

Auroville Today

SEPTEMBER 2002, No.164

MAIN THEME: Joining Auroville

- The first door
- A young boy's entry
- Negotiating newcomerhood
- From Chidambaram on a scooty

- Newcomers housing
- Facts & figures

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Opening the First Door

AVToday met with Lila, Ann and Auroasha of the Entry Group, who help, "open the first door for people wishing to join Auroville." Here are excerpts from the interview.

AVT: Some newcomers, in varying degrees, experience a sense of being left to their own devices, or an initial lack of integration within the community. How do you deal with such cases?

EG: Every person's experience of Auroville is unique and individual, one cannot attribute someone's negative experience to the Entry Group! The Entry Group is really the first door for people coming to join Auroville. After that, depending on the individual's sincerity in working towards the evolution of Auroville, and making the effort to open other doors and participating in the community activities, the experience can be positive or negative. The community is facing problems of different kinds, and these problems affect the Entry Group as well. So, if one decides to join Auroville then one must also be aware of the ground realities of living in Auroville and perhaps take some responsibility for one's own efforts towards integration. Newcomers are always welcome to meet with the Entry Group for clarifications or help with regards to their situation in Auroville. We would like them to be open about their problems or needs. Also, regular meetings or communication with the contact person can be helpful in this direction.

The diversity of peoples and cultures in Auroville is among its greatest strengths, yet the integration of these disparate strands within Auroville's collective fabric remains one of its biggest challenges. While for some newcomers entry into Auroville is like a homecoming, for others it is fraught with difficulties. In this issue we touch upon some of the highs and lows of newcomerhood through the experiences of new arrivals and we hear the views of the Entry Group.

Could you explain briefly why the previous Entry Group had to close for a period of two years?

We've been operating as the new Entry Group since August 2001. The previous Entry Group closed for sometime because there was an acute problem of housing for the many newcomers arriving to settle in Auroville. The Entry Group sent out several calls to the community but no viable solutions were available at the time. There were not enough funds, either on the part of the newcomers or the community, to develop the infrastructure necessary for building adequate housing facilities for newcomers. The economic crisis was and is very real. The Entry Group

at that time couldn't go on accepting more people when there was no place for their accommodation. There seemed no other way except to put the brakes on the entry process for a temporary period.

One of the things to come out of the closure has been the new guidelines for those wishing to join Auroville. Newcomers now have to go through a two-year period before they can become Aurovilian, instead of the one year previously. What is the rationale behind this extension?

The first point that we would like to make is that the terms "Newcomer" and "Aurovilian" have to be redefined, changed, so that the distance between the two becomes less. We are not comfortable with the current usage of these terms. For many people the word "newcomer" is like a label, a sort of stigma, which they would like to get rid of as soon as they can. People are anxious to become "Aurovilian" as if that would somehow change their status to a more acceptable one. The essence of being or becoming an "Aurovilian" is not just to have one's name added to the Master List. It is the relationship between oneself and the Mother, defined by one's level of sincerity towards the realizing of Auroville's vision and goals. The rationale behind the extension period has to do with the community's concern as to how much commitment and interest newcomers have towards helping Auroville to grow. Are they

here for their self-fulfilment, or self-transformation? Are they genuinely interested in realizing the Mother's dream? For many people who come here, Auroville represents a nice place to live, sort of like Club Med. There is free education for the kids, one can build a house here without having to pay for the land, etc. But do they have a real attraction to the Mother's dream? The more we dilute the focus, the more we lose out on the point of being here in the first place. The two-year period allows newcomers to take the time to decide whether they really want to be in Auroville or not. Whether they can make a meaningful contribution to Auroville or not.

Given the community's economic difficulties, does this mean only people with independent resources can enter Auroville?

To some extent, yes. But the economy-based admission policy is something that we are trying to change. We are looking into ways to open more doors so that more young people enter Auroville.

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Seeing India through a child's eyes gives a different perspective on this new place where I have landed with Vincent. During the taxi ride from the airport to Auroville, he said: "Mammy, I don't understand the traffic rules here. They drive on the wrong side!" after which he fell asleep. As soon as he got out of the taxi, he immediately started taking pictures of all the insects around the large banyan tree of our new guesthouse. Meeting many strangers who are all speaking different languages was difficult for the shy Vincent. Then luckily he met Theo, who has lunch there every day, and who has an "eternal" supply of "Gummibaerchen", a favorite German sweet, in his pocket. Vincent's first English words were, 'Sweets please', with a grin on his face.

After a two-week stay in the guesthouse, Vincent and I have found a nice room in a private house. It is very close to Transition, the school that Vincent will attend. We can use the kitchen and prepare our own meals. This is a relief because in the guesthouse he hardly ate anything like rice and Indian soups because they were not familiar. There is also a swimming pool here and he has made friends with an 8-year

old Indian boy who also lives here in the house. Within a few days he learned to swim on his own. In the meantime Vincent got a new cycle (much cheaper than in Germany) and has learned to ride around. He has met another newcomer kid, the 6-year old Jorne from Holland, who also just

Dear family...

A newcomer describes in a letter her 7 year old son's first encounters with Auroville.

arrived. It immediately clicked between the boys, and often they go to the beach together during the school holidays.

Finally the first school day arrived. He was pretty scared about this, especially as everybody there speaks English. But luckily he already knew two other boys: Jorne, and Chandran, an Australian-German boy, who helps him with translations. He got a school partner, Kareem, who is German and who is always at Vincent's

side to explain him everything. The schoolroom looks beautiful, his teacher Nicoletta is very nice, and with a good feeling I left. When I came back at one o'clock to pick him up, he has already eaten in the dining area. It looks like the first school day went well.

The next morning he starts crying before going to school. Only with some promises of a reward could I get him to school. When he comes home, he tells me that school is stupid, or maybe just a bit stupid. But then he tells that pretty soon he will be much better in Tamil and French than me. He enjoys the computer classes and the German lessons, but also the Body Awareness, the arts and crafts, music. In the afternoons he goes to sport. I already notice that I will hardly see my child!

Now a few weeks further on, I see that Vincent is adapting well to his new school. His English is improving, he understands it quite well but is still shy to speak it, and he enjoys his math and computer classes. He has made several friends, saw a huge snake, plays with the big dogs in the house and seems to be a happy 'newcomer' in Auroville.

Stephanie

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From the heart of a dry south India

Joss writes about Auroville and its environs in the midst of a long hot summer

In thirty summers it has never been this dry. The Kurrukoppilli seeds fell earlier this year, the cashew crop was a failure, and there is hardly a mango on the trees. All morning we were scrambling around in a merciless thorn scrub forest, searching for seeds and wild animal scats. It was 43 degrees. At midday we sheltered in the meager shade of an ancient fertility tree festooned with colourful cloth wish bags and listened to stories from an old villager who was mending his fish trap with a vine from the forest. A scattering of brown and white quills on the ground indicated the possible drama of a spiky encounter. When threatened the porcupine rushes backwards at its foe, impaling it. It can kill a tiger or panther.

There is so little unmanipulated habitat in this part of the world. We search for seed and plant material in small mostly degenerate patches of evergreen forests and scrub jungles. In Auroville the arks of biodiversity that we have created become more detailed as we wait for better times when wild, indigenous, natural and sacred will be appreciated again. Much time is spent dealing with so-called wasteland, looking out for spaces that nobody really wants, where we could plant a bit of indigenous vegetation. Good land, for most people, means it is OK for agriculture, and it seems the word 'cultivation' generally implies a movement away from natural processes. Anyway, we know that parts of more than one hundred wild plants in Pitchandikulam are edible without even cooking, and that still 400 species are used as medicine by people in our bioregion.

In the early morning light old squirrel nests sway high in the leafless bamboo. Everywhere seeds are silhouetted, shining, swelling, falling, exploding, flying off in the already hot breeze following the summer rhythms, the pattern language of rejuvenation. Tiny mosquito size bees swarm around an old log in the forest. The honey is strong and sour. The powerful antifun-

gal properties in these wild hives can be used against the terrible monsoon skin complaints that ulcerate the feet. A shikra swoops from its hiding place in the thick foliage of a lepisantis tree. A lizard is caught in steely talons and a nearby bevy of babblers scatter hysterically. The jagged patterns of a saw-scaled viper disappear into a rat hole. It probably ate the occupants and now lives there. Mother mongoose passes with three trainees in tow. The little ones stop when she stops, all look around together, one foot raised, alert. She might have four litters a year.

Choose your programme

I drive the motorbike to Pondicherry to work with friends redesigning the town's Botanical Gardens, established by the French some 200 years ago. Along Mahatma Gandhi road one passes the Golden Hour Trauma Centre and Dr. Ram's College of Cosmology in between the Virgo Wine Shop and the old lady sitting on the pavement outside the temple who has been selling jasmine in the same place for the 30 years I've been passing by. The show goes on. Water buffalo and auto-rickshaws mingle with a thousand motorbikes on the never-ending Indian main street festooned with communist flags, huge cut-outs of film stars and politicians. All is seemingly tied together by myriads of mad mingled cables and wires criss-crossing the street above the awesome silver dish forests of satellite receptors on every rooftop. A Tamil movie, the World Cup or a nuclear war...choose your programme.

Later, I meet our Pitchandikulam team together with 50 schoolchildren enthusiastically involved in a village mapping exercise. A huge multicoloured plan is being drawn on the road outside the temple. A crowd has formed to debate whether the information is correct. Someone arrives with a pot of lemongrass tea and a basket of palm-fruit. Since early morning, transect walks have been done by the children,

collecting plants, identifying trees and places, recording where the skilled people, particularly the healers, live. We sit under a peepul tree with the village midwife, and a bright-eyed young man who is a bone-setter, identifying some 150 plants the children have collected. The children know many of the medicinal and cultural uses of the plants. The discussion is animated and interspersed with songs about the local environment. An old man tells us about the other bits and pieces that he mixes with plants to make medicines. Pigeon droppings for chest pain, cow's urine for jaundice, horse hair for warts, peacock feathers for vomiting and, of course, everyone knows that hare droppings are good for children's diarrhea.

