

AUROVILLE TODAY

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So much happens around and over food. In India, where its preparation has been raised to something of an art form, women often spend many hours preparing, cooking and presenting food. So how is it in Auroville? Are we replicating food patterns from elsewhere or are we evolving something different? How conscious are we of the need to secure our own food supply? What role should our prime food purchasing and distribution centre, 'Pour Tous', be playing? And what is it like to eat out in Auroville?

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The world is facing a food crisis. A combination of exploding population, soil erosion, climate change, war, and a global economic order that views food as a commodity means that, after all the promises held out by the Green Revolution, about a third of the world's population is not getting enough of the right food—and this percentage is rising. We are living closer to the edge than ever before: Lester Brown of the Worldwatch Institute warned last year that the world's grain stocks were at their lowest ever, and this at a time when massive harvest shortfalls were predicted in China.

At first sight, the Auroville bioregion does not seem to reflect this trend. Compared with the situation twenty-five years ago, the local villagers appear to be much more prosperous and well-fed. Yet the seeds of the global food problem are here also. They can be seen, for example, in the way that the local farmers have shifted from producing food for themselves and their families to producing food for consumption elsewhere—the so-called "cash crop syndrome" which involves risky monoculture, the heavy use of pesticides and artificial fertilizers, the destruction of the natural fertility of the soil, and the substitution of low-nutrition processed foods bought from shops for the healthy indigenous food they grew in the past. It's a short-term prosperity, bought at the cost of the long-term health of the local population and the environment.

In a world with an uncertain and, increasingly, "tainted" food future, it's essential that Auroville and its bioregion attempt



Vegetable counter at the Pour Tous store

FOOD

Food security for Auroville: why is it so important?

to be as self-sufficient as possible in food production. Moreover, if Auroville is really to be "the city the earth needs" it has to provide an example of how a city can contribute to the restoration of its environment, living responsibly and lightly off its land. For, typically, cities tend not only to destroy their immediate environment, but also to pauperise the surrounding bioregion by attracting all the best and brightest energies off the land with their promise of better wages and opportunities.

How has Auroville done in reversing these global trends? In one sense, it's already unique in being a city project which began by restoring the land. In another, however, Auroville reflects rather than challenges global patterns. As one of our farmers put it in a recent seminar on Auroville's agriculture,

"At the moment what we have in Auroville is not agriculture but rather small-scale agribusiness. That is, food is not grown

to feed people but rather to make money... Auroville has no food policy. Auroville's farms are products of haphazard development that has been funded by the personal resources of the farmers, money generated by the sales of produce, donations from outside, and occasional investments by the township. Consequently, in comparison to the need for food in the township, Auroville's agriculture is severely underdeveloped".

A survey made some years ago revealed that Auroville farms were producing no more than 2% of the community's grain and pulse requirements; recently, Otto pointed out that 95% of the vegetables available in Pour Tous' food store are grown outside Auroville. What are the immediate implications of having to depend upon outside sources for much of our food? Firstly, the supply is always at the mercy of market forces, transport strikes etc. Secondly, many of the vegetables and fruits have been

sprayed with toxic pesticides. Thirdly, we are helping support a system in which many village farmers are exploited by middlemen and are not paid a fair rate for what they produce, leading to the further impoverishment of themselves and the land. Fourthly, as some food products travel hundreds if not thousands of miles to reach our shelves, we are contributing to the energy wastage and pollution associated with long-range transport.

Sri Aurobindo remarked that, for a spiritual commune, "agriculture is the mainstay. The community must try to stand on its own feet for food", and Mother stressed that Auroville should seek self-sufficiency in food.

Why, after 29 years and Mother's clear indications, is Auroville so far from being self-sufficient in food? There seem to be no lack of reasons: not enough good agricultural land, not enough Aurovilians involved in farming, insufficient water in some areas, the difficulty of growing certain foods, lack of adequate storage and processing facilities, an emphasis upon food research and experimentation rather than upon production, lack of support from the community regarding investment and willingness to change "consumeristic" food habits, the difficulty of obtaining skilled and committed labour due to the low status accorded land workers etc. etc. But the larger, underlying problem seems to be a general lack of consciousness not so much of the importance of self-sufficiency in food—a recent survey revealed that a majority of the community favoured food security—but of the implications of pursuing such a strategy. To take

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but one example: it is estimated that it takes between one tenth and two acres of land, depending upon the diet, to feed one person in India. Taking a median figure of one acre (which, admittedly, is probably on the high side) Auroville with its present population should be devoting half of its total land holdings to agriculture if it wishes to be self-sufficient. The other option, of course, is to work with the local village farmers, encouraging them to once more grow organic food for local consumption by guaranteeing prices and a market. This should happen anyway—the health of Auroville cannot be separated from the health of the bioregion—but it's worth remembering that these farms should also be feeding the local population (about 15,000 people and expanding rapidly), and, in a time of food shortages, the local farmers might be tempted to sell on the open market to the highest bidder.

Whatever the strategy Auroville decides to pursue for food security certain things are clear. Firstly, we need information. How many people do we want to feed? How will we farm? Where shall we farm? How much land do we need? What infrastructure? What will it all cost? Secondly, on the basis of replies to such questions the Farm Group must take the lead in working out, in consultation with outside experts if necessary, a coherent food policy for Auroville as a

One of the most powerful messages that Auroville can send to others is that it values the health of the land and self-sufficiency in food so highly that it is willing to devote a considerable portion of its energy and resources to making this possible.

tool for planning future agricultural developments. Thirdly, it won't be cheap! Even if Auroville chooses to work partly with the village farmers on food production, we will have to acquire much more prime agricultural land (perhaps some distance outside the community) if we are to feed a population of 5,000, let alone 50,000, and we will have to invest much more heavily in the Auroville land already devoted to agriculture and in related infrastructure if we are to make the most of its potential. It's worth remembering, however, that the advantages of having a secure and healthy food base are incalculable (and that, the world over, agriculture is heavily subsidised because of the high overheads and risks involved).

Finally, and perhaps crucially, food security for Auroville is dependent upon a consciousness shift. Many of the great cities of the past foundered because they finally destroyed their physical base—water and the fertility of the surrounding land. It's as if, at a certain stage of what we term civil-

isation, people lose their contact with the stream of life and begin engaging in activities which are life-destructive. Auroville began with the land, with land work and a land consciousness. Yet as Aurovilians have moved into "pukka" houses and taken up other kinds of work, the link with the land (and, through that, an intuitive knowledge of our life support systems) appears to have weakened, allowing us to become, in certain ways, consumers rather than conservators. If Auroville is not to destroy its base, the land and the local people who live upon it must become an extension of ourselves, one body, and our values and behaviour must reflect this. In this sense, one of the most powerful messages that Auroville can send to others is that it values the health of the land and self-sufficiency in food so highly that it is willing to devote a considerable portion of its energy and resources to making this possible. And this means, among other things, that good farmland is not used for residential or industrial purposes, that

purchase of additional agricultural land is made a priority, that far more Aurovilians take up land or land-related work, that we attempt to change the present low status accorded land work by the local people by offering them much better wages and conditions, that Auroville farmers are compensated for the true costs of growing healthy food, that housing settlements in Auroville should become "food production friendly" in the sense that space is allocated for small-scale food production, and that we think twice before buying food in the Pour Tous stall which is grown far away or at the cost of social or environmental exploitation.

