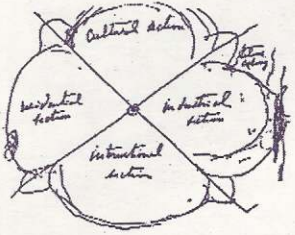


Auroville Today

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Mother's sketch of 1965

MAIN THEME: Business

- Changing views of the Industrial Zone
- Where are the commercial units in Auroville?
- An assessment of Auroville's business

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The Aurobhakti building in the Industrial Zone, home for 5 units

The earliest known town-sketch of Auroville was made by The Mother in a conversation with Satprem on June 23, 1965. It shows the city divided into four sections – the cultural, industrial, international and residential sections – around a central point. In this conversation Mother speaks about this as a first concept and indicates that she has no illusions that the original purity of the idea will be kept. Much has changed since then. As the land for the construction of Bharat Nivas, the Pavilion of India, could not be bought, Mother approved of the shifting of the zones. The international zone was relocated towards the west, the residential zone to the south, the cultural zone to the east and the industrial zone moved to the north. Mother also approved the creation of the Auromodèle and Aspiration communities near the village of Kuilapalayam. Around them other communities came into existence. They not only became residential areas, but also came to house small handicrafts units. Thus, a kind of double city gradually developed. One part, located around Kuilapalayam, is now separated from the main city by a large area of village owned land. Some units that settled around Kuilapalayam eventually moved to the Industrial Zone, but many have chosen to stay, a development which led to two or even three one industrial, or rather, economic zones. At the same time a firmly held conviction is being questioned: that Aurovilians can only run businesses that are owned by the Auroville Foundation.



Garment production at Filaure

PHOTO: PINO MARCHESI

The metamorphosis of the Industrial Zone

The concept of Auroville's Industrial Zone is changing into an Economic Zone, one of three economic zones in Auroville

The Industrial Zone, though being the smallest of the four zones of Auroville, has the maximum amount of land features. It has the most canyons; it has low-lying waterlogged lands; it has excellent farm-lands. The rich soil in its environs has been under cultivation for generations, giving rise to the neighbouring villages of Bharatipuram and Alankuppam. Its density, in contrast to other areas of Auroville, is high. Agricultural farms and manufacturing industries intermingle with residential settlements, a pony riding school and the substantial pieces of land that Auroville has not yet been able to purchase. "This makes it so difficult in terms of logistics to introduce new industries," explains Sheril. Together with Alok, Bobby, Suhasini and Mona, she has run since March 2003 the Industrial Zone Group. "Whenever someone wants to start a business in the Industrial Zone, the request is discussed in the group and there follows a rather tedious process involving the entire neighbourhood. Where can the business be best located? What is its impact on the environment? Where does it get its water from? What are its electricity demands? Can we give access to existing infrastructure? Does the unit intend to build caretaker houses or staff quarters? Are the finances sufficient to pay for the buildings and the extensive infrastructure? For Auroville's Industrial Zone is not comparable to industrial zones elsewhere: there are no demarcated plots with water and electricity brought to the doorstep."

"So far, the development of the Zone has happened in a more or less haphazard way," adds Suhasini. "A few years ago Aurosarjan built a rather big factory building, which later became known as Aurobhakti. Aurosarjan's executives

resigned when the building was finished, and their successors were not able to keep up the business. Ultimately the building was split-up to house several smaller units. This taught us some valuable lessons. One large building where many units can rent spaces is more needed than the one-unit one-plot development everybody had been thinking of before. The food producing units Naturellement, Aurosoya and New School Crafts have also realised this and are now building their units jointly. The infrastructure costs are high, and most units, when they are ready to build, are not capital rich. It is better to build multi-purpose spaces which units can rent."

The Master Plan interpretation

A problem is caused by the ideas that have been put forward for the Zone. Says Suhasini: "One of the major disagreements that has blocked development is the interpretation of the Auroville Master Plan, with its road plans and mega-structures called Lines of Force. The Master Plan envisages these Lines of Force in two of Auroville's zones, the Residential and the Industrial Zone. The Cultural Zone and the International Zone do not have them. In the Residential Zone, they will start low close to the Matrimandir and gradually rise to their highest point at the periphery of the city. In the Industrial Zone they go the other way: they are low at the periphery and rise upwards towards the Matrimandir. So far, the Development Group has made it a point to locate new industries within such lines of force. Lorenzo's workshop is supposed to be part of one of them. The incense manufacturing unit Mereville, which wants to build a factory, has been asked to study how it can become part of another Line of Force. Personally,

I do not see how industries can be located in Lines of Force. But in our group we have decided to leave this discussion for the future. We superimposed the present land use on the Master Plan with its Lines of Force, its ring road and its radial roads, to see what is left. And then it appears that there is very little land where a new unit could come up. The other available lands are either not yet owned by Auroville, or are intended for roads or Lines of Force, or are canyons. In the end, we are always looking at the same three or four small plots: the area around Angiras' Garden, Kottakarai Farm, Ganesh Bakery and the Pony farm; the area of the former Red-Earth riding school; and the Auroshilpam area."

Is it possible to increase the area of available land by simply filling up the canyons, for example with sand to be excavated from the future Matrimandir Lake? "That is exactly the wrong attitude!" bristles Mona. "That would obstruct the natural flow of the land and water. What would happen to the villages? To their ponds and the traditional systems that they built around it? You can't act as if you live upstream and not be responsible for the damage this would cause downstream. What about this 'city of consciousness' story? Such a blunt move would irreparably damage our relationship with the villages! No, for the time being we can only concentrate on these three areas."

Waste, water and access

A few years ago the lack of effluent treatment plants in the Zone sparked a protest action from the residents of Kottakarai. Asked if this is still a problem, Amrit shakes his head. "In 1999, the then Industrial Zone Monitoring Group resigned as it found that the attitude of many unit execu-

tives in the Auroshilpam area was not supportive of the development of an environmentally-healthy Industrial Zone. This was a major issue as the Industrial Zone is located on top of a water recharge area. But the units have completely changed their attitudes and are now very responsible: they have either improved their waste water systems or are in the process of doing so. Several units have even taken out loans for the purpose. In a way, the past years with bad monsoons have helped to convince people that water is a precious resource and that waste water management is necessary. Ironically, the private residences are now the problem, and we are urging them to take action and build small-scale waste-water treatment plants."

Water is still a problem in the Zone. There are two bore wells that presently supply most of the area, but their output is not sufficient. Moreover, the water of one of the wells is not potable, and can only be used for flushing toilets and gardening. There is agreement that another well will have to be dug before the Zone can house more industries. Explains Amrit: "We want to develop an integrated system, where the three wells are hooked-up. Individual units will not be allowed to drill and operate their own bore-wells. Instead, we aim for a central distribution system with one or two large underground water tanks and generator back-up. The units will have their own underground and overhead tanks to monitor their water consumption. We rejected the idea of having one central overhead water tank, as the experience of the Residential Zone has taught us that an overhead tank only contributes to water wastage."

