

AUROVILLE TODAY

Number Ninety

July 1996

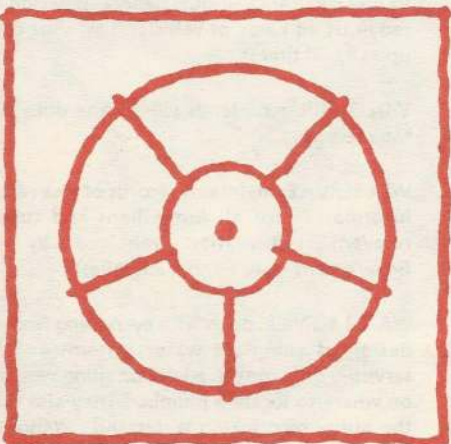
In this issue, we take a look at the Auroville Services – those often unheralded activities which keep the wheels of the community turning. The Services have not been without their critics, but a recent community-wide survey revealed a fairly high level of satisfaction: more about this below.

Summertime in Auroville is an opportunity to “stand and stare”, to enjoy aspects of our life here which frequently get ignored in the bustle of our busy winter season. One of these aspects is nature, and in this issue we also feature articles on flowers and the birds of Auroville.

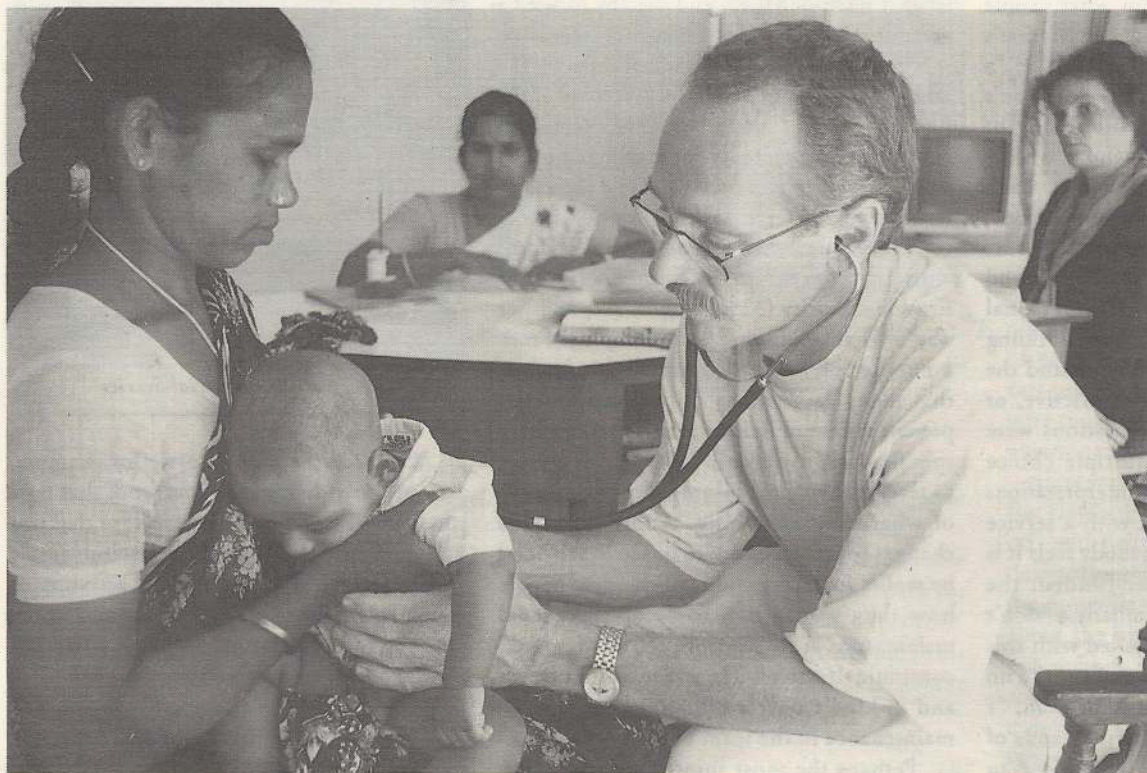
Finally, we profile the man in the “hot seat” – the Acting Secretary of the Foundation – who took up his post a few months ago.

Design by Nicole for
the Auroville Services survey

AUROVILLE



SERVICE



Dr Lucas examines
another patient
at the Auroville
Health Center.

SERVICE OR SELF ?

There is a major trend in many Western countries at present to cut back on State-administered services like national health care in favour of privately-run, commercial schemes. Why? Because there is a widespread perception that State services are often badly run, inefficient, wasteful and over-manned as, unlike the private sector, they don't have to prove themselves in open market competition with others. There is some justice in this accusation. However, real doubts remain concerning the wisdom of turning everything over to market forces, as such forces, dominated by short-term interests and the maximisation of profits, are not notable for promoting social justice or community responsibility.

Interestingly, a similar kind of debate has been playing in Auroville for some time now. On the one hand, some commercial unit managers accuse some of our community services – which are supported by the Central Fund – of being ineptly run, wasteful and unproductive, and advise them to become more “market-oriented” (meaning they should become self-supporting through charging a realistic price to those who use them). On the other hand, there is a tendency of the services to accuse Auroville business people of not giving enough of their profits to the community, and of putting personal needs or interests before the needs of the larger community.

There is nothing surprising about larger world trends being mirrored in Auroville. Mother made it clear that if Auroville was to come up with real solutions, it had to deal with the real problems of the world first. And it is also clear that, while we carry a great ideal in our hearts, there is still plenty of the old world knocking about inside us. One consequence of this is that, as a community, we still seem to lack the inner-directed efficiency or sense of responsibility for the job which would replace the traditional lever of competition and personal profit.

For this is one of the challenges – perhaps THE challenge – which faces humanity at present: to replace the ego-centred drive that powers and is destroying so much of the modern world with the fundamentally different orientation of service to a larger principle, whether it be the environment, social equality or a spiritual ideal.

In Auroville, it is clear what Mother wanted. Not capitalism, not State-directed socialism but a third way, based upon each one of us becoming “a willing servitor of the Divine Consciousness.” And until we're there? Well, maybe we can be a little easier on one another and assume that everybody, whether they be involved in business or community services, is trying to serve Auroville, serve Mother. And maybe also we might start seeing the differences that exist between us less as fundamental conflicts, battle lines drawn across the universe, and more as possibilities for course corrections, nudges on the wheel, as we attempt to steer the Auroville ship between the reefs of dogma and the shallows of pragmatism.

Alan

Surveying our services

Why a survey?

“It's the first time that we know what over 400 Aurovilians think about something. The first time, perhaps, that so many people have put so much concentration upon one issue at the same time.” What a participant in a recent seminar was referring to was the Central Fund services survey which a small group had drawn up for distribution in the community. The main reason for conducting the survey was to try and find out why the Central Fund, which wholly or partly supports 70 community activities and services, is not receiving sufficient funds to cover some of the budgets. This is something of a perennial problem, but it has acquired greater urgency now that two of our major donors have made it clear that they no longer want to fund recurring expenses, while our Economic Study group proposes to move our economy one step closer to Mother's Dream by providing more services for Auroville's inhabitants. But how do we raise funds for additional services when we can't even cover the existing budgets? And why can't we cover the existing budgets when there is a widespread perception that the funds to do so are available within the community? One reason is that there seems to be a preference for individual spending and support of development projects rather than of the less glamorous recurring expenditure. But another blockage to the flow of funds seems to stem from reservations in the community about the efficiency and necessity of some of our services.

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SURVEYING OUR SERVICES

continued from page 1

The survey, then, set out to discover what Aurovilians felt about the services and related activities supported by the Central Fund. But it also wanted to know what Aurovilians felt about the present maintenance system; about what constitutes work for the community; about what, in terms of hours and days a week, is understood by "full-time" work; about other services people would like to see provided; and, crucially, about what people felt we could do practically to realize Mother's Dream of a place where work would be "a way to express oneself and develop one's capacities and possibilities while being of service to the community as a whole, which, for its part, would provide for each individual's subsistence and sphere of action."

Clearly, the survey had limitations. Some people did not participate because they found no value in the expression of personal opinions. Others sent letters instead of filling in the questionnaire because they found the framework too "mental", too restrictive, or because they felt the wrong questions were being asked. Some of the multiple choice answers allowed of ambiguous interpretations – for example, dissatisfaction with a service might indicate either that somebody feels it is badly run or that it is under-funded: the difference is clearly crucial. Similarly a "don't know" answer to "Are you satisfied with this Service?" could mean either "I can't make up my mind" or "I've never used it" or even, "I don't want to say because they're friends of mine"! The survey also invited respondents to express themselves freely about the services, about the present maintenance system and the economy in general, and in-depth interpretation of the results are continuing. However, a fundamental problem in interpreting survey results is that certain things can never be known. This includes

differing motivations different individuals may have had for answering the way that they did, and the impossibility of determining the level of consciousness expressed through, for example, multiple-choice answers.

