

# AUROVILLE TODAY

Number 129, October 1999

avtoday@auroville.org.in

## Introduction

*"There should be somewhere on earth a place which no nation could claim as its own, where all human beings of goodwill who have a sincere aspiration could live freely as citizens of the world and obey one single authority, that of the supreme truth... in this ideal place money would no longer be the sovereign lord; individual worth would have a far greater importance than that of material wealth and social standing. There, work would not be a way to earn one's living but a way to express oneself and to develop one's capacities and possibilities while being of service to the community as a whole, which, for its own part, would provide for each individual's subsistence and sphere of action..."*

These excerpts from "A Dream" by the Mother are, for many Aurovilians, ideals to be fulfilled. How to evolve an economy where money is no longer the driving force? A significant step in this direction is the fact that fixed assets in Auroville do not belong to individuals, even to those who have invested money in creating them, but are collectively held by the community. Secondly, the community has always been trying to evolve a non-monetary internal economy. In this issue of **Auroville Today** we publish excerpts from a speech of Dr. Kireet Joshi on this topic, as well as an overview of Auroville's attempts to come to a more "kind" economic system.

### IN THIS ISSUE

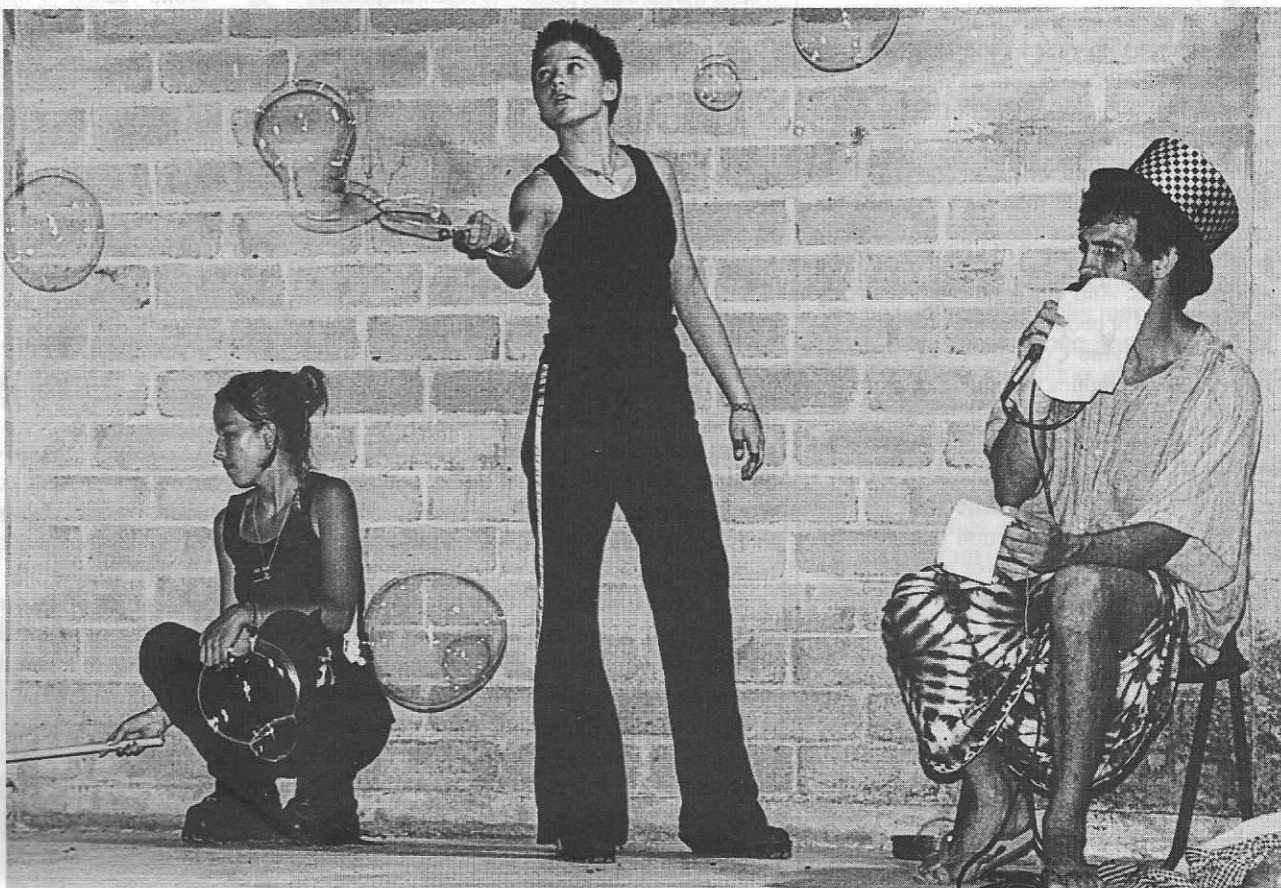
<b>Economy</b> .....	1,2
A plea by Dr. Kireet Joshi	
<b>Open Page</b> .....	3
The need for unity and culture in Auroville.	
<b>Then and Now</b> .....	4,5
Glimpses of the past which still throw light on the present	
<b>Book Review</b> .....	6
"The fate of Tibet"	
<b>Brief News Page</b> .....	7
<b>The Circus comes to Town</b> .....	8

• The latest news • The latest news • The latest news

### No more Newcomers

Due to the alarming housing shortage in Auroville, the Entry Group has decided "not to accept new applications for Newcomer status for some time." The issue is being discussed in the community at present.

• The latest news • The latest news • The latest news



As elusive as soap bubbles? A scene from the circus (see page 8).

## Towards a spiritualised economy

On August 17th, Dr. Kireet Joshi made a passionate plea to a small group of Aurovilians to manifest the economic model in the light of the guidelines that The Mother has given for Auroville. Some excerpts of his talk:

**D**uring the past thirty years, Auroville has made remarkable steps developing an internal economy of its own, and I would like to congratulate Auroville for the dedication and the work done in this field by individual Aurovilians. I also would like to express my appreciation to the commercial unit holders for the contributions they are making towards Auroville's collective economy.

Auroville has, in the thirty years of its existence, not yet been able to manifest the ideal of an internal non-monetary economy. We all know that the Mother has said that there should be no exchange of money within Auroville, and that Auroville should only have money transactions with the outside. It is my firm conviction that now the time for this next step has come. For we have reached a critical point. Already now, to make this change will be difficult. To make it in a few years, will be even more difficult. For if Auroville continues as it does, it will develop into another capitalistic society where one has to work to earn a living. If it continues as it does, it will not realise Mother's ideals. We have to change it, for Auroville is a site of constant progress.

Auroville aims to become a spiritual society. It is the society to which Sri Aurobindo's words, as written in the Human Cycle, should apply. These words are as follows:

"A spiritualised society would treat in its sociology the individual, from the saint to the criminal, not as units of a social problem to be passed through some skilfully devised machinery and either flattened into the social mould or crushed out of it, but as souls suffering and entangled in a net and to be rescued, souls growing and to be encouraged to grow, souls grown and from whom help and power can be drawn by the lesser spirits who are not yet adult. The aim of its economics would be not to create a huge engine of production, whether of the competitive or the co-operative kind, but to give to men — not only to some but to all men each in his highest possible measure — the joy of work according to their own nature and free leisure to grow inwardly, as well as a simply rich and beautiful life for all."\*

I think that these words particularly apply to Auroville, as Auroville represents a movement towards true subjectivism. Individuals, who make the discovery of their true inner being their fundamental occupation, come together. As the Mother said in Auroville's Charter "But to live in Auroville one must be a willing servitor of the Divine Consciousness."

Sri Aurobindo mentions here two characteristics of a spiritualised society: the way in which it deals with its members, and the aim of its economics. If we would apply this to Auroville, it would mean that we have to regard all those who have joined Auroville as our brothers and sisters, whether we like or dislike them. It implies that we cannot treat them as problems to be thrown out or crushed or pressed into a structure. We have to deal with them differently. During my stay here I have repeatedly heard the complaint that some Aurovilians do not work, and suggestions were made that Auroville would be better off with a policy that would enable it to send these Aurovilians out. But in the light of Sri Aurobindo's words it becomes clear that this is too easy and trenchant. It is the duty of the community to help those who do not work: to meet with each individual and check the reasons why he or she is not working (many individuals may have good reasons why they do not work, such as going through a life crises or lack of skills); to inspire and motivate that individual; and impart the joy of work in the spirit of Karma Yoga, when every work becomes a garland offered at the feet of the Divine. Seen in this light, there cannot be a "code of conduct" which applies impartially to everyone. Each individual is unique.

**T**he second part of Sri Aurobindo deals with the economics of a spiritualised society, a vastly different concept from the present economic systems of capitalism and communism which represent mankind's attempts to individualism and collectivism respectively. The extremes of both systems are well known, and Auroville, obviously, has to steer free from them while keeping essential elements of both.

To encourage individual development in the economic field, Auroville should promote free individual enterprise. It is necessary for the individual and it is necessary for the community. Let enterprise be developed with the realisation that people

(continued on page 2)



(continued from page 1)

who do so produce wealth for the community. I have often heard that business managers lead more comfortable lifestyles than other Aurovilians. I believe it is obvious that these people have a natural advantage. Those who live near the riverbank can enjoy fresh water while those who live at a longer distance cannot. Individuals in an enlightened society should not envy them – if they feel the strong need to enjoy identical lifestyles, they too should move towards the riverbank – start a unit themselves.

