

# AUROVILLE TODAY

July 1990

Auroville - Kottakuppam 605104 - Tamil Nadu - India

Number Nineteen

## AUROVILLE, HERE I COME

For five years now I have been wanting to make THE DECISION. I have been doing something that totally lacked any creativity, but it did put bread in my stomach and a roof over my head. It also allowed me to save some money for this moment. My dream is about to come true. Kissing my employer goodbye (figuratively speaking) and converting everything I had into cash, I dash down to the airport, and purchase a one-way ticket to the land of human unity, the International City of Auroville. What do you mean? You never heard of it? How long have you worked for this airline anyway? Oh!

The Madras Airport experience is something that one should only have to go through once in a lifetime. After customs and immigration I feel that I can deal with anything (little did I know). The contents of a Boeing 747 empties into a large bare room with about ten plastic seats in the whole place. At one end of the room there are two immigration officials. Yes, two, to handle this crowd of hundreds. Now I understand why everyone was pushing and shoving to get off the airplane. Hundreds of excited people in one large room without any ventilation, with cigarette and cigar smoke, babies crying, people shouting to one another and at the officials. One hour later, soaking wet with sweat, I approach the man behind the desk. "Your passport please. Where are you coming from? What is your native place? Have you ever been in India before? For what purpose are you visiting India?" Finally he stamps my passport and I take my hand luggage through the door in front of me. What do you know! Another large room with about fifteen long queues of people opening their baggage. Retrieving my baggage from the airport roundabout, I place myself in line one more time. "Do you have gold?" "How much currency do you have with you?" They would not believe that I did not have any electronic equipment with me. One official even asks me why I did not have any! Did I land in Alice's Wonderland without noticing it? The gauntlet of taxi drivers is my next step into this new reality. Tumbling out of the airport doors, I find myself surrounded by what seems like thousands of men all dressed in dirty tan pants and shirts, all talking to me in a language that I cannot understand, pulling my baggage this way and that. Finally some understanding, negotiating a price (not knowing the correct amount) and falling into the back of a taxi that is a World War II reject. After many attempts, this 'vehicle' (I am being very generous) coughs itself into existence, and bucks itself out of the parking lot. There are two men in the front seat, talking to each other as fast as humanly possible, but no one is looking at the road. Swimming around in the back seat with springs sticking into me here and there, I find myself becoming very concerned about the way these gentlemen are guiding, or rather not guiding, the automobile. After a terrifying four hours, during which new heights of fear are explored and not conquered, the driver turns off the engine and announces that we are here.



A newcomer, at the crossroads...

Photo Bill

Where is 'here'? The Centre Guest House of course. Crawling out on hands and knees, fear oozing out of every pore, I manage to get to a standing position, when out of the darkness comes this beautiful lady. She smiles, and the meaning of life returns. She asks, in English with a slight Dutch accent, "Do you have a reservation?" "A what?", says I.

With a wave of her hand, and already turning away she says, "Sorry, we are full!" "But lady", I say, "You do not understand, you see..." She stops me dead with a look and says that she understands all too well. Then she inquires whether I have eaten or not. With my most humble voice I say, "I haven't eaten all day." She comes back (the voice worked) and helps me remove the taxi drivers off my back for they want more money than we agreed upon in the begin-

ning. I thank her profusely, and receive another look that clearly tells me not to get carried away. As I stumble with my baggage into the kitchen area, this lovely angel is pulling food from the refrigerator. There follows a dinner of rice and dhal with some vegetable that I cannot identify, but which tastes great. Then the angel explains that all the rooms and beds are taken but I can sleep on a mat on the floor in the kitchen. She will provide me with a cover and she will see what she can do with me in the morning. I had imagined a different type of welcome, at least some cheering. (Is it a welcome or is it a rejection?) With that thought, ants and mosquitoes biting my body, concrete jabbing my hip bone, I start to drift off to sleep. My first night in Auroville, the City of Dawn.

THERE she is. Where?