Results

Having said this, the fact that 424 Aurovilians took the trouble to complete a lengthy questionnaire – and thereby focused a great deal of community energy on this issue – is surely impressive. And, accepting the inherent limitations of any survey, some of the findings are very interesting. For example, a majority of respondents felt that many of the existing services were 'essential': only 4% of the responses were in the "unnecessary" column. Again, while a majority (43%) agree with the present maintenance system, a sizeable minority (32%) would "like another way". What would that "other way" be? From a number of written comments, it is clear that many Aurovilians do not support the present system of linking maintenance with a specific work; some would like all Aurovilians to receive the same maintenance irrespective of what they are doing. Another clue to changes people would like to see is provided by replies to the question which asked people how they would like to receive personal maintenance. A clear majority (61%) favoured continuing to receive it as a mixture of cash and in-kind: only 14% wanted to receive maintenance in the form of cash only.

Perhaps the most interesting responses, however, were to the questions asking people to explain what they understood as "work for the community", and to suggest practical steps to help us realize the Dream. For what was revealed here was both a depth of concern and a wish to progress which is not always evident in our daily dealings with each other.



Nico at the Financial Service

Work for the community, for example, was variously defined as "Any work that puts you in contact with your inner self or that you do with the maximum of consciousness", "Work for any of the recognized activities of Auroville's collective" and "An activity which puts you in bed at 9 pm. tired and satisfied!"

As to how we can realize the Dream:

"Be more and more sincere"

"Realize our psychic being and collective soul as soon as possible"

"Be more supportive of each other"

"We should no longer have private ammas but collective institutions"

"We have to promote 'inner quality' and not the 'horizontal expansion' of consumerism"

"Initiate more communal sharing"

"We need to develop a much better work ethos"

"Never take more than you can give"

"It is high time we stopped going around with our begging bowl and thought of ways and means of earning money to become self-sufficient"

What next?

On 7th April, the Economy Study Group convened a seminar to prepare the next steps forward for the Auroville economy. They had already made a proposal that all Aurovilians performing full-time work for the community should receive a minimum maintenance of Rs 2,000 a month, and that a special fund should be created for those who need more. Further, they suggested that additional income for the Central Fund should be raised from a variety of sources, including commercial units, Aurovilians who support themselves, Friends of Auroville and guests. However, in the light of some of the survey results, participants at the seminar wanted to go further stating, for example, that work should be de-linked from maintenance as soon as possible, and expressing a strong wish to move away from the present individualistic, 'consumer' economy towards a more collective economy with a minimum cash flow between Aurovilians. At the end of the seminar, a new Economy Group was chosen with a mandate to try to find ways of materializing these aspirations.

It will not be easy: there is already serious opposition in the community to the proposed strategy for increasing income for the Central fund. But the survey and the seminar also suggest that there is a lot of support in the community for bold new initiatives which can carry us closer to the Dream.

Alan

SERVICING AUROVILLE

It has often been noted that Auroville has the population of a small village, but the activities of a township. Among those activities are the community services that maintain the day-to-day life of the community. The numbers are astonishing: out of 800 adults, more than 300 Aurovilians work in over 80 services or service-related activities, most of which are supported by the Central Fund. Here is a selection of them:

ABUNDANCE: provides a grant proposal writing and consulting service, and functions as the secretariat of the Project Co-ordination Group

ARCHIVES: collects and preserves documents, photographs etc. relating to the foundation and development of Auroville

AUROVILLE'S FUTURE: town planning service which includes conceptual planning, topographical mapping and mounting exhibitions

AUROVILLE GUARD: about twenty-five volunteers who patrol Auroville's roads at night

AUROVILLE NEWS: the internal weekly newsletter within the community

CYCLE PATHS: looks after the maintenance and creation of the community's network of cycle paths

DENTAL CENTRE: provides services to Aurovilians and villagers related to oral health. Includes a prosthesis laboratory and a programme for raising awareness of dental hygiene in the villages

ECO-SERVICE: collects waste-paper, scrap metal, plastic etc. from 60 locations around Auroville for recycling in Pondicherry

ELECTRICAL SERVICE: installs and maintains electrical connections and equipment

ENTRY GROUP: oversees the entry process into the community and facilitates Newcomer housing

FARMS: experiment with the production of and provide organically-grown food for the community. Currently there are 10 farms represented in the Auroville Farm Group

FINANCIAL SERVICE: informal banking service which allows Aurovilians to make deposits and money transfers within the community

FOREST STEWARDS: the thirty-two land stewards manage existing forest areas (at present totalling about 1,200 acres)

FREE STORE: where clothing and related items can be exchanged, free by members of the community.

HAIRDRESSING: provided by a number of Aurovilians at Pitanga

HEALTH CENTRE: serves Tamil population of the wider Auroville area (approximately 35,000 people) and Aurovilians. Its aim is to achieve primary health care as defined by the World Health Organization

HEALTH SERVICES: include foot reflexology, classical and ayurvedic massage, shiatsu, lymph drainage, acupressure and pranic healing

HOUSING REPAIR SERVICE: allocates money for house construction or repair to those Aurovilians unable to afford it

INFORMATION CENTRE: reception centre for visitors. Facilities include information service, exhibition room, cafeteria and the Auroville Boutique

KALAMITRA: arranges and co-ordinates many of the cultural events involving artists from within and outside Auroville

LIBRARY: central facility for the lending out of books and tapes and for stocking reference works. A number of newspapers and magazines can be read on the premises

LIFEGUARDS: two of them patrol the beach at Repos

MESSENGER SERVICE: delivers messages and the Auroville News within Auroville

POUR TOUS: purchasing and distribution centre for food, household goods and propane gas. In addition to the shop, it includes an accounts office and a snack bar

PUBLIC LIAISON: deals with all matters involving the police

ROAD REPAIR SERVICE: attempts to keep Auroville's roads in the best possible condition

SAIER: the Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research maintains and furthers many aspects of educational research in the community – includes maintaining various creches, schools and evening schools, as well as a sports programme and various cultural activities

SOLAR SERVICE: services solar panels and batteries, repairs DC electronic circuits and charge controllers

TELEPHONE SERVICE: maintains telephone equipment and installations and is a liaison between Auroville and the Government Department of Telecommunications

UNITY SERVICE: provides direct assistance in conflict resolution and runs workshops on conflict resolution skills

VEHICLE REPAIR SERVICE: general servicing and repair of all kinds of vehicles. Last year called upon 4,000 times!

VIDEO LIBRARY: lends videos and does basic tape servicing

VISA SERVICE: maintains records of visa-related information for all Aurovilians and collects relevant information required by the Government from visitors and guests

WATER SERVICE: deals with everything from the design of complete water systems and the servicing of pumps to advice on siting wells and on where to locate a plumber. They also check the purity of drinking water and monitor the water levels throughout Auroville

On the Road

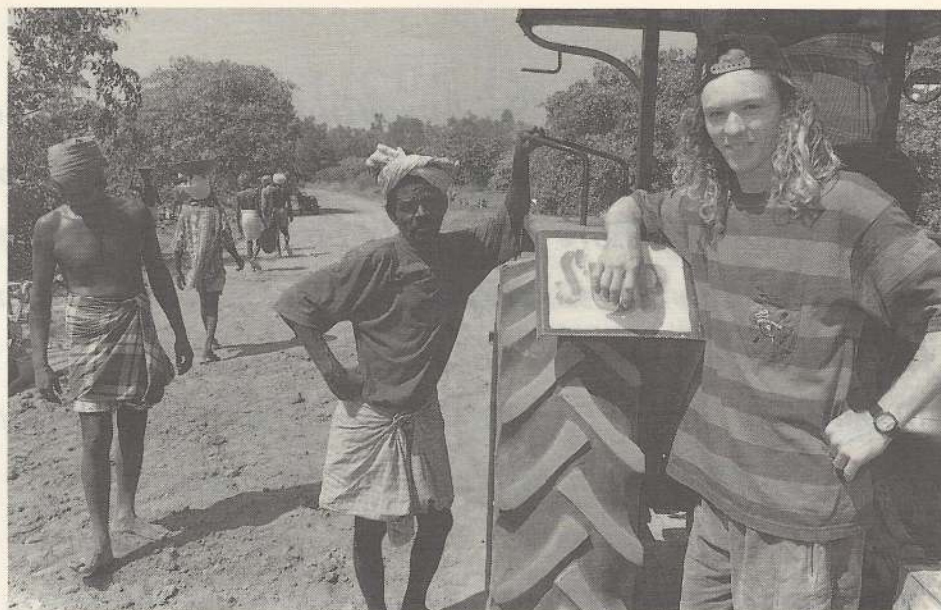
It's a one man road show. The Auroville Road Service is funded by the Central Fund when they have the money. The one man was born in Auroville in the mid-seventies. He is there at six every morning with his hired crew of about ten workers. "I like it, it's fun," says Sukrit about a job that few might look at in that light. The repair and maintenance of the dirt road system such as it is, he inherited about two years ago from Roy (who now edits the dirt in the Auroville News).

