

AUROVILLE TODAY

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MOTHER: "You see, this is what I have learned: the failure of the religions—it is because they were divided—they wanted people to be religious to the exclusion of the other religions; and every branch of human knowledge has been a failure because they were exclusive; and man has been a failure because he was exclusive. And what the new Consciousness wants (it is on this that it insists) is: no more divisions. To be able to understand the spiritual extreme, the material extreme, and to find... to find the meeting point, the point where... that becomes a real force."

From: *l'Agenda de Mère*, vol. XI

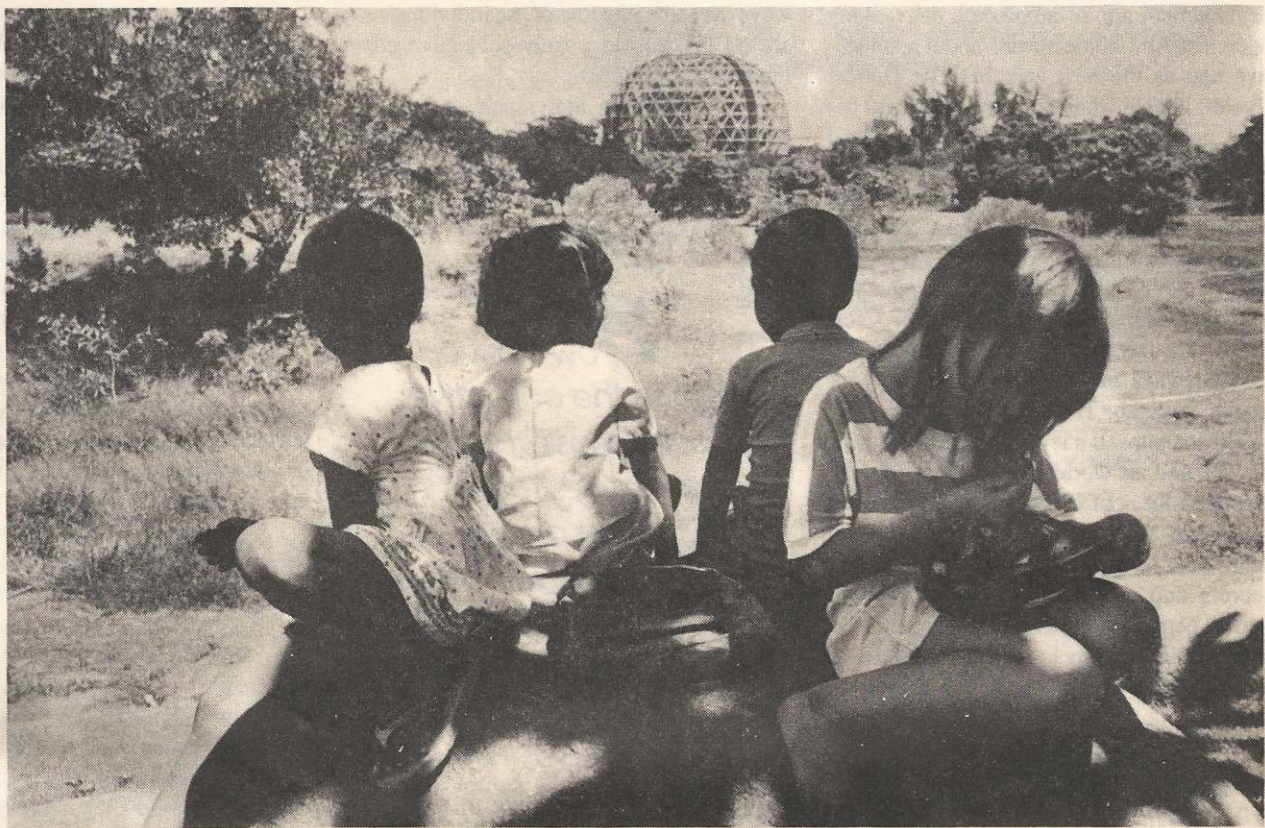


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The Sadhana of the Group Soul

Extracts from a paper by Ruud Lohman, selected and introduced by Alan

As Auroville moves into the 25th year of its becoming, what are the next steps to be taken? On a physical level, opinions among Aurovilians might differ widely—some stressing the overriding importance of building the city quickly, others the need to assist in the conscious and sensitive development of the bioregion—but on one thing there is widespread agreement: the need for 'more community'. But what exactly does this mean? And how do we get there?

In 1972, Ruud Lohman (author of several books, the last of which was *A House for the Third Millennium*), with the assistance of Ron Jorgenson, prepared a discussion paper for the Planning Group called *The Sadhana of the Group Soul*. In it, he attempted to sketch the outlines, in relationship to the Auroville experiment, of what he called a 'spiritual sociology'. Beginning with Mother's various definitions of Auroville, he proceeded to describe—on the basis of the terminology used by Sri Aurobindo in *The Human Cycle*—the various stages or transitions that Auroville would have to pass through in order to evolve from a predominantly 'rational' to a 'spiritual' society. In other words, from a society based upon an objectifying and analytical approach to perceived reality, to a society which, ultimately, has undergone the supramental transformation, the details of which, as Sri Aurobindo put it, "must be left for the supramental Energy to work out according to the Truth of its nature".

Ruud added, "What Sri Aurobindo aims at—and we may apply the same to Auroville—is the breakthrough, on a massive and collective scale, from the conventional and rational stages towards the subjective (the stage in which the group comes to see and feel what is behind the outside and below the surface, and therefore to live from within) as a preparation for the spiritual age. Auroville would belong, if it comes to its own soul, to the spiritual age. It is interesting to note, however, that probably the project will not move straight into the spiritual age; we will first have to go through the transition from rational to subjective, and only then from the subjective to the spiritual." A crucial realization in this process is the discovery of the 'group soul' as a means and lever to transcend the separative individual consciousness.

Ruud concluded his paper by examining the practical implications of making these transitions. For example, what does planning for a spiritual society involve? Is it, in fact, a contradiction in terms? And what kind of environment—both physical and psychological—is the most conducive to encouraging these transitions?

As an aid in focussing the community upon what may be the next step in its evolution, we publish in this issue excerpts from *The Sadhana of the Group Soul*, which has lost none of its relevance or urgency over the past 20 years. We welcome any responses, insights or practical proposals generated in our readers by this catalyst...

Who builds Auroville? It is done through the group-soul, which, by coming to the front, surrenders its being to the Mother. The first thing to be attained, then, is the awareness of the group soul. As in the individual sadhana, the first phase of the effort should be directed towards this emergence of the group-soul. The group-soul will take over our mental workings and develop its own way. The development of Auroville must go from inside towards the outside, from the inner to the outer. Things must first get an

inner awareness, then they will translate themselves according to their own truth into the outer.

It seems that even here we can draw the parallel with the individual sadhana. First the group itself, the population of Auroville, must reach a stage of love, of devotion in the heart, of mental quietude, of being open for the deeper truth, in order to get a collective awareness of the collective psychic being—which again is identical in nature with the individual psychic being—and to bring it to the front.

What sociology and planning can do in this context, having reached a silence and devotion themselves, is to become conscious instruments for the experiments and the other means of bringing about and strengthening the awareness of the group-soul. The creation of an environment—in architecture, agriculture, horticulture, etc.—should accompany this growth of the group-soul from stage to stage of consciousness, which can "plan" its next step and the physical environment fitted for its embodiment in matter. Sociology, planning, the sciences, art and architecture

then become integrated parts of the development and the outer expression of the group-soul.

What this amounts to is to realise a collective awareness of the Truth itself behind the superficial levels; the Truth that wants to realise itself among and in the collectivity. Not even a "search for the Truth" must be aimed at, not a nervous going hither and thither to experiment on particles of the Truth, but simply an openness in which Truth can work according to its own nature: "Mind is on the surface of existence. Men work along this surface and try to find the Truth behind it by more thorough study. The true method is to enter into direct contact with inner truth and (...) make an outer creation, that is to say, the power of Truth to realise itself by way of human instruments in an external manifestation". (Mother, 28.6.1966)

One more point of consideration in this context is how much the two processes, the individual and the collective, are simultaneous. Some individuals may reach a psychic level of development, which has not yet been realised for the group-psychic. But the relationship may work both ways: in order to develop personally one can work on the group-soul and vice versa. This may be true for every transition: first some individuals realise it in themselves and then the group as a group breaks through. But the inverse may also be true, that the transition of the group causes or stimulates the breakthrough of the individual consciousness from one stage to another. The Mother says about this, "There is between the collectivity and the individual an interdependence from which one cannot be totally free (...). One can try to go ahead much faster (...) yet in spite of everything, the realisation, even for him who is at the top of the evolutionary ladder, depends on the realisation (...), on the condition of the human collectivity." (1)

(continued on page 2)

The Sadhana of the Group Soul *(continued from page 1)*

Sri Aurobindo has also said that a double movement is necessary: along with the effort for individual progress and realisation there must be an effort to lift up the whole, enabling it to make the indispensable progress that would bring in a great progress of the individual—a progress of the mass allowing the individual to take one step more.