At the crossroads between No Way and Center Guest-house, coming from a Past Way. She looks lost, and puzzled. Where to go? A Newcomer has arrived...

This month's single sheet issue of AUROVILLE TODAY deals with newcomers. It gives some insight into that strange experience all Aurovilians once had: that of entering a new life. It concentrates on the present material position of the newcomer in Auroville and indicates how to get here, how to start living here, what is asked and what is offered.

This issue also touches upon a challenge that Auroville is being increasingly confronted with: how to ensure the genuine and harmonious integration into Auroville of those people from the surrounding villages who want to participate in the experiment.

## JOINING AUROVILLE: PRACTICAL STEPS.

### BEFORE COMING TO AUROVILLE

All those who intend to come and live in Auroville are advised to make a preliminary visit first, before making any commitment and before giving up everything at home.

### THE FIRST YEAR IN AUROVILLE

#### ■ Three-month guest period

As a general rule, everyone new to Auroville is considered a guest for the first three months. During this period one can stay in a guest-house in one of the Auroville communities. As a guest one has the time and the opportunity to look around and to find out if one really wants to stay, and if so, to decide where one would like to live in Auroville.

If you, after your three month period, decide to stay in Auroville, you will be introduced to the Entry Group. If there are no objections you will be accepted as a newcomer. For all non-Indians this implies that the Entry Group will make a recommendation to the Government of India to grant you a residential permit (see below).

#### ■ Nine-month newcomer period

After the three-month guest period there follows a nine-month newcomer period. During this period you are expected to

settle in one of Auroville's existing communities, and to take up a regular work in the community. Participating in work for the community is the best way to integrate yourself into the community, and to meet people. At the end of this nine-month probationary period, the Entry Group will make a final recommendation regarding whether you should be accepted as a member of the Auroville community.

### ABOUT EXPENSES

■ Guest-house fees vary from Rs 60 to Rs 200 per day per person, depending on the facilities of the guesthouse. Most guest-house fees are inclusive of food and laundry service.

#### ■ Newcomer contribution.

During the nine-month newcomer period you will be requested to contribute to the community Rs 1,000 per month per adult person (total Rs 9,000) and Rs 200 per child. From this amount, Rs 200 will go to Auroville's Central Fund (see Auroville Today no 16); the remaining amount is a contribution towards existing infrastructure, newcomer housing projects and administrative expenses. You will be requested to give this amount in advance at the beginning of the newcomer period, but it can also be given in instalments over the nine-month period.

(contd. on page 3)



(contd. from front page)

With an aching back and a constant buzz of insects in my ear, I emerge to greet the dawn, my first day in Auroville. Leaving my shoes behind, wanting to feel the Auroville earth between my toes, I decide to make a pilgrimage to the Matrimandir, half a kilometre away, before anyone awakes. Off I go with a song in my heart, only to return ten minutes later on the back of a bicycle with what seems like hundreds of thorns in my feet... Twenty minutes later I am able to walk, thanks to the angel from last night who takes action with a needle and some disinfectant. She tells me that I must go to the Visa Service at the Bharat Nivas to fill out an arrival form while she checks with the other guest houses for a vacancy. "I do not want a guest house", says I. "I came to Auroville to live and work here, not to be a guest."

She informs me in an all too calm voice that there are certain procedures that have to be followed, and for the first three months I will be a guest. Procedures, procedures, I just came from a land of procedures!