**T**he other side of the medal is that those who bring wealth into Auroville should do that in the spirit of true trusteeship and should give as much as they can towards the development of the community. This, of course, is not to be done in the spirit of philanthropy, which, as Sri Aurobindo said, is nothing more than the stirring of the conscience of a robber. The ideal is to reconcile true individualism and collectivism on a spiritual basis. And this ideal can necessarily only be asked of people who are willing servants of the Divine Consciousness. For true individualism implies the guidance from the psychic, which is, in the Mother's words, the first discovery each Aurovillian should make.

Where does the "no exchange of money" come in? I would like to share with you my reflections and my conviction that the Mother's rule of "No exchange of money" is the key to get rid of the conflict between individualism and collectivism.

In Auroville you have developed a financial system where the exchange of money is done through a kind of individual "bank account" system, and those people who have no means of their own and work for the community receive a maintenance. This system, while eliminating the exchange of currency notes, has not eliminated the sense of insecurity. Individuals are led to save to feel secure, and the motivation is still on a lower plane. But you are not here to work in order to earn, but to serve the Divine Consciousness and to earn in order to live. To live in order to earn is not a spiritual view. This should change.

I believe that it is a false illusion that individuals can battle against insecurity. History has shown us over again that individuals can lose their accumulated wealth in a moment. But I believe that security can be had if we live as one family. Auroville stands for the Family of Humanity – and Auroville should give security as a community.

Let's look at Auroville's strong points: we are not suffering from poverty, and we have able manpower to produce wealth. These two points combined give an enormous strength to the community. I believe it gives sufficient strength to take that next step the Mother wants us to take. My request to you therefore is to develop plans to realise the Mother's ideal. Develop plans to create a society where food, clothing, education, basic shelter and health care will be provided free to every Aurovillian. Your plans should deal with this and also include provisions for specific demands, such as the provision of additional rations to satisfy individual tastes. The package should include as well education of each one in the theory and practice of Karma Yoga.

**M**y request to all those who have economic holdings in whatever form, is to collaborate in this effort. Collaborate to make it a success, and give a commitment that you will do your utmost to support it in the transition phase. A new society can be born; we are on the threshold and I am convinced that we can do it. We are at a favourable time. What is needed is collaboration of all Aurovilians.

\* Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle, Centenary Edition vol. 15, p. 241; Complete Works vol. 25 p. 257.*

## The Basic Needs: A community responsibility

**I**n his address to the members of the Economy Group and other interested Aurovilians, Dr. Kireet Joshi requested the Aurovilians to develop an economy in which the community would provide a basic packet to every Aurovillian – consisting of free meals, free clothing, free health care and an allowance to cover specific personal needs and power consumption.

At a first view, it is strange that Dr. Joshi has laid stress on the centralised provision of a basic maintenance packet for essentially there is nobody wanting in Auroville. Each Aurovillian gets a basic maintenance in one way or other. The problem is rather that quite a number of people consider that they do not receive sufficient maintenance, and centralising the provision of a basic maintenance packet would not solve their problem. Why then would there be a need to centralise the provision of basic maintenance?

**T**here are two reasons for this. First there is the Mother's "Dream", where She explicitly mentions that "the community... would provide for each individual's subsistence and sphere of action." Dr. Kireet Joshi takes this literally, and explains that doing otherwise would promote a capitalistic society where individuals work for a living and live to earn. He also offers a solution to deal with the distrust that exists at present between those who generate money and those who they believe are "parasites" on the back of the community. This perspective has for many years bedeviled attempts to move towards a more collective economy. The distrust would only increase if the community were to offer each Aurovillian a free basic maintenance packet without stress-

ing the need for each individual's participation. Dr. Kireet Joshi envisages a pro-active stance by the community towards those who do not participate in work he suggests that those who do not work should be contacted and helped to find a place of action. This would be a dramatic change, as at present, individuals are left to themselves and are not asked to explain to the community the reasons for their non-participation.

**A** second reason is that the centralised provision of a "free basic packet" would, to an important extent, do away with the need for internal money transactions. The Mother was very specific that money should not be used in Auroville's internal dealings stating that "Auroville should only have money relations with the outside world." It is hoped that the centralised provision of a "free basic packet" would promote the growth of a spiritualised society as envisioned in the Mother's "Dream."

### How can a centralised system be introduced?

**I**n Auroville's present economic system, Aurovilians receive their maintenance from the unit for which they work or from the Central Fund. Self-supporting individuals have their own sources of income. A centralised system for the provision of a basic packet would necessitate that each unit executive and self supporting individual would make two transfers: one transfer to the Central Fund for 'basic Aurovillian maintenance', and a second transfer to the individual's account for the extra maintenance he or she requires. The Cen-

tral Fund, in its turn, would provide each and every Aurovillian with the basic needs.

While such a system would centralise the provision of a basic maintenance packet, it would not help to provide more maintenance to those who need it. For that, extra funds have to be found. At present Auroville's commercial units provide those funds to a limited extent, which enables the Central Fund to provide additional maintenance to a specific group of Aurovilians in view of their commitment and work for Auroville. If commercial units could donate more and if self-supporting individuals could also help, for example by transferring to the Central Fund not only the amount due for their own basic maintenance packet but rather whatever they can, then more Aurovilians could be supported thus.

**T**he immediate effects of the implementation of a centralised system will be mainly psychological. An initial result would be that the link between the individual working in a unit and the maintenance provided would start to fade. But a more important consequence would be that the community would develop the sense of taking care and the individuals of being taken care of. It would be a small but decisive step towards a different type of economy.

**A**uroville is a "giving society". Many are the examples of individuals who spontaneously and sometimes anonymously extend support to other Aurovilians, often to a large extent. A centralised system as proposed by Dr. Kireet Joshi would make this underlying fraternity more manifest.

Carel

## Going Kind: What's being done?

### An overview of collective and individual attempts

#### Collective Attempts

**T**he Central Fund was started in 1989 as a system to collectively support Auroville's services and other collective responsibilities. Its income is generated from commercial units, which contribute varying percentages of their profits; from contributions from guests; from donations by individual Aurovilians; from the Rs 900 scheme, under which each unit pays Rs 900 a month for each Aurovillian working for that unit; and from interest on deposits with the Auroville Fund and of individual account holders. Since July 1995, the Central Fund has successfully increased its income by asking Aurovilians to transfer the amounts they had in low interest-generating bank accounts to their Financial Service accounts, and to forgo interests on these amounts. This has resulted at present in a total capital of over 4 crores (approx. US\$ 930,000). The Central Fund distributes its income of approximately Rs 26 lakhs per month (approx. US\$ 60,000) to more than 40 activities and services. The Central Fund accounts are published each month in the AV News. The Economy Group is responsible for administering this Fund.

**T**he Economy Group monitors Auroville's internal economy and acts as a liaison body between the community and its commercial units. Particular attention is given to the Central Fund and its disbursement each month. In specific terms, the group grants loans; keeps close contact with

the Auroville services, the Auroville Board of Commerce, the productive units and collective budget holders; raises funds for the overall maintenance needs of the community; and studies the Auroville economy to find ways of moving towards a true collective economy.

Over the past two years the Economy group has shifted its emphasis from supporting the services to supporting the individuals. The Central Fund's budget for the maintenance of Aurovilians receives a great deal of attention. As of today, the allocations for the basic maintenance of about 370 Aurovilians and their families is under intense observation with the will to secure a strong base for the well-being of each one. For about two years there is an ongoing experiment where a number of Aurovilians, in view of their commitment and work for Auroville are provided with all the maintenance they need.

**T**he Financial Service (also known as The Auroville Maintenance Fund) was started in the seventies as an attempt to do away with cash transactions in Auroville by keeping accounts of the cash holdings of Aurovilians. Since then, nearly all transactions between units and Aurovilians are done through transfers using these accounts. In August 1999, the Financial Service introduced a new accounting system that allows Auroville's internal and external economy to be studied separately.

**Auroville Fund** is the official receiving, disbursing and accounting channel through which Indian and foreign donations for various projects reach units and projects in Auroville.

**T**he Repatriation Fund provides money for overseas tickets, to expatriate Aurovilians who may need to leave Auroville especially for reasons of health.

**Nandini** (meaning the "Cow of Plenty" in Hindu mythology) was started in 1994 as part of a collective move towards an economy in kind, providing basic clothing, household items and a tailoring service for a small participating group. It has three sources of income: from the Central Fund to cover the needs of children and students as part of their maintenance in kind; from a set monthly contribution by the participating adults; and from donations in cash and kind.

**T**he Freestore was started spontaneously in 1972 as an exchange centre for second-hand clothing and linen items. A budget from the Central Fund and donations from individuals and commercial units support it. Auroville offers a free tailoring service.

**Mahasawati's Free Store** started in 1995, is an exchange centre for all types of non-clothing items, from kitchen and household wares, electric and electronic

(continued on page 3)





# Cultivating Auroville's Culture

Webster's Collegiate Dictionary defines society as: "A community, nation, or broad grouping of people having common traditions, institutions, and collective activities and interests. An enduring and cooperating social group whose members have developed organized patterns of relationship through interaction with one another." By definition, Auroville is a society, a township growing for 31 years, and as we interact with each other in the process of our living and working together, we are establishing patterns of relationship. These patterns are formed through how we communicate, how we act towards one another, solve problems, work together, celebrate and play. One example of pattern formation could be the "Aurovilian English" that our children have become so good at speaking!