Breaking open

(...) It seems then, that we have reached a stage in which cultures stuck in a conventional or rational, objective phase of their development are in the process of breaking open. Sri Aurobindo speaks about a subjective age as the next step in 'The Human Cycle'. People who leave their old ways behind and search inward for meaning and depth may be said to be in this transitional stage, between the old objective ways and patterns, and new subjective ones. This transition has two characteristics: it is a protest against the old, and a search for the new. It is a protest against being dominated by traditional and fixed or externally determined, rational ways of living. It is a search for reality in depth. The individual studies the world and himself anew and, "in his study of himself and the world he cannot but come to face with the soul in himself and the soul in the world and find it to be an entity so profound, so complex, so full of hidden secrets and powers, that his intellectual reason betrays itself as an insufficient light and a fumbling seeker... The need for a deeper knowledge must then turn him to the discovery of new powers and means within himself. He finds that he can only know himself entirely by becoming actively self-conscious and not merely self-critical, by more and more living in his soul and acting out of it, rather than floundering on surfaces." (2)

Emergence of the group-soul

(...) This process is a crucial one for the individual. He has to come to terms with his past and to reorganise all the parts of his being around a new centre, which in the beginning is still vague and subconscient or superconscient. Such a reorganisation is really the movement from the ego, which operates on the surface of the being, toward the self, which—being deep within—is the goal of the subjective impulse. All this consumes much energy and the tendency to somewhat close oneself off from the social dimensions is inevitable.

In this phase the individuals in the group are still largely unaware that they are part of a larger soul, and the group-soul cannot yet emerge. Quite a few elements of the now existing population—their behaviour patterns, social life—can be understood against the background of this first level of awareness, one that is preparatory for the emergence of a group-soul.

The group-soul, Sri Aurobindo states, is more complex than the individual soul, though being identical with it in nature, "because it has a great number of partly self-conscious mental individuals for the constituents of its physical being, instead of an association of merely vital subconscious cells. Therefore it also seems more crude", he adds, "more primitive and artificial in the forms it takes." And, "it has a more difficult task before it, it needs a longer time to find itself, it is less fluid and less easily organic". (3)

When the group-soul succeeds in getting out of the stage of vaguely conscious self-formation Sri Aurobindo describes, its first definite self-consciousness is objective much more than subjective. And insofar as it is subjective, it is apt to be superficial and loose and vague. As an example of this objectiveness Sri Aurobindo shows how it

comes out very strongly in the ordinary emotional conception of the nation about its most outward and material aspect, the passion for the land and the soil, for just the shell of the body. In Auroville this objectiveness would show itself in the tendency to lay great stress on the land, the structures, the outward aspects of communities and buildings, instead of on the inner process.

When we move away from the outer appreciations and when we begin to feel that the real body is the men and women who compose the unit, a body ever changing yet always the same like that of the individual, we are on the way to a truly subjective communal consciousness.

(...) Only when individuals and groups come to a full subjective awareness of the deepest reality of their own being, can we speak of entering into the Subjective Age. "The Subjective stage of human develop-

How do we come to the collective consciousness? How do we make the transition from the first phase—"from many egos to many selves"—to the second one—"a first awareness of the group-soul"?

ment is that critical juncture in which the group comes to see and feel what is behind the outside and below the surface and therefore to live from within. It is a step towards self-knowledge and towards living in and from the Self." (4)

Further transitional stages

(...) From the subjective phase towards the heights on which Auroville is envisioned, three more transitions seem to be necessary. It seems that here too we must draw a parallel between the individual sadhana and the collective one. Ultimately, Auroville is meant to be a collective supramental realisation, being a complete transformation of even the group-soul itself. Again, this will happen in transitions or stages.

From the fully subjective stage—when the first deep awareness of the group-soul grew—a progression will have to be made towards the psychic transformation, in which the different planes and parts of the collective being will become organised around the group-soul. The psychic being will come fully to the front and determine the whole life of the collective being. It may be suggested that the identity in nature between the individual soul and the group-soul becomes more and more explicit in these higher stages of development. In the highest stage we might no longer be able to even speak of any difference. Then there may be only one sadhana. This psychic transformation comes from deep within the collective being.

In the second transition which moves towards the spiritual transformation, the direction is changed: instead of from within, the change descends from above. It means, "to open upward to the Divine Peace, Force, Light, Ananda above, to rise up into it and bring it down into the nature and the body", even "occupying the very cells of the body". (5)

And as far as the final transition goes, the supramental transformation, we might make it very short and quote Sri Aurobindo's

answer to a disciple who asked for a description of the supramental change: "It is not advisable to discuss too much what it will do and how it will do it, because these are things the supermind itself will fix, acting out of the Divine Truth in it, and the mind must not try to fix for it grooves in which it will run. Naturally, the release from subconscious ignorance and from disease, duration of life at will, and a change in the functioning of the body must be among the ultimate elements of a supramental change; but the details of these things must be left for the supramental Energy to work out according to the Truth of its own nature." (6)

From planning to no-planning

(...) We look at a description of planning. "Planning is a rational and conscious collaboration of men and means in relation to the aims one has chosen; and one tries to calculate as many effects as possible over a period of time as long as possible and to control them from key-positions." (7)

Now, what is wrong with that? Why couldn't this be applied to the construction of Auroville? Why should we even with respect to planning move into a new phase? Shouldn't we draw from the experience of the whole world and from all the experiments in town-planning which are sprouting up in many countries? First, it should be said that planning as described above is an objective way of dealing with men, information and events, and that Auroville is meant to move into a subjective stage, in which things and groups are no longer determined by outside laws and by knowledge derived from facts, but from within. We have in our own soul, and in the group-soul, new ways to be discovered. In planning there is always the aspect of manipulation, which cannot be applied in the subjective age of mankind.

Second, in a supranational age, there must be found supranational means of knowing the future. Humanity—and maybe Auroville first—will no longer be manipulated by the forces and gods and fate, and no longer try to manipulate them; but come in contact with them, take part in them, respond to them in a dialogue and discern consciously between the real fate and the false one, the real higher powers and the false ones. This requires that the group itself rises to a higher knowledge which includes the knowledge of the powers that shape the future. It will be a subjective, inner knowledge that is vista-less and has itself no future; it only descends into the time framework when the right conditions are prepared for it to descend.

And the third reason is this: planning plans for a future from known facts and known laws; that is, it plans for an extension of the known. This means it can only handle those forces that are determined to act in the way they did in the past and do in the present. We can say that the more of these forces we know, the more accurately we can read the future, but only in so far as the future will behave in the same rhythms of determination as the past and the present. Planning is planning for a determined future and that is exactly where the concept of planning is not to be adapted to Auroville, where the future is NOT determined, not a continuation of past and present, but wants to be a new creation. Planning continues the old creation, and can therefore not be used in the same way.

Planning in the subjective age, then, proceeds by knowledge of the higher forces which descend in Time to create a body for themselves. It means openness to the end, non-interference with the descent, and, concretely, it means to discover ways in groups to come to this knowledge. It is no longer the knowledge of the forces of the past and the present which shape the circumstances according to known patterns, but knowledge of entirely new things. Also it is knowledge

gained in a new way—by identity with the thing known—which dissolves the old, once immovable polarity: subject and object.

So, our no-planning, or knowing-planning (by identification) is to be done AS A GROUP, as a collective soul. That is difficult and unusual, but, "Auroville's realisation does not advance in the habitual manner and it is more visible for the interior consciousness than for the exterior vision". And the interesting thing is that only by going inward and discovering the soul and the group-soul, will the outer things become clear, crystal clear, and perfect plans of infallible application and potency will emerge spontaneously when they are needed. To be an Aurovilian one just needs to have the will to collaborate in all that favours future realisations. "The material conditions will be worked out gradually, ACCORDING TO REALISATION", the Mother assures. (8)

(...) Now the 'problem' is a very different one. The question now is: how are we going to realise this inner knowledge AS A GROUP, as a collection of smaller subgroups, as a cluster of groups, or however? How do we start or intensify our collective sadhana? How do we come to the collective consciousness? How do we make the transition from the first phase—"from many egos to many selves"—to the second one—"a first awareness of the group-soul"? How do we manage to bring the collective psychic to the front? Only the group-soul will build Auroville, and create, from step to step, its own body. And the planners and the planning group, and the administration? They will get a new function: realisation of its body, from step to step.