After arming me with a map and a poor imitation of a bicycle I am sent off. An hour and many inquiries later I finally arrive at the Visa Service where two nice ladies are sitting behind a desk. With large smiles they enquire how they could be of service. I tell them that I am there to fill out an arrival form. I show them my passport and fill in the form that they present to me. One of the ladies reads what I have written and asks, "How long will you be staying in Auroville?" With a voice a little bit louder than I had wished, I answer, "For the rest of my life. I have come to live here and to build the city of Auroville". With the smile more tight, but still there, speaking with the same excruciating calmness as the angel did, she explains to this not-too-bright person that to stay in Auroville one must enter India with an entry visa, and only an entry visa can be converted into a residential permit, and only then is one allowed to stay in Auroville. With a tourist visa one can stay in India for a maximum of six months. That is the procedure. There is that word again. Again a little too loud, I say, "tourist visa, entry visa, residential permit, what has all this got to do with me? All I want to do is to live and work here". "Did you contact the Auroville International Centre in your country, or did you communicate with Auroville before you rushed here?" "Did I what? Listen, why can you not understand? All I want to do is to stay and work here, here, here." I am pointing to the ground all the time. With the smile all but gone she tells me again about procedures. Totally deflated, I make my way back to the guest house, and collapse into a chair with sweat dripping from everywhere. The angel approaches me with a large bottle of water, informs me I should consume large amounts of liquids, but to be careful what I consume in order that I do not become sick. I am instructed to give her all of my valuables, so they do not land up in the village before night fall.

It has finally been arranged that I can spend my three-month guest period at the Forecomers guest house. My two suitcases, a bicycle that I purchased for too high a price and myself are all loaded into a bullock cart, for the four kilometre, two-hour trek, that gives a new definition to the word 'slow'. After arriving and getting settled, I have to learn everything anew, from where I brush my teeth to how I should wash my plate, how I should hang my mosquito net, and how to remove my shoes before entering a house. Those first three months are really something. Problems with my digestive system, insect bites, sunburns, cuts on hands and feet, working from sun up to sun down. The heat, the people, the working conditions, the food, the transportation, all these things I complain about every day.

Towards the end of the three months, I receive a note asking me to attend an Entry Group meeting. The ENTRY GROUP, the lions at the gate, anything but the Entry Group! It is at that very moment that I realize that I am happier than I have ever been in my entire life. It just does not make any sense at all. I came looking for paradise, went through hell, and I feel better about myself than I ever did.

A little nervous, with my hair slicked down, putting my best foot forward, I am off for my meeting with the Entry Group. What questions are they going to ask me? I will never make it. It begins... "Yes, thank you, I would like some lemon juice." "Yes, I would like to become a newcomer so that I may become an Aurovilian, because I want to live and work here." "No, I am not having any great problems. I had some when I first arrived but the people I work with and live with have been very helpful. I do have one problem and that is in my haste

to get here I obtained a tourist visa instead of the correct entry visa. I plan to return within one month and I would like permission now to build a temporary house at Forecomers." "Yes, I do like my work in the afforestation programme, and wish to continue there." "Yes, I can maintain myself for a while." "Yes, I can make the newcomer's contribution." "I thought you would never ask. I am here to become a better human being and to attempt to do the Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and The Divine Mother." On my way home I can only think what a nice group this Entry Group is, so friendly, so helpful, so sweet, so caring. I decide to stop by the Matrimandir to gather my thoughts and to express my gratitude to the Divine.

Two months later, I am back in Auroville, and in the middle of building my house. I cannot imagine how anyone wants to live in this place. Masons, carpenters, workers.

The rains are coming. How will I ever get my roof on when it seems that all of Tamil Nadu is either getting married or dying? The holes for the trees are behind schedule and there is not enough compost. The pump is broken and we are hauling water to keep ourselves and the seedlings alive. This is madness, this is insane, no one should have to go through this. But I love it.

Nine months already, it's hard to believe. The Entry Group would like to see me again. Now it is about to happen, I am about to become an Aurovilian. I am more secure within myself, I have grown a lot in this last year. I have learnt so much, basic practical things, and I know that I am standing at the beginning of a long, long road. It is so good to be alive and to be in Auroville.

Francis, the writer of this story, is a long-term Aurovilian and a member of the Entry Group.

## "It Was Like Coming Home"

Nollie, a 54 year old Hatha Yoga teacher from Holland, talks about her first year in Auroville.

"I first came into contact with Auroville by meeting Ilse in Amsterdam. She is one of the co-founders of Auroville International Holland. She showed me some videos about Auroville that I found interesting but didn't really catch hold of me at that time. She advised me to take Hatha Yoga lessons to deal with my ailing back. And very soon I found myself doing the Iyengar yoga and gradually I became a teacher.

