indian and international businesspeople in what the organizers described as a 'reflection' on changing trends in global business.

What are those trends? Marc Gishi, in his keynote address, explained that the last two decades have seen a new business paradigm emerging. Business is now seen to be not only, or even primarily, about making profits. Rather, business has to assume responsibility for making the world a more equitable and more sustainable place. "In this new paradigm," explained Marc, "profit becomes your efficiency in promoting the common good". The World Business Academy, set up by Willis Harman in 1989, began to explore this concept. But this, Marc noted, was only the first step. "The second step is the rediscovery of the spiritual dimension in business activities".

This is all revolutionary, and Marc admits that no more than 3% of businesses today are exploring these avenues. "But those 3% are undoubtedly the fore-runners of a huge change as humanity is already subconsciously aware that the traditional path of development is leading to collective suicide."

For Marc, one of the key questions was what role Indian businesses would play in furthering this new paradigm. However, for the Auroville businesspeople the key question was somewhat different. They wanted the Indian businessmen attending to tell them how Auroville businesses could be improved. These two differing objectives were to coexist rather uncomfortably over the course of the three days.

The first day was taken up by presentations which, in differing degrees, explored the theme of the conference. Pashi Kapoor pointed out that the Auroville Charter provides the basis for the way in which Auroville's economy should function. "We have to learn to become selfless, non-competitive, non-possessive collaborators in a larger dream." Toine, with his precision-instrument mind, decided to spell it in his 'Auroville Economy Charter'. "1. The Auroville economy serves the material needs, which arise from an aspiration towards a change of consciousness. 2. The Auroville economy provides each one with the material means required to be a servitor of the divine consciousness. 3. The Auroville economy respects the value and sustainability of the natural resources of the universe. 4. The Auroville economy creates a self-supporting environment without exchange of money."

The relation between the economy and business was never clearly enunciated in this seminar, resulting in another blurring of focus. The next Auroville presenters, however, tried to clarify what made Auroville businesses different. "The prime purpose of Auroville business units," said Alok, "is not to make profits but to express some inner aspiration of the individuals who are managing them." "We are not owners," said Paul, "but we have a responsibility to our workers, the community and, above all, to Sri Aurobindo and The Mother." His partner, Laura, put it more pithily: "Our work is our yoga."

Mr. Ravi Chaudhry, founder Chairman of Cemex Consulting Group, New Delhi, returned to the other focus of the seminar. He pointed out that today the concerns of business and society run on different tracks. "How can this gap be bridged? Only through a complete transformation in the way business functions."

Mr. Subbiah who, until recently, was the Chairman of the Murugappa Group – a \$1.5 billion Indian conglomerate – had a rather different take. He pointed out that many traditional Indian family businesses, like the Tatas and Birlas, have a deep-rooted value system. "We are all brought up to believe we are trustees and not owners of the business.

For me, the two fundamentals are doing your duty without being attached to the fruits of the work, and ensuring that nobody loses if they transact business with you."

Mr. Manoj Chakravarti, General Manager of Corporate Affairs for Titan, a Tata company, exemplified the spirit in which Tata, India's premier business house, operates. "In our founder's words, 'What comes from the people must go back to the people'. In other words, social responsibility is crucial. We believe that sustaining financial excellence depends on how good we are in delivering to the community and how good we are in looking after the environment. We believe that if we make the environment, the local community and the world a better place, the company will be much better off in the years to come."

Seminar on Auroville Radio

About 250 people from 25 countries followed this conference live. The countries included Hong Kong, India, South Korea, Syria, Japan, China, Lithuania, Kazakhstan, USA, Brazil, Norway, Sweden, UK, Denmark, Holland, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Belgium, France, Emirates, Malaysia, Ukraine and Russia. Auroville radio has also recorded the entire conference on MP3 files. For further info contact info@aurovillerradio.org

Mr. Sergio Lub, CEO of Jewels Company and founder of an alternative currency, felt that Indian business remained something of an unknown quantity for the West. He emphasised the need for better communication and the development of trust-based relationships. To this end, Sergio developed the first 'social networking software' to interconnect like-minded people who care about and want to change the world on a basis of mutual trust.

Mr. Tachi Kiuchi is also a committed networker. Co-founder and chairman of The Future 500, a group that strives to promote sustainable environmental practices, he pointed out that humanity was in grave danger because it had lost its 'sense of survival'. "Today many businesses strive to become bigger and bigger, but who cares about what is happening to the world?"

It was precisely this concern which motivated Rosanna Agudo to develop and teach to business people what she terms the 'Technology for Inner Transformation'. "I believe that business is a key agent in the global transformation process described by Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, and that, from now on, prosperity and profits will be the consequences of how well-aligned businesses are with the forces of evolution."

Day two, as often happens on the second day of a three day seminar, was somewhat messier. Topics like complementary currencies and the role of money washed around before Marc returned to his fundamental question: "What can Indian businesspeople bring to the global conversation about the role of business in the 21st century?" Mr. Subbiah politely pointed out that the answer had already been given. "We must return to our ethical roots. That is our contribution to the global debate."

At this point the Auroville businesspeople once again appealed for help and advice. Ravi Chaudhry responded that

as, in his view, "Auroville is much more about concept than practice", it is difficult for outsiders to pinpoint exactly what was needed. "Rather than coming to us, you need to access the wisdom that is already in Auroville." When an Aurovillian commented that very little information is shared between commercial units at present, Sergio was incredulous. "You don't even communicate with each other? This is totally dysfunctional!"