When we would become group-soul-centered, planning would become the same as the first concrete actions in the practical programme.

Engineers, industrialists, technicians and others of us may feel everything said here is well enough, but what to do in the meantime with their skills while the group-soul is emerging? Certainly, it might be said, we should go ahead and correct the deficiencies of present plans by using what skills we have on the mental level until the group-soul begins to direct the development and plans. We cannot just wait and rust.

This directly raises the question, it seems, of faith. That is, since Sri Aurobindo and the Mother—especially the Mother, very recently—have said the true beginning is to be made from the inner and expressed in the outer, since the Supramental Truth-Consciousness is already in the earth atmosphere, since the Mother has started Auroville and told us in effect, that now is the time to build the City (since 1968), and to realise the Truth (since 1971); then quite possibly it is only by the leap of faith into the future that we will know and see the old mental ways are no longer necessary, or needed, or even of any help. But to do that would mean forming groups in which we apparently turn our backs on the common-sense way of working and using skills; and doing the individual and the group-sadhana, not only for itself, but as a means of finding the new way to work, to use skills, to plan—because the deepest part of us knows She has called us because it is time and we are ready, and the rest of our being follows in faith. For otherwise, by clinging to the old until finally pushed in the nose by the New, we can hold back the Light and ourselves for some time. (...)

References:
1) The Mother, *Bulletin of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education*, Vol. XV, No. 1, Feb., 1963.
2) Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, p. 24.
3) Op. cit., p. 29-30.
4) Op. cit., p. 37.
5) Sri Aurobindo, *Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 24, p. 1094.
6) Op. cit., Vol. 22, p. 8.
7) Karl Mannheim in *Moderne Sociologie*.
8) From *Conditions for Living in Auroville*, 1968.
Note: One or two quotes do not have references.

Living Apart Together

COLLECTIVE HOUSING PROJECTS IN THE RESIDENTIAL ZONE

"So far residential buildings in Auroville have been mostly provided by 'private enterprise'—individuals and families building accommodation for themselves according to their own resources, requirements and preferences. Matrimandir Worker's Camp and the Aspiration huts are the exceptions. As a result this aspect of Auroville's development seems to perpetuate old familiar social patterns, instead of leading us forward to new ones less dependent on 'personal property'. Perhaps it would be helpful to provide a different model for possible residential developments in Auroville—one which provides privacy and the possibility for very varied life-styles, but at the same time, by a complex of shared services, the chance to take a step towards a no-money economy."

This is the first paragraph from: *Proposal for Community Housing in the Residential Zone of Auroville*, by Helmut, written around 1987. Since then, the 'private enterprise' trend has continued, along with its accompanying individual or family-based life-style. The trend is a source of discontent to our town planners who see this kind of development as leading directly to the kind of suburban conditions so common in Indian or Western cities. But now suddenly plans for collective housing abound and some are actually underway. Let's look at what is happening in the area designated as the 'Residential Zone'. (See map)

Samasti

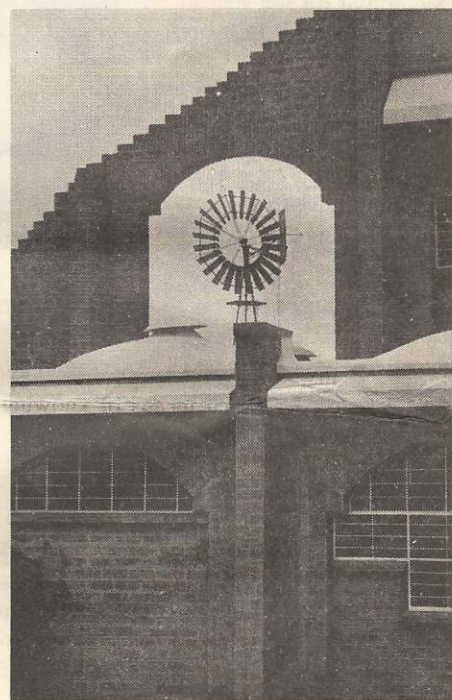
About five years ago, a group of individuals started 'Samasti', which is the Sanskrit word for 'collectivity'. These people knew they wanted to live close together, and they started researching a higher-density way of living, with collective facilities. The project is virtually complete now, with 25 people living there and three more about to move in. All of it, including the infrastructure, has been privately funded by the residents themselves. The collective facilities so far include a common catering facility for residents and guests, a water system with individual overhead and under-

ground tanks and electric submersible pump, a large lotus pond which is fed by a wastewater treatment unit, a laundry service and a badminton court. Part of the Samasti complex is the multi-purpose cultural hall, 'Pitanga', where exhibitions and cultural activities of benefit to all Aurovilians take place. Samasti is one of the best examples of the application of earth architecture in Auroville, the majority of the houses having been built with either stabilized or unstabilized compressed earth blocks (see box).

Area: 7 acres

Samasti (2)

'Samasti 2' is on the drawing boards and the land has been acquired. It is intended eventually to house 90 people. A few people are already interested in living there. For this project, a new financing scheme has been established. An advance of Rs. 10 lakhs (Rs. one million) will be invested by 'Auroville Fund', and individuals (or commercial units if interested) will refund the cost of the house or apartment, with a percentage on top to



Earth block construction: an example, at the Visitors Centre.

cover infrastructure and a little more to be able to build one house for somebody without money. Collective facilities will include overhead as well as underground water tanks, playground/sports facilities and a multi-purpose collective space. Row houses in staggered clusters will cater to the different needs of people and will contain family units, 1- and 2-person apartments, studios, and single-person apartments of not more than three storeys. They will be built using locally available materials and all walls will be built using compressed earth blocks.

Area: 4.6 acres

Vikas

'Vikas' is Sanskrit for 'expansion' or 'progress'. The project developed out of the idea to raise funds for newcomers housing. Gradually this evolved into a proposal for creating a community where Aurovilians and newcomers could live together. Then it widened into the idea of a small community growing towards the Town. The emphasis is on "collective life where each individual can grow harmoniously and enrich the collectivity through their individuality" (quoted from the 'Spirit of Vikas' leaflet). The prospective residents are asked to participate financially and/or otherwise in an attitude of surrender and acceptance of what will be given in return, without insistence on personal preferences. 'Vikas' will employ only appropriate technology and renewable energy. The design consists mainly of row houses or small clusters of three- or four-storey high buildings and a few separate houses.

At present five people, including one child, live at Vikas in temporary dwellings. The first building, the community kitchen, has been completed recently, and features a roof specially designed to catch rainwater and channel it into a storage pond. The water storage system is about to be completed to make the best use of their new windmill, and the first building will be started soon: five one-storey flats. Four of these will be sponsored by Auroville International France.

Area: 12 acres

Surrender

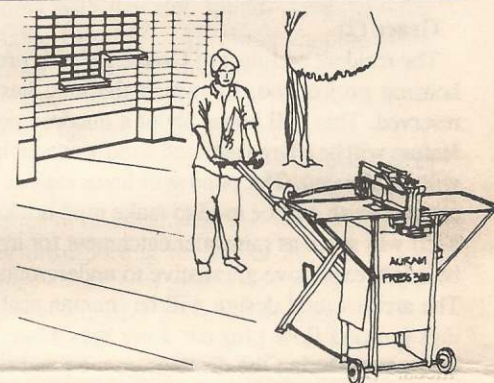
According to Luigi of 'Aurofuture' town planning office, 'Surrender' is ready to start

The Residential Zone

The Residential Zone has been divided into several sectors according to the intended population density. The projects described here will all take place in Sectors 1 and 2. The overall plan for these low- and medium-density sectors has been worked out at Aurofuture, in cooperation with Auro-Satprem (architect and pioneer of 'Vikas'), Helmut (resident architect of 'Grace'), Peter Anderschitz (architect of the first three houses in Samasti), Poonam, Anupama, and Suhasini (Samasti). André Hababu took part in designing 'Surrender' and 'Terrace Village', which has not yet got its final name, is Roger Anger's idea.

Building Materials

Many of the new constructions will utilize the CEB. A CEB is a compressed earth block made on a hand press. A team of seven can produce about 800 blocks per day on the building site with the available soil. A special press for the purpose has been developed by the Auroville Building Centre and is manufactured in Auroville at the Aureka workshop. The CEB is not a fired brick but gains its strength from being compressed, and 5% cement may be added to reinforce them.



Earth block press developed during construction of the Visitors Centre.

