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LAND PURCHASE

Originally some 2,000 acres of land, scattered over a large area in parcels of different sizes, were acquired to start the Auroville project. On this land Auroville's first settlements were established, and the massive work of environmental regeneration and creation of the township was begun.

Since Auroville's foundation in 1968, some 800 additional acres have been acquired. Despite these considerable holdings and the establishment of some 80 individual settlements to date, still the total land held by Auroville represents only 49% of that needed for the township and its protective greenbelt. A further 2,900 acres (1175 hectares) urgently need to be acquired: 300 acres (122 hectares) in the city area and 2600 acres (1053 hectares) in the greenbelt.

For further information about the map (enclosed for subscribers only), please see page 7.



Catchment pond near Two Banyans

PHOTO COURTESY AUROVILLE ARCHIVES

Auroville and the land

One of the people behind a present move to purchase more land is SHIVAYA. Auroville Today talked to her about her ideas and motivations.

“When I was a member of the Working Committee three years ago, I was confronted with the Master Plan and the constant increase in land prices. I felt more and more that land purchase was a priori-

ty of the community, but how to tackle it? After my work with the Working Committee was over, I joined the Development Group. At that time, Angad was busy with an appeal to the Indian Government. I felt, however, it was wise not to put all our eggs in one basket. This was borne out by events: at the last Governing Board meeting it was made clear to us that we should not rely on money coming from the Indian Government, because they have so many other priorities in so many fields. But the Chairman of the Governing Board, Dr. Swaminathan, has encouraged us to work on modules which define certain areas of interest, certain projects, and connect our land needs with them. So one and a half years ago I decided to raise money in another way. I designed and photocopied a kind of “coupon”, each representing one square metre of land. At the Christmas Fair that year we collected enough funds for more than an acre. That was the first step.

Last summer, Emanuele and I designed postcards together. Many people will have seen them by now: one card depicts a land-puzzle with pieces which belong to Auroville and pieces which don't. Another has a little piece (one square metre) of soil on it. A third card shows the god Ganesh above Auroville removing obstacles. The fourth is the Tree of Unity where people from all over the world are meeting. And the last card is a somewhat fairytale-like

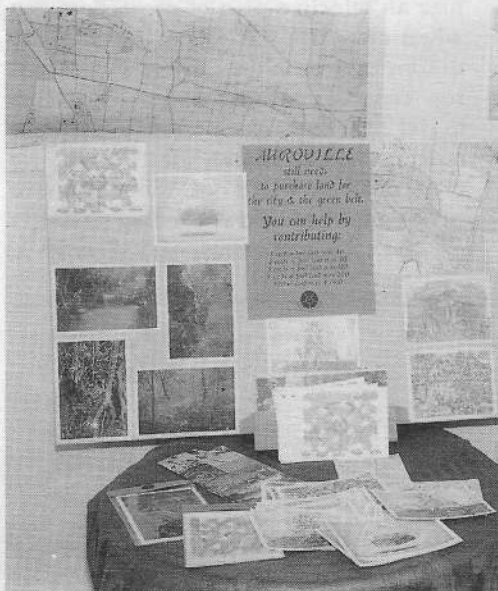
impression of the city full of all types of houses. And with Regina's help we produced a second series of cards featuring nature scenes. We printed 37,000 cards which represent a total of 9 acres of land. On the back of the cards is the Web address where interested people can find out more about Auroville and the land. Next year we will develop new cards. We do not exactly see crores of rupees coming in with the sale of the cards; the main purpose is communicating all over the world our need to buy the land.

The response to date has been mixed. Some people think the approach is too small-scale, some say it doesn't respond to Western taste, but there are many who are supporting us. At this moment we are also making a film on the land. Audrey, an Australian video maker, will be working with us on a five to ten-minute film on land and related issues.

This year we want to reach out to individual donors with a big mailing in August-September and study the possibilities of legacy fundraising. In India we have just launched a campaign approaching Indian business people.

As I had no experience at all with this kind of land purchase work, it has at times been like the painful birth of a baby. Often I was discouraged, but all the time I heard this voice inside me saying, “Go on!”

Interview by Tineke



Tackling the land purchase issue: Shivaya and postcard display

How should we use this land?

ANGAD manages a big pottery workshop in Kottakarai where clay is transformed into beautiful and useful objects. He was until recently also very active in the Development Group and still is in the Land and Estate Management Group. His connections to Auroville, to the land of Auroville in particular, are strong, having lived here for over 18 years. He is a Punjabi, impassioned when he talks to Jill about the land use and the impact of Auroville's land purchases on the development in the area.

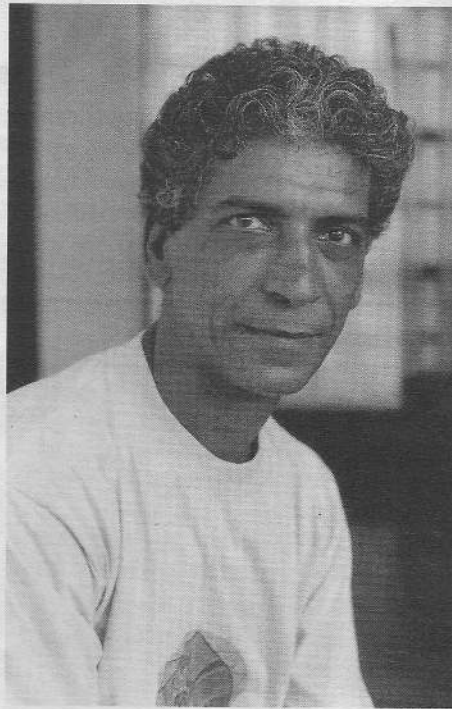
"Many of my school chums are now influential businessmen in India, and they sometimes accept my invitation to visit Auroville. I tell them about Auroville, of course, and they are very interested in how we use the land, in particular when I ask them for donations [for land purchase-eds]. I have to show them that we also help the development of the surrounding villages by building schools, providing health care and jobs, that we do think regionally, practically, and holistically.

"You see, most donors are pretty pragmatic. They want to know if their money is being used in a good way. They are concerned about what happens to the person from whom the land was bought. Therefore we should embrace the idea that the local people are part of Auroville (not necessarily as Aurovilians, unless they join Auroville); we should have as policy that the ideals of Auroville extend to the villages as well." "Six villages lie within the borders of Auroville—five in the area designated as 'Greenbelt' and one in the city area. Approximately 8000 people are living there, in 2000-odd houses."

So what is the best possible use of the land? "We must see land as an asset to be managed," Angad replies, "not only managed in a way that is relevant to ourselves, but with relevance to the population of the area at large. To start with ourselves: we need to clarify our policies for land settle-

ment and land-use. With regard to land settlement: years ago it was necessary to have people settle, fence and plant all the land, and everyone who came could settle freely anywhere in Auroville. Today it is different. Those who join are referred to the city area of Auroville, and if they do not want to live there they are stuck, as there is, under the present greenbelt guidelines, no place in the greenbelt for those who are not engaged in greenbelt activities. There doesn't seem to be much room for newcomers looking for places to live or work in. Yet we are only about 1200 people occupying over 2700 acres of land! Most of our greenbelters live northward and westward, from Pitchandikulam to Discipline; the rest of the greenbelt is partly situated in and around the villages, where 3000 people are already living. Around Kottakarai, for instance, local entrepreneurs are buying up lands designated for the greenbelt in order to start small businesses. Therefore we need to formulate and practice policies that take into account the development in these areas. Our policy should be flexible, allowing for environmental regeneration, but also taking into account the local, industrial character of the area."