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Stichting de Zaaier

Since 1986, the Dutch Foundation 'De Zaaier' has played a very active role in Auroville. Auroville Today interviews Ms. Mia Berden, who, apart from being Board member of De Zaaier, is also honorary life member of Auroville International.

AVToday: What is the origin of De Zaaier's interest in Auroville?

Mia: Yoka [an Aurovilian who passed away in 1991, eds.] and I were board members from the day the Foundation became active in 1986. We shared a deep interest in the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother and in Auroville's development. Yoka moved to Auroville in September 1986 and I got involved in the work of Auroville International. The Netherlands. That's how Auroville became a part of our funding.

At the end of the eighties, Dr. Henk Thomas joined as chairman of the board. He is Professor Emeritus of the Dutch Institute of Social Studies and became professionally involved in Auroville with the research project in the Auroville economy. The other two board members, Ms. Martine Bush and Ms. Carmelita Zeyl joined later. They have both visited Auroville, were impressed by the manifold activities and have a positive position towards Auroville. I am now holding the Auroville project portfolio on behalf of De Zaaier.

How does the Foundation decide which projects to sponsor in Auroville?

Over the years a modus operandi has been worked out with the Auroville Project Coordination Group. Each year they receive all the project proposals from within Auroville, check them and then present us with a shortlist for funding, indicating their priorities. From this shortlist we select the projects. Apart from this shortlist, we have given special grants to particular large Auroville projects such as recently the Land Fund (Rs 1 crore / € 200,000) and the Town Hall (Rs 52 lakhs /

€ 100,000). We also sponsor individual projects, such as study and research proposals. The total of our donations since 1986 is now about Rs 6 crores (€ 1.2 million).

Clearly De Zaaier's goodwill for Auroville is enormous. Is Auroville de Zaaier's main project?

Mia: No. Auroville features high on our list. Apart from The Netherlands we have projects all over the world. In Pakistan, for example, we are supporting the Institute for Labour Education and Research, which is active in issues such as the status of women, child labour and general labour conditions. This Institution has become a centre for peace in the south-Asian region.

In January this year you visited Auroville to review the projects submitted to De Zaaier with the project holders. Are you satisfied with the projects you receive?

Mia: I can't really answer this question with a simple yes or no. For example, this year's short list contained requests to fund three buildings. But we have given substantial grants for buildings in the past and we would now like to shift our focus to sponsoring new initiatives, for example to promoting the development of small industrial units and to giving fellowships for courses in India and abroad.

We built up experience by sponsoring the organic food processing industries, which have not taken off as we had anticipated. We learned how difficult the situation is for Auroville's small industrial units. The unit executives have to struggle all by themselves; their units develop because the unit holders put in their own money. There seems to be little possibility for them to get additional

capital at low interest rate. There is as yet no support for entrepreneurs where they can receive expert advice on marketing, accounting, legal affairs, taxation, building a factory etc. Now time and energy is lost to acquire necessary information and help. A centre for the promotion of industry would help to create the climate whereby industry can develop.

De Zaaier is also supporting the farms.

Mia: Yes. In the beginning, we were approached by individual farmers. Afterwards the Farm Group came into existence and we agreed to support them with a yearly amount which they were free to distribute. This Farm Fund was intended to grow and attract new money. But this hasn't happened. Instead, it only served as an instrument for the distribution of our donations.

This year we received additional requests for support from three farms, submitted with the approval of the Farm Group and the Project Co-ordination Group. These projects were not part of the shortlist. It made me understand that the position of Auroville's farms is very difficult and that, as the Farm Group had already budgeted, a large sum is needed. After discussions with the concerned farms a proposal was made for a farm-assessment research project. This is now happening. [see AVToday June/July 2003]

It appears that De Zaaier prefers a passive attitude and is not using its position as a donor to influence Auroville's development.

Mia: No, we would not like to be considered as exercising undue interference on Auroville's affairs. The expression of our views might come as a consequence of our analyses of the problems presented to us, but not



Mia

as an independent push.

For example, the position of women in society is one which is very close to my heart. In this respect Auroville is not in the forefront of progress. Women work very hard and also participate in the affairs of the community and some women hold important posts with great results but male domination still prevails. Personally I would welcome a plan to change the situation, but that is all. I can't take the initiative.

Another example that I feel that Auroville could consider starting is a kind of public reward system for outstanding workers, as one of the means to improve Auroville's relationship with the employees and the villages. I have been told that years ago an open day, a Good Work Fair, was organized for all the employees, where they displayed the products they produced, but it appears that the effort has not been repeated. That is a pity. But here again, we can't take the initiative to promote this.

Nevertheless, De Zaaier got deeply involved in the study of the development of Auroville's economy and also initiated a research into the living conditions of the Auroville's employees.

Mia: Yes, but that was only because, in 1998, the Economy Group had asked Henk Thomas if he could

make recommendations for the future development of the Auroville economy. Henk replied that that was impossible without studying the key issues of the economic history of Auroville from its beginning in 1968 till the present and he took up the challenge to conduct the research. A spin-off of the economic research is the Socio-Economic survey of Auroville employees 2000, as a way to learn about the specific dynamics between Auroville and the villages that surround it. That survey was done in the period February to July 2000. It included all Auroville employees. All this will be published as a research monograph, The Economic and Social History of Auroville 1968-2002, perhaps as early as winter this year. [see also AVToday June-July 2002 and May 2003] So here again, De Zaaier only got involved because we were asked to do so.

Do you foresee any changes in the future relation between De Zaaier and Auroville?

I cannot predict. I only can say that our income has suffered due to market circumstances, and this may influence the extent to which De Zaaier can meet Auroville's request. It will very much depend on the projects Auroville submits.

In conversation with Carel

OPEN FORUM

Developing Auroville's neighbouring villages

When you read the details of the now abandoned plan to build a Taj Heritage Corridor you become aware of just how tenuous any given 'protection' for heritage centres in India is. This project, which entailed changing the course of the Yamuna River just behind the Taj in order to build a shopping mall for tourists, would have gravely endangered the Taj Mahal. It took the intervention of the media and a huge public outcry to stop this development. But if even the Taj Mahal can become so seriously threatened, then how fragile is Auroville.

The following is an excerpt from an article in the Hindu Magazine, of Sunday 13th titled 'Tunnel vision in Agra':

'As is the case with any place which is a tourist attraction, a whole service industry grows up around it, starting with shops selling cheap replicas and other souvenirs, stalls providing food and drink to tourists, guide and ticketing services, hotel accommodation and the like. But it does not stop there; pretty soon, untrammelled growth results in everything being sold there from sandalwood to suitcases. Municipal authorities do nothing to check this proliferating entrepreneurship and pretty soon everything gets blocked and the

tourist for whom this glut of services is being provided cannot get through to see the monument for what they have come in the first place. The Taj Mahal, in spite of its pre-eminent

innumerable small shops that lined the route to the entrance. It was not a pleasant experience and I am sure it is much worse now. If we are not vigilant the same thing will happen to the



Anne in Kuilapalayam village. The first Kashmiri boutique and other handicrafts units have already opened there

position in our heritage hierarchy, has not escaped this fate either.'