Keeping traditions alive

Increasingly, knowledgeable people who work in laboratories are interested in this information that old people squatting in a dusty street might know. We work closely with groups who believe that indigenous traditions are alive, growing and mutating. It is not simply bringing back her past, but a deeply serious effort to add depth and the cultural diversity from thousands of different ethnic groups of India into the fabric of modern society. Through all this the thread of the story so often comes back to the importance of indigenous plants, of conserving wilderness, of creating sanctuaries and protecting sacred groves with their deities. One often senses that some of these gods were there before the agricultural religions were established. Through imprisoning plants in monoculture systems we have, perhaps, imprisoned ourselves.

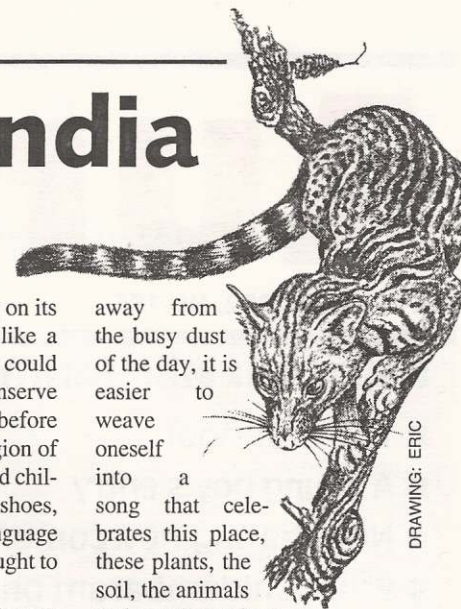
A coppersmith call echoes through the forest that we have nurtured over these last three decades. When one is quiet and away from the latest project, it is clear that the nature spirits have always been here, though it feels they are sometimes a bit wary these days about modern developing India, pressing in from all sides.

I watch closely the spider sitting on its orb web, plucking the spokes like a harp. A difference in tension could indicate a captured prey. To conserve protein, spiders eat old webs before building new ones. In the contagion of modern schools, full of uniformed children with collars, ties and shiny shoes, does the curriculum include a language of smells? Do the children get taught to touch?

A hare hiding in its patch of tall grass leaps out wildly when I approach, disturbing a family of quails as it bounds towards the safety of the forest. The evening light shines through the defiant new copper-tinted lagerstroemia leaves. One can hear the tree murmur, "Even if two monsoons have been a failure, I will endure". The Mother called the flowers, 'Intimacy with the Divine'. Lightning flashes away far to the north. Soon rest will come to many players in our magic mystery forest theatre. In the quiet of the evening,

away from the busy dust of the day, it is easier to weave oneself into a song that celebrates this place, these plants, the soil, the animals and smaller things, nurturing our own culture and myth, those dimensions that help us understand our role in the ecosystem. The little scops owl calls gently, civet cats scramble in the palmyra leaves, all sorts of wonder waits, poised. Jackals sing in the open field as the moon rises over Pitchandikulam.

(This is an edited version of a piece which originally was published in the newsletter of the Singapore Sri Aurobindo Society)



MATRIMANDIR

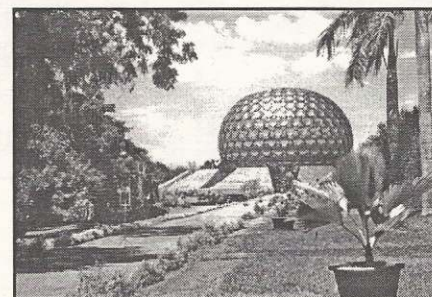
Hide-and-Seek.

Throughout the years we have been used to view the Matrimandir through the veil of various shapes of scaffolding. Scaffolding has surrounded the four Pillars, the walls of the Inner Chamber, the inner and outer skin; even the Banyan Tree looks as if it's held up by it.

At times a veil gets torn and the true form emerges. On other occasions it is lifted for a short while and a glimpse reveals what is trying to manifest. A recent example of the first is the completion of the latest row of gilded disks on the outer skin.

At this stage the veil fell well below the crest of the large petals, so that the golden spherical form of the Matrimandir now stands fully revealed, reflecting the light and beauty of its parent Sun.

Lately the scaffolding surrounding the inner skin of the sphere was taken down for a short while. But during that interval the experience of ascending to the Inner Chamber completely changed. Instead of feeling hemmed in by a maze of pipes one could walk freely walks up aspiring curve, suspended in space beneath the protective dome. Despite feel-



ing awed and thrilled, one cannot but smile at the game of hide-and-seek the Matrimandir appears to be playing with us, till one day she will stand revealed in all her glory.

COMMUNITY

Going Organic Together

Soruba promotes home-grown organic food products in a revitalized Pour Tous

Pour Tous has changed and grown throughout the years, reflecting changes within the community. Having begun as a "no money exchange outlet" in the early 70's, Pour Tous, (meaning For All, a name given by the Mother), has grown into a financial service, a store supplying needed foods and goods to the community, a gas bottle service, a shopping service, a basket service and a snack bar. In recent years, the Auroville community outgrew the space of the Pour Tous store, which not only led to crowded, frustrating shopping but to a lack of space for a variety of products, many of which come from our own community. But now things have changed. On the 15th of July, a puja took place at Pour Tous to welcome the changes made by Pour Tous, Soruba and some Auroville units.

Soruba is a name adopted by a team of Aurovilians who "aim to promote more organic Auroville food products within Auroville," explains Mark who has joined the team and who works on improving Auroville's access to the national market. "It would be nice to change things in Auroville so that we buy more Auroville products instead of

the stuff from Pondy. If you buy from Auroville, you contribute to the growth of the community so allowing us to take care of ourselves and be more self supportive." With these aims, Soruba has been working in conjunction with the Pour Tous management team and staff to increase community knowledge of, and accessibility to, more natural Auroville products. Before promoting local goods, the Pour Tous store had to be enlarged. Soruba assisted the Pour Tous team with these changes both financially and physically. As Mani of the Pour Tous management team says, "This group has helped us a lot. It has helped Pour Tous make changes that we have been talking about for the last couple of years." Of course change, often readily desired, can also cause confusion. During the first few weeks of change, there were many confused shoppers.

The entrance had changed, leaving some individuals standing in front of the old entrance wondering why the store was not yet open. Items that could be found in the same shelf space



for years were now in another room altogether. Shoppers zig-zagged this way and that, trying to locate their dinner supplies. Luckily, Pour Tous and Soruba had anticipated these confusions and there were many people available to help. "It was difficult at first," says Mark, "but now everyone is getting used to the changes." Every day

now two or three individuals from the Soruba team (which currently consists of Olivier, Mark, Inge, Eliane, Nevi and Krishnaprem), work with the Pour Tous team to help inform, promote and locate our community products.

While focussing locally, Soruba is also working on moving into the currently fast expanding national market. At present, Naturellement, AuroSpiral, and La Ferme Cheese are the main Auroville food products selling outside of Auroville. While supporting the growth of these products, Soruba envisions a future for Auroville where smaller units who may not have the marketing possibilities are given those possibilities through the larger community. "It is possible to unify units under one umbrella," says Mark, "and to unify our efforts toward one idea." If Auroville units work together to help in the promotion of each other, there are possibilities not only to expand marketing, but to realize a greater community

participation.

Another ambition of the Soruba and Pour Tous teams has been to bring healthier products to Auroville which are not currently available from our community. For example, some Aurovilians went to Kodaikanal and spoke with distributors of organic vegetables who are willing to supply Auroville fresh vegetables on a daily basis. This not only increases the quality of our produce but also cuts out the wholesaler and therefore lowers our prices. Plans are in progress for a central Pour Tous near the Solar Kitchen that will be another step towards wider distribution and a community support network for Auroville products. In the meantime the recent changes, "Are affecting the community in good ways," says Mani. "The long time Aurovilians especially, who know the history of Pour Tous, are giving very positive responses."

Sunaura

The AVI Meeting, 2002

This year's theme was the International Zone

This year's AVI conference took place in Ben Lomond, California, in a beautiful forested area in the hills, where little wooden cabins are interspersed between majestic redwood trees. The big trees create an amazing environment and since it doesn't rain in the summer, the only moisture comes from the fog travelling up from the nearby sea, which often lies thickly and mystically over the very still forest until later in the morning.

The meeting was superbly prepared. AVI USA and its support members did a fantastic job organizing, chairing, facilitating. They broke the days into well-timed work-sessions, presentations and discussions, along with music, theatre, party and other fun together. In total, 12 Aurovilians were present. What was surprising is that everyone present had been living and working in Auroville or the Ashram, or was born there, so it was really nice to experience our extended old-time family get together.

The main theme this year was the International Zone and the national pavilions. Dr. Ananda Reddy warmed up the assembly on the first evening with a talk on "What role does the world have in the life of Auroville and how do Aurovilians and those outside form one community?" The next days saw a number of excellent power point presentations. There was a slide show with music by Chandresh and Vishnu which ended with everybody chanting OM. Next Guy presented "Securing the Land for Auroville" - we made a basket to start collecting the needed 16.8 million dol-

lars to purchase all the remaining lands for Auroville. Then there was Bhavana's presentation "The Tamils and Villages in Auroville", and a Matrimandir slide show by Michael Bonke with a special report on the inner skin, which needs approximately 1.2 million dollars to be completed. Wolfgang also started an interesting discussion on "The Influence of Integral Yoga on Western Thought", which compared Ken Wilber, Jean Gebser and other philosophical thinkers with Sri Aurobindo.

After a dynamic party evening with a live rock band and energetic dancing, the participants gathered the next morning for discussions and presentations on different aspects of the International Zone (IZ). The most interesting outcome of our work is a paper entitled the "Extended International Zone Group Proposal", which sees an active involvement of AVI centers in the IZ, especially in regard to the development of the national pavilions. The paper proposed, among other things, to expand the membership of the International Zone Group in Auroville with one representative from each pavilion group of the AVI centers, plus a representative from an ad hoc committee of consultants and advisors composed of Aurovilians and AVI members. Since the future of the IZ is an issue involving direct interaction between Auroville and the world, a close participation of all groups involved is seen as essential to pro-

gressively manifest Auroville's ideal of an actual human unity. It is hoped that this step will drastically improve the lines of communication and decision-making process between the Pavilion Groups of the AVI centers, the Pavilion Groups in Auroville and the International Zone Group.