Over time, these patterns of relationship form and culture evolves. Webster's Collegiate Dictionary defines culture as: "The integrated pattern of human

knowledge, belief, and behavior that is conditioned or determined by man's capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations." Culture is fluid and continues to evolve over time. The quality of culture that gets passed on is influenced by the knowledge, beliefs, and patterns of behavior and human relationships that are formed as we live life together.

The question is, are these patterns being developed consciously or unconsciously? Culture will develop, it is inevitable. What I care about is that the culture of Auroville be developed consciously. We can tell our children all kinds of lofty ideas of human unity, read them the Charter and Mother's Dream, but what they learn is what they see and experience for themselves. Adolescents abhor hypocrisy and will throw whatever signs they see of it in your face relentlessly and without remorse.

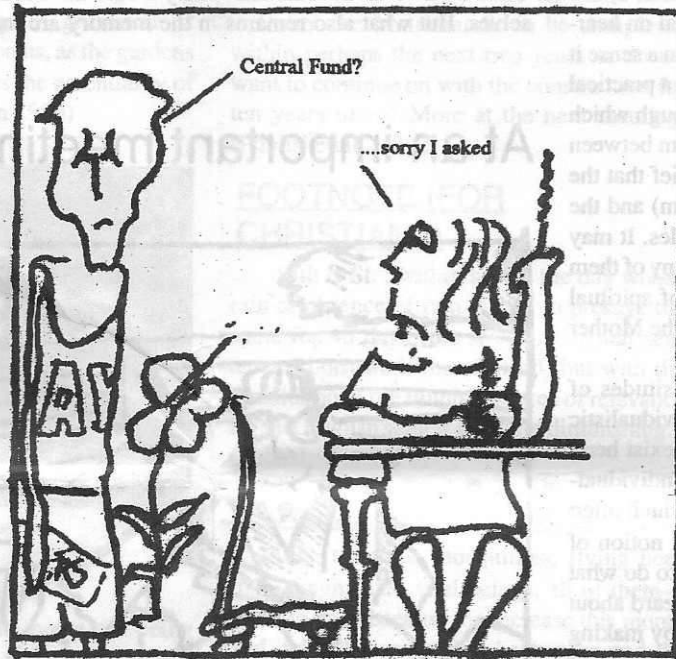
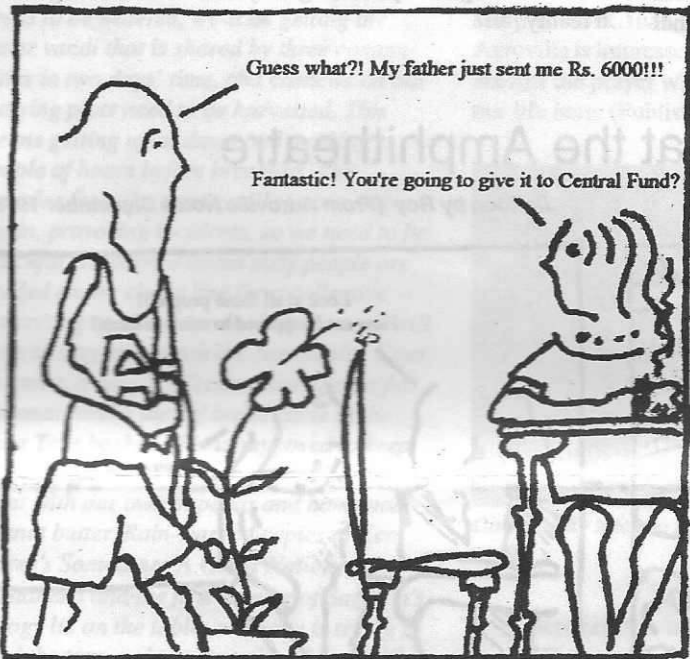
By Abbey

When I was raising my kids in the US, we lived in a big house with lots of friends around all the time, and besides our family of six, we often had other people who lived with us. Every member of the family had jobs they had to do, from setting the table, cooking, washing dishes, cleaning the bathroom, shopping, to children learning how to run the washing machine when they were old enough to fold their own clothes and put them away. It was important to me that my children take responsibility for what they were able to do and become aware of the time and energy it takes to care for the everyday things in life. Learning to care for others and ourselves begins when we are children. What I see in Auroville is a generation of children who are growing up with an "amma" (housemaid) who does most, if not all, of the work in the house. What messages are we giving our children

about the Tamil people we share this land with? Are they our servants and the ones who do all the dirty work? The question of culture is a big one because our values are reflected not only by what we do, but also by what we don't do. For example, we do not yet have any designated No Smoking zones here in Auroville. By allowing smoking in all of our public places, we inadvertently give our societal approval.

As my grandmother used to say, children are our wealth and our future. The energy and time we give our children, what we provide for them, and the influences around them, are all forces that are shaping the Auroville of tomorrow. In USA there was a group of Native Americans called the Iroquois Federation. Before the white man came, when their nation was strong, they had a process of decision-making where they tried to extrapolate the consequences of their actions seven generations into the future. In light of this, it is important to ask: What are our values as a community? What kinds of things are important to us? What kind of culture is developing here Auroville and are we happy with the way it is going?

(Abbey, an American, first came to Auroville as a visiting teacher at Last School. But last year she joined Auroville, and at present, teaches in Transition School.)



Cartoon by Roy  
(From Auroville Notes September 1978)

(continued from page 2)

appliances to cycle and motorcycle parts, building materials etc. which are donated by Aurovilians.

**Prosperity** (previously Caring Service) tries to help meet financial, material and other needs of Aurovilians in a constructive and caring way, and also extends its services to the families of Aurovilians living in the villages. The service, started in 1991, attempts to link needs and resources among Aurovilians. Individuals communicate their specific needs to the service and the service then tries to fulfil that need by either approaching other Aurovilians personally or by putting a note in the AV News.

## Individual Attempts

**Seed** is an experiment that has been going on since 1993. At present, there are about 30 full-time working Aurovilians who pool their maintenances and then take what they need in cash and in kind.

**The Common Account** was an experiment, started by a group of about 80 people in January 1994, to put all their maintenances into a common pot from which they would take goods and cash as per their needs. Cash withdrawals were restricted to payment of miscellaneous bills plus some pocket money. Aurovilians who did not depend entirely on Auroville maintenance donated an extra 10% of their personal money. This account closed in 1998, as the demands exceeded the income.

# Human Unity in Auroville

One of the principal aims of Auroville is to create a living embodiment of human unity. Auroville, as such, is meant to be a beacon of hope to a chaotic world; a world where technological progress outstrips our spiritual growth, and our capacity to manage the consequences of our creations is increasingly in doubt. Auroville's aim is consequently more relevant today than it was when Auroville was first envisaged and, there is a greater urgency to explore processes that may lead to greater human unity.

But how? This is a perplexing and complicated question. More so, because Auroville does not make a concerted effort to define and redefine what it means by unity. It has not laid down principles of unity. It has not systematically attempted to consider the manifestations such principles should imply. And consequently it has not been able to fairly evaluate its progress toward its ideal. Without an evaluation, mistakes more easily fester, successes are more easily missed, and there is no serious consideration of lessons learned. Most importantly, the concept of unity remains undeveloped, vague, and offers little practical direction.

By Lyle

Aurovilians might argue that the definitions are there in Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's writings. Have Aurovilians so internalized these teachings that there is no value in bringing them out? Lay them before the community of Auroville. Let the community agree that they, and perhaps other concepts, should form both the basis of unity in Auroville and the means to develop a process of evaluation. One might argue that Auroville is an organic community that defies definition. But, definitions are meant to be reviewed, questioned and refined; the concept of unity itself must be redefined as Auroville grows. One could say that human unity must be approached from a strictly spiritual process where definitions have no place. But, Auroville is meant to work out the problem of human unity materially as well as spiritually. There is a double action at work. Our spiritual progress is reflected in our material intercourse and our material decisions impact our spiritual movements.

To what extent is Auroville achieving its aim of human unity? There are probably more opinions on the matter than there are Aurovilians. Unfor-

tunately, many of these opinions integrate facts in a biased way to reflect personal ideals of unity and not necessarily community aspirations. The first step toward achieving greater unity is to develop common understandings and approaches toward it, then Auroville can revisit the understandings, refine them, and progress. Until now, with occasional exception, our fractious world has muddled through; but muddling is an increasingly unsafe approach to solving the world's problems. Can Auroville demonstrate a more powerful, more cogent approach? Or will it too muddle through?

(Lyle, an American married to an Aurovilian, is a long-term guest who has been associated with Auroville for many years. Lyle has been working in a rural development programme in Lesotho for the last ten years now but hopes to move to Auroville soon.)

*The sentiment of unity is not sufficient to create unity; we require also the practice of unity.*

Sri Aurobindo



# Liberty or license?

In the winter of 1979 a social philosopher by the name of Henryk Skolimowski made an extended visit to Auroville. Later he wrote an essay on what he had observed at that time, which he recently sent for publication. Here are some extracts:

Aurovilians are extremely diverse and individualistic; they celebrate their uniqueness. And they have a great flair for projecting their own image. So there are as many conceptions of Auroville as persons to talk to. It often happens that after one of them gives his impression of the total conception of Auroville, he or she will immediately add: "but this is my personal view, no generalization about Auroville is possible". In actual fact, after a while one gets tired of being constantly told that Auroville cannot be described, that a person must spend years here in order to grasp it, that all intellectualizing and mentalizing is no good. One tires of this kind of talk because there have been periods in human history in which new shapes of reality emerged which are as complex and unprecedented as those of Auroville. Yet these periods have been described, comprehended, shared among people desiring to know. This mystique about the uniqueness of Auroville and the aura of its indescribability I find both odd and phoney...