"Our land-use policy should be clarified as well. We should be able to obtain far more revenue from the land, which includes the Greenbelt itself. For example, we have about 370 acres under cashew, 145 of which are managed by Land and Estate Management; their lease, this year, has given



ANGAD

"Buying land for Auroville is creating wealth for the region."

an income of Rs 3,75 lakhs. Where is the income from the other 225 acres? Why is there so little revenue from the land being put into our collective economy? We should have a way to combine ecological regeneration with some financial returns for the Central Fund of Auroville."

Angad knows his opinions are not popular with the forest stewards, but the problems must be faced.

And then there is the relevance to the local area. "We have been extremely influential on the local population over the years, changing the way the villagers relate to the land. The biggest positive change for the villagers has been easy access to fuel and fodder. The women no longer have to walk long distances to find firewood. They can gather headloads of firewood in fifteen or twenty minutes after work, on their way home. Then there is plentiful employment in domestic and handicraft situations. It's changed the lives of the women in the family, it's given them greater independence and more free time, and that's great."

"When we buy the land, the villagers are benefitting from a very good purchase price. By itself that is good, but we should also do more for the area. We should use our expertise to find development solutions for the whole bio-region, funding garbage disposal projects, waste water treatment, even more schools. In our area, over 35% of the population is under 15 years of age, and 50% is under 20. We need to focus on more schools relevant to the villagers' aspirations. If we had three or four schools like Kuilapalayam School Trust, each school could take four to five hundred kids each. We also need to focus on generating sustainable employment opportunities for the villages. Auroville should have such a good rural development programme that adverse political forces are sidelined. Our workshops and craft units are a great model for rural India because they use little or no electricity, non-toxic raw materials and are labour intensive, relying primarily on Auroville-created energy to develop products." Angad concludes: "Buying land for Auroville is creating wealth for the region. It puts money into the hands of the locals, it creates employment, environmental progress, and it improves the lot of women and children through better health and education."

Success in Success

BY MARTI

Being the closest resident to the Success Sanctuary means my nearest neighbours are mostly of the feathery, furry, or even scaly type. The humid night air at my place is often full of strange stirrings. A great horn-rimmed owl coming through an open window to perch on the drainboard, civet cats chasing each other through the trees, a cobra coiled in the middle of my meditation space with a mouse or some other light snack neatly tucked behind its fangs.

Sometimes, I'll hear a monitor lizard rearranging a pile of palmyra leaves like a stack of cards, or see a mongoose, sneaking in for a forgotten mango peel. At other times, I'll be sitting outside in front of the fire enjoying a little solitude and late-night bournvita, when a dozen or so jackals will all suddenly start howling at once. To my surprise, they're just a few metres away, and have probably been clustered around the house watching flames and smoke rise into the sky for some time. With the general nocturnal thrashing and carousing that goes on here, Success is not a place for the faint-hearted...

Success is adjacent to Forecomers, the first of Auroville's pioneering forestry communities. In 1968, when Forecomers was founded, the early Success lands jutted out on a peninsula surrounded on three sides by steep bare ravines. Gradually, with good bunding, checkdams and reforestation, which included the tremendous proliferation of the "Work" tree, the Australian *Acacia auriculiformis*, sufficient ground cover developed to begin to check erosion and to provide a canopy for the spontaneous regeneration of indigenous trees such as neem. As welcome rains make the trees ever greener and denser, one can now begin to say that this severely eroded but now replanted canyon and surrounding lands have responded well to the care and attention given to them by Auroville's pioneers.

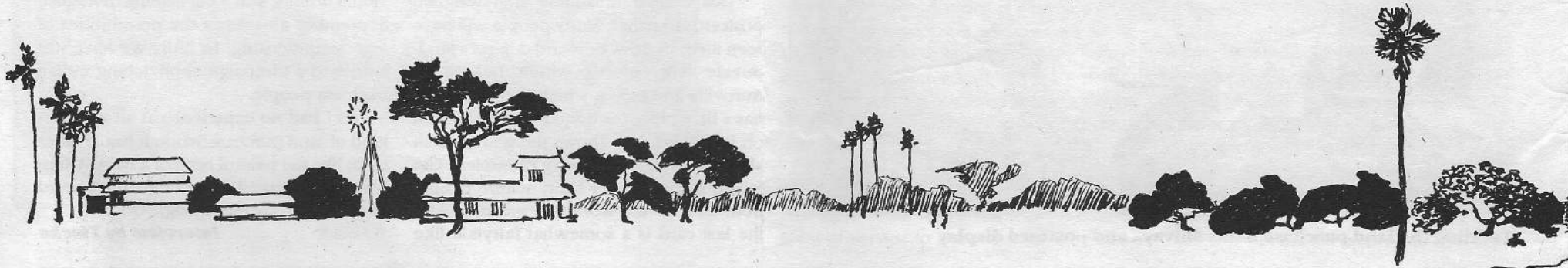
Over the years, a stream of Aurovilians have stewarded the place. But when the last Success stewards-in-residence, Georg and Barbara, eventually left after many years of dedicated green work and organic living, Success began to enjoy "just being", and Nature started to chart her own course.

But humans have a penchant for not leaving nature alone. In 1994, someone proposed to the Auroville Development group that a natural dyeing factory (which would have implied no small infrastructure) be set up at Success, as it was, after all, "abandoned" land. A group of us who were more environmentally inclined came to the rescue and a plan ensued to make this area with its stately banyans, palmyras and thick jungly growth into Auroville's first and largest sanctuary. This sanctuary, next to the Forecomers forest, is part of a whole area stretching east to Ravena and north to Newlands, all of which has since been designated as a special nature reserve with corridors for wildlife extending into other parts of Auroville.

Hopefully, Success will be just one of several Auroville sanctuaries. Its location is critically important as it touches Auroville's southern border and serves as a buffer zone to protect our forests and Auroville land from the urban and industrial development of neighbouring Pondicherry, which is expanding rapidly towards us.

In actual fact, quite recently the status of Success was questioned by just such an

expansion attempt. A year ago, a housing developer from Pondy bought some agricultural land that touches the southern border of the canyon. This land was marked out for a high-density housing development, and it seemed evident that the canyon itself would have become a garbage disposal area, if the plan were to be realized. With the help of members of our Governing Board and International Advisory Council, and frequent trips to Villupuram and the Pondicherry planning authority to contest its legality, we have been able to stall the actual development so far. But the issue remains open to question, as Auroville does not own this land and may not be able to control its ultimate use. For this, as for other buffer zone areas around Auroville, it will take a certain amount of effort and vigilance, plus real financial resources, to organize an effective plan of protection. But when one sees the sun rising over the canopy of trees in the canyon with its narrow crevasses covered with trees clinging to cliff edges, when one listens to the wind making music through the tall swaying casuarinas, or when one watches a rare sight—a furry baby owl blinking its sleepy eyes on a low tree branch—it's all worth it.



The other side of the fence

Shankar grew up in Kulapalayam and got to know Auroville when he was twenty, joining the community in 1994. Before that, he saw Auroville from "the other side of the fence". Shankar has been teaching Tamil at Last school for several years. Jill asked him about his and his family's relationship with the land.