As Brooks Anderson, on behalf of the Auroville Farm Group, concluded in the recent seminar on Auroville agriculture:

"The time that we have to develop Auroville's agriculture is limited, and it is running out. As the land around and within Auroville is developed for industry and housing, we lose our opportunity to secure our food source. What we are recommending, food security, is not merely an option, it is a survival strategy. If Aurovilians continue to refuse to take responsibility for producing their own food, the future of the entire experiment is jeopardised, and its significance is, we feel, substantially compromised. The Earth simply does not need another township of people who do not feed themselves responsibly."

Alan

"For All": a powerful statement

Twenty five years ago, on 14th March 1973, Mother wrote the names "For All/Pour Tous". Alan talks to CLARE about the setting up of this organisation, and to AURALEE about the present situation.

First, like many young people of the late sixties, I came to Auroville revolting against money, remembers Clare. 'One day, a couple of months after arriving, I picked up a dictionary of Mother's definitions and was very surprised to find her describing money as "the Divine's Power in the physical world, which is, unfortunately, mostly in the hands of the vital forces..." So it seemed logical to me that if Auroville was to be a Divine Dream, and if money is the physical power source to manifest that Dream, then some work had to be done to protect it against imperfect usage! My other concern at the time was that Aurovilians' energies were getting dispersed by their having to run around purchasing food and building materials in Pondicherry and Madras, leaving little time to concentrate upon the real work of building infrastructure and services. So I began thinking about creating a channel, an organisation, which would utilise money as consciously as possible while providing for the needs of the Aurovilians.

'Now, the nice thing about being in Auroville in the first five years was that, if you had an inspiration, you could ask Mother if it was the right thing to do. So, in March 1972, I wrote to Mother:

Since one day Auroville must function fluently for need and demand without the internal exchange of money, perhaps the time has come to create that proper channel. We could begin in a temporary building and see what needs develop first. If this is the work to do and money comes for this work, what should be the name of the bank account?

'When I went to see Shyam Sunder for Mother's reply he shook his head and said, "I never saw Mother so happy! She said, 'C'est ça! C'est Ça! Donnez-moi un papier et un stylo!' and wrote first *For All* and then, a little smaller, *Pour Tous*."

The original concept was that Pour Tous would one day respond to and serve all the needs of the Aurovilians. Clare also planned to offer supplies to the local workers partly in lieu of cash, so making them feel more part of the community. However, when the first building for the new project was ready and Shyam Sunder asked her to coordinate food distribution there, these other ideas were shelved because, 'We—Surbhi, Erumalai, Madhasudan, Dayalakshmi and myself—just didn't have the time for anything else. We were busy taking orders, shopping, filling the baskets, keeping accounts up to date and last but not least, cleaning, cleaning, cleaning! For we were stationed in cockroach heaven.

'Once a month I would collect the food maintenance money for the Aurovilians from the Auroville administration office in Pondicherry. The collective kitchens, work units and individuals would send in their orders, and every morning Madhasudan would come to my hut for the list and the money. Then he would bicycle to Pondy to do the shopping. The shopping would return on the bullock cart, and then the food baskets for the various communities would be prepared. Each community received a delivery three times a week. Erumalai looked after the daily balancing of the books. In those days things were hectic because our accounting system was changing all the time. And I wore a huge money belt which I put on in the morning and only took off at night, with different pockets for money, orders and an account book.'

In the early 1970's almost everyone ate in community kitchens. However, when

the first babies were born some couples started cooking at home, beginning a movement away from collective life which accelerated in the next two decades. Other changes also contributed to this. For example, when the Sri Aurobindo Society cut off funds to Auroville in the mid 1970's, food was suddenly short and the modest baskets did not suffice, causing people to return to buying food in Pondicherry.

Clare went back to the U.S. in 1975 and the original Pour Tous team broke up. But Pour Tous continued, and in the years ahead, first Alain and Christine, then Ann and then Otto, took up the considerable responsibility of coordinating its growing activities. Today it is managed by a small team which includes Auralee, Pratap and Sadrishya. 'We are in a transitional period,' says Auralee. 'Pour Tous has grown enormously since its beginnings—today we have a shop which stocks over one thousand

items, a snack bar and a gas refill service in addition to the food purchasing and community distribution service—but now the community needs to decide where it wants to go next. Because, while we may be offering more items than ever before in the stall, I'm aware that many of the people who shop here simply can't afford many of the more expensive items. There are other problems, too. For example, Pour Tous is a very difficult place to work, which is reflected in the fact that so few Aurovilians join the team. What makes it so hard is that in a place like this you're dealing with the lower vital, the

centre of lower impulses, and people come here with their vital hanging out, demanding, demanding. It really opened my eyes to an aspect of Auroville which has not yet been conquered. Another thing is that many of the village women have been employed here for ten years or more. They are marvellous because, in one sense, they have kept the place going during the changes of management. However, I've also noticed it is very difficult for them to change old habits. If I show them, for example, a way of keep-



Pour Tous initiators: Clare (left) and Surbhi

ing the place more clean, they will do it while I'm there, but as soon as I've gone they'll revert to the old pattern.

'Yet another major problem is that of theft. We don't know the exact figures, but the losses are substantial.'

How to change all of this? Auralee and the rest of the team are convinced that moving Pour Tous to the proposed new site behind the Solar Kitchen could initiate a new era. 'When Martina moved her food processing unit to a new place,' recalls Auralee, 'it enabled her to set standards from the very beginning. Those workers

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Eat local, stay healthy

ANANDI was born in Tamil Nadu and joined Auroville in 1991. Today she works with Sharanam in the Kottakarai Organic Food Processing Unit (KOPFU), promoting the use of local grains and vegetables.

'I first came into contact with Mother in February, 1973. I was living with my family in Pondicherry, having just completed my degree in Home Science, when one day my neighbour asked me if I'd like to go with him to something which he said I would enjoy. I didn't know what it was all about, but I agreed. We went to the Ashram where, after ten minutes, Mother appeared and gave her balcony darshan (it was actually her last). It was so powerful—she just kept looking at us very beautifully—that afterwards I don't remember anything. But she gave a seed message to me that day through her power.

'Then I left Pondicherry and only returned in 1978, which was Mother's centenary year. I took a job as a typist in the office of the Sri Aurobindo Society. One day I read a leaflet which struck me very strongly. Mother was talking about peace and said something like, "If you want it, call and it will come". The next day I went to the Samadhi for the first time and felt so filled with peace that afterwards I went every day.

'I stayed in Pondicherry for twelve years. During this time I helped start a business to produce high quality spice powder—the local spices were all adulterated. In 1991, however, I went through a period of great personal crisis. I challenged Mother to show her existence to me, and she did. It was as if I died and she resurrected me. The next morning I met an Aurovilian who I hadn't seen in five years. I told him I'd like to come to Auroville and he said, "Of course, there's a cycle in my storeroom for you. Come and pick it up!"