This process changed my life drastically. Ten years later I got a chance to go to an intensive Yoga training in Puna, India. I remembered Auroville and decided to visit. I contacted Ilse again and she showed me the latest Auroville videos, and this time it was like being hit by a bomb! From the moment I saw the videos I was already—in my mind—selecting from my household what could be of use here. I first came for two weeks, then for three months to see if I should stay in Auroville. When I came to Auroville it was like coming home.

It was not an easy time in the beginning. The container with my household goods which I had sent from Holland arrived empty. Also, as a guest you are left to sink or swim, but if you have some initiative you can manage. Aurovilians are very closed towards guests and appear almost arrogant, but if they notice that you are really interested, then the wall comes down and they help you and become more friendly.

But you have to let them know you need help. You have to first try it yourself and if it doesn't work, you ask and then everyone helps.

Now I see myself that sometimes it is very exhausting to answer all the strange questions you get from certain guests, but still I think one should make an effort.



Photo: Bill

I did not know much about Mother and Sri Aurobindo. I never read much. I am more a practical person who reacts spontaneously. Here I feel very strongly in touch with something and it gives me a feeling of certitude, something I never experienced before.

Here I don't need to conform to social standards. I can be myself.

When I was here before, I met Paulo. He is building a dance studio and he immediately agreed when I proposed building an extra hall within it for yoga classes. We decided that I would be the caretaker of the building, and so I started immediately designing my house together with an Auroville builder and it is being built by his construction team. I started giving Yoga classes right away and that brought a lot of contacts with people which is very helpful. For the moment I am staying in a newcomers' house. There is one room, no kitchen and the bathroom is outside (and you have to really lock your house because you easily get things stolen). I eat in the collective kitchen with eight others. This

forces me to live with other people, something I am not used to, and that is good as I have always been living on my own. However, you have to accept that, as a newcomer, it is quite hard to change or bring something new into a long-established community with stabilized routines. It takes quite a lot of talking to get permission to change the house or the garden. That blocks my creative initiative, which had free expression for many years.

Living together is a good exercise, but I look forward to being in my own house.

In the beginning, while working on the Matrimandir, I had some difficulties because I was doing things that were too easy for me and were not a challenge. Just cleaning the floor was not enough. But I talked about it and now I am cutting the marble, and I love it. In my youth I wanted to take up technical studies and jobs but I was not allowed to do so because I was a woman. And I am so happy I can do it here."

Interview by Sonja

### Pact

Today I have made my pact with thee  
Supreme Fire  
Burn in me  
Ever more  
May my support to thee be complete.

Today I have made my pact with thee  
Yoga of sincerity  
Flower in me  
Ever more  
May my love for thee be complete.

Today at last, I have joined my life  
with thee,  
Mother's dream,  
White-flamed Auroville,  
City of sky-reaching ideals  
And... Eternity's ambition.  
Realise in me  
Ever more  
May my dedication to thee be complete.

A newcomer, after his first  
meeting with the Entry Group,  
26.4.90

### ◆ ◆ ◆ To Receive Auroville Today ◆ ◆ ◆

The contribution for the next 12 issues of Auroville Today is for Auroville Rs. 94, for India Rs. 100\*, for other countries: Rs. 350, Can.\$ 27, French F. 145, DM 45, It.Lira 31,500, D.Gl. 50, US \$ 22.50, U.K.£ 13.50. 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%) or to the Auroville Today Office, Auroville, Kottakuppam 605104. Cheques should be made payable to Auroville Fund, specifying: Contribution for Auroville Today. You will receive the issues directly from Auroville.