After hearing the AVI centers' annual report, lengthy discussions started as to where and when the next AVI meeting 2003 should take place. Finally the recommendation was given to the General Assembly to hold two meetings: one next January or February in Auroville, which will focus specifically on International Zone matters, plus a sum-

mer meeting in France to deal with more internal AVI affairs. For 2004, a meeting in Brazil is envisioned, and for 2005 it is planned to hold another AVI meeting in Auroville.

The atmosphere throughout was charged by all the intense interactions and activities - the day excursion to the Henry Cowell National Park, the Monterey Bay aquarium and the beach, the games, sharing poetry and songs and doing theatre together. One felt enveloped and protected in this cloud of love and friendship, and it was hard to say good-bye. See you all again next year in Auroville!

Tine

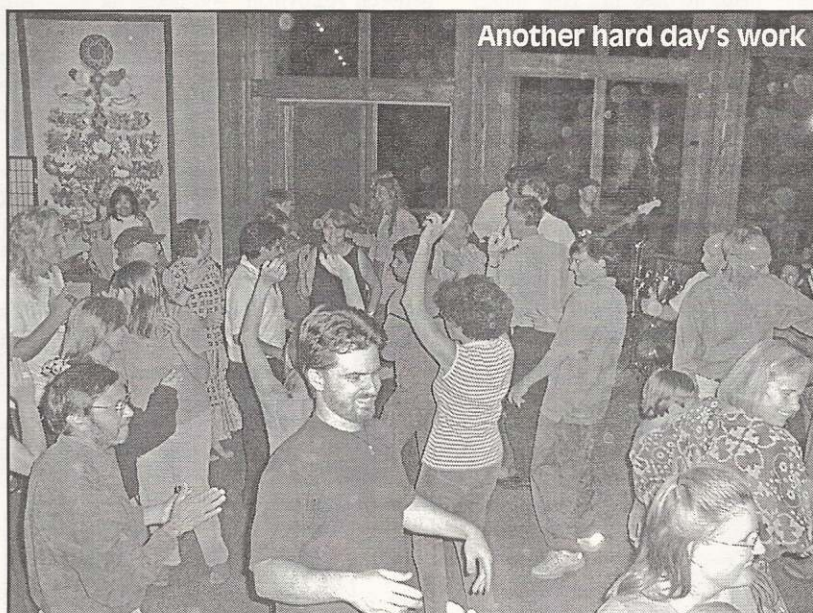


PHOTO: TINE

The Three Steps of Vishnu

The following reflections by Dr. Ananda Reddy on the relationship between the Ashram, Auroville and the Auroville International Centres are based upon a talk he gave at this year's Auroville International meeting.

Once we are clear about the Spiritual Perspective of Auroville, then it becomes easier to grasp its integral perspective. This perspective too is hinted at in the Mother's message to the UNESCO committee. She wrote:

"The task of giving a complete form of Sri Aurobindo's vision was entrusted to the Mother. The creation of a new world, a new humanity, a new society expressing and embodying the new consciousness is the work she has undertaken. By the very nature of things, it is a collective ideal that calls for a collective effort so that it may be realized in the terms of an integral human perfection."

"The Ashram founded and built by the Mother was the first step towards the accomplishment of this goal. The project of Auroville is the next step, more exterior which seeks to widen the base of this attempt..." (CWM, 13, p.210)

On another occasion, the Mother answered to a disciple's question:

"The Ashram is the central consciousness, Auroville is one of the outward expressions." (1970)

And again, to a clear-cut question, *"What is the difference between the Ashram and Auroville,"* the Mother replied in categorical terms:

"The Ashram will retain its role of pioneer, inspirer and the guide. Auroville is the attempt towards collective realisation" (June 1968) (Ibid., p.202)

We see that the emphasis has been always on Auroville being a 'more exterior' expression, 'an outward expression', a 'collective realisation' of a Truth that has been worked out successfully on the individual level in the community framework of the Ashram. The Ashram, since its inception in

1926, has been a laboratory for the Consciousness and Force that Sri Aurobindo has been wanting to bring down upon earth, the supramental Truth-Consciousness. Here, many individual sadhaks, under the direct supervision of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, 'recreated themselves in the image of the Spirit.' That is to say, these individuals not only recognized integrally that the spiritual evolution is the great need and destiny of man but they also lived the spiritual knowledge inwardly and integrally and thereby prepared the next stage of manifestation, the collective realisation, symbolized by Auroville. Perhaps this is what the Mother had meant. Auroville is a 'next step' not only chronologically but also in the process of the manifestation of the Mother's own work for the earth. It was evidently an organic growth of Sri Aurobindo's integral yoga which usually proceeds from the individual to the collective, and from the collective to the universal level of manifestation. Before the collective-body of Auroville could be built, the important thing was to manifest the soul of Auroville. That is what the Mother had said to a disciple who had asked her:

"When the project of Auroville is so grand and stupendous and our means so limited, what should we do for its realisation?" "You build the Matrimandir, the rest I will do." (The Golden Bridge, p.205).

The soul of Matrimandir has descended; it is in its place though the psychic-body of Matrimandir is yet to be completed. The golden tower is not yet built fully, but the influence and the power of this luminous and pulsating centre is 'becoming more and more

real', more and more tangible. It is true that the 'ideal town' envisaged by the Mother is a far cry at present. But the soul of Auroville seems to be exerting a pressure on the collective body of Auroville. At present the residents of Auroville seem to be going through a great travail and a deep churning both on the psychological and physical levels. This unrest, this unease may be symptomatic of Auroville's need to expand, of our need to enlarge our vision and to deepen our inner understanding of the integral perspective of Auroville. As the Ashram had to widen itself into Auroville in order to complete itself, so too Auroville at present needs to extend itself into the global, universal level represented by the Auroville International Centres in order to fulfill itself. Unless and until all these three movements - the Ashram, Auroville and Auroville International Centres - that is to say, the Individual, the Collective and the Universal levels coalesce and are willing for trying out a more transparent and dynamic symbiosis, none of these units by themselves will be able to fulfill their role and purpose. They are like the three strides of Vishnu in his march towards the divinisation of earth life. The truth is that there is One consciousness behind all these movements - the Supramental Consciousness - which is manifesting itself in different forms and modes of existence. A dynamic interfacing of all these modes of expression can alone fulfill their raison-d'être. If there is a sense of separation, then there is a disruption, a barrage built, in the contiguity of the New Consciousness and the consequences could be damaging for all involved in the process. There

should be no divisive sense of the outsider and the insider: the Ashram, Auroville and the AVI Centres are an extension of each other, complementary to each other-only the modes of expression differ. Auroville is like the healthy trunk of a banyan tree with its roots in the Ashram's spiritual efforts and its flowering branches in the Auroville International Centres around the world. But this interdependence between the three modes of expression of the New Consciousness could tend to become mental or artificial if the underlying factor of a deep dependence on and a surrender to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo is not recognized and followed in its deepest spiritual sense. That is to say, the inner Divine consciousness is the only unifying factor; the soul, the psychic is the only centre of unification and until union with that is achieved all else is an endless and frustrating and conflicting groping on the way. Each one of us has not only to participate in the Becoming of Auroville but also in the Being of Auroville. That Being is the Supramental twin-incarnate Mother and Sri Aurobindo alone. It is those individuals who can connect themselves with the universal Mother or the deeper being, the self within, who can link themselves to the collective-soul of Auroville or to the Universal Soul of the Earth. It is only the increasing numbers of such individuals that can prevent an admixture of the old and the new, who can be the channels of the new ways of working with the New Consciousness and be the Men and Women of Tomorrow.

(Full text of talk at: www.aviusa.org/avi2002_fri_keynote.pdf)

In brief

President of India

A letter of congratulation has been sent to the newly elected President of India, Dr. Abdul Kalam, who is very much acquainted with the teaching of Sri Aurobindo.

New Secretary

Mr. Vengateshwaran, a recently retired, high-ranking IAS officer, originally from Kerala but who has worked in New Delhi for the last 40 years, has been appointed as new Secretary of the Auroville Foundation. He is expected to assume office soon.

Sri Aurobindo's birthday

August 15th, the day of India's Independence and Sri Aurobindo's birthday, was celebrated with a collective concentration and bonfire at the Matrimandir amphitheatre.

Matrimandir gardens design

The completed study by Paolo Tommasi of the Matrimandir's Peace Area, comprising the inner and outer gardens/park, and the lake, was exhibited at the Matrimandir Unity office.

Puthupet sacred grove cleaning

The Pichandikulam Bio-Resource Centre organized a successful cleaning of the Puthupet sacred grove, famous for being one of the few remnants of the original Tropical Dry Evergreen Forest, a biotope that once fully covered the coastal plain of Tamil Nadu. The operation aimed at creating awareness among the villagers, devotees and trustees in charge of the temple in the area, and was the starting point for a "Friends of Puthupet Forest Conservation Association."

Land situation critical

The land situation is critical. Money to buy plots for sale is lacking, and all Aurovilians have been asked to write to potential donors. For more information contact: landfund@auroville.org.in or visit the website www.auroville.org/index/land.htm

Land protection

A request that has been made to the Government of Tamil Nadu to protect the lands around Auroville is under its active examination. There have been various meetings with various officials of the Government to find an acceptable solution.

On August 9th, a silent gathering took place at the Matrimandir amphitheatre to make a collective aspiration for the realization of the city and invoke the Grace to protect the lands.

Self-supporting services encouraged

The Economy Group has announced that, in view of chronic deficits of funds, it is encouraging service units that can become self-supporting to do so. On this line, the Auroville Electrical Service has revised its billing policy so that service calls will henceforth have to be paid for.

Towards a new organisation

A Resident Assembly meeting approved in principle the formation of the Auroville Resource Group (ARG). The ARG, which is open to all residents, will assist the community in overhauling its organization.