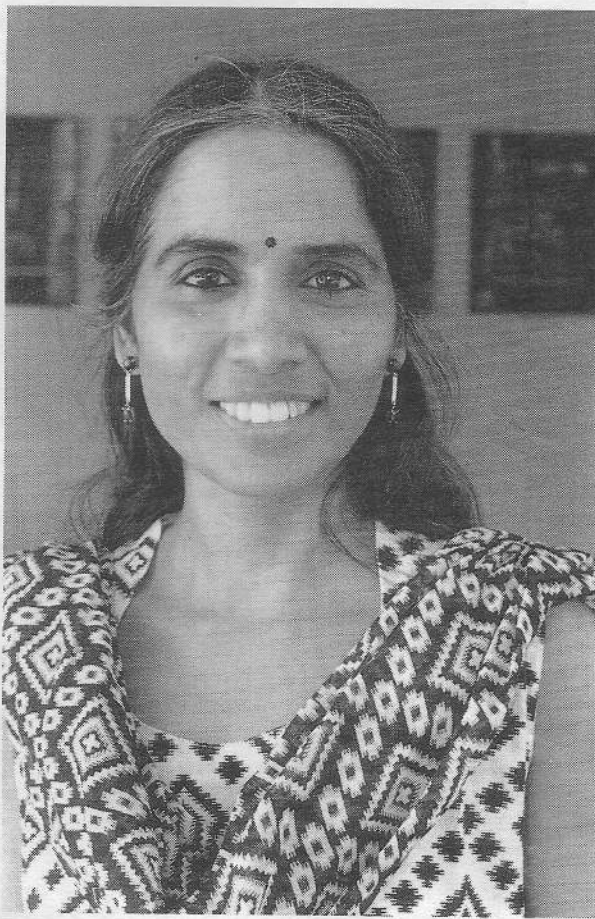
'Four days later I moved to Auroville and a few days later, after reading in Auroville Today that Otto needed help at Pour Tous, I began working there.

"For All"... (contd. from p.2)

who didn't want to change simply left. If we could change the way and the atmosphere in which people shop—by having more pleasant surroundings, for example, and providing a counter service which removes the "consumeristic" temptations of open shelves—we may also attract more Aurovilians to work there. Who knows? Perhaps one day we may only have Aurovilians working there...

Clare agrees that the move to the new Solar Kitchen could mark a new phase not only for Pour Tous but the community as a whole. 'It is a wonderful opportunity to revive the collective life in Auroville as well as expand the range of the Pour Tous service. For example, the old Pour Tous building in Kuilapalayam could function as a purchasing service and warehouse for educational and building materials.'

In fact, if its original inspiration and orientation could be revived, Pour Tous could play a key role in moving the community back to a more collective functioning and



ANANDI

'I worked there for two very happy years, and then Ursula asked me to teach body awareness and health to the village children in New Creation school. After some time I felt I wasn't progressing enough there—it was very difficult to make the children aware of the importance of such things—so I joined Sharanam at the Kottakarai Organic Food Processing Unit (KOPFU) where my main work is to promote the growing and eating of locally-grown vegetables and grains.

'My interest in food, nutrition and health goes back to my mother. She was very particular about cleanliness and about preparing food with the right consciousness. Our first task every morning was to purify ourselves, which meant taking a bath and cleaning in and around the house, but also lighting a lamp before the god and chanting purification sloka. Only then could we

consciousness. 'We don't want to keep putting our energies into what is basically just a big supermarket,' says Aralea. 'It's much more interesting to see if we can move towards something closer to the ideal. One idea is to have a kind of food prosperity where people order what they need but the money comes out of a collective account. Another initiative which may get off the ground soon is a kind of bartering system where people exchange services they can provide without any exchange of cash. This works very well in many communities in the West.' Clare mentions that the computerisation of Auroville also allows everybody to feed into a central computer information about the resources in their community. 'Then, for example, if somebody wants to borrow a wheelbarrow for two weeks, they can check through the data base and see if one is available. This not only prevents wastage of resources; it also promotes a spirit of sharing again.

"For All" is such a powerful statement. Are we ready to make it a reality?

begin preparing the food, for my mother told me that if we were emotionally disturbed when preparing the food, that disturbance would pass into the food and affect those who ate it.

'She knew a tremendous amount about the traditional ways of growing and preparing food. My father worked for the railways which meant that we moved quite a lot and frequently lived a long way from the nearest town. So my mother grew all the vegetables we needed—including 15 different types of spinach alone!—in our garden. She taught us that a healthy diet must include a balance of root and leafy vegetables and grains, and six different tastes—sweet, astringent, bitter, pungent, salty etc.—and that certain foods have very particular qualities. For example, root vegetables cleanse the intestines, cooked banana stem keeps the correct water balance in the body and cleanses the kidneys, the banana flower is a very rich source of iron, and onions and garlic remove toxins from the body. We were hardly ever sick, but if we had a cold she would treat it with turmeric from the kitchen, and

if we had a cut or skin infection she would apply neem paste—we never went to an allopathic doctor.

'Also, she never used preservatives like sugar if she wanted to preserve food. She would soak vegetables in thin salted buttermilk overnight, and then dry them in the sun the next day. After repeating this operation, she would put them in airtight containers where they would keep for months.

'When I went to work in Pour Tous I felt very sad that so few vegetables and local grains were available in the stall, for this meant that Westerners remained ignorant of the variety and abundance of our native food. At the same time, because some of the food provided there was not particularly healthy—like polished white rice—I felt that it was important to remind ourselves that one of the things we wish to do here in Auroville is to promote health. So, since joining Sharanam at KOPFU, this has been my main work: to promote local food for healthy living.

'One approach I've taken has been to talk to Village Action development workers and explain, for example, why a local millet like varragu is nutritionally far superior to polished white rice. They were very interested and immediately wanted some, which we supplied at a subsidised rate. This, in fact, is one of the problems with the local grains. Because if all the nutrition is to be retained, the grain must be pounded and prepared by hand, which is expensive compared to processing in a rice mill. Another problem we have to overcome is that the local people now look down upon local millets like varragu, samai and sorghum as 'poor man's food': they all want to be in the fashion and eat processed food, forgetting that the bowl of ragi porridge eaten by their fathers was so nutritious that it enabled them to work all day in the fields.

'Aurovilians also have some resistance to the local grains and vegetables, often because they don't know how to prepare them. So now I prepare part of a lunch twice a week for Auroville schoolchildren

and adults: this includes dishes like pancakes made from local millets. I'm also thinking of bringing out a recipe book for local foods.

'At KOPFU we are also preparing things like cold-pressed sesame and peanut oil and noodles enriched with spirulina and soya, as well as neem powder which is the beginning of a line of cosmetics: all these are available in Pour Tous. We also provide healthy snacks for the Youth Camp and employees of Maroma. We've told both Aurovilian and village farmers that if they grow local vegetables and grains organically we will make use of whatever they can supply.

'What I'm really looking forward to is the opening of the Solar Kitchen because then I think it will be much easier to provide Aurovilians with healthy, locally-grown food cooked in an attractive way. I think that all Aurovilians want good food because they are so conscious of health. Perhaps at first it will be difficult to break old food patterns, but if people are not rigid, if they are willing to begin with trying only a spoonful or two of this 'new' food (which, after all, was eaten for years by the early Aurovilians), they will enjoy it. In this way, I'm sure Auroville can reverse this global trend towards processed food and unhealthy eating.'