After hearing so many stories about [The Mother's] extraordinary power and influence one is less sceptical on hearing that it is the Mother who is building Auroville. In a sense it is a mystical conception. Yet in another sense quite a practical one: for they take themselves to be the medium through which the Mother operates. However, there is a deep chasm between the conception and its realization, between the belief that the Mother is building Auroville (even in spite of them) and the often messy wanderings and ugly political squabbles. It may be said (according to the Mother's teaching) that many of them are on a lower level of Yoga, thus a lower level of spiritual evolution, and have to work on themselves before the Mother can work through them...

The other force that shapes the present vicissitudes of Auroville and its future destiny is an extremely individualistic conception of liberty. The social contract does not exist here. Nor do they believe in such things at the moment. Individualism is respected to the point of sublime tolerance, which often verges on the ridiculous. This is the Anglo-Saxon notion of liberty, in which every individual is to be allowed to do what he or she wants to do. They do not seem to have heard about the idea of polis which binds people together, and by making them relinquish individualistic freedoms, provides them with other extensions of freedom and liberty. If they had heard about the idea of polis, they have chosen to forget it. After the first two days of my stay in Auroville, I said to myself, "This is Kropotkin's Divine Anarchy in action"...

In any case, this insistence on respecting everybody's way has resulted in the Chaos rather than the Life Divine. Liberty here is not infrequently taken as a license for indulgence. Some clearly do indulge by doing precious little, and participating in no social life at all. Yet they are supported and fed by the community. From the point of view of equity the system seems to be clearly deficient. However, one must not rush to judgement. On a deeper level of analysis something else emerges. Ideally it would be a wonderful thing if a system could be created in which the will and ways of every individual are respected, in which a community can afford every shade of opinion and every form of behaviour, in which nobody is censured or regimented. This conceivably could be the highest ideal for a future mature society.

But maturity has not yet arrived in Auroville even though one of the great paradoxes here is that they try to govern themselves as if it were so—while in fact they are driven by their egos, petty fights, indulgences and emotions. J. J. Rousseau said in the "Social Contract" that if there were a nation of Gods they could govern themselves democratically, for democracy is too perfect a form of government for ordinary human beings. The same could be said about the ideal of Divine Anarchy as the basis of government...

For the moment, the chaotic way in which Auroville handles its social affairs is both pathetic and admirable. It is pathetic as they are unable to find any common basis for communication and action, and would not, for example, expel a person who is mentally disturbed and causing harm to the community. It is admirable as they insist (while defending this disturbed person, for example) that it is the strength of the community to tolerate all forms of human behaviour and neither regiment or chastise anyone. But then one asks again: What is a community? When pressed with these questions, more often

than not, they hide themselves behind quotations from the Mother, such as: "To have a life that wants to grow and perfect itself, that is what the collective ideal of Auroville should be: a life that wants to grow and perfect itself".

Decentralization, which is sometimes called Aurovilianization, is carried at times to extremes. And this physical separateness and social separateness seems to have affected the intellectual life at Auroville. The life of the mind twinkles but dimly here...

What stands out in one's memory is the sphere of Matrimandir—the symbol of aspirations and of the spiritual quest of Auroville. In retrospect one admires those resourceful individuals who are doing real work and who, at the same time, are obviously connected inwardly. Observing them one grasps the meaning of integral yoga. But one has the impression that those individuals would have done well in whatever circumstances they would have found themselves. But what also remains in the memory are many indi-

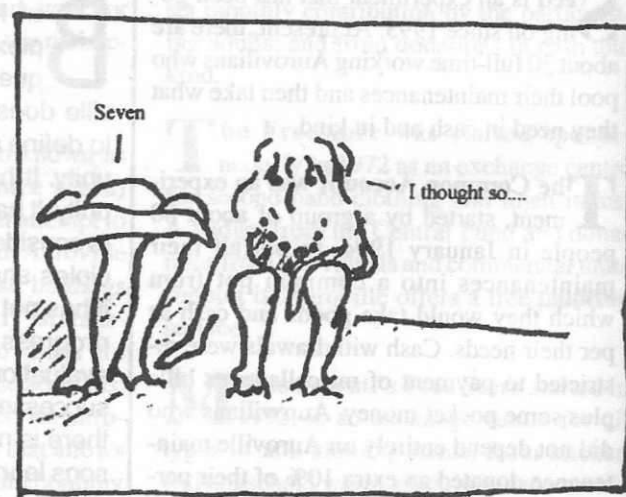
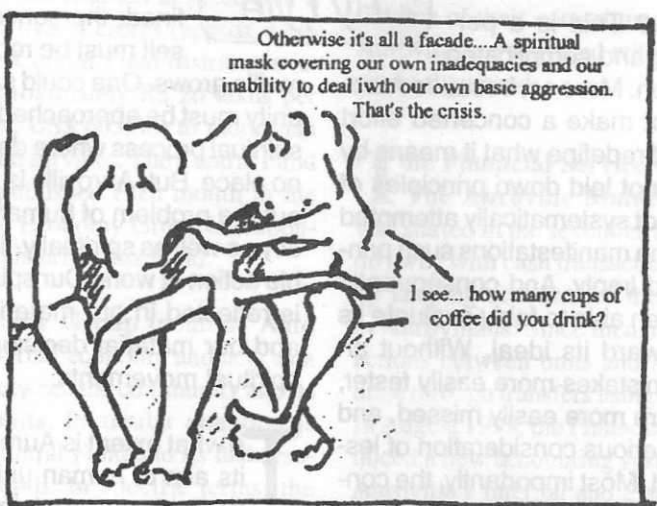
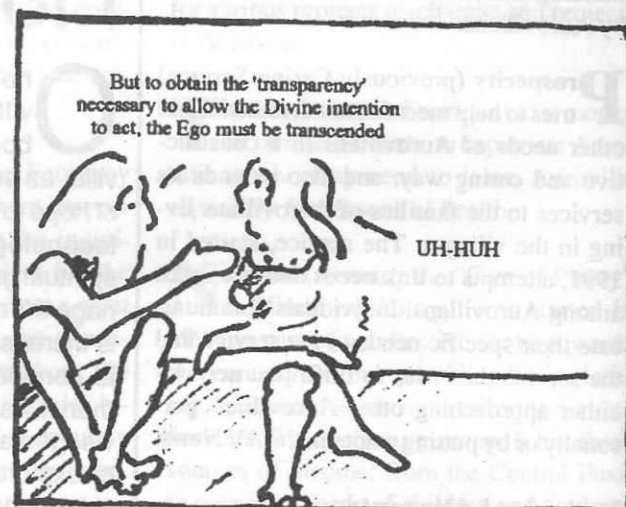
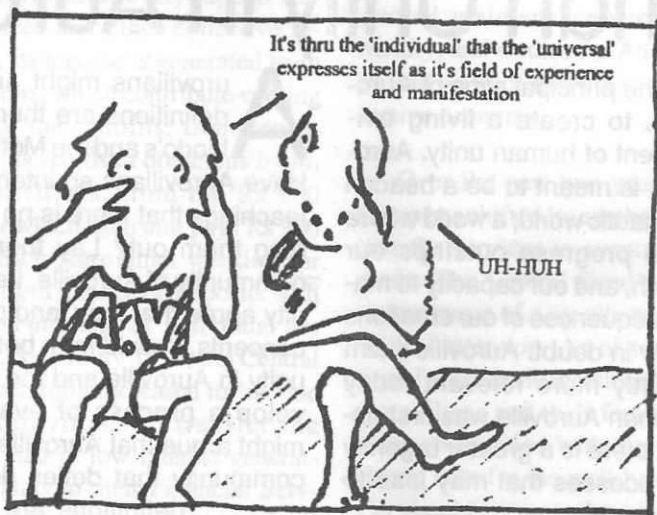
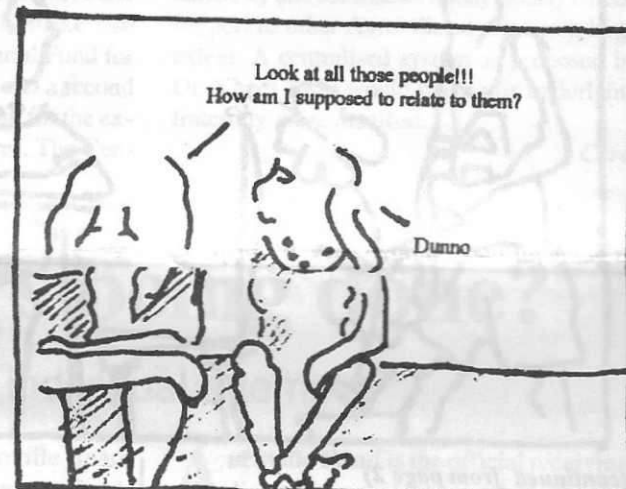
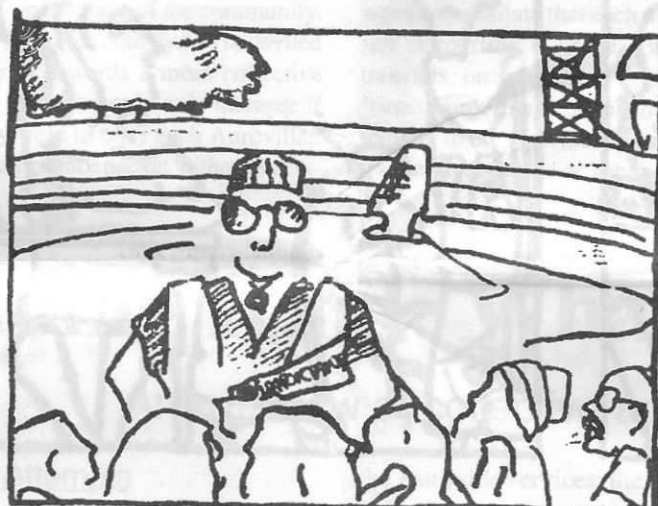
viduals who have not distinguished themselves by their accomplishments, who have often been afflicted by all kinds of illnesses (the climate is harsh, the diet is poor, the health often breaks down), but who insist that "in spite of everything Auroville is a wonderful place to be." It is, I think, the high ideal which they pursue that gives them this elevated strength, the ideal by which they are incomparably rich in relation to the empty life they would have led in the West.

