

# AUROVILLE TODAY

February 28th, 1990

Auroville - Kottakuppam 605104 - Tamil Nadu - India

Number Fourteen

On February 28th, Auroville celebrates another year of its unfolding. Every year is different, but some seem more charged with potential than others, as if a nexus was being arrived at, a convergence of inner and outer energies that may become the focal point for the years and the decade ahead.

Auroville is linked to the world where the winds of freedom, blowing across man-made borders, carry with them a challenge — a challenge

that Auroville has been confronting for the last 22 years—that of helping to establish a truly planetary outlook where human unity will be no longer a dream but a fact.

As this year begins, work at Matrimandir is accelerating towards the date when the crystal can be installed in the chamber, as the focus for a beam of light... and our aspirations.

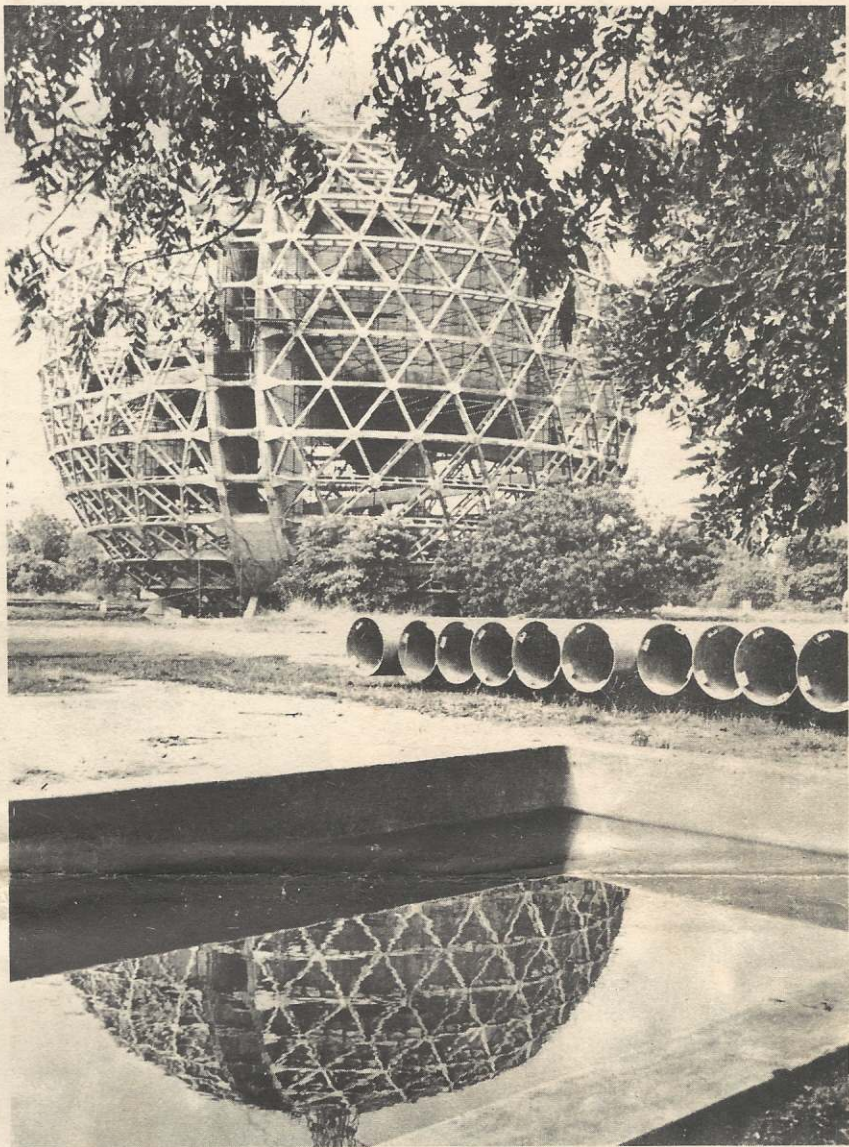
*"The most important thing is this: the play of the sun on the centre, that becomes the symbol—the symbol of future realizations." (Mother in the Agenda)*

## Auroville and the villages

In our last issue, we presented some aspects of village life and identified some of the problems the villages are facing. In this issue, we introduce Auroville's response to the challenge of the villages.

Columns  
for the  
Matrimandir  
chamber.  
See page 4!

Photo: Sven



## "They like us when we do our yoga!"

An interview with Dee

**Auroville Today: Why should Auroville concern itself with the villages?**

Dee: We in Auroville are committed to achieving human unity. The villagers represent our greatest challenge because the gap between us and them is so immense. Auroville is like the world—we are a small elite representing the powerful rich of Western society surrounded by thousands of villagers. Three quarters of the world's population live in villages! So if we're really serious about human unity, our challenge is to bridge that gap. We should also see that closing our eyes to the villages won't make them go away. Even from a self-protection point of view, we should concern ourselves with them, because if we do not share and care, how long will they be willing to cooperate with us?

**The vast majority of Aurovilians know very little about the villages. Why is this?**

Dee: I think it's a clear case of us rejecting our shadow side. We project onto them what we don't want to look at in ourselves, everything that we wish we were not. We do this individually and collectively. And the villagers are so convenient for this projection. Yet I believe no villager does anything that we don't also do.

It's our work, our yoga, not theirs, to look at this and acknowledge it. Then the compassion will flow and everything will look different. If we begin, the villagers will

help by appreciating and supporting us. If we don't do it, we'll never achieve human unity. In this sense, the villages are our great opportunity.

**How then, should Auroville relate to the villagers?**

Dee: I can't give you a mental answer. But I feel it should be like a family relationship. As in a family, individuals have different talents and strengths so we can see the villagers as part of the family that is helping to build Auroville, rather than simply taking their labour for wages. And we should recognize their children as our children and feel pained when they go hungry.

A good reason for working with them is that they are still close to their emotional centres, and they are not primarily mental. They like us, they respond to us, when their intuition tells them we are sincere. They'll reinforce our good habits if we see them as partners in the yoga. That's my experience.

Of course, there's the danger of sen-

Dee has coordinated "Village Action" work for the past 5 years. From small beginnings, it now encourages and helps sustain a wide range of activities in the surrounding villages—education, counselling, health, youth and women's groups, the improvement of basic facilities etc. But how should Auroville relate to the villages? What do they expect of us and we of them? How can we change the present situation?

Auroville Today spoke with Dee recently to get her views on these critical questions.

timementality—of idealising the villagers. Some Aurovilians have done this and have been taken advantage of—and now they don't want anything to do with the village. We need to find a middle way, a poised position, where we can relate to the villagers in a way that is genuinely human and true to what we are trying to live here.

**Has Auroville failed the villagers so far?**

Dee: We shouldn't be too hard on ourselves. If I look at the rest of India, I see that Aurovilians care more about the villagers than most others. Auroville has brought tremendous economic improvement to the villages—even if the improvement is not evenly distributed—and the work situation here is good. In the early days, when the personal contact between villagers and Aurovilians was good, the villagers liked working here, because they saw that to work in Auroville meant to be treated as a human being. And they had tremendous respect for those early Aurovilians because

they dressed simply and lived simply. That was 5 or 10 years ago. Now fewer Aurovilians relate personally to the workers and the life-style is no longer simple.

I don't know if promises were made in the early days, but I do know that the villagers expected Auroville would help them more than it has done. Materially. And why not? Doesn't everyone have a right to want enough to eat? But it's wrong to just blame Auroville for this. We're all at the mercy of a world economic situation which keeps the poor poor.

**What can be done to change this?**

Dee: I don't know the solutions. But if all Aurovilians would take seriously this challenge of realizing human unity between us and the villagers, there would be a shift in consciousness. And in that new state of consciousness new ideas and solutions would come.