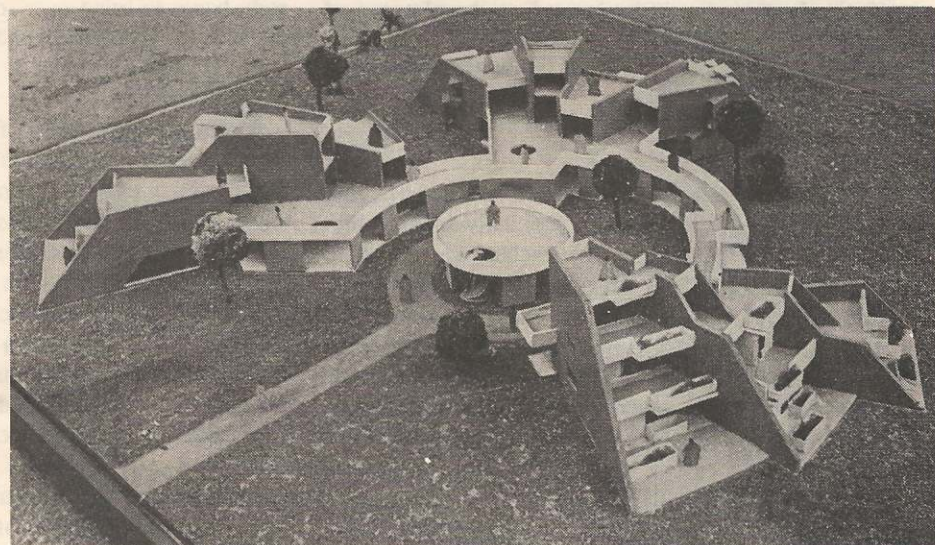
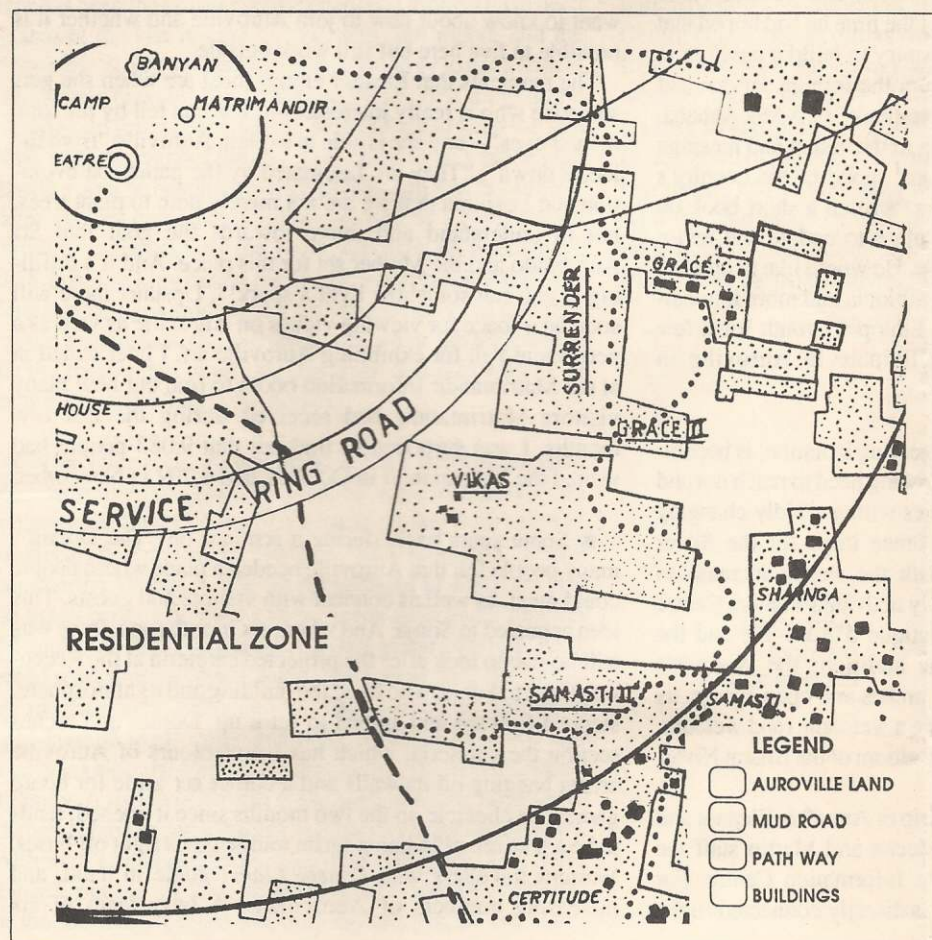
whenever funds come in. An attractive model can be seen at Aurofuture. It will consist of triple units (one single, one double and one family house) placed in a circle around a central meeting place. The houses will be solar-powered. Electricity from the grid will only be used in the separate community kitchen-centre. There will be a waste water treatment unit and solar water heating, presently under research.

The 10.7 acre area is envisaged to house 100 to 120 people.

Grace

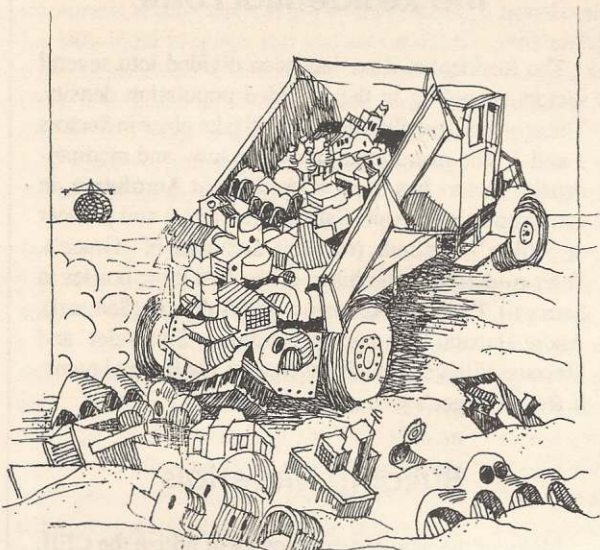
'Grace' is a community that started about 13 years ago with two people and has now grown to 15. The plan foresees three cluster developments around a central park and buildings for common use by the community

(continued on page 4)



Surrender (model at 'Aurofuture')

Living Apart Together (continued from page 3)



Suburbia Unlimited... (cartoon by Helmut, 1987)

residents (parking, kitchen/dining facilities, workshop, guest-house, teenagers' quarters, etc.) The community is envisaged to eventually house about 100-120 people. Within this scheme five houses (three residences and two newcomers apartments) and a central water-tower have already been built. The walls have been built with exposed fired bricks and these form an attractive feature of the architectural design.

Area: about 6 acres

Grace (2)

The resident architect of Grace, Helmut, proposes another housing project too, for which the land has already been reserved. This will house about a hundred people. Its main feature will be a large terraced pond around which the houses will be situated. The pond will have various uses. The excavated earth will be used to make mud bricks and the pond itself will serve as rainwater catchment for irrigation. It will be a less expensive alternative to underground water tanks. The architectural design will be 'human scale'—i.e. buildings (ground floor plus one floor max.) integrated into the landscape. During the dry season, the pond can be used for other activities, such as meetings or sports. It is envisaged that collective facilities will be shared with Vikas.

Savitri Solar Village

The concept for this project has been around for some time and was prompted by the need to relocate the residents of the Matrimandir Workers Camp as the Matrimandir Gardens take shape. Although the Camp has existed for more than twenty years, it was never intended to become a permanent fixture (in fact it was expected to be there for just a few years!) as it was set up to temporarily house Matrimandir workers. The design for the new project is being worked out; research is being done on a solar bowl to generate energy. The Housing Development Group has made it a funding priority. A suitable location, not too far from Matrimandir, is under discussion. The first phase of construction will be 12 double units in two levels to house the Camp people.

Terrace Village

You will not find this name on the map on page 4, because a final name has yet to be given... The source of inspiration for this project designed by Roger Anger is the architectural style of a 'kasbah' found in Northern Africa, where houses in towns have been built one above the other in a slightly sloping landscape. It will be located on the plot east of 'Vikas'.

The project will house 250 people and will be located on an area of about 5 acres.

Collective kitchen

Not part of the residential projects as mentioned here, but interesting for the move towards a less individualistic lifestyle, is the plan to build a collective kitchen, where food for 1,000 people will be cooked using steam produced by a solar concentrator bowl, now under study. There will be a dining room seating 200. A food delivery system will distribute food all over Auroville, to individuals or collective dining rooms. Appropriate technologies will be used as much as possible. The location is not yet certain, but will possibly be in the industrial zone.

The contact person for this project, for which funding prospects are good and which is likely to start soon, is Gilles at Samasti.