When I last visited the Taj Mahal ten years ago, I was hassled by touts who wanted me to visit one of the

access roads to Auroville. Indeed development is already mushrooming on the road from Repos to Kuilapalayam, and has started on the Edayanchavadi road to the Visitor's

Centre. It could also begin on the road from Bommayarpalayam to Auroville. But even more worrying is that it is appearing on the road from Kuilapalayam to Certitude.

Two of the most endearing images of Auroville I have are on the road from Kuilapalayam to Certitude. One is of the horizon framed by Palmyras across the open space near New Creation; the other is of the archway of trees a little further down the road. Very soon commercial units, billboards, etc. could replace these charming images and they could end up as old photo images of how beautiful Auroville once had been.

Is there anything we could do to preserve what is left? The first and most important step is to look at ourselves and try to make our attitudes more in line with the Charter. We have to surrender our individual egos to work together for the good of Auroville. When we are less divided as a community we will find a clearer sense of direction and become more powerful.

The second necessity is that we need to have a realistic picture of the present situation in regards to Auroville. It is a childish fantasy to see Auroville as an oasis paradise in a rural setting. The reality is that Pondicherry is expanding, and expanding fast, and it will do more so

in the future. We have to accept the fact that this entire area of Tamil Nadu will become more densely populated and urbanised. And most of the development that will take place may go unchecked.

But most of all we have to cooperate with our village neighbours. All traffic for Auroville passes the villages. It is but natural that the villages seek to get economic advantage from that - after all, they also share in all the disturbance which the traffic to Auroville brings. Auroville should help the villages to develop properly, assist them in making village development plans and also invest in this development. This would prove that Auroville is not self-seeking, that we want to work with them and share with them the prosperity we want to bring to Auroville.

The horrendous development that threatened to engulf the Taj Mahal and still threatens Auroville threatens other parts of India as well. Auroville has the potential to serve as a model for sustainable development in India. Including the development of its surrounding villages in that model is just the next step. Auroville can do this. It has achieved acclaim for transforming a desert into a fertile landscape. Now let's achieve more wonders and build a beautiful green town with prosperous villages around it. *Anne G.*

How to govern Utopia, chapter 301

Over the years, many Aurovilians have worked hard on sensible proposals for collective decision-making. These tend to get shot down – often with maximum hostility – by this or that section of the community. The surprising thing is that anyone has the energy to try again...

Auroville's long march towards effective governance has taken us through some twisted paths and byways in the last few months. The destination may be as far off as ever, or it may be just around the next bend. But at any rate, the journey has recently been quite interesting.

Since March 2003, two widely differing proposals for collective decision-making in Auroville have been drafted. Much discussion has taken place in the Auroville Council, the Working Committee, the unofficial forum known as the Tibetan Pavilion Group, and doubtless around a hundred dinner-tables. And a final distinction was conferred in the form of a speech on Self-Governance by the Chairman of the Governing Board, Dr Kireet Joshi. What, if anything, will emerge in terms of a policy proposal is not yet clear.

The present stage of the journey began two years ago when Serge and Carel drafted "Towards a Divine Anarchy", a detailed proposal for making and implementing decisions in Auroville (see *AVToday* No. 152, Sept 2001). After much general discussion, and four revised drafts, it failed to gain community approval in March 2002. From the ashes of this proposal arose "The Experiment", which came into effect in September last year with the endorsement of the Governing Board (see *AVToday* No. 165, Oct 2002).

Perhaps it would have been wise to try out the new system on some harmless issue. This did not happen. The first trial of The Experiment was Matrimandir. A series of difficult meetings failed to resolve Auroville's longest-running dispute, since when no policy proposals have been through the process of The Experiment.

And there things might have rested for a while, but for a curious development elsewhere.

Last November, a new Auroville Council and Working Committee were elected. The previous Working Committee had enjoyed the services of an informal support group consisting of about fifteen fairly senior Aurovilians. When the new Working Committee decided it did not require this service, the group decided to keep on meeting anyway. They chose the Tibetan Pavilion [TP] as a venue for unofficial weekly discussions on subjects that the members found interesting, which included "Decision-making in Auroville".

The TP Group took a novel approach. Rather than defining how policy proposals might be created, they decided to focus only on how such proposals would be ratified by the community. Put simply, if any Aurovillian could make any suggestion about governance at any time, how would Auroville as a whole decide which ones to adopt?

A preliminary document emerged, which proposed a partially democratic method. Under certain circumstances – which were fully defined – an issue would be decided by votes cast at a meeting of the Residents' Assembly; depending on the type of proposal in question, a greater or lesser majority would be required for ratification. This is direct, or Athenian democracy, which is still quite rare in the world. A much more familiar system is representative democracy, in which voters elect governors (or "representatives") who then make all the decisions on their behalf.

The TP Group's suggestion was taken up for discussion by the Auroville Council, some of whose members are also in the Group. At the same time, the Council asked

Serge to analyse The Experiment and produce a report on how its processes might be improved. The original intention was then to attempt a synthesis of the two methods. However, the elements of direct democracy contained in the TP Group document proved to be irreconcilable with the "intuitive intelligence" elements in The Experiment.

At this point, Kireet Joshi announced that he would be visiting Auroville and would like to address the residents on the subject of "Self-Governance in Auroville". The meeting took place on July 19th.

He opened his remarks by saying that, "There is present in Auroville a certain egoistic conception of self-governance. Our task is to see how we can arrive at a true conception, and how we can implement that idea." He regretted the community's apparent inability to co-operate in this venture.

Several times Dr Joshi stressed that the people of Auroville enjoy enormous – indeed unique – freedom to manage their own affairs. "As long as you develop Auroville according to the Charter, there is no limitation on what you can do. This freedom was deliberately not defined in the Act. You have a complete freedom even to shape how you will determine the governance of Auroville." In particular, he said, the framers of the Act "avoided putting down that this freedom would be exercised by election."

Developing this line of thought, he emphasised that Auroville should not be an attempt to make a State, democratic or otherwise. "This is an inadequate idea. It should be a living body. If you are going to create the kind of machinery that is used by every Parliament in the world, there is no experiment. We are not going forward. Sri Aurobindo wrote, 'The State is bound to act crudely [...]. It

is incapable of that free, harmonious [...] varied action which is proper to organic groups. For the State is not an organism. It is a machinery. And it works like a machine. [...] It tries to manufacture. But what humanity is here to do is to grow, and create.' This is what we are here to do in Auroville."