There are alternatives. If we took the villages seriously, we'd see that there are about 10,000 hard-working people in this Auroville area and that there are many things we could do together. We could for example, create a local economy where value is based upon usefulness rather than market forces. At the moment, Auroville is making products for a consumer society, not things that are useful for the village.

(Continued on page 2)



(Cont. from page 1)

It sounds as if a catalyst is needed to begin changing the situation. What do you suggest?

Dee: I see two possibilities. One is the *Auroville Today* suggestion of holding an Auroville seminar on the village. Another possibility is to organize a conference and bring in some really interesting people from 'outside' to stimulate us. I don't always agree with this approach, but in this context it may work.

Above all, what we—who are working with the villages—need more of, is attitudinal support from the rest of Auroville. We're doing a job that shouldn't exist in a well planned society. We're absorbing the poison and trying to clean up the mess caused by a world economic system in which others reap the benefits while the villagers suffer. More important than money or manpower is the feeling that village action work is supported and appreciated.

Interview by Alan, 20.12.89



## About Village Action

FROM THE beginning, there have been people active in the field of village development, initially under The Mother's guidance. One of the first organizations to be established (in 1973) was the Tamil Fund for Rural Development, which did active work, with programmes including road improvement, assistance for small businesses and education etc. Unfortunately there was a long lapse during the period of troubles with the Sri Aurobindo Society, in which virtually no organized work could be done. But individuals like Ruud Lohman, Meenakshi, Ivar and Andre Tardeil continued to work steadily during those early years to establish a solid base for further development.

Village Action, with its present headquarters at Isai Ambalam near Kottakarai, was slowly developing due to Ivar's pioneering work, and experienced a new start in 1985 with a one-time grant from SWIS-SAID. Subsequently, other funds were received through wellwishers, Auromitra, Tata Trust, the British Overseas Development Agency, Threshold USA, DRDA Pondicherry and other governmental organizations. The result is that there are now 8 social workers, 15 community health workers and 17 environmental workers, who receive training and maintenance.

In June 1989, Village Action became an official unit of Auroville Trust.



INVOLVING the villagers in planning and implementation is of essential importance for Village Action. People are first of all being listened to and encouraged to come up with their own solutions. In this way, the villagers accept changes as their own and take care to maintain things afterwards.

Community development is the real core of village action work. In the spirit of Auroville, it is fundamental that the people of the villages recognize their own growth process and join in the collective work of making a new world. The key word for this: "Co-Evolution", reminds us that Mother called the villagers living in the Auroville area the "first Aurovilians" and that Auroville's and the villages' growth go hand in hand.

Presently, Village Action has established contacts in virtually all the surrounding villages. We can here only attempt, without being exhaustive, to list some of the major activities in the different aspects of village development, which are presently going on.

### YOUTH CLUBS

Quite a lot of work has been done with the village youth, to direct their energies and encourage them to organize themselves in youth clubs. Now these clubs have sports facilities and do service to the village community, by repairing roads, cleaning out wells, raising funds etc.

### EDUCATION

A lot of attention goes to child-care and education facilities for children as well as adults. The children of the villages are as open and adorable as children are anywhere, full of wonder and goodwill, ready to learn. Their situation is, however not so full of hope. They are often suffering from malnourishment and diseases borne of poverty and unhygienic conditions. Auroville, through SAIER, runs several schools and programmes for village children. (see box)

In 11 villages there are now evening programmes for children. Most of these are run by concerned village youth who want to give the younger kids some help in getting through school. The curriculum varies with the skills of the teachers, and Village Action staff supplement the teaching regularly with music, drama and environmental education, and non-competitive games, mat-weaving, Bharat Natyam dancing.

Other educational activities include field trips to different parts of India. Recently, for example, a mixed group of teenagers from Auroville and the villages, led by Meenakshi, went to New Delhi to attend the Republic Day parade, on the invitation of the Ministry of Human Resources.





## ENVIRONMENT

This aspect of village development work is on the increase. Meetings have been going on with farmers, on organic farming, bunding, tree planting etc. At the village schools tree planting classes have been held, and eco-clubs to create awareness of environmental issues and to encourage love of nature have been set up in three high schools in the area. As a result, youth clubs have spontaneously taken to bringing saplings along with them when they go on cycle tours, and planting them. The book *A Boy and a Tree*, which was written for primary schools by two Aurovilians to encourage environmental awareness, was introduced in a number of government schools.

A Greenwork Resource Centre, to act as a focus for environmental education, is nearing completion at Isai Ambalam.

## HEALTH

The Village Action group works closely with the Auroville Health Centre, where great numbers of people from the village are given treatment. Several trained social workers are promoting hygiene and health education in the villages.

## ECONOMY

Auroville is providing training and employment for nearly 2000 villagers, with a consequent increase in income in village communities, increase in the standard of living, and an increase of service businesses in the villages themselves (provision stores, cashops, cycle repairers, masons, carpenters, etc.)

Apart from this natural growth process, more conscious attempts are being made to help the poor to set up their own businesses. The American-based 'Trickle Up' programme provides loans of 50 to 100 dollars to groups of 5 people to start a small business. Follow-up on this by Village Action workers has led to a relative success: over 60 small businesses have started and 37 are still running. Sometimes it is only a bicycle which makes all the difference, as in the case of a fisherman and his family who needed a bicycle to transport the fish to the market. In other cases, women are freed from moneylenders' clutches, who ask an interest of 10% per day!

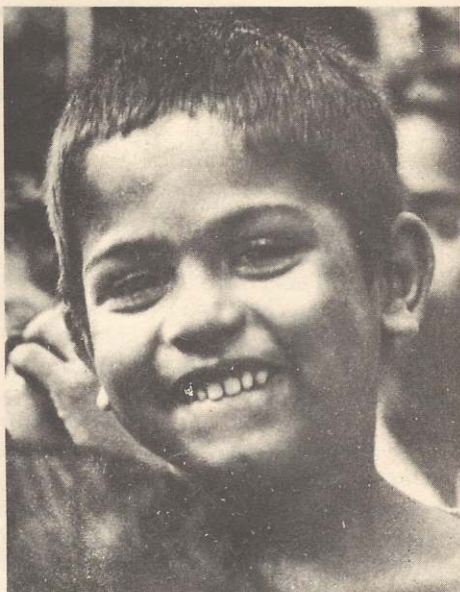
Auroville has assisted in setting up several co-operatives in leather work, carpentry etc.

□

## Food for thought...

"AUROVILLE was founded for a specific purpose, not for the development of the village. Auroville is not a village development organization, and we are not competent to be one. But of course, as employers, we cannot say, 'We work for joy, and they, the villagers, for labour.' That distinction cannot remain. Everyone who works in Auroville should work as much for joy as anyone else. To what extent are we disturbed by the fact that a large sector of the people who come to Auroville are only working for wages? That our existence, food supply, fencing and so on depends on people whose only relationship with Auroville is one in terms of earning money? If we are not happy, what are we going to do about it? That is the important question, not how we are going to develop the village. Take the child labour situation, for example: a very large percentage of children are working in Auroville. They have studied to level two or three, and now they are unskilled labourers in Auroville. If we are saying that Auroville is a place for unending education, what educational opportunities are available for them, who is planning for that, who is ready to finance that, how is that happening? This question has to be asked."

(Arendthu, during a talk)



1. Village Action social worker Dee with Vengateshan whom she 'adopted' when he was a child. He is now a Pettai village youth leader.