From an interview by Alan

WE ARE WHAT WE EAT

Selected items purchased by Pour Tous in February 1997

ITEM	RATE (Rs)	QUANTITY
(*=AV grown)		
Rice (basmati I)	46.00/kg	162 kg
Rice (various)	± 12.00/kg	4,810 kg
Rice*(various)	± 25.00/kg	6 kg
Fr beans	12.40/kg	284.20 kg
Wing beans*	12.30/kg	12.40 kg
Brinjals	10.30/kg	251.91 kg
Brinjals*	8.50/kg	92.80 kg
Cabbage	5.15/kg	599.63 kg
Capsicum	25.75/kg	299.95 kg
Capsicum*	30.50/kg	2.75 kg
Carrots	9.30/kg	2007.64 kg
Corn sweet*	3.60/kg	204.00 kg
Corn sweet	2.60/kg	4.00 kg
Cucumber	9.30/kg	724.05 kg
Cucumber*	7.90/kg	206.54 kg
Ginger fresh	15.50/kg	54.53 kg
Leeks (big)	2.60/piece	1004.00 pcs
Mint	1.10/bundle	212 bundles
Onions	6.00/kg	1603.09 kg
Potatoes	6.20/kg	2806.90 kg
Pumpkin	8.30/kg	157.15 kg
Pumpkin*	7.20/kg	98.76 kg
Spinach	1.60/bundle	412 bundles
Spinach*	2.25/bundle	21 bundles
Tomatoes	10.30/kg	2927.42 kg
Tomatoes*	12.30/kg	14.45 kg
Apples	4.10/piece	4599 pcs
Bananas grn	0.85/piece	10060 pcs
Bananas yell.	0.80/piece	15697 pcs
Bananas*	11.30/kg	96.25 kg
Coconut dry	4.50/piece	45 pcs
Coconut dry*	5.15/piece	334 pcs
Grapes	36.00/kg	251.65 kg
Lemons	0.70/piece	9995 pcs
Lemons*	18.50/kg	222.63 kg
Oranges	1.80/piece	2232 pcs
Papaya*	9.25/kg	698.74 kg
Tangerines	2.10/piece	7111 pcs
Eggs	1.55/piece	16251 pcs
Eggs*	2.05/piece	9417 pcs
Bacon	35.10/100 gms	54.00 pkts
Chicken legs	98.00/kg	68.12 kg
Chicken	74.00/kg	230.25 kg
Crab meat	53.00/tin	1 tin
Minced beef	19.40/500gms	528 pkts
Butter amul	49.00/500 gms	638 pkts
Butter*	28.00/200gms	308 pkts
Cheese lofabu*	210.00/kg	208.80 kg
Cheese seas'd*	230.00/kg	252.00 kg
Cheese yak	375.00/kg	42.05 kg

EATING OUT

For Jesse's final project before leaving for some months, we gave him the onerous task of eating his way round Auroville and reporting on the results.

New Creation Corner

A roadside cafe/restaurant best suited to afternoon snacks. Good for tea and coffee and last resort dosa. The dosa tends to be a bit rubbery and you always have to ask for more sambar but it's okay. Sometimes they make an excellent croque madame (hot sandwich) and sometimes they don't. The staff maintain an air of relaxed unhurriedness whilst providing an entertaining



Relaxing at New Creation Corner

soap opera of cafe politics. There's almost always a few-days-old copy of the *Hindu* or the *Indian Express* to read and thanks to the cafe's strategic roadside location you get to check out everyone's movements up and down the road between Ami and Kuilapalayam. They used to serve dinner but don't anymore and now operate only between the hours of 9:30 am and 5:30 pm.

Pour Tous Snack Bar

Ideal for lunch. Do your shopping at Pour Tous and then go for *dejeuner*. Elbow your way to the front of the crowd at the Snack Bar counter and find Padma, the queen of the cheese omelette bun, so charming one moment, only to be ferocious the next, or flustered but waiting to see how nice you'll be. There you can order, if you're lucky, good fresh chapathi, sambar and salad, a world-class cheese-omelette bun (invention of Auroville), or a plate of slightly-too-oily chips with ketchup and mayonnaise. If you're lucky. To order anything at the PTSB is to enter into a chaotic lottery where you hope your 'number' will be called next. There are winners and there are losers. And every new attempt at acquiring food requires delving once again into a seething throng of faces and voices all plaintively calling "Padma? Padma?"

Uphar

Auroville's answer to a chic restaurant. Super-friendly if sometimes charmingly absent-minded, the staff are a nice bunch. The salads are great and you always get a plate of bread. If you ask nicely, you'll even get butter. The main courses vary in quality depending on your time of arrival. Get there early, around 7:00 to 7:30, and you can rely upon being served a hot, tasty substantial meal. After that time, it's anyone's guess. As supplies of ingredients begin to dwindle, so do the size and quality of the meals. In some cases your order is completely vetoed by the owner of the place ordering the same thing for a few friends. There's a theory that the often most elusive and difficult to acquire part of the meal, the dessert, can be reserved on arrival. This is false. Although the staff will smilingly take your reservation, that's where it ends. I think it's a private joke

amongst them: "Ho ho, table five just reserved three lemon pies, that's a hoot. Lemon pie anyone?" The rest of the time, the food you want is the food you get.

Information Centre

This place has great cakes and a good variety too. Tea and coffee are normally good. Of the cakes, walnut and cheese are excellent, the apple pie is yummy and there's a sort of chocolate-topped biscuit also worth having. Dinners are served on Friday and Saturday nights and can be very good. Offering pizza or pie, the Friday-night menu rarely varies. There's the occasional lasagna but otherwise never enough choice to confuse even the most indecisive of diners. The staff are stoic heroes, coping each weekend day with crushing numbers of normally-sensible people who've taken leave of their senses as tourists. "Twelve teas," "Fifteen cakes," "Twenty samosas," and sometimes only two staff. Ask the question "How's it going?" and they'll throw their hands up in the air, breathe a deep sigh and look at the ground, shaking their heads.



Information Centre Cafeteria



Beach Cafe

Sunbliss Cafe

Open only on Sundays at Repos on the beach, the Sunbliss Cafe feeds the sunstruck and marinated Sunday beach crowd and is no sooner open than immediately stripped bare of beverages and food. Late arrivals can usually rely on a coconut and some peanut cake to keep them going. It's a nice scene by the beach with tables and chairs set outside. After a swim, you can sit and chat and sip your coconut but if you want coffee or tea you have to go elsewhere.



Padma, "queen of the cheese omelette bun" at the Pour Tous snack bar

Paul's Teashop

When Paul Blanchflower came out to India some years ago, his dream was to start a teashop like no other. "Other teashops, man, they're surrounded by walls, they're immobile they don't serve the needs of the people." That belief and a desire to build a teashop for the people and the future led Paul to Auroville where he created Paul's Teashop. Paul's Teashop, not a building but a concept that crosses time and space. Devotees gather at a sacred site in a Eucalyptus grove and only at that point in space at 5:00 pm Thursday does the Teashop materialise. Like a being from another world in a trancelike state, Paul makes tea and coffee and whatever you desire appear before your eyes. In return he asks for nothing. And as darkness falls and the light disappears, so does Paul.



Paul's Teashop

"The Proclamation of Truth is Fearless" *

SELECTIONS FROM THE AVNEWS

Leave-India Notices

The Working Committee regrets to inform the community that the Government of India has refused to rescind the Leave India notice issued to Gilles Pfeiffer. Gilles has been advised by the Foreigners Police, Pondicherry, to leave as soon as possible, and a date has been fixed of November 4th, 1996.

The Working Committee would like to state emphatically that, according to its knowledge, Gilles is not guilty of any of the allegations made against him.