"On the theory of road building," philosophizes Sukrit brushing his long red hair out of his eyes, "everybody has a different idea. The only way to know is to drive out there after the first rain and see what happened. Actually, you can make it work with any soil, even topsoil. Drainage is another thing that everybody has ideas about. They say my drainage will make canyons in Auroville!"

Sukrit is applauded and criticized for his roads but he seems not at all bothered. "It's the speed bumps that I get the most complaints about," he remarks.

Sukrit feels that the Road Service became really efficient when they got a tractor with trailer and an earth rammer. "That has made all the difference," he notes. "We have to resurface all the major roads each year. It's the four-wheel vehicles that destroy the road. Each one loosens two handfuls of dust that are then lost."

The Road Service is wholly managed by Sukrit. He gets requests from the Development Group, from Aurofuture, and



Sukrit on site

from people who stop him anywhere, anytime. He takes on private work to fill in the gaps in the Central Fund budget. "It's the only way to keep the crew in full-time work," he explains. But Sukrit himself has recently taken up another full-time job at Matrimandir. "If I get everybody started at six, and sometime later I can go to work at Matrimandir and then just check up on my crew three or four times a day, it works well. The workers know their job. All the credit

goes to them. They work out there in the sun all day. Ever try just to stand out there in the sun all day?"

Sukrit seemed really happy about one effect from his job. "The greatest benefit for me is how much my Tamil has improved." Anyone who has known the Auroville roads over the years also appreciates how much the roads have improved.

Bill

A HIGHLY APPRECIATED SERVICE...

but who wants to work here?

One of the services which got very high ratings in the services survey and was found to be deserving of full financial support from the community was the Auroville Guard. But, strangely enough, it is also one of the services in Auroville where hardly any Aurovilians want to work.

The Auroville Guard was set up two years ago after an incident in which an Auroville woman, returning home from a concert one night, was attacked on the road by a group of men from Pondicherry. As a response, Auroprem and other, mainly Tamil, members of the Youth Club decided to start a guard to protect Aurovilians travelling on the roads at night. Volunteers came forward; small groups of people were seen shining torch-lights at cars passing by in the evenings, some thieves were caught, suspicious looking visitors were questioned and sometimes sent back to town – safety was restored to Auroville's roads!

But slowly the number of volunteers dropped off "and right now only the Tamil boys are doing the work," says Agnes, who organises the Auroville Guard at present. "When I read about the high ratings in the survey results, but nobody was coming forward to do the actual patrol work, I got upset. For the past 6 months I have been trying to get people to spend 4 hours a month patrolling. It is always words, words, words, but no acts. I wrote a few times in the Auroville News that if no people come forward to help, there won't be any guard anymore. Because of lack of manpower we even stopped the guard for a few days. When we picked it up again we halted some people coming from Pondy, asking why they were here at night. They told us that they had heard that there was no longer a Guard! People in Pondy already knew about it! That tells how much this Guard is needed.

"I realised that something is wrong with our way of functioning in this community. People have a tendency to care more about the safety of their compound than the larger Auroville. Also somehow our life style attracts the wrong people from outside. We talk about protection, but we bring something in here with our parties which attracts people from outside. If you want to meet people from Pondy, go there, stay there, but don't bring them here.

"Another thing is that more and more of our daily life depends on our servants. We send our workers to Pour Tous to do our shopping, they clean our houses and our clothes. Aurovilians rather pay than actually do the work. It was suggested to me that we should hire people to guard our roads in the night. This is something I refuse!

"Recently some people have come forward, but none of our athletes. It's either the Tamil boys or the older Aurovilians. Where are the athletes? Mother says that there should be no police or army in Auroville: "They will be replaced by a battalion of guards consisting of athletes and gymnasts." But where are the young Auroville adults between 20 and 30? If three or four people would take up this work as a full time job, that would be ideal. All the athletes should come forward, all those who do martial arts. Or some of the younger guys who do sports. Anyone with a fit body. Money is not the problem. We need more energy," concludes Agnes.

The Dental Service

The Dental Service in Auroville started under a tree in 1981. Since then, in spite of only minimal financial support from the community, Dr. Jacques Verre, who started the service, has progressively added equipment and facilities to establish a dental centre of international standards.

At present, the Dental Service consists of a main dental clinic and a prosthesis laboratory situated in Protection and two dental clinics to treat villagers in the Health Centre. The equipment is of the latest, international standard and the method of treatment is based on a concept that marks a new trend in the field of dentistry. In this method, devised by an internationally acclaimed dentist, Dr. Beach, the conventional dentist's chair is replaced by a

bed with a head support that allows the patient to lie down. This position both reduces the stress on the patient and facilitates the work of the dentist. It had always been Jacques' dream to offer in Auroville the best dental services available in the world, instead of merely providing basic facilities that anyone can avail in Pondicherry.

Besides the clinics and the laboratory, the Dental Service runs a Training Program to train twenty-six oral hygienists to work in the villages and a Prevention Program for school-children of the local villages which includes bi-annual check-ups and regular distribution of toothbrushes and toothpaste.

The main clinic is run by two dentists, two assistants, and a hygienist. While Dr. Andrew, an Indian dentist, works there full-

time, there is a ongoing group of European dentists who work on six-month contracts in exchange for air-fare, and room and board in Auroville. The prosthesis laboratory, which provides top quality prostheses from resin to ceramic bridges for all the three clinics, is managed by two European prosthetists and one Indian who is currently undergoing training. The prosthesis laboratory started its operation only three years ago, and because of the lack of facilities for all these years, it now faces many difficult cases from a backlog of twenty-five years.

Jacques' main frustration is the lack of finances for his service. Aurovilians complain that his charges are too high but Jacques claims that he charges only the cost-price for top quality service and imported material for prostheses. The generally poor local population pay only a token donation. Other patients from outside bring in some revenue but not enough to cover the full costs of the centre. At present, on average, 800 patients are treated in the dental clinic each month. And Jacques maintains that he would be able to treat all these patients for free if he received an allocation of Rs. 2 lakhs (about US \$ 6,000) from the Central Fund each month. Jacques feels that funds of this order are available in the community, but due to a lack of awareness people are not ready to donate it to the Dental Service.

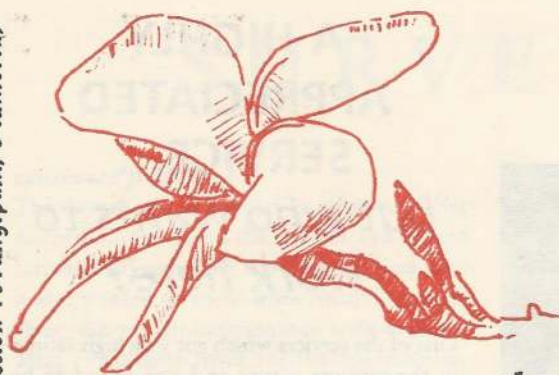
While the community debates over the costs and services provided by the Dental Service, Jacques and other Aurovilians connected to the Service quietly continue with their plans for providing more facilities and training to reach a wider range of people.



New trends in dentistry at the Dental Service

Annemarie and Bindu

Tineke (based on an interview with Agnes)



Floral

"Flowers," said Sri Aurobindo, "are the moment's representations of things that are in themselves eternal." The Mother identified with the vibrations of more than eight hundred flowers and plants and gave each a name according to its vibration. In many cases, such as "Devotion" (Ocimum sanctum), the Mother's names for the flowers correspond with the ancient knowledge and use of those flowers in India. This "Potpourri" presents a glimpse of the different ways that flowers touch people's lives in and around Auroville.