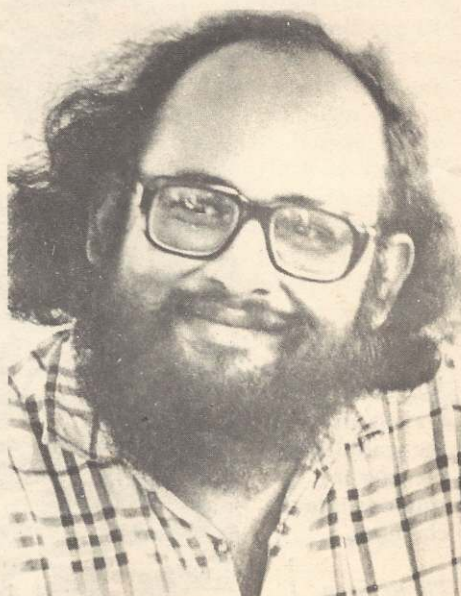
2. Anbu and Moris celebrating the opening of Pettai village night school.

3. School at Koot Road, during physical education class.

4. Ladies bicycle-repair team at Isai Ambalam.

5. Arumugam (Village Action green-worker) and school children planting trees.

6. Arendthu, Village Action social worker, primarily involved with ecology and education.

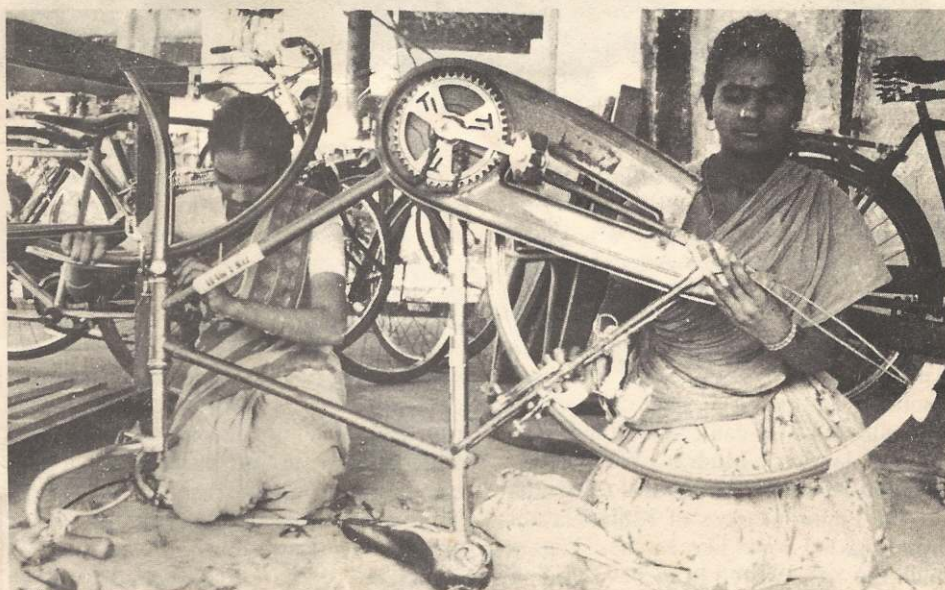


## VILLAGE ACTION AIM AND OBJECTIVES

**Aim:** To act for Auroville in the spirit of the Charter, i.e. in a spirit of Human Unity and Unending Education, especially as it applies to the surrounding villages.

### Objectives:

1. To share the ideals of Auroville with the villagers, and to facilitate the mutual exchange of village and Auroville cultures.
2. To maintain a friendly link between the villages and Auroville.
3. To hire and maintain a social work staff in the villages neighbouring Auroville.
4. To carry out programmes for development in the villages, responding to the expressed aspirations of the villagers themselves and in complete and equal cooperation with them.
5. To fund raise for village and village action projects.
6. To assist any and all Auroville units in the village outreach aspect of their work.
7. To assist any Auroville units in settling disputes involving villagers.
8. To assist village organizations and individuals in communicating with Auroville.
9. To promote consciousness within Auroville of the importance of including the villages in the vision of Auroville.



All photos by Sven

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Auroville, through SAIER, runs several schools and programmes for village children, including:

**New Creation**, a primary school and kindergarten for 130 children from Kuilapalayam village. The campus has a hostel for 25 children, and a vocation training centre in carpentry, masonry, handicrafts and traditional sculpture in softstone and granite.

**Isai Ambalam**, near Kottakarai, has a creche and kindergarten for 60 tots, where they are bathed, dressed, doctored, fed and played with while their parents are at work. There is a primary school for 20 'dropouts' (children who for one reason or the other do not go to the village schools), the main purpose of which is to get them used to going to school in the village. Now there are plans to take about 20 children from the age of 3 through practical and vocational training up to their 14th year.

**Ilaigarkal**, near the Matrimandir Nursery, provides after-work classes for young men and girls (Auroville employees), and also teacher training. There is a hostel for village youth integrating into Auroville, and this has had a great impact on several boys who are now fully integrated Aurovilians.

**Arul Vazhi**, in Morattandi village, provides a nightly programme of gymnastics and sports for some 50 harijan children.

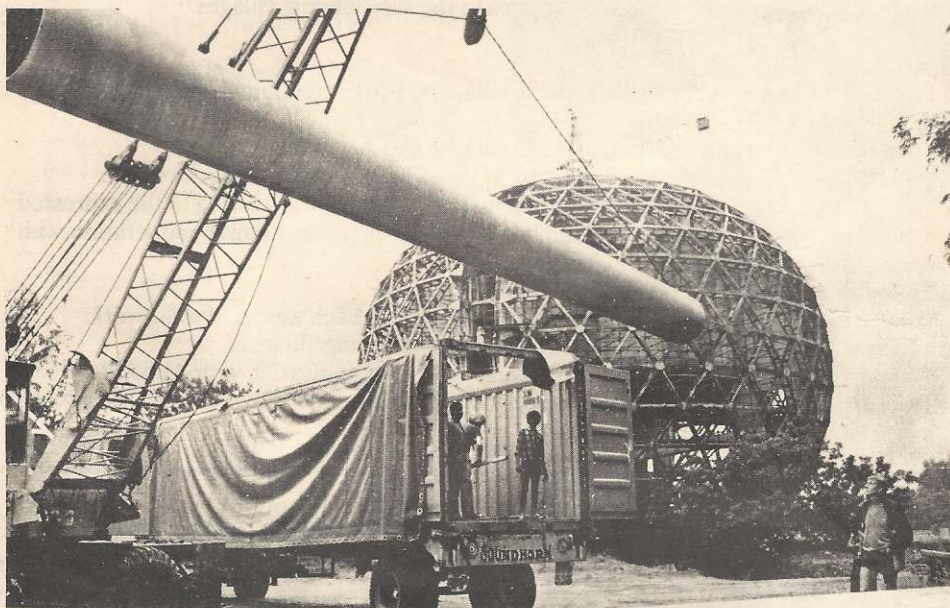
**Arul Anandam** (near Edayanchavadi) is a primary school for village children.

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# Of Columns, Docks...



There they are... twelve 24-inch diameter, seamless steel pipes, eight metre long. Painted white, they will become the columns of the inner chamber.

Photo: John Mandeem.

repeat, and to locate a crane instead for the unloading operation, as the columns weigh 830 kg each. Finally he succeeds and we inch out of Madras at dusk. Slowly Marutis, buses, Ambassador cars and rickshaws give way to long parked lines of water trucks, and finally the countryside begins.

The rock carvings of Mahabalipuram come alive, as if by magic, in the moonlight, and we're back in Auroville just after midnight. I walk out into my garden to catch a last glimpse of Orion and the Pleiades glimmering beyond the canopy of trees; they're still there, so reassured I clamber up to bed, and knock-out like a Tamil Nadu power cut.

## January 6th

Most of us had thought the monsoon had gone out with the eighties, but it rained gently at the bonfire, which was considered an auspicious omen by many. And the morning of January 6th is grey and drizzling. (Tibet has its oracle and it occurred to me that perhaps Auroville should follow suit and have an equivalent official hierophant: a reader of the bonfire ashes, or something of the sort, who could pronounce on what the year-to-come might have in store.)