Negotiating Newcomerhood: Highs & Lows

Does one choose or is one chosen to be in Auroville? What is it like to be a newcomer? How do Aurovilians respond to newcomers? Do factors of nationality or cultural perception count at all? These issues are examined through the experiences of three recent newcomers to Auroville, one of them being myself, writes Abha

Before joining Auroville formally, I decided to sound some Aurovilian friends and acquaintances about it. In a brief visit to Auroville last October, I went about spreading my message of cheer in the midst of pre-monsoon showers. Most people smiled indulgently at my enthusiasm, urging me on. Others, more sober, congratulated me on my resolve, which had taken eight years to shape. A few, with a wry twist of their mouths, asked me why, Auroville being amongst the most difficult of places to live in, did I want to be here?

I remember that question throwing me off. It seemed unfair that one could be asked to explain the most important decision of one's life, beside an assortment of motorcycles parked outside Pour Tous. What does one say? That I am here because of an unspoken, wordless beckoning that has been getting stronger over the years? That sometimes, when I walk here at night, gentle shadows stalk ahead, stepping carefully over the trees, against the luminous sky? That the breeze here actually lifts up my spirit like on no other place on earth? That I believe this is the only place where my inner being can be manifest? That I feel connected to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo? That I'm willing to join hands, however different and tenuous that they may be? That I am here for maybe the same reasons that you are and which cannot be explained?

I had first heard of Auroville in 1992 while completing my higher studies in Canada. Surprisingly, even today, not many middle-class people, particularly in North India know of the place. When I came to Auroville briefly in 1993, I experienced a strong state of déjà vu twice in the space of one week. Feeling came in exhilarated rushes -- I felt in touch with my child self. The sense of belonging deepened when I came to settle in November 1994, but within a few months contrary forces were at play within my personal life. I moved to Pondicherry soon after, with still some measure of love for Auroville in my heart.

Joining Auroville in May this year was a turning point in my life, yet it seemed the most natural thing in the world. I ended my last day of work as a lecturer in English at St. Stephen's College, Delhi, and bought a one-way ticket to Madras. While most of my extended family in Delhi thought of the move as nothing short of "crazy," my parents, with their selfless love, wished me luck as I boarded the train. With my old laptop nestled precariously under my tennis racquet in the suitcase, and a lot of goodwill, I finally arrived. Everything that needed to be done happened quickly and quietly in the space of two weeks. I found work, a place to live, filled the forms, and got the go-ahead from the Entry Group. Even in the unrelenting heat of the summer, life seemed wonderful. I happily cycled my way up and down between Certitude, where I was staying, and Aspiration for my essentials, and to Surrender for the AV

Today meetings. A colleague and friend offered rides to Bharat Nivas where I worked three mornings a week. When I received my newcomer status, I gladly made the rounds, like last year. To become a newcomer was a badge of courage and faith, a symbol of my entry into an infinite, boundless journey that I had struggled hard to reach.

The magic of Auroville was still palpable but had it really become a more "difficult" place to live in? Had things changed from 1995 when at the age of twenty-nine, I had left Auroville due to my broken marriage and had chosen to live near the ashram for the next three years? Some things were indeed different. Auroville had a greater internation-

Monica joined Auroville. Presently, they live in Franca's house in Auromodele.

Valeria has a strong sense of belonging to Auroville in an individual, spiritual way. She realizes that most Aurovilians have intense characters because they choose to be here and because "it takes courage to be here." She feels part of the community, but sees little meaningful interaction and supportive networking between Aurovilians and newcomers. Aware that her responses to Auroville are filtered through her experiences as a person with hybrid cultural traditions with their roots in Italy and Japan, she makes the strong claim that living in Auroville as "an Italian woman" is fine but as a Japanese, life is "very difficult in Auroville. A Japanese person finds it hard to adjust in Auroville given the high level of respect people give one another in Japanese society. Many people are friendly in Auroville, but some are not very polite. One expects

shock she encountered after moving to Auroville last year. "Newcomers from outside India have to deal with many new things on different levels. A new country, a new culture, a new community, a new orientation... one needs a buffer, a support system which can help newcomers participate and feel integrated in the community life. Newcomers should not be made to feel stupid. We may not know too much about Auroville, but most of us are coming with some life experience that is as important. Including newcomers in responsible work activities will boost their self-confidence and feeling of oneness with the community."

In addition to her future plans of doing Ikebana workshops in Savitri Bhavan, and the ARKA residential centre, Valeria hopes to be a contact person for newcomers one day. "It takes courage to live in Auroville. I want to be a support for those who come here," she smiles.

Doris, a German layout designer in publishing, heard about Auroville thirty years ago when she was working as a flight attendant with Lufthansa Airlines. Through the "flying network" of international tourists, and airline staff, one could know about the most interesting places in the world. "At that time, around 1969, only two places in India were the most talked about - Pune and Auroville." When Doris heard about the Auroville Charter she was interested but thought at the same time that, "it was an outrageous dream, which seemed difficult to manifest." Her marriage to a pilot and their hectic work lives kept Doris busy for the next couple of decades. Auroville receded into the background, becoming nothing more than a distant, unlikely dream.

Last year, however, when Doris and her yoga teacher were deciding on a place to visit together, Auroville suddenly came to mind. It seemed the one place that Doris had not been to. Having traveled virtually the whole world, and having ended her marriage, Doris felt ready for a new experience that would offer her the freedom to "start from scratch." Before visiting Auroville in December 2001 for a period of three months, Doris went through all the information on the Auroville website. After a wonderful time in Auroville during which Doris made the decision to come back for good, she went back to Germany to arrange the final move. Before returning to Auroville in April this year in order to begin the newcomer process, Doris went through a detailed study of all the website information available on

the Auroville housing situation. Excited by the prospect of being able to secure accommodation within a few weeks of her arrival, Doris was surprised at the discrepancy between what was on the net in the year 2001 and the actual situation in Auroville. "The housing policy had changed completely! Also, there are still no clear-cut guidelines as to exactly how much a newcomer needs to pay for the total cost of a house. There are various percentages that are added on to the basic costs, and then there are the other costs that are not listed at all and that come as a nasty surprise for the person who is expected to pay."

As a response to her own somewhat difficult experience of getting a house, Doris, with the help of Charles, a long-term guest, and Volker, who works with the Housing Service, is compiling information on the basic steps to putting a house together in Auroville. In addition she is also researching all the experimental housing which have been constructed in Auroville. These results will be posted on a web page. Doris is also working as a layout designer for AVToday, in addition to teaching quilt-making to young Tamil children in New Creation school. "Organising an improvised hand-sewing class with incomplete materials to a group of enthusiastic children has been really rewarding," she says. "It is like making the best out of nothing."

For newcomers and Aurovilians alike, that is one of the joys of living in Auroville, despite it being a difficult place. There are limitations of all kinds and yet new dreams continue to manifest themselves, sometimes, virtually out of nothing.

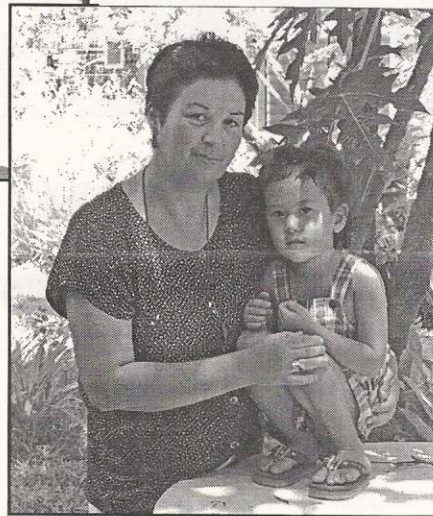
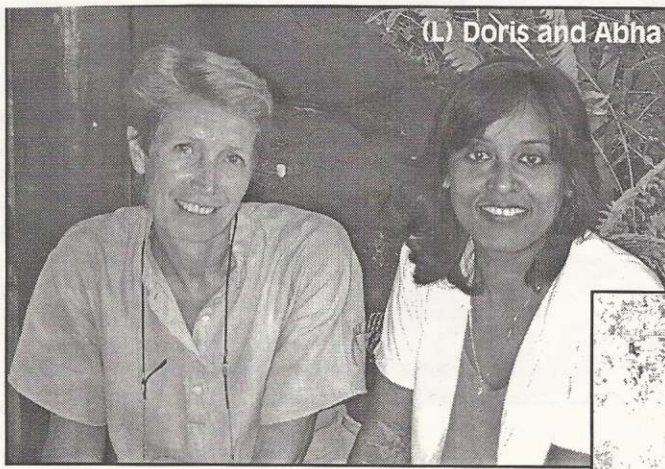
Abha

Opening

From left: Lila, Auroasha and Ar



(L) Doris and Abha



al diversity than before - there were newcomers from Israel, and Kazakhstan, for example, -- but also a degree of possessiveness about people's personal space had crept in. Owing to the economic crisis, housing and land had become contested, problematic issues. There was a better organization and communication network in the community, but more rigid rules had come into effect. Many things had become more commercialized, and more expensive.

How were these changes affecting other newcomers? I decided to ask some people about their experiences here, both positive and negative. One of the first persons I approached did not want his views aired at all. "It will change nothing, so why bother?" he said. Another wanted only her positive views on Auroville to be included, not the rest. Finally, I met Valeria and Doris who were both willing to share their experience of arriving in Auroville, along with the ups and downs of newcomerhood. It would be fair to keep in mind that their views are necessarily rooted in the personal and coloured by their specific cultural and social backgrounds. Also that they are related to the present moment, and therefore, not unchangeable or absolute.

Valeria, an Italian woman in her mid-forties, had an interesting life before she joined Auroville. After completing her major in Psychology in Italy, she travelled around the world on a yacht, visiting 25 countries in the space of 8 years. A trained Ikebana teacher, Valeria has lived with her husband Kenji for the last fourteen years in Japan. Last November, they and their little daughter

educated people to have a more civil manner of speech especially if they are working in a service unit in Auroville. Basic terms like "please," "excuse me," or "thank you" are rarely used by some individuals here."

Having studied the Mothers's experiences in Japan before she began her work of spiritual collaboration with Sri Aurobindo, Valeria believes that people in Auroville have a lot to learn from Japanese customs and culture as these had a special place in the Mother's heart. "Many people in Auroville ask me about Japan. When I tell them I miss the level of the respect people give to each other in Japan, they ask me why we have come here!"