FLOWERS IN THE INDIAN WAY OF LIFE

"In the beginning were the waters. Matter readied itself. The sun glowed. And a lotus slowly opened, bearing the universe on its golden centre." (Indian creation myth)

The use of the lotus to symbolize the multifarious play of creation in this ancient myth attests to the importance of flowers in the Indian way of life. Flowers play a prominent role in all the aspects of life – social, cultural, culinary, medicinal, business, astrological and spiritual – in India. The sensitivity of Indians in general and Tamils in particular to flowers is perhaps best revealed by the fact that while in English there are only two words, "bud" and "flower", to indicate the different stages of an opening flower, the Tamil language has seven words to precisely describe each stage of the same phenomenon. Though forces of modernism have to a large extent mitigated traditional uses of flowers, even a casual visitor to India cannot help being struck by the variety of the flowers that are found here and the uses to which they are put.

Flowers in daily life

The most common use of flowers in everyday life is as ornaments and cosmetics. In olden days, both men and women used to bedeck themselves with flowers. Women use pastes of certain flowers, or, as with saffron, the stamens of certain flowers as cosmetics.

As auspicious symbols, flowers mark all the important occasions of a person's passage through life. In Tamil Nadu, the process starts at the age of seven or so, when a child is given its first garland after its hair grows back after Mundan (a ritual and complete shaving of the child's head where the hair is cut for the first time and offered to the gods). Thereafter the girls adorn their hair daily with strings of jasmine or other seasonal flowers. Originally the custom was to wear just jasmine or a champaka flower, woven into the plait and half hidden from view to keep the body cool. But today, it is more in style to adorn the hair with six or more inches of flower-strings.

A girl's attainment of puberty is even more publicly celebrated as she is dressed in a new sari, gold ornaments, and has her hair braided in a customary design with marigolds, chrysanthemums and jasmine. And it is the same at her engagement and wedding. A wedding moreover is solemnised not just by an exchange of rings, but more importantly by an exchange of garlands. In celebration of a couple's first

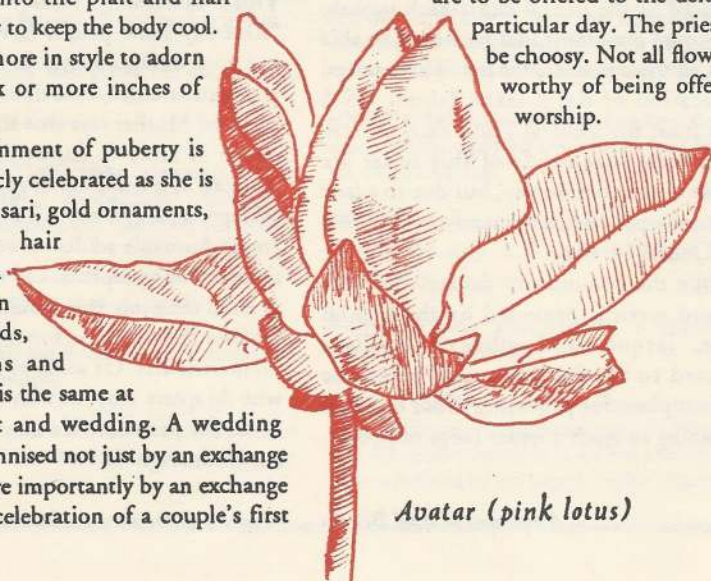
night, the bridal chamber and the matrimonial bed are wreathed with garlands of scented flowers. A woman's first pregnancy is also cause for a commemoration called Puchudal, literally meaning to decorate with flowers. In this ceremony, held in the fifth month of pregnancy, friends and relatives are invited to bless the unborn child, and the expectant mother's braid is adorned with clusters of flowers. Finally, at the end of a person's life, flowers feature in the funeral as mourners strew petals on the road as the body is borne to the cremation ground on a floral palanquin.

Flowers as gifts

All over India, important dignitaries are honoured with rich, thick garlands of tuberose, marigolds, and roses, entwined with silver thread. In Tamil Nadu, in addition to this custom, strings of flowers, especially jasmine, are presented as gifts whenever one calls on a family to transact business or on a social occasion. Also, when one buys flowers for decorating one's hair, it is a must to share it with all women that happen to be present even though they be strangers, for it is considered to be su-mangli (auspicious) to thus share one's flowers.

Flowers in worship

As one may surmise from the flower markets that flourish in towns or from the flower stalls outside temples, flowers form an important part in temple rituals and worship. In Tamil Nadu, each of the major gods and goddesses in the pantheon is characterised by one particular flower. And only garlands of that particular flower are offered to the gods. Or the temple priest dictates the flowers that are to be offered to the deity on a particular day. The priests can be choosy. Not all flowers are worthy of being offered in worship.



Avatar (pink lotus)

Coral jasmine, red hibiscus, champaka, yellow chrysanthemums and of course lotuses, are traditionally used for worship. Roses, despite their beauty of form and smell, were for a long time banned from the temples by the Tamil priests, as the plant was not indigenous but had been imported by the

Mughals into the region and was usually fertilized by bone-meal. A garland made of tarai pu (flowers growing in shrubs), neer pu (aquatic flowers), kodi pu (flowers growing on creepers), and kotu pu (flowers of trees) is often in demand as it is believed

to balance all the properties that accrue from these four classes of plants. Still attached to some temples are the Pandarams, a special "flower" caste that carry out the priest's orders – gathering, weaving and selling garlands of flowers made according to the priest's bidding. If the occasion so demands, the priest may ignore the local flowers and ask for a Tanjore Kadambam [a special multicoloured garland of flowers woven only in Tanjore] or a Madurai Malai [a garland of jasmine grown and woven specially in Madurai] as an offering. And whenever the temple deity is taken out into the town on a procession, it is borne on a floral palanquin. While in many parts of the state these temple rituals are dying out or are being adapted to suit the modern way of life, the Vishnu temple of Srirangam near Trichy staunchly persists in keeping these floral traditions alive.

As with the gods, each planet too is symbolised by a particular flower. Just as the sunflower is affected by the movement of the sun, the flower corresponding to a particular planet is believed to be affected by the power of that particular planet. And in the Navagraha Puja, the worship of the nine planets, the nine flowers that correspond to the planets are offered in worship.

Flowers as symbols

In ancient times, especially in South India, each king had for his emblem a particular flower that grew in his region and somehow symbolised the power of that particular king or region. While the kings were regularly adorned

Protection (Bougainvillea)

with garlands of that flower, their delegates wore that flower on their person at regional meetings for purposes of identification. The geographical features of the land, in Tamil Nadu, are moreover symbolically named after the flowers that are found in that particular landscape.

For example, the Tamil word for "plains" is Marudaram referring to a flower that grows only in the plains.

Similarly perhaps, the lotus has been chosen as India's national flower not just because it is indigenous to the country but because it emanates the same spiritual power as India.

I was in the courtyard beneath a young bakul tree so heavy with clusters of buds that bees swarmed thickly around its wine sweet perfume and the fallen flowers were in such great heaps I began to amuse myself weaving these into an intricate garland.

(Bhavabhuti, Malati Madhyavan, 8th century AD)

Sadly, the tempo of modern life in India is such that people no longer have time to cultivate different varieties of flowers in their courtyard or to weave them into intricate garlands. Flower farms, where only flowers in great demand – jasmine, rose, marigold, and chrysanthemum – are commercially cultivated using inorganic fertilizers now supply the flower markets and temple stalls in Tamil Nadu. Worse still is the fact that some enterprising shopkeepers have now resorted to selling strings of artificially scented plastic jasmine flowers. Against this hard-grained commercial attitude towards flowers, Auroville's attempts to cultivate both indigenous and exotic varieties of flowers and to look at the deeper significance of flowers, the significance that the Mother has identified in each of them, comes as a welcome new tide.

Bindu

(based on an interview with Meenakshi)

potpourri



Purity
(Jasmine)

Flowers as medicine

Pitchandikulam Forest and Shakti Nursery of Auroville, the Medicinal Conservation Research Parks of the region, are dedicated to the documentation and dissemination of traditional medicinal knowledge. While leaves and seeds, roots, or bark of a plant are most often used in remedies, here are a few applications using flowers that commonly grow in Auroville as their base:

NEEM (AZHADIRACHTA INDICA):

A distillation of neem flowers acts as a herbal tonic curing general weakness in the body, liver trouble and lack of appetite. A paste of neem flowers cures most skin diseases including leprosy in the early stages.

FLAME-OF-THE-FOREST

(BUTEA MONOSPERMA):

An oil made from these flowers mixed with sesame oil and other natural cooling agents, serves as a good bath oil: it soothes the eyes, cools the body and cures minor skin ailments. When rubbed into the scalp, the oil promotes the growth of hair.