He concluded by commenting on the Residents' Assembly meetings. "At one time it was said that the Residents' Assembly's fundamental function is to arrive at an agreement. This statement is good, but not sufficient. It is not an instrument of agreement and disagreement. The starting-point is wrong. The Residents' Assembly should meet from time to time to generate harmony. Invite everyone. It is to mature, constantly, the sense of all of us as a collectivity, devoted to the Divine's will."

Since then, no progress has been made either on the revised Experiment or the Auroville Council's partially-democratic proposal for ratifying policy.

If "Self-Governance in Auroville" were a piece of classical music, we would hear two main themes always playing against one another. One represents a system in which Aurovilians directly participate – by whatever means – in shaping their government; the other represents rule by a responsible, enlightened elite. Each tune has its own beauty. But they are in different keys and different modes, so that they clash horribly with one another. This is Dissonance.

Perhaps a time will come when our aspiration to be a different (and better) community does not conflict with our practical, everyday needs as a society. On that day, there will be Harmony. Until then, we must struggle on as best we can.

David C

A VIEW FROM OUTSIDE

The problems of the Russian people

Every time I come to Auroville and speak English, the people living here are astonished. "It's impossible," they say. "People from Russia can only speak Russian. Also you Russians don't have much money and you are strange people."

Why do people think like this?

The problems of the Russian people are mainly the problems of Russia herself. Our democracy is very young – only about 15 years old. We don't speak English or other foreign languages well because our language teaching was bad. Also, the communist government of the Soviet Union decided that Soviet people should not go abroad, so it was not necessary to know a language other than Russian. Only a few hundred Russians a year from families of VIPs received a proper language education so that they could work in Russian embassies, the intelligence service, etc.

Our people only recently got the opportunity to read books and receive information about the world. Before, all this was forbidden. For example, it was forbidden to read, buy and keep at home not only the writings of Sri Aurobindo, Vivekananda and Krishnamurti but also the writings of Russian philosophers like Florensky,

Berdyayev, Soloviev. Even the Bible was banned.

Recently I was told a very interesting story by Dr. Ganguly who, during the Soviet period, worked at the Indian Embassy in Moscow. One day he, together with the Ambassador, visited the Museum of History on Red Square. Looking at an exhibition of things owned by Lenin they noticed a book by Sri Aurobindo. It was locked up in a glass case. They asked permission from the museum officer to take out the book to discover the title, but he told them, "It is impossible. You must ask permission from the State Department".

When they returned to the Embassy, Dr. Ganguly at once wrote a letter and sent it to the State Department. No answer was received. After two weeks he sent another letter. After one month he received an answer that Lenin had never read a book by Sri Aurobindo. At once someone from the Indian Embassy was sent to the museum, but the book had gone! Most probably it was put in a special closed depository.

At that time, we could only read photocopies of illegal translations of the writings of Sri Aurobindo. If the secret police found somebody with these photocopies they could be

arrested. It was only about 15 years ago that all prohibitions were lifted and our people got the possibility to read, buy and keep at home any book of any philosopher. But since they can read only Russian we needed translations. The first book published was a good translation of Satprem's book, "Sri Aurobindo, or The Adventure of Consciousness". About a million copies were published and it was sold out. Many Russian people first came to know about Sri Aurobindo and Mother from the book by Satprem. This is why every Russian who comes to Auroville asks, "Where is Satprem? How is he?"

Then in May 1989, an article on Auroville was published in the main newspaper for Soviet youth. It made Auroville sound like paradise, a place where it wasn't necessary to work, and where everybody could do what they want – even meditate all day. So some Russian people came to Auroville without being able to speak English, without any money, and without any understanding of the real situation. Most of them returned to Russia, disappointed by their experience.

Today the situation in Russia is changing. There is a publishing house, "Aditi", founded by Michael

Bonke, which has published good translations of four volumes of Sri Aurobindo's writings and four volumes of the Collected Works of Mother. While people have started to learn English, Russian people really have no money because the salaries in our country are so low. The average salary in Moscow is about \$300 a month. In my city, Saint Petersburg, it is about \$200 and in the rest of the country about \$100. The average pension is about \$50 a month. But we, the followers of Sri Aurobindo, have a sincere aspiration to live in Auroville and to work together with the rest of you.

As our consciousness grows, so does our sense of wellbeing. I ask you to understand us, and to help us learn and understand the new knowledge which has been available to the rest of the world for many years.

Vlad

Vladimir, who lives in St. Petersburg, Russia, has been a follower of Sri Aurobindo for about 30 years. He helped to publish the writings of Sri Aurobindo and Mother in Russian, and tries to distribute their books all over Russia.

In brief

Matrimandir

The Auroville Council and Working Committee informed the community in a General Meeting on August 7th that the Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation has filed a caveat in court. This means that in case a litigation is started by anyone, seeking redress against an action of the Foundation regarding the Matrimandir, the court will not pass any orders without having heard the other side. The Foundation's lawyer has also issued notices to a few Aurovilians working at Matrimandir stating that if they wish to go to court, they should inform the Foundation and not try to get an *ex parte* decision. In view of the deteriorating situation at the Matrimandir and the inability of parties to harmonize viewpoints, the Auroville Council and the Working Committee proposed in the same General Meeting that a new management team be chosen in consultation with the Residents' Assembly. The Council and Working Committee believe that the issues relating to the lake, gardens and Peace Area have yet to be resolved.

One million dollars for the land

The deadline to raise one million dollars for the land has been extended to February 21st, 2004. By August 15th – the original deadline – \$350,000 had been raised, which means that in only six months the land appeal had raised as much as the Land Fund normally receives in one year. In terms of purchase power, this translates into about 40 acres of land for Auroville. In addition it has created a flow of income which has enabled the land team to come to a purchase agreement with a real estate developer for 50 acres in the Green Belt and to begin negotiations for a sizeable area in the city.

As a means of keeping up the momentum, and extending the range of the appeal, a land fair was held at the Visitors' Centre between 14th-17th August to inform visitors about the land crisis and to share with them our hopes for a solution. Stalls sold Auroville products in aid of the Land Fund and everything was rounded off with the ever-popular jazz evening.

Percentages on House construction

The Funds and Assets Management Committee has increased the contributions to be paid by those who wish to build a house. The percentages on a house construction costing below 5 lakh will be 3% (2% for Auroville Fund (AVF) and 1% to Development Group (DG)); houses between Rs 5-12 lakhs: 14% (2% AVF, 1% DG, 10% Housing Fund and 1% Land Fund); and houses that cost more than Rs 12 lakhs 15% (2% AVF, 1% DG, 10% Housing Fund and 2% Land Fund). None of these percentages will be levied on projects where the funds are received from Indian Government grants. If an individual has made a separate donation for the purchase of a piece of land for Auroville, the Land Fund contribution will be waived.