There's a mood of anticipation in the air at Matrimandir. Yesterday was a day of preparation—Larry going in and out of

Pondy to organize a crane for the unloading operation. He brings out Lourduwamy, a sturdy, French-speaking Tamilian, who fits the image of what you'd imagine a local port, crane impresario would be like, and we check out the garden and service access roads together. He's worried of the crane truck getting stuck if it rains. There's a slight hitch concerning the schedule for the crane and its availability, but we have a limited amount of time to unload the container and return it to Madras, so we manage to persuade him that Matrimandir takes precedence over Anglo-French textile mills. Barring a thunderstorm, the crane should leave Pondy at six and arrive around nine at a stately 5 kilometres an hour. That evening, a phone-call comes through from Pondy—it's Chacko announcing that the truck had left Madras Port in the early evening. This means it should arrive in Auroville either around midnight or in the early morning, if it decides to break its journey en route.

At midnight I drive to Matrimandir. John paces up and down on solitary nightwatch—the flat-bed hasn't come. Matrimandir lit-up at night confronts you like a statement from another world, the arcing curves of its space-frame, a poem traced in stone, more secretive than the smile of any sphinx; subtle, yet overpowering, mysterious and beguiling. One's gaze is helplessly drawn to her. Then, too late to escape, one is caught in the caul of her mystery and force, enslaved to her charm forever.

The next day, it's slightly after eight o'clock when Chris goes out to the Tindivanam highway to see if the truck is anywhere near the Auroville turn-off; but it's already in the middle of the village of Edayanchavadi, and he escorts it towards the gardens. They take the main road, pruning a few service trees around the Amphitheatre turn, past the Banyan tree, then the

January 4th, 1990

A HORN honks in the half-light of the morning's early hours, half-light trickling like a golden stream through a dew-green darkness of climbing trees. A cock crows as Lila stops dead in her jogging tracks, her Florentine features a combination of utter shock and disbelief at seeing me up at such an unearthly hour. I reassure her that there is nothing supernatural going on as Andy and I pile into a tin-can cab, destination—the dock-lands of Madras. We pick up Chris and Toine then head out of Auroville, past the tamarind trees of Kulapalayam whose gnarled roots like witches' fingers clutch the soil, twisted branches scraping the pink-red sky. We've chosen the beach road in order to avoid the tiresome task of tallying the latest truck wrecks. Lamps and burners hiss in tea shops as women draw kolams in front of their huts in the fishing villages, and near Kalapet the sun rises, a red orb from the sea.

We pass hamlets, salt flats, estuaries and the woodland of Marakkanam. Electricity poles stick out like stilts from waterlogged fields that alternate with expanses of yellow-green rice paddies. Before we know it, the ominous towers of Kalpakkam atomic power station loom in the distance—no sign of mutant cattle, or humans for that matter, in the nearby villages yet.

Then we break for coffee in Mahabalipuram midst granite dust and roadside gods. In the outskirts of Madras, we spend half an hour in an area where houses were numbered as they were built, and not according to any obvious pattern of human logic, finally locating the house of Dr. T.K. Santhanam. Toine has to set up a meeting with him for the next day to discuss the staircase between the first and the second levels of M.M.

This accomplished, we drop Toine off the Marina and wish him luck with his schedule of meetings with representatives of Tamil Nadu Electricity Board. We now head for the port and the offices of our ship ping agents.

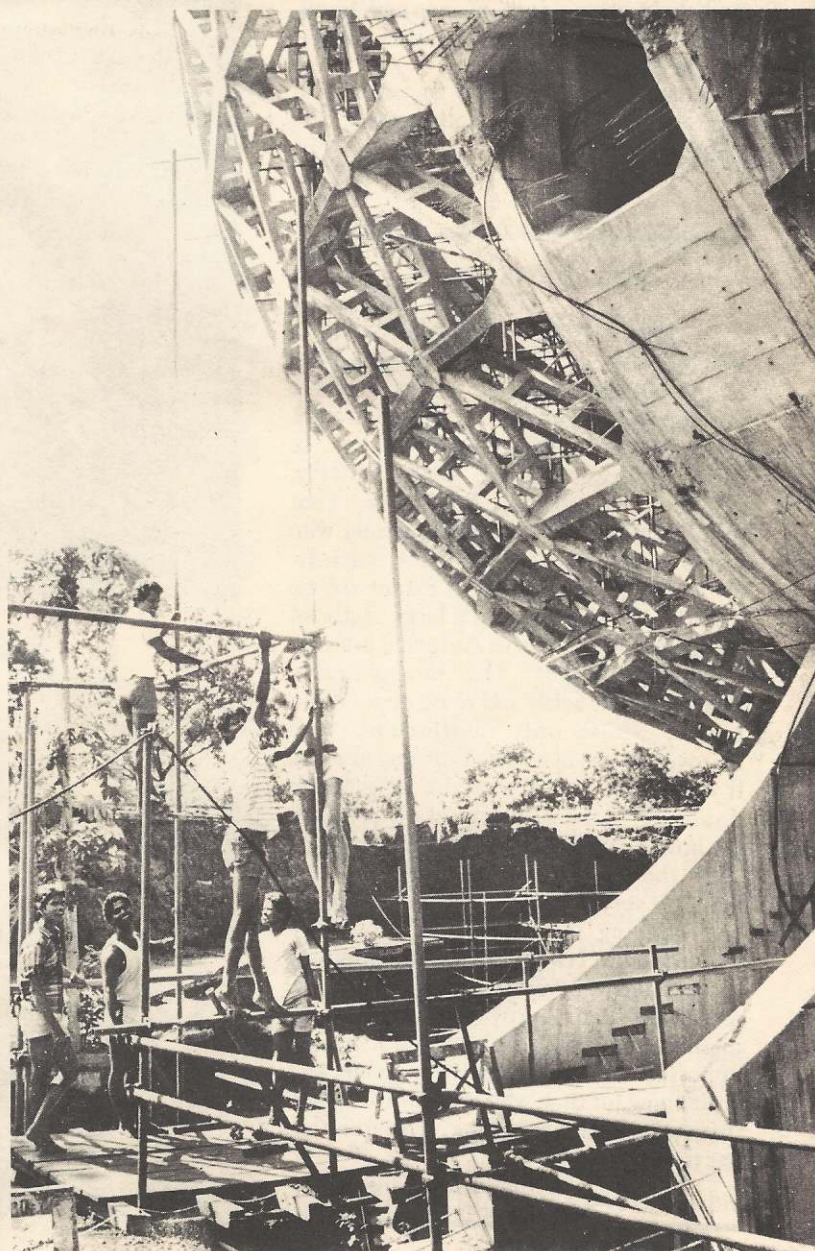
The offices of Southern Shipping Services are located on a dusty street of scrap-metal merchants and second-hand door sellers. A five minute walk from the Customs House and port, children play between brightly painted trucks as woman sleep beside the road. The object of our mission is to inspect the container that arrived on December 26th from Italy, containing, we hope, the 12 columns of the inner chamber of Matrimandir. We have come armed with a tax-exemption certificate, and a bond that officiously states the object of our mission in what is, I presume, a current variety of legal 'Indlish':

"Auroville Trust is destrous (sic) of having the container removed out of Madras Harbour for the purpose of getting the contents destuffed (sic) at their factory on Auroville."

The next two hours we spend on drinking tea, handing out M.M. brochures, surrendering our passports for passes to the port, and visiting the customs house. This is a sort of sister Fort St. George, corridors teeming with a cross section of humanity clutching files and forms in triplicate. Luckily we had a guide—one usually needs them in these places—to lead us past endless rooms where files reach pillar-like from desk to ceiling (an important element in bureaucratic architecture, of which few serious studies yet exist) to the Officer of the Assistant Collector. A quick glance at our documents and he simply informs us that a bond will have to be signed as there is a discrepancy between the wording of our certificate, which speaks of 'columns' and the factory invoice, where the columns are referred to as 'pipes', which, technically, is what they are. It's back to the offices where we pick up our passes. Our visit to the port is scheduled for the afternoon, so we break for lunch at the Connemara where we run into Nadaka and Mohammed Ali—in town to address a gathering of Muslims.