Valeria wanted to live in India since her first visit at the age of 21 in 1978. Still that did not prevent the wave of culture

Newcomer Housing

Some years ago a scheme was begun which provided newcomers with accommodation for the first two years of their stay in Auroville. The newcomer was asked to deposit the cost of the unit or house with the Housing Service. When they left, 80% of what they had paid was made available to them to construct their own accommodation.

Today the scheme is still operating. However, rather than depositing the cost of accommodation at the outset, newcomers are now required to pay a non-returnable monthly contribution for their use of the unit. The cost varies according to the facilities offered, the most expensive at present being approximately Rs 3,000 a month. The

understanding, as before, is that they will vacate the unit after a maximum of two years to enable other newcomers to benefit from the scheme.

At present there are around 25 newcomer units in Auroville, comprising family as well as double and individual units. Some of the original newcomer units are no longer available, either because the communities in which they were situated no longer want to host such a unit, or because Aurovilians in need of emergency housing are occupying them. Yet more newcomers seem to be coming every year.

Does this mean that not enough accommodation is available for new-

comers at who super Service, "t have accommodation with also a big Aurovilian approximate that new Group see quate finan

From Chidambaram on a Scooty

A Tamil newcomer's experience

Vinodhini comes from a very conservative Brahmin Family in Chidambaram, a town 75 kms south of Pondicherry. After her schooling in Chidambaram, she came to the Pondicherry college to study Law. In Chidambaram, which is a very traditional town, there are only half a dozen or so women lawyers. On top of that, she chose the criminal courts, something which was not seen as appropriate by many of her acquaintances. However, having chosen the field she was most interested in, she continued. After her graduation, she did her apprenticeship in court for eight months, and it was during this time that she first came to Auroville and visited the Matrimandir. "I had always dreamed of living in a place like Auroville," she explains. "As I visited more often, I started discovering it more. Among other things, I learned that moving here would be difficult in many ways for somebody who had been brought up like I had been." After her apprenticeship was completed, Vinodhini received her license in law. But the very next day she decided she would not practice as a lawyer. "I went back to Chidambaram," she remembers, "I stayed at home. And, although I didn't yet know very much about Auroville, I started dreaming of the Matrimandir. I would close my eyes and see the inner chamber. In our house, we had a big photograph of the Mother. One morning I went to sit in front of it and started asking Her to please make it possible for me to go and live in Auroville. It had become

almost an obsession, that is all I wanted." The same day, she received a letter from a friend in Pondicherry, telling her there was a job for her there.

move to Auroville. She stayed for a year before deciding to become a newcomer. Then she decided this was really where she wanted to be. Her newcomer period began last

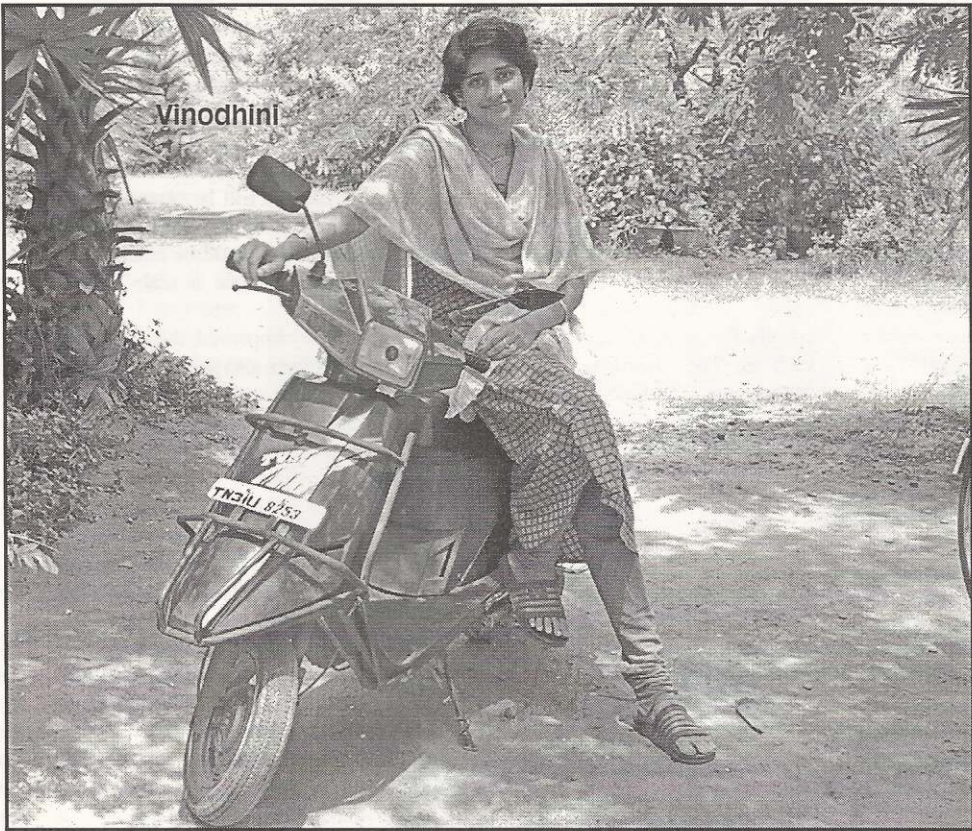
enjoys very much. She presently lives in a newcomer house in the Surrender Community.

Asked about what she thinks of the entry process, and how she is experiencing her newcomer period, she stresses: What Auroville has achieved since its beginning is something beyond one's imagination. And of course it is because of the contribution of all the individuals, in all senses. So before commenting on anything or criticizing, I would like to give my wholehearted appreciation for whatever is there.

"When I decided to come, I knew it would not be easy," she continues. "And as newcomers, there are, of course, challenges and struggles one has to face." She feels one of the biggest difficulties is that there is often a lot of judgment passed on newcomers. "As a newcomer, you sometimes don't feel secure enough to express yourself, to say what you really feel, or think, because whatever you say makes an impact, and you are often judged for it," she says. "Aurovilians should realize that newcomers also struggle. There is the whole process of integrating into Auroville, work, housing. It's also an emotional struggle. We have taken an important decision in our lives, we have given up a lot in order to come here. We should also

be given our own space. "Sometimes, I find it difficult to face certain of the problems here, but it's just that sometimes I need encouragement. After the seriousness of the problem has abated, I realize it is part of what we have come for. "Outwardly there may be problems, but what is important is what happens inside oneself, and that's all very subtle, and happens gradually. And though problems exist, that's probably all part of living here, part of the challenge."

Emmanuelle



She decided then and there to go, as Pondicherry was for her one step closer to Auroville. "That same evening, I packed my bags, said my good-byes to my mother, put petrol in my scooty (a small scooter), with which I drove all the way to Pondicherry. I just left without a second thought. My mother saw how adamant I was. She knew she could not stop me." Six months later, she left Pondicherry and her job there to

October. "I feel this sense of belonging," says she. "If I visit my mother, or if I go out for a small tour, as soon as I return and enter Auroville I feel I am back home." Since she arrived, Vinodhini has been working in different places in Auroville, including the Visitor's Centre and Centre Guest House. For many months she has also been working part time in Savitri Bhavan as a receptionist, a work which she

the First Door



continued from page 1

The community should enthusiastically support those willing to participate fully in its physical and material growth and the criterion for joining Auroville should not be financial - we have enough retired people here - but should be based on work and participation. But the economic crisis is an urgent reality, and we cannot change the way the economy is functioning at present. We are already telling people that we are not comfortable working solely on the basis of economic considerations. It is difficult to tell people who wish to join Auroville but who lack the funds to support themselves, to come back after some time, when they can afford to do so. Not only do they lose out, we lose out as well. But sometimes we do meet people who might not have the means, but have the sincere willingness to participate and be involved, and who very clearly have something deeper to offer to the growth of Auroville. And despite their initial difficulties, these people do find sup-

port, not necessarily financial, from the community, which recognizes their offering. The work that these people are doing is self-evident.

Are there any clarifications that you would like to make regarding the residency requirements for newcomers? Is the first year mandatory?

If people decide to join Auroville, then they should want to be here for an extended length of time instead of leaving temporarily, for whatever reasons. If, however, newcomers do decide to leave for a prolonged period, say 2-3 months, then their time as newcomer starts up again when they come back to Auroville. Typically, a newcomer must complete one full year, either in the first or second year of their newcomer period. But we are in the process of re-examining all these criteria with the goal of encouraging those come here with the right reasons i.e., encouraging those willing to engage themselves in the Auroville experiment.

The current Aurovilian and Newcomer population of almost 1900 people is drawn from more than 36 countries in the world, yet some countries like China, Japan, and continents like Africa, remain under-represented or not represented at all. What could be the possible reasons for this?

Auroville welcomes people from all countries in the world. But the three regions you have mentioned are barely represented in Auroville (see box on newcomer statistics). Maybe people there do not know about Auroville, or are not ready for Auroville at the present moment. There are no AVIs (Auroville International Centres) in these countries which could be another reason why we do not get enough people from these regions. We do get a number of requests for marketing Auroville products in Japan, for instance, and perhaps that is another way of raising awareness about Auroville in the long run

Finally, is there a helpline available for newcomers? An information centre where they can find answers to some of their questions?

The Auroville website offers concise, updated information on various aspects of life in Auroville. In addition, the Entry Group office at Bharat Nivas is open to any queries on the part of newcomers. Newcomers should feel free to drop by at the office, or call in at our information desk. Newcomers should not fear us, we are here to help. We will be happy to help them in any way we can.