Report by Annemarie

December

Days

Roger weaves a pattern of events in Auroville's 'winter' season



December days, when the white flowers of the Transformation trees hang from branches like so many scented earrings, and carpet rain-soft forest paths. Acacia and Cassia trees in yellow bloom line the busy roads as workers clad in orange prepare for their yearly Ayyappa pilgrimage to Kerala. A lone kingfisher sits perched against a sea-blue sky, piled high with grey-white clouds, as flocks of parrots gambol midst storm-bent kambu stalks, adding to nature's palette. December is when they light the great fire on the sacred hill Arunachala and when the thousand names of God, broadcast from village temples, ride the wind at night, and mingle with the ocean's rain-fed roar. December is when our energies, like the harvest, are joyously gathered, stored for the year to come, and Auroville's creative *élan* can be felt in many ways: plays, exhibits, and yes, even smiles!

✿ The week begins with our Tuesday *Auroville Today* editorial meeting. I bicycle from Certitude to Samridhi after tuning into the BBC and trying to make out what Mark Tully was saying, from behind the static, in Ayodhya—epicentre of a wounded past whose tremors shook the sub-continent for days. Tamil Nadu remains relatively free of disturbances honouring the Land with Peace. At our meeting we counter a pre-deadline dearth of ideas with levity, and intuit the theme of Auroville's Group Soul as our thread for the year to come.

After the meeting, Jill drops in for a cup of coffee and a break from her floating hut and the combined pressures of teaching and last-minute rehearsals—now in their final week—for the new play she is directing: Peter Shaffer's "Black Comedy". "The play is about light and darkness, and stripping away the masks we all wear", she says, but is worried—with one rehearsal left—about the pacing: "There are moments when you could drive a Mack truck through the pauses."

✿ Lunch at Tineke's Centre Guest-house is followed by coffee at the Visitors Centre with Mr. Tekeste, an Ethiopian visitor who has known Auroville for years. As a young diplomat stationed in Delhi, he had met Mother a number of times in the late 60's and early 70's, and elicited Haile Selassie's interest in Auroville. At the time he had hoped that Ethiopia would be the second country to build a pavilion in Auroville. He recently retired from the foreign service and has opened a small "Auroville restaurant" in Addis Abbaba. He feels Ethiopia is ready to open to the vision and message of Sri Aurobindo and Mother, and spoke of his country's ancient spiritual traditions. He has written a short book on Auroville in Amharic which he plans to update and revise following his three-week stay here. He would like to open an Auroville International centre in Ethiopia and more immediately hopes to bring over some Ethiopian youth for a few months to experience and participate in Auroville in February.

✿ Auroville, after years of pioneering isolation, is becoming better known and there is a growing need to reach out and mesh gears in these global nineties with a rapidly changing world. As Auroville begins to brace itself for the Silver Jubilee, how are we dealing with the steady increase in visitors? One example is the newly activated Visitors Centre which now houses both the Boutique d'Auroville and the Information Centre and a new addition: the Auroville Cafeteria. The Centre's pleasing arches and open spaces, its soft limestone-coloured shades are a welcome (and welcoming) change from the bureaucratic gloom of the Bharat Nivas.

✿ I dropped in on the cheerful trio of Amudha, Eleanor and Selvi, who along with Kanta, Meena and Martin staff the greatly expanded quarters of the Information Centre. For Amudha the increase in visitors is directly connected to the

PHOTO ROGER



Susan and one of her colourful cloth creations

Matrimandir becoming more known. Visitors to Auroville can be generally divided into two categories: those who are already interested in Auroville and those who are shuttled out here on tourist buses. How do people react to Auroville? According to Eleanor, those who have visited Auroville before and return frequently remark on how Auroville has changed: more houses, more trees and better water facilities. Indian visitors on the whole tend to be very positive and express a desire to return and see more, while Europeans tend to ask more searching questions and are more critical. Eleanor, who is pushing a merry eighty with more energy than many people half her age, laughingly adds that Indian visitors sometimes ask surprisingly personal questions such as "Are you married?" or "Are those your own teeth?"

Selvi says that Tamil visitors are initially concerned about segregation and want to know whether the Health Centre and the schools are only for foreigners. "How do you communicate with foreigners?" they ask, and "Are the communities mixed?" "We answer that people in Auroville are equal and try to share—at least most of the time!". Some visitors also want to know about how to join Auroville and whether it is possible to live here but still work outside.

The moments that Eleanor enjoys most are when she gets someone who is really interested—"You can tell by the look in their eyes"—and she is able to explain Auroville "from the ideals down". "They are fascinated by the panels on evolution and I explain that we are not merely here to plant trees, but to understand and move towards the goal that Sri Aurobindo and the Mother set for this place. And it's fulfilling if you can somehow light a spark!". Upstairs there will soon be a space for viewing videos on Auroville as well as a permanent hall for exhibiting Auroville art. I later called in at the Matrimandir Information booth to find out how many visitors Matrimandir had received during the last few months. I was surprised to find out that 9,083 people had visited the Matrimandir in October, and 6,209 in November.

✿ Some years back, during a seminar on "The Dream", many people felt that Auroville needed a place where people could meet, as well as connect with visitors and guests. This idea appealed to Sonja. And when, six months ago, there was still no one to look after the projected cafeteria at the Reception Centre, Sonja, who liked the building and its atmosphere, stepped forward and agreed to set it up. Domes and arches section the cafeteria, which has watercolours of Auroville artists hanging on its walls and a corner set aside for board games. Its clientele, in the two months since it opened, tends to be a mixture of Indian pilgrim tourist types right off buses, Western travellers with *Lonely Planet* guide in hand, and increasing numbers of Aurovilians. A busy team of six



PHOTO ROGER



PHOTO IRENO



PHOTO ALAN

Photo top left: (l. to r.) Selvi, Amudha and Eleanor give information to visitors.

Top right: A tense moment in the play

Left: Tourists relax in the cafeteria at the Visitors Centre

finally felt it was my responsibility to say 'yes'—not only to them but to my creative self as well. The prospect of sustaining the effort was daunting at first and an exhibition makes you realize whether you should continue or maybe try something else!"

"My designs come from the urge to try and portray the feeling a particular flower conveys" she says, and feels following a recent trip back home to Canada, that a new quality of gentleness has entered her work, particularly in her hangings inspired by sweet peas and roses. "For me the emphasis is now, after two years, less on the cloth than on the light coming through—it is always the effect of light that catches me."

"It's a miracle that anything gets done at all. My concepts are always developing and I have to communicate them to my two tailors whilst I'm in the midst of discovering them myself. My mother was a potter and now paints. I've always been taught, by example, to experiment—it's not an experiment if you know what's going to happen. All of us who've chosen to be here in Auroville are going out of any territory that we've known." Susan feels that the last few years have created an opening in the community to artistic creativity "People seem to want it more in their homes now, Auroville's pioneering phase wasn't quite the time." All her works are untitled except for *Two Zebras who are Friends Resting in the Jungle*, about which she laughingly remarks "No one can make them out anyway!"

Her show, canopied at the entrance by the large blue butterfly, bird and banyan tree sunshade that usually protects Centre Guest House diners from falling civet cats and palm fruits, presented the viewer with a dazzling array of colors whether those depicting palm-fringed seas or dream roads leading to sun-pink hills. Red and mauve lotuses against a background of layered shades of green startled the viewer in one room; while other hangings contrasted tropical greens with the pale violet of wild roses, or red and yellow cannas on a field of blue. Comments in the visitor's book ranged from "Jeux de transparences inoubliables" and "Traumhaft

schön" to "A little piece of heaven." For those who missed an extraordinary show, Susan plans a smaller exhibit in Auroville for February.

✿ Cosmic considerations of light and darkness and the shedding of masks aside, it was the farcical element in *Black Comedy*, Peter Shaffer's comic send-up of the English middle class, that appealed to Auroville's rustic taste and had the Bharat Nivas echoing with that rare sound—laughter—for two consecutive nights. Brindsley, an aspiring sculptor, plans to request Claire's hand in marriage and has invited her father to his apartment—which he has furnished for the occasion with the contents of his art collecting neighbour's flat upstairs. A German millionaire interested in his work is also expected. A power cut before the guests arrive, an ex-girlfriend who phones from the airport, and the unexpected early return of the unsuspecting neighbour all add to the imbroglio. In the play—that most agreed was about moving and moveable assets—Shaffer's West-End English was brought home by a Franco-Italian-German combine of Auroville accents and all deserved by play's end the generous whistles and applause they received. There was Stefano as the harried suitor harlequin; the exquisite Jackie as the precious antique lover; Otto as the spit and polish Colonel hardly impressed by his daughter's suitor or the goings-on; and Ellen as the teetotalling neighbour upstairs, who by play's end has discovered new tastes in the dark. There was Elodie as the *ingenue debutante* whose hand in marriage Stefano seeks, and Bettina as the scheming mistress who recaptures her man, and finally Theo's cameo appearance and sudden disappearance as the deaf millionaire. Alain Antoine bridged the Anglo-French theatre tradition in Auroville with his performance as the art connoisseur-cum-philosopher-cum-electrician who brings—at play's end—the lights back on.