Later, we return to the offices and proceed armed with our passes to the port. A guard waves us by as we enter the port area and continue on foot towards the docks. Dockers play dice next to an indoor stadium-sized godown filled with alleys of crow-barred wooden crates (my heart goes out to all those who ever attempted importing grand pianos to Auroville), cardboard boxes filled with the latest high-tech imports, and an arsenal of gas bottles files with the latest industrial chemicals and pesticides. (Light a match, I tell myself and you could kiss Madras good-bye.) A customs official then appears who will act as our Virgil (in Dante's 'Divine Comedy', Virgil was Dante's guide through Hell. Eds.), and we are out of the warehouse, down the avenues, of red, yellow and green containers stacked high like building-blocks against a backdrop of smoking funnels and rust-red 40-metre bridge cranes. Finally, after many adventures we found ourselves in front of the vision of our pilgrimage: an orange sea-container, belonging to Hamilton Sea Containers Ltd., Bermuda. The door is ajar and there they are: twelve 24-inch diameter, seamless, galvanised, stainless steel, eight metre steel pipes, which, painted white, will become the columns of the inner chamber. I clamber back to check that the consignment of paints and painting accessories, also part of the shipment, won't have to be tracked down in Burma Bazaar. Everything looks O.K., so it's back to the offices to sign a bond, organize a flat-bed truck, and phone Auroville so that a crane can be organized in time for the 'destuffing'.

Andy gets John on the phone and has to do a bit of long-distance shouting to dissuade him from organizing a Stonehenge



Matrimandir workers erecting the scaffolding to transfer the columns into the chamber.

Photo: Sven



## ...and Sphinx-like Smiles...

truck is parked between the curing pond and the clamp shed. Right on time, slightly after 9, the 28-ton Coles Pondicherry Port Authority crane is inching its way at 5 kilometres an hour, tackle dangling, past the eucalyptus grove towards MM, a couple of Auroville kids joy-riding along. By the time it arrives, via the service-entrance road, a couple of dozen Aurovilians have gathered and the flat-bed container has already been 'destuffed' of its paint and painting accessories. By ten o'clock the unloading operation begins. Two six-metre pipes are connected with turning clamps and inserted into one of the eight-metre columns, stacked four high in the container. A cable is attached to the two ends of the pipes and to the tackle of the crane. Each pipe is gently lifted — outstretched hands guide it on its way up out of the container; I fear for Hans' beard getting caught in the cables — clearing the container, the column is swivelled in mid-air and laid down on the ground next to the curing pond. Aurovilians start showing up, unaware of what's going on. Piero is smiling and relaxed, the mood is cheerful and Gloria remarks to me that it was exactly twenty years ago that Mother described her detailed vision of the Chamber and the columns. I ask Piero if he feels 1991 might be the year of the crystal. He answers with a certain urgency, "No, no, it is *this* year that we must finish the chamber." The unloading operation is over at noon and less than ten minutes after the last column is laid on the ground, the clouds collapse, destuffing their contents in a torrential downpour (some friendly spirit must have signed a bond with the local rain-gods for the unloading operation), a downpour worthy of a Forties Hollywood film-set that has us all scurrying for shelter in the bicycle shed. Someone remarks that today is Epiphany; columns from the West instead of incense from the East. This time round, who knows?

### MM Tea Shop, January 9th

There is a tangible sense of joyful urgency at MM these days to finish the chamber, if possible, this year. By 'finish' I mean to have it ready to receive the crystal. Coloured graphs are tacked to the wall giving the work projections next to the names of the different teams and their areas of work. The marble work on the walls is finished except for around the doors (these will be installed last), the chamber has been cleared of rubble, and the first bases for the columns are being made. Scaffolding is already going up outside the east entrance, for a platform at the floor level of the chamber. The columns will be raised vertically by the crane on top of the structure, angled, and laid down, enabling them to be then brought into the chamber. Before the columns are ready for installation however, they have to be painted. A shed is ready for this work. The painting of the inside roof of the inner chamber is about to begin. After this the scaffolding in the inner chamber can come down, and work on the laying of the Rajasthan floor-marble begin. Chris Gray, who has worked since 1982 in different aspects of commercial granite and marble work in the U.S., came back in Dec. '88 to help start and supervise the marble work for the walls of the Chamber. He had to leave for a few months this summer, and when he returned the work was just about finished. "The work went much better than I anticipated in the beginning", he says. "People organized themselves into two teams, each taking half of the job, and as far as I'm concerned it was completed on schedule — in nine months. It was refreshing to work with people who are interested in perfection, not only money, and consequently, comparing it to anything I've seen on the outside, it was a first-class job. The floor-laying will be more straightforward as it will

be ground-level and polished smooth after it is laid."

I buttonhole Piero next, who gives me a rundown about what is in the works, and what remains to be done, in order that the chamber be ready to receive the crystal. "The columns and the floor are the two crucial things", he says. "They will be installed simultaneously." If all goes well, this phase of the work should be finished by August this year.

As regards the air-conditioning he expects by next month to have the specifications for the Indian market (types of fans, coils, motors, dumpers and insulating material that could be appropriate for our design, as well as being available in India.) "Unfortunately", he adds, "companies

**"Installing the crystal in a chamber that is functional will be more of a beginning than an end..."**

don't give detailed catalogues. We're now working with an engineer on this one, and the main problem we're facing is the requirement we have for an exceptional low-level of noise, given the quality of absolute silence that Mother had envisaged for the room."

However, a lot still remains to be worked out before the air-conditioning can be installed. The chilling-unit has yet to be conceptualized, and we're waiting for an answer from a company in Japan as regards the solar possibilities. A realistic estimate as regards the inner chamber is to have it finished this year without the air-conditioning. We could then have the crystal installed and keep it open for half a day.

"Installing the crystal in a chamber that is functional will be more of a beginning than an end", says Piero. "Experiments will have to be conducted as regards the reflecting and the focussing of the beam by the faceted prototype mirrors presently in the workshop. The solar tracking system is there, but it has to be integrated with a solar feedback system (*photovoltaic cells that keep track of the sun and keep it on target - Eds.*). The programme gives the movement and points the system, the photovoltaic cells provide the fine adjustments. The photovoltaic sensor control has been ordered to carry on the necessary experiments on light, intensity, glare, precision of movement, control problems, etc. Contacts are presently underway with specialised companies for a final system."

Of many unknowns, as regards the optical crystal and the chamber, one is the problem of glare. The chamber, as Mother specified, would be in a sort of penumbra, and the question according to Piero is "How much intensity of the sun can we bear with the naked eye? As a general rule the maximum contrast that a normal eye can sustain, in a darkened room, is one hundred times the least light intense spot. The problem won't be the light passing through the crystal globe, but the reflections of the refracted light from the gold plated symbol of Sri Aurobindo on which the crystal rests. The focal point of the beam of light will be 15 centimetres below the crystal globe. I'm thinking of placing a flat plated gold plate below the symbol that would reflect and diffuse rays upwards and to the side of the globe. A model is too small, so experiments will have to be done when the crystal is installed. At this point the ray will have to be adjusted and the perfect solution found."

1991? The year of the crystal? "No, it is this year we must finish the chamber..."