\*cash, bank draft or money order only

Addresses of Auroville International centres:

AVI Brasil. Caixa Postal 96, 45660 Ilheus-Ba, Brazil. AVI Deutschland, Bismarckstrasse 121, 4900 Herford, West Germany. AVI España, Apartado de Correos 36, 31.610 Villava, Navarra, Spain. AVI France c/o Marie-Noëlle, 14, Rue Nungesser et Coli, 75016 Paris, France. AVI Nederland, Marco Polstraat 287/3, 1056 DN Amsterdam, The Netherlands. AVI Quebec, Boîte Postale 2236, Succursale Delorimier, Montreal, Quebec H2H 2R8, Canada. AVI Sverige, Borgholm, Broddebö, S-59700 Atvidaberg, Sweden. AVI U.K., Boytons, Hempstead, Essex CB10 2PW, United Kingdom. AVI USA, P.O.Box 162489, Sacramento CA 95816, USA.



# "Entry into Auroville should be the same for everyone"

## An interview with members of the 'Co-Entry' Group

Sixty-three Tamil people from the neighbouring villages are waiting to join Auroville. For many of them this means breaking away from traditional village life.

What motivates them to want to become Aurovilian and what is the role of the special 'Co-Entry' Group? These were some of the questions AUROVILLE TODAY asked Ponnusamy and Meenakshi, members of the Co-Entry Group.

**P**onnusamy, a 28 year old Aurovilian who joined Auroville in 1974, has been in the Entry Group (the group that supervises entry into Auroville) for three years. He explains:

"Meenakshi and I joined the Entry Group mainly to deal with village people. There used to be one or two of them a year. Then suddenly the number of villagers wanting to join increased. We decided to have a separate Entry Group, a 'Co-Entry Group', dealing with Auroville villagers only. The idea is that once a case is clear, we present the file to the main Entry Group and then the normal entry process would start.

The first thing we tell the people is that they should have a proper job, like working in a unit, and get maintenance; they should have a permanent house, and not a temporary hut which after a few years they cannot financially maintain, as there are always other demands on their money; and they should have a contact person in the community or their working place.

At present none of these 63 people completely fulfil these requirements as Auroville cannot provide them with jobs, nor with houses. The Co-Entry Group is

not able to handle all that, and we have referred the problem to the Auroville Council."

### Why do they want to join Auroville?

**Ponnusamy:** In some cases it is clear. They have been working here for a long time and they want to join, and also the Aurovilians supporting them are quite keen. They think they can do a better job and get better facilities as an Aurovilian. But in some cases we feel they want to escape from life in the village. They see Tamil Aurovilians like us, who are from the same background and the same villages; they see that we look after some areas and have responsibilities, and they think that they can do the same. It is not from a deep aspiration. It is difficult to know whether they come for a deep spiritual life. I also came just like that. I was working here and I felt I wanted to stay here. I didn't even know why.

Then there are the students. They think they'll get more chance to study in Auroville, that they will have a better education. They want to learn more and they think Westerners will train them better than the specialized schools which are often distant and expensive. They are also attracted by the sports facilities and the summer-holiday camps. You can't imagine doing these things when you're in the village.

They don't think about the fact that we don't give school certificates, which they would need if they would go back to the village. But these kids who join Auroville never think of going back. In some cases the parents don't want their children to go to Auroville, because they think that they will get spoiled, that they just waste their time and don't get a conventional education. The parents get worried, because who

is going to look after them when they get old?

There is also a category who come because they think they can get a good house, a motorcycle, free clothing. Lastly, there are the people who join us through marriage. When a Tamil Aurovilian marries a girl from outside, his wife automatically becomes Aurovilian. Sometimes, what happens is this. He promises to maintain her for the first year. After one month she starts working at Matrimandir. A few months later he says he cannot manage anymore and then they want to claim full maintenance.

We have to find ways to integrate and help these people. At the moment we tell them to be patient and to wait.

**Meenakshi:** Once a villager joins Auroville, he cannot return to the village. He would be considered someone from a new caste, almost an outcaste. For example his living and eating habits change through his living in Auroville. Also the children brought up here can't go back to village life. Instead of rice and *ragi*, they eat bread and butter. They attend schools without getting school certificates and they cycle freely. In the village a woman cannot cycle in front of an elder. I think that for a Westerner it is easier to come here and try it out. He or she can always go back and pick up the 'old' life again. For local people it is once and for all. So, once villagers decide to join, we give them more time to think. We try to discourage them from joining for the wrong reasons by saying that maybe one day we will have a different economy—there may be no money transactions, and Aurovilians will only get basic maintenance.