✿ The week ends with Tuesday nightwatch at Matrimandir. Patrick joins me and fills me in on the Working Committee's week. The way things are going, our Council might well need an armadillo's skin by the time their term is up. We soon take up sky-gazing and make out Jupiter and distant Beltegeuse. Matrimandir, anchoring a sea of stars, seems to herald in its mysterious way tonight—ancient, millennial yet ever new, the Winter's birth of light.

Roger

✿ What I like about Auroville art is that it is not dissociated from everyday life, and the work of Auroville artists can frequently be found in people's homes, adding their touch of transfigured realism. In Susan's wall hangings, which decorate the Cafeteria, the meeting rooms of Merriam Hill and many private homes, colour blends with many moonlit and sunlit moods. I dropped in on her at her open-air keel-roofed workshop in Centre Field. She was putting the finishing touches to a collection of fifty pieces of her latest multi-layered work—one year in the making—that was due to go on exhibit the following week at the Alliance Francaise in Pondy. A native of British Columbia, she is no stranger to art shows, having run a gallery in Vancouver for many years. "Although I had been producing work to order for a couple of years, putting together an exhibition was a new challenge for me. So many people told me that I should do one that I

Early
December
morning
at Matrimandir

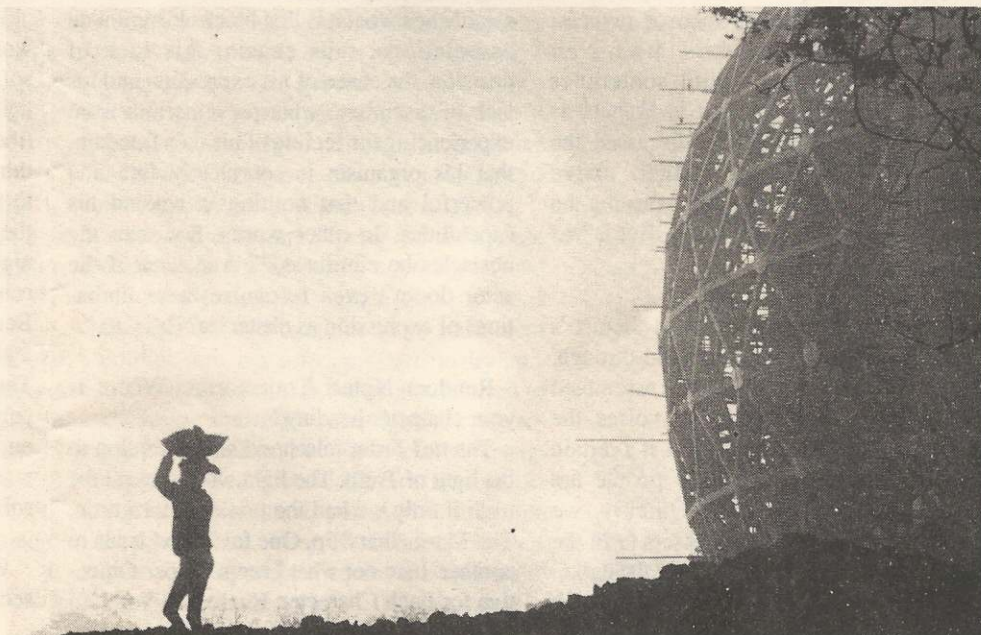


PHOTO IRENO

Reflections on a Rehearsal

So, after all, what did we discover on this journey? Because every show is a journey into the unknown, with a crew aboard who you hardly know and the only thing that's clear is your destination—the performance.

Is it what I remember, or what I imagine I remember? After "Waiting for Godot", Otto and I talked about doing another play. This time a comedy. Enough theatre of the absurd, essential angst. We wanted something funny, crazy, adaptable to Auroville. Something people could connect with. But what experiences do we all have in common? We read and read. Several plays seemed almost right. Then we found a collection of three comedies by Peter Shaffer. "Black Comedy" was one of them. And it was about—a power cut.

Light and darkness. Darkness and light. In doing my homework before the beginning of rehearsals, I read the play over several times and found many things that would challenge me. (It is no use doing a play you have already done as a director.) The size of the cast—eight people—was twice as many as "Godot". It was a farce, definitely a farce—that meant non-stop physical and verbal mayhem, broad strokes, but not caricatures. The writing was too good for us to dismiss these characters as mere cardboard cut-outs. They had substance. Physically, the challenge would be to create movement on a stage which the audience must believe was dark, even though the lights were actually on. Fortunately in Auroville, you get a lot of practice moving around in the dark—when ever there's a power cut, or the generator isn't working, or your flashlight (torch) fails, or you have no candles, or the light on your moped or bicycle decides to go out on the unlit road in the middle of the night. Here in Auroville we are particularly sensitive to the distress of lights that fail. And in the context of the play, this failure of light also represents, metaphorically, an inability to see things as they really are, an aversion to shedding light on the truth, especially for the main character, Brindsley, a poor artist living in London, whose dilemma is that he has two girlfriends and has been lying to each of them about the other.

How do you cast a show in Auroville? Somehow, it's like any place else, and then again, it isn't. Some people I already had in mind, others just... appeared, or were met on the road (where most profound discussions take place). In conversation, I would register the energy of a possible actor, my antennae out for liveliness, a capacity for foolishness (essential in a farce), a love of language. Well, this last one provided some problems, considering that, finally, none of my cast were native English speakers. *Mais, c'est Auroville*. Rehearsals would sometimes proceed half in English, half in French, as two French-speaking actors discussed the possibilities for staging in their native tongue. I would wait patiently, grasping the beginnings or ends of sentences. But it was all fine, somehow.

So, now we are all together in Stefano's house, Aurodam, for a first read-through. Your throat tightens as you see the assembled crowd (your stomach, too). The voices, the voices. Listen to the voices. Well, it's certain no one will believe all these people are English, so why pretend? Quickly, we changed some names of characters to fit the origin of the actor. Stefano became the Italian artist living in London, Jacky the French

antique dealer, Ellen the German neighbour from upstairs. And why not?

The work on stage begins. For every two hours of rehearsal, an hour of warm-ups and improvisational games to loosen us up, to get the creative juices flowing, to shake off the troubles and tightness of the day, to crack through the barriers, to break old habits, to create unity from diversity. It is a good work for Auroville, I think, time and time again, as I watch the group gain in strength, trust, spontaneity, mutual respect and sharing. It is absolutely necessary (*c'est absolument nécessaire*). I am beginning to think in French.

I am reading Peter Brooks' book, *The Empty Space*, and also Grotowski's *Towards a Poor Theater*. I find quotes which are indispensable to our rehearsal process: "One must give oneself totally, in one's deepest intimacy, with confidence, as when one gives oneself in love." This is advice to the players, but doesn't it also apply to the collective process in Auroville, and doesn't the need of the actor "to transcend our solitude" echo the needs of this unique community at this particular time? So many facets of our 'real' life come up during this process of discovery. To discover, to find what lies hidden, to shed light in the dark places. At the most material level, how much light is enough light on that staircase? On the spiritual level, how to combine spontaneity and discipline? Far from weakening each other, these two concepts mutually reinforce themselves to become the real source of a kind of acting that glows. And again and again, the Divine source of this energy, this light, is love. You cannot create without it.

Concentrate. Concentrate! CONCENTRATE! This word will come up often during rehearsals, mostly out of the mouth of a frustrated director whose actors will not concentrate for more than... a few bloody seconds. And continually "I can't..." and "But I'm not going to..." "Do I have to kiss him?" I turn again to Grotowski for solace. "For each individual actor it must be clearly established what it is that blocks his intimate associations, thus causing his lack of decision, the chaos of his expression and his lack of discipline; what prevents him from experiencing the feeling of his own freedom, that his organism is completely free and powerful and that nothing is beyond his capabilities. In other words, how can the obstacles be eliminated?" And what if the actor doesn't even recognize these limitations of expression as obstacles?!

Random Notes: Trajectories. Where is your character heading?

Theme? From falsehood and deception to the light of Truth. The light would reveal the truth if only we had the power to turn it on. The Masks that Slip. One falsehood leads to another. I am not what I seem. Super-Objective for Each Character. Express in Verb. To



At a rehearsal: Jill (front) and Ellen

Conceal. To Reveal. See the Darkness. Feel the Darkness. Imagine the Darkness at Every Moment. Many rehearsals are spent walking around the space as if in the dark. Over and over again, until every character has his or her own way of moving. Yes, how indeed do we find our way in the Dark? At times, watching people work so earnestly, so carefully, I am moved by their willingness to surrender, their understanding, my own lack of the proper words to get us through.