"I remember when I was young, there were small communities and Aurovilians had to sneak around through village land to get home. The Aurovilians wanted easy access in and out of their communities, and so they asked for the cooperation of the villagers. But then they would grow trees which spoiled the

villagers' land. They would grow eucalyptus or work tree, which would put shade on the peanut field and spoil the crop."

"When I was young my family had about 15 acres of land. They grew black gram (*ulundu* in Tamil), cashew, peanut (which was the major cash crop, and ragi, kambu and varagu (local millets). My family for a long time ate varagu as a staple food. They sold *ulundu* and sesame. Sesame oil was used a lot in cooking. I can remember, with peanut oil, they would keep it for cooking in a clay pot the whole year. Ragi porridge was eaten in the morning and this would be the only meal for the day. The left-over rice from dinner was given to the children in the morning. The mango pickle they made themselves."

"We used to have *idlis* (steamed

the land. The landless workers would help us in the fields also." Now none of the brothers is a full time farmer. "My grandfather was a weaver and he spoke Telugu, which he picked up from migrants. He came from a village 30 kms. from Pondy, near Marakkanam, and moved to this area because it was a good place for weaving. Pondy was a good market for his products then. So he bought this land. At that time people were not much interested in farming because the land was not irrigated. The area near Abri where we own some land was actually a little forest. It cost then 200 rupees an acre. (Now the same land could sell for 2 lakhs an acre). "The water was not good, and most people wanted to migrate to the city. There were about 1,000 people in Kulapalayam at that time (now there are 3,200)."

Shankar talks with a mixture of pride and regret about his father, who is still alive and works every day. "My father thinks I'm a lazy bum because I'm not farming. It's the only kind of real work he knows. He is a very stubborn man," Shankar says, sighing. "Once he wanted to exchange land because he wanted some land from New Creation. They offered him money instead, but he didn't want it. 'What can I do with money?' he asked. 'I want land'. He still thinks this way," Shankar says. "He thinks people are becoming soft. He doesn't understand about investing money. He still thinks you can't do anything with money except spend it."

But he did manage to send five of his six children to college. "My father said we should all go to college so we could get educated so we could learn about the world in order to manage the land better and not cheat anyone. Now I'm taking care of the garden at Last School and the wonder is,

when you work well with the land, the land responds."

When Shankar became an Aurovillian and moved out of the village his father was not happy. "My father wouldn't give me any land because I moved to Auroville. My family said if I want to go to Auroville I have to take care of myself. I am the oldest and now I recently got married. When I asked for my share my father was angry. Maybe in a few years they might change their mind. Of course, if my father dies all the children will share. And my brothers will farm like when they were young."

I asked Shankar about the status of farmers in the village. "For the bigger farmers, they wouldn't prefer to do any other thing but farming. They are 100% farmers. It's a kind of prestige. They are looked up to by the villagers, invited to attend festivals and marriages. They have a high status."

How do the farmers feel about Auroville? "The villagers complain that we are intelligent, even intellectuals, but they ask, 'What do you grow?' We grow eucalyptus and worktree, but why not more mango, jackfruit? Each community can have their fruit trees and vegetable garden. You can have biodiversity that way. I believe we will learn this soon. Some communities are already doing it. Like Vêrité, where they use drip irrigation. We can do it in a good way."

And what about the issue of spraying the cashew with pesticides? "The village farmers believe that because Auroville doesn't depend on its cashew crop for survival, we don't understand the necessity of spraying. 'Do you harvest your cashew for your livelihood? We want to increase the harvest. That's why we spray,' they reply. We can also learn something from the farmers, not just complain about them," Shankar advises.

"We should ask ourselves, what are we going to do for food? We claim to have a vision of being self-sustainable. Well then, okay—if we say we want to be self-sustainable, are we going to sustain ourselves with forests or with farms? We shall see."



SHANKAR

"The villagers complain that we are intelligent, even intellectuals, but they ask, 'What do you grow?'"

rice muffins) once a month. Every new moon day we would make them because it's a festival day to remember the dead. The people would fast and in the evening do a *puja* (blessing ceremony) and have *idlis*." This is how Shankar remembers the land of his family when he was a boy: in terms of the food they cultivated and harvested, the food they could eat, and what they could sell.

"During sowing or harvest time my brothers and I would work on

A more conscious approach

How consciously is Auroville working with the land? JOHNNY and PAUL from Fertile, two Aurovilians involved in agriculture and afforestation, share their thoughts.

Johnny: "I think we need a more conscious approach to land purchase. Before deciding to purchase or not we should look at how it is being used at present. Is it being farmed traditionally or is it cash crop monoculture? Because it would be fantastic if there were still traditional farmers in this area who would want to cooperate with our organic food growing programmes."

"We should also make the best use of the land we have acquired, which has not always, perhaps, been the case. For example, Transition School has been built upon one of the most fertile crop fields in the area: local farmers would come from miles around to compare its crop of ragi with theirs. But one of the first things the Aurovilians who constructed the school did

was to scrape off all the topsoil—the wealth of this land—and pile it around the edges. I wonder what the local farmers thought of this. At that time we in Fertile were also farming very good agricultural land in that area. When the school came we wanted to make it into a school farm to teach the kids about agriculture; Transition was interested, we even had the money, but the planners didn't agree that agriculture should be part of the Cultural Zone. So they allocated that land for a sports ground..."

"This is where the zoning question comes in. Zoning, in the thinking of modern town planning, is not considered to be beneficial because it separates activities which could benefit from happening together. So, instead of the present plan for Auroville, which has farms in one area,

houses in another, workshops somewhere else, people could be growing food everywhere, in small gardens, in back plots of workshops and cows could be kept in residential communities like Samasti.

Paul: "I think we need a lot more people working on the land. Some of the kids are interested, but often the people who would come to Auroville to do this kind of work don't have much money and wouldn't be able to afford our Guest Houses. We've got to find a way for such people to be here."

"Some time ago we did a vegetation map of Auroville, but nobody has ever bothered to plan Auroville on that basis. I don't think that it's impossible to have 50,000 people while preserving our forests and land, but with our cars and consumeristic lifestyle it will take a lot of imagination. Why do we go in the present consumeristic direction? I think it's to do with the eco-

"People could be growing food everywhere, in gardens, in back plots of workshops and cows could be kept in residential communities."

nomic imperative created by our present lifestyle. We're all living life to the limit here, and when you live to the limit and there's an extra demand made on your energy—like having to go to Pour Tous, Bharat Nivas and Kottakarai on one morning—you'll always take the easy way out and get on your motorcycle. If we had more people doing the work, and if we could bring our lifestyle back from the limit we could live with surplus energy, and then, when we are confronted by these situations, we would have the opportunity to be creative."



Developing Auroville

Developing ourselves

An overview of the planning seminars

In February and March, a major exhibition and a series of seminars were held on different aspects of planning and development in Auroville. Organised by the Planning and Development Groups, the seminars covered topics like farming, bioregional development, relations with the villages and Auroville workers, afforestation, the four zones of the city, traffic, renewable energy and water. The series concluded with a full day seminar which attempted both to define the major issues which block us from moving forward faster and to suggest ways of solving them.

Alan followed the process. Here is his report.

"They've got to be joking!" was my immediate reaction when I first saw the announcement in the AVNews: the Planning and Development Groups wanted to subject us to a total of twenty six hours of seminars followed by a full day discussion on planning and development—and all this during one of the busiest periods of the Auroville year. Yet I went to the first one... and kept going to the others. Why? Partly because I was aware that something significant was happening: the process of planning and development in Auroville has not always been an open one, yet here was an invitation to everybody to come and find out what was happening and to give their input on all aspects of our development process. It was also the excitement of finding out just how much is happening in the various corners of Auroville, and of meeting those who, in their various ways, are the motors and inspiration for this work.