As Aurovilians of foreign origin are not given any protection under the Foreigners Act nor under the Auroville Foundation Act, there is nothing any more the community can do to help Gilles remain in India. We will, however, endeavour to obtain the permission that he can return to India as soon as possible. (26.10.96)

Of Cats, Fish, and the Happiest Compilation of All

Three weeks ago, the fishermen in Repos made some kind of Miraculous catch. With the result that, from that day on, a huge stretch of the beach was entirely covered with sardines trying to get dry between showers. Quite an impressive sight. A friend of mine, coming back from a swim, told me laughing what he had just seen: my cat, attracted by the delicious (!) smell, had come out through the fence on to the beach; had looked, stunned, at those thousands of sardines lying there right under its nose...and had quickly run back home!!! Scared away by the enormity of the feast!!!

We had a good laugh. A few days later, I met that friend again. He was still laughing at the thought of that poor cat—until I remarked to him that we humans are just as ridiculous (more even, for we are supposedly more intelligent!): we have, at our full disposal, all the infinite riches and joy of our real, divine nature... and most of us just shy away from it!!! (Bhaga, 9.11.96)

Bonaventure

Everything about Bonaventure, his outfits, his words, his special and somewhat funny black stone [*applied on snake bites to extract the venom—eds*] and other works spoke of a small but sweet character of some outstanding historical times! A character who chose to incarnate himself in order to participate in the creation of Auroville! In other words, he carried with him in this material world a different air, a different spirit.

True, like most others, he too had seen troublesome times in Auroville, met with dejections and disappointments, but nothing stood in the way of his quiet goodwill towards Auroville. I still remember the superb ease and spontaneous serenity with which he explained to a large audience the points of his group during a seminar on the Dream in 1990...

All who came in touch with you will cherish fond and tender memories. (Aryadeep, 16.11.96)

Library flooded

Due to flooding the Library will be closed at least until Wednesday the 18th. That is to say if the rain has stopped during the weekend.

The idea that the library is an "asset" not being taken care of (according to a note

The past six months as reflected in the pages of the AVNews, Auroville's weekly internal newsheet, have not exactly been uplifting for the community. Quit Notices and responses to a tragic death have interspersed reports, sermons, recipes and gems or clunkers of home-spun philosophy. We salvaged the following...

on the door) is in flat contradiction with Lloyd getting soaked to the bone climbing the roof to clean it from leaves and digging trenches to redirect the water. Also inside the library precautions were taken on time so that the damage will be limited to the loss of a fifteen year old carpet. The Library Group. (7.12.96)

AVNews editors make a stand

We have been repeatedly requested by the Financial Service to reduce costs. The only feasible way to do this is to reduce the number of pages.

In the position of having to decide what goes in and what gets axed the Editors find themselves with the rejected Authors clustering round the office either ranting and foaming at the mouth, threatening the Wrath of God (or some sub-committee anyway) or else weeping about the absolute necessity—"for the future of mankind"—of publishing varagu recipes and news about kitten care. Now, what, you may ask, are the criteria for the painful decision? Sermons, by their nature distasteful and futile, go. Varagu recipes go. Letters which do nothing but extol the superior moral virtues of the author go. Full-page ads go. Fancy formatting goes. And so it goes.

Don't like it? Increase your contribution to the Financial Service. The Editor (7.12.96)

Christmas is coming

CAKE: "A mixture of flour, butter, eggs, sugar, etc., baked in oven; flattish, compact mass. (Little Oxford Dictionary)

Yes, it's that time again! All you bakers get out your best healthy or unhealthy cake recipes and whip them into competition shape for the annual Christmas Fair Cake Contest. Please contact me if you have any questions or to let me know that you will participate. Thanks! Chali. (7.12.96)

Holistic Healing!

The Healing mind of Man. Nutrition, herbs and Iridology. Workshop begins on Tuesday, Samasti, backdoor entrance under William's pyramid, 3.00 p.m. on time.

In Vino Veritas

Get a few New Age types, preferably named after herbs. Build a block of cubicles where total strangers can learn spirituality from each other. Serve food without salt. Organize courses on various spiritual themes such as sexuality and screaming. Charge outrageous prices for "guests".

This is a new way of generating money that can be used for having holidays in exotic locations. After all, it's a major growth industry in the West, and what more spiritual place than India to fleece troubled souls? In the process, Aurovilians also benefit—there are at least twenty who have been added to the AA List (Auroville Avatars, not Alcoholics Anonymous.)

A casual perusal of this rag will show how strong this trend has become in Auroville, and from it some themes spring

to mind. What about the Maggi 2-minute yoga noodle course? Or, fondle an elephant while blindfolded and let an expert interpret your thoughts? Or, study the importance of false speech in smooth art? Or, somatic blocks, emotional and breathing patterns while working with posture, movement, sound, colours and dreams for retired bikers?

Further themes will have to wait for more spiritual awareness among the community as a whole, because the presence of, say, a social worker can ruin hours of spiritual instruction. . . . (Rauf in "Roughspeak", 11.1.97)

Health Centre Compost

Dr. Lucas has approached the Development Group who have asked the Forest Group, who have in turn asked the Farm Group, for feedback on the proposal to relocate the village compost project to Auroville land. The group felt that this was a possibility, but would like to speak with Lucas about it more, as others were also interested in creating composting facilities for Auroville. (From: Farm Group monthly meeting report, 31, 12, 96)

Pour Tous: Take One

Did you know that Pour Tous presently stocks 24 different kinds of face soaps, 22 laundry soaps or powders, 21 kinds of noodles, 15 different items of toothpaste and 52 items of biscuits or sweets?

At the same time, Pour Tous is chronically very short of adequate shelf space, and products are often crowded together vying for shelf space, or placed in illogically out-of-the-way locations. Therefore, the Pour Tous team is proposing to cut a number of varieties from the shelves, particularly those which are less organic, less nutritious, less ecological, less popular and less accessible to all shoppers.

We propose that the following items be cut from our shelves and await your reactions for two weeks' time... (18.1.97)

Pour Tous Take Two

Dear Auralee,

I carefully read the note, but was unable to make out the difference between "items to be eliminated" and "items to be cut". Further looking at my own consumption and seeing that many of the items I frequently purchase had been cut, I have to conclude that you are eliminating items on ideological grounds and not just on commercial grounds... (Ulli, 25.1.97)

Found

Found at Matrimandir Office—a small leather pouch containing two pendulums and one other mysterious object. (25.1.97)

Natural History

For more than four years I have been living in Auroville and continuously using two bicycles which were presented to me by Dimitri from the Ashram.

There isn't a place for technology in my biologist's heart generally. But I received great joy from these cycles and named them Bucephal and Rosinante.