Roger

the newness, the dawn

*coming to the end  
of a long long line  
— time wrought connection —  
umbilical cord  
million years old  
starkly aware in the back*

*— the thread throughout the ages  
still holds me —*

*confronting the 'nothing'  
the unknown of old  
gaping in halls filled with form  
rays of golden colour  
appeal to the being  
take over the heartbeat —  
in- pouring dawn*

*— a totally new era —  
totally new call —*

*the medium's still matter  
— feet always find solids to walk —  
but the consciousness is groping  
sends feelers, is searching  
unicorn's concentration, piercing an opening  
drilling the barrier  
the dark*

*timelessly suspended  
in zero-point nowness —  
shocked into spaces  
of ether-fine air  
then  
trembling awaking  
to breath-taking newness  
silence  
oneness  
aware*

*nowhere to go for information  
no slogan to hang on for help —  
facing with New Life in its rawness  
un-knowing the known  
the self*

*golden I AM pervading  
beckoning smile from within  
stretching in matter to hold it —  
oh wonderful city  
of dawn!*

A Matrimandir worker  
13.12.'89



Photo: Sven



# A Forerunner in Village Work

— An interview with Varadharajan —

**Varadharajan:** In the beginning there was a large misapprehension in the minds of the local people that Auroville was going to evict them from their homes. At that time most people lived in Pondicherry, and it was absolutely necessary to have Tamil people in Auroville itself to start making the contacts with the people from the local villages. Not many people from the Ashram, and none of the newcomers from Europe and the USA spoke Tamil at that time.

What I understood was that Mother gave a tremendous opportunity to the people of the villages. She was very concerned with their welfare, and issued various messages on the villages. To counteract the feeling that Auroville would evict the local villagers, She approved the following statement in September 1970.

*"The advent of Auroville in Tamil Nadu has given a new hope and cheer to the people—THE FIRST CITIZENS OF AUROVILLE ARE THOSE TAMIL PEOPLE WHO LIVE ON THE SOIL OF AUROVILLE. The Tamil culture which is one of the oldest in the world, has a unique role to play in the city of Auroville, which is coming up with the cooperation of various nations of the world and various states of India."*

Some people out of various interests are spreading the false propaganda that Auroville is not beneficial to the people, and does not help the poor. But we see today in society that the rich are becoming richer and the poor, poorer. It is against this calamity that Auroville wants to fight. Auroville wants to show a new way of life.\*

(\*The last two sentences of this paragraph were added by Mother—Eds.)

Because of Auroville, (1) there will be better employment opportunities, (2) the standard of living will improve and (3) health, sanitation and educational activities will increase. Further, those who want to join Auroville completely will be taken as such. Auroville wants to give to each individual without any distinction of caste, community, religion or race, the opportunity to grow fully. Auroville is not merely a city but also a way of life.

Auroville does not want to evict anybody from their houses. It is a gross error to say that people from eleven villages will be forcibly evicted. Fifty-two acres of land in Bommapalayam and eighty acres in Irumbai have been asked to be made available at reasonable rates.

Today mankind is at the crossroad between unprecedented progress and total annihilation. The old methods of solving the problems have failed. New methods and a new way of life is necessary. The UNESCO has commended Auroville to all in its unanimous resolutions. Even before many of the present countries came into existence, the saying "all countries is my country, all peoples are my kith and kin" was well prevalent throughout Tamil Nadu. Today the time has come to prove it. It is certain that the Tamil people will do all they can to realize human unity."

Mother gave much importance to relations with the villages. Hearing of a kind of neo-colonialistic attitude of the recently arrived Aurovilians, she gave a message saying:

*"Those in contact with the villagers should not forget that these people are worth as much as they, that they know as much, that they think and feel as well as they do. They should therefore never have an attitude of ridiculous superiority. They are at home and you are the visitors."* (1969)

How do you interpret Mother's message that the local villagers are the first Aurovilians?

WHENEVER we talk about "the first Aurovilians", some think of those who heard of Auroville in the late sixties, came here to settle, and started communities like 'Forecomers', 'Aspiration' and 'Auromodèle'; others think of words of the Mother, when she spoke of the inhabitants of Auroville's surrounding villages as being "the first Aurovilians". Few know about the work that went into the contacts with these villages in the very beginnings of Auroville, laying the foundations for what is now the work of 'Village Action' and other Auroville organizations. Auroville Today spoke with a forerunner in this field, Mr. Varadharajan, about his work, and in particular about his contact with Mother on relations with the villagers. Mr. Varadharajan is from Tamil Nadu. He worked for the Government's Central Secretariat Service before coming to Auroville. He came in contact with The Mother in 1964. Shortly afterwards, when the concept of Auroville was taking shape, he offered to contact the local people. In 1969 he asked Mother's permission to settle in Auroville, and has stayed ever since.

V: I think you should distinguish between two kinds of Aurovilians. There is the geographical Aurovilian, who is here because he is born here, and has a birthright to Aurovilian citizenship. And there is the other Aurovilian who has come here following the call of Mother, who said that in Auroville simply the goodwill to make a collective experiment for the progress of humanity is sufficient to gain admittance. Each one has to become a true Aurovilian.

Did the villagers at that time understand anything about who Sri Aurobindo and The Mother were?

V: This is a very interesting question, which was also asked by Mother herself! Once two villagers had given 1 rupee each to me to give to Mother. She asked if they knew of her existence? I just smiled in reply and said "yes", and then She took two blessing packets and gave them to me saying: "You will give them that. You will tell them: The Mother is sending that for you. And you tell them: Keep that upon you, it will help you."

I was always amazed to see the intensity of the concern Mother expressed for the villagers. For example, I once took to Her some children from the families we were integrating into Auroville at that time; and She was so happy, and used words for these Tamil children in French that were so very intimate and happy, unbelievable! And once, when it had become very difficult to meet Mother, I sent her my report and mentioned that a certain child from the

"with love and blessings"! The parents were ignorant, the child did not know, and still She sent that card!

You know probably that Mother has once said that she takes responsibility for a person, even when she has seen that person only for one second in her life. What I used to do was to take a lot of children from Kulilapalayam to Mother's darshan, just to let them be present there, thinking: Mother, it is up to you to do whatever has to be done for them. Some of these children have grown up so beautifully here, it is unbelievable, and some have become good Aurovilians. I believe it is all because of Mother's grace.

You communicated directly with Mother on questions of village policy?

V: I think the question is put in a too mental way. I communicated with Mother via other people, and received Her instructions on major policy matters in writing, but most of it came verbally. But I was not thinking about the problem and its possible solutions, or proposing a 'policy'. I was doing the work Mother had given me, and that was the end of it. I would report things to Mother, and I was never questioning what She was telling me, leaving it to Her to work things out. I was taking all this work as part of my sadhana.

Do you feel that many mistakes were made in the past?

V: I can tell you of one thing, but I do not know if it is a mistake. At a certain point in time, we thought that the entire Kulilapalayam could be incorporated in Auroville. Now I can see the enormity of my aspiration. At that time someone from the ashram, I believe it was Pavitra, asked "Are they ready?"

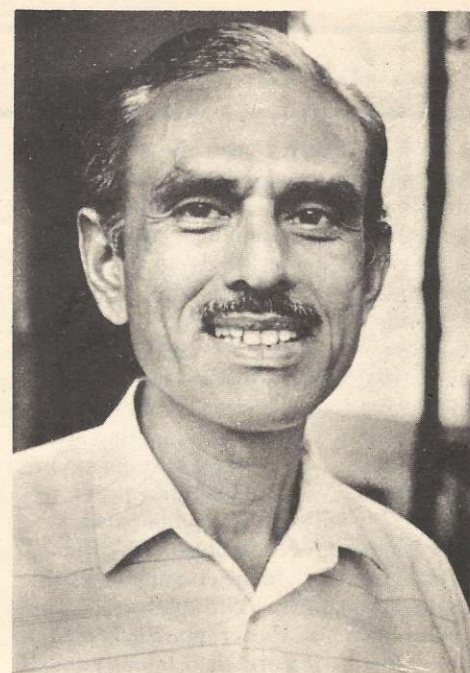
You see, Mother was talking in terms of having the Olympic Games in Auroville, in terms of having a city of 50,000 people, including the villages. I was overreaching, thinking that the entire village could be integrated, while in fact only five families were ready to do so initially.