In this context, one of the most interesting discoveries was that many of the current Auroville projects are not only answering to the needs of the community; they are also potentially important for India as a whole. These include:

- the first experiment in large-scale solar steam cooking in the world;
- the only indigenous research on wind-mills in India;
- new approaches to the re-introduction of indigenous species and the rediscovery of ancient herbal remedies;
- research into organic waste water recycling, appropriate building materials and integrated renewable energy systems;
- the setting up of women's empowerment programmes in the villages.

And then... well, Aurovilians have never been short of ideas and visions for the future. Here are some of the most interesting ones:

- making Bharatipuram (a small village behind Bharat Nivas) into a living pavilion of the best of Tamil Culture;
- desilting and renovating some of the old irrigation tanks in the bioregion in order to improve water storage and permeation;
- creating unending education schemes for the Auroville workers;
- supporting entrepreneurship in the local villages so that local people don't join Auroville for material reasons;
- making the proposed service areas of the city accessible to the local villagers;
- growing food everywhere, in small gardens in the city as well as on big farms outside Auroville;
- beginning the International Zone with an

international university rather than with pavilions;

- creating an Auroville gardening and house-cleaning service staffed by Aurovilians;
- meeting the community's total energy needs through large wind turbines situated in the south of Tamil Nadu.

As the programme of seminars unfolded, common threads, common needs, began to emerge. The sense that "we can't do it alone", that the local villages and environment must be integrally included in Auroville's development plans was clearly one such thread. Paradoxically, the need for greater self-sufficiency was also stressed, particularly in regard to food, water and energy. And, somewhat related to the previous two points, the need for a somewhat simpler and more community-based lifestyle which saves energy, reduces inequalities and draws people closer together. In this connection, there was a powerful plea for Aspiration-type, low-cost housing settlements to be built in the city as an alternative to multi-lakh apartment projects.

Another common denominator was the need for a more professional approach by

the working groups concerned to research, communication and decision-making. Although some of the work, like research on the water uptake and transpiration of selected tree species, is presently being carried out at a high level of expertise and commitment, we continue to lack essential yet relatively easily acquired information in many areas (there has not been a serious survey of our food consumption habits since 1992, for example, and there is no estimate available of how much farmland we will need if we are to be self-sufficient in grains, vegetables and fruit), many major work groups have still not evolved detailed plans for future development, there are large holes in our research programme (no work is being done at present on alternative transport for the city), and coordination between different groups working in the same field—like village-related projects—is often poor. Again, there is sometimes a tendency for the process of decision-making in Auroville to be overly-bureaucratic and not clearly communicated ("We had to get about 12 green lights for our project!" lamented one of the participants). All of this is partly a reflection of the fact that we don't have enough people to take up and streamline the work. But it's also to do with the persistence of an outlook and manner of working in the community which is small-scale, ad hoc, territorial and suspicious of authority, professionalism and even change itself.

Underlying these perceived needs, however, are certain fundamental differences between Aurovilians which, while rarely addressed, have severely hampered, even paralysed, areas of Auroville's development over the years. One such difference relates to the definition of development itself. What, primarily, are we 'developing'? Ourselves? the environment? a particular model of the city? an example for the world? And what values do we base our development upon? The needs of the land? human unity? replicability?

Again, in terms of the development process, some Aurovilians put the stress upon individual initiative and inspiration, others see the need for a more centralised

coordinated process which attempts to set community priorities. Some would favour a form of coercion to move us faster towards certain goals—for example, charging higher prices for non-Auroville-grown food—while others feel that only an organic process based upon a change of consciousness is appropriate.

Such differences are sometimes more apparent than real. Sometimes they reflect different personality types or 'energies'—'doers' get a kick out of getting projects implemented and are often impatient with those who favour a more collective process—rather than anything more absolute. Yet there continues to be a feeling among some Aurovilians—implied but rarely expressed openly—that there are profound differences of consciousness or understanding concerning certain issues. Aurovilians who have worked for many years with the land, for example, tend to assume that planners have little sense of the importance of the givens of topography and of the indefinable "spirit of place", while planners believe that many green-belters have no understanding of the need for a critical mass of people—and, therefore, a developed township—to make a culture come truly alive.

Perhaps the underlying difference over the years, however—underlying different approaches not only to town planning but also to the completion of Matrimandir—has been between those who emphasise the 'vertical' dimension—Mother's explicit or implicit instructions or the channel of individual inspiration—and those who favour a more 'horizontal' and participatory process. The latter do not deny the importance of Mother's initial guidance, but see it as a starting point for a continuously evolving process which stresses the collaborative aspect of her vision ("You must all agree"); the former point out the dangers of "leaving Auroville to the Aurovilians" given the present state of our collective consciousness.

Interestingly, there has been real progress recently towards integrating these two orientations in the area of town plan-



ning. For example, the original Galaxy plan has been dramatically modified to take into account natural resources—the four forest parks and other green corridors preserve many of the trees planted over the years—as well as the individual creativity of different architects while retaining certain defining features like the system of radial roads. The full day seminar which concluded the series of seminars came up with further integrative suggestions. For example, one sub-group suggested that the Galaxy model could be made even more flexible, and, therefore, more widely acceptable, if the defining lines of force (like radial roads) could be ‘softened’ or relocated to protect additional existing areas of environmental value in the city like the water catchment at Aurodam. This group also suggested a ‘layered’ approach to the future development of the city, leaving space for future generations to make their own explorations, and allowing temporary structures in areas where there is no community planning consensus at present.

A second sub-group examined another question which had surfaced in many of the seminars—does the 50,000 projected inhabitants of Auroville include the local villagers? They concluded that the topic was really a non-issue because, while individual villagers remain free to apply to join Auroville, there could be no question of imposing Aurovilian status and values upon those around us who want to take a different course. The group stressed that any Auroville development taking place in areas adjacent to the villages must take the reality of the villages into consideration, and be willing to help in the development of those villages if the villagers request it. As to whether the planned area of Auroville would be able to support a population of 50,000 in terms of food self-sufficiency, the prognosis is extremely doubtful...

How far the seminars went in defusing residual fears and distrust and synthesising different approaches to development in Auroville is difficult to ascertain. Few Aurovilians attended the 13 seminars—the majority of participants were guests and newcomers—and even though attendance was better on the final day, the one sub-group that tackled the issue head-on failed to come up with a new process that could incorporate the different approaches associated, at present, with the Development Group (more ‘participatory’) and Planning Group (more ‘directional’). On the other hand, the fact that so much space and time were given over the past two months for the expression of ideas and concerns may have defused some tensions and created a broader platform for the solution of some of our greatest challenges.

It may be a cliché, but in many ways Auroville is at a turning-point. As our population and that of the local people has grown, as Indian society changes in response to global influences, certain pressures—both internal and external—have increased enormously requiring us to plan, to meet, to communicate in new ways. In terms of planning and development, the answer to these new conditions is clearly not just a structural change, the setting up of a Planning Commission or Municipal Authority. It's more to do with a deepening of our collective awareness and a shift in our values—from ‘holding the line’ on that which is dear to us, to discovering, and celebrating, the inner truth of apparently contradictory positions. For only then can we move forward, can we ‘develop’, together.