It's a pity that Alexander the Great and his army and Don Quixote and Sancho Panza hadn't such cycles. (Boris, 15.2.97)

Report on flood relief

Since the heavy rains in December, most villagers have managed to repair their houses which collapsed, and now they are ready to take up collectively the work of repairing common facilities. The washed-away streets are the first priority, as many houses now open out on small gullies where the street used to be. Auroville through the Flood Relief Fund is providing a tractor to bring the fill-dirt, and in some cases supplying materials. Seventeen villages are affected and the work is estimated at Rs.1.45 lakh, of which we have Rs.1.04 lakh. Your contributions are still welcome. (Village Action Group report, 22.2.97)

Petrol station in AV

The Working Committee has requested the Development Group to determine the location for a petrol bank within or in the vicinity of Auroville. Once such a location is finalised, the WC will start the work to obtain the permission to establish such a petrol station, and find the finances therefore. (Working Committee report, 1.3.97)

About the Youth Centre

I thought the Youth Centre was finally a place for the youth, belonging to them. But it seems even before it's being built some adults have to make some moralistic rules and break down and criticise and put limits and basically make it as hard as possible for it to happen. Finally make them promise that they will be little angels. Welcome to the city of dawn dear Auroville children. We love you all so much (as long as you are already a perfect ready-made angel that is). I hope that our Auroville children don't take the adults here (the ones that smoke and drink and party are also the ones that are so holy) as their examples because that would make me sad.

(Li Mei, 1.3.97)

A Peaceful Bonfire (is possible)

The Peace at the bonfire on Mother's birthday was mostly her Grace—but also due to the work of a large team of people. Meenakshi's entire night school came to help out as ushers—showing people where to sit and then spreading out around the amphitheatre to keep the silence and peace of the morning. Other Aurovilians were at the gate and around the place and did the same.

Many Aurovilians have stopped coming to our bonfires because of the chaos and noise that seems to flow from people not connected to Auroville who don't have the same love and respect for our special days—Auroville's birthday and Sri Aurobindo's birthday.

This team went about turning that around. Reclaiming this time, special to us, for Her—through silence concentration and love—and the right organization. Love from the Bonfire Team (15.3.97)

* Motto of the AVNews

"Never forget this destiny of yours"

This February, as in previous years, members of the Governing Board met among themselves and with representatives of various work groups in Auroville. What was different this time, however, was that the Governing Board had a new chairman, Dr. M.S. Swaminathan, who replaced Dr. Karan Singh. Dr. Karan Singh resigned the chairmanship (but retained his seat on the Board) on applying for a seat in the Raja Sabha. On the evening of the 27th February, the community met with members of the Governing Board both to thank the departing Chairman for his help over the past six years and to welcome the new Chairman. Here are extracts from the speeches of Dr. Karan Singh and Dr. M.S. Swaminathan on that occasion:



Dr. Karan Singh:

I've had many interesting assignments in my life, starting from the age of 18, in India and abroad, on the national and international scene. But I must admit that these six years as Chairman of the Auroville Foundation has been for me perhaps the most enthralling, meaningful, learning experience that I've had. I became the first Chairman by a strange turn of the divine will, having been associated with Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, and having once spoken in Parliament about Auroville being like an arrow shot into the future...not realising that a day would come when I myself would be astride that arrow, and would have to do my best to direct its course.

The Foundation came into being in 1991, and for these last six years my colleagues and I have tried to fulfil, on the one hand, the vision of the Mother and, on the other, the text of the Act passed by Parliament whereby the Foundation was set up. It was not an easy task. We met with a great deal of resistance from inside the community because for the decade preceding the setting up of the Foundation it appeared as if the community could do very much as it liked without any sort of direction or guidance. We had to impose some structures, howsoever unpalatable they may have been to the community, because we were impelled by the Act to set up these structures. It was a tremendous responsibility. We had a lot of very interesting meetings—this is my fourteenth meeting of the Governing body—and each time I came there were a new set of problems and a new set of solutions. There was a new Working Committee very often. So it was never boring!

In these six years, many problems arose, but we have always tried to approach the problems of Auroville and the Aurovilians

with understanding, with sympathy and in a spirit of helpfulness. I realise that Aurovilians have come here to try to build a new community and a new consciousness. We are aware of the fact that you have built Auroville literally from scratch. You have put your heart and soul and spirit into this work. We respect that. We realise this is not any other community, it is a community drawn together by a higher power. And we have tried in our own way to express this realisation in whatever we did.

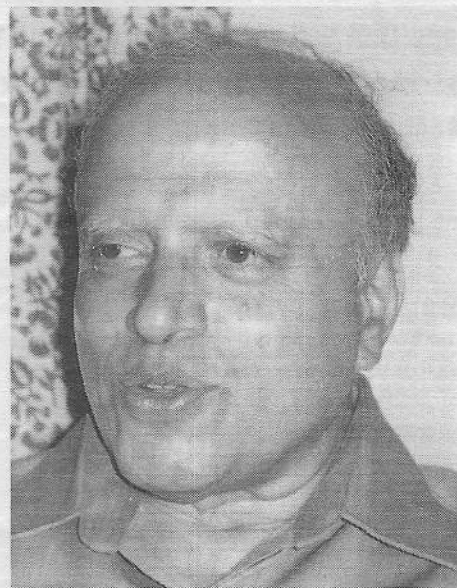
It is possible that in the course of the last six years we have done things which were not palatable to the community. I can only say that never on any occasion did we act either from a sense of reactive anger or irritation or exasperation. Every issue was looked at calmly and coolly and whatever action we felt needed to be taken was taken. And I'm sure that this is the way in which the work of the Foundation will continue to be carried on...

Let me, friends, end on another note. I travel around the world constantly, and it is now becoming clear that humanity itself is poised at a critical crossroads in its long and tortuous history on the planet. On the one hand, tremendous creative, holistic forces are beginning to emerge. Around the world, cutting across barriers, there are men and women who are striving for something higher, who are seeking to move away from the structures of confrontation and conflict and hatred and violence that have marred human history from the dawn of civilisation: people who are trying to transcend the limitations of our present consciousness and to move on to a higher level. At the same time there are the opposite forces also, of violence, of fundamentalism, of arms and drug trafficking, and these darker forces are also gathering their strength and their power. And it almost seems as if there is emerging a major conflict between the powers of the light and the powers of the darkness.

When the great Raja Raja Chola was building the great temple in Thanjavur, the greatest Shiva temple in India, he went out one day to inspect the work. He got out of his chariot and he saw a man cutting stone. He asked him, "What are you doing?" The man replied, "Your majesty, I am cutting stone." He asked another man doing the same thing the same question. "Your majesty, I am earning a living." And again to a third stone-cutter and the reply came, "Your majesty, I am building a great temple to Lord Shiva." So it is not what you do that is so important. It is the consciousness you bring to your work that really makes the difference. You are all here involved in building a great temple to the higher consciousness. The Matrimandir itself is a symbol, is a temple to the higher consciousness. Never forget this destiny of yours. Never forget that you are privileged human beings for having this opportunity of spearheading this transition to a new consciousness.

And it is with that hope, with that prayer, that I take leave of you and thank you for all your kindnesses and all your courtesies, having borne with me for all these years, and for the good wishes you have expressed in your speeches. I can assure you that wherever I am and whatever it is that I am doing, my links with Sri Aurobindo and the Mother will remain as long as I am in the body and beyond it also—for these things far transcend material barriers—and it will be part of my endeavour to help, to nurture, to foster, to

support the great Auroville experiment in every way that is possible. Thank you very much.



Dr. M.S. Swaminathan:

I'm very grateful to Dr. Karan Singh for first asking me to sit on the Governing Board and later recommending that I should succeed him. It's a real privilege. Dr. Karan Singh is not only a visionary but also an achiever. For vision can remain a dream, unfulfilled, unless someone converts it into reality. And this is what you have done here with the vision of the Mother. Yet, while we are proud of the task which you have accomplished, the task which remains, to convert the original concept in its entirety into this unique town in the world, requires us to work hard. And I can only assure you, on behalf of all my fellow members of the board, that we are all committed to Auroville's cause, to Mother's vision, we are all committed to helping you help the world. For Auroville stands for more than a particular town or a particular way of living.