Mr. Subbiah responded to the evangelical note he sensed in some of the previous day's presentations by Auroville businesspeople. "We can see what Auroville has done for the land, we can see that you have built Matrimandir, but it is much less obvious what your business units have achieved. Your businesses must become an example of what you want to see happen before you try to convert others. You must become the values you want to live by." He also noted the importance of involving the local people. "Explain to them why you are here, let them see that you are making a difference in their lives and their community, and they will become your best ambassadors and supporters. That's how the Tatas and all the great Indian business houses operate."

At this point, the facilitator called for an action plan. Marc, noting that Auroville could be a catalyst for bringing together Indian and Western businesspeople in the 'new conversation', proposed a follow-up seminar in Bangalore early next year. Other suggestions focussed almost exclusively upon what could be done in Auroville itself. "You have to create an open house for your business units where you can share best practices and expertise," said Sergio. Toine's action points for Auroville business units included a need for diversification of activities, rotating successful managers, a common business budget and exploring a new employer-employee relationship. He also noted that we have to evolve other ways of evaluating the performance of our businesses beyond the traditional profit/loss criterion. Tachi suggested setting up a training centre in Auroville for the local people. He also proposed that a high-level science and technology institution could be based here. Ravi was one of a number of partic-

Follow up Action Plan

The attendants of the Seminar on New Business and Global Consciousness agreed that the following topics need to be followed up. For each topic, except topic no. 13, Aurovilians have committed themselves.

1. White paper on Auroville Units
2. Auroville's Human Resources Survey
3. Auroville Development Holistic Road Map 2012
4. Auroville New Business School
5. Business Training Centre for Aurovilians and local residents
6. Women Business School
7. Visitors and guest's data collection
8. Open house Auroville Business Units
9. Booklet on Auroville Business Units Experience
10. Auroville Products Business Corporate Identity
11. Joint Ventures
12. Second Seminar 24 – 28Feb 2006
13. Create a prototype model unit

ipants who suggested that Auroville should even have its own business school which would stress the role of values and consciousness in commerce.

The final morning was spent evaluating some of these suggestions and trying to assess what the seminar had achieved. This was not immediately obvious. On the downside, there was the familiar sight of people talking past rather than to each other. This was partly due to the fact that people had very different agendas – Marc wanted to further a 'global conversation' while the Auroville business people wanted very practical advice – and not all of them could be dealt with satisfactorily in such a short time. It was also noticeable how few Auroville businesspeople attended the first two days of the seminar, something which Alok put down to poor communication. "The next time such a seminar is held, the Auroville business units have to be involved from the beginning and not merely informed about it very late in the day."

Perhaps the major criticism of a seminar devoted to new business and global consciousness is that nobody really presented a concrete model of what new business would look like in its totality. There was much discussion about new value systems but how are these reflected in management, in products, in disposal, in different relationships to customers, society and the environment?

Without concrete examples, the suspicion remains that 'new business' – and this includes many Aurovillian enterprises – is often really only old business with a few value labels or improved work practices added-on.

On the positive side, the seminar saw the successful launch of Internet streaming by Auroville radio, enabling over 200 people around the world to follow the proceedings live. Sergio's gift was a workshop introducing Aurovilians to 'social networking' on the Internet: many Aurovilians already signed up to a network which allows access to like-minded groups around the world.

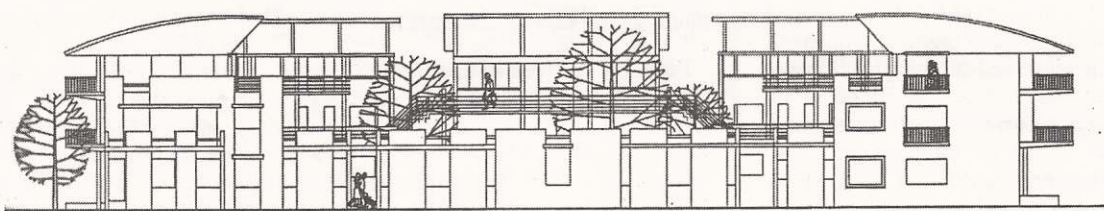
However, perhaps the biggest achievement of the seminar was that, in Toine's words, "We've established an interactive field with Indian business people". In this sense, the fact that Auroville doesn't have so much to offer at present in terms of radically new business practices is less important than that new contacts have been made which may lead to interesting developments in the future. True, 'New Business and Global Consciousness' is a ridiculously over-inflated title for what happened over the three days of the seminar. But Auroville often advances by throwing out such a grappling hook and hauling itself forward with the help of those whom it attracts to share our debates and concerns.

Alan

BUILDING THE CITY

Citadines

A new experiment in collective living in Auroville



Five Aurovilians and one long term guest have taken the initiative to build Citadines, an alternative residence project. To live in Citadines, one has to work meaningfully for Auroville. In exchange, the person obtains the right to use a fully furnished flat, decorated with beauty-in-simplicity, together with access to collective services: covered parking, a multi-purpose hall and gardens, Building maintenance and laundry services are part of the project as well. "The basic concept," explained Louis Cohen during a public presentation of the project in September, "is that the time, energy and resources of the residents who are fully dedicated to the growth of Auroville will not be scattered and inefficiently used."

The novelty of this experiment is also that the flats will be offered without exchange of money. "Future residents will not pay for 'their' apartment, but the entire project will be built from funds collected from outside Auroville. "We should underline that we consider it a privilege for humanity to finance the building of Auroville," explained Louis, who added that 15% of the Rs 2 crore project have already been secured and that donations for another 60 lakhs have meanwhile been promised.

As quite a few Aurovilians have no means to acquire a house, Citadines will give them priority in house allocation. But Citadines is not meant for Aurovilians alone.

Newcomers, long-term guests and youth coming to Auroville to work and do research, are also entitled to apply to live in Citadines.