POINTS FROM THE SEMINARS

The bioregion

The bioregion can be defined in different ways: by watersheds, by the soil, its vegetation, by the area covered by village development programmes, or by its ‘spirit of place’ or spiritual integrity. In terms of vegetation, Auroville is part of a bioregion that is almost unique on this planet. As a spiritual bioregion, it is surrounded by villages which have worshipped the Mother goddess for centuries.

Geographically, Auroville is a small portion of the larger bioregion, but in terms of its present and potential influence it is enormously important. Present outreach programmes in the bioregion include village action micro-projects and women's empowerment programmes, night schools, health sub-centres, waste land regeneration and the protection and replantation of remaining stands of indigenous forest.

Auroville farms

Is there enough land in the proposed Auroville area to meet our food needs? Average per capita land necessary to feed one person in India is one acre. For a population of 50,000 we would have to acquire and farm 50,000 acres! One possible solution is to work with local farmers, offering them premium rates for growing organic food. But this reduces our food security as they can also sell elsewhere.

How to focus more energy in food growing in Auroville? Pay higher wages for workers (land work is considered low caste work in this area nowadays). Make it fun, part-time, so that more Aurovilians can get involved. ‘Tax’ non Auroville-grown food at Pour Tous. Dedicate far more of our resources to buying good farm land and making better use of the land we already have.

Water

In the 20 square kilometres in and around Auroville there are 320 wells at present, some pumping more than 100,000 litres a day. Many of these big village pumps are permanently on, resulting in huge overwatering. One effect: salination in areas near the sea. One response: the Water Service is promoting drip irrigation to the local farmers, installing and maintaining a system on the land of the local panchayat president.

Realizing that our water supply is dependent upon factors in the bioregion, the Harvest Project of the Water Service aims at renovating some of the major water catchment and irrigation tanks in the bioregion. Within Auroville itself, there is an emphasis upon recycling domestic water and improving rainfall catchment facilities (‘We have more than enough water falling upon our heads every year. The challenge is to catch and store it.’)

The city

Auroville is, ultimately, an experiment in consciousness. We are at a critical moment in the construction of the city because there is confusion among us concerning the direction we wish to take. The need now is for a minimum consensus in order to unblock the process. Concretely, this means ‘finding the common ground’ between the descend-



Sub-group discussion at the concluding seminar

“Auroville has a tremendous potential to pioneer new approaches to project development in the bioregion. We have the skills, and money is available from big funders. But the Aurovilians who are working now on separate projects have to be able to combine their expertise and work together.”

(One of the conclusions from the seminars)

ing vision and the organic unfolding”.

One persistent question: why do so many inhabitants (perhaps 35,000-40,000) of the future city have to be crammed into the small area of the Residential Zone?

The Cultural Zone

Many different projects are planned for this Zone, including a Youth Centre, artist's village, music studios, sports ground, performing arts centre and media school. But what is the purpose of the Cultural Zone? “A striving for self-perfection and self-knowledge through the arts”, “The cradle of a new culture which has to come from within”, “A centre for self-expression based upon the psychic being”, “The integration of all cultures”.

Is a specific Aurovilian culture already emerging? Rolf remembers an exhibition of Auroville artists in Germany in 1992 when viewers found that these works expressed something completely different from the works of other artists—“something luminous, expressive of something within”.

The Residential Zone

The first phase of the Residential Zone already underway will provide accommodation for about 1,000 people in different settlements. If Auroville is to aim for 50,000 inhabitants and if most are to be accommodated in the Residential Zone, the remaining areas of the Zone will see much higher density.

Phase one incorporates certain experiments, including an integrated water system for all the settlements. Each settlement tries to ensure zero run-off of rainwater and to treat its sewage organically on site.

Concerns expressed included the appearance of the apartment blocks coming up in the Zone, the lack of low-cost housing for youth and low-income groups, and the lack of communication between architects and planners and the rest of the community. “Building a city is not just a question of buildings but also of people”.

The International Zone

Mother wanted each nation with a well-

defined culture to have a pavilion showing not only the spiritual but also the practical achievements of that culture. The aim was to allow the individual to become aware of the fundamental genius of their nation and to understand and respect other cultures. So far, with the exception of Bharat Nivas little has happened in this Zone. Why? “Because we've looked at the Zone too much in terms of externals. We should begin by discovering the essence of a culture, then let the architecture of the pavilion flow from that.” Others felt that the lack of progress in this Zone reflects a denial by many Aurovilians of their roots.

“Perhaps we should not start with pavilions but with an international centre of research and education, as happened in the Ashram.” Another idea: creating a museum of archeology and Tamil culture which would reveal the richness of Tamil culture.

The Industrial Zone

The main problems which the monitoring group of the Industrial Zone are facing include a shortage of water in this Zone, the high risk of groundwater pollution as no solutions have yet been found for toxic waste, and lack of adequate access roads. About 70% of the commercial units are located in the Industrial Zone at present, but there is a general feeling that, in the future, larger industries should be located outside the city limits. Another suggestion: a large storage depot for this Zone should be located near the Madras road. Goods could then be transported into the Zone by electrical vehicles.

The main challenge is to create an Industrial Zone in Auroville with characteristics like beauty, innovation, environmental consciousness and model relationships between management and workers.

The Greenbelt

Those who have worked on the land for many years are aware how fragile the achievements are, and how they have to be protected. Few Aurovilians are doing greenwork today, yet their work of protecting species from extinction is very important. The greenbelt is under threat

(contd. on page 6)

The mystery of Hsu

BY ANGE

In the slanting afternoon rays a dragonfly dips over and over onto the glass pane of our solar cooker. Over and over—makes me wonder whether it matters if it's glass or water. Some things in life can never be figured out and some people always remain a mystery to the mind that can only lightly touch the surface. Like the dragonfly dipping, dipping.

My childhood friend Hsu is such a mysterious figure. The only Chinese man ever to have become an inmate of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. He was professor of Chinese Literature in the National Central University in China, before, in 1950 or so, he came and settled at the feet of Mother. Aside from speaking fluent German, French, Italian and English, he was a Sanskrit scholar and translated the famous Panini grammar as well as the Bhagavad Gita into Chinese. His school teacher in pre-Revolutionary days, he once told my father, was Mao Tse Tung.

In 1964 my family moved to a house round the corner from Hsu's abode. My father and Hsu became friends. They used to meet on Sundays to go exploring the country side by foot. Decisions were made by drawing lots, in two stages: first, cycle or foot; second, "north", "south" or "west". But when, due to the heat, my father preferred the one direction not written in the lot, i.e. "east", this project came to an end, as Hsu didn't favour swimming into the ocean.

I was a little kid, and he was my round the corner pal. Tall for a Chinese—

or maybe I only thought he was tall because I was tiny—skinny, long-necked with an Adam's apple that drew the eye, spectacles, protruding teeth and a high pitched voice that would break into a neigh of laughter at my pranks. He always wore shades of blue pyjamas, and sometimes

white, had a sun shade and wooden clogs. Do you see him now? He loved to practice his German with me and we communicated pretty well, but there was more that drew me to run around the corner again and again and venture through the deep jungle that consisted of a few casuarina trees which surrounded his house. It was the warmth and joy he expressed every time I showed up. Today I know that he had few friends and kept himself to himself, and it is amazing that he had so much time for a little German girl and heaps and heaps of patience. For he was a busy man: translating the Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's works into Chinese, painting and expressing his own spirituality in calligraphy. I have understood since that the Chinese express their deep thought and spirituality and worship of nature not so much in their temples, but in their painting and brushwork. Hsu was an artist and as The Mother once commented on his work at an exhibition: "Here are the paintings of a scholar who is at once an artist and a yogi, exhibited with my blessings." (signed The Mother, date 4.5.67) Hsu only laughed in embarrassment. He didn't consider himself a yogi, though he had a powerful recipe for Yoga, very potent as he asserted: when breathing in, imag-

ine all you want to become; breathing out, all that you wish to get rid of.