Now, it is a myth that Auroville has worked out a social model of universal importance applicable to all societies. It is a reality that they are trying new forms of social interaction; but first of all that they are trying to survive in adverse conditions. It is a myth that Auroville has evolved a new consciousness, the Aurovilian consciousness does not yet exist. It is a reality that many individuals try to attend to the spiritual needs of life, and some are well "connected" inside, so that their daily work is a form of yoga and a part of the process of self-perfection. It is a myth that Divine Anarchy works at Auroville; it doesn't at all because it has not yet arrived there. It is a reality that in their groping and messy ways they are attempting to be exceedingly tolerant of all varieties of human behaviour. But this they accomplish at the price of social adhesion. It is yet another myth that Auroville can never fail. Auroville is full of myths.

The "true" Auroville is somehow hidden in the peculiar blend of myth and reality, whereby by enacting a myth you transform it into reality. This is the way all great societies and cultures emerged—by enacting a myth and transforming it into a reality.

## At an important meeting at the Amphitheatre

Cartoon by Roy (From Auroville Notes September 1978)







The community Hope in the early days

# Twenty years ago: "plus ça change...."

A sampler from some issues of the Auroville Notes (Green Notes included)

**E**vening in a community kitchen circa 1979: The sound of drums from the village, the distant roar of the sea. In the light of swaying kerosene lamps someone strums a guitar. Talk, sporadic and desultory, ranges from the last Pour Tous meeting to the price of spares for the pump, or the windmill—made out of barrels containing Tibetan prayers—that needs to be repaired. The new mango tope needs to be watered, we'll be getting the water vandi that is shared by three communities in two days' time, and cashews on our outlying plots need to be harvested. This means getting up at dawn and working a couple of hours before breakfast. The goondas from the nearby village are active again, provoking incidents, so we need to be watchful. Tomorrow about sixty people are needed on the chetty line for a collective concreting at Matrimandir. But someone will have to stay and watch the community. Four potatoes, a couple of rotten tomatoes, a few bananas, and a loaf of bread came in the Pour Tous basket. This is supposed to keep us going for the next three days. We supplement with our own papayas and homemade peanut butter. Rain-warped copies of Ken Kesey's *Sometimes A Great Notion*, Castaneda and the first volume of Satprem's trilogy lie on the table; someone is trying to read the torn and tomato-stained *Auroville Notes*—put out lovingly in Fertile—that just came in the basket.

**20** years later: Reading a pile of old issues of the *Auroville Notes*, now crumbling and falling apart, brought back memories of an era where the red-baked plateau of Auroville was still a tabula rasa of sorts, and the only thing that seemed to define us was our dreams. Much has been built and come up since then, and we rarely meet to physically work together anymore. Gone are the windmill raisings and concretings at Matrimandir. However, quite a few of the concerns touched upon in the *Notes* of those days and reiterated in one form, forum or the other down the years, like variations on a theme, remain fundamentally unchanged...as evidenced by the following extracts.

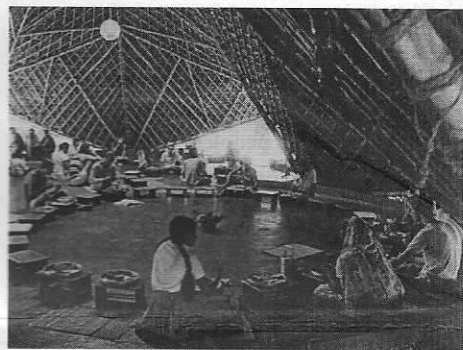
## MUSINGS

"THE WINDOWS OF THE SOUL ARE INFINITE, WE ARE TOLD. AND IT IS THROUGH THE EYES OF THE SOUL THAT PARADISE IS VISIONED. IF THERE ARE FLAWS IN YOUR PARADISE, OPEN MORE WINDOWS!!!" Henry Miller.

Mother said something to the effect that 'Auroville is for those who think the world isn't as it should be' while at the same time reading in "Notes on the Way": "Everything is as it should be at every moment." One can enjoy this kind of contradiction because one immediately "understands" with one's inner sense whereas the mind is content to argue and arouse confusion.

We can readily see this same sort of paradoxical working in Auroville. At once we see

the obvious, things must change, the suppression must be vanquished, while at the same time concede that Auroville is exactly as it must be, considering the conditions of the earth consciousness at this time. One can remain here, it seems, only after one has reached this "understanding," it adds a balance to our existence here....It is during just such a period that simply planting trees and tending our gardens is all we can do, for it is through such simple work that the quiet grandeur of Auroville is impressed upon us, as the gardens are like the prayer which is the essentiality of our life here. (Published in 1980)



Community kitchen at Douceur

...between the trees the notes are being made. The notes are being made out of spaces divided only by words. We meet and the spaces make love while the words gruntle on in the background, trying to be spaces. This is what is happening now... (Published in 1978)

What emerged from the meeting was basically this: Greater clarity and coordination is needed in many areas of our collective life. There is a call for fresh energy and wider individual responsibility for work that needs to be done for Auroville. There are many pressures within and without. (Published in 1980)

## UNHEEDED ADVICE

My answer in general to production of gas from "farm waste" will be: do not do it. Instead, put everything organic back to the ground (either through heap composting, sheet composting or plain mulching) until the fertility capital is such that you can take a proportion of the Bio mass which will have become insignificant in comparison with the total Bio mass. It might take us 15 to 20 years of hard work here in Auroville before we reach such a stage. (Published in 1980)

## LOST AT MATRIMANDIR

If anyone can help locate the two lost Matrimandir chain pulleys it will be very much appreciated. (Published in 1977)

## MATRIMANDIR

By the end of the first week in April, concreting of the Inner Chamber roof, a mammoth work taking months of preparation, was accomplished.

Each quarter section of the roof required two days to complete; and work on the quarter sections had been preceded by concreting of the four inter-pillar roof beam panels, beginning at East Pillar (Mahalakshmi) from 3 p.m. to 7 p.m. on February 21st, 1978.

It's important that the Matrimandir becomes a concern of Aurovilians so that we find the solution to the next stage together.... Do we want the Matrimandir to be completed within perhaps the next two years or do we want to continue on with the construction for ten years more? More at the next meeting. (Published in 1978)

## FOOTNOTE (FOR CHRISTIANS)

15th is St. Swithin's Day, the day whose rain or absence of rain is said to presage the same for 40 days (the structure of that sentence I borrowed from Oxford) but with the dissolution of the Empire the area of relevance for this English saint is no doubt diminishing... (Published in 1978)

## FRAGMENTED BEINGS

Ants, termites, mosquitoes, flying beetles—fragmented vital beings, all of them—seem to have been on the increase this month and, with the continuing heat wave and the fact that we have blown our two year old no-dust-storm record with a beauty, it all added up to a month we could easily have done without, still, soon it will be another season, not so very different from the one that went before and quite different from the one that follows, but the change is there, definite: blades of grass - little green things they are, if your memory's poor, that come up out of the ground - give



At a general meeting

religion to the goats and the area you thought devoid of life, once the earth is rain softened, shows footprints of the night creatures who come up and investigate your slumbers. (Published in 1978)

## FOOD WITHOUT MAINTENANCE

At the end of November we're still terribly in debt. As wages are the same as food to our employees, when money is very short, it will be shared between food in our baskets and wages. A meeting was called for Friday of those in large community kitchens to discuss cuts in food. (Published in 1977)

## FOOD COST REDUCTIONS

At the meeting on Friday concerning food cost reductions, a couple of main points were made. One is that in the budget there seems to be only one thing left to cut: food. But food COST reduction does not necessarily mean a reduction in the healthiness of the diet, it can even mean an improvement. Another point is that when there's a severe shortage, we're not going to go on eating the same while we don't pay wages to our employees - there's got to be a balance in cuts between food and wages. A Tamil family, it's said, eats for about Rs.1/person/day. We're aiming at Rs.3/person/day. (Published in 1977)

## RECIPE EXCHANGE

There is considerable interest in recipe exchange, and anyone with tried and tasty ways of preparing grains and dals and the low-cost vegetables is asked to get them to the Notes, either through Christine at Pour Tous or to "nobody in particular" in the Fertile area.