Citadines, will have 31 apartments intended for 60 residents. There are single rooms with shared bathrooms and kitchen facilities; studios for one or two persons with toilets; and one, two and three bed room apartments. The project is envisaged to use solar energy for 80% of its requirements, harvest rainwater and have its own waste water recycling plant. It will be located next to Creativity, opposite Prayatna. The project holders have meanwhile applied for building permission.

Carel

Educational life out of home

Leaving Auroville by bus, we (Perumal, Ancolie and Ashok) set off to Bangalore for a post-graduate course in journalism. All three of us had made the commitment to this intriguing yet uncertain affair. It wasn't easy for us, to leave the green environment of Auroville for the concrete jungle of Bangalore.

"In the beginning, especially for Ashok and me, everyday was a constant battle as we did not have a place to stay and we were financially handicapped as the living standards in a city are much higher," said Perumal. "I was an emotional wreck to be frank, but I had to push on through. Financially and morally François Gauthier supported us a lot. He felt responsible for our well being, as he was the one who brought us there."

The Sri Sri Centre for Media Studies (SSCMS), founded four years ago by Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, has the objective of forming 'spiritual journalists' who would do the work differently, with more depth, give their work a more spiritual significance instead of staying at the surface of things. "'Spiritual', because we were given the initiation of Kriya Yoga, an ancient Indian breathing technique of *Pranayam*," explains Ancolie.

Motivation

Perumal: "I had an aspiration to study and to learn computer graphics. This course gave me a chance to

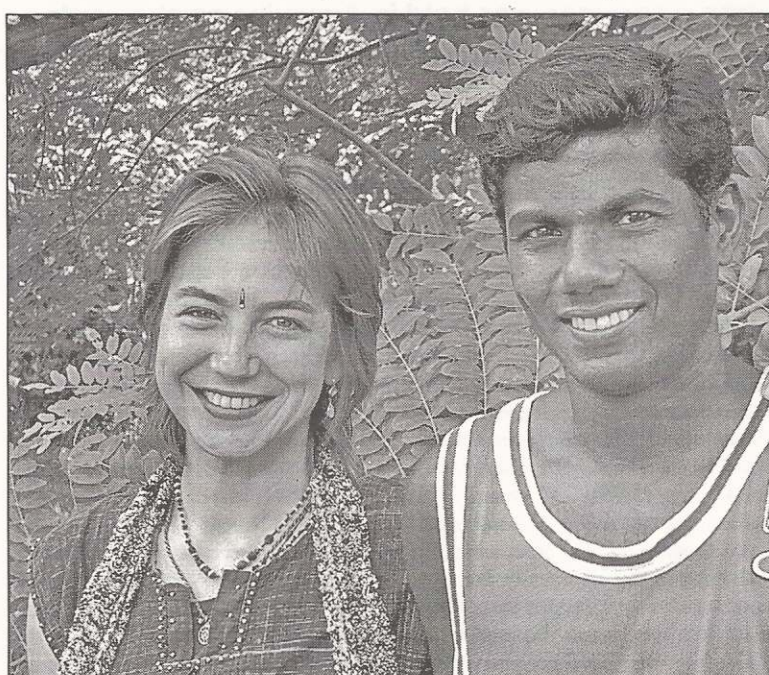
study, so I grabbed it."

Ancolie: "The same was for me, although I wound up participating in this programme by sheer coincidence, I had no idea what was in front of me, therefore I surrendered to the unknown out of curiosity but with some fear. How I benefited the most and what made me stay there, was the teaching of *Pranayam* and to learn new things keeping always a focus on the Divine."

Life in the big city

Coming from Auroville, home sweet home, life was puzzling yet amusing trying to adapt to the Bangalorean life style. We were studying from 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. subjects like English, sociology, current events, reporting, media law, ethics, computers and mass communication. We brought out a monthly paper *Dateline Bangalore*, made individual documentaries, learnt to confront new situations; life was interesting yet challenging living as a student in the big city.

Ancolie: "My experience living in a girls' hostel taught me a lot about how the real Indian student's life was, and the feeling of living together, eating, laughing, studying, and quarrelling together, gave me the sense of being connected to all of them although I was the only *vellakarachi* (white woman) in college, in the hostel, and around Jayanagar. Often dur-



Ancolie and Perumal

ing my morning walks I would be stopped and asked whether I was a tourist. I used to reply 'No, no, I'm an old timer,' Auroville style, and walk away.

Our internship was the ultimate learning experience for we really had the chance to tackle real life situations. I got the opportunity to work for The Hindu in Hyderabad. Writing articles everyday, correcting press-releases, and page-making, and

always continuing the *Pranayam*. 'Breath is life, no deep breath, no deep life!'

Perumal: "My life was more expensive as I lived in a flat along with three others. The first month was the most difficult period of my entire life — every day I had to watch every paisa that I spent, and I never managed to live within what I had; I always had to borrow from friends. I felt so suffocated living in a big city,

that my only desire was to run back home to the beautiful trees, dusty roads and the blue ocean. For one whole month we (with Ashoke) stayed in the college classroom after which we found the flat.

"For my internship I got the chance to work with Doordarshan Chennai for the news section. It was very challenging. As it was a government television channel no one was very keen on teaching me and I had to explore all the possibilities to learn to make news reels and to write stories for the footage shot by the camera men. It was difficult in the beginning but after some time I made friends and found my own way to cope with the situation."

Plans for the future

Perumal: "Although I would like to stay and work in Auroville it seems that a better option for me would be to start working in another city to gain some experience in order to come back to Auroville with more skills and knowledge."