The memory of Hsu hit me when I walked into my first Chinese painting lesson in Taiwan, six years ago. The picture of Hsu

there, in the midst of the fire-crackers and hundreds of lanterns in Taiwan, and my old friend Hsu. I started talking to my Taiwanese students about Hsu, and was surprised to find that many knew him as a famous scholar and philosopher, living in mainland China.

I am now back in Pondicherry, wondering about Hsu. An old friend of his tells me that Hsu taught the game Go to some Americans while he was here. But he taught them to play this game as a way to self-mastery. Instead of following the normal human tendency of completely wiping out the opponent and taking advantage of the upper hand to wield destruction, he taught how to play with the removal of only a few pieces of the opponent, using the process to study and change psychological conditions. One of the Americans actually went to China to see Hsu again, but he never made the last stretch to the actual place where Hsu is said to be living in Beijing.

Why did Hsu leave the Ashram? No-one knows. Perhaps Hsu missed his home, or felt that he had a mission to fulfil in China. When he went to Delhi to meet the representative of communist China, he received a promise that he would not be harmed if he returned. That he was considered an asset to his country is not surprising, for there are only a handful of old Chinese scholars with such an extensive knowledge left alive today. But there is an impenetrable veil of mystery around him, and our minds can only put together fragments of information and then remain silent in awe. Probe the surface, and guess at the depth.

Tsai chien. *

* see you again.

Ange lived in Auroville between 1970-76, and then went to live with her parents in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry. Recently, after spending two years in Taiwan, she returned to Auroville as a long-term guest.

DRAWING BY HSU



and a happy girl holding a large old brush with a heap of Chinese paper in front of her emerged, un-called for. Last year, back again in Taiwan, such a flash-back occurred once again, when I glimpsed the hundreds of red paper lanterns bobbing up and down in a park. I had the irresistible impulse to turn my motorcycle and take a close-up look. It was Lantern Festival Day, and I was transported back to Hsu's garden where he had fixed one such lamp on a stick for me and I paraded all around the trees, the proud owner of a lantern. It was then that I started to realise that there was some connection between my being

Seminars (contd. from page 5)

from both without and from within Auroville. From without from Pondicherry overspill and speculators; from within from planning strategies which have located non greenbelt communities and a proposed service area for the city within the greenbelt.

Today, state-of-the-art work is happening in watershed management and indigenous species preservation. This means reintroducing varieties of trees, shrubs and grasses which were originally part of this unique area of vegetation termed "dry evergreen tropical forest".

Roads, traffic and other infrastructure

Mother wanted only non-polluting traffic in the city moving at a maximum of 15 kilometres an hour. Yet today 60 four-wheeled vehicles are 'resident' in Auroville and over 140 buses and lorries every day use the road between Kuilapalayam and Edayanchavadi. How to move Aurovilians towards more sustainable forms of transport? A first-class cycle path network, disconnected from the present main roads; research into alternative transport resulting in solar-powered electric vehicles.

One concern—the planned radial roads

and Crown Road invite fast driving. Why not incorporate more bends, and reduce the proposed width of such roads?

Renewable Energy

"Mother said that one of the signs of the New Age will be when humanity learns to draw energy from above, from the inexhaustible source of the sun, instead of from below, by depleting the earth."

Today, Auroville is probably the main demonstration site for renewable energy systems in India. What makes it more than the conventional demo site is that all the different systems—windmills, biogas, solar cookers, photovoltaics etc.—are in daily use in the community.

At present, state-of-the-art research is being undertaken in windmill design (CSR is the Indian centre of the South Asia Windpumping Network) and in designing a solar bowl for steam cooking. Agreement on installing a 36 kilowatt solar power plant, which will provide a significant proportion of the energy needs of Matrimandir, is expected very soon, while next year Auroville hopes to have two big wind generators installed in the south of Tamil Nadu with enough capacity to cover Auroville's

present needs.

Auroville workers and labour relations

At present, four or five thousand villagers are employed in Auroville. The larger units are required by law to have insurance and retirement funds, but not so small workshops and individual employers. Consequently, SEWA (Small Employers Welfare Administration) was set up recently in Auroville to provide such facilities for the workers. It also provides a conflict resolution service and a labour exchange.

Concern was expressed that upward financial mobility in the local villages is often defined as becoming an Aurovillian. It would be better if Auroville helped would-be entrepreneurs in the villages with design and marketing advice, creating a 'prosperity belt' outside Auroville. Then financial gain would not be the motivating force for those who choose to join Auroville. The Auroville workers are the bridge between Auroville and the villages, transferring skills, keeping us in touch with the 'heart' quality of the local people.

Village Action

The two important elements in Village Action's approach to village development are: 1) participation from the villagers themselves in any development schemes is indispensable; 2) emphasis should be placed on increasing women's participation in society.

At present, the Village Action development workers are active in over 30 villages in the Auroville bioregion. Interestingly, they find it easier to work with the more distant villages as villages close to Auroville expect Auroville to do everything for them. The development workers are concerned that, in villages close to Auroville, young boys are leaving school early because they can get jobs as mason's helpers so easily in the township. Other changes Auroville has helped effect in the local villages includes the empowerment of women, more material prosperity, the end of dry crop farming, but also inflated land prices.

Auroville has a tremendous potential to pioneer new approaches to project development in the bioregion. We have the skills, and money is available from big funders. But the Aurovilians who are working now on separate projects have to be able to combine their expertise and work together.

Letters

To speak or not to speak?

Recently we received a letter from an Aurovilian in response to two articles by Bhaga (AVT nos. 93 and 97) in which she speaks about certain inner experiences. Here is an extract from the letter:

Dear editors,

Because of the strong reactions to two articles by a long-term Aurovilian published recently in "Auroville Today", it's time we reinstate the following principle which binds all spiritual seekers alike and, first of all, those who claim to be disciples of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother: Yoga, Integral Yoga sadhana is top secret!

In sadhana we must abide by certain fundamental principles, which are common to all paths. Whether we are beginners or advanced sadhakas, the first of such principles is complete silence about one's spiritual experience. Yoga and self-assertion mutually exclude each other. And this applies more forcefully than ever to Integral Yoga, which from beginning to end revolves around the leading role of the psychic being; alone, in silent communion with the object of our adoration.

When Sri Aurobindo stated that at least a half dozen of his disciples were established in the Brahmic consciousness he did not reveal their names, nor did they even claim such a status. Oneness with the Divine is the sadhaka's only need.

Paulette (Auroville)

Deciding that a wider debate on this important issue would be helpful, one of the editors summarised Paulette's argument on an Auroville-related international e-mail forum and asked for responses to the question "To Speak or not to Speak?". Here is a selection from the replies:

Aah, an interesting question. Let me stick my neck out. I have always wanted Collaboration to be more than just a vehicle for philosophical articles. I felt that the yoga community in the USA, living in the "outside world" without a central focus, needed to connect with each other on the personal essay level; or, rather, that personal essays were basically more interesting to read. Of course, conditions here are not the same as in small-town Auroville where the personal interaction is more intense. I don't remember Mother's exact words, but perhaps they had more to do with squelching spiritual gossip in the Ashram than keeping people from writing about their spiritual life. After all, many sadhakas, including Nirod, have done so.