The contributions from non-residential projects are increased to 7% (2% to AVF, 1% to Development Group, 2% to Land Fund, and 2% to the new Infrastructure Development Fund). Auroville architects and contractors have been requested to present a proposal with regard to the percentages they charge clients.

Assessing Auroville business

The concept of doing business under the Auroville Foundation needs an overhaul

When the Government of India passed the Auroville Foundation Act in November 1988, it had one objective: to bring the assets of all the organisations that were related to Auroville together into one body, the Auroville Foundation. Nothing connected with Auroville should exist outside the Foundation.

The wisdom of that view was at the time unsuccessfully challenged by the managers of Aurelec, who held that the move was detrimental to the development of Auroville's business units. Business in Auroville, they said, should be allowed to exist in any form that is convenient to those who do the business as long as it respected the ideals of Auroville and conformed to the laws of India. Any additional control, be it by the Auroville Foundation or by the Government of India, could only harm business. And if a business were to collapse, the Foundation would be responsible for the losses.

Today, fifteen years later, it seems that the Aurelec managers were right after all. The near bankruptcy of two Auroville units – a small-scale electronics manufacturer and a carpentry workshop – is causing a rethink of how business in Auroville should operate. One obvious possibility is to impose more stringent controls on businesses within the present structure. But others think that it is time for Auroville units to be placed outside the Foundation altogether.

The problems with the existing structure fall into two broad categories. Firstly, Auroville businesses find it very difficult to raise capital. Secondly, the Foundation is responsible for any debts or liabilities incurred by insolvent units.

Raising money

To start a business, or significantly expand an existing one, requires access to capital. A business has to buy raw materials and machinery, rent space, buy computers and so on. Normally, capital is provided by banks against the security of the business' immovable assets: the factory buildings and its land. Another way to obtain capital is by taking loans from individuals, or by issuing 'shares' in the company. The shareholders then become co-owners of the company to the extent of their share holding.

Auroville units, however, cannot follow this model because they do not themselves own immovable property. Nor are they available to be owned. They are legally part of the Auroville Foundation. Anything the business owns is owned by the Foundation.

This might not be a problem if the Foundation itself would provide capital. But it does not. Nor does it pledge its assets as collateral for bank loans, or stand guarantor for loans taken by "its" businesses. The Foundation, essentially, is risk-averse. So the only way for a new unit to obtain funds is by taking loans from friends or to use the personal money of the unit executive. To ameliorate matters, a small loan fund has come into existence with a grant from the Foundation for World Education and a donation from Auroville International UK. It now works with additional funds from the Auroville Maintenance Fund, and gives small short term loans to Auroville businesses against a contribution. But the situation is far from ideal; for the Maintenance Fund doesn't have capital of its own and can only lend out part of the money deposited with it.

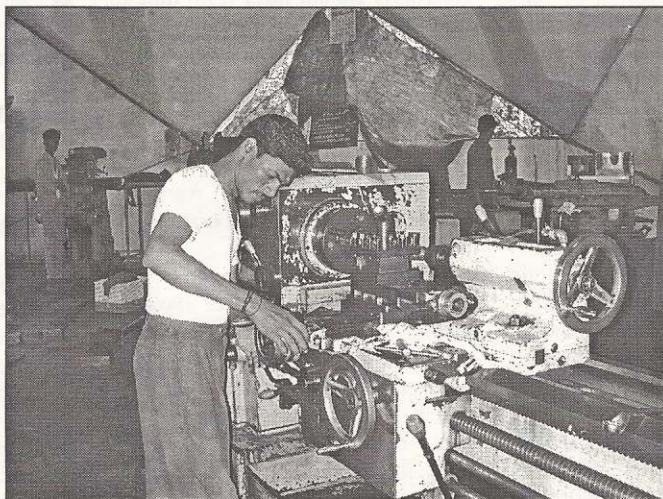
Though it is natural for the Foundation to be risk-averse, the opposite is true for business. Funds and Assets Management Committee (FAMC) member and former Aurelec and Shuttle Technologies executive Ulli has this to say about the problem: "It is inherent to business to take well-calculated risks in the absence of sufficient data. If all data were clear, a bureaucrat could do the job. So here is the paradox: the Foundation does not want to take risks but needs the businesses' income to help build the city. Business, on the contrary, can only generate meaningful income if it can take risks. To generate income, the business needs to have access to capital. The Foundation does not provide any capital, and also doesn't pledge its assets as collateral for bank loans or stands guarantor for loans taken by its businesses. The unit cannot obtain venture capital as the unit belongs fully to the Foundation. The only way for a young unit to obtain funds is by taking loans

which usually have a high interest burden. So Auroville business executives have all the odds against them. The incentives for a small business to start are not given and the environment for business to grow is hostile."

The Foundation's risk exposure

As the Foundation is the owner of all the business units, its exposure to potential losses is vast. This has been highlighted by two recent business failures.

The electronics manufacturer's mistake was to raise capital by taking unsecured loans from individuals at extremely high interest rates. When the business did not grow as fast as expected, it was suffocated by its debts and ultimately became insolvent. The FAMC intervened. The factory building was transferred to another Auroville unit, which in turn agreed to service some of the unit's liabilities. The house of the unit executive was transferred to a friend of Auroville. The proceeds of this "liquidation" were used first to cover bank liabilities, then the liabilities to Auroville's Central Fund, and finally (on a pro-rata basis) the money owed to Aurovilians who had lent



Metalwork at Aureka

money to the unit taking into account interest already received.

Managerial mistakes of the carpentry workshop had led to a deficit of almost twice the unit's annual turnover. The unit's suppliers and other business partners were aware that they were indirectly dealing with the Foundation. They believed – correctly – that if something went wrong, the Foundation would bail the unit out. So they were far more lenient in extending credits than they would have been otherwise. This in turn enticed the unit executive to run up more liabilities. Here too the FAMC intervened, but it is still to be seen how these losses can be recuperated.

In both cases the Foundation got off unscathed, for it was not directly held liable for the losses. But it may only be a question of time before that happens. If a unit were to become insolvent, the Foundation might have to sell-off assets to meet its losses. So it is no wonder that the Foundation has requested the FAMC to implement a set of internal measures which will oblige unit executives to sort-out problems at an early stage. But the trouble with such measures is that they are mainly administrative, prescribing the limits of the executive's powers. In order to control the running of a unit on behalf of the Foundation, competent people would need the power to intervene whenever they deem it necessary. But business executives may object to this power, regarding it as undue interference in their management. And even the best controls are no guarantee of detecting problems in time.

Doing business outside the Foundation

Are there other ways by which the Foundation could retain ownership of the businesses, and yet distance itself from their liabilities? One option is for the Foundation to transfer the units outside of itself, while still retaining control and ownership. For example, moving all businesses to limited liability companies that are 100% owned by the Foundation would "cap" its liability to the value of its shareholding. However, it is not clear if this option is legally feasible.