CASHEW FRUITS, which are rich in Vitamin C as well as free for the asking from the Green Belt, can be cooked into a compote jam. Simply stew them in a bit of jaggery water (just enough to cover the bottom of the pan); the choking taste disappears in the cooking. Hopefully the Vitamin C will not also disappear, if you keep the lid on the pan, but will remain in the sauce. Makes good spread for bread or a dessert-sweet either by itself or with curd or tofu. (Published in 1977)

## WHY AREN'T ALL THE VILLAGERS RICH?

Money for planting is not available at Pour Tous, but Yusuf could borrow Rs.2000. There was some objection since crops often are not profitable. Ulundu was cited as a cash crop, but it was questioned, "Then why aren't all the villagers rich?" (Published in 1977)

Idle bullock needed for Aspiration vundhi. (Published in 1978)

1. Just enough rain - sometimes untimely.
2. This is a suitable year for pilgrimage, studies, arts, crafts, sports.
3. Brahmins and yogis can carry on their spiritual and devotional activities without much disturbance.
4. The government will try to be very sympathetic with its subjects.
5. The South will flourish. (Published in 1978)

"A Windmill Tower raising"

9.30 Monday morning, 12th October  
All able-bodied help is welcome.

Love, Forecomers. (Published in 1979)



# "My heart was split between Auroville and Tibetans"

An interview with Claude Arpi

*Auroville's connection with Tibetans goes back to the very beginning of the community. The Dalai Lama has visited Auroville twice, some Tibetans have joined Auroville, others have come to give talks or attend courses in Auroville, while Aurovilians have visited Tibetan settlements within India to install wind-mills or help in other ways. In 1994 the Dalai Lama laid the foundation stone of the Pavilion of Tibetan Culture, the first stage of which is now complete and functioning.*

*For many years Claude Arpi has been an important link between Auroville and the Tibetans. Recently, he published a major book on Tibet (see accompanying review). Alan of Auroville Today met him to find out more about his Tibetan connection.*

**Auroville Today:** How did you first become interested in Tibet and the Tibetans?

**Claude Arpi:** In 1972, I was travelling in a bus from Kulu to Manali in the north of India and there, working on the road, were Tibetans. The work was very hard, these people had lost everything in fleeing their homeland, but they were smiling. It was amazing. This encounter changed my life. The same evening, my bus was blocked by a landslide. I decided to stay the night in a small village and walk to Manali the next day. At a tea-shop a small boy came up to me and said, "Come to my house". Then he started saying, "Sri Aurobindo, Mother. Pondicherry." I followed him in the dark, and when we came to his house I discovered that his sister was a disciple of the Mother. The house even belonged to the Ashram. So on the same day I met my first Tibetans, I saw my first photograph of the Mother (who I thought was Sri Aurobindo's mother!).

Two years later I finished my dental studies. I had met the Dalai Lama's sister and she had asked me to practise dentistry in Dharamsala. Then I heard about a caravan of people who were leaving France for Auroville. So I decided to travel with it to Delhi and then make my way to Dharamsala. But the collective experience on the way was so inter-esting—it was a real Auroville experience: there were 35 of us and we discussed and argued about everything!—that I went all the way to Auroville.

My heart was split between Auroville and Tibetans. I thought I'd stay six months in Auroville and then travel on to Dharamsala—but it was eight years before I visited the north of India again.

**AVT:** But there were already Tibetans in Auroville...

**Claude Arpi:** Yes. A group of Tibetan children had come in 1971 and were being educated in Auroville: the Dalai Lama visited them in 1973. Actually, the Mother had begun taking Tibetan children into the Ashram school from the early 1960s. She was also very insistent that, at the inauguration of Auroville, there should be a translation of the Charter into Tibetan.

**AVT:** You have brought many Tibetans to Auroville to share their culture and wisdom

with us. Is there something that you feel we can learn from that culture?

**Claude Arpi:** The Dalai Lama said, "My religion is simple, my religion is kindness". I think we need more of this in Auroville today. Also the idea of brotherhood, of the Sangha, is very important in Buddhism: in the Buddha's last speech he told the monks that, as long as they remain united, nothing could happen to the Sangha. That quality of brotherhood was very strong in the 1970s in Aspiration, but now we have to find it again. Without it we cannot make any progress towards a new organization or new economy.

Unfortunately, Tibet also became a divided society.

**AVT:** Was this the crucial factor in the loss of their homeland to the Chinese?

**Claude Arpi:** It's difficult to know what the crucial factor was. The Dalai Lama said it was their "karma" (fate). Perhaps the main problem was that the Tibetans remained closed in on themselves whereas, as Buddhists, they should have shared the knowledge and wisdom that they had gained with all peoples.

Actually, regarding the Chinese it's worth remembering that it's only recently—since China became a communist state—that there has been antagonism between their government and the

Tibetans. Before this they practised the same religion and the Dalai Lamas were the spiritual mentors of the Chinese emperors. Even now the Chinese leaders are afraid that if the Dalai Lama came to Beijing millions would come to listen to him, as happened in Taiwan recently. For the old religion is still alive in China.

**AVT:** Are you optimistic that Tibet can be restored to the Tibetans in the near future, and that the Dalai Lama's plan to make it a zone of peace can be realized?

**Claude Arpi:** It's very difficult to predict. When the Soviet Union collapsed, the Dalai Lama said it would take five years for his dream for Tibet to be realized. When I reminded him of this recently, he laughed and said, "I made a big, big mistake!"

Actually, in 1986 he told me that the only thing the Tibetans have to do is to very strongly hold on to their faith and their culture, and that change will happen from within China itself. Historically, the revolutions in China have always come from within, from the peasants who had nothing to eat. Today this is again a possibility as massive inequalities exist between the rich south and the poor heartland. China may also have to deal with Muslim fundamentalism in the near future.

When the Dalai Lama met Mother in 1973, he asked her if his dream of a future Tibet, a Tibet founded upon the Buddhist qualities of compassion and love, would be realized. The Mother replied, "If the teaching of Sri Aurobindo can spread over the world, and if there is the full manifestation of the Supramental, then the Supramental will be the power of the liberation of Tibet".

In his book **The Fate of Tibet: When Big Insects Eat Small Insects** Claude Arpi tries to understand the fate of this mountainous country. He begins with a question, "Why have the Tibetans lost their homeland?" and then sets out to answer it.

One of the roots of the tragedy can be traced back to the 7th Century when Buddhism became the state religion of Tibet. Before that, Tibet had been a warlike nation with a large empire, but as the influence of Buddhism took hold, the Tibetans became "nungpas," meaning "those who live inside," and Tibet became dependent upon its relations with its two huge neighbours, India and China.

The "Great" Fifth Dalai Lama was the first one to assume temporal as well as spiritual power, and from this combination of two responsibilities in a single man Claude traces one of the key weaknesses of government in Tibet. For it meant that between the death of one Dalai Lama and his successor coming to age, there was an interregnum of twenty or so years when the country was heavily dependent upon the qualities of the Regent, who was sometimes incapable or easily manipulated. It was also from the time of the Fifth Dalai Lama that the "choe-yon" relationship (priest-patron) developed between the Dalai Lamas and the rulers of the Chinese Empire, whereby the Chinese guaranteed Tibet's security as a mark of respect for the land of their spiritual gurus.

By the 18th century Tibet was totally dependent upon China militarily, and the Chinese had persuaded the Tibetans to close their country to all foreigners. But as the Chinese Empire began to disintegrate towards the close of the 19th century, the other great imperial powers with interests in the area—Britain and Russia—saw their chance to influence events. In 1903, Francis Young hus-

band led a British expeditionary force into Tibet and, after massacring Tibetan troops at Chumik Shinko, forced the Tibetans to sign a Convention which opened up Tibet to trade with Britain.

Yet another chance for Tibet to avoid the later tragedy occurred more recently, during the reign of the 13th Dalai Lama. He was one of the few Tibetans of his time who saw the need to modernise his country, and planned to send Tibetans to be educated in the West. However, he ran into the implacable opposition of the large monasteries, which feared that this would result in the dilution of the traditional religion, and he was forced to abandon his plans. The present Dalai Lama was later to remark about this, "if (his) attempt to introduce modern education into Tibet had not met such intense resistance by traditionalists, history may have taken a quite different turn."

In fact, Claude is clear that at this period the Tibetans were weakening themselves from within. There were sectarian disputes, rivalries between the large monasteries, the intrigues of the Tibetan aristocracy, the enmity which existed between the Khampas and the

government in Lhasa, and a government with no experience of how to deal with the great powers.

When the Chinese invaded in 1950, the Tibetan army was both unprepared and inadequate—in a Buddhist nation, it was not a source of pride to be a soldier—and the Chinese swept in encountering little opposition.

Tibet's call for international assistance went unanswered. Yet Claude makes clear that India held the key: if India had been willing to take a stand, other help would have been forthcoming. But Nehru did nothing except make weak protests to Peking. Why? Claude explains that Nehru wanted to play a leading role in the Korean conflict as a negotiator and didn't want his neutrality called into question: he certainly didn't want to be perceived as pro-western. Besides, he had a certain sympathy for

the Chinese model of socialism and even seemed to believe that a dose of it would do the Tibetans good. Above all, he was an idealist unable to comprehend that the Chinese could ever be a threat to India. Sardar Patel, the only man who could stand up to Nehru, knew differently, but he died before he could

convince his Prime Minister. The Chinese invasion of India in 1962, which finally demolished the fiction of Chinese goodwill, was left Nehru a broken man...