As an editor, I have to look at whether the piece is actually exploring some question or issue that might be of general concern to the community and whether it is sincere. As Lynda Lester knows, we've had our share of this controversy. Even so, I haven't changed my position over the years: I still like to read people's attempts to understand themselves and their 'Self'.

Gordon (USA)

In '71 Mother gave me the following message:

"If one is sincere, each experience is true. But it is only part of The Truth." If one is sincere, and The Moment calls for it, one speaks. If there is no call for it, one is silent.

And smiles!

Mauna (Auroville)

Let me also give it a try. The point is rather to speak AND not to speak more than the question to speak OR not to speak.

Spiritual experiences as we all know by experience, when not "settled" in or bringing about a permanent change of consciousness are better kept for oneself since there are too often a host of opposing forces that love to play around with it (to say it mildly) or even ready to attack it. At the most one can share it with someone very close to oneself.

Spiritual experiences leading to a change of consciousness or "settled in" have transformed you so to say; they are no longer too vulnerable for attack but enjoy the full grace of protection; but one should always be on guard and also that we know by our own experience.

Surya (The Netherlands)

Dear Editors,

Thank you for the great editing job you did regarding the two contributions you gave me the opportunity to make recently for Auroville Today. My only regret is that, in both articles, a certain passage was edited out, which for me had a special importance. Here are the two passages:

In the article on the body cells (AVT, October '96) I had written towards the end: "I am trying to give an idea of what might be going on nowadays in quite a few people's bodies, in Auroville and elsewhere." (given the fact that already in the early '70s Mother had started noticing, with great joy, the "contagious" effect of what was going on in her own body.)

In the article outlining my own sadhana (AVT, Feb. '97) I had written also: "Many other Aurovilians could tell, I am sure, a very similar story."

Without those passages, the rest of what I have written in both issues of Auroville Today may well have left the readers with the impression that I believe myself to be quite a rare and special case! It is precisely the fact that I am not special at all which I wanted to put across because I have seen that it encourages others, that it makes them feel, "Well, if it could happen to an ordinary person like her, there is real hope for myself too!"

It is important for people to know that Evolution is indeed accelerating, and that finding the contact with one's psychic being doesn't necessarily take thirty years any more; as Mother herself emphasized:

"Normally it takes an entire lifetime, or even several lives in some cases. But here, in the present conditions, you can do it in ... a few months. Those who have an ardent aspiration can do it in a few MONTHS." — Mother's Agenda, 8.2.73.

Bhaga (Auroville)

NOTE TO OUR SUBSCRIBERS

The land purchase figures on the back of the enclosed map are already (fortunately!) out of date. Please refer to page 1 for the correct figures.

Eds.

Book Review

The City and The Oasys, by Vijay. Auroville Press, 1996, 233 pp.

The City and The Oasys is a funny, sly tale of the adventures and misadventures of Phaldor. Phaldor is a man in search of Immortality, who travels to a city called Poplar and is guided by a lady called the Eternal Anima, "of whom he knew but Her Eyes, and saw Her Eyes, then gradually Her whole face, smiling at him..."

Vijay has created a world in the future, based on a story about the past. (And the present. And the future.) Those who are familiar with Pondicherry and the Ashram will have fun guessing "who's who"—the names are changed, but the essential characters are recognizable. It is an intricate tale of Phaldor's quest for Eternal Life which everyone in Poplar seems to be working on in their science labs. Those who love a science fiction story will also not be dissa-

pointed, as this book is steeped in futuristic weapons and Mind Wars, cortical stimulation machines, machine flutes and holograms. There is also romance, political intrigue galore, inhabitants who speak "Unilingo"—"Me spricken correct Unilingo, nah?" and even poetry:

By the burning quasars of Her eyes awakened long forgotten songs from another age their own hesitations of beryllium transcend in an irresistible tide beyond mind surging...

The journey is all, and I can't spoil the ending by revealing whether or not Phaldor finds Immortality. You will laugh a lot, and if you have your wits about you, you may receive something to think about as well. The only problem I encountered is the book needs a thorough run through the spell checker, for you are constantly tripping over strange, exotic English spellings. Happy travels!

Jill

News

AVI USA

Auroville International USA has issued the Spring edition of its new newsletter called EVOLVE. They are trying to keep in touch with the more than 1300 people scattered over that country who have some interest in Auroville. This is their new address and phone: AVI USA, P.O.Box 601, Sausalito, CA 94966 USA. Tel. 415 788 AURO. aviusa@aol.com

AVI Netherlands

For years, Ilse Breijman has taken care of the information about Auroville. Now she is preparing to leave for India in order to live permanently in Auroville. For information about Auroville you can now contact: Surya Jaasma, Nieuwenhuysenstraat 31-3, 1063 JC Amsterdam. Tel: (31)-20 6147587 surya@dds.nl

The 100th issue

I am glad to inform you that I have been subscribing to Auroville Today since its first issue. And the next, May 1997, issue will be the 100th issue. I therefore felicitate the present and past members of the Editorial team as well as all the contributors of articles and others on this great occasion.

For me, every issue of Auroville Today was a valuable aid in learning something more, something wider, something higher.

Ramakant Navelkar (Pondicherry)

I would like to congratulate you heartily for reaching a century mark. The clear impression that emerges while looking back is that of promises being kept; that the standards that you had set before you while launching the magazine—that of publishing "an enjoyable, stimulating and inspiring magazine" and of avoiding "cheapness and personal attacks" have been admirably adhered to. Thank you very much for giving me many enjoyable hours of reading, many flashes of illumination here or there, indeed, a whole world of Auroville and her rich and luminous background.

Aryadeep (Auroville)