What is for you the most striking thing Mother has said on the villages?

V: The most striking for me is that Mother said that it is by example — "and I do not mean preaching!" — that we have to educate, so that little by little they will change. We should realize that a great power is working, and that by living the example, things will change automatically! I believe that the present integration of people from the Tamil villages is quite impressive.

And also She said that you should know how to fall without getting hurt. At that time I did not understand, but now I understand that even if we fall, it is She who carries us through.

You have been doing this work up to now, and you are still continuing. You still feel this is your work?



Photos: Sven

V: Yes, but I have changed direction. Until 1976 I was doing a work in Kulilapalayam, basically with adults and children. Adults are however very well set in their ideas, and now I prefer to work with the age group between 4-14 years.

In Promesse, where I work now, we have a sports school and a kindergarten, and we take care of some 140 children. Though we know that we cannot give much, they still rush to come with so much joy. We suffer from a lack of resources and lack of manpower to help them.

Speaking about this, I want to tell you an incident. When I worked in the Kulilapalayam village, we used to give some nutrition and milk to the children. I felt that we should give this to all the village children, and prayed to Mother that this should be done. And see how Mother has fulfilled this now for the whole of Tamil Nadu! The government itself is now funding the midday meals for the children! This is Mother's great force, not just because of my prayer, but because of the aspiration of the earth. And She has granted it!

We are now in an important phase of AV, where we are starting to realize concretely the townplan. What is your view about integrating the villagers into Auroville? Do you believe it is useful to create a 'model' village?

V: It is good to have a model village, but my feeling is that the people will only go to live there if we can build something which will definitely be far better than where they are living now. But if you again are going to build low cost housing and all that, I think the experiment will be a failure. You see, the people are not stupid. In Tamil Nadu each house is not just a house, it is a part of a whole way of life. For example, the entrance area (*thinnai* in Tamil) has an important function, and you cannot just do away with it because it does not fit your architectural design. If you create inbuilt toilets, you will need to provide for ample watersupply, for if there is scarcity of water, what will they do? You will have an epidemic next day! We have to study their ways of living in great detail. Designing and building model villages is not only a townplanner's work. Many more disciplines will have to be involved to make it a success.

Can you share with us your aspiration in doing the work with the villagers?

V: The best answer is to quote these lines of Savitri:

*"Awakened to the meaning of my heart,*

*That to feel love and oneness is to live,*

*And this the magic of our golden change*

*Is all the truth I know or seek, O sage".*

Interview by Carel, Annemarie



village would celebrate its first birthday on the 14th of August. I did this wondering whether to bother her at all with this kind of information, but I had made it my firm policy to send her all information anyway, knowing that it is not up to us to know what She will decide or not. And then She wrote a card for that child of only one year old.



# Auroville: A Prophecy

A FEW MONTHS ago, the world scientific community was astonished by a unique discovery—the unearthing, near Bharat Nivas kitchen, Auroville, South India, of what appear to be ancient Lemurian prophecies relating to the last decade of this century.

The prophecies were incised on a variety of materials, including date pits and bandicoot bones—and have only just been deciphered by Dr. Rangolapuri-chavadinesan ('Jimmy' to his friends), author of *Lemuria in 30 Days* and *Laugh-Along with Lemuria*—a neo-Marxian interpretation of the Lemurian limerick.

The Lemurian script is imagistic and symbolic, and may be related to the Chi-

nese ideogram. Jimmy believes the language was not widely spoken, as at least two of the vowel sounds involve forcing the tongue backwards down the throat to curl around the tonsils while the breath is forcibly expelled. One theory, in fact, is that the demise of the Lemurian civilization was due as much to glottal strangulation as to inundation by the sea.

The following fragment, which appears to refer specifically to Auroville, has never been published before. Jimmy stresses that the interpretation is by no means definitive, and invites readers to send their own interpretations of the text to him at the Institute for Deciphering Lemurian Eccentricities (IDLE), c/o Auroville Today Office.

**"When the pregnant parrot slips into shade**

**And the cloth of the known fears the gaze of the sea,**

**When the one-legged man shall sing at the pump**

**And the dice in the grave be rolled by the moon,**

**When the winnowed word shall lodge in the heart**

**And the stains on the coat be shaped by the breath,**

**Then shall the Rising Sun rule the ways."**

## Interpretation

**"When the pregnant parrot slips into shade..."**

The pregnant parrot is a common Lemurian image and seems to represent worthless repetition or gossip. 'Shade' suggests obscurity. Consequently, the line may be freely translated as "When there is no more gossip."

**"And the cloth of the known fears the gaze of the sea."**

This line is difficult. "Cloth of the known" may be a mistranslation. Alternatively, 'cloth' may be synonymous with 'habit' (as in Middle English), which would suggest something like, "And old habits cannot cope with immortal wisdom" ('the sea')

**"When the one-legged man shall sing at the pump"**

The one-legged man represents wounding or mutilation. The pump is a symbol of life and fertility. The wound will be healed or transcended when the man learns to celebrate life.

**"And the dice in the grave be rolled by the moon"**

This line is very challenging. If the 'dice' represents 'fate'—as it does in many cultures—and the grave represents finality, then the image is of the fixity of fate being overturned ('rolled') by evolution or change (symbolized by the moon). On the other hand, the Lemurian hieroglyphic for 'dice in the grave' can also mean 'garlic crusher'. And since only the Lemurian men were, for some obscure reason, allowed to crush garlic, the line



Jimmy with Lemurian Parrot

Photo: Sven

## Coming soon!

The next issue will include an introduction to environmental issues in Auroville; the subsequent issue will deal with Youth and Education. We welcome ideas and contributions from our readers on these topics, as well as suggestions for future themes.

Eds.

may also be interpreted as meaning that the masculine principle ('Hgotmik' in classical Lemurian) must be influenced ('rolled') by the feminine (the moon).

**"When the winnowed word shall lodge in the heart"**

The 'winnowed word' may mean a) the word that has been widely scattered or disseminated or b) the essential, true word from which all the inessentials have been eliminated. A mantra. The rest of the line requires no elucidation.

**"And the stains on the coat be shaped by the breath"**

'Stains on the coat' perplexed me for many days. Then I remembered that the Lemurian priests dressed in animal skins for certain rituals. No doubt these skins were re-used many times and became stained by Hyllkokkr (Lemurian beer) and other noxious substances. The image, then, refers to something which may appear disreputable ('stained') when unused, but which acquires significance when life or spirit are 'breathed' into it. (My washerwoman thinks this interpretation is absurd. I tend to agree with her.)

**"Then shall the Rising Sun rule the ways."**

The final, climactic line appears to contain the clearest reference to Auroville. For surely 'the Rising Sun' is the City of Dawn. The prophecy, then, is that when all the above conditions have been fulfilled, Auroville will come into its full power and assume its rightful place in the world.

An alternative reading of the last line—for which I'm indebted to Mr. Kumaresan Kamikaze of Honda Scooters Ltd.—is that the time approaches when Japanese motor-cycles (from the Land of the Rising Sun) will reign supreme on the roads of Auroville.

As dictated to Alan

## "A children's circle of light around the planet"



Photo: Sven

Marguerite Smithwhite, who lived and worked for a long time in Pondicherry and in the Ashram, and who received some special guidance from Mother, had a unique experience in England. A year and a half ago she was 'inspired' by Mother to organize a peace council where children from all over the world could come together to learn about each other's cultures and language, and to try to organize happenings for spreading peace. The practical details involved in materializing such a vague, huge idea came together with remarkable ease. She had already formed a group which looked for symbols and ceremonies appropriate to our times and which help find new ways of living together. One of the ideas was to get children all over the world to light a candle on January 1st at 9 a.m. and let them think at that particular moment about each other. During this moment of meditation, the children are asked to feel love inside themselves and they send it out to other children in the world. "You first start by feeling this love, warmth, and nice thoughts, and then sending it to the children around you, it spreads to the children of your town, your country, until you have the image of a circle of love, spreading over the whole planet". It happens in every country at 9 a.m., so in one day it covers the whole earth.