As a biologist, there are two phenomena in life which are very important for a successful organisation, organism or individual. They are symbiosis and synergy. Symbiosis means people living together in a mutually beneficial way. But more important, I think that Auroville represents the ultimate in human societies, the highest synergy society, what Mahatma Gandhi called the Sarvodaya Society: a society in which the individual's good and the common good of the community as a whole are not antagonistic, but mutually reinforcing. A society where nobody prospers at the expense of another, but where all prosper together. And I think this is the mission of Auroville for the world, the example you should set.

I want to wish you well. There will always be differences. In genetics, survival is based upon biological diversity. Biological diversity is the very foundation of progress in life. So diversity of feelings, of ideas, will always be there. But so long as there is a methodology by which consensus can be built, all will be well.

My first visit to Sri Aurobindo Ashram was on August 15th, 1947. It was the day of India's Independence. When everybody else was going towards the Marina Beach in Madras, I was walking towards Egmore Station to take the train to Pondicherry. And in the fifty years since then I have often visited the Ashram and my great friend Mr. Dyumanbhai who started Gloria Farm, one of the best organic farms in our

A Place for the Healing Arts

The Inauguration of Quiet

If good things take a while before they take shape this is certainly the case with Quiet. It took ten years for the Healing Centre to materialize, but now it is there ready to shine and to function. The Healing Arts can now have their established and worthy place in Auroville. Situated on a stretch of Auroville beach, the beautiful new building with its many domes still looked somewhat dreamlike on January 31st when it was officially inaugurated by a ceremonial tree-planting and an opening address by Dr. Diwan Chand, India's foremost Senior Homeopath. Then followed a 9-day Homeopathic Seminar of the highest class. Four world-renowned Homeopaths—Rajan Sankaran, Divya Chhabra and Jayesh Shah from Bombay, India, and Misha Norland from England—led the audience into the fascinating world of the homeopathy of today. About 100 participants—homeopaths and interested lovers of homeopathy from India, Auroville and abroad—filled the new conference hall and gave their share of open-mindedness and responsiveness to make these 9 days a true success. The four speakers showed videos which presented case studies of their various patients. It was shown that, in order to prescribe the correct remedy—the *simillimum*—the homeopath has to be able to be totally with the patient, to feel what he feels, to journey with him into the unknown recesses of his innermost self. He has to understand the irrational, subconscious and unknown sides of man because only there lies the hidden but central disturbance which has to be treated in homeopathy. Dr. Divya Chhabra gave a wonderful example and demonstrated the most outstanding cure of the Seminar where a girl suffering from depression was healed with the Eagle remedy. This new remedy does not exist in the *Materia Medica*, and is prepared with the blood and feathers of an eagle. The girl was only happy when she was aloof and above the world, and became annoyed and upset about the noise and strife of human beings. So the homeopath felt this girl was feeling and viewing the world through the perspective of an eagle, but compulsively, not out of free choice. When she was treated with the eagle remedy she was completely healed of her depression.

Practiced in this way, homeopathy becomes an art and is able to heal on the deepest levels.

The atmosphere of the nine days of seminars was truly inspiring, and as such was already healing in itself. It created a great deal of awareness which opened up new doors of perception. Thanks is especially due to Maggi Lidchi from the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and to the Quiet group for bringing about this miracle.

Peter Holl

(Peter is an Aurovilian homeopath)

country. I travelled in this area where you are now and I remember how it was a desert. You have made this desert bloom.

Let the spiritual flame that is Auroville always remain an affirming flame in the midst of the sea of despair that we see all around. Let this flame be bright so that darkness can be dispelled. Thank you again for the privilege of serving this project.



Situated by the sea: the new Healing Arts building at Quiet.

BRIEF NEWS

New member of the Governing Board

Smt. Shantadevi Malwad has been appointed to the Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation to replace Professor Madhusudan Reddy who died in December.

Development Seminars

The Development and Planning Groups organised a major exhibition and a month-long series of seminars during February and March on the topic of Auroville's future development. More in our next issue.

Corrections

• Ajit ("A reluctant environmentalist"—AVT of January '97) points out that he is from Karnataka and not from Gujarat as was stated in the introduction. He also clarified: "The statement in the introduction, 'but the trees are gone forever' is not quite correct. It is true that trees between Auroville and Pondy to the South and Auroville to the North are gone—ironically that's what triggered our intervention. However, on the whole we have been instrumental in saving about 40% of the trees that would have otherwise been cut between Madras and Cuddalore, a distance of 170 kms."

• In our last issue, we omitted to mention that all the unattributed photographs, with the exception of the photograph of Mia at an AVI meeting, were taken by John Mandeem.

• Also in our last issue, in the article on the Children's Opera CD on page 7, the last line had disappeared. It should have read: "All profits will be used to promote the cultural development of Auroville."

DANCE REVIEW

"Mantra"

There are three phases to making art. First, you conceive the idea. This is a period of sleepless nights, listening to the inner voice, everything else fades into the background, colours vibrate, songs find you, books fall into your lap, words have their moment, get caught or slip away. You are obsessed. Everything is synchronized. Or nothing is. You wake up writing... you paint potent daydreams on the walls and just before unconsciousness, you realize something fantastic. You forget to eat. You're out of time. You are lost. You have never been surer of where you are.

Then comes the second phase. You share your ideas with the group and you work, work, work, work, work, work. A time of Grace (if you're lucky). You are inside. You are pursued. Driven. Insane. You never get sick. You laugh a lot. Here we are again. You go home loaded on stars, drunk on moonlight. You eat oranges, starfruit jam on hard bread and drink black tea at midnight.

Presenting your work to an audience is the third phase. Your palms sweat. There isn't enough time. You lose things: keys, money, you forget where you put everything. You move through glue. There isn't enough time. You race back and forth, sailing through a silent landscape. Where did all the sound go? You can only hear your own heartbeat. The wheels repeat, "It's only a show". You pray for the health and sanity of everyone. You watch the skies for threatening signs. You tell yourself to slow down, drive carefully. Don't have an accident now. There is never enough time.

After the show come the reactions, criticisms, critiques. How was it received? Being so close to your work for so long, you lose perspective. Did it communicate? Did it touch the audience? Was the inner power received? Sometimes we give ourselves very hard tasks indeed. Then the intention is there, the motivation is there, but the expression is inadequate, or confused. The intention is clear, but the mixture doesn't work. I felt this way after seeing "Mantra", Anu's latest dance performance.

O Immortal
Thou art born in mortals
in the law of the Truth,
of Immortality, of Beauty...

Rig Veda IX, 110

As Anu states in her introduction, "Mantra is a modest attempt to explore the Vedas, inspired by Sri Aurobindo's translations and interpretations, which reveal anew the vast vision of the ancient Rishis, their intensity of experience and their powerful language of joy."

A mantra is a sound, a vibration which carries with it the power of experience and realisation. As Satprem says in *The Adventure of Consciousness*, it is "a sound that makes one see." So the strength of any work of art based on the theme of Mantra must, necessarily, be the sound. Perhaps a useful approach, then, is to continue working until you find what dance movements are directly related to the vibration of the "sound which makes us see". Taking this approach, the sound/movement combination becomes the most important aspect of the work.