Another possibility is for Aurovilians to start businesses entirely outside the Foundation structure. But would that be in accordance with the ideals of

Auroville? Do all Aurovilians have to live and work in Auroville, or is it possible for them to reside in Auroville and work "outside" in the sense of having a business not owned by Auroville?

From Mother's answer to a question in 1969 it can be inferred that Aurovilians are allowed to start industries on their own as long as the profits go to Auroville.

Question: X, Y and Z will be the partners in this project to construct a factory named Auro-steel. They will invest various sums of money. How should the profits be distributed? In proportion to their investment or some other way? X's will be the biggest share. All told it needs Rs. 2 lakhs.

Answer: They do not seem to know that in Auroville after all expenses are paid, including their own maintenance, the profits go to the town. Blessings.¹

Mother's answer does not mention the ownership of the factory. It only makes explicit that the profits go to the town. Shyam Sunder Jhunjhunwala, the former Secretary of The Mother in charge of Auroville, also states that from the instances he remembers, Mother was not concerned about ownership but about the profits.

Ulli finds this to be conclusive evidence that "Aurovilians can be engaged in a business that is not owned by the Foundation, if they set it up outside the Auroville area. The bylaws of such a business undertaking should contain a stipulation that a major part of its profits would be donated to the Foundation. The advantages would be that the unit could attract capital in the normal way by pledging its immovable assets as collateral for bank loans, and even attract venture capital from third parties who do not have to have a particular relationship to Auroville. And the Foundation would not run any risk if such a unit would go bankrupt. Even if such an undertaking would donate some of its shares to the Foundation, making the Foundation a part-owner, the Foundation would not be liable for any business losses incurred. These losses would be limited to the assets of the business. In other words, the losses the Foundation could incur would be limited to the value of its shareholdings. This looks like a win-win solution for all.

"Another major advantage for having business outside the Foundation is the possibility of inviting joint-ventures, which is impossible for the units now owned by the Foundation. In today's global economy, joint ventures are normal ways to expand business. Already quite a few Auroville units have been approached by potential joint-venture partners. But regretfully, these invitations had to be declined. My unit Shuttle Technologies was outside the



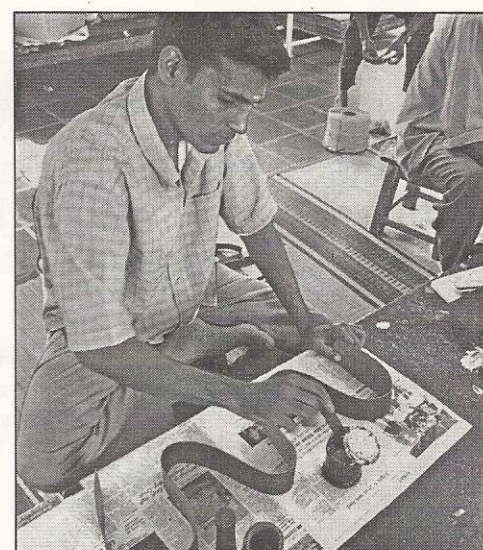
Garment manufacture at Auromode

Foundation. Its success was due to a successful joint venture with a UK company."

Doing business outside the Foundation would imply that the issue of visas for Aurovilians who are not Indian nationals is adjusted. The visas presently given to Aurovilians are based on the supposition that the Aurovilians reside in and work for Auroville. The Foundation would need to state explicitly to the relevant authorities that foreigners who own and operate a business unit outside the Foundation, and the foreigners who work there, fulfill the requirements of the Entry Visa. Alternatively the Foundation could seek clearance for recommending Aurovilians to hold business visas.

The tax angle

An objection to privately-owned units operating outside the Foundation is that they would have to pay income tax, thus reducing the amount which they could contribute to Auroville. The Auroville Foundation and all its trusts and units are presently



Leather work at Auromics

exempt from paying income tax, enjoying a unique exemption which is only granted by the Central Government to special institutions. This exemption has to be renewed regularly. During each renewal process, however, questions are raised by the tax-authorities as to how an entity like the Auroville Foundation can be involved with business activities. The answer is that the Foundation Act brought commercial activities under the purview of the Foundation, and thus explicitly acknowledged that business is part of Auroville's aims and objectives. Though this answer is still being accepted, it is clear that renewal of the exemption would raise fewer objections if new businesses were not part of the Foundation.

Those who favour having business outside the Foundation argue that the question of income tax would not arise if a unit donated 100% of its profits to the Foundation, for by doing so it would virtually not pay income tax. This, they say, would also be in line with what The Mother said on the topic. The problem is that a unit needs to reinvest money into its business in order to grow. A donation of all its profits would not be feasible, and consequently, such a unit would have to pay income tax.

Business friends of Auroville

If Aurovilians can own and run businesses which are not under the Foundation's control, on the condition that they donate a major portion of profits to Auroville, another development becomes feasible. Increasingly, people with goodwill towards Auroville but not willing to join the community, express interest in setting up independent or joint business ventures based within the Auroville area. They themselves would either reside in Auroville or elsewhere.

Could a category of 'business friends of Auroville' be started for these people? Ulli thinks it should. He gives the example of Turtle, a company that has been renting office space in Aurelec for the last two years. "The company has nothing to do with Auroville. But we can see that gradually a closer relationship is developing. One of their managers even expressed the desire to become Aurovillian. This is a good development for Auroville. The partnership could be enhanced beyond merely renting out office space; it could include a good possibility for Aurovilians and Auroville youth to become employed and learn skills and earn a maintenance. In the long run, such a company might even decide to fully integrate into Auroville, as happened in the past with Mereville, Auromirayan and CADDcon, or increasingly donate part of its profits to Auroville."

Selling a unit

Ulli finally points out a last advantage of having business outside the Foundation, namely the option of selling it. "Part of business in the present global context is that you build a business and then spin it off. It is not wrong to do that. Business has its own dynamics and there are outside parameters which help it to grow and develop. At some point in time a business is ahead of the curve or behind it. And then you either take a quantum step – by entering into a joint venture or buying a market share or buying another company – or you sell the business. Otherwise it may die. Shuttle, for example, was successfully sold in 1998. If we had continued its operations, it would have sold for very little today."

He concludes: "Business is part and parcel of Auroville's aims and objectives. The current situation is not encouraging entrepreneurs to develop businesses, and the existing businesses are a risk to the Foundation. It's time that the views on doing business were overhauled."