GULMOHAR (CASSIA ARICULATA):

A distillation of cassia flowers is a tonic that cures thirst and fatigue. Taken regularly, it improves the skin tone and colour. Dried cassia flowers, powdered and cooked into a syrup, is a remedy against diabetes. A powder made from flowers and all the other parts of the plant – leaf, root, bark, seed – helps to cure tuberculosis.

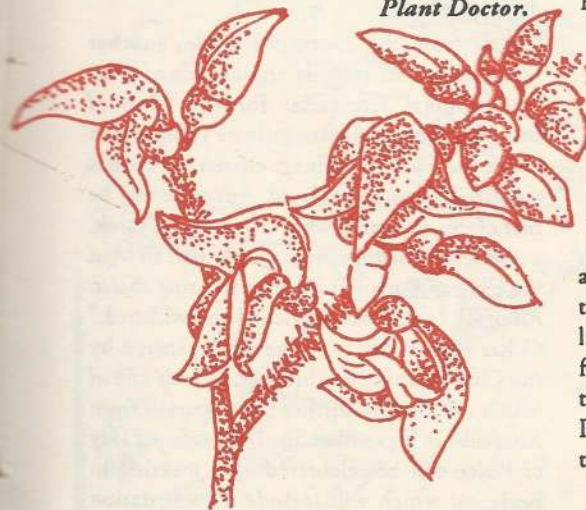
RED HIBISCUS (HIBISCUS ROSA SINENSIS):

Infusions of this flower serve as a general tonic to cool the body. Red Hibiscus also prevents urinary troubles and heart diseases, controls fever, promotes the growth of hair, and acts as an emmenagogue to promote delayed menstruation. While the flower infusion is believed to be an aphrodisiac, an ethanolic extract of the flower acts as a contraceptive.

GOLDEN CHAMPA (MICHELIA CHAMPACA):

This fragrant flower is used in the preparation of perfumes and hair oil. In medicine, the oil cures vertigo and is a linament for relieving pain from headaches, rheumatism, gout and skin allergies, sores and other skin diseases.

Based on an interview with
N. Loganathan, Botanist and Medicinal
Plant Doctor.



Beginning of the Supramental
Realisation (Flame of the Forest)

FLOWER USES IN AUROVILLE

Auroville is a floral paradise: its roads are lined with cassia of different types, multi-coloured bougainvillea serve as hedges to define boundaries, bushes of huge, tropical hibiscuses are in every garden, jasmine grows wild in its forests while cosmos and radha's consciousness flourish like weeds. And these are just the common flowers...

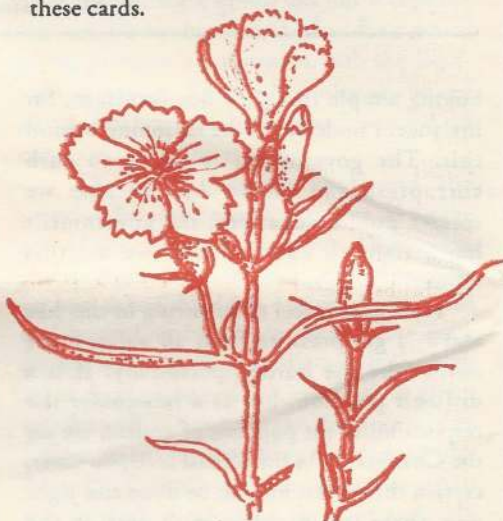
Little wonder that most Aurovilians are open and sensitive to the power of flowers. Many are selective in planting their gardens and others have experimented with the vibrations of flowers. A new community decided to call itself "Madhuka" after the flowering tree that grows on that site.

Arlette and Jean-Jacques of "Quintessence," a unit that plans to make floral remedies based on Mother's meanings, have conducted an initial set of experiments. Anna makes cards only of pictures of flowers.

Paul and Laura of Maroma were among the first to use dried and pressed flowers on their candles for decoration.

Here are a few other floral enterprises of Auroville:

SHRADHANJALI: The floral cards of Shradhanjali – dried and pressed tropical flowers glued to handmade paper – are almost a trademark of Auroville. Started by Abha as a teenage hobby, Shradhanjali is now a successful commercial venture in India with some sales abroad. Abha says that many of her customers in India have discovered Auroville through these cards.



Obedience (Carnation)

Other than cards, Shradhanjali also produces table-mats, lamp-shades, pen-holders and other stationery. Flowers that keep their colour when dried and have thin petals are chosen for decoration and the unit grows the flowers it needs in its own gardens.

While the unit is restricted to using just twenty-four flowers that grow in this climate, efforts are currently being made to import mountain flowers from North India.

NEW SCHOOL CRAFTS: The light-red Power syrup, the darker coloured Realisation syrup and the violet Radha's Consciousness are by far the most popular products of New School Crafts.

Lachmanben, who runs the unit, started making flower syrups out of Power and Radha's Consciousness based on recipes that were used in the Ashram. "When I was in the Ashram," remembers Lachmanben, "an ayurvedic doctor used to make Power syrup according to the Mother's instructions; it used to be given to the Ashramites. I have heard at least one story where a person who suffered from fits was cured by the Mother giving him two spoonfuls of Power syrup daily. The Power syrup was like 'prasad,' a medium that transmitted Mother's Force to a person."

Realisation syrup, a later venture, was started when Lachmanben observed children eating the petals of this flower. At present, she is experimenting with infusions of jasmine

flowers and would like to try making syrups and sweets of rose petals provided she finds a steady supply of roses in Auroville.

Because of the limited production, sales of flower syrups are confined to Auroville. But Lachmanben knows that there is a market for them in India which Auroville could easily tap.

FLOWER COMPOST: She hand-picks every flower that has fallen on the ground, cleans them, puts them into drums or plastic sacks in her house, and carefully, trying to maintain the right humidity and temperature, turns them into compost. Auroculture has been doing this work for more than 20 years now. She started in 1972 by using flowers from the Samadhi in Sri Aurobindo Ashram as mulch. From there it seemed a natural step to pick up the used flowers from the Samadhi daily and turn them into compost. In 1972, on her birthday, when she was granted Darshan of the Mother, she took Her one of her early batches of compost. The Mother raised her hands over the bowl of compost in blessing and meditated on it for a while. "It felt that the Mother was putting a message in the compost for me to realize later," remembers Auroculture. "And this gave me the faith to continue with my work despite obstacles," she says, "for people don't realize the work that goes into this. I prefer to collect the flowers by hand. And then sometimes I have to grind them, or if they are flowers that are prone to drying like Service flowers, I have to mix vegetable rinds to maintain the necessary humidity...there are many factors that need to be controlled to get good compost that does not smell and is just moist to touch."

In the seventies, Auroculture came from Pondicherry daily to work in the Matrimandir gardens. At that time her flower compost from Samadhi flowers was used with amazing results in Pitchandikulam, and what presently is La Ferme and Protection. Today, she has joined Auroville as a newcomer and has just produced her first batch of compost using Auroville flowers. "Flower compost has such a different vibration from the Pondicherry garbage that is brought into Auroville by the villagers as compost. If we have to transform Auroville, we have to work on responding to and encouraging such vibrations."

Bindu

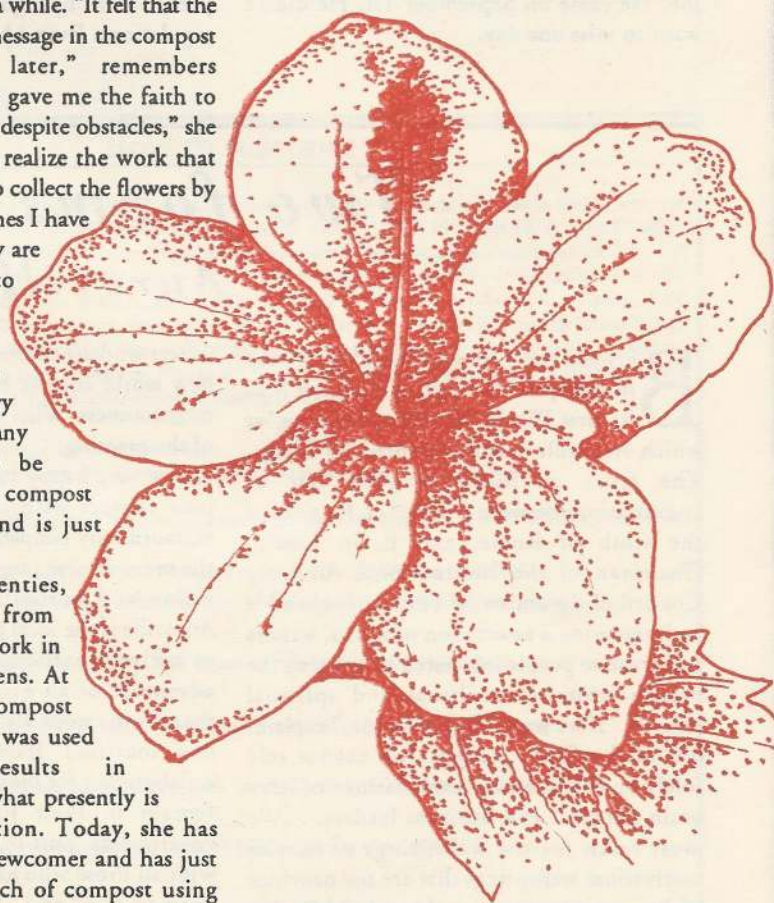
Flower Power

It is one of the most endearing customs in our community. To walk through the forest gathering flowers early in the morning and to arrange them in the shallow, terra-cotta bowl in the central kitchen table before the others come in.