Ancolie: "I have to stay in Auroville till I get all my official papers sorted as my departure to Bangalore created a helter-skelter in the visa offices. Now I learn music, singing and playing the guitar, read Sri Aurobindo and write articles for Auroville Today."

"OM"

Ancolie and Perumal

REFLECTIONS

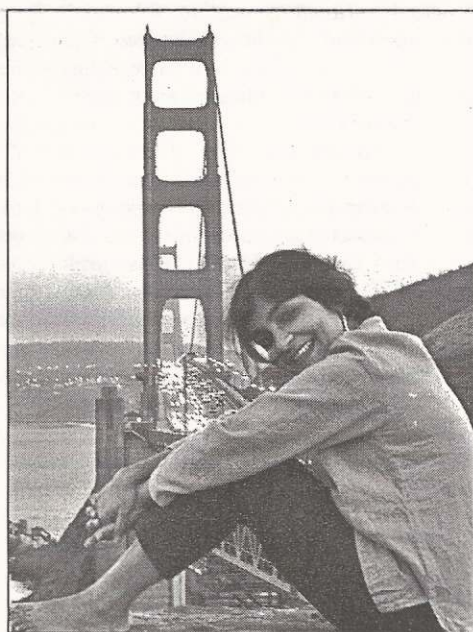
Dreamin' of California

A tongue-in-cheek account of life in the Bay Area, USA where Bindu, one of Auroville Today's former editors, is currently studying.

I came to California dreaming of blue skies and palm trees flirting in the breeze on sun-drenched beaches. I came for the famed progressive bay area culture that I thought flourished in communities surrounded by organic gardens, and I came to an integral educational institute to pick up an academic degree where I expected meditation to be the norm and not the exception in academic life.

Nothing really prepared for the dark mean streets of downtown San Francisco as I walked to school huddling from the wind

But the progressive bay culture, recognizing me as an emancipated, full-blooded Indian woman, wrapped me in its embrace. Every second person that I met avowed to be an expert on the subtle nuances of tantric sex and promised a lifetime of enlightened coitus with delicious energy serpentine its way through the chakras. I counted the triangles in the Sri Yantra and debated on Buddhism as a socially-engaged philosophy intoxicated by substances that I couldn't quite identify. I was invited to salons (a neat concept by the way) and dance parties where rock and roll had bowed to fusion. And I discovered in the twinkling disco lights, Ganesha dancing away with the rest of the crowd or sedately seated on his altar next to the DJ surrounded by plastic flowers, incense and ganja smoke — a truly living integration of the East and the West. I wished I had bought a plastic Jesus that they sell at Christmas time in India to complete the picture, but then again, Jesus hanging from the cross would perhaps dampen the mood of the hip-jerking hip-hop dancers. A curvaceous Madonna then...



Bindu at the Golden Gate bridge

I quickly realized in and out of school that here finally was my chance to experience all the mystical states that I had been trying to attain seating cross-legged daily for years. Here, finally, I could hook up to a machine and have an out-of-body experience or tune my brain waves to the theta frequency, or my being sing in resonance to its tonal frequency. Alas, my meagre student earnings couldn't quite afford it. The road to *personal* (emphasis in original) enlightenment is paved with dollars. So I have applied for a US patent of Ganesha's elephant head and the OM squiggle in the hope that it would pay for my tuition.

And, on Earth-Day weekend at the New Living Expo (nobody really wants to call themselves New Age) as I wended my way through the copper, three-dimensional sacred mandalas and the aura readers and psychic healers, I marveled at how

the Eastern philosophy of "nothingness" had mutated in this hip-hop spirituality to a philosophy of "every-thingness." Yes, indeed, just as much the sex, drugs, rock and roll culture had evolved into the sex, drugs, soul/fusion/trance spirituality ethos of the nineties and beyond, where given the Buddhist understanding of here and now, all of the above were undertaken simultaneously with the same breath.

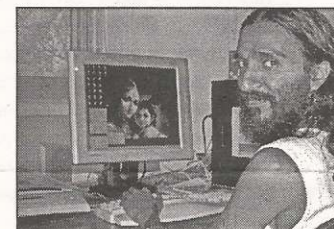
And so here I am, still inhaling all that the bay culture has on offer. And I must admit, despite everything, enjoying it. We all need a good laugh now and then. But sometimes nostalgia hits me and I long for the simple, well-trodden paths of India where Buddha stole away from the riches of his palace leaving his sleeping family behind (never quite forgave him for that) to make peace with his creator under a peepal tree or, a hot-headed Aurobindo Ghose looked out of the bars of his solitary prison cell and saw Krishna's face in his enemy.

It's not the trivialization and commercialization of spirituality that bothers me — hey, we do that in Auroville too — but the surfeit of it. Then again, everything about the US, California not excepted, is in excess. So be it.

Did someone, some time ago say in these pages that we Aurovilians have a lot to learn from the West? No siree. All that we truly need to know is already within us. And believe me, there are no short-cuts. It will take all of our fragile patience and sweaty endurance to build this City of the Future, and all said and done, Aurovilians have more integrity than they are credited for.

Desktop sadhana

They say Auroville is not what it should be
Things are going wrong on many fronts it seems.
The reality is One,
an unbroken whole,
Say the Masters.



I open my eyes to see how things are:
I see a dusty computer monitor in front,
It is not as clean as it should be.
I open my mail box, there is a torrent of Viagra sale,
Cheap loans and porn site links, hardly any good mail.
It is not what it should be.
The electricity has just failed, it is very common,
Not exactly what a power supply should be.
I see a pile of CD's on my desk top;
They are waiting to be sorted out, I had been postponing.
This makes my desktop cluttered, not what it should be.
One of my legs has gone numb, long hours on a chair
Makes my limb go numb however soft the chair is.
Not exactly what it should be.
It is getting hot and stuffy, I begin to sweat,
Weather is not very pleasant, it can be better.
Somewhere in me there is irritation coming up,
Not what it should be if I am here for yoga.
They are right, I see it clearly within me,
I see it clearly outside me,
Auroville is not what it should be.