**The Fate of Tibet** is a fine historical study which clarifies many points, particularly in relationship to India's role. If there is any criticism it is that the book could benefit from tighter editing, particularly in the latter parts, and the lack of an index is a definite disadvantage. On a few occasions Claude's perceptions seem suspect—to call Tibet between the years of 1912-50 a kind of "Shangri-La" is surely very debatable—but overall he is a trustworthy guide who helps us understand the intricacies and pathos of a situation which continues to haunt the modern world.

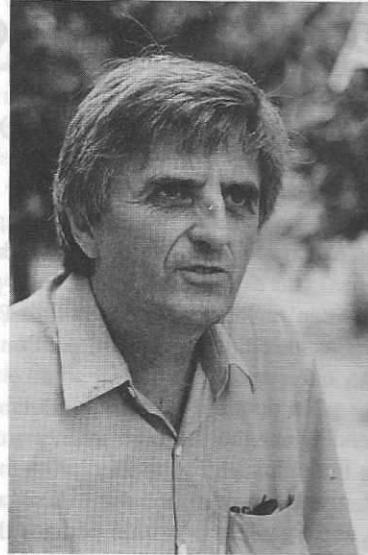
Alan

**"The Fate of Tibet: When Big Insects Eat Small Insects" by Claude Arpi.** Published by Har-Anand Publications, New Delhi.

Available from "The Wild Seagull" bookshop, Auroville. Price Rs. 595. For postage and packaging add Rs 50 (within India) or Rs 200 (overseas) Cheques and DDs should be made out to: "Editions Auroville Press International".

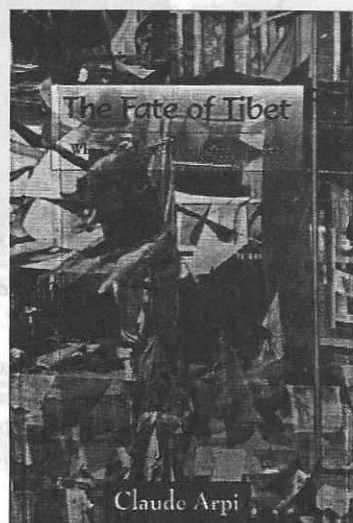
U.K. distributor: Star Publishers Distributors, 112, Whitfield Street, London, W1P 5RU.

U.S.A. distributor: Julian Lines PO Box 676, Woodstock, NY 12498. E-mail: avinfo@aol.com



## "The Fate of Tibet"

A Book Review





### Sri Ganesh Chaturthi

Dozens of Aurovilians and young school-children gathered in the garden of the small Ganesh temple at the entrance of Auroville and listened to the chanting of Sanskrit slokas by Kusumben and others, in praise of the Auspicious One - the much loved Ganesh, on the morning of the thirteenth of September. This was the birthday, celebrated throughout India and abroad, of the beneficent elephant headed God - who in the words of Sri Aurobindo is "The power that removes obstacles by the force of knowledge."

### Paintings by Chantal

Chantal Gow has recently mounted an exhibition of her paintings at Alliance Francaise, Pondicherry.

### After School makes it to State Basketball Finals

Auroville's After School in only their second participation in the event, gained a well-deserved second place in the 8th annual S.T. Murugesan memorial trophy all Tamil Nadu state level school basketball tournament held in Theni, Tamil Nadu, at the end of August. After School, which has regularly provided several players for the Pondy team in the Indian Nationals, after some spectacular wins, lost honorably to the defending champions St. Peter's Higher Secondary School, Thanjavur in the finals. Elumalai and Bala were the main scorers of the After School team.

### Football Fever

The football fever is on at Auroville with the annual football tournament having kicked off to a start this month. As usual, the creativity of our home-grown Maradonnas are expressed through the names of their teams which include Tamil Terriers, Andhra Amazers, Kashmiri Kickers, and Delhi Dynamites.

### Perceptions

Perceptions, an exhibition by Eva of oil and acrylic paintings created on a wide range of materials, adorn the walls of the Pitanga Art Gallery at present.

### Sri Aurobindo and the Veda

At an event organized by the Sri Aurobindo World Centre for Human Unity, Dr. Kireet Joshi gave a well-attended talk on "Sri Aurobindo and the Veda". The Veda is still an esoteric subject for most Aurovilians, and Kireet led the audience through a short history of interpretations of the Vedas culminating with the unparalleled contribution of Sri Aurobindo who had a direct experience of the knowledge of the Supermind that was hinted through symbols in the Rig Veda. Himself a nationally-acknowledged Vedic scholar, Kireet gave a lucid explanation of some of the Vedic symbols as it applied to the Integral Yoga and a fascinating account of the oral tradition of reciting the Veda which for over two thousand years has continued till the present day in all its glory.

### A home for Auroville Youth

Kailash, a residency project for youth aged between 14-21, has been started by a group of ten Auroville teenagers and four adults. Kailash will be located in the Residential Zone and the first phase of its construction is scheduled to start in January 2000. For more information or to donate funds to this youth project, please contact [kripa@auroville.org.in](mailto:kripa@auroville.org.in)

### Higher studies for Auroville Youth

Students at the Centre for Further Learning desire to have a "hands-on" learning experience of Auroville's economy and organization by attending meetings of key groups such as the Economy Group, FAMC and the Executive Council. The students are expected to report on their observations.

### Change of E-mail address

Auroville International France has got a new e-mail address: [avifrance@free.fr](mailto:avifrance@free.fr). The old one [avifrance@compuserve.com](mailto:avifrance@compuserve.com) will still be active for a few weeks.

### Western Classical Music

Heinrich gave a piano recital of works by Schumann, Schubert, Brahms, Chopin, Scriabin, Wagner-Liszt at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry.

### Auroville at the United Nations

Guy gave a presentation of Auroville to a panel of Non-Governmental Organizations on "The Religious and Ethical Dimensions of Globalization" at the United Nations. His presentation was extremely well-received by the international audience of over 100 people.

### The Auroville 2000 Calendar

The Auroville 2000 Calendar is ready. "Unity" has been chosen as the theme for the first year of the millennium. And this theme is beautifully expressed by Ireno through pictures of people, nature, art and architecture, all in the form of mandalas. For more information, or to order, contact: Ireno, Sangha, Auroville 605101, India.

### Building the city?

For a couple of months now, the Development Group and the Green Group have been locked in an issue concerning the appropriate location of a high-tension transformer in the Green Belt, close to the Evergreen community. This proposed new transformer would supply electricity to a workshop and a housing project in Reve, a community in the Residential Zone. No solutions acceptable to both parties have been found so far.

### From dust to dust...

A new group, called the "Farewell Team", is currently looking into procedures of conducting funerals and maintaining the 4-acre plot in Adventure that has been chosen as the first burial and crematorium ground for Auroville.

### Subscription Information

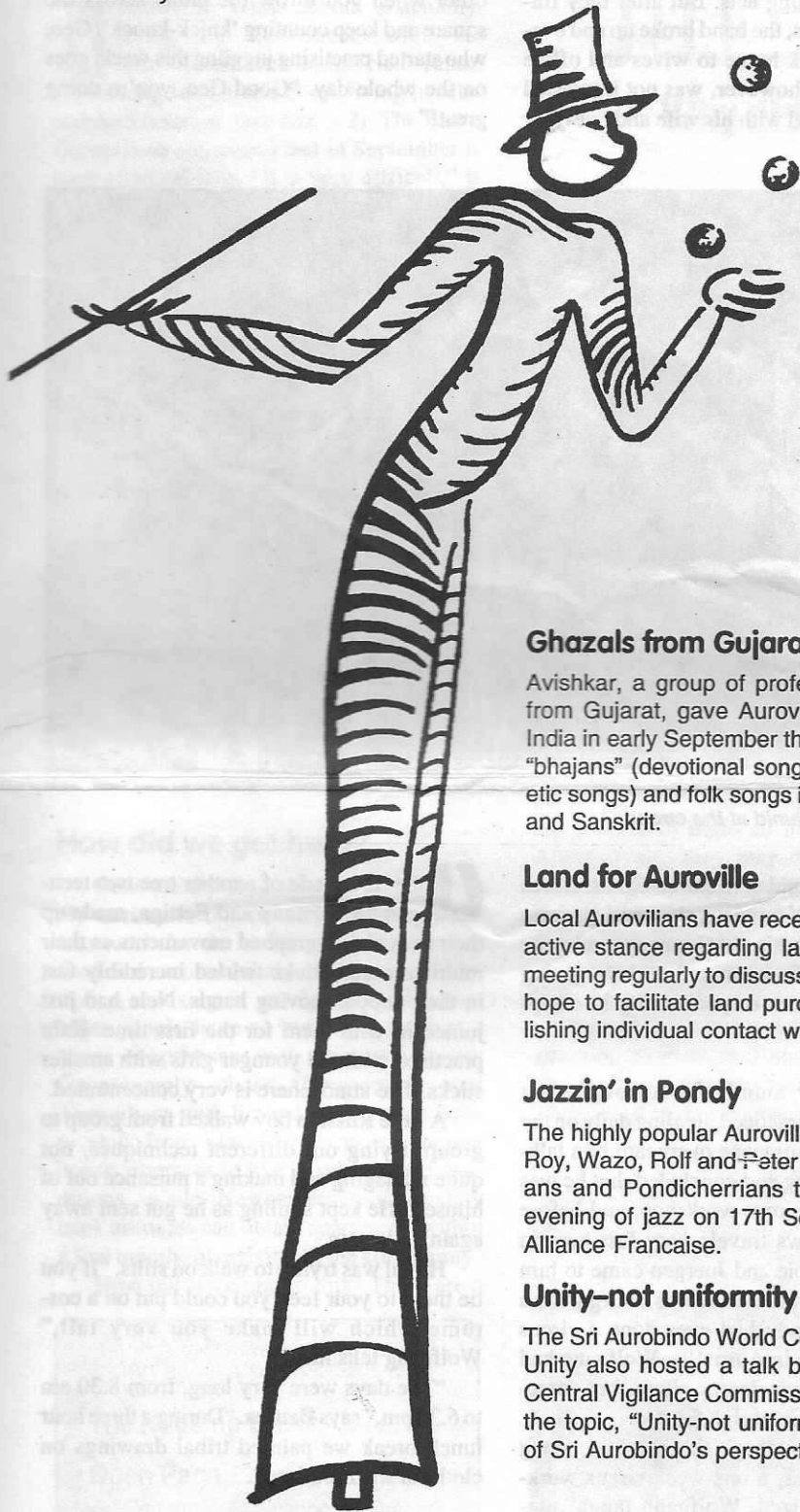
Subscription rates for 12 issues of **AUROVILLE TODAY** are the following: for India Rs 250; for other countries Rs 1250 or the equivalent of US \$ 38. This includes the postage by airmail. Please send your contribution either to one of the Auroville International centres or directly to Auroville Today, A. T. Tower, 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.