Carel

¹ 17 October 1969, Bulletin, 1987, 4, p.87, Mother's Collected Works Vol. 17 p. 328

The metamorphosis of the Industrial Zone

continued from page 1

The other problem is that of access. At present, traffic for the Zone passes Bharat Nivas and Matrimandir. To divert the traffic from the centre, access to the Zone should be from the Kottakarai-Alankuppam tar road. Says Suhasini: "The main problem is that a crucial piece of land is still not owned by Auroville. We are talking with the Farm Group about how we can create a link to the tar road, either on the side of Windarra farm or through a piece of Auroville land close by Bharatipuram. In the latter case, a road could also be opened behind the pony farm, and a piece of land which is situated next to Bharatipuram could be opened for industrial development. The villages would welcome that,

villages. Auromode operates two vans to collect its employees. Mereville is a costly operation. But this is a justly operation."

Adds Alok: "The Industrial Zone is in fact a rather remote area, located as it is to the north of Auroville. Auroville's commercial units are not exactly lining up to move there. Those units that are at present established in the area around Kuilapalayam have no intention to move whatsoever. It is much more convenient to remain where they are, with close access to the East Coast Road. The workshop acknowledged the reality of those 'satellite economic zones', and recommended that the Aspiration-Fraternity-Aurelec area and the Kottakarai-Koot-Road area be acknowledged in the Master Plan as additional nodes of industrial development.

Another problem of the remoteness of the Zone is that we can't easily find highly-educated people to work there. I run an Info Tech company. If I would run that company in Pondicherry, there would be 50 people lined up to work for me each day. As I don't want to be in Pondicherry, I started the unit in the Pondicherry Engineering College - about 10 kilometres outside Pondicherry on the East Coast Road. The programmers were quite happy, but I wanted to be back in Auroville. So, I moved to the Aurelec compound, but I lost some employees and find it difficult to recruit good programmers. I have begun outsourcing several projects to companies in Pondy. Auroville is still a village and doesn't have the technical infrastructure or the social atmosphere for IT industries."

"So the workshop came up with a different perspective," says Mona. "Instead of an 'industrial zone' with its rather negative connotations of dirt and pollution and the deserted feeling in the evenings, we are now speaking of the



Silk-screen printing at Lumière

as there is dissatisfaction that they haven't got as much benefit from the presence of Auroville as the villages of Edayanchavadi and Kuilapalayam.

The change of vision

But what is the vision of the Industrial Zone? This was the central question of a two-day workshop held in the beginning of March this year, which was attended by most of those who live or work in the Zone. The Master Plan was analysed in the light of the ground realities and the immediate needs. Based on the feedback provided, the Group is now preparing a coherent 5-year development plan for the Zone.

The workshop brought a number of surprises. The major one came up when trying to find an answer to the question of who would work in the Industrial Zone. Right now about 1,500 Aurovilians employ about 4,000 people. If this trend continues, the ultimate population of 50,000 Aurovilians would employ about 140,000 people, many of whom would be working in the Industrial Zone. This seems to be unrealistic, particularly as the villagers that are presently employed by the units seek to educate their children for white collar jobs. This makes the prospect of depending on the nearby villages for the kind of labour we are used to not feasible.

"The unit executives provided us with some startling information," says Sheril. "They men-



Crocheting work at Auromics

tioned that having more than 30 to 60 employees was not beneficial either economically or in terms of management. Most units are now outsourcing their production. Instead of bringing labour and raw materials into Auroville, the work is brought where the people are. This has tremendous advantages. The unit reduces its infrastructural requirements and potential labour problems, as everything scales up just by bringing the people there. The zone has less environmental pressure. And the people don't have to travel long periods every day. For many employees come from beyond the surrounding

Auroshilpam Economic Zone. It is essentially a low-level manufacturing zone, where offices will be located for research and development, where samples and prototypes will be developed and where the management will be housed. The bulk of the manufacturing will be outsourced to areas where labour is immediately available. The Zone would rather provide employment to Aurovilians than to employees coming from outside, and hopefully, it would also have industries there that exclusively cater to the needs of Aurovilians. Apart from this, there will be a certain amount of social activities. The Vêrité community is expanding with a new integral learning centre and many more buildings are expected to come up there. The Kottakarai guesthouse facilities have expanded. We hope that facilities like cafeterias with internet facilities, crèches and spaces for recreation will come up as well. It all should result in a zone with a different, a harmonious vibration of energy. And for the time being, there would be no need to relocate the pony farm or use the farmland of Kottakarai for industrial purposes."

"The Group's major task now is to prepare the first Development Plan for the Auroshilpam Economic Zone," says Sheril. When we have received all the necessary data, we'll try to visualize what Auroville needs and can manifest in the next 5 years. Once the Development Plan is ready, it will be offered to the community for its approval. We'll restrict the plan to a 5-year period as much can change."

Carel

Where are the units in Auroville?

INDUSTRIAL ZONE - AUROSHILPAM

ADITI
ALADIN
AUROMODE
AURORE SYSTEMS
AUROVILLE BUILDING CENTRE
AUROVILLE ENERGY PRODUCTS
AUROVILLE WIND SYSTEMS
CYNERGY
FILAURE
GECKO
INSIDE INDIA
MARAYANA
MEREVILLE
MIRA
NYMPHEA CREATIONS
PENTA SERVICES
RANGOLI
SHRADHANJALI
THE COLOURS OF NATURE
UPASANA DESIGN STUDIO
VARDAN

Patchwork bedcovers, cushion covers, table linen
Paper lampshades
Garments & hand-painted silk for export
Solar PV systems, ferroceement products
Prefabricated ferroceement roofing, doors, water tanks
Renewable energy products and services
Wind-electric hybrid systems
Software development
Garments and children's clothing
Garments
Travel agency
Stuffed toys, manikins in wood & cloth
Incense
Computers, computer peripherals and software sales
Interior decorative items
Graphic and web-page design, software development
Garments
Pressed flower stationery; lampshades, trays, screens
Pure/naturally dyed textile garments and fabrics
Garment design and manufacture
Website design, book-binding in leather

INDUSTRIAL ZONE - KOTTAKARAI:

AUROMICS
AUROVILLE EXPORTS TRUST
BIJOU
BOMMAIYUR CARPENTRY
GANESH BEADS
IMAGINATION
KOPPU
MANTRA
THE NEW DAWN
VIJNANA

Hand-knitted sweaters, crochet and leather goods
Exporters of Auroville products
Beaded wear and tapestries
Furniture, doors, windows and wooden gift items
Fancy leather bags, beaded and crochet shoes
Handwoven textiles, hammocks & garments
Organic health food, ayurvedic oils, etc
Handmade glazed stoneware/pottery items and tiles
Carpentry and furniture manufacture
Colloidal gold & silver, power pyramids, pendulums

FRATRENITY-AURELEC-NEW CREATION-DJAIMA

ALTECS ENERGY SYSTEMS
AURO HI-TECH
AUROSYSTEMS
AV COMPUTER WAREHOUSE
AV TRANSPORT SERVICE
CADD CONSULTANTS
DISCOVERY
FREELAND
LINEA
LOTUS FRATERNITY AUROVILLE
LUMIERE
NEW CREATION CORNER
NEW CREATION FRATERNITY CRAFTS
PAPYRUS
PRISMA