The reality is One, I remind myself.

I see a mop which was always there in a corner.
It took me only a few minutes to clean up my monitor
And sort out the pile of CD's; it looks better.
I let my door and windows open,
There is fresh air now, I go out for a walk
In the corridor, I drink some water and
Watch the beauty of a bamboo growth
Next to my terrace; many leaves are golden orange.
In my room the power is back;
My limbs are also feeling alive.
I spend some time to redefine my filter rules
To sort out the junk mail automatically.
The new mail server is little bit more intelligent
Than the one before, it puts a spam stamp
On junk mails so that it can be filtered out.
My breath is slower and deeper than before,
I am at peace, there is no more irritation.
Every thing looks fine now,
One metre radius of Auroville has improved.

The phone rings, a long distant call,
My mother is anxious to know
If I am coming home for a festival;
She is like that, waiting, always.

Manoj

Celebrating Africa

Sharing the familiar in a different land, Elene, a student at Future School and a resident of Auroville, shares her experiences of the recent 'Africa Evening'

On September 3rd, we celebrated the first ever 'Africa Evening' in Auroville. 'Africa Evening' was to present the culture of Africa, the dance, the music, the storytelling, and of course the good African food. It was a great idea. Many people do not know about Africa and how beautiful it is. All people hear about Africa is its poverty or famine or the AIDS problem. Jasmin and Aravinda from Cape Town, who were visiting Auroville in preparation for the Auroville International meeting next year in South Africa, launched the idea.

There are very few Africans in Auroville, but by a strange coincidence, my uncle Tekeste and I were hosting four Ethiopians – Sebawit, Tibebe, Shita and Dr. Ashenafi, all architects who studied mud construction at the Earth Institute. And then there was Bisirat, an Ethiopian student at the Pondicherry University. We decided to pull it off together and present Africa to Auroville. As there was not much familiarity with African cuisine, we all had to help with the cooking of Ethiopian food. Luckily, Sebawit, the sole female besides myself, was a splendid cook. Her dishes make one want to lick one's fingers, or 'chew on them', as we say in Amharic, my native language. The men and myself were her helpers. Tibebe, her classmate, surprisingly contributed with a delicious sauce. It is quite unusual in my culture to have

a male in the kitchen, much less one who cooks. It was delightful that after two years in Auroville I was in the company of people from my country, chatting in my language as we cooked together!

Even with the help of the cooks from the Visitor's Centre cafeteria, it took us all over 6 hours to prepare the food for the buffet-style dinner. We made it just in time to be able to rush home, freshen up, and don our traditional Ethiopian 'Habesha' kameez' of fine white cotton, and get back in time. Tabibe was particularly splendid looking.

The evening saw a humungous crowd, all colourfully dressed in their best outfits. This was unexpected. I hoped there would be enough food to go around. Yes, there was, fortunately! But there was a long queue even for the last bits and scraps. The Ethiopian food was the most liked – *dorowat* (chicken stew), *shiro* (lentil sauce), *difo dabo* (wheat bread). There were also dishes from Senegal, Morocco and Guinea, as a few Aurovilians have connections to these countries.

The post-dinner entertainment began with a storytelling by Jasmin and Aravinda around a symbolic bonfire. In many African cultures, stories are told while everyone is gathered around a fire. I was to take part giving voices to special characters, but it did not happen. Following that, a documentary on the personal life of a South African astronomer was shown. This was a frus-

trating experience as the technology failed and a blank blue screen appeared almost every 5 seconds, causing quite a few people to leave. Perhaps it would have been better to have stopped the movie, and switched to the next of the evening's line-up, playing African music so that the people could dance – something that many in the crowd were waiting for. Soon after, a group of boys from the Mohanam Cultural centre took over the stage and began African-style drumming. This got almost everyone off their seats and moving spontaneously to the marvelous rhythms of the drums. The number of empty spots in the audience grew, and by the time the recorded music from the African continent began to play, everyone was on-stage, including all the Ethiopians. When songs from my country came on, it gave me a strange feeling. It was different to hear these familiar tunes in Auroville, among so many different nationalities of people, and to see so many enjoying it. Already I have been asked by many friends when the next Africa Evening will be, and a few girls at school asked me to teach them African dancing...

It's now a week later. Something from inside me woke me up early, as the sun just rose on this Sunday morning. I sat up for a few minutes before I realized that it was today, September 11th,



Elene pouring Ethiopian coffee

that in Ethiopia, we change the calendar. Today we would enter *Enkuthathaash* the New Year. Our calendar is different from the Western calendar but similar to the Russian. In addition, we have 13 months, 12 months of 30 days each, and a very short 13th month that is 5 or 6 days long. I got up and got myself ready and prepared my room, creating a beautiful altar to do a small prayer for my family and people. I arranged candles in a perfect circle, and there at the centre, placed the picture of my mother, my princess. Besides her, were her children. I put on her favourite *Tigrina* song as I prepared for the prayer. She sat there gazing at me, while I burnt her incense. Her eyes

glowed like stars in the darkened room. I then sang to my family far away, the song that we used to sing together before going to bed, and I danced for my princess. At the end, I read a poem out from the Bible, and concluded the ceremony with a silent communication with my family far away. I wished them all the best, and a 'Happy New Year'.

Elene

Seventeen-year old Elene Habite moved to Auroville two years ago. While she loves living in Auroville, she does miss her mother, and the smell of coffee beans being roasted in the afternoon for Buna Affalal, Ethiopia's ritual coffee-ceremony.