Interview by Abha

Newcomers: facts & figures

Nationality	Numbers
French	59
Indian	55
German	30
Dutch	17
Italian	9
British	8
American	7
Swiss	7
Russian	6
Korean	5
Ukrainian	5
Spanish	4
Australian	3
Canadian	3
Kazakhstan	2
Japanese	2
Irish	1
Tibetan	1
Israeli	1
Austrian	1
Belgian	1
Luxemburgian	1
Latvian	1
TOTAL	229
Age group	Number
0-18	51
19-29	52
30-39	51
40-49	44
50-59	19
60-69	11
70-79	1
TOTAL	229

Occupations

Students	47
Teachers	30
Gen. Services	21
Administration	19
Health care	17
Artist/designer	17
Greenwork	16
Matrimandir	7
Architects	6
Technicians	6
Researchers	5
Business	5
Village Action	4
Construction	2
At home	23
Others	4

DATA PROVIDED BY RESIDENTS SERVICE

The library, past, present and future

Some believe that books will soon be passé in this technological era. Others, and I confess I number among them, love nothing better than to curl up in their favourite armchair with a good book, writes Bindu

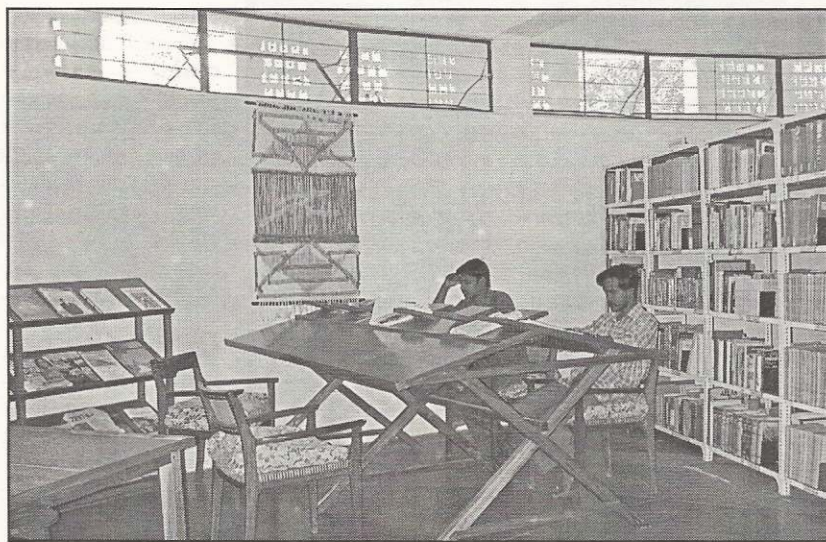
This war between the printed word and the virtual, digitalized word became evident in Auroville when Juergen, the Auroville librarian, refused to shift the library to the 200 sq. m allocated to him in the multi-media centre under construction. "200 sq. m of library space for a growing township is a joke," he growls. "The present library is almost that size. I don't think books will ever be outdated. On the contrary, libraries will incorporate electronic media. We need at least 500 sq. m of space to see us through for the next five years, and corresponding to the growth of the township, there should be a possibility to extend the library." Crawling sideways amongst the overcrowded metal racks and narrow spaces of the Auroville library, I can only agree. Located, since 1986, in a basement building of the Bharat Nivas, the library does feel cramped. Worse, during heavy monsoons, the library gets flooded and has to be closed. In the past five years, on two occasions, books have been damaged thus, and to pump out the water a pump had to be permanently installed. Slowly over the years however, the set-up of the library has improved: the rearrangement of the shelves has created more space in the study section; good lights have greatly brightened the dingy, basement room; and cushions invite one to plop down on the floor for relaxed reading.

The Auroville library was started in 1975 with private collections of Aurovilians and Auroville friends. At the time, the bulk of the collection, 5000 books, was gifted by the mother of the late Aurovillian Namas and shipped all the way from America. Since then, various book-lovers have acted as librarians. They have tried to enhance the collection of books and interest people other than the donors themselves to check out books.

Juergen accepted the job of librarian in 1998. Interestingly, he reminisces that his very first job as an Aurovillian was

that of a librarian. In 1972, he looked after a room with a sea-view, generously financed and equipped by Navajata, which was meant for Aurovilians visiting Pondicherry to relax from the harsh midday heat. And apart from couches and chairs, the room had a collection of books and periodicals.

From such humble beginnings, the Auroville library has come a long way. Small grants, not fixed but given annually by Auroville friendly institutions, and donations of books by Aurovilians and guests have resulted in a multi-lingual facility. Apart from English books, the European languages of French, German, Dutch, Spanish, Italian and Russian are represented. Juergen however emphasizes that they are all small, seed-collections that need to be vastly developed.



Last year, a long overdue section of 1,500 Tamil books was added. Bought out of a government grant, this language section is now the most coherent and up-to-date, of all. Most of the funds go into acquiring English books. For other languages, the library is still dependent on donations. "And that means," clarifies Juergen, "we often receive books that are similar in content, or lack any signif-

icant content! At present, each year, on an average, only 10% of the books are purchased while the remaining 90% of books are donated. It is just not possible to build a good library like this, through donations." English fiction, the most popular section, is well represented while the natural/human science section is "pretty pathetic." The present collection is estimated to be over 18,000 books (though Juergen derisively adds that one could easily throw out a third of the books without losing anything of value). While the reading section containing magazines is popular amongst users, the library can afford to subscribe only to some regional Tamil and English periodicals. Favourite European periodicals such as *The Guardian Weekly*, *Le Monde* or *Der Spiegel*, are mostly

software ourselves was quite a job," says Juergen. "And a computer crash once caused us to lose data on 3,000 books." At present, Ramesh, a Tamil writer and scholar from Pondicherry, is in charge of the data entry section. Over 6,500 books have been entered on the computer so far, and once the classification is complete, the Auroville library would be the first digital public library in the region including Pondicherry. After computerizing circulation as a second step, the library database will be accessible via the AV Intranet. Finally even the private book collections could be entered into the system to create a real "public" library.

As the library improved, the number of library members also started increasing. At present there are over 850 users who checked out close to 16,000 books last year. The users are mostly Aurovilians and occasional guests. "There was this couple with a child from a remote farm in France visiting Auroville last year who were really happy to discover our library, even though the French collection is pretty dismal," says Juergen. "Each week the three of them would check out 15 books between them."

The increase in users has however increased Juergen's work. Extra hands are badly needed. A small but dedicated team would greatly improve the facilities of the library. Juergen envisages the library as a community centre for people—a community asset and an investment in knowledge that is catered to by the collective. "If, as some people wish," points out Juergen "each national pavilion starts its own library, then this will lead to building insular groups isolated from each other. Rather studies show that 'people from multicultural backgrounds view the library as a place for social contact'. We should also work towards opening up the library to the villagers, especially those working in

Auroville. This would another level of interaction with our neighbours on whom we are co-dependent."

Another of Juergen's concerns is to interest the youth in books. At present, young Aurovilians hardly ever visit the library. A special section catering to their needs is needed for the youth, something which is just not possible in the present circumstances. With adequate space and outdoor seating areas, quiet games—chess, go, scrabble—could also be provided for the young and the old alike.

Ideally the library needs be located in a central place that is regularly accessed by all. Even though, at present, there are no funds for building, permission has been requested to the Development Group for a library building next to the Solar Kitchen. An architect has already drawn up plans for building and which include possibilities for future extension. In the short run however, Juergen feels a lot could be done with participation by Aurovilians and Auroville International Centres. "One possibility would be for all Aurovilians to contact and request friends, especially those abroad, for donations. Also, if friends and Auroville International Centres could gift us a subscription to a periodical from their home country, our collection would be greatly enhanced. Ideally there would be for each of the 8 languages a couple of people in the respective countries who in cooperation with us and the AVI Centres would define a seed collection of their national literature and try to find ways to channel some of the literary riches of the world into Auroville. After 30 years of successful land regeneration, it's time that Auroville starts to develop the barren, cultural desert we are still living in. Auroville is a place of an unending education and a site of material and spiritual researches for a living embodiment of an actual Human Unity," concludes Juergen with a smile and unexpected optimism.

HISTORY

The Enigma of Max Theon

In the early years of the 20th century Mother stayed some time with the Theons on their estate in Algeria. Here Christine Rhone, a writer with special interest in sacred geography and spirituality, places them in the context of the spiritual and esoteric traditions of Europe and India at the turn of the century.

The Western esoteric seeds that Mirra Alfassa brought to India, where they were implanted in Sri Aurobindo's mystic philosophy, had come to her through contact with Max and Alma Theon, the moving spirits behind two important occultist groups in Europe, the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor and the Groupe Cosmique. Mirra, who had had spontaneous psychic and spiritual experiences from childhood, trained intensively with the Theons during two long stays at their home in Tlemcen, Algeria. The Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor, known as the H B of L, went public in England in 1884 as a school of practical occultism. In this it differed from the Theosophical Society, whose teachings were more philosophical, and the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, which was more social and ceremonial. The Groupe Cosmique evolved at the turn of the century as a continuation of the H B of L and had a profound influence, especially in France. Through Mirra Alfassa it has left its imprint on the Integral Yoga, whose teachings are closely connected with

the Theons' philosophy of the period around 1900. Max Theon was a shadowy figure, so elusive that the best scholars today remain unable to identify his precise origins or name. Of all the variants that appear on official documents, his original name was most likely Louis Bimstein, probably born in 1847 in Poland or Russia. He himself always said he was Jewish. It is definitely known that Theon was active in Poland toward the time of the insurrections of 1863, when many Jews were demonstrating against Russian dominance. Theon must have spent much of his life under false names and identity papers to escape Tsarist or Austrian repression, but when exactly he left his country, and whether he had to flee because he was Jewish or else wanted to avoid military conscription is unresolved. His work suggests that he was an initiate of Hasidic circles; it is entirely impregnated with Kaballah. There are important theoretical and practical elements of sex magic in the H B of L, whose source was Paschal Beverly Randolph's teachings in *The Brotherhood of Eulis* and more dis-

tantly, the Zohar. Theon declared that he had received full initiation at the exceptionally young age of eighteen. Presumably, he travelled widely, although information on this is not explicit and comes from accounts by his successors in the Groupe Cosmique. After Theon's initiations in European or Hasidic circles, he must have received initiation into Indian or Tibetan-Indian wisdom. Mirra Alfassa said that he knew the Rig Veda in depth and Sanskrit and that he claimed to have been the heir to a tradition antedating the Kaballah and the Vedas. Theon's marriage to Alma, formerly Mary Ware, who was English, took place shortly after the first public notice of the H B of L. Alma was a medium, an occultist, and a successful lecturer, whose own Universal Philosophical Society, founded under the pseudonym Una, anticipated the future Philosophic Cosmique. Mirra Alfassa was lavish in her praise of Alma's immense occult powers, which she said were even greater than Max's. The Philosophic Cosmique is thus a synthesis of esoteric streams issuing

from Hasidic Kaballism and Indian or Tibetan-Indian sources, blended with knowledge of Western spiritualism that the Theons probably gained primarily from their own explorations of magnetism. So, in moving from the H B of L to the Philosophic Cosmique, the elements of sex magic were dropped, and Indian ingredients were added along with mediumistic activities which Max Theon termed "pathotisme". "Pathotisme", which Theon said meant magnetism in antiquity, is a practice where two persons, one psychically sensitive or a medium, and the other a protector and guide, work together to obtain occult knowledge. This operation works best when the force of polarity is used, one active and the other receptive, or male and female. The information and visions channeled by the sensitive, who speaks in trance while exteriorized from her body, is subjected to intellectual control by the protector, who also ensures that the sensitive is not endangered by encounters with



Mother's drawing of Theon

diabolical forces and does not lose her way while voyaging in the subtle planes. The Theons collaborated in this way for many years and used the material thus obtained to write the texts of the Philosophic Cosmique, which total more than 10,000 pages. Among their contemporaries were other couples who used similar methods, such as S.L. Macgregor Matthews and his wife Moina Bergson, whose collaboration produced the rituals of the Golden Dawn in 1891-92. This was a process that Mirra Alfassa also trained in, according to passages in her transcribed con-

The Sacred Tie

Within the complexities of Auroville's cultures, the traditions of the Tamil people predominate. Their lives, whether Aurovilian or not, intertwine with all who live in this township.