God, will they be able to remember all these lines? Hasn't anyone... but these are all remembrances of a rehearsal from the heart of a director, so please, do not be unduly alarmed. Directors are just like that, sometimes. We panic. We watch, dumbfounded and helpless. We pray a lot.

We are all completely crazy. Let me explain. There has been a power cut. There are no lights on at Matrimandir as we drive to Bharat Nivas for a rehearsal. There are no lights on at Bharat Nivas. Yet everyone comes. We are all here. Why? Because now we are not many; we are one. And where else would we go on a Wednesday night? Through sheer stubbornness, or foolishness, we work in the dark. We listen to each other in the darkness. We are all completely crazy.

The technical staff are incredible. They work, uncomplaining, around our rehearsal, softly, gently, spending untold hours on lights and props. Somewhere after the middle (the show will be in December, it's now the third week in November), some friends come to watch. To listen. The biggest problem is the acoustics in Bharat Nivas. It is a nightmare. Voices bounce off the bare walls, echoing hollowly, or simply disappearing. Beautiful stage. Terrible acoustics. They go away, these friends, shaking their heads. There is no good space for a theatre group to perform in Auroville. We spend a lot of time on the voice. This will continue to be the main technical problem. It will never be solved.

We decide to perform two nights in the second week of December. It is a good

decision. We have enough time. Miraculously, no one has quit the show, no one has had a major nervous breakdown or thrown a tantrum. The work has deepened, and the actors, the young ones and the older ones, are helping each other, learning from each other. There is a lot of laughter. A lot of patience. A lot of late nights. Everyone's other work suffers. Spouses and friends start coming to rehearsal, out of curiosity and loneliness. (What are you doing three hours a night, three nights a week?) They stay to help, lend a hand where they can.

Finally, we can see the whole show. From start to finish, it is two hours and fifteen minutes. My God. We need to eliminate, oh, about half an hour. It is so slow. And in comedy, the pace is so important. No, not just important. It is almost everything.

Three days to go, two days. We have tightened it up considerably; the show now runs "What was it tonight? One hour and thirty eight minutes?! A record!" We are ready to perform. We are all ready to perform. We are tired of rehearsing. We need the energy of an audience to spark us off, to laugh. My goodness, will they laugh?? Let us pray.

Jill

First impressions

Manivone, who has been living in England, is in Auroville on a six-month visit and has recently started attending the *Auroville Today* editorial meetings, enlivening them with her enthusiasm and openness. Here she gives us her first impressions of Auroville.

"Whatever you do," I was advised, "carry on shaving your legs, DON'T shave your head, or pierce your nose." I came to Auroville with the minutest knowledge of the place. A surprisingly large number of my friends and associates, who were otherwise slightly aware of alternative life-styles, knew nothing at all! To them, Auroville sounded like a hippy commune with people indulging in cosmic eccentric things.

I admit that, although I have been here for over three months now, I am only getting into the message of the whole place little by little, and discovering its aims and purposes.

Auroville is notoriously tough for its newcomers and guests; it took me a while to feel really secure within myself about the place; but I do believe the settling-in process is starting to roll round (albeit with gradual and hesitant steps!). People here aren't the most openly friendly, and come across as very much contained within themselves, without an obvious interest in you (leaving you to do all the ice-breaking). However, once the wall is breached, then you find the majority very interested, and interesting, people who are willing to share what they feel and think. You've just got to be social enough, and confident enough, to do all the initial communicating.

Visually, Auroville, as a green landscape, is beautiful. The contrasting hues of red earth and vibrant, green vegetation is stunning to the eye. Occasionally, the horizon is marred by a few architecturally displeasing formations, but, balanced with the nature surrounding them, there is a surreal effect that leaves the aesthetic in me somewhat satisfied.

These impressions are only my first, and as my stay extends, I am sure that discoveries will be bountiful in all aspects. □

Short News

Exhibitions

* Anissa Advani knows how to advertise her exhibitions: every Aurovilian received a beautiful card announcing the exhibition of her paintings at Pitanga Hall for a week during the month of December. Among other things we learnt that she is from India and, at the relatively tender age of 24, has already a number of exhibitions behind her, including in the USA. Manivone went there and reported the following: "If you have an inclination for bold and disturbing art, her style of painting is for you! Her art varies from still-life poses to macabre observations echoing Munch; there was no unifying theme and no obvious signature style—upon first glance you wouldn't associate the many paintings with the same artist."

The visitors' book had mainly negative reactions—but then someone's remark was: "Art should be disturbing!" Voilà.

* For Susan's successful wall hanging exhibition in Pondicherry we refer you to Roger's article on page 4 and 5.

Land for Auroville

The leaflet "A call to acquire the land for Auroville" has just been printed and will be sent to Auroville International members and friends of Auroville world-wide.

One-man show

Francophiles enjoyed an evening of Jacques Prévert's poetry, brought to life by Robert (Dana). Prévert's poignant poetry is full of pun, fun and melancholy. It was a lovely evening at Pitanga Hall where French *esprit* could be tasted to the full.

"Sing we and chaunt it"

The Auroville choir is getting popular. During two evenings at the Bharat Nivas Auditorium they chanted and enchanted an enthusiastic public. They sang a variety of pieces in different languages including Latin, Catalan, medieval English, and Russian, three of which were composed by Pushkar, the choir's conductor. This was the second time the Auroville choir performed, the first time having been about a year ago.

Circle Dance

Universal Peace Dances and other dances were danced in Pitanga Hall on Christmas

Day and New Year's Eve. Judith Bone from the Findhorn Community in Scotland and Corrie and Angelika from Auroville led the dances.

Children's Day

On a Sunday in December, around eight hundred children from surrounding villages came to the football ground near Bharat Nivas where they enjoyed a varied programme of sports, games, a magic show, skits and songs. 'Village Action' organized this day which has become a tradition during the last few years.

International Advisory Council

Dr Karan Singh, Chairman of the Auroville Foundation, has informed the Working Committee that the International Advisory Council, a body of the Auroville Foundation composed of eminent persons, has now been formed and will have its first meeting in Auroville in February. The members are: Prof. Ervin Laszlo, philosopher, Italy; Mr. Frederico Mayor, Director-General, UNESCO, Paris; Mr. Bertrand Schneider, Secretary-General of the Club of Rome, Paris; Mr. Maurice Strong, environmentalist, Canada; and Mr. J.R.D. Tata, industrialist, Bombay.

Tibet

His Holiness the Dalai Lama has consented to be the Patron of the Pavilion of Tibetan Culture in Auroville.

Housing

An article under the title 'Auroville model for low-cost housing' was published in *The Hindu* daily newspaper dated January 1st. It said that funds had been allotted to build 3,400 houses for Adi Dravidars (Harijans) in the South-Arcot District and "Mr. M.V. Irai Anbu, Additional Collector, who is also Project Officer of the DRDA [District Rural Development Agency], said that the low-cost technique adopted in Auroville would be followed. He explained that the model was being implemented in Vanoor block at present.

... "Depending on its success in Vanoor, the group houses for Adi Dravidars would be constructed only on the Auroville model throughout the district."

choir plans to meet him for a rehearsal in his chamber...

* Immediately underneath a proposal to hold an "Auroville Smile Week" we found a piece of prose, addressed to "whomever stole 14 (fourteen) litres of petrol from my *bile* at the Ami party". (There follows a series of dire suggestions).

* And what they are up to at 'Vérité' is anybody's guess. They announced a workshop in "exploding yoga and holitic living".

* And now for our own typos. In case you felt that a major event in world history passed you by, we should point out that the reference made in our article "Those were the Days" (see previous issue) to "the events of 1972" should have read "the events of 1792". But what's a couple of centuries among friends?

Letters

"Alarm bells should be ringing"

✉ I very much appreciated Alan's comprehensive article in the last *Auroville Today* on our water situation, which gave plenty of food for thought.

I'm sometimes shocked by the unconsciousness and selfishness we display in our attitude to water usage. We all know the situation is becoming worse, perhaps serious, maybe even critical, yet what is happening? I see yet more water-intensive gardens being developed in the Pitanga area; the lawns of Auromodèle continue to be watered as heavily as ever (not one has been abandoned, let alone reduced); tanks continue to overflow regularly, despite available technology for automatic cut-off of the pumping system; taps and valves are left leaking for months or years, sometimes hundreds of litres a day; and unsupervised or inadequately instructed garden workers continue to run large diameter hoses for hours to areas of already saturated bushes or flower beds, often for 6 days a week in non-monsoon weather. Is it surprising that we move towards a crisis in water, when we are incapable of dealing with our crisis in behaviour?