AUROVILLE TODAY provides information about Auroville, an international township in South India, on a monthly basis and is distributed to Aurovilians and friends of Auroville in India and abroad. It does not necessarily reflect the views of the community as a whole.

For this issue:

Editorial team: Alan, Annemarie, Bindu, Carel, Jill, Roger, Tineke. Layout and DTP: Martin B. Proofreading: Barbara. Photo Courtesy: John Mandeen and Auroville Archives. Line Drawings: Bettina. Printed at All India Press.



### Ghazals from Gujarat

Avishkar, a group of professional singers from Gujarat, gave Aurovilians a taste of India in early September through recitals of "bhajans" (devotional songs), ghazals (poetic songs) and folk songs in Hindi, Gujarati and Sanskrit.

### Land for Auroville

Local Aurovilians have recently taken a proactive stance regarding land purchase by meeting regularly to discuss the issue. They hope to facilitate land purchase by establishing individual contact with land owners.

### Jazzin' in Pondy

The highly popular Auroville Jazz Group of Roy, Wazo, Rolf and Peter treated Aurovilians and Pondicherrians to a scintillating evening of jazz on 17th September at the Alliance Francaise.

### Unity-not uniformity

The Sri Aurobindo World Centre for Human Unity also hosted a talk by Shri N. Vittal, Central Vigilance Commissioner of India on the topic, "Unity-not uniformity" in the light of Sri Aurobindo's perspective.

## Rocky Mountain High: AUM 99

In mid-August of 1999, the All USA Meeting (AUM) convened in a scene of vastness and silence. This is the Baca Grande, the heart of the largest alpine valley in the world, set aside as a refuge for World Truths in Colorado, USA. The view is forever...high mountain peaks and a vast plain where the wind meets only the Aspens, the Pinon and the Juniper ranges. For thousands of years the wind has carried the sand of the Rio Grande and the San Luis Valley up against the mountains to create the Great Sand Dunes National Monument at the edge of the Baca. The dunes are higher than anywhere in North America, adding another unexpected dimension to the scale and spectacle of the natural wonders.

Here was a setting in which to appreciate and plunge into Sri Aurobindo's epic poem Savitri, the theme of the conference, which was explored through lectures, readings, and dance and drama performances.

This Savitri immersion effectively served the rest of the conference agenda, which focused on the securing of the land of Auroville in South India. Guy and Shivaya came from Auroville to tour America to raise the needed ten million dollars. This conference was their first stop to refine their lectures and slides with the conference participants and work out the details of their presentations in various cities throughout the United States.

The urgency to secure the land against speculators, and to obtain the needed lands immediately for access and planned development, came home clearly.

As Savitri emerges as the Veda of the Third Millennium for those who are ready, and as Auroville secures its foundation in the land, there is the needed complementary movement of "community" in the sense of the Integral Yoga. Aurela Sequoia presented "Strategies for Creating an Integral Yoga Community". Balancing this was the panel discussion on networking, collaboration and setting goals where representatives from all the various organisations involved with the AUM agenda

could brainstorm with the participants. These various centres and groups included the Sri Aurobindo Association, Foundation for World Education, Auroville International USA, Matagiri along with the regional groups around America.

What emerged from the gathering was the sense of a new beginning that would have a continuity to bring the vision of Mother and Sri Aurobindo into more manifest form. The next AUM conference, with as its theme "The Bridge", will be held in West Cornwall, Connecticut at the Trinity Conference Centre on July 5, 2000.

B. (W.M. Sullivan)



BY AIRMAIL  
BOOK POST

# AUROVILLE TODAY

A.T. Tower, Surrender, Auroville 605101, India



IN THIS ISSUE:

ECONOMY  
OPEN PAGE  
THEN AND NOW  
CIRCUS

AUROVILLE ARCHIVES  
C/O KRISHNA T.  
BHARAT NIVAS  
AUROVILLE

October 1998  
Number 129

## THE CIRCUS IS IN TOWN!

**S**unday night at the Visitors Center: the outdoor sitting space of the Jazz Cafe is packed. Paul from Fertile walks around with a microphone in his hand. With his decorated top hat and painted moustache he looks different than usual. Ananda sits in a corner blowing huge soap bubbles. The atmosphere is different from the regular jazz night. It is circus night, the gala premiere of Circus Bubble!

### Wolfgang, the juggler

It all started with Wolfgang, a visiting German architect. As a student he and his friends played in a band, performing in many small villages in Germany and combining music with juggling acts. But after they finished their studies, the band broke up and everybody went back home to wives and office jobs. Wolfgang, however, was not interested in office work and with his wife and one-year

ers intensely focused. In one corner of the building magic tricks were being performed under Juergen's guidance. "Turn your face to the audience, Nadia, when you show your trick!" he told her while she was sliding a box slowly down a rope, which she could stop whenever she wanted. Some other girls were sticking huge knives into a box around Mauro's head. He emerged later in one piece with a big grin on his face.

**B**alls and clubs were flying around under a banyan tree where some kids were practicing their juggling. Wolfgang set the pace. "Hey, you guys, keep looking at each other when you throw the clubs across the square and keep counting 'knick-knock'. Geo, who started practising juggling this week, goes on the whole day. "Good Geo, you're doing great!"



A live young pyramid at the circus

old Mauro, he decided to start a circus. It was a great success. Years later they still perform at festivals and parties in Germany, and quite often spend their summer holidays giving street performances or performing in campsites.

**D**uring four months in Auroville last winter, he practiced juggling daily on the beach. One day someone overheard him talking about juggling and concluded that he was going to give a circus workshop, and before he knew it—news travels very fast here in Auroville—Appie and Juergen came to him saying what a great idea it was to organize a workshop! Nobody had ever done a circus workshop before in Auroville. Wolfgang had never given circus classes either, but somehow the time seemed ripe for it.

When he came back this summer, along with his two sons, a one-week circus workshop was organized. Wolfgang taught juggling, helped by Appie for acrobatics, Kalu for stick twirling and fire juggling, and Juergen for the magic show. The feedback from Auroville was very positive and Last School and Transition School gave one-week leave to one group of children, aged 9-15, who wanted to follow the workshop. The food-processing unit donated snacks and juice to sustain their energy and several parents helped out financially. The organisers were happily surprised about how smoothly the four adults worked together, and about the concentration of the participants.

### The circus workshop

During that week I attended some of the workshop classes in Last School. The atmosphere was at times chaotic and lively, at oth-

**U**nder the shade of another tree two teen-aged girls, Fanny and Bettina, made up their own choreographed movements as their multi-coloured sticks twirled incredibly fast in their supple moving hands. Nele had just joined in with them for the first time. Kalu practised with the younger girls with smaller sticks. The atmosphere is very concentrated.

A little Russian boy walked from group to group, trying out different techniques, not quite managing and making a nuisance out of himself. He kept smiling as he got sent away again and again.

Himal was trying to walk on stilts. "If you tie them to your feet, you could put on a costume which will make you very tall," Wolfgang tells him.

"The days were very long, from 8.30 am to 6.30 pm," says Bettina. "During a three hour lunch break we painted tribal drawings on cloth for the backdrop".

**F**inally after one week of intense practice the day has come: Circus Bubble is performing at the Visitors Center. It is seven o'clock and the place is full of nervous parents, friends, guests, babies, adults—all curious about what is going to happen. All of a sudden the sounds of circus music begin and Paul, the ringmaster dressed in circus attire, announces the show. After two and a half hours of flying acrobats, jugglers, the irksome Russian boy as a walking dog in an act with Himal on stilts, young magicians, clowns, the metaphysical dialogues of the Uncozy Couple, and a grand finale with flaming juggling sticks, the audience was left truly amazed by Auroville's fresh young talent.

Tineke