REFLECTIONS

Full moon walking

It's 7.25 p.m., September 18th. The Banyan tree appears surreal. It is the night of the full moon. Slowly the walkers amble in, seating themselves under the silent roots in quiet anticipation.

The moonlight walk tonight will be my first. The Unity Work Team members have been running the programme for over a year and a half. It always gave me a warm feeling – reading the announcement each month – but I have never managed to make it this far before.

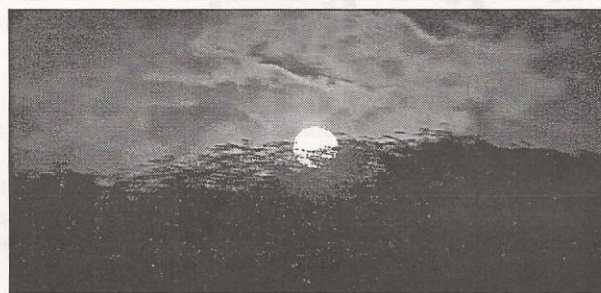
Rising out of the inky blackness of the East, the moon shimmers from behind a hazy streak of clouds. Matrimandir in the foreground appears like a pin-cushion; the scaffolds sticking out like needles, like energy fields... From where I sit, I hardly can see any gold disc, only the pristine whiteness of the water-proof Kemperol broken by polka dots of milky portholes. To contemplate that we have been working at this for over 30 years... and how much more... My mind is too noisy. "Quiet down – you are supposed to be meditating!"

I shut my eyes; my ears tune in to the sounds around. A hungry skeeter noisily whining by my ear scouting for a spot to land... the velvety rustle of the girl by my side rubbing her feet in the grass... the sudden screech of a barn owl from the dark branches above... the drumbeat from a marriage festivity at some village far away and an accompanying burst of a firecracker... even my pen scratching at the page of my journal... From some village to the west, an old Tamil film song seeps in through the night air, intense and fading moment to moment, spilling verse of universal morals... There is a strange amalgam of mystery as we sit in the silence of the Matrimandir with the spirit of the local people strong in the air. People continue to trickle in, some noisily, with voices breaking the charged stillness. "Sssshh," goes one of the organizers. My thoughts slowly subside.

Finally there is a stirring – we're ready to move. The moon lies shy, half-hidden behind the wash of clouds. The crickets get louder, their high-pitch hum deafening to

the ears. I have no idea what I am in for. We gather around one of the organisers who quietly instructs us, "We'll be going through the forests. There will be a few stops. We'll return back here for refreshments." He adds, "and please keep silent during the walk." I expect a counting of heads, but there is none... What if one of us gets lost in the forest?! A frantic thought pops in my head. It's too late; we begin the walk.

The South-American ear-pod tree at the town hall junction is sleeping, its compound leaves tightly folded and closed. Finally unveiled, the moon shines brightly now. We walk towards it... I begin to see how quickly this walk may get addictive... A piebald dog joins us, trotting along, weaving in between our legs. It stops now and then, sniffing, taking detours, also silent... Suddenly for a brief moment, a scent like a skunk's fills the air – perhaps the spray of a civet cat... It is intense... In the darkness, my vision recedes, and my nose and ears seem to expand beyond my body. The night's aromas magnify; the night jas-



Rising out of the inky blackness of the East, the moon shimmers from behind a hazy streak of clouds

mine ready for the moths, the moist sarsaparilla roots under the earth, even the quirky human smells – the light gardenia perfume of a young woman, or the sharp musky sweat of a lanky chap ahead. The sense of time fades away. Only a faint rhythm of crunching soil grains underfoot keep a beat...

We pass by my jogging route – we must be close to Samridhi I tell myself. At an old cashew tope, the group stops. It is an open field with a few straggling trees, and the moon beams rain down with intensity. It is glorious and for the first time, I notice an enormous halo appearing around it. Our gazes are turned upwards; like baying wolves our collective chins are lifted; only we are silent. Even the dog stands still...

It's the final stretch – from behind Surrender,

between Arati and Invocation, we begin the march back. The fluorescent dial of my watch shows we have walked over an hour. I take my chappals off – it is familiar terrain and I know the path will be sandy and soft on my tired soles. My steps get buoyant; and I find myself filled with an unusual energy... The moon now behind us, our long shadows appear to race ahead. Back past the sleeping earpod and through the Matrimandir gates to the welcoming fragrance of the rain-tree blossoms.

We collapse on the grassy knoll under the wisdom tree. I am elated, somewhat disoriented but slowly grounding. Someone offers a glass of power syrup... My thoughts switch on noisily again – so when in October is full moon night?

Priya Sundaravalli

In brief

Transition School

Another phase of the Transition School expansion has finished and the Dolphins, Unicorns and Kingfishers have moved into their new classrooms. Transition now calls for funds to start building two more classrooms, the next phase of development, as the number of children in Auroville is increasing. An estimated Rs 21 lakhs is still required. For further info contact lyle@auroville.org.in

DEVA postcards

Ten drawings and paintings from 5 and 6-year-old children from Centre Field Kindergarten have been printed as postcards to be part of DEVA, a fund raising project for Auroville schools created by our children and for our children. DEVA postcards are available from selected shops in Pondicherry and from didiercecilia@auroville.org.in

Goat milk / cheese

La Ferme Cheese have purchased a number of Telichery goats, the South Indian milking breed, and monitors how they adapt in the Auroville environment. Goat milk in first instance will be given to people who need it for therapeutic reasons.

'Music of the Soul'

An Indian recital of devotional music was offered by Smt. Karunamayee, a visiting guest artist from New Delhi.