Amongst the many ceremonies and rituals of the Tamil culture, marriage overrides all others in the development and growth of each village. It is through marriage that family and community structure is built, a support system that eludes many western societies. Although "love" marriage is a concept more commonly accepted today, arranged marriages are still practiced to the larger degree in this area. Unlike in the Western tradition, marriage is not something that waits years to be discussed. When a Tamil child is born, her marital destiny begins to be carved out for her. Within the large extended families of Tamil Nadu (and they can be very large), a child's birth is discussed and possible marriage proposals are taken seriously. It is not yet a time for papers or astrologers, yet spoken words between family members can hold a strong commitment. Over compliments on the beauty of a daughter or strength of a son, mothers and fathers will match their newborns to suitable future spouses. Many look for matches within their own lineage. Typically, the boy will be two to three years older than the girl. If marrying a cousin, he must be either her father's sister's child or her mother's brother's child. Consequently, as she grows up, the young bride often knows about her husband to be. Her girlfriends, who may envy her position, might tease her. Or she and her friends might find this boy entirely disagreeable. Sometimes, the girl romanticizes about her marriage only to have the outcome change when the time has come. Many factors are reconsidered when the girl reaches puberty. Did the boy's family lose or gain status in the community? Is there a better match for their daughter? What dowry will be expected? "You don't know what is in the mind of the girl when she comes

and sits on the dais for marriage. She will have gone through so many stages in her life before accepting the hand of this boy," says Meenakshi, a long-time Aurovilian who works extensively with the Tamil community. When the boy's family is interested and the girl has come of age, a relative, friend or, on rare occasions, a broker, will approach the girl's family and ask for her horoscope. The Tamil people follow the lunar calendar and the horoscope plays no small role in marital matches. Through a special horoscope reader, (today it is not unheard of to use the computer to interpret the information), the boy's family will determine if this girl will have a healthy life, be obedient, bring good luck to their family, bring Lakshmi (prosperity) with her, have healthy children...etc. "For the boy," says Meenakshi, "the horoscope is secondary." Once the boy's family approves of a girl's horoscope they (the family with elders) will visit the girl's family to talk about property, family relations and will then agree upon an engagement. "There is a demand from the girl's family for around Rs.10,000 for the girl's sari (marital dress). Both families go to the shop and examine everything. One of the elders may say 'Oh! I am not happy about the color.' So they step out into the street to examine the colour more closely. Each family may

have a certain color preference. The girl's family may say, 'in our family blue is good' and the boy's family will say, 'no, in our family we prefer to have red.' So they make a compromise and end up in purple." The elders must

participate. In some areas the bridegroom is brought in procession - in some it is the bride. Every house owner will come and greet them in their chariot or open car. The welcoming ceremony introduces the boy or girl to the village. But now, they often marry in a hall in town and make a procession through the streets, jamming the traffic with everybody scolding." As a Westerner attending a marriage, I have been amazed by the organized chaos. Unlike the silent rows of collected onlookers in the West, an Indian marriage is full



Tense moments

of action, laughing, talking and celebration right through the ceremony. Both families will be involved in different preparations and certain rituals. Loud drums often drown out the happy cries of children, while jasmine and local flowers fill the air with a thick aroma. "The most symbolic thing in a Hindu marriage," explains Meenakshi, "is the tying of the Thali, also known as 'Mangalyam'. The Thali is traditionally made of a particular yellow rope though many Thalies today are made out of gold. The entire marriage ceremony revolves around this auspicious moment (which the Brahmin will indicate), when the boy ties the Thali around the girl's neck. This gesture implies that she is now tied to his community and now takes responsibility to uphold the ethnic, cultural position and status of his family. An anthropological study states that the Thali represents a tiger's nail or claw. "When there were still jungle people, the women preferred only the strong men. Those who spirited the tiger and brought the nail to a maiden were considered a good choice and it was an honour for the girl to choose such a courageous man." Today, the Thali is a symbolic representation of the history of its caste. So, when one sees a Thali, they know what caste or religion the family is." During the marriage ceremony there are four clay pots. Two are painted while two remain plain. While the boy ties the Thali, water is poured from the two plain pots into the two decorated ones. After the marriage, the bride and groom go to the river or pond. There the woman will fill each pot with water, representing the eternal flow of life. The man will plant seeds and the bride will feed her new husband rice and beetle leaves. This is symbolic of the work ahead (once, commonly, fieldwork) and the woman's commitment to support and nurture. The boy then takes his bride to his family where they receive blessings and gifts. Then they will go together to the girl's home where they may stay for a day or a week. They then return to the boy's home. After some time a family member from the girl's side (usually an uncle or brother) will come and take the girl back to her parents' home. And finally, the young groom will go to retrieve his wife and together they will walk into the life ahead of them.

Sunaura

versations. Sri Aurobindo's epic poem, Savitri, which runs to 800 pages, is among other things, a description of Mirra's spiritual experiences as she travelled in the subtle realms. The keystone of the whole system of the Philosophic Cosmique is the concept that physical mortality of the human being is not inevitable. One of its basic axioms is, "Mortality is the result of imbalance: it is accidental and temporary." Nor is immortality something for the far distant future, after a long wait for some form of resurrection of the dead. It is something to be attained right now. Closely associated with this is a concept of evolution, stated in another axiom that says, "The perpetual evolution toward perfection is the eternal and natural means to arrive at earthly Immortality." The "glorious body", which is immortal and made of spiritual light, is our birthright. The Theons supported these concepts with examples taken mainly from the Bible and the Kaballah, since they were writing for people brought up in Judeo-Christian traditions, but also had recourse to quotations from their translation of the Rig Veda. Marshaled for support were the esoteric currents of Alchemy, Freemasonry and Rosicrucianism, plus Socrates (Theon's name, incidentally, was a reflection of Alma's predilection for ancient Greece). When Alma unexpectedly passed away from illness in 1908, Max was

deeply shaken and never fully recovered. Their Revue Cosmique ceased publication that same year. When he himself reached old age, some of his disciples, perhaps intimidated by the boldness of their leader, must have tried a cover-up, because the words "earthly Immortality" in the aforementioned axiom, meaning physical immortality, were changed to "Immortality of the earthlyconsciousness", which is much more limited. More than a century has passed since the heyday of Max and Alma Theon. The influence of the H B of L on subsequent occultist groups has been profound, both in Europe and in the USA. Its threads can be traced through the activities of some of its leading members, such as the Rev. William Ayton, F.-Ch. Barlet, Peter Davidson, and Thomas Henry Burgoyne. Its teachings were part of the esoteric core of French occultism, whose driving force was Papus, head of the Martinist Order. Of all the students of the Philosophic Cosmique, the most illustrious is no doubt Mirra Alfassa.

(edited version of a longer article)

Sources: Christian Chanel, *De la 'Fraternité de Louxor' au 'Mouvement cosmique': l'oeuvre de Max Théon, Doctorat d'Etat (E.P.H.E., Section Ve, 1994)*. J. Godwin, C. Chanel and J. P. Deveney, *The Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor* (Samuel Weiser, 1995).

In brief

Photos of Mother

An exhibition "In the Mother's Room 1960-1972", showing rare photographs of The Mother, took place in Pitanga.

Community Swimming Pool

Aurovilians and Friends of Auroville have come together to build Auroville's first community swimming pool in New Creation. The estimated costs are Rs 33 lakhs of which two thirds have already been secured.

Janina Stroka

Savitri Bhavan housed an exhibition of delicate paintings from Janina Stroka, "The little ball", which show the Divine Mother playing with the earth. Janina, a Polish disciple, lived in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram from 1957 until her passing in 1964.

Future School

The new high school situated in Transition, called "Future School", is nearing completion, although Rs 11 lakhs is still needed. The building, constructed with funds from Gateway, the American Foundation for World Education and the Dutch Stichting de Zaaier, will be inaugurated in early 2003.

Concerts

The usual cultural dry summer was dispelled in August by many music performances, amongst which there was a Carnatic flute and violin concert by Gordon and Kirupa, a fusion performance by Oswald; a Carnatic vocal concert by Ms. Vijayalakshmi Subramaniam; and a Hindustani vocal concert by Ms. Nandita Majumdar, accompanied by Apurbo on the tabla.

Expressing the spirit of Brazil

A 20-day Capoeira dance workshop was given by Oswaldo from Brazil. Capoeira dance was introduced into Brazil by Africans as 'Nigolo,' the dance of the zebras. Capoeira is a dance form through which Brazil's spirit is expressed.

Seminar on consciousness

A one-day seminar on the evolution of consciousness with visiting speakers Veenapani, Ananda Reddy and Shradhalu, was held at SAWCHU.