If after understanding all the consequences, laid before them they still want to join, then you can say there is some kind of commitment.

However, customs change slowly. Many, even after joining Auroville, don't give up their religion. They still worship Ayyappa. They keep their social customs and marry the way they want, complete with dowry. And most of the Tamil girls who have grown up in Auroville have their marriages arranged by their parents and leave Auroville.

**How many of the people from the village who have become Aurovilians participate in the general decision making process?**

**Meenakshi:** Only very few, those like Ponnusamy, who were brought up here and stayed here for many years, and who went to our schools. It is a long process.

**Do you see possibilities of guiding these people into Auroville?**

**Ponnusamy:** We have to find ways to integrate and help them. Guidance, education and contact people would help. Right now there is an evening school for boys and girls in Ilaingalkal (see previous issue), and there is an evening school for girls in Aspiration. Sports events and cultural activities and a Tamil newsletter try to create a bond. But better housing facilities and education in the villages themselves would prevent some people from wanting to join Auroville.

**Meenakshi:** I would like to see meeting places where villagers can come and talk to Aurovilians. I proposed to the Council to have Auroville centres in all the neighbouring villages, with beautiful buildings where people can come for information on Auroville, so that we could begin to link with the villagers at a higher level. This is one of my dreams!

**Ponnusamy:** I feel we should not have a separate Co-Entry Group. The entry procedure into Auroville should be the same for everybody.

Interview by Tineke

## Joining Auroville: Practical Steps (contd. from page 1)

### Food, maintenance

In principle all newcomers are expected to be able to support themselves during their first year in Auroville. In some cases it will be possible to take up work in an Auroville unit and to receive a maintenance.

The cost of living will vary depending on your needs and life-style, but you should allow a minimum of approximately Rs 2,000 per month per person.

### Other initial expenses

A bicycle costs around Rs 1,000, a moped Rs 8,000, a motorbike Rs 20,000, bedding and furniture anything from Rs 2,000 up.

### HOUSING

There is a housing shortage in Auroville and it can be difficult for newcomers, particularly for those with families, to find a place to stay. It is advisable to reserve a place in an Auroville guesthouse well in advance of coming, particularly if you intend to come during the peak guest season of January, February and March.

You should be prepared for the eventuality of having to build a temporary or permanent structure during the first year. There are architects and building teams to help you, but it will need a lot of personal

**We advise every newcomer to make major investments only in consultation with the Entry Group. This might prevent misunderstandings and resulting frustrations.**

## VISAS AND RESIDENTIAL PERMITS.

In order to come and live in Auroville all non-Indians have to enter India on an ENTRY VISA, valid for three months, to be obtained from the Indian Embassy in one's home country.

You should normally be able to obtain this visa if you provide the Indian Embassy with a letter of recommendation. This letter can be obtained either from the Auroville Visa Service, Bharat Nivas, Auroville, Kottakuppam 605104 or, in some cases, from the Auroville International centre in your country. (For addresses see the subscription box elsewhere in this issue.) The Auroville International centre and the Auroville Visa Service can also send you information about the possibilities of bringing your personal possessions into India.

As this entry visa is granted for your stay in Auroville, you should be in Auroville within two weeks of arrival in India and fill in an arrival report at the Visa Service within 48 hours of reaching Auroville.

**DO NOT COME ON A TOURIST VISA IF YOU INTEND TO STAY.** On the basis of a tourist visa a residential permit cannot be granted; it will allow you to stay in India for a period of 6 months only.

If you experience any problems obtaining your entry visa, please contact the Auroville International centre in your country or the Auroville Visa Service immediately.

The Government of India will, on the basis of your entry visa and with the recommendation of the Entry Group, grant you a residential permit. It will be given to you on the condition that you are an honorary voluntary worker for Auroville, and are residing in Auroville.