Subscriptions

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

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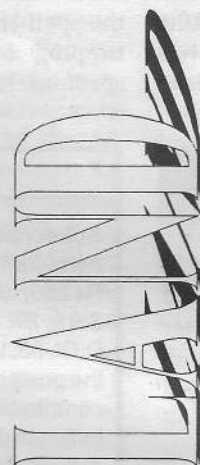
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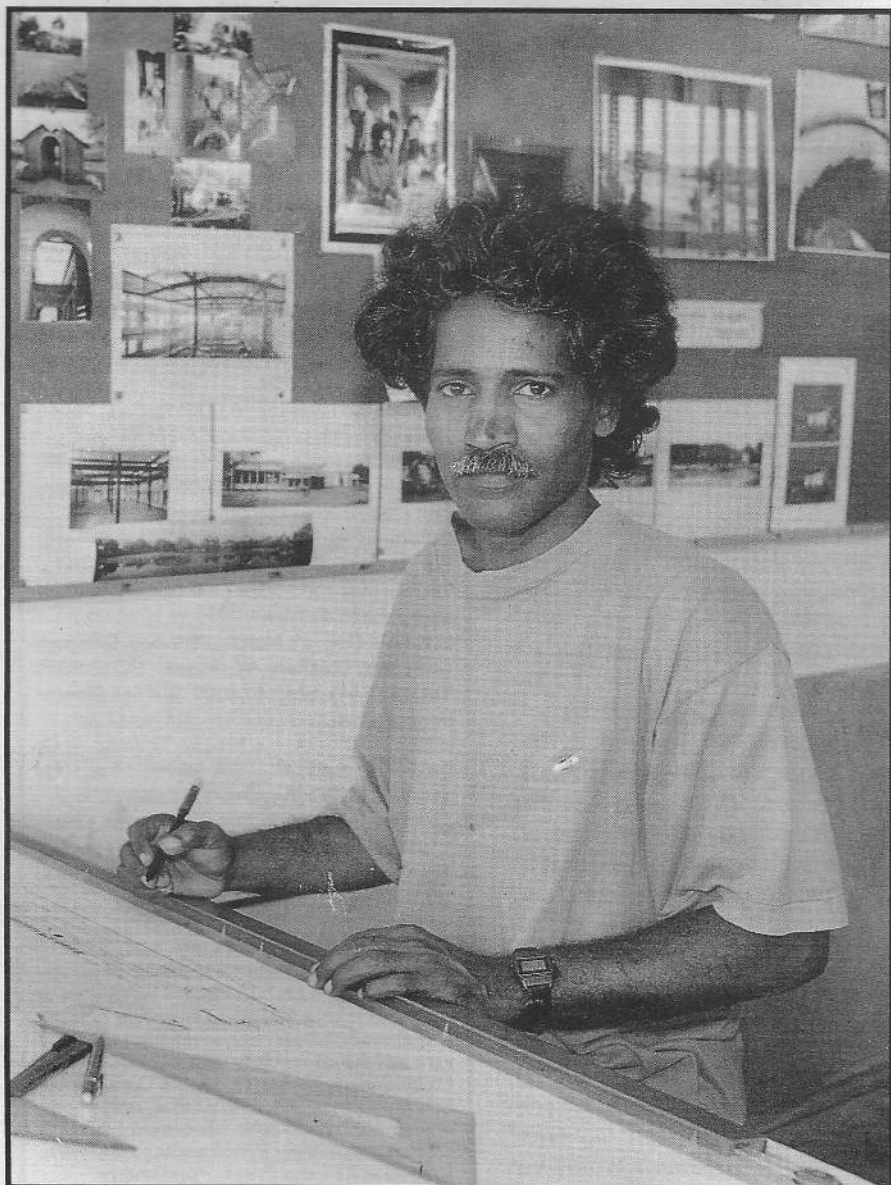
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ANKE AND MICHAEL
GRACE
AUROVILLE

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- TWO PORTRAITS
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May 1997
Number 100



RAMAN

Raman

A portrait

RAMAN was born in the nearby village of Sanjeevinagar. One day, while still a small boy, he saw from the playground of his school a huge balloon hovering in the air. He ran towards it to find out what was happening and saw many people gathered near the Banyan tree: it was the day of Auroville's inauguration...

"I knew nothing about Auroville then. A few years later, my father became a watchman in the Amphitheatre and I would visit him in the evenings, bringing him food from the village. I got to know Ruud Lohman and Alain Grandcolas who became real friends and helped me with my education.

"By the time I finished 11th standard I had decided I would leave school and come and work in Auroville, even though Ruud advised me to go to college. I became a mason's helper, and then I began working in the Matrimandir workshop. When there were labour problems there, Michael Tait and Jack Alexander

took me to Aurofuture, the Auroville architecture office, to begin an apprenticeship under Seven, an Aurovilian architect.

"In 1977, when the troubles with the Sri Aurobindo Society began, I decided that I wanted to become an Aurovilian. I asked at a 'Pour Tous' meeting if it was possible, and everybody said 'yes'—that's all there was to it then!

"Meanwhile, not only was I reading about Auroville but I also began to dig into my own culture. I read the old, classical Tamil texts and realized how educated people were then. I also found many links between those texts and what we are trying to do in Auroville—the aspiration for discovering the Divine within, for example—although the idea of achieving human unity between different cultures really seems new.

"I didn't want to leave Auroville when many of the Aurofuture team moved to Pondicherry to start Auroservice, so I stopped architecture and started working with Bernard at La Ferme. After a time, I felt I needed a change, a challenge, and so I decided I would travel all over India for one year with the minimum of possessions, seeing if I could survive on my knowledge of architecture. It worked well: I would go to a school of architecture in a big city and ask the students for addresses of architects' offices. When I had earned about Rs 1,000, I would quit my job and start travelling again until I had no money left. In this way, I saw many beautiful temples, and met many spiritual teachers and sadhus. It really opened my eyes to India, to the spiritual side which is everywhere, and which is everywhere respected.

"When I returned to Auroville I once more worked at La Ferme, but in 1991 I took up architecture again, designing and building low-cost housing in Auroville and the villages. Two years ago, a group of us came together to design a new guest house at Bharat Nivas. We had to have a name for administrative purposes, so we (Dharmesh, Anupama and myself) called ourselves 'Kolam'.

"In 'Kolam' we try to do things differently. We don't make any fixed charges for our work because we want to work in a spirit of service to Auroville. I don't think

that the practice of Aurovilian architects and contractors charging a fixed percentage of the total cost as fees is the right way. We should all work for Auroville, since work here is not a means of gaining money but of evolving consciously, and in return Auroville should maintain us.

"Another thing I feel strongly about is that we should put much more energy into building low-cost housing for those who join Auroville from the nearby villages. At present, many of them are housed in virtual slums—broken-down storerooms and so on. How can we expect them to concentrate on achieving the ideal of Auroville when their living conditions are so poor?

"In fact, I think a lot of things are out of balance in Auroville at present. There is a line in ancient Tamil text, the Thirukkural, which says that all souls are equal because they all carry the Divine within them. Yet by housing some people in sub-standard conditions while others are able to build huge palaces, we in Auroville are creating a society of first and second-class citizens.

"We are losing the spiritual discipline that Mother gave us for living here."

"In the early years, Auroville was much more open. Anybody could walk into anybody's house because everybody lived simply and had few

possessions. Now we build bigger houses, we have more possessions to which we become attached, and we keep more and more distance from each other.

"At the same time, some Aurovilians born in the local villages seem to have lost hope, lost their trust in Auroville. That is why they are seeking security for themselves and their families by making money, buying land and building houses for themselves outside Auroville. It's as if they have one foot here and one foot somewhere else.

"All this gives the local villagers a wrong view of Auroville. Most of them know nothing about Auroville's spiritual ideals. They just see it as a place for easy employment and good money: Auroville is known as 'mini-Kuwait' in the local villages, and the term 'Auroville work' means that you don't have to work hard or be honest!

"How to change all this? Certainly we have to explain to the local villagers the spiritual side, the truth of Auroville. But also we Aurovilians have to change. We have to learn from the ancient Tamil culture—and also the simple village life of today—how to act from our heart rather than just our mind, and we need to live more simply and get closer to each other again. We are losing the spiritual discipline that Mother gave us for living here. 'Discipline' in this sense doesn't mean strict rules. It's a dimension of life which bases disciplined action upon Dharma, upon behaviour which is in line with the ideals of Auroville. If we don't have this, we might build something wonderful here... but the spirit and consciousness will be lost.

"All Aurovilians should try to live this, but Aurovilians from the local villages have a special responsibility here because, through their behaviour, they strongly influence how people living in the villages think about Auroville.

"Sometimes I lie awake at night worrying about these problems. But then I remember what Mother said about Auroville being built 'in spite of us' and, like Her, I can laugh."

From an interview by Alan