Philosophy courses

A 7-day summer course on themes of Indian Philosophy was conducted by Dr. Kanchana Natarajan of the University of Delhi. A series of introductory lectures on Western philosophy was started by Jehuda

Kuilapalayam School

The Tamil medium school at Kuilapalayam, which teaches 540 students from age 3 to 16 from the surrounding villages, reported substantial growth and progress. This year the 10th standard government exam was passed by all students, indicating the quality of teaching. An 11th standard group will start this year, and a new campus has been opened close to Bommaiarpalayam with three classrooms for the smallest children. A big bus has been donated to pick up children and teachers. Four of the six school trustees are Aurovilians.

The Brothers are Back

The Akademic Genius Brothers have returned from their worldwide travels and are once more delighting Aurovilians with their satirical skits on life in Auroville.

The Sikkim adventure

Recently Aurovilians installed a wind generation system in a remote army base near the Chinese Tibet border. It wasn't exactly a breeze...

Jan first became involved with wind energy systems about four years ago when he was asked if he would assist in a project to provide wind-generated electricity for the Sagar Islanders in the Sunderban delta. However, the project took so long to come through that Auroville Energy Products-Wind Section turned its attention also to smaller wind generators which charge batteries and don't require a grid.

"What you have to understand," explains Jan, "is that these systems, even with a heavy subsidy, only make real commercial sense in remote locations. Consequently it is always going to be a bit of an adventure..."

This particular adventure began with the wind team receiving a letter from the Sikkim Renewable Energy Agency telling them they'd been awarded a contract to install a system in the State. "To begin with they didn't tell us where it was or who it was for. For a long time they wouldn't give me even a telephone number-only a postal address. As the post takes two or three weeks to reach that part of the world, communication, from the very beginning, was a nightmare."

It turned out that the army wanted a wind system which would supplement their diesel generators in providing lighting for the barracks and officer's quarters in a high, remote camp near the Chinese/Tibetan border. Undaunted, the Auroville team designed a system comprising a 10kw wind battery charger and a large battery bank. Meanwhile Aureka workshop constructed the tower upon

which the turbine would be fitted.

When everything was ready they loaded it on a lorry bound for Shiliguri, near the Sikkim border. The understanding was that the army would transport it from there up to the base near the border. Unfortunately the lorry broke down and was stranded for some time in West Bengal. This meant that when Perumal and 'wind-mill' Pallani arrived in Shiliguri after a 46 hour train journey, the lorry had only just arrived. "When we got down from the train," recalls Perumal, "we learned that the army was not going to transport the materials up north after all. We would have to arrange that ourselves with the Sikkim National Transport Department. They told us a landslide had blocked the road to the north and that nothing could get through for another six weeks. We were getting desperate. Finally we learned there was another route and they would be willing to take it...for a price!"

Meanwhile Jan and Johnny, the other two members of the team who had traveled separately, were having their own problems. In Gangtok they finally

met the major in charge of the project who informed them that, as non-Indian nationals, they could not visit the camp as it was in a sensitive border region. Jan pointed out that, as the engineer-in-charge, he could not guarantee the system would work if there were problems and he was not present to supervise. Impressed by this argument, the officer told them they could try to obtain permits from the Home

generator was about an hour's ride from the camp, at an altitude of 4,600 metres. At that height oxygen is in short supply, so they had to spend the first few days acclimatizing. "I had a permanent headache," recalls Perumal, "which wasn't helped by the fact that we slept in a barracks with thirty other people who would slam the door every time they came in or went out. I didn't sleep for the first two nights. As for the food..."

When they finally inspected the site they discovered that the foundations for the tower had not been spaced correctly and the quality of the cement work was very poor. Since there wasn't time to make new foundations, Perumal decided to level the site and place large boulders against the foundations to strengthen them. This was an engineering unit of the Indian Army and he'd noticed there was earth-moving equipment in the stores, so he thought there'd be no problem. "However I spent the first few days running from one guy to another trying to get someone to drive the machine. Nobody

knew where we civilians fitted in, so they played it safe by constantly referring us to someone else. Eventually I told the major he had to give me two men who would do what I said, or nothing would ever get done."

Meanwhile Perumal discovered that essential cables had gone missing-they hadn't been reloaded at Shiligiri. So he had to drive 65 kilometres to make a

phone call to Gangtok where Jan and Johnny were still languishing (they arrived two days later with their permits).

Finally the tower was winched up slowly, the generator was bolted to the top and the blades began turning nicely. Everything seemed to be turning out well. Unfortunately, then the team discovered that the inverter-a crucial component of the system-was not working. It had been damaged in transit. And there was no replacement...

"So while the batteries are charging nicely, they can't use the power until one of us returns with a working inverter," explains Jan. "We're drawing straws at the moment to see which one of us has to go back..."

"We learned some important lessons," admits Jan, "like never again offering a turn-key, fixed-price contract on jobs like this. Also next time I would insist on the materials being transported by the same vehicle all the way up to the work site. As for food, I think we should consider taking survival rations with us on future expeditions. In spite of all this, though, there's a thrill in getting to such places, which most people aren't allowed to visit. What we saw of the mountains was just fantastic."

The army is interested in having up to three more systems-in even more remote locations. Before that, however, the Auroville wind team has a project lined up in the more visitor-friendly Nicobar and Andaman Islands. "To make up for the Sikkim experience!" jokes Jan.

Alan



Sweltering in Sikkim: (L) Gopi, Johnny, Perumal and Pallani

Ministry.

While they waited in Gangtok, Pallani and Perumal drove through the mountains up to the camp. Normally there would have been spectacular views of the peaks. However, they'd managed to arrive at the worst time of year when the cloud is low and everything is wreathed in cold, clammy mist. The place where they were to erect the

HUMOUR

DRAWING: EMANUELE



A MAD DOG AND AN ENGLISHMAN

Like most Aurovilians, I have quietly admired from a distance the work of Ann, our dedicated Aurovilian animal-lover, who spends most of her time caring for stray dogs in the villages, specially Kuilapalayam, but I never imagined that one day I would find myself drawn into that work!

On the day in question I had been to Pondy by motorcycle for my weekly shopping session, and returned in time to drop off my purchases at my house before lunch. I had then swapped the motorbike for my bicycle; and pedalled to work at the Aurelec compound "for exercise".

Around 5.15 pm I left the office for home, and was dawdling along

through Kuilapalayam (when I could have been dashing through - deaf to the world - on my m/cycle, but for my zany "exercise" idea!), when I heard someone loudly calling my name. I stopped, and spotted Ann pressing down on an upturned red plastic dustbin some 40-50 metres away, and urgently waving me over to where she stood; which happened to be in a filthy open 'toilet' area where villagers squat pre-dawn or post sunset to do their thing.

At first I thought she must have some rare creature trapped under the bin, or maybe an injured bird, but when I went over to her it turned out to be a suspect rabid dog! And she wanted help in dealing with it...

I quickly reviewed my planned programme from reaching home onwards; put it to myself that anything would be preferable to getting closely involved with a rabid dog; mumbled something to Ann about being pressed for time; but then decided I couldn't ride away and leave her to it, hoping someone else would come by to help (there were several villagers in the vicinity, but it was fairly obvious that they didn't want to get involved!). In the end I opted to stay and keep the dog trapped and

secure under the bin while she went home for some ether to anaesthetise it.

Unfortunately, her home was at least 10 minutes away, which meant 20-25 minutes of guarding the dog. Anyway, off she went, leaving me leaning fairly heavily on the bin to keep the dog from escaping by lifting the edge or digging out underneath, which it kept trying to do.

Standing there, I remembered a famous Noel Coward song which carries the line "Only mad dogs and Englishmen go out in the mid-day sun!", and realised that the dog and I were just that, a mad dog and an Englishman, though we were not in the mid-day sun; just the fading light of early evening, watched by a number of amused villagers at a sensible distance.

Of course, with all my attention focussed on the dog-in-the-dustbin, I next did the inevitable. I failed to notice a nasty heap of doo-doo just one step away, and put my chappal-shod foot in it. Squidge! Yuck!! My immediate thought was to head for a tap to wash it off, but then I realised I couldn't, as the moment I took the pressure off the bin the dog would get out. All I could do was stay put, my mind full of dark thoughts, wondering why one lets oneself in for such things, or what bad karma from a past life had thrown me into such a situation.

Next I remembered the old school prank of getting a friend to hold a plastic bucket half full of water up against the ceiling, until one had got it firmly supported from below by a broom handle pressed against the base. One then waited for some innocent passer-by, usually a new boy, and casually asked him: "could you just hold this for me for a moment." Once he had a grip, one then waltzed off with one's friend, leaving the poor fellow with the inevitability of a half bucket of water eventually coming down on his head or the floor when finally he tired! It occurred to me now that Ann could have put me in a similar fix; though instead of a half bucket of water held aloft above my head, I had a rabid dog held below at my feet. If I gave up and took the pressure off the bin, the chances were that it would come frothy-mouthed out from beneath, and sink its rabid fangs into the nearest juicy leg, namely mine (regardless of how that leg happened to smell at foot level). Needless to say, no villager was likely to step forward and take over, as they generally equate Western behaviour towards animals as at least eccentric, if not close to madness (a view which I was fast coming round to myself at that point).

So... there I stood, or rather leaned, trying to look as though pressing down on an upturned red dustbin in a doo-doo minefield was perfectly nor-

mal, the sort of thing anyone might be doing at that time of evening; though at the same time I also imagined passing children asking their Aurovilian parent: "what's he doing with that bin?" (I never did think of a good answer, or I'd give it here. I doubt any parent could have either!)

10 minutes went by, and I imagined Ann stuffing whatever it was she needed into a bag and starting back. 20 minutes, but no sign of her. 25 minutes; still no sign. Half an hour, and then finally she arrived back.

At this point I suppose I could have gone on home, as Ann assured me she could do the anaesthetising and follow-up herself. However, I didn't like to leave her totally unaided in the fading light, so after holding the bin while she put a wadge of cotton wool soaked in ether underneath, I arranged for someone from Fraternity to come with a torch incase further help was needed.

And the outcome? It turned out that the dog was definitely rabid, so had to be 'put to sleep' on the spot. Which brings me to the end of this anecdote; though not without heaping praise on Ann for her dedicated work. I'm often amazed at what my fellow Aurovilians get up to here, but few are so deserving of admiration as her for what she is doing to care for stray animals around our area.

Tim

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