Painting and photo exhibitions

'The Red Soil', a painting and photography exhibition by Adam, a visiting artist from Dublin, was show in the Foyer Art Gallery, Bharat Nivas.

'Work in Progress', paintings by N. Anandou, an artist from Pondicherry, were exhibited at the Tamil Heritage Centre in Bharat Nivas.

On Janmashtami (Krishna's birthday) a painting exhibition on Krishna by Ritam was opened at the Foyer gallery of the Sri Aurobindo Auditorium, Bharat Nivas

A painting exhibition by Anna Maria called 'The Loom, the Colour and the Light' was held at Pitanga, Samasti

An exhibition called 'Tao Magic' on the secret language of diagrams and calligraphy of Taoist graphic art by Franz was held at the Aurelec Cafeteria.

What I Heard about Iraq

The Auroville Theatre Group presented the play "What I heard about Iraq", (a cry for 5 voices) adapted for stage by Simon Levy from the article by Eliot Weinberger at the Creativity Community 'Hall of Light'

Sunset Sitar Concert

Renowned sitarist Sri Tapbrata Mitra performed at sunset at the Amphitheatre, Matrimandir

Sutra Dance

On the Malaysian New Year (August 31st) the Malaysian Dance Group Sutra Dance Theatre presented 'Spellbound', modern live Odissi dance, at the Sri Aurobindo Auditorium.

The Golden Voice

The 9th 'A' standard students of Udavi School staged the Norwegian folk tale 'The Golden voice of little Eric' translated into English, at Udavi School.

An inveterate hippie at heart....

"In my heart I am a returning Aurovillian," says Tlaloc, a Hawaiian – American – Australian of Japanese ancestry

"Turn it off!" screams 14-year old Darryl as Tlaloc walks away from a running tap in the biology lab. It is the middle of a beginner science class at Future School where first year students are becoming sensitized to water conservation. Tlaloc is satisfied – the message has been received.

Bare-torsoed, in khaki shorts, and his long jet-black hair held up in a pony-tail, Tlaloc paints the picture of the proverbial Auroville greenbelter. "When I lived in Fertile before, I only wore a loin cloth... so my shorts almost make me over dressed!" he jokes. Having lived in Auroville in its early years between 1974 and 1977, Tlaloc is 'back this time for good', after a 30 year hiatus. "I guess it was time to return," he says with a shrug. "I had been to Auroville five times since I had left. During my last visit in August 2004, it felt just right to move back." And move back he did with a tourist visa, a detail that has gotten him into a tizzy with the Auroville's Entry group. "I have a 10 year visa and it makes no sense to spend so much money, to go back to Australia and get an entry visa. So I am not a newcomer and I am not recognized as a returning Aurovillian."

Of eclectic interests and strong green leanings, Tlaloc is still every bit an inveterate hippie of the seventies, and is not shy of being identified as one. "There were so many hippies per capita in Auroville at that time," he recalls with a chuckle. "And we fitted right into Auroville's ethos because we already had lived collectively in communes and shared houses, and were exploring Eastern mysticism and spirituality... we had sort of left our Christian roots; and it was Hinduism that made sense to us." In his early years in Auroville, Tlaloc grew Chlorella (spirulina), taught mathematics and life sciences at the 'Pyramid school', and later helped Johnny and Jan with reforestation at Fertile. It was the latter upon which he based his Master's thesis for a degree in environmental education. "I would have been happy staying on, but my professor from Hawaii kept saying 'come home, come home' and I kept saying 'Not yet Gordon, Not yet!' but eventually I did." (His departure coincided with the time Auroville split from the Sri Aurobindo Society.)

His university degree put him on another trajectory and for 3 decades he worked with environmental and social justice development

NGOs and also taught at university on Ecological Sustainable Development. He made his home in Hawaii, California, and finally Sydney, Australia where he raised his son for 20 years. "I loved parenting more than anything I've ever done," he shares. During all this time away, he continued to stay in touch with Auroville. "There was June of AVI in Santa Cruz who kept me updated with information. I was also supporting Fertile financially for many years, or sending a little birthday money of \$5 to many kids." He also presented slide shows and talks on Auroville many times a year to different groups.

But what really brought him back? "I am not sure," he muses. "It was perhaps the transparency of the Auroville News; I was very impressed by it. So I read many copies and talked to friends and I got to see a glimpse of what was going on, and that was really good."

How has Auroville changed? "30 years ago, it was about survival, man!" he exclaims. "Just red earth – parched earth – little water – little food – and you lived on *ragi* and *kambu*. That was our mainstay. And we really adapted to the life of the Tamils in many different ways. But you see, that wasn't really much of a thing for hippies because we chose 'voluntarily simplicity'. We saw what decadent bourgeois, middle class society was doing... consuming all our resources, and we realized that having conspicuous consumption in cars, homes, and of things of this nature was not really at the core of where we needed to be headed... And these hardships weren't really anything to us at that time. But now things have changed. You see more middle class life styles and more comforts ... though many of the greenbelters are still there, living their frugal lifestyles..."

Does it bother him? "No, each one has to work out what ever stage one is in. You know it is easy for someone coming from the west who has had lots of things to reject them. But for someone who hasn't had those things, it only makes sense that they aspire for material goods before they can let go."

"In the past Pour Tous too reflected our lifestyle. It was very frugal and very basic and now it has all this fancy stuff – even dog food! But what is heartening now is that Pour Tous is moving back to basic necessities, and I think it is fantastic..."