As matters presently stand, I'm not the least surprised to learn that some of our wells are now on the verge of drying up. But I am surprised at the continuing lack of action and indifference displayed by so many fully aware Aurovilians. I know one place, with a large developed garden area, which rather than think of cutting back when they found they couldn't get enough water last summer to keep everything lush, announced that they planned to put in a second well to pump out even more water! I know an individual who, until confronted 2 years ago, used to regularly leave a small hosepipe running all night onto a single hibiscus bush, giving it as much as 1,500 litres at a time. (The bush subsequently died!). And I know another individual, who seeing a neighbour using excessive amounts of water, argued with me for the right to waste equal amounts by putting in a non-essential lawn area. "If he can go on using that amount, then why can't I?" was the comment. What shocked me, was on the one hand the observation of a neighbour's apparently *unconscious* over-use of water, and on the other the *conscious* determination to do the same! Yet another individual was heard to argue "I paid for most of the community piping and water system, so I feel I have the right to use more water". Incredible. Absolutely incredible! Equivalent to two people drinking through straws from a shared glass of cool drink, and one arguing that he has the right to consume more of the contents because he has spent more on a costly straw to suck it through! I, for one, am upset by such blatant, self-centred disregard for how our most essential life-supporting asset is used, because as I see it the water below ground is a single, inter-connected resource which belongs in equal parts to every one of us here. Meanwhile, I know of at least one well which is already down to its last meter of water. Alarm bells should be ringing.

Don't people care? Or are we simply unable to link our actions to anything beyond our own house and garden area? If so, I suppose we will continue to be indifferent until, in turn, our own well starts to dry up.

You may think that the people referred to above are somehow exceptional, or not-so-good Aurovilians, but you would be wrong. They are all of them really nice, hard working, kind individuals, typical of the best type of people here. They are beautiful in their own way, but when it comes to water usage

they simply don't seem to care; or if they do care in an intellectual sort of way, the consequences of their personal behaviour are all too remote for them, and they see no reason to act. That, in a nutshell, seems to be our problem when it comes to individual water usage.

Meanwhile, what about township projects such as the Matrimandir gardens? There's no doubt that the new rose garden area is beautiful, but it's very water intensive in style. If the rest of the Gardens are developed along the same lines, the water required to maintain them will be horrendous. I just have to trust that the team responsible is aware of this, and is taking it into account in their overall plans for the area. Likewise other projects.

To conclude, we simply can't afford at this stage of Auroville's development to go on treating water as if it were an unlimited resource. It's not; and it's high time everyone started acting accordingly.

Tim, Auroville

Discovering the Unknown

✉ Dear Auroville Today,

What we live outside is what we are inside and vice versa.

In your article on water scarcity in the last *Auroville Today* you have omitted to see this problem from different angles including the most 'true' one—in the sense that Mother explained that Auroville is a "dream of the Lord and generally these 'dreams' turn out to be true, much more true than the human so-called realities!"

Your intention is to bring an awareness about the water situation. Yet, day after day, we ignore the unexpected. When we expect something to happen, we are inviting that to become a reality. Everything is like that. We fear disease and we fall sick; or our life gets too much involved in protecting ourselves. We are losing the track on which everything is possible.

We forget, or it doesn't come to our mind, that all life moves between the most subtle and the most material, and behind everything are forces or vibrations and it is up to us to discover and to master those forces.

This is what Auroville is all about. We should always think or work or aspire to make all the apparent impossibilities into certitudes. Mother said that there is enough water in Auroville and I am inclined to say that it is because of our lack of faith that things are going away from us, even water. Also money has a tremendous difficulty to come here for the same reason.

This is why we should project our faith into the future, and all of us should call together to make our dreams become a reality. This could be the powerful remedy to all our dilemmas, and bring the joy of discovering the unknown. With love,

André Tardeil, Auroville

To our subscribers

✉ Please note that your next issue of *Auroville Today*, which will be a special 25th Anniversary issue, will be mailed to you in the month of March, and will combine the February and March issues.

Omission

The cartoon on page 8 of the previous issue (Jill being inundated) was made by Peio. We regret the omission.

—Eds

X Typical Typos X

Sometimes typographical errors (or 'typos') seem to have been inserted by little imps, who like to distract the reader from the intended message, and to bring out a smile of surprise or a new angle of insight. Lately there seems to have been a little collection of those in the 'Auroville News' asking to be brought to notice. Here goes.

* An Aurovilian named Bonaventure was inspired by the following line, which he felt urged to put in the News: "To evolve is to surrender choices..." The unfortunate Aurovilian did not have any choice about how his name evolved: it had become 'Nonaventyre'...

* In a Residents' Assembly meeting report, the following sentence was found: "The Secretary would just have to *sing* and forward the recommendations" Many in the community thought it was an exciting proposal. The

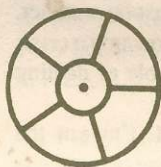
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ANKE AND MICHAEL
GRACE
AUROVILLE



January 1993

Number Forty-Eight

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AROUND AUROVILLE

The mini-businesswomen of the village

What is life like for the women you see carrying baskets of fish on their heads from Bommayapalayam to Edayanchavadi? How does she manage on ten rupees a day?

For ten rupees she can buy a kilo of rice, some *dhal* (pulse) and vegetables, and maybe some spice. She'll cook it on firewood found in Auroville. (In this respect, Auroville villagers are well off compared to most Indian villagers as firewood is becoming scarce and requires longer and longer treks to fetch.) What's left over is soaked in water overnight and eaten in the morning as a gruel. Some days, only *ragi* porridge is eaten (a kilo, at Rs 3.50, feeds the family two meals), and thus money is saved for a shirt, a sari, or books for the school-going child. No wonder the young ones are pulled out of school and sent to work on construction sites, or to mind the house and smaller children while their mother goes to work.

Some women are enterprising and start tiny businesses. They buy the ingredients for *idlies*, then cook and sell them to other villagers. They take the fishermen's fish and carry them to sell in the inland villages. They carry milk or curd to Pondy for sale, and buy vegetables which they bring back to sell in their villages. Normally these undertakings are financed by the local moneylender, who gets 10% interest per day. (This is an interest of 300% per month or 3600% per annum!) It doesn't seem like much, as the amounts in each transaction are small: Rs 100 taken in the morning is repaid as Rs 110 in the evening. And no doubt the moneylender would tell you it's a high-risk loan and he is often not repaid. Still, the moneylenders remain in business, whereas the small entrepreneurs rise and fade like flowers.

Village Action met these women in connection with an American programme called "Trickle Up". ("Trickle down" is shorthand for the idea that the best way for underdeveloped countries to grow rich like developed countries, is for them to borrow money on the international money market and invest heavily in big industry. This will stimulate the national economy, resulting in a general prosperity which will trickle down

to the masses. In fact, this policy has proved to be totally fallacious and so effective in pauperizing the masses, depleting the environment and enriching the elite, as to be easily mistaken for a conspiracy.) "Trickle Up" is a private programme which aims at giving small amounts of capital (100 dollars) to small groups (5 people) of entrepreneurs to start their own businesses.

Village Action has formed three groups of women from Bommayapalayam and Kuilapalayam. They have received these small grants which allowed them to avoid having to take the daily loans from the moneylenders. In lieu of interest, they have agreed to save regularly in a joint account. Recently, after nine months, one group had put away nearly Rs.7,000. They met and decided what to do with the savings: in this case, and usually, they decided to take half the amount to spend, and to keep the other half in savings. When any member faces an emergency, such as sickness or marriage or whatever, they can apply for a loan from the group's savings. So far, this is working very well, with great benefit to the women. (We haven't asked the moneylenders what they think about it!) It's more than just a monetary help, it's a support group as well.

Of course such a programme owes a lot to the dedication and honesty of a social worker like Anbu, a Village Action worker in Kuilapalayam, who is able to explain the idea and win the trust of the women, and who is available to them at the hours when they can make their deposits — never office hours, always early morning or evening.

And the "beneficiaries" are working hard. They are up at dawn, clean the house and make breakfast for family, slog to the market, purchase wares, prepare the wares for sale, sit in the market and hawk them or walk over long treks of unshaded road to inland villages, travel on crowded buses, attend to accumulated chores at home, perhaps also to the unloving ministrations of a drunken husband — they've not got it easy by any reckoning—but perhaps it's a little better now.

Dee

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Light in darkness: a moment from 'Black Comedy' (photo Ireno)