Those above 18 years are requested to produce an AIDS-test certificate from an organization recognized by the WHO (World Health Organization), issued within one month before arrival. This certificate can also be obtained in the local hospital once you are here.

input.

For building you will have to ask permission from the Housing and Land Service group, and they will also give indications of the places in Auroville where it is possible to build.

The costs of building a one-person 'capsule' (temporary structure with a palm-leaf roof) is approximately Rs 10,000. Costs of sanitary and kitchen facilities may have to be added to this.

To build a permanent structure costs anything from Rs 1,500 per square metre upwards, depending on building materials and the quality of finishing desired.

### OWNERSHIP

In accordance with the first paragraph of Auroville's Charter, nobody in Auroville can claim ownership of houses and infrastructure created on Auroville land. Before permission to build is given, you will

## Useful things to bring with you...

*More and more high quality goods are available in India. However, the following are either not yet available or not of good quality.*

- Lightweight plastic raincoat (with sealed seams)
- Halogen torch (N.B.: square batteries are not available)
- Precision tools
- Nail clippers, scissors
- Herbal teas
- Garden/work gloves
- Easy-pump cycle valves
- Lightweight rucksack
- Stretch-band with hooks (to fasten loads)
- Penknife
- Swimwear
- Sleeping bag
- Rechargeable batteries + battery charger
- Potato peeler, kitchen knives
- Waterproof watch/camera etc. (the climate is humid!)

be asked to sign a statement saying that you agree with this. You have the right to use the assets created by you, but not to sell them when you leave. The community reserves the right to decide who can use your house if you have vacated it. □

**The International Cultural Township of Auroville is situated in India, and consequently everybody has to abide by the rules and regulations of India.**



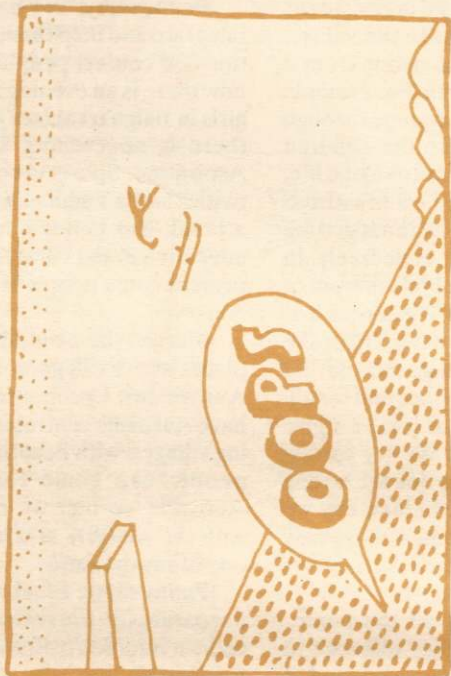
# AUROVILLE TODAY

BY AIRMAIL  
BOOKPOST

Rs.10

Auroville  
Kottakuppam 605104 - Tamil Nadu - India

Address Correction Requested



In this issue: Joining Auroville.

July 1990 - Number Nineteen



28.2.68.

Greetings from Auroville  
to all men of good will.  
Are invited to Auroville all  
those who thirst for progress  
and aspire to a higher  
and truer life.

Greetings from Auroville to all men of good will.  
Are invited to Auroville all those who thirst for progress and aspire to a higher and truer life.

## AMRITA

*Amrita, a young woman of Moroccan nationality, studied architecture in Paris. She came to Auroville for six months to see if this was the city she dreamt of as an 8-year old girl. She works at Matrimandir and at CSR.*

*Amrita, why have you come here?*

I cannot exactly explain. My decision to come here was both conscious and unconscious. I did not know anything of Sri Aurobindo and Mother, I knew hardly anything of Auroville. Actually, the answer is completely irrational: I have come because I could not do anything else but come. I woke up one morning and wrote to Auroville to know if they were in need of architects. I did not think more about it at that time. It was something like a distant dream, and the next thing was that I made the step and came.