Tlaloc (right) leading a tai-chi class on the roof of Pitanga

"Also back then, we weren't as friendly as now. We were friendly amongst each other, but with newcomers and tourists, we were sort of wary and didn't smile at them. I think people are much more friendly now; I notice on the road that people smile... The demographics too has changed. In the early years, Auroville was mainly populated by 20 to 30 year olds, and today the average person is much older. When you see older people in a community, it is a sign that life is getting more stable and easier."

"The children in those days used to amuse themselves differently – drawing, being in nature and doing things with their hands... Now it is more of computers or TV... Another thing was that 30 years ago, kids were choosing the adults they wanted to hang out with, and it was not necessarily their parents... Kids just moved in with other families, in different communities. The rest of the community never judged the parents of these kids. The benefit of multi-parents is that kids and other adults get to see different parenting styles, and this only enriches the child and future parents. I learnt my parenting skills from Johnny. He's the most compassionate, patient, and fair person I have met... and living collectively becomes a really valuable lesson in observing this. Now, there is still a lot of interchange but the families are more nuclear. But even now I see the kids have their huge peer groups; and they benefit from having so many brothers and sisters... and they have this larger group of people that they can relate to."

Children and collectivism appear to be Tlaloc's credo. He agrees vociferously. "Yeah, yeah. Children are our future. And parents who come to Auroville are definitely more enlightened in this aspect – they see that this is an alternative to the mainstream dominant society,

and they realize that they want to get away from that... And collectivism and communism are the vehicles to transform ourselves and our surroundings..."

With typical newcomer gusto and goodwill, Tlaloc has thrown himself into Auroville, including showing up at community and general meetings. He volunteers his time and effort wearing several hats in the process. Much of the day is spent at the Tsunami office exploring ideas for more human friendly habitations in house-rebuilding, or ensuring ecological sanitation in affected villages, where the danger of groundwater contamination by sewage is high. His interest in greenwork has him also involved in exploring drought resistant species for landscaping (*xeriscapes*). Through a website he hopes to link this information to the unique work on 'Tropical Dry Evergreen Forest' already well established in Auroville. At Future School he leads a peer education and team teaching class, where 'older kids will teach younger kids on environmental and sustainability issues by their own sensitization'. Four times a week at Pitanga, he leads a small band of dedicated beginners through the dance of Tai Chi. As for leisure... it is his time at the Kindergarten... "It is there I play – it's the little ones that give me my greatest joy!"

Being caught up in a bureaucratic limbo with his status in Auroville undefined doesn't faze him. So what's with his unusual name – "I never liked my real name and so I wanted a different name and I always liked the word 'cloud'. Tlaloc, means cloud in Mayan and also refers to the god of rain. And it was in Pondicherry that I actually found my name 30 years ago in a UNESCO courier! And that was it!"

Priya Sundaravalli

Profile

And the music finally stops...

The brief life of Royal Express, Auroville first alternative eco-friendly public transport, has abruptly come to an end. Nikolai, its faithful driver, submitted the final eulogy to the 'News and Notes', this time in tragicomic verse.

*Three weeks have now passed with no meeting, no reply,
The Royal Express Pour Tous account has now run completely dry.
Everything was flowing in divine anarchy, then came a brick wall,
How will we ever evolve Auroville from the Town Hall to For All?
I have no choice but to take this electric vandi off the road,
Communication to you will now have to be in Morse code.
This is the end of my introduction, The Royal Express,
It is now time to part with Auroville in search of a princess!*

Have his desperate cries for support fallen on our collective deaf ears? Who is to blame? Have we, the dreamers and idealists in this 'city of

the future', finally stopped dreaming and believing? Global warming is reaching monster proportions. The news is full of hurricanes and flooding rains appear like mythical demons. Here in Auroville the sun beats down its scorching rays even at the end of September, the price of petrol continues to rise. and I, a teacher of biology, ecology and all things alive, continue to drive my petrol guzzling scooter, even during my present two-week holiday. "Wake up!" I shake myself.

It was early this year on Earth Day that Auroville saw the 'silent' debut of the electric nine-passenger three-wheeler, aptly christened Royal Express. "Auroville Motor-less", the banners proclaimed. Soon the Royal Express became a regular fixture outside the Solar Kitchen, shuttling the hungry back and forth at the lunch hour. It warmed many hearts; it was one colourful buggy alright, a mascot of our green aspirations. Nikolai's love and creativity visible upon it –

psychedelic banners of spirals and stars, playful signs fluttering in the breeze "For Kings, queens, princes and princesses" and two mean speakers roped inside homey terracotta pots belting out world beats and rhythms.

But somehow the experiment failed. Auroville did not take to the Royal Express like Nikolai hoped we would, even though it ran as regular as clockwork between the Town Hall and the Solar Kitchen and Pour Tous in Aspiration. "There were perhaps a handful of regulars," he muses, "but most of the time I ran empty."

Perhaps we are unused to patience and waiting; perhaps we too, like the world outside, prefer speedy and immediate gratification for getting from A to B. But can Auroville, after 36 years, really afford to let collective eco-friendly transport take a back-seat in our mobility?

I hope that this is just a test of fire, a typical newcomer experience of life in Auroville. Didn't the Royal



Nikolai (in his Yin-form) with Royal Express – Auroville's non-polluting, psychologically healing, enlightening and spiritually uplifting symbol of a general renaissance

Express axle break this summer, grounding the services, till Nikolai's desperate appeal brought in 'material and spiritual' contributions – and magically on Sri Aurobindo's birthday services were ready to resume? Perhaps a sign of things to come...?

As we wait, Nikolai's presence on

the road will be missed – in his double 'avatar-dom': as yang driver by morning in pressed pink suit and a natty brown beard; and in the afternoons, in yin form with golden braids and an enviable floral-print dress, still with that natty brown beard ...

Priya Sundaravalli

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