Perhaps, as with any dance based upon a text such as a poem or sacred writing, we need to step back from the text, using it as a source of inspiration. Then we can soar. Using it directly, that is, trying to translate onto the stage instead of interpret, we risk confusion and the failure of the task we have set—the task of trying to make the audience see what was meant to be heard.

Anu describes Mantra as an attempt to map a journey of sacrifice, which is the central imagery of the Vedas. For me, the exploration worked well with Jean's superb lighting. Slowly, without words, with light, the fire within the lighting design touched me directly and powerfully, illuminating the meaning. Yet the movements of the dancers were curiously mechanical, too static and synchronized. I felt they were holding the energy instead of releasing it, and this to me was frustrating. Aesthetically beautiful was the passage about the River,

with the curved forms of the dancers expressive of the image of water. However, it failed to touch me at a deeper level.

Perhaps for Anu it is the containment of energy which best supports the text. For me, a journey releases energy because it is constantly renewed, so it sends and receives. Of course, this is very much my own personal reaction to the performance, and I offer these comments as stepping stones along the way, and hope they may serve some useful purpose, especially since it is a new work.

Anu always approaches her work with great confidence, and I'm sure that she will continue to work confidently on Mantra with all our support and encouragement and love.

Jill

Subscriptions

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BY AIRMAIL
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Auroville 605101
Tamil Nadu, India

FOOD

Exp. # 109

ANKE AND MICHAEL
GRACE
AUROVILLE

IN THIS ISSUE:

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- AVNEWS SELECTIONS
- SPEECHES BY DR. KARAN SINGH AND DR. SWAMINATHAN
- HAVE YOU PERMISSION? A CAUTIONARY TALE

April 1997
Number Ninety-Nine



Hanging out at New Creation Corner

Have you permission?

An imaginary odyssey

"In the past, a few persons have tried to avoid the procedure of obtaining building permission from the Development Group... To this we can say that we are aware that sometimes the process is lengthy and bothersome but generally at the end the project evolves in an improved form."

(From the Development Group meeting report in the AV News of 31.12.96)

One day I decided to build a small keet-roofed shed for my motorcycle. I'd dug the foundations and was levering the first granite pillar into position when a passing Aurovilian asked me if I had permission. "For what?" "For your shed. Every planned construction must now get prior approval." And so began my odyssey through the highways and byways of *administratio aurovilianus*.

Friday Met Development Group (DG). Provided them with detailed plan of shed and of site. Agreed to pay 10% of cost to Housing Fund, 10% to Development Fund, to use an Auroville architect and contractor, and to tear down shed immediately if it was discovered to be obstructing a line of force of the Galaxy. They gave provisional approval subject to two weeks' feedback from the community. Advised me meanwhile to contact Motorcycle Management and Coordination Group (MMCG).

Monday Met MMCG, all tattoos, studs and leather, over a nice cup of tea. Agreed to join their campaign for maximising road widths, minimising bends and eliminating trees and speed-breakers, and took a solemn oath to fight with them to the death against the Pondy Jets.

Thursday Called in by Charter Council (CC). Didn't know who was there because not allowed to raise eyes. Was told no mention in the Charter of keet sheds for motorcycles and "anyway, we only want electric transport in the city". Conclusion: I am an "anti-evolutionary force obstructing the manifestation of the true Auroville". They suggest I buy a cycle and take up Aikido.

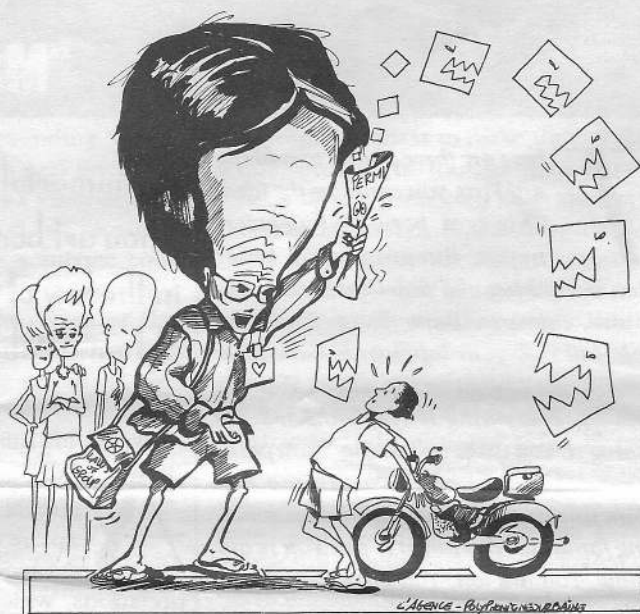
Tuesday Summoned by Concept and Communication Committee (CCC). They had been giving much thought to my motorcycle shed and felt that, on balance, taking everything and everyone into account, and notwithstanding my right to appeal, the construction of the aforementioned edifice would be detrimental to the bioregional realities pertaining at this point in time. But suggested that I approach Housing Service (HS) for a second opinion.

Friday HS regretted they couldn't approve my motorcycle shed in its present form as they had just passed a resolution banning all constructions which could not be lived in. However, if I added three rooms, a kitchen, bathroom and toilet and made it available to a needy Aurovilian family they would reconsider. I made a somewhat forthright remark, and was referred immediately to...

...Unity Service (US), where two nice ladies asked me why I had become so obsessed with my motorcycle. "Does it make you feel more powerful? Were you not allowed to play with toys when you were young? Do you have problems with your masculinity?" Made me lie on the floor, then took me through a guided meditation

and told me to imagine myself driving my motorcycle over a cliff only for me to sprout wings and fly away into the sunset. Developed vertigo.

Tuesday Invited to attend meeting of Residential Zone Group (RZG). Told me they liked my plan for the motorcycle shed—"It has great ambience"—but wondered if I could re-site it 300 metres to the south because they'd allocated the present site for a sewage farm. I mentioned that my house also seemed to be situated on the site of the future sewage farm (fsw). They suggested I talk it over with Water Service (WS).



Friday WS very apologetic: "We wanted to inform you but we were just too busy". It seems, however, that the RZG got it wrong. The latest plan to maximise infiltration into the first aquifer and to combat salination is to build twenty metre retaining bunds and then flood large sections of the greenbelt and town. They suggested I sell my motorcycle and buy a houseboat (one of them just happened to have one for sale "at a very reasonable price").

Wednesday Invited to attend a forest meeting by the Forest Group (FG). Received lecture on the evils of the internal combustion engine by externally combusting greenbelters. At the very least, I should convert motorcycle to run on biogas, wood-chip waste or chicken feathers.

Monday Summoned by Working Committee (WC). They sympathised with my problems, but regretted that construction of motorcycle shed now seemed impossible—the Oil and Natural Gas Commission (ONGC) of the Government of India wanted to prospect further in my area. Neyveli Lignite (NL) also interested to initiate open-cast mining nearby. WC suggested I might consider initiating public interest litigation, and to contact Auroville International (AVI) centres, the International Advisory Council (IAC), the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India (MHRDGoI), the Prime Minister (PM), The United Nations Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organisation (UNESCO) and Ramaswamy of "We Fix Everything Enterprises" (WFEE) to see if pressure could be applied to reverse this decision.

Tuesday Sold motorcycle.

Alan