*What did you imagine Auroville to be like, when you were still in Paris?*

I actually did not want to have any ideas, to imagine Auroville. But of course from time to time images did come up of what it might be. When I met the reality, I did not have any surprises or deceptions. It was what it was, and I never experienced a 'shock'. With the Aurovilians it was the same thing. I did not have any illusions. I did not think I was going to a paradise, and I did not expect to meet purely nice people either. You have here the complete

spectrum of society. You find the same difficulties here, even stronger, and the difficulties are augmented because we are all in the same place and there is no escape. Here you have to go through your difficulties and problems, and you have to start to overcome your personal problems which are related to your psychological structure.

I do not believe that the spirituality here is stronger than outside of Auroville. The spirituality is in each of us, and it is up to us to live it, to develop it, to carry it, and to radiate it afterwards. But what is extraordinary is that we are all here together at this moment in a little part of the world, that is far away for all of us—with the exception, of course, of the Tamil Aurovilians. We have all come here from different cultures, from different backgrounds, and it is that which is so incredible... to discover that it has absolutely no reality to say that you are French or Moroccan or German or Indian or Japanese or Jew or Christian or Muslim or Hindu. We are all here together to go to the same goal.

Though I am conscious of my origins, they do not have any importance for me. Already when I was 7 or 8 years old, I dreamt of a place like Auroville. I said to my mother that I wanted to live in a place where there are no nationalities, no religions, that I wanted the entire earth to be like that. I never understood the 'borders', the 'nationalities'. I have, as a Moroccan, suffered much in France because of the need for 'official' documents. It seems to me to be such an unimaginable thing, as we approach the 21st century, that we are still on that level, to have to say that you are from 'here' or from 'there', and to



"I do not believe that the spirituality here is stronger than outside Auroville. But what is extraordinary is that we are all here together at this moment..."

have rights attached to that. Auroville is wonderful for that... We are terrestrials. And that implies starting to develop a consciousness of the earth in its totality.

*You experience Auroville as part of your way, which also includes the teachings of your Sufi master. You have an Islamic background. What does all this mean for you?*

It means that everything is together, and that things are not limited in little boxes. If you are searching for truth, ultimately the goal is the same, though the ways may be different. Even those who are following Sri Aurobindo and Mother will interpret, according to their nature, what Sri Aurobindo and Mother have said and live according to it.

For me there is no contradiction between having a Sufi master and coming here and having a connection with Mother and Sri Aurobindo—for I believe I have a relation with them, and I think this is why I am here.

*You once said that you find the Aurovilians rather sectarian.*

Yes, but I do not want to generalize. Sometimes I felt with some Aurovilians that they put Sri Aurobindo and Mother as, how to say it, the only 'masters' who have thought about this and that thing. As if the other masters, gurus, rishis, anonymous seekers or whatever name you want to give them, do not exist at all. I find that regrettable, as by doing this, they fall into the 'isms', into the old ways of religion, that say, "There is only this and the rest is false". I believe that the teaching of Sri Aurobindo and Mother is extraordinary, and they would be the first to persuade us that it does not do to denigrate all the rest in order to emphasize the value of their own teaching. And it is also a question of vocabulary, of language and of communication. The fact that others have not expressed it in the same way does not imply that they have not done identical things.

*You are leaving. Will you come back?*

Yes, there are a number of things I have to do in France and Morocco, but I will come back, as I have something to do in Auroville. It has been a chance to be here, I feel it like a grace, and I thank Mother from the depth of my heart, for I have that deep sense that it is thanks to her that I am here. In a sense, everything I experience here is full of meaning, the 'good' as well as the 'bad' happenings, and I wish Auroville to continue, as truly the Earth needs a place like this.

Interview by Carel

AUROVILLE TODAY tries to appear monthly and is distributed to Aurovilians and friends of Auroville in India and abroad.

Editorial team: Tineke, Sonja, Roger, Carel, Bill, Annemarie, Alan (Sven and Yanne are out of station.) Design: Franz. Desk-top Publishing: Annemarie. Printed at Auroville Press.