Uninterrupted Power Supplies
Metal work, brass casting, repair of fridges
Supply and servicing of computers and peripherals,
Computer peripherals, spares
Transport service
CAD drawing for architecture and engineering
Garments, bags and purses, dolls
Bookshop (office)
Consultancy in dental equipment and allied products
Hammocks, hammock chairs, cloth bags
Screen printing
Restaurant
Hammocks and other handicraft items
Printing, book binding, stationery, displays, paper
Advertising, design, DTP, text preparation & editing

ASPIRATION-KUILAPALAYAM -SHAKTI AREA

AQUA DYN
AUREKA
AURIGINAL
AUROMIRAYAN
AURORE MECHANICAL ENGIN.
AUROVILLE PRESS
AUROVILLE PRINTERS
BRAND NEW DAY
CAPABILITY
EDITIONS AV PRESS INTERNAT.
HEALTH CENTRE PHARMACY
LA FERME CHEESE
LE GOURMET
MAGICA
MAROMA
SOUND WIZARD
THE TRAVEL SHOP
WILD SEAGULL BOOKSHOP

Water filtration and purification systems
Earth-block presses, wind pumps, wheelbarrows
Garments and handicrafts boutique
Leather goods
Design and manufacture of metalwork products
Offset printing plus graphic design
Printing, book binding and stationery items
Architecture, interior design, graphic design
Architecture, interior design, landscaping and design
Books, videos and handmade paper stationery items
Pharmacy products
Fresh and seasoned cheeses, yoghurt and ice cream
Bread, buns, baguettes, biscuits, pastries and cakes
Classic, modern and ethnic jewellery
Perfumes, incense, floral candles, gift sets etc.
Acoustic consultancy, audio equipment supply
Air tickets, hotel bookings, tours and transfers
Bookshop

ELSEWHERE

AUREATE
AUROANNAM
AUROKRIYA
AUROLINE
AUROACHANA
AUROSOYA SERVICE
AUROSPIRUL
AV ASS. ARCHITECTS
AV BOUTIQUE
FLAME
JOY POSTCARDS
MANDALA POTTERY
MEMORIES
MINIATURE
MIRA BOUTIQUE
MYSTIQUE
NATURELLEMENT
NEW SCHOOL CRAFTS
OM TRAVELS
PLASTIC SEASONS
RADIANCE
RAIN TREE RECORDS
ROMA'S KITCHEN,
SUMARK
SUNSHINE MUSIC
WILD SEAGULL

LOCATION

Agni
Acceptance
Auromodèle
Sangha
Hope
Bharat Nivas
Simplicity
Grace
Visitors' Centre
Dana
Auromodèle
Dana
Fertile
Sharnga
Visitors' Centre
Sri Ma
Bharat Nivas
Aurobrindavan
Acceptance
Certitude
Aurodam
Sharnga
Auromodèle
Invocation
Sharnga
Bookshop

PRODUCTS

Coloured glass panels; decorative glassware
Organic food ; Effective Micro-organisms
T-shirts
Photography, graphic design, advertisements
Antiques and restored classic furniture
Soya products
Spirulina
Architectural design
Garments and handicrafts boutique
Stoneware
Postcards and visual documentation on India
Handmade pottery items & miscellaneous ceramics
Jewellery, gemstones, crystals and healing stones
Designer fashion, ready-made garments
Garments and handicrafts boutique
Incense, garments, general trading
Jams, Jellies, Marmalades, Syrups, nut butters
Ayurvedic food products, incense
Taxi service
Plastic fabricated items, bags, accessories
Interior design and decorative products
Recorded CDs and cassettes
Restaurant
Architectural and construction services
Recording, music production
Visitors' Centre

In relentless pursuit of Divine Anarchy

Armchair travels with an Aurovilian revolutionary

"I was always a kind of rebel against life in the West," says Serge matter-of-factly, "and at quite an early age, perhaps at fifteen or sixteen, I decided that I should get free from that society." When asked if he thinks the French are a naturally rebellious people, he quickly retorts, "We always dream of revolutions. Perhaps it is a part of the Celtic nature. Like the Irish – and we love the Irish," he adds with eyes twinkling.

Born in Germany, Serge grew up in Burgundy, France, where his parents moved when he was very young. "At that time, it was a provincial city, very bourgeois and conservative. It was terrible place for a young person to grow in. Absolutely boring!" he recollects with a shudder. He beat the boredom by reading a lot. He had a particular penchant for literature pertaining to freedom-fighting movements and social struggles. "I felt a great attraction for those; I felt immediately sympathetic towards them." In his readings, one concept especially intrigued him – that of 'anarchy'.

"Though I never associated myself with any political party, the idea of anarchy was something I could understand fully. For me, it did not mean chaos," he clarifies. "I did not see it as a wild explosion of a vitalistic life in all directions. For me, it held a truth." One can only imagine his excitement when for the first time in Auroville, he learnt that The Mother spoke about 'Divine Anarchy' as Auroville's ideal political organization. "All my youth had been in search of this freedom – of this elusive order of what could be this anarchic state. And here was the possibility!" Later on, he would contribute to co-developing a document detailing how 'Divine Anarchy' could be practically manifested in Auroville.

But the journey to Auroville from France was an adventure by itself. "I left my family very early. They wanted me to be a teacher, especially my mother since she wanted to be one herself, but never had the opportunity." A reluctant Serge appeared for the examination to enter a Teacher Training programme, which in his words he tried very hard to fail. "Unfortunately, I was one of the last ones to get in," he shrugs sheepishly. "So finally I had to consciously decide to quit the educational system and lead my own life". That decision proved to be a turning point.

Though his family was disappointed with his choice, his obstinacy won over. But he was only seventeen, a minor who had no rights to be 'independent'. Special legal arrangements were then made to have an adult watch over him. His freedom was to be 'supervised' for the next four years, but providence struck the following year, and majority age got reduced to eighteen, releasing a restless Serge finally on his road to freedom.

He immediately set off for India with a close friend. The year-long journey over land and sea took them through North Africa, Eastern Europe and the Middle East. Their final destination was Pondicherry. Serge had heard of this little sea-side town through his exposure to Sri Aurobindo's writings, 'Le Guide du Yoga' (Letters on Yoga) and the Bhagavad Gita, published by Pavitra in French. They reached Pondicherry a few months after the Mother had

left her body. "The first thing we did on arriving in Pondy was to visit the Samadhi," he reminisces. "Later while having a cycle puncture fixed, somebody offered to guide us to Auroville, and thus we landed up there, at the Auroshika factory in the present Udavi campus."

It was to be a wonderful period in his life when Serge threw himself into work in the incense unit. A care-free six months followed, which ended abruptly when he received notification from the French Government alleging he had wilfully avoided military duty. Advised by Nata to tie up loose ends in France and then return to Auroