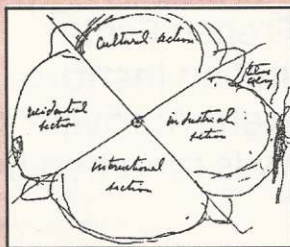


Auroville Today

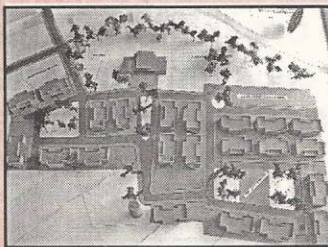
MAY 2002, No.160

MAIN THEME: Village relations

- The Sangamam model village
- Mother's message to the Ashram employees
- European Union support for village schools
- Composting village garbage pages 1 and 3



Mother's sketch of the city



Layout of Sangamam



Double housing unit at Sangamam

In August 1954 Mother's "A Dream" was published. "There should be somewhere on earth a place which no nation could claim as its own, where all human beings of goodwill who have a sincere aspiration could live freely as citizens of the world ...". This Dream has been a great inspiration for Aurovilians, though Auroville was founded many years later.

Just a month before the publication of "A Dream", another message had appeared in an Ashram publication entitled "To the employees of Sri Aurobindo Ashram". Mother's ideal community for Ashram employees has remarkable similarities to the community described in "A Dream". It showed that The Mother was concerned to create ideal conditions not only for sadhaks but also for employees, indeed, for everyone who fulfilled the essential conditions for living in such a place: "good character, good conduct, honest, regular and efficient work and a general goodwill".

When Auroville was founded, The Mother expressed a similar concern for the welfare of the local villagers and workers. Apart from clarifying the correct way to relate to the villagers, Mother also explained how they should be helped to improve their living conditions and indicated that a 'labourers' colony' should be created for those who work in Auroville.

Over the last thirty years Auroville village oriented groups have been busy promoting water supply systems, health and dental care, education and a variety of other development projects in the villages. However little was done about the often dismal housing situation of the villagers, until a new project, Sangamam, opened its doors in April.

The inauguration took place in the same week that some villagers presented a list of grievances, mostly related to land purchase and management issues, to the Secretary of the Auroville Foundation. It was a reminder that, for all the good work it is doing, Auroville needs to involve the villages more fully in the planning and development of the whole area.

A model village opens its doors

The first phase of Sangamam, a model village situated near Utility, was declared open for habitation on Tamil New Year, April 14th.

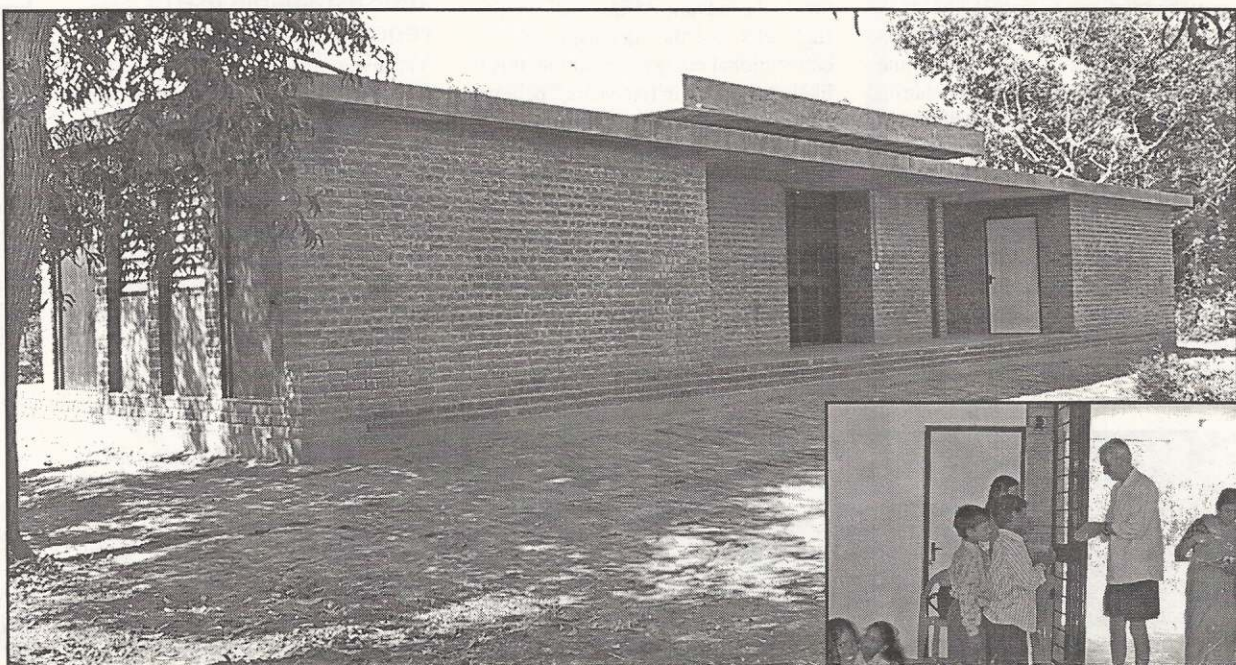
The opening of the first phase of the Sangamam model village on Tamil New Year was a happy occasion. The first inhabitants, four couples with their children and one bachelor, were given the keys to their brand new accommodation in an atmosphere of joy and laughter.

Sangamam marks the beginning of the materialisation of a vision of The Mother to create housing for those who work for Auroville. In one of her early sketches Mother had indicated that there would be a kind of 'labourers' colony'. This concept finally evolved into Sangamam, meaning 'confluence', a meeting place for the villagers and Auroville. "We have envisaged Sangamam as a demonstration centre. It shows how a village can be planned, what type of appropriate infrastructure is suitable, and how, using low-cost building technologies and creative eco-friendly architecture, a village can be built," says Joseba. "Following this strategy, it has been possible to raise the funds for the first phase. We hope that ultimately, when the next phases of the project have been finalised, the village can become an example for other villages in India."

It is due to Joseba's and his partner Anandi's untiring efforts that the project got its initial funding. They secured a donation of US \$61,000 from the government of Navarra, Spain, for the first phase of the project and acted as its project managers. Auroville contributed by making two hectares of its land available next to Utility. "The complete project will comprise 48 houses, dormitory and guesthouse facilities, a community centre, a 3-chamber water tank, a waste water treatment system and an extensive infrastructure including two bridges over the canyon and a causeway," says Joseba. "In the first phase we have created six houses, the community building, and all of the infrastructure. I have high hopes that we'll be able to manifest the entire project within a few years."

Architect Anupama and builder Dhanapal have been responsible for the design and construction. The house design is simple. Alternative technologies such as rammed earth techniques have been used as much as possible. As is the standard in Tamil Nadu, the houses are small (the living and cooking area is about 30 sqm) with bathroom access from the outside. The cost amounts to slightly less than Rs 2 lakhs (US\$ 4,200) per house, cheap if one takes the quality of the finishing into account. The community centre consists of a large meeting cum television room and other common spaces.

"The water tank is unique," explains Josebas. "It consists of three chambers: the top one is for potable water, the second one for recycled water and the third for harvested water. Recycled and harvested water will be used for flushing toilets and gardening. The wastewater plant is another prototype. The Indian Central Pollution Control Board has donated



Top: the community centre of Sangamam.

Insert: Frederick and Meenakshi handing the keys to the first inhabitants.



the money for this research plant, and also pays for 2 engineers to supervise its operation for 2 years." Meenakshi is responsible for the social aspects of Sangamam. All residents are selected by Auroville and have to contribute ten percent of their salaries as a monthly rent, which will be used for the maintenance of the village facilities and infrastructure. Residents participate in educative programs to encourage the understanding of the value of the project, so that they are motivated to fully participate and maintain the village. A management committee composed of representatives of the village and rep-

resentatives of Auroville is responsible for the overall management of the project. The project team plans to open up the next phases of the project to other architects. It will also invite individuals who would like to help their employees to live in decent houses to co-fund houses in Sangamam - they would pay 50%, and so would the Sangamam project. "The project team has cooperated very harmoniously to manifest this project," said a beaming Anupama at the opening ceremony. "I hope that this atmosphere will continue here in Sangamam."

Carel



Mother's message to the employees of Sri Aurobindo Ashram 1954

All my effort is towards realising in the world as much truth as actual circumstances will allow, and with the increase of truth, the welfare and happiness of all will necessarily increase. Difference of caste and class have no truth for me; all that counts is individual value. My aim is to create a big family in which it will be possible for each one to fully develop his capacities and express them. Each one will have his place and occupation in accordance with his capacities and in a relation of goodwill and brotherhood.

As a consequence of such a family organisation there will be no need of remuneration or wages. Work should not be a means of earning one's livelihood; its purpose should be two-fold: first to develop one's nature and capacity for action, and, secondly, in proportion to one's physical means and moral and intellectual aptitude, to give service to the family to which one belongs and to whose welfare it is but proper to contribute, as it is proper for the family to provide for the real needs of each of its members.

To give a concrete form to this ideal under the present conditions of life, my idea is to build a kind of

city accommodating at the outset about two thousand persons. It will be built according to the most modern plans, meeting all the most up-to-date requirements of hygiene and public health. It will have not only residential houses, but also gardens and sports-grounds for physical culture. Each family will be lodged in a separate house; bachelors will be grouped according to their occupations and affinities. Nothing necessary for life will be forgotten. Kitchens equipped in the most modern hygienic way will supply equally to all simple and healthy food, assuring the energy necessary for the proper maintenance of the body. They will function on a cooperative basis of work in common and of collaboration.

In the matter of education, what is necessary is to arrange for the moral and intellectual instruction and development of all, children and adults: various schools, technical instruction in different vocations, classes for music and dance, a cinema hall where educational films will be shown, a lecture hall, a library, a reading room, varied physical education, a sportsground and so on.

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Auroville: a sustainable energy community?

Three students on a course organized by the French Ecole Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne and the Indian Institute of Technology, Madras, researched to what extent Auroville's image of being a renewable energy community is matched by the reality.

Today Auroville has the reputation of being one of the most important demonstration sites for renewable energy (RE) technologies in India. This is based on solid achievement: the community is home to around 500 kW of photovoltaics (which includes the largest stand-alone PV power plant in India), 30 windmills, 20 biogas units, a ground-breaking solar bowl, and there is continuing experimentation in areas like solar electric transport, solar desalination, and plant oil as a diesel substitute. Auroville is also increasingly sharing its RE experience and expertise with other parts of India. For example AuroRE, the unit which promotes renewable energy through the intelligent use of financial mechanisms, has recently installed 175 solar pump sets in the Punjab, Aureka has erected 40 windmills in Tibetan settlements, CSR has fabricated biogas units for the Andaman Islands, and Auroville

ber of factors, some of which are beyond our control. For example, most renewable energy technologies have steep up-front costs in comparison with conventional energy delivery systems. This is why renewable energy proponents the world over are awaiting technological breakthroughs in RE technologies to make them more efficient and comparable in price to conventional technologies. However, "with the advent of innovations like fuel cells and the increasing cost of conventional energy generation, this is likely to happen in five years," believes Hemant, the coordinator of AuroRE. Renewable energy systems also require more maintenance than conventional energy systems, thus requiring a higher level of commitment from the end-user. In fact, while the main reason why Aurovilians switch to RE technologies seems to be the freedom from power-cuts so prevalent on the Tamil Nadu Electricity Board grid,

all the relevant information and hardware. Moreover, since different groups provide different components of the system nobody takes overall responsibility for design and maintenance. The danger of ending up with a badly designed system is further exacerbated by the tendency of some Aurovilians to go for cheaper components to offset the steep price of solar panels.

The sustainable use of renewable energy

Yet even among those Aurovilians who have chosen to use renewable energy systems the level of environmental consciousness is not always high. As the students put it, "Renewable energy can only be sustainable if the energy produced is used in an efficient way". In other words, it's not enough to generate your energy from renewable sources; you have to use that energy wisely and appropriately. The students found examples of

people who use windmills to pump water yet who fail to fix leaking taps, or who generate their electricity through solar panels but then use energy-inefficient light bulbs.

In fact, the sustainable use of renewable energy, given its present state of development, seems inextricably linked with a commitment to a certain lifestyle – one which is relatively modest and low in its impact upon the environment. To illustrate this, the students cite an Auroville community which initially embraced renewable energy and purchased a large number of solar panels. However, when the inhabitants realized that it would be difficult and costly to run washing-

machines and fridges on solar power, they chose to tap into the conventional grid instead. Environmental consciousness also has an important social component. The students studied two communities which ran almost exclusively on renewable energy. One is a success, the other a failure. What made the difference? The successful community had designed its system carefully, everybody was very committed to making it work and so they undertook



Made in Auroville: windmill and ferro-cement water tank

to live within the overall capacity of the system. The renewable energy system of the other community was badly designed from the outset (the wiring alone was done by at least 12 different people!). When the RE pioneers left the new residents were not committed to renewable energy, they didn't have the technical capacity to maintain the system and didn't feel the need to adapt their individual needs to the overall capacity of the system. Consequently in this community there are frequent power cuts and the residents now want to purchase either a generator or to hook up to the grid.

The other main factors identified by the students as preventing Auroville moving more quickly towards a renewable energy future are the lack of building codes or by-laws which would mandate, for example, the provision of solar hot water heaters in all new buildings, the poor coordination between different groups working in the renewable energy field (which is often a failure of systems thinking, or of considering the overall picture when planning a new project), and the lack of data regarding the total energy needs of the community, and even of the total installed renewable energy capacity (the students were told by three different 'experts' that the total capacity was 65kW, 200kW and 500kW).

Similarly, in the field of construction (houses and apartments represent a large amount of embodied energy) the students did not find a high level of awareness among Aurovilian architects concerning the principles of energy-efficient and solar-passive architecture, and even among those who knew there were very few instances of them putting the principles into practice in an integrated way. "This was a surprise," admitted one of the students in a final feedback session. "While you have achieved much, we had expected

Auroville to be far more advanced in its use of renewable energy, energy-efficient architecture and water conservation programmes."

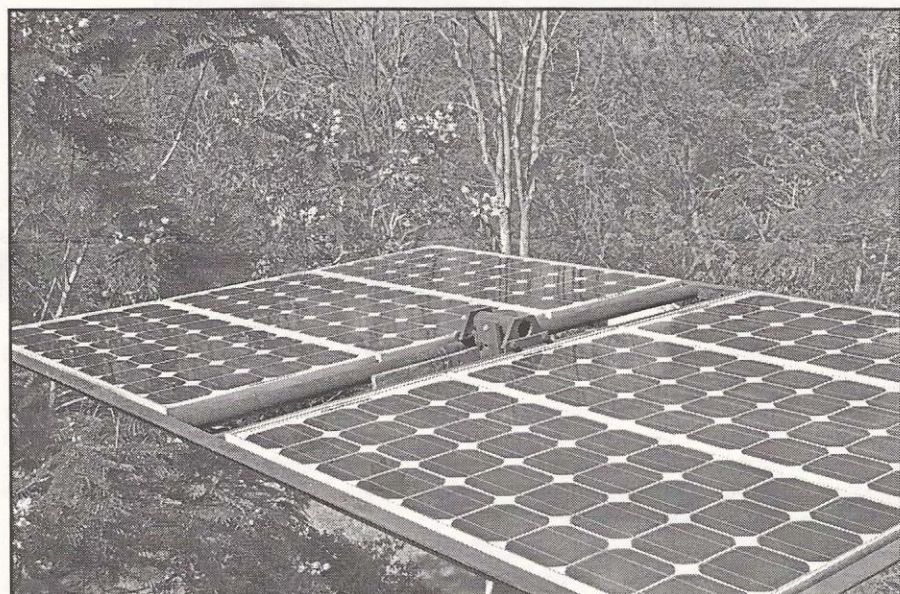
Recommendations

The students make a number of recommendations. They propose a general sensitization campaign to make Aurovilians and villagers not only aware of the need to be energy-efficient, but also to act upon that awareness (the AV Electrical Service is already planning to run sensitization courses for Aurovilians this summer). In this context, they suggest that an efficiency unit be set up to survey individual households and give advice. Such a unit could also help coordinate the activities of the different RE groups in Auroville. In terms of installing complex RE systems, they propose that one group should be responsible for the whole installation, and that a central maintenance unit be set up which would maintain all RE systems in the community.

At the planning level, building codes should be developed which would make the utilization of certain RE technologies mandatory. For example, solar hot water systems are comparatively cheap, easy to install and save enormous amounts of electricity. The students also suggest that we should study the possibility of creating mini-grids which would deliver renewable energy efficiently to groups of communities, using whichever source of RE is appropriate to that area. Another option they mention is generating energy by renewable means outside Auroville (i.e. by setting up a wind farm in the south of Tamil Nadu) and then selling this to the state grid to offset the energy we use in the community. In fact, AuroRE is already planning to make this its next big project.

However, the biggest problem at present regarding planning a RE strategy for the community is a lack of essential information. Consequently the report recommends that we begin by documenting all the RE systems in Auroville as well as the total energy needs of the community. There also needs to be an environmental impact assessment made of the way we generate and use our energy so that everybody is aware of the environmental cost of using conventional energy technologies.

The report does not make comfortable reading. But if it manages to make us clamber off our laurels and start re-examining how far we still have to go before we become an energy-sustainable community, all those kilometers cycled in the heat and the dust by the intrepid students will have been very worthwhile.



Photovoltaic (PV) panels can be seen everywhere in Auroville

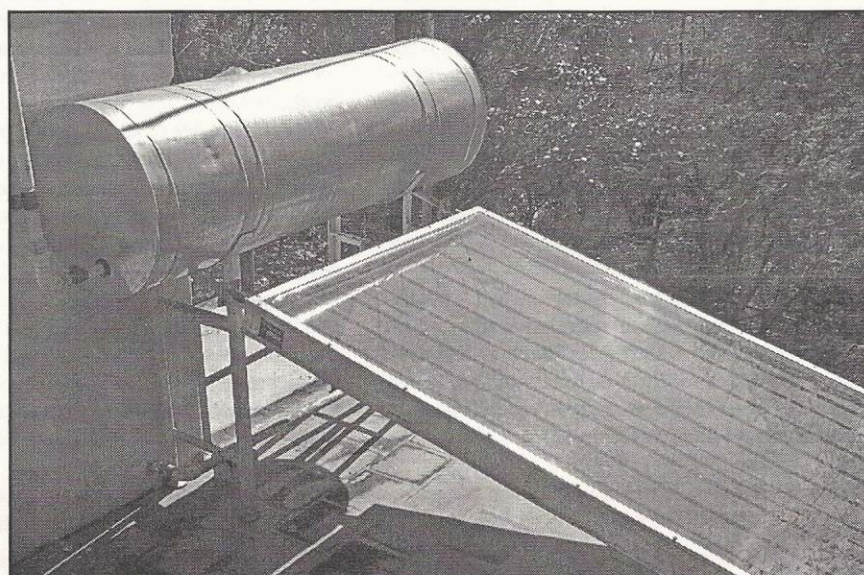
Energy Products is involved in a wind generation project in Bengal.

The Master Plan submitted to the Government last year states that "Auroville's vision is to become energy independent and self-sufficient, with all its energy requirements met from renewable sources." 'Vision', of course, rather gives the game away, for it indicates that, in spite of the achievements so far, there is still a long way to go before Auroville is truly a RE community. Why is this? Why do Aurovilians still draw heavily upon non-renewable sources for their energy? And what is the experience of those who have embraced RE? Three students on a course organized by the Ecole Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne and the Indian Institute of Technology, Madras, spent a month interviewing a cross-section of Aurovilians – RE users, implementers and promoters of RE technologies, architects and town planners – in an attempt to answer these questions. Their final report *Sustainable Energy in Auroville: the Vision and the Reality* is something of an eye-opener.

Why doesn't everybody use renewable energy systems?

For their conclusion is that while Auroville is well on its way to a RE future, it is liable to be a considerable time before the vision of the Master Plan is fulfilled. This is due to a num-

many of them are also motivated by the feeling that they are doing something for the environment. Does this mean that Aurovilians have a high level of environmental consciousness? The students conclude that while the environmental consciousness of Aurovilians is well above the average in India, it compares unfavourably with that found in some of the Western nations. By that they mean that, even though there is widespread awareness among Aurovilians of the need to protect the environment, it doesn't always translate into action. Why not? It's not just tams or the cost, or the ubiquity of the conventional grid, or the difficulty of obtaining good quality components or renewable energy devices in India. It's also the fact that it's uneconomic to run certain devices and systems on renewable energy at present. But how does one discover this? In fact, it is not easy to obtain information and implement certain renewable energy alternatives in Auroville at present. For example, if you are considering setting up a solar-powered electrical system in your house, you have to go to three or four different groups in Auroville to obtain



Solar hot water systems are widely used

Education: Bridging worlds

The Auroville Youth Education and Training project, funded by the European Commission, benefits four Auroville schools that provide education to children and young adults from the nearby villages.

In February 2001, a strangely synchronised moment brought Greta Jensen, a development consultant to Auroville International UK, across my path. We discovered we had a common friend – a wonderfully inspirational art teacher in the same Waldorf School where I had recently completed my teacher training. From this meeting, an opportunity arose to coordinate an IT link between New Creation School and Sedlescombe Primary – a school in a village in the UK. Promoting global awareness and celebrating diversity in education through a sharing of various classroom activities between school children in England and India – it was a perfect match for my own skills and interests, and just what I had been looking for. The Development Awareness component of a much larger partially funded European Commission (EC) project, it was to be my first initiation into Auroville.

Auroville had been something of a surprise – not exactly like the India I knew and cherished, but not exactly like England, where I had been brought up. Auroville intuitively felt like a bridge between both worlds and cultures, located deep in the south of India, yet receptive and open to an emerging consciousness, where new ideas can unfold and bear fruit and the right people always seem to miraculously appear at just the right moment.

A few months later, having returned to the UK, I again met Greta and also Martin Littlewood of AVI-UK (the Project Managers). As we enjoyed a

morning coffee by the Thames, Martin asked me if I was interested in supporting all the E.C. project holders by writing reports and doing some coordination. It seemed a good opportunity to deepen my connection to different people and ideas within Auroville, so I agreed.

Now in its second year, the Auroville Youth Education and Training project has gone from strength to strength. With in-depth workshops given by Greta on various aspects of project management, from log-frames to report writing, all the project holders have learnt not only how to communicate more effectively, but also how to truly appreciate and reflect on their determined efforts.

Drawing together four different educational establishments from within Auroville, it is essentially a human resource development project, building on the combined experiences and knowledge of some truly amazing individuals. Visiting Isaiambalam School, for example, and meeting Subash and his team of teachers, is clear proof of the benefits of value-oriented education. The 'Rishi Valley method' is only one example of many innovative teaching methodologies employed there, with children following an individual progress system, with an in-built assessment process, as they work through various learning cards for different activities. These include a variety of creative pursuits – for example performing small plays/songs, games, story-telling, collage-work, puppetry for language learning – as well as the regular study of subjects like maths and environmental science.

Subash commented that a noticeable benefit of this project was that it had enabled all those involved to work in a really focused manner in a daily context where everybody is co-operating and growing together.

Work at the Life Education Centre (LEC) is again different, providing a supportive and therapeutic community environment for abused young women to learn life and vocational skills. Recent input from professional educators like Hannah (UK), who initiated a self-awareness photography project, and Desarea (Sweden), who facilitated group discussions exploring the role of women in society through the use of evocative games, songs and exercises, helped to deepen self-confidence and understanding amongst the young girls.

Zerina, the overall coordinator, expressed appreciation of two aspects of the project. Firstly she had learned to compose succinct reports with relevant supportive data (Greta's voluminous guidance must be acknowledged here) and secondly, and perhaps most importantly, she now felt truly connected to the other schools involved with the project. The work done at Ilaignarkal Heritage School is somewhat different again. The project funding enabled the construction of a new and much needed school building, substantially enhancing regular school activities. This is a school where great emphasis and pride in Tamil culture is expressed through the development of innovative educational materials. Overall coordinator and youth coun-

sellor Meenakshi emphasises that much of the work being done at Ilaignarkal is to encourage youth to strengthen self-esteem and manage economic/lifestyle affairs independently.

The existence of the completely new New Creation Vocational Training Centre reflects the need to provide learning opportunities for non-academic children, enabling school-leavers and young adults to earn livelihoods locally. The completed woodwork and electrical workshops already benefit children attending New Creation School next door.

André, who has been responsible for holding the vision for this centre, stressed the crucial need for supporting the progress of the people surrounding Auroville in order that they may also participate properly in the development of the township. He also commented that this project is another reflection that there are many people throughout the world interested in Auroville's growth and all that emerges here. Without this support and commitment, Auroville would never have been able to flourish into the rich and diverse learning environment it is today.

Facilitate, the EC project has helped to foster a practical understanding of unity in diversity amongst all those involved. Working with this project has been a true celebration of common purpose as we share a dream and an intention to serve our children through helping them to grow and develop with joy and self-confidence.

Priya Mahtani

VILLAGE RELATIONS

Garbage collection in the nearby villages

Exnora, the successful Chennai based solid-waste management organisation, has started work in the villages of Kulilapalayam and Lakshmipuram.

On Tamil New Year Day, April 14th, a pilot garbage collection programme was inaugurated. Under the programme, garbage will be collected daily from each of the 700 households in Kulilapalayam and around 80 in Lakshmipuram. Each of these households will be given two dustbins so that the residents can separate the garbage into recyclable and compostable waste. Auroville's solid waste management expert, Pratul, will be supervising the operation which will be run in conjunction with Exnora, a Chennai-based organization with considerable expertise in solid waste management.

Exnora is spread all over India, with around 13,000 volunteers. It was started in Chennai by a retired bank manager who used to waste through the garbage to get to his house. He devised the Exnora waste collection scheme, and it spread from place to place. It is very simple: they go to an area of about 200 households and present to the people a slide show on their method of door to door garbage collection by tricycle (a 3-wheel flatbed cycle rickshaw).

Gillian, who is the coordinator of the Kulilapalayam – Lakshmipuram – Auroville Solid Waste Management Programme, came into contact with Exnora through the Australian waste specialists Sonja and Bill, who visited Auroville recently

[see AVToday June/July 2001, # 149/150 and 152]. Says she: "Exnora knows how to motivate people to live in a clean environment. They understand the psychology, and stimulate them to do the cleanup themselves, without bringing in outsiders. That's how Exnora operates wherever they are in India."

Two men have been appointed to collect the garbage from the homes. They will be

provided with equipment, tricycles, gloves and uniforms. All this has been made possible with financial assistance from the State Bank of India, which has provided Rs 40,000 for the project.

Says Gillian: "Most of these villages have played an important part in the development of Auroville and the community. Auroville would now like to give back something to them."

Tineke



A garbage collection tricycle

To the employees of Sri Aurobindo Ashram

Each one can choose the kind of activity that is most suitable to his nature and will receive the required training. Even small gardens will be provided where those who like cultivation can grow flowers, fruits and vegetables.

In the matter of health, there will be regular medical visits, a hospital, a dispensary, a nursing home for the segregation of contagious cases. A department of hygiene will have the exclusive function of inspecting all public and private buildings to see that the most rigorous rules of cleanliness are observed everywhere and by all. As natural adjuncts to this department public baths and common laundries will be put at the disposal of all.

Finally, big stores will be set up where one can find all the small "extras" which give life variety and pleasantness and which one will get against "coupons" that will be given in recompense for especially notable achievement in work or conduct. ...

It goes without saying that for admission to live in this ideal place the essential conditions that need to be fulfilled are good character, good conduct, honest, regular and efficient work and a general goodwill."

The Mother: 10 July 1954 (MCW Vol. 13 pp. 179-181)

In brief

Remembering Sri Aurobindo and the Mother

To celebrate the arrivals of Sri Aurobindo and Mother in the month of April (Sri Aurobindo's on April 24th) a gathering was held on April 4th at Sri Aurobindo World Centre of Human Unity, consisting of a 45-minute programme of recordings from the Mother and some music, in the presence of Sri Nirodbaran. Later there was a gathering at the Amphitheater where music from the Ashram composer Sunil was played on Savitri, the book of Birth and Death. In the evening the slide show "Silence et regard dans un monde émerveillé" was shown at the Visitors Centre. An exhibition of rare photos of Mother was held in the lobby of the Bharat Nivas.

Village grievances and protests

A number of villagers from surrounding villages have held two meetings on successive Sundays to discuss grievances mostly related to land purchase and management issues. On Thursday April 10 they organised a procession from Kulilapalayam to Bharat Nivas to present a list of their grievances to the office of the Secretary, Auroville Foundation, which attracted press coverage and necessitated a police presence. The Working Committee and concerned working groups have met the Talsidhar, Vanur about this and are preparing replies to the points raised and necessary explanations. Efforts to resolve the situation by engaging all parties in a constructive dialogue are continuing.

Visit from ISRO officials

For the past two years, the Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) has been organizing the Geographical Information System (GIS) unit of Auroville by supplying technical help and satellite imagery of the Auroville bioregion. The GIS unit of Auroville, currently located at Water Harvest, is working towards establishing base maps for the region. The Additional Secretary of ISRO, Sri Meenakshi Sundaram and the Joint Secretary of ISRO, Sri V. V. Bhatt recently visited Auroville and were given a presentation of the GIS work in Auroville.

Pavilion of Tibetan Culture

The construction of the Pavilion of Tibetan culture has stopped due to lack of funds. The Pavilion structure is complete but a lot more needs to be done. Those interested to help can contact tibpav@satyam.net.in

Decision-making process

A group has been working for some weeks to find a process by which collective decisions can be made by the community. They presented their findings to the community on 23 April.

Meeting on Matrimandir

A general meeting was held on April 28th to listen to presentations by the Matrimandir Design Study Group, the Access & Usage Group, the Architect's Team and the Matrimandir Workers' Team and to discuss a proposal for a city centre development task force.

The Circle Experiment in the context of the Auroville Economy

The 'Circle Experiment' began in February, 2000, when 101 Aurovilians gathered together in 4 'circles' of approximately 25 members each, to find ways to move towards an economy with no exchange of money. Jean-Yves reviews the experiment after two years.

The idea behind the experiment was to create "extended-family" groupings where people who have more resources can share with those who have less. In that way, the material living standard of those who live solely on maintenance provided by the community would improve. The experiment aimed at developing trust and caring amongst individuals belonging to a circle, while at the same time creating an economy where the basic needs of the individual who works for Auroville are taken care of. Ultimately, the circle-experiment was to further the ideal economy of Auroville in which individuals would lose the sense of personal possession, and where the community would move towards self-sufficiency and no exchange of money within Auroville. The experiment would re-establish sharing as a principle of the Auroville economy and provide a decentralised field for experimentation towards no-exchange of money. The experiment, however, was not preceded by any quantitative or structural study of Auroville's economy, and no instrument of evaluation was felt necessary. Thus a vague program of sharing and caring, of losing the sense of personal possession and of the disappearance of money as a means of internal exchange was announced. Wishful thinking rather than knowledge and objectives or a clearly defined methodology presided over the Circle experiment from the very beginning.

Those interested in the experiment grouped themselves into circles. Each circle appointed a circle coordinator who controls the circle collective account and keeps check on the difference between what a circle-member contributes to the collective circle account and what he or she takes out.

In case a circle's expenses are more than its income, the difference can be compensated from a "buffer account" from the community. Though some people had to be warned against overspending, one of the initial objectives of the circle experiment was soon reached: many Aurovilians could improve their access to basic or less basic needs.

There are, of course, also flip sides. One is that not all circle-members feel motivated to donate any incidental excess income they may have to the circle account. Another difficulty is how the Circle coordinators control the accounts, and halt the ever-increasing discrepancy between expenses and income. Their attitudes have alternated from an attitude of laissez-faire to aggressive control, which could take the form of moral judgment rather than the economic analysis of the reasons why a person spends more.

The economic context of Auroville is largely determined by two structural features. The first is that individual Aurovilians freely determine the allocation of their resources. This feature is strengthened by the fact that about one third of the Aurovilians have external resources available to them. The second feature is that public services are supposed to be financially self-sufficient, which means that they have to find the margin they need to cover their expenses and development.

If the services have to be self-sufficient, they will automatically aim at the more solvent sector of the population, those who are not maintained by Auroville because they have resources exceeding their personal basic needs. Pour Tous, for example, which was created to provide food to all ('Pour Tous' means 'For All' in French), has become a commercial supermarket,

where one finds certain food and household products that Aurovilians who depend on the community for their maintenance cannot afford. But there was no other strategy possible if Pour Tous had to be self-sufficient.

Thus, a non-affordable offer of products coincided with the start of the Circle experiment, leading naturally to an upward level of consumption. The supermarket system adopted in Pour Tous exposes its customers to a stimulating offer to fill up one's basket. This system, which comes from consumerist types of societies, has not been invented to help people become independent of their impulses but, on the contrary, to promote 'buying on impulse'. The community subsidizes the demand-increase by supporting the circle experiment, and so indirectly supports the self-sufficiency of the services. One can guess that the money that has been saved by not supporting the services is now allocated to the "customers" in an equivalent amount, if not more. A liberal and consumerist type of economy has entered Auroville, though nobody has chosen it and nobody would have deliberately designed it for Auroville.

The circle experiment then, at best, can only be regarded as a step on the way. But our failure to give a material expression to The Mother's ideals is a source of weakness damaging our credibility and preventing the mobilization of funds and support required for the Auroville project. We still suffer from too much wishful thinking and lack of concept.

A clear conceptual thing of our aims and goals then is required. Here we should be guided by Mother's vision which She expressed for Auroville and by Sri Aurobindo's statement on the economics of a spiritualized society:

*"The aim of its economics would be not to create a huge engine of production, whether of the competitive or the cooperative kind, but to give to men – not only to some but to all men each in his highest possible measure – the joy of work according to their own nature and free leisure to grow inwardly, as well as a simply rich and beautiful life for all".**

Basically, this points towards an economy where you give and are given to, with no money transaction needed for it to happen. It requires a redefinition of the roles of capital, labour, money and of their inter-relations. Practically, it would lead to the creation of a service oriented towards the production and distribution of basic needs and of a material harmony, thus allowing all those who do not want to be caught in commercial transactions to live in an organization that is a living expression their ideal. Such a 'gift economy' would not be imposed but only offered to those who have an inward 'Yes' for it without reserve, and it would co-exist with the commercial economy.

To manifest such an economy two things are required. One is the need for empirical data. We need knowledge of the community budget, and knowledge of the basic needs of the Aurovilians. The second one is to recognize that if we want a simple and beautiful life for all, we need to invent a new model where harmony is our organising principle. If harmony is not seized upon by the intelligence and the heart as our first need and as the foundation of all our practical research, it will be vain to believe that we can discover the new type of economy that Mother envisaged for Auroville.

*Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle, CWSA 25 -p. 257

New Dawn Circle

“New Dawn” is one of the economy circles started in February 2000, in response to Kireetbhai’s [Dr. Kireet Joshi, chairman of the Auroville Foundation, eds.] appeal to all Aurovilians to make an effort towards a collective economy more in line with the ideals of Auroville. At present the New Dawn Circle has 21 adult members with 3 children. Of these 5 adults are self-supporting, 9 members receive Central Fund maintenances, the other 7 receive maintenances from the units or projects that they work for. These maintenance allowances are pooled to form the family budget which covers the members’ basic needs of food, clothing, medical expenses, and other personal requirements. In addition we have a separate fund for additional exceptional needs, filled by donations from members and well-wishers. We want to achieve the aim proposed to us by The Mother, an economic system that functions like a family without internal exchange of money, because we believe that this will make it easier for us to move towards the higher ideals Auroville is meant to manifest. So we are happy and grateful to be able to take advantage of the communal services that have already been established in Auroville, such as the Solar Kitchen and the Nutrition Scheme, Nandini and the

Free Store, and the new Auroville Health Fund for basic medical expenses. Two of our members live in Aspiration, where they receive accommodation and meals for a very modest monthly charge.

We do not yet see a way to tackle that other very important area of “basic need” that would make a truly family economy possible in Auroville – accommodation. But we want to acknowledge all the many wonderful opportunities that are available freely to Aurovilians, in the areas of education and culture, of care and development for the body, as well as the very helpful base provided by the Financial Service and Pour Tous.

To supplement all these services, we have decided to start providing some requirements – such as toiletries, household items, and provisions for the meals that are not yet available under the Nutrition Scheme – directly in kind to our members, a sort of “Prosperity” system in which a large choice of articles is freely provided without any individual accounting.

Monthly incomes are pooled together to finance these basic needs, and the remainder is shared in the form of a personal allowance which takes care of each member’s declared individual needs. It can be used at their own discre-



PHOTO: PINO

tion for covering what the Mother calls “the small ‘extras’ which give life variety and pleasantness”, as well as any unavoidable cash payments they have to make. This is a kind of pilot project we are trying out. If the results are encouraging, other interested people will be invited to join the attempt.

Shraddhavan

C.U.R. receives major grant

The materialization of the Centre for Urban Research, formerly known as the Town Hall Annexe, has been assured by a generous donation of Rs 51 lakhs (Euro 121,000) from the Dutch Stichting de Zaaier. Says Prof. Henk Thomas, Chairman of De Zaaier: “We are very happy to stimulate the urbanisation of Auroville by making a special donation to the Centre for Urban Research so that it can be fully completed.” The Rs 1.5 crore building is co-financed by the European Union for 49 lakhs, Auroville contributed 30 lakhs while another 20 lakhs is expected for the alternative energy plant. The construction of the Centre is progressing on schedule. It will be ready in six months and will house town planning, financial and other civil services.

The last discs

After four years of non-stop work, the very last disc was covered with the small golden-glass tiles at the end of March 2002. This is a tale of sheer numbers: 1,410 discs were to be covered with more than 1.7 million small glass tiles. And each tile contains a 4 x 4 cm square gold leaf, vacuum-sealed between two pieces of glass. The number of people involved in the production of these tiles on the Matrimandir site itself varied between 7 to 65. At peak periods the kilns for fusing the tiles were operating from 6 in the morning until midnight.

But the actual process of fabricating the discs began long before 1998. At a large and nine-hour long community meeting in October 1987, it was decided to cover the Matrimandir with golden discs. Research was started into what kind of material would be feasible. Experiments were done using a fiberglass base, to which gold leaf was applied and sealed with a varnish. A gold leaf specialist from Bavaria, Germany, an area famous for the gold leaf ornamentation on its baroque churches, came over to train the people here. A few trial discs were fixed to see the result. But this process had to be abandoned after it became clear that the resident pigeons and doves that used the Matrimandir as a perfect roosting place, scratched and damaged the gold. Then someone came up with a solution: fuse the gold leaf between thin glass plates, a technique similar to the one used for covering the Royal Palace in Bangkok, Thailand.

After nine months of further research, a workshop was set up, people were trained and the production of the 1,410 discs started in 1998.

Eight more rows of discs are still waiting to be mounted on the sphere. The 16 discs for the bottom-most row are covered with mosaic tiles on both sides. As it takes one month to mount each row, this work will be finished by the end of this year. And then one more major task will be finished on the way to the completion of the Matrimandir.

Tineke

The Swedish connection

Ulf Meuller, senior management-consultant for the Swedish company, "Connectum" recently gave a workshop on organisation.

How do you find the Auroville organization?

Ulf Meuller: I find that individuals here have a strong belief in higher ideals like unity, higher consciousness, and decisions based on consensus. The difficulty is to practise the philosophy and manifest these high ideals in the daily life. I have met many individuals that have come far in their practice. But as a community it is still at a beginning stage. Maybe it takes generations to really develop these high ideals as a community.

It seems that there is real stress here. People are overloaded, going from meeting to meeting, thinking with a fragmented brain, not really having any time for themselves or to practice their own high ideals. This stress has a negative influence on people's inner structure. And if this inner structure is missing, it leads to chaos both inside and outside.

People here seem to be losing their "part/whole awareness".

What do you mean by "part/whole awareness"?

Auroville is part of the world, a larger whole. It is like a hologram, each part of the whole. So what we have to realise and acknowledge is the diversity and the wholeness at the same time. This is what I call "part/whole awareness" and it takes a lot of practice before one can sustain this awareness. Some are good at details (parts) and some are good at seeing the overview (whole) but we need to practice an awareness of both and not either/or.

To practice, you need to start with yourself. To accept and respect your own uniqueness and diversity as well as your own inclusiveness in a larger whole. This has to go hand in hand. You cannot say that your neighbour can do his or her thing and you can do yours, because everything affects everything else. What needs to be developed is collective trust and collective responsibility. You need to relate to each other for everything is in relationship. You need to surrender to the collective.

When you talk about surrender, couldn't it easily lead to the kind of paralysis that one can sometimes feel at big meetings here?

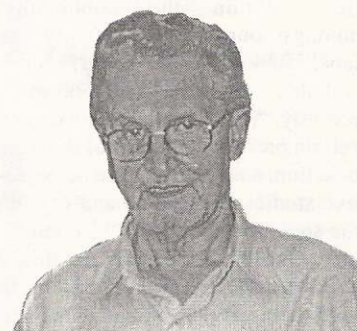
Yes, maybe because of fear and their defence patterns, people's reactions are paralysed and not pro-active. This leads to passivity, which has to do with lack of courage in standing for your own power or opinion or ideals. One has to become aware of that fear. All fear comes from the head, and not from the heart. To surrender means taking a deep breath and acting from the heart. Then the fear will disappear.

What about fear of dark forces?

When people give space and energy to the darkness there is not so much room left for the light. I am often my own worst enemy; I often don't need any outside enemy, and I do need to work on my inside enemy. But then, of course, it is often easier to find

and fight with an outside enemy. It is the same for an organization, which also has to give space and energy to the light.

Do you think that people, deep down, fear change?



Ulf Meuller

Perhaps. However, change is a continuous process. If I don't change from inside, if I'm blocking that, something or someone is going to change me from the outside. It can be like a cancer that a passive body gives space to develop. The same holds for the organization. I am amazed that there are so many people here who care about individual health, but are not caring for the health of the organization. As the organization is not very healthy right now, it cannot protect itself. Its immune defence is very weak. So this is something that needs to be strengthened with honesty, compassion, respect, trust, and with an inner felt responsibility.

What does responsibility mean to you?

Response - ability: able to respond. That is what the word means. Are you able to respond, to see the problem, to stay with it till the solution emerges? Are people in Auroville able to do this? Or are they running away from the problems?

Responsibility based on honesty and trust is the basis for every sound organisation. Without this, you need a formal hierarchy; you need outer structure and rules.

Responsibility and power have to be connected in a true democracy.

Power seems to be a scary word in Auroville...

Power is just energy and it needs to be handled with care, love and responsibility. Otherwise it can be dangerous or misused. Would you give power to a child without also demanding responsibility? So why are you giving power to people without demanding responsibility?

Everyone should have the courage to stand for his/her own power, for his/her own belief, in life, in community, in work and in all relations. Most people are afraid to admit the power they have and to stand for it. They are afraid to admit that they are accountable for that power.

Consciously using power from the heart with love and compassion creates motivation and trust, while using power unconsciously and indirectly leads to manipulation and mistrust.

Marijke

Alternative pesticide update

June 1st is an important day in rural South India. It marks the end of the cashew season. Landless people are allowed to collect the left over cashew fruits.

For Rita and Njal it means the end of an almost four-months long period during which they gave information on alternatives to the spraying of heavy pesticides like Endosulfan, DDT, and Parathion, which usually goes on during the cashew flowering season.

Through research they came up with an alternative spray based on neem oil. Legend has it that the Neem tree germinated from a drop of nectar that fell on the earth when the gods were carrying away the pot of nectar after their victory over the demons. During the last century scientists discovered the extraordinary insect repellent properties of Neem, and many eco-friendly minded organizations are now educating the masses about it. Closer home, Mother has named the flowers of the Neem tree "Spiritual Atmosphere".

This neem oil product was sprayed on some trial plots around Auroville. Then, together with a few volunteers, they manned an information stall under the cool shade of some Neem trees on one of these plots, opposite the Solar Kitchen. Photos showing the side effects on health of using the heavy chemicals, and leaflets on the 'alternative medicine' were distributed. Many types of visitors came daily to their information stand, varying from local farmers, Aurovilians, school classes, guests, Tamils or Indians from further away. So far about 200 litres of the neem oil have been purchased,

not only for treating cashew trees, but also mango trees, and vegetable plots. Auroville's Land and Estate Management group has used another 100 litres for the 120 acres under their control. In all, about 180 acres of cashews will have been treated in a more organic way, something that was unthinkable in the past.

Srinivasan, a theatre director who puts on environment related plays for villagers, together with the support of Aurovilian Claudine, made a play about pesticide spraying which was performed in many different villages. In the village of Kuilapalayam there was also an information stand, organized by Rolf from Petite Ferme, where more than 20 litres of neem oil have been purchased.

Njal is very enthusiastic about the success so far. "There will be no revolution this year, but our one year campaign informing the people of the many aspects of integrated pest control and what is available for them is bearing fruit. We did not concentrate only on big farmers but on the whole population, from housewives to academics. One result of our campaign is that people from Italy, Spain, Germany, France and even Senegal contacted us for exporting the neem oil!"

Says Rita: "We are very thankful for all the help we received from Dr. Narayanan, an entomologist from Pest Control, India. He often visited the test plot, regularly gave us advice, and all the time supported us. Now we have to continue this work with follow ups, but it feels like at least a first change has come about!"

Tineke

Are we succumbing to dogmatism?

Bindu argues that a dogmatic attitude to one's spiritual beliefs can drag the community backwards

It is amazing, when one thinks about it, that in over three decades of its existence, there are very few social or anthropological studies of Auroville. We were pioneers in researching sustainable technologies in India, we have tried out numerous alternative economic models, experimented with our internal organization, with educational methods, documented our success in environmental regeneration, and yet, when it comes to studying ourselves, Aurovilians is as a sub-species of homo sapiens, we are strangely silent.

Sure, there have been isolated attempts to explain the way we function. Within the community, amongst ourselves, we freely use labels such as "green-belter," "city-wallah," "old crocodile," or more recently, "rich newcomer," to denote certain prevalent patterns of thinking or action, and yet, there are no objective studies to research and explain the social behaviour of the community. One of the reasons for this, I believe, is that Aurovilians tend to hold themselves a cut above the rest of the world. Aurovilians see themselves as practitioners of a new yoga, the Integral Yoga, that goes far beyond other spiritual traditions, and hence they are too easily dismissive of other traditions of knowledge. Yet, even a superficial observation indicates that Aurovilians often exhibit the same behavioural patterns as elsewhere in the world. One such behavioural trend is the need to judge other's actions through the measuring-rod of "religion." What I mean by "religion," in this context, is a dogmatic adherence to one's spiritual beliefs. To me, religion

connotes a mental (as opposed to transcendental) understanding and expression of one's beliefs. The danger of such an attitude is that it is infra-rational, below the reasoning powers of mind, and if allowed a hold, it could drag the community backwards.

The need to differentiate religion from other areas of life

To begin with the obvious, Auroville is shaped by the tenets of Integral Yoga, or rather one's understanding of it. That is to say, Aurovilians judge their actions by the ideals set forth by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Every attempt to reorganize the economy or the organization is prefaced by quotes from the Mother. Such is our dependence on the Mother's words to guide this experiment that one disgruntled long-term guest was led to comment that, in Auroville, religion and political organization were yet to be differentiated, something which happened centuries ago in the West with the Enlightenment and the consequent separation of the Church and the State. The "Pulse," an electronic medium to solicit the views of the community, recently conducted a poll to check if the need to use the Mother's words was becoming a religion: 64.3% of the people polled replied in the affirmative.

In the evolution of civilization, particularly in the West, religion sought to dominate all human activity till the Enlightenment of the 18th century. Descartes, with his dictum, "I think, therefore for I am" liberated the individual from the dictatorship of the church. One could decide for

oneself, from one's own belief-systems, what was right or wrong, rather than being judged by an established code of beliefs. The emphasis that the Enlightenment placed on science and reason heralded the birth of the modernity. As Ken Wilber puts it, the biggest contribution of modernity, however, was to differentiate "the value spheres of arts and morals and science" and thereby allow each to develop separately without being encumbered by the values of the other spheres. In a pre-modern culture these three spheres were undifferentiated with the result that, as Wilber describes, "Galileo could not freely look through his telescope and report the results because art and morals and science were all fused under the Church, and thus the morals of the Church defined what science could-or could not-do."

"Religious persecution" by individuals, who believe that they are following the Mother's words, is similarly evident in Auroville. For instance, as has been seen in the past, Aurovilians can be highly intolerant of people who profess other spiritual faiths, resulting in infamous "witch-hunts". Even more recently, I had the personal experience of "religious intolerance" when I raised rational objections to the proposed development of the International Zone and to the recent organisation proposal. In both cases, my objections, instead of being listened to, were dubbed as the "adverse forces" that were trying to delay the implementation of the Mother's work.

Similarly in the field of art, a visiting artist once said that art in Auroville was very often restricted to "spiritu-

al" themes, and that there was no objectivity allowed in reviewing art. A case in point is the recent performance in Auroville of The twelve qualities of the Mother. People who did not like the composition could not say so openly for the fear of being dubbed as "being of a lower consciousness." In short, very often a religious standard rather than a purely objective one is used to gauge our actions. Needless to say, the community needs to guard itself against such dogmatism and narrow interpretation of our spiritual ideals. (Thankfully, the buffoonery of the Academic Genius Brothers, a regular comedy act on Auroville, holds nothing and no one sacred.)

The distinction between Religion and Spirituality

It is interesting to note that the Indian civilization did not follow the path of the West with such a clear distinction between the pre-modern and modern eras. For one of the drawbacks of the Enlightenment or modernity was that science, with reason as its basis, began an aggressive career that soon came to dominate other traditions of knowledge or "value spheres." Modernity thus led to the denial of God for it could not be rationally proved. Indian civilization, founded on a strong base of spirituality, never experienced that profound dissociation with God that the modern Western mind was subject to. As a result, at the infra-rational level (below the level of the reasoning mind), Indians are marked by deeply religious and superstitious beliefs, but at the supra-rational level (above the reasoning mind), individuals have been left free to

access, on the basis of their beliefs, higher spiritual states instead of being chained to the rational mind. Similarly, Auroville should find a way to steer its course towards spirituality without falling into the Scylla of religious dogmatism or the Charybdis of the limited reasoning mind.

The difficulty, however, lies in that the difference between a religious attitude and a spiritual attitude is quite tenuous. People can have the same belief systems, but the behaviour that emerges from those beliefs can either be spiritual or religious. As said earlier, a religious attitude connotes a mental understanding and a dogmatic adherence to one's beliefs. A spiritual attitude, on the other hand, seeks inspiration from the beliefs, but is guided by inner experiences of the spirit and not by a limited mental understanding. People with a religious attitude tend to impose their views on others, while those with a spiritual outlook do not see the need to have others subscribe to their point of view. These distinctions are flimsy, based as they are on the inner subjectivity of an individual. Indeed, the moment one publicly articulates one's spiritual beliefs, one risks being dubbed "religious."

Another important distinction, in this context, is the fact that the Mother founded Auroville on the highest spiritual vision. As individual Aurovilians cannot yet operate from the spiritual consciousness of the Divine Mother, they have of necessity to take her words on faith. And it is precisely here, if one is not careful, where the slide from spirituality into religion starts. Olivier, one of the Aurovilians who responded to the "Pulse" poll, distinguishes clearly the different ways in which Mother's words should be used:

What we need is to have a bit of discrimination about the different things Mother told us: There will always be the statements and indications She gave us about spiritual truths that will stand forever and help generations to come and grow. They can always be quoted with love for the power they carry...

Then there are those PRACTICAL, usually quite precise and unequivocal indications She gave us that we cannot tamper with, omit or dismiss, like for instance, how to build Matrimandir. To follow those indications is certainly not a religion.

But then there are many things she said about Auroville and its conception, things about organization, economy, technology, education, etc., which have to be placed in the context of the time she spoke about them and the period of Auroville's development at which time those things were mentioned. If we fail to do that we indeed tend to become dogmatic by repeating a sclerotic understanding that doesn't allow for fresh and deeper visions that will enable us to discover a wider knowledge and solutions connected with our present reality. The Mother wouldn't repeat the same things today that she said 30 years ago, and this is where we have to use our discrimination and have the maturity to listen to Her in the depth of our heart with our love for Her and Auroville.

I may be excused then to end here with one of my favourite inspirational sayings of the Mother: "No rules or laws are being framed. Things will get formulated as the underlying Truth of the township emerges and takes shape progressively."

Bindu

CULTURE

Pitanga

is still flowering, Tineke discovers.

When you come off the red dusty main road and reach Gate 1 of Samasti, you find yourself surrounded by a wide variety of flowering bushes, trees and small plants. This is the entrance to Pitanga, Auroville's first and only multi-cultural community center. The musical syllables of the word Pitanga, which is the name of a Brazilian cherry tree, hint at the vibrant nature of this center. Built with donations from Brazilian and Dutch Aurovilians, Pitanga takes its name from the Brazilian cherry tree. Pitanga was built in the early nineties, before the community had even started the Residential Zone. In those days, when the community was still struggling to meet basic needs for shelter, some questioned the need for a community centre. But once it opened, under the care of Nolly, a hatha yoga teacher, Pitanga blossomed into a center that offered a wide range of activities including dance, pranayama, hatha yoga, concerts and healing therapies like massage, physiotherapy, homeopathy. It also housed services as diverse as hairdressing, a video studio and a music library. Its inner open courtyard served as an exhibition place for graphic art.

Nolly is an enthusiastic gardener who scoured South India for rare plants which she then planted in the gardens around Pitanga. Today, her efforts bear fruit with flowering creepers and exotic shrubs, creating an atmosphere of peace and beauty

around Pitanga. In the beginning of this year, after a decade of dedicated care taking, Nolly due to health reasons gave up her involvement with Pitanga.

The new caretaker, Andrea, has plans to widen the scope of Pitanga. "I would like to invite more people to participate in the activities at Pitanga," she says. In immediate answer to her wish, two persons approached her to offer new activities at Pitanga: Balkan folk dancing and traditional Thai massage. To keep the community informed of regular and special events at Pitanga, Andrea has also introduced a monthly Pitanga page in the Auroville News.

To encourage the Aurovilians working at Pitanga to take part in its further development, a meeting was called in which 14 Aurovilians participated. One of the points that was raised in the meeting was the difficulty of having guests attending regular classes as most classes have been continuing for years with the same students and, consequently, a certain atmosphere and concentration has developed. Also due to limited space, it is often difficult to take in more than two guests at a time. Yet, during the guest season, many guests would like to attend the classes. Therefore the teachers agreed to introduce special workshops and classes in Odissi dance,

hatha yoga, and body awareness during the guest season.

Another question which was raised is how to better utilize Pitanga throughout the year. As many Aurovilians go out in the summer, classes are poorly attended then. On the other hand many children tend to get bored during school summer holidays. Thus the idea came up of offering classes in hatha yoga and body awareness for children and youth between seven and seventeen. It is envisaged that in a couple of years the video and music library will move out to a new multi-media centres. Andrea already has a few ideas about how to use the space that will be freed. One of them is to create a place for relaxation. Another idea is to create a library containing books and magazines

related to the activities of Pitanga. The Pitanga team has also discussed how to make use of the beautiful garden of Pitanga. "We could serve healthy fruit juices and raw salads under the trees at the back of Pitanga", muses Andrea. "What we envision is not another cafeteria but a quiet place without music, coffee and smoking."

As Pitanga is located in the residential area of Samasti community there are limitations to further development. More people implies more traffic. The parking situation has already been improved by closing the parking space in the direct vicinity of the neighbors while the area next to the gate has been enlarged. Also, to realize some of the dreams for the future, financial help is needed.



"Auroville is dancing"

The above was the announcement heralding Auroville's first ever Festival of Dance on March 30th, a wonderful evening inclusive of everything from classical Indian dances to Spanish, jazz, ballet, hip-hop, Afro-funk and improvisational modern dance plus freestyle aerobics, all choreographed in Auroville, and performed by more than 15 groups – around 100 dancers! – ranging in age from young children (the first half of the programme) to mature adults (the second half). The audience, jam-packed into the 850-seat Sri Aurobindo Auditorium, was absolutely marvellous: an enthusiastic – often excited – mixture of Aurovilians and local villagers, many of whose children or friends were performing.

As this was the first time for many of the performers that they had

everything seemed to fall into place, from the lighting and stage work to Grace's informal and enjoyable coordinating/announcing role and the dancing, probably inspired by the wonderful audience, who spurred the performers on and made them feel that their long period of intensive preparation – in some cases as long as a year – had all been worthwhile.

In a long programme lasting over three hours it seems a bit unfair to highlight individual numbers, because ALL were enjoyable, but from the audience's reaction it seemed a few had special



Offering: Jothi and Srimoyi dance Odissi

PHOTO: PINO



Top: A touch of Spain: Suryamayi and Jivatma performing Sevillanas
Below: The Black Cats pumping it out.

popular appeal. Among these one has to mention from the first half of the programme the Spanish Sevillanas performed by Jivatma and Suryamayi, the Tamil children's 'Kolattam' folk dance with sticks, and the last item, 'Thillani', to modern Indian music, the latter two both performed with exceptional precision and grace. Then in the second half of the programme there was Aurelio's group with their dynamic 'Dance Collage', the classic Odissi dances of Srimoyi and Jothi, and Bharatanatyam of Blanchefleur (the latter showing that a Westerner can also acquire the skills to put on a good performance), the modern jazz dance 'Warriors of Nature' with accompanying film shot by Brian in Utilité canyon, 'The Black Cats' aerobics team number led by Bobby (performing with a broken toe!), and the final beautiful and innovative 'net' number with Jutta, Daria, Aurosyllie and Veronique to mysterious, stirring music.

As to the performers, their experience seems well summed up by one of the participants: "We had the tremendous fun of working with our

fellow performers towards a shared common goal, and the joy of achieving it after so many high energy practice sessions and so much fun and laughter. The sense of being a closely knit team and of succeeding together was, for those of us who had never done anything like it before, just fantastic, really euphoric, a memory to treasure all our lives. In fact I know from talking with others that we remained on a 'high' for days afterwards as a result of what we experienced."

As an event intended to help Auroville integrate, through increased understanding and appreciation of each other's art and culture as experienced through numbers ranging from ballet to Bharatanatyam, it was a resounding success; a fun, fun, fun evening and milestone in Auroville's cultural history; a night to remember for all those who took part on stage or in the audience; and a night when Shiva himself, as Lord of the Dance, seemed to make His presence felt among us.

Thank you Grace. Thank you everyone.

Tim



PHOTO: PINO

appeared on stage before an audience, some were naturally very nervous beforehand. This situation was not helped by the fact that the first rehearsal three days before the event was a bit of a shambles, leaving many worried as to what lay ahead. However, the second rehearsal – with costumes – was much more coherent. Finally, on the night itself,

SPORTS

Gyroriders

Gyroriding, a new sport, was introduced in Auroville

If you happen to feel stuck in your upward standing position, hopelessly grounded in your rubber slippers from morning to night, and somehow dream that you could fly, spin or somersault through thin air, stop by at Auroville's Youth Centre one of these days and take a ride in the gyroscope.

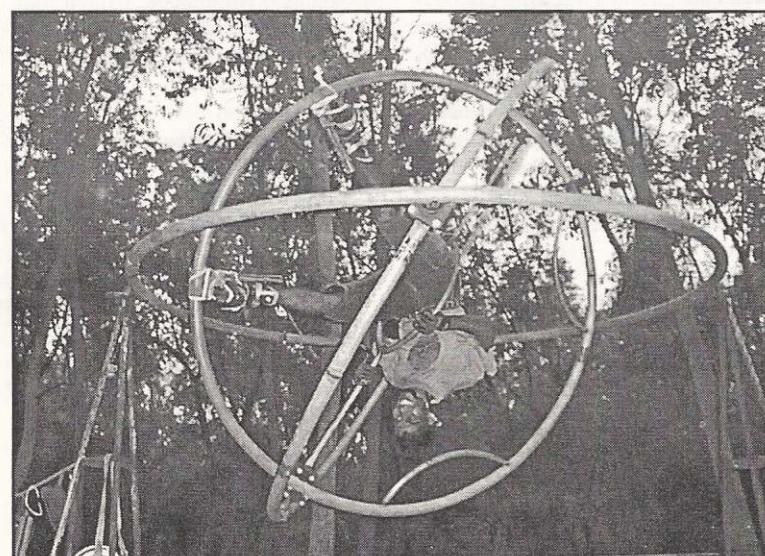
Designed and built by one of Auroville's youth, Himel, with funds from various Aurovilians, the gyroscope is an amazing yet simple structure made of three big steel rings that pivot within one another on ball bearings. The entire structure is placed on a sturdy stand a couple of feet above ground level. The rider's feet are strapped in boots fixed on the inner ring and he holds himself with han-

dles above the head or at the waist. Now, once you are left hanging in the gyroscope, the slightest shift in your body's centre of gravity will send you rolling, rocking, spinning, twirling head-over-tail and all over again. Unless you keep quiet and still in one position this crazy machine will fling you all over space, sending your brain straight to cosmic consciousness and the perception of infinite dimensions.. But you can also ride the gyroscope carefully and methodically, slowly moving your body to enjoy yoga-like postures and stretching, trying to consciously control your spins and invent new rocking patterns, or you can throw yourself wildly in any direction you can possibly manage with your body's physical strength!

This toy is the ultimate fun in body-building that will develop muscles you didn't even know you had. A 15-minute ride will leave you sore from head to toes if you are not trained, and

your subtle body will keep spinning for days, giving you that pleasant feeling of "out of the body" experiences each time you lay down.

Olivier



Himel in the gyroscope getting a new view on things

In brief

The spirit of Auroville

"The Spirit of Auroville" is a recently released book by Huta of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. It contains a record of Mother's letters and conversations with Huta about Her vision of Auroville and the Matrimandir, together with Huta's personal observations. Available from VAK, Pondicherry.

Flute concert

Jivatman, Western Flute, accompanied by Bruno on the Tampura, gave a concert of "Improvisations on Indian Ragas".

Vocal concert

Tine, Eliane, Martin and Gundolf, accompanied by Holger, entertained Aurovilians at a vocal concert.

Bharat Natyam

A Bharat Natyam dance performance by Saroja and Prabha accompanied by musicians from Pondicherry was held on 6th April at the Sri Aurobindo Auditorium, Bharat Nivas.

Piano recital

A recital of French classical piano music for four-hands was given by Carel and Heinrich.

The Phantom Hour

Students from the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education staged "The Phantom Hour" in Bharat Nivas, a play written by them on the basis of a short story by Sri Aurobindo.

Shakespeare's Richard III in Tamil

Magic Lantern, a professional theatre group based in Chennai, brought their latest work, Shakespeare's "Richard III" in Tamil, ("Kodunkolan" - The Tyrant) to three villages around Auroville

Savitri

Fabienne, Grace and Savitri choreographed and presented a dance on Sri Aurobindo's "Savitri" that was presented at the Sri Aurobindo Auditorium in Bharat Nivas.

Dance by Mohanaam

Students of the Mohanaam Centre in Sanjeevinagar, a cultural centre of Auroville Village Action Group, presented a dance choreographed by Aurelio.

Altérités: "New Continents"

A musical spectacle artfully combined with multimedia installations was staged at Bharat Nivas Auditorium. The show, which brought French and Rajasthani musicians together, is an outcome of a month-long reserach held in Jaisalmer and Ahmadabad. Rhythms are drawn from jazz and Spanish and Rajasthani vocal and instrumental music.

DVD Films

Showings on a large screen have taken a technological leap forward with the advent of digital videos and LCD projectors. So far, DVD copies of "Baraka," "Lord of the Rings," and films based on the rock group "Talking Heads", have been screened outdoors to enthusiastic audiences.

Japanese film on Auroville

A Japanese film crew spent three weeks here making the first Japanese film on Auroville.

Broken Rules

An exhibition of drawings by Vahula titled 'Broken Rules' was held in Pitanga.

Namas

On April 15th Namas (Dennis Bailey), who lived in Auroville between 1970-1989, passed on in England, where he had been living. He was very involved in the greenwork of Auroville's early years, starting 'Fertile' in 1972 and 'Dana' in 1974, had taught in Last School, and been part of the team which translated the first volumes of Mother's Agenda into English. He also contributed articles to a variety of early Auroville journals.

I remember quite a few years ago, but the memory still remains vivid, sitting with some colleagues on the terrace of a house in Certitude, where we had gathered to conceptualise and put together the first issue of an alternative Auroville publication. Four issues were finally to come out between 1985-86. Namas offered to read us something he had written and we listened as he diffidently read out from his small tattered notebook what was to become the editorial of our first issue: Invisible Ships. What he wrote then still reads with relevance, maybe even added relevance today:

"The voyage of the Beagle, the ship which carried Charles Darwin around the world and enabled him to make the observa-

tions which would form the basis of his theory of evolution, is a landmark in the history of scientific thought. For humanity's understanding of itself, it ranks as one of the most important voyages ever made—even more earth shattering, in its small way, than Neal Armstrong's first small step upon the moon.

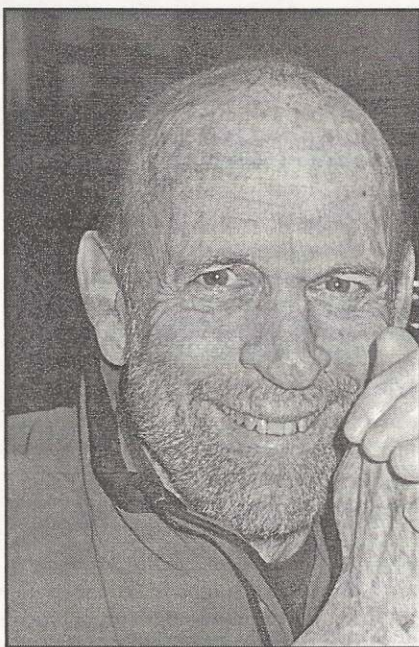
For the inhabitants of Tierra del Fuego, however, the passage of the Beagle through their island channels was essentially a non-

event, shattering nothing, disturbing not even slightly their traditional ways of life. The mere size of the ship—to say nothing of the implications of its epochal voyage—was too vast for their imaginations and vision to encompass. And so, like all sensible people faced with unprecedented phenomena they simply took no notice of it. To the Tierra del Fuegians, the Beagle was quite literally invisible.

There are a number of invisible ships on humanity's horizons today, vessels of change too vast in their implications (or merely too different in lineament and design) for most of us to take notice of. We believe Auroville to be one such ship, but, in a larger sense, we are all, all of us alive on earth now, invisible; what we really are and, even more, what we are becoming, is simply too vast for our own imaginations to encompass...Perhaps we can learn to widen our eyes and our imaginations and open our minds and hearts to a truer understanding of who we really are and what we are becoming..."

Sail on, brother.

Roger



BOOK REVIEW

Healing the earth, healing oneself

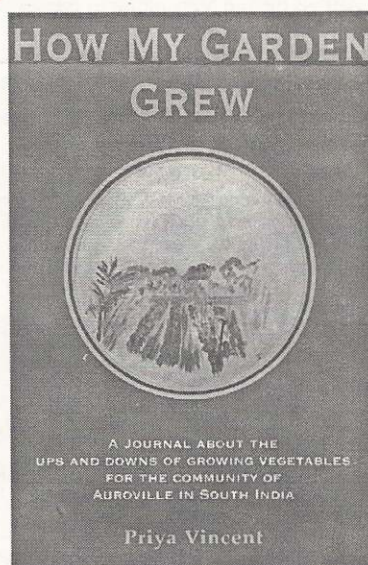
Lloyd reviews a new book by Priya Vincent, an Auroville agriculturist.

This is a book about persistence, without which no ecological farmer may hope to achieve anything on the depleted soil around Auroville. Written in diary-form, it lays no claim to literary style. Nor is it a handbook for aspiring planters. As such, it reads as a straightforward and honest account of the birth of Buddha Garden, an eroded piece of land from which Priya tries to extract indigenous vegetables, such as egg-plant, okra and beans. The book reveals the wish of the author to get in touch with the land as the source of food and life and use gardening as a means to self-healing. In the account, Priya describes fifteen months of struggle and disappointment, due to—among others things—"those forces of nature that descend from the air on wings, or creep through the soil, in the form of bugs, fungus and worms; boring themselves into fruit and attacking root systems and leaves." Throughout the book, one is constantly made aware that the "poochies" (bugs) equally manifest themselves in the expectations of the aspiring farmer and self-healer. Yet it is the honesty with which the daily struggle is written down that makes the diary a page-turner; a plain but captivating description of hopes, despairs and small victories. The book is not pretentious in the least, but deals above all with water, the mistreated body of Earth, compost and caring hands.

Towards the end of the book we learn that, to a certain extent, Priya succeeds in healing both the land and herself. The last chapter contains a strong realization, when she learns about the history of the plot of land: "In the aeons of time that this land has existed, my time here with it is less than the blink of an eyelid."

Tangential to the main account of the growth of the Buddha Garden are anecdotes from daily life relating to the author's children and to the larger community, such as a quarrel about a telephone line. These anecdotes allow us to get to know Priya Vincent; a woman who decides to work against all the odds, in the agricultural world of India where women have as yet little say in matters of first importance. In a meditation on freedom she expresses herself in a critical way towards the Auroville community, when she finds that, for all her toil to produce healthy food, Aurovilians just go to local markets for cheaper, pesticide-sprayed vegetables.

The subject of the book is introduced well enough and a foreword places all of the action in the light of the Auroville community. Related subjects are further explained at the end of the book. It is here, in the appendices and glossaries, that one feels that the book could have been better edited. For instance, in keeping with the subject of the book, the appendix on



Auroville economy could have been replaced by a chapter about the materials, labour and funds put into Buddha Garden. The short references in the glossary about species of fruit and trees could also have been elaborated upon to provide more information. But as mentioned earlier, this book is not meant to be an agriculturist's handbook. "How my Garden Grew" is, above all, a humane—and as such womanly—warm book, written from an overheating planet that could do with more healers like the author.

How my Garden Grew.

By Priya Vincent.

Published by: Auroville Press.

ISBN 81 8737-21 0

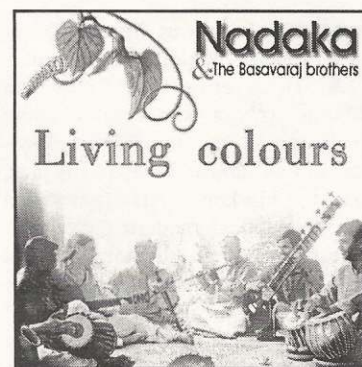
Living Colours

A famous writer once described the way a novel works as the process by which "the reader's sympathy flows and recoils". The basic building blocks of music may be equally simple, and yet...what enormous variations in rhythm, texture, melody can be generated by gifted musicians.

Nadaka's new CD *Living Colours* is as light and yet as densely woven as anything he has produced so far. It all began, as he described it, with him meeting Raghavendra Basavaraj, one of the foremost Carnatic violinists, with the "idea of creating a raga-based fusion where classical and not-so-classical would combine effortlessly". Their first encounter worked well, but, to Nadaka's surprise and delight, at each succeeding rehearsal yet another of Raghavendra's brothers would turn up and spontaneously join in, "thus adding a new musical colour to our musical venture". Ramakrishnan, from a family of famous south Indian percussionists, completed the ensemble.

The four Basavaraj brothers received their initial musical training from their father, a renowned flautist, who chose their instruments, then sent them off across India to study with different musical gurus. Today Balasai is a leading Carnatic flautist, Raghavendra a wonderful violinist, Sivaramakrishna an accomplished sitarist and Ganesh a crisp and expressive tablaist. As youngsters they played many concerts together before each went his own way. Now, as if by accident, they came together again, immeasurably enriching Nadaka's initial idea with their wide palette of tones and textures.

Nadaka's music is impossible to classify. While he describes this particular project as "an acoustic fusion of Indian classical with a contemporary feel", 'fusion' is a trifle misleading because it suggests absorption, whereas in his music different traditions—Hindustani, Carnatic, jazz—mesh seamlessly without losing their distinctness. We're in a unique zone where a traditional sitar introduction leads into Western-style guitar rhythms, where the flute can be quick-flight Carnatic one moment, smoky jazz the next; where the violin and the guitar can be percussive or achingly fragile, the tabla or mridangam an almost solid wall of sound or a solitary questing voice. The different musical textures play off one another, interweave, the musical tra-



ditions cross-pollinate, as the music builds, holds climatically, before the violin, flute or guitar once again flies free, like the soul refusing imprisonment in form.

Each piece in *Living Colours* is based upon a traditional raga. 'Caprice', Balasai's and Nadaka's interpretation of the Surya Raga, is one of the most successful interpretations. Like a day dawning, it begins with Balasai's meditative silver flute introduction, then the violin sounds the awakening of the earth, echoed high above by the flute before the warmer, richer tones of the guitar break in, to be counter-pointed by flute and plangent sitar. A pause, then the meditative tone gives way to the urgent staccato of the violin—shades of 'Rite of Spring'—as the insects and bees begin humming. Guitar, tabla and flute pick up the urgency of myriad life awakening, first expressing their different identities, then weaving their notes together...

'Hamsa Leela', 'Rangita' and 'Surya Shakti' are equally remarkable in the way the texture of the music varies between density and light threads, meditation and affirmation, journey and arrival. 'Chakra', based upon the Chakravakam Raga, is a series of brief solos showcasing the various instruments. Some of the solos—notably the guitar and flute solos—are fine, yet, in the context of the CD as a whole, perhaps 'Chakra' represents a certain loss of dynamism and multi-layered richness.

Living Colours concludes with the brief, exquisite 'Shanti', an early hours jazz rendition of the 'Bhairavi Raga'. It made me realize what fun these musicians were having in eluding, albeit temporarily, the meshes of tradition...

Alan

Living Colours. Further enquiries: nadaka@auroville.org.in

LETTERS

American Pavilion? USA Pavilion?

Dear Auroville Today,
I was delighted to read the two articles on the USA Pavilion Guest House in the last issue of Auroville Today. In the title and in the articles themselves you referred to this Guest House as being part of the "American Pavilion," a name that has already caused considerable confusion. Many people refer to the USA as "America," a name which the International Zone Group uses to refer to all the countries in North and South America combined. Although there may some day be an Americas Pavilion that brings together a unified North and South American concept, that pavilion does not yet exist. So, in order to keep the present situation in the International Zone clear, Auroville International USA would like to stress that the Guest House that was recently worked on by the University of Washington team is really a building of the USA Pavilion in the Americas Area of the International Zone. Hoping to reduce the confusion,
Nilaro, Executive Director, Auroville International USA.

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