Breakfast duty at Pitchandikulam is done in turns. And the flowers that one chooses for the kitchen table reflect one's knowledge of the forest and the subtle love and energy that one puts into the community that day. The choice of flowers, of course, depends upon the season – in winter it is hard to find anything other than the ubiquitous Protection and Power. But at present, various shades of Psychological Perfection, various shapes of Jasmine, Imagination, Idea, Fire, Refinement of the senses, and Purified Senses are all in bloom and commonly feature at the table. Sometimes there are forthright messages to be read in the floral decorations, like the Integral Progress that featured on New Year's Day, the yellow catkins of Work, or the sprays of Harmony that are draped onto the bowl when one senses tension in the community. Other times, the messages are more subtle, coded in symbolic colours and mandala-like arrangements of the flowers.

Sometimes the arrangement is minimalist or modern in design featuring not just flowers, but stones, or berries, or even sculptured clay figurines. And it is a little game in the community to guess "who-did-the-flowers today?" For flowers in a terra-cotta bowl at the centre of a round, polished, stone table around which the community gathers for its meals, are more than flowers. They form a radiant focus of energy that helps to hold the community together.

Bindu



Beauty of Supramental Love
(Auroville Flower, Hibiscus)

Flower drawings by Vahula

"It is the Mother's force that keeps us going"

JILL talks to Mr P.R. Srinivasamurty who came to Auroville in 1995 as the Finance Officer and now serves as the Acting Secretary of the Auroville Foundation.

Mr P.R. Srinivasamurty, the lanky, pleasant-looking man behind the desk at the Auroville Foundation, can answer questions on the phone in Hindi while reading and writing in a file in front of him in English. At the same time. He's very unassuming about his gifts of concentration and dedication. After all, he came to the job interview from Hyderabad in 1995 with a very high fever. Approximately twelve people had come to be interviewed for the job of Finance Officer for the Auroville Foundation. Because Mr Srinivasamurty was feeling so bad, he thought he didn't reply to questions correctly. He remembers Dr. De, the previous Secretary of Auroville Foundation, asking him two or three questions about his connection with Sri Aurobindo and Mother.

He first came in contact with Sri Aurobindo's teachings in 1981. When he saw the Ashram in 1984, he was very impressed. He came back again and again. He was impressed by the way they organised things, their care for beauty. He even thought of joining the Ashram, but was advised against it. "Better marry," he was told.

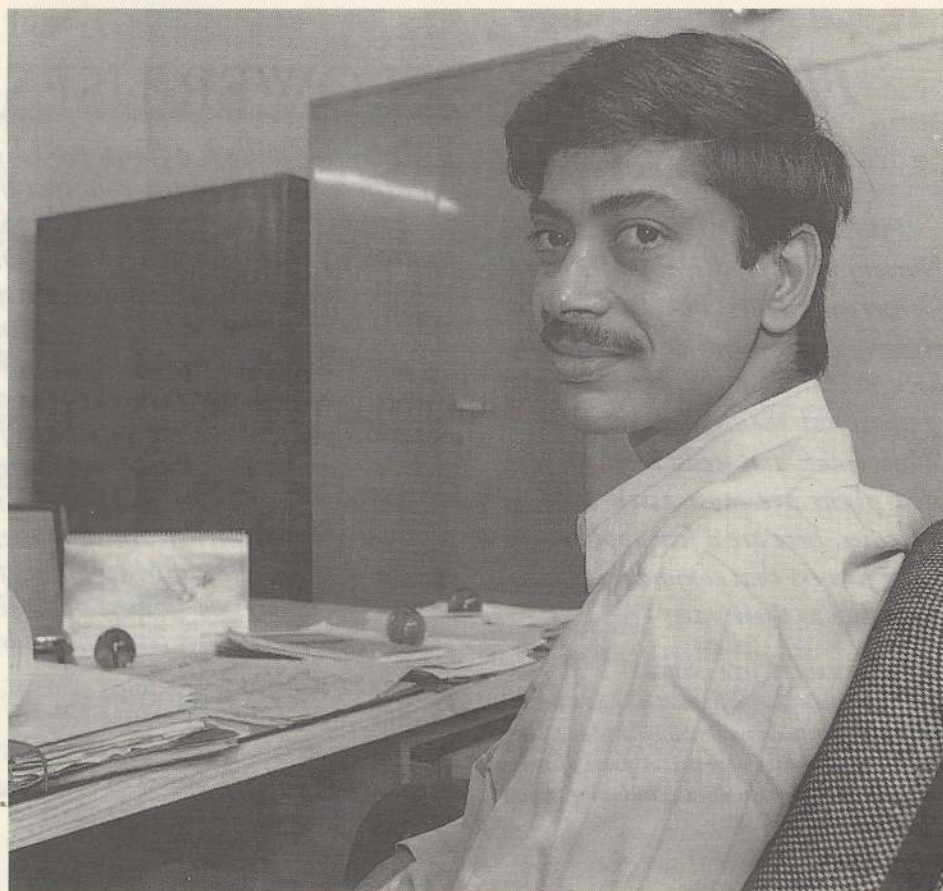
In 1988, he visited Auroville and Matrimandir. But the visit was brief and there was no literature available on Auroville. Then he lived and worked in Madras for several years as an accountant. But he kept in touch with Pondicherry, visiting often. When he was accepted for the post of Finance Officer in August, 1995, he was told he had one month in which to give notice at his job. He came on September 1st. He didn't want to miss one day.

Now he and his wife Chitra, a professional accountant who is also a devotee of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, live in a small house in Promesse. "This is not a career-oriented job for me," he says smiling. "I am here because of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. I think people are here to grow. I am also here for this reason." Now he finds himself as Acting Secretary, filling this position upon the retirement of Dr. De in March of this year. He assumes all the responsibilities of the Secretary, while waiting for a replacement.

"I am here because of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother."

What does he think about Auroville? "Generally, it's very interesting for me to be here because there are many friendly people. I accept the conflicts because I believe in the experiment in human unity. Actually, it's amazing the way people have survived after all this time, because the goal and the reality are very far apart. It's almost as if, in spite of ourselves, something gets done. It's the Mother's Force that keeps us going. If I didn't believe in this I would go crazy here." What is the real challenge for Aurovilians? "The real challenge is to communicate. There are so many misunderstandings that could be avoided if we all could communicate better."

What are the challenges that he faces? "This office functions within certain government regulations: my role and influence are limited. When Aurovilians ask me to use my influence to get things done, I have to explain that my authority is prescribed by government rules and regulations. Even I have to seek approval for



Mr Srinivasamurty

buying simple things, office furniture, for instance. I understand the reasoning behind this. The government is trying to curb corruption and excess. And because we receive public donations, the government has a right to question how we use this money."

How does it feel to be sitting in the 'hot seat'? "I get pressure from all sides, but I don't take the burden personally. It is a difficult position, but as a newcomer the responsibility for policies, of course, are on the Chairman. On the official level, however, certain things just have to be done and right now there is a problem with getting the

"Rules and Regulations" of the Foundation approved because of the changes in the Indian Government."

Will a new Secretary be appointed by the next Governing Board meeting in August? "The process will probably take a few more months because of the change in the Central Government." Unlike his predecessors, Mr Srinivasamurty is not a government civil servant. "Actually," he points out, I feel the Government doesn't need to appoint an IAS (Indian Administrative Service) or IPS (Indian Police Service) officer to this post because the job is not big enough for people of this calibre."