How to practically organize these symbols and ceremonies into a world-wide conference came in an amazing way in just a few hours. The first conference was held in Lugano, Switzerland. An enthusiastic participant from India suggested next year's conference be held in India. And it

really happened! From December 28, 1989 to January 4, 1990, Pondicherry hosted the second International Children's Peace Council.

The participants, aged between 11 and 15 years, came for one day to Auroville. In the pre-dawn of the first day of the new decade they arrived. Matrimandir appeared to them in the middle of nowhere as a 'beacon of the future' and lit their way to the centre of Auroville. "Then all of a sudden there was a bonfire and all those people sitting around!" They held their candle-ceremony around the banyan tree, joined by some children of Auroville.

After a typical "children's breakfast" with decorated chocolate cake, sweets and buns, the youth of Auroville gave them a tour around Last School, the greenbelt and Isai Ambalam. After lunch some of the children fell asleep, while others watched videos on Auroville or played sports.

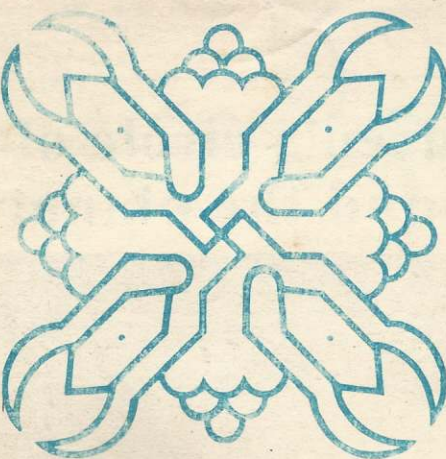
One of the highlights of the day was the cultural programme in the evening with a very unusual dance performance, choreographed by Geeta and Krishna Kumar and danced by their students. After some examples of classical South Indian dance, there was 'Snow-White and the Seven Dwarfs', the old European fairy-tale, danced in Bharat Natyam style. Who could ever have imagined dwarfs in sarees, with gold ornaments, anklets and flowers in their hair? Yet the dwarfs, Snow-White, and the wicked queen captured the international audience with their portrayal of the timeless struggle between good and evil.

Tineke



# AUROVILLE TODAY

Auroville  
Kottakuppam 605104 - Tamil Nadu - India



Address Correction Requested

February 28th, 1990 - Number Fourteen

This month: Village Action; Matrimandir columns; etc.



Water...! See next issue.

Photo: Sven

## A Corner Has Been Turned

— An interview with ROGER TOLL —

Roger Toll recently returned to Auroville after an absence of almost 10 years. During that time, he edited a newspaper in Mexico and is presently publishing a newly-launched Spanish quarterly, 'MÁS', in the U.S.

*Auroville Today: What are your immediate impressions about Auroville today?*

Roger: The most immediate thing when you come back are the people. I have found very dear friends are still here and the reception has been extraordinarily loving, nostalgic and warm. There is a sense of great continuity even after years of absence.

*But you and your friends have nonetheless changed?*

Roger: We, like Auroville have changed and like Auroville have remained the same. The exterior changes: more buildings, more communities, developments in education, etc. What stays the same are the inner realities. That is, the constant rubbing against each other of points of view, attitudes, personalities, in a way that you don't find as much in the West because there people are so isolated. In Auroville one of the extraordinary things is that everyone does come here for various reasons but I believe basically because they are touched by a certain atmosphere, a certain possibility an adventure and they say "yes" to that adventure. I've been struck coming back at the amount of involvement in the process, the amount of time that people talk about Auroville!

*What is the relevance of Auroville?*

Roger: I think the biggest relevance is the idea of representation. I've always believed that the effect of one person's small effort has repercussions that are quite impossible to gauge, and especially when they are sincere efforts then it can effect a much broader level. In Auroville the people want to change, want to grow and develop, and that has an effect on the rest of humanity.

I have had a lot of talks since I have been here. There have been a lot of questions "How do you see Auroville?" "Is it working?" And very often if I mention one thing that is of concern I see people get worried like "But are we relevant?" "What is our meaning?" There is a little nervousness there, which is very understandable because all these 10 years that I have been away Auroville has gone through very traumatic times, very difficult times, and really, what I see is that there is absolutely nothing to worry about, because I feel very truly Mother's involvement with the process. I think that all these things like the fear of capitalism and government involvement are going to right themselves. Whatever the issue might be, we are going to go to a limit and then come back again, because these are learning experiences.

*With the traumatic experiences we've gone through, we have quite a learning process behind us already and many people feel that there is a phase-shift going on. Do you feel that?*

Roger: Yes, I feel that. The major drama of the last years has been basically human battles or battles between what we call ideologies, battles over stances, positions, a very important learning process. What I think is happening now is that there is an effort — a corner has been turned and the people in Auroville have learned that maybe the ideological battle is not where it's at. Or maybe the phase, the necessity of the ideological battle is over and people are learning, and coming to a greater consensus on basics. There is a need to return to the fundamentals which are the city... the fact that it was founded on certain principles. And we'd better try to understand these principles and not just toss them out. The

period of arrogance and fanaticism of all sorts is over and we have learned from it. And what we have learned from it is the necessity to... center ourselves; to get back to the core and to work from there. To have the confidence, the trust that Mother is working through us.

*To go beyond our mental interpretations?*

Roger: Yes, what I've been trying to say is to get back to the heart.

*Where can you see Auroville going, where would you like to see Auroville going in the years to come?*

Roger: A greater sense of why we are here and the importance of it and development of the inner light, inner joy, inner strength out of which Auroville will grow — it is that which will be collaborating with the force that is coming from the outside. So, the uniting of the divine within each individual and the divine without is really the fuel of Auroville.

It is very important to show a relevance to the modern world. What we need is more development, more serious dealing with economic issues, self sufficiency. These are very important issues and as long as Auroville can't be self-sufficient, it is going to always have trouble speaking to the outside, being relevant to the outside and I think being relevant to itself.

I don't think Auroville should be afraid of developing an industrial infrastructure that is appropriate as long as it is in keeping with the economic ideals of the city.

My own personal view is that the ideal would be when Aurovilians can go to the outside and come back and when people from the outside can come into Auroville and go back out, so that there is a breath in and out. Then Auroville really can serve the world in a more dramatic external form than it has till now. The way it has served the world until now has been more internalized and esoteric but I think it can be more exoteric and, in fact, should be.

*What had you learned in Auroville that has served you in the last 10 years outside? And what have you learned outside that perhaps you couldn't have learned here?*

Roger: What I have learned in Auroville is the fact that people are made up of two basic ingredients: one, their own heart personalities, the thing they are born with, and secondly the culture and rational tendencies that are put upon them. I think what I have really learned most, what has been most valuable, is to seek the essence of each individual and not see the accoutrements or the outer display or habit. I think this has been the greatest lesson of my whole life.

Then what I have learned abroad in the last 10 years and what I couldn't learn in Auroville is the joy of professional or quality work.

*What surprised you the most on this visit?*

Roger: Quite frankly what has surprised me the most is the human element. I find a tremendous sense of heart among all the people here. It's a real brother/sisterhood, a real family, and like all extended families there is a lot of squabbling and fights, and we sometimes get broken apart by stands of one group or the other. But to me it is clearly a family. There is no denying that. I think we created the community: the community is there. Now it is a matter of it being directed and moved forward and integrating more people into it.

Interview by Roger