Two forms of the same wavelength: Auroville and the Club of Budapest

Between the 12th and the 15th of May in Budapest, the Club of Budapest held its first World Members Meeting, at which Auroville was represented by Bhaga. The Club of Budapest grew out of conversations between Mr Peccei, founder of the Club of Rome, and Ervin Laszlo, Chairman of the International Advisory Council of the Auroville Foundation, and is an international association of artists, writers and creative people interested in creating the preconditions for cultural and spiritual renewal. "If we want effective action," explains one of the Clubs leaflets, "we cannot rely solely on the ideas and exhortations of left-brain political and business leaders. . . We must reach for the wellsprings of human motivation: wellsprings that are the province of the creative, intuitive and insightful faculty. . . of artists, young people, and creative individuals of all ages and walks of life". The theme of this meeting was "From Selfishness and Isolation to Solidarity through Empathy: the Role and Responsibility of Art and the Spirit", and brought together people like Yehudi Menuhin, Robert Muller and

others who are interested in the creation of a new world culture based upon a change of consciousness. What were Bhaga's impressions of the meeting?

"I was very happy to have attended. I came into contact with an amazing number of extraordinary people, all expressing, through the most diverse range of activities, the same vision and aspiration. I see now that if Auroville is the ideal place for those interested in actively participating in the collective adventure of an experimental society, still there is the need also of a more general and less localised framework and field of collaboration for those who, while wanting to remain in their present social context, nevertheless want to feel actively connected with all those who have the vision of a more harmonious and luminous future for humanity. The Club of Budapest is helping create this new web. In this sense, the Club of Budapest and Auroville are two complementary forms of the same wavelength, of the same evolutionary urge which is pulling humanity towards a higher and truer state of consciousness.

"As to Auroville's participation: there was not enough time in the conference proceedings for me to make a special presentation. But I prepared an Auroville exhibition outside the meeting room, and on the last afternoon I gave participants a guided tour of it.

"I came into contact with an amazing number of extraordinary people, all expressing, through the most diverse range of activities, the same vision and aspiration."

There was much interest, particularly from one of the participants who had had a dream some years ago about a galaxy, at the centre of which was something representing total love. So you can imagine how she reacted when she saw the Galaxy photo and heard about Auroville!

"Apart from the contacts I made, another interesting initiative is the creation of an international secretariat for the Club of Budapest which will disseminate information about the Club to ordinary citizens in various countries around the world. Auroville will be part of this secretariat which represents, I think, a new level of involvement on our part in what the Club of Budapest is trying to bring about. All in all, I came back enriched and widened." Other global events are being organized by the Club of Budapest this year, at least one of which will involve further participation from Auroville: in September, the International Day of Peace will be celebrated by a meeting in Budapest which will include a presentation about Auroville's Centre of International Research on Human Unity (CIRHU).

Alan

MATRIMANDIR UNDER THE SPOTLIGHT

A series of general meetings on various issues about Matrimandir have recently been taking place. The first three meetings were attended by unusually large numbers of people and each meeting went on for about four hours. As Matrimandir is "the soul of Auroville", it is naturally of utmost concern to people both inside and outside of Auroville.

The root of the "problem" is generally attributed to the inability of those involved, from the beginning up to the present day, to work together in harmony and collaboration. However, it has often been said that "if we could work together, there would be no need to build it!" The process apparently is the means by which we learn to find the way.

The first meeting in mid-May began with the resolve to heal the historic division into two "camps" which was even "institutionalized" in an eight-hour general meeting in October 1987, giving a mandate to one of the groups led by Piero to finish the chamber and to the other, led by Roger Anger, to execute the outer structure. The chamber now is virtually complete. The Mother had seen it in a vision and had given a very precise description of how it would be, even indicating the actual measurements. She left the outer structure to the discretion of the Aurovilians which gives more scope for a clash of ideas as well as growth in collaboration. At present, the basic outer structure is complete but the mounting of the gold discs and the fabrication of the "inner skin" are yet to be done and there are many technical and aesthetic problems to be resolved.

A surprising and immediate consensus to initiate a new way of working at Matrimandir was reached at the very beginning of the first meeting. It was resolved that more Aurovilians should be involved in the work at Matrimandir, that while decisions about work should be made by Aurovilians working there, decisions on policies should be made by the

whole community, and that there should be transparency in accounting, planning and procedures.

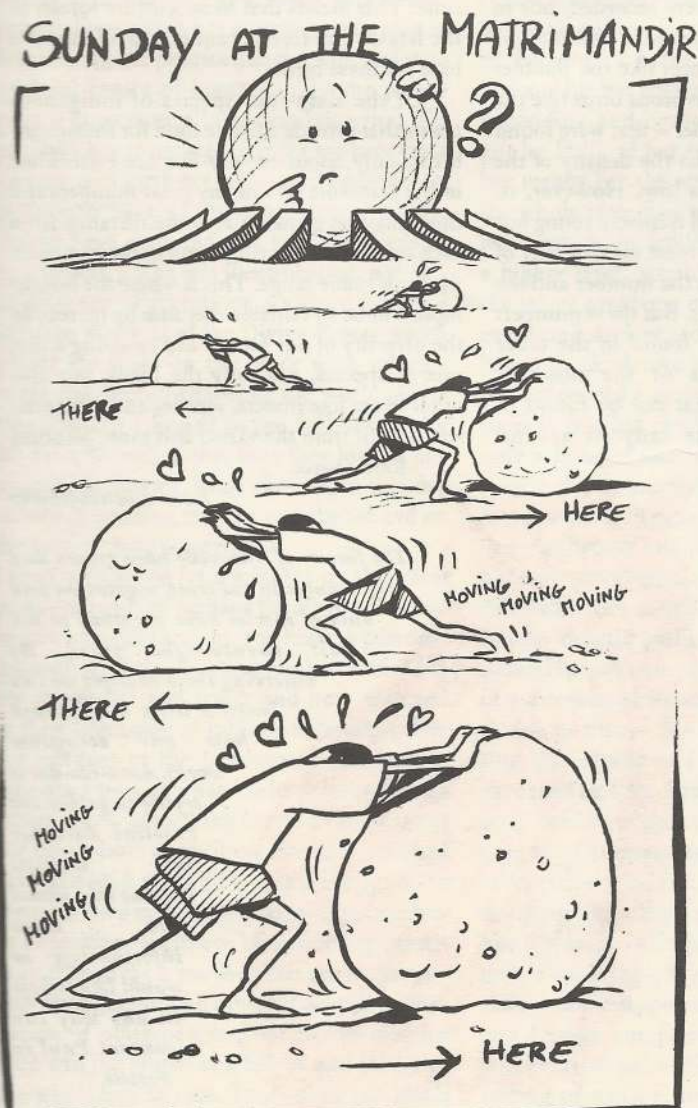
In the second meeting, the problems with the MFRC (Matrimandir Fund Raising Committee) were looked at more in depth. This fund-raising committee is composed of non-Aurovilians who have generated a major portion of the donations for Matrimandir. The MMCG (Matrimandir Management and Coordination Group), which consists of Aurovilians who organise the work at Matrimandir, has refused to cooperate with this group since February 96 when the Chairman of the Auroville Foundation authorized the fund-raising committee to open bank accounts and issue receipts for Matrimandir donations. The co-ordination group noted in their eighteen-page report that the fund-raising committee was set up without any reference to the community process and that receipts for Matrimandir donations should only be issued at Matrimandir itself. A sub-group appointed by the Auroville Council to look into the matter also had prepared a report calling for a possible solution with a reconstituted fund-raising committee subject to certain conditions that all parties should agree upon. The co-ordination group did not accept the sub-group's resolution and asked for a return to the previous arrangement with the fund-raising group. The community discussed alternative ways of channeling funds but no consensus could be reached.

The third meeting continued the previous discussions and focussed more on the role of the co-ordination group. Differences among Aurovilians working at Matrimandir on how things should be organized were aired and suggestions for changes were made. Three groups were organized by the meeting to look more deeply into problematic areas. A group was formed to work on the finances and to follow up what had been started by the Auroville Council sub-group; another group was formed to report to the next assembly meeting on the technical difficulties with the inner and outer skin and the gold discs; a final group will find ways to deal with visitors' access to Matrimandir.

Lastly, it was decided to organize community work at Matrimandir to move the last remaining earth from the 1971 excavation of the foundation for landscaping the Garden of Light. There was an objection to this community work at Matrimandir claiming that such work is only symbolic! The objection was not accepted. There will be more meetings, more process, more work... on all levels.

Bill

Collective work in the Garden of Light (Common Cartoons of Auroville. W.E.L.)



Brief News

AUROVILIANS AT UN CONFERENCE

Satprem and Suhasini, architects and executives of the Auroville Building Centre, are participating in the United Nations City Summit being held in Istanbul in the first two weeks of June. The conference called Habitat II is being hosted by the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (UNCHS). Satprem and Suhasini will give a presentation on Auroville and will also build a small mud-block house to demonstrate mud-block technology, a speciality of the Auroville Building Centre. Earlier this year, the Auroville Building Centre was nationally honoured with a plaque by HUDCO (Housing and Urban Development Corporation) for its "outstanding performance". This is the second consecutive time that the Auroville Building Centre has picked up this award.

GOVERNING BOARD CHANGES

Ms. Bilkees Latif has resigned from the Governing Board of Auroville Foundation. The Government of India has appointed Mr. M. S. Swaminathan in her place. Mr. M. S. Swaminathan is known primarily for the changes that he has helped bring about in agricultural practices in India.

A NEW EDITION OF THE COMPLETE WORKS OF SRI AUROBINDO

To commemorate Sri Aurobindo's 125th birth anniversary in 1997, the Sri Aurobindo Ashram will bring out the Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo in a uniform library edition consisting of about 35 volumes. This special edition will contain all the works hitherto published and those which have not yet been published in book form. The pre-publication price for the whole set including postal charges is Rs. 6,000 within India and US \$400 outside of India. This pre-publication offer is valid until 21 February 1997. For further details contact SABDA, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry 605002.

ARISE MEET

A successful conference of the South Indian participants of ARISE (Agricultural Renewal in India for Sustainable Environment), the national organic farming alliance, was held in May at Aurobrindavan, Auroville. The aim of the conference was to exchange information and technical knowledge in all aspects of organic farming and to nominate four organizations in the four southern states of Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh to play a leading role in promoting organic farming in their respective states.

"INDIAN" COMES TO TOWN

The much-awaited Tamil movie "Indian" in which about a dozen "vellakara" Aurovilians star is now being screened in theatres in Pondicherry. The Aurovilians who are portrayed as British policemen and officials, in the pre-Independence era, are seen on horses and in tanks, fighting to control the insurgent masses. In one scene, they actually strip Indian women!

THEATRE IN SUMMER

It all started when Jill, one of our editors, went to Kerala. Vekkan, the director of a theatre group called Viacom Thiurnal, invited her in early May to conduct an acting workshop. Eight students participated in this six-day course, which included improvisations, character development and late night discussions. Inspired by this, Jill started acting classes this summer thrice-a-week in Pitanga which is highly popular with the Aurovilians.

GOSHI WE DID IT AGAIN...

In our last issue, we inadvertently left out the name of our cartoonist. The unsung hero is Emanuele, an Italian, who among other things did the sets and the pictures for the opera "Beyond Asleep and Awake".

HOW TO SUBSCRIBE

To cover our costs, the suggested new subscription rates for 12 issues of Auroville Today are the following: for India Rs 250; for other countries Rs 1250, Can \$ 51, FF 195, DM 56, It. Lira 61,000, D.Gl. 63, US \$ 38, UK £25. This includes the postage by airmail. Please send your contribution (or your supporting contribution of double the amount) either to the Auroville International centre in your country (add 10% for admin. and bank charges) or directly to Auroville Today, CSR Office, Auroville 605101. Cheques should be made payable to Auroville Fund, specifying: "Contribution for Auroville Today". You will receive the issues directly from Auroville. Personal cheques are preferred to bank cheques. Please do not send postal money orders. Subscribers will receive a reminder when their subscription is about to expire.

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Auroville Today provides information about Auroville, an international township in South-India, on a monthly basis and is distributed to Aurovilians and friends of Auroville in India and abroad. It does not necessarily reflect the views of the community as a whole. Editorial team: Tineke, Roger, Martin B., Jill, Carel, Bindu, Bill, Annemarie, Alan. Photos (unless otherwise specified): John Mandeem. Layout & DTP: Natacha. Proofreading: Barbara. Printed at All India Press.



In the flower market.

PHOTO: SVEN / JOY POSTCARDS

AUROVILLE TODAY

BY AIRMAIL
BOOKPOST

AUROVILLE
ARCHIVES

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AUROVILLE ARCHIVES
C/O KRISHNA T.
BHARAT NIVAS
AUROVILLE

IN THIS ISSUE:
THE AUROVILLE SERVICES;
THE NEW SECRETARY;
FLOWER POWER;
BIRDS OF AUROVILLE.

Exp. # 99

July 1996
Number ninety

Birds of Auroville

For the past eight months, two ornithologists from the Bombay Natural History Society have been conducting a bird survey of Auroville lands. They are covering seven habitats within the city limits to observe which birds are here, when they are here, and how they are distributed. The study will continue for at least one year, and longer if providence allows. However, some results have emerged already, sometimes confirming intuitions and sometimes provoking new thoughts.

Since October, ninety-six species of birds have been identified. Of these twenty-four species are migratory, coming either from Europe (e.g. the Brown Shrike and Blyths Reed Warbler) or from the Himalayas (e.g. the Warblers, Flycatchers, Wagtails and the Indian Pitta). The study has also recorded fluctuations in the populations of the resident and local migratory species, such as the Wood Shrike, Tree Pie, Spotted Dove and the Black Drongo. At present we can only guess at the reasons for the variations, but as the study continues the restraining environmental parameters may be recognised.

Birds have long been recognised as indicators of the health of an ecosystem. Thus with observations from this survey we can begin to gauge the health of various ecosystems within Auroville and perhaps identify simple action that can enhance the viability of our forests as biotic reserves.

Two of the study sites are located in relatively homogeneous stands of trees, one in a Work Tree forest near Bliss and the other in a cashew tope near Abri. In these sites, about twenty species of birds were recorded, but in every case they were common resident or migrant species – omnivores like the Babbler and the Crow, and insectivorous birds like the Drongo and Blue Kingfisher – that were found in all the other sites. Often the density of the species in these sites was low. However, in areas where the forest is still relatively young but under management to increase the diversity of trees and vegetation, both the number and the density of species increases. But these numbers are fewer again than are found in the older mixed Auroville forests or the remnant indigenous vegetation that can be found in the Swami Tope or the canyons around Ravena.

The older forests of Pitchandikulam and Fertile support the highest number of insectivorous migratory species like the Pitta and the Orange-Headed Thrush, perhaps because the varied canopy and developed ground cover provide a good habitat for insects to multiply. The highest density of bird life was

found in Ravena. Here the remnant vegetation with its higher density of berry-bearing bushes supports a great number of fruit-eating resident species like the Bubul, the Spotted Dove and the Barbet. The nearby canyons also provide hunting-grounds for the large birds of prey that are not seen in other parts of Auroville, like the Great Horned Owls and the Barn Owl.

Not only is there variation of species density over different areas of Auroville: there is also variation over the year. With the onset of the rains, migratory birds arrive. Some stay for a few days, others, like the Paradise Flycatcher and the Forest Wagtail, over-winter in the Auroville forests. These incoming migrants from afar compete for resources with the local migrant species, such as the Drongo and Wood Shrike. At this time, the local species are pushed towards the more marginal habitats, away from the continuous forest cover in Auroville and out into the surrounding croplands. However, when the migratory species move back north to their summer homes around April, the local migrants move back into the Auroville forests for the summer.

The numbers and variety of the species that stay and breed over the summer months in Auroville are another good indication of the health of our forests. If a bird decides to stay, it indicates that the food source is sufficient for its needs. The fruit-eating birds, for example, need a constant supply but each fruit-bearing species will only provide fruit for a limited period of time. This means that monoculture forests or the less diverse forests cannot provide a stable base for these birds.

Of the sixty-four species of indigenous plants that provide suitable food for fruit-eating birds, only about twenty-five are established in the Auroville area in any great numbers and these may be growing at some distance from each other, thus putting some of them outside the birds' home range. This is where the human input can be so valuable. Because by increasing the diversity of our forests and ensuring a rich mix of species, not only the birds, but also other fauna like insects, reptiles and mammals will benefit from the varied and more plentiful food source.

Paul Blanchflower

The forests of Auroville have grown and big changes in the trees, vegetation and animal species have occurred in the last twenty-eight years. By observing these changes we can learn a little more about how our ecosystem works. Auro-eco-dat is trying to gather the baseline data for such studies. Anyone who would like more information or would like to help in any way can contact Paul in Fertile.

A black
drongo

Drawings by Emanuele

A tree pie

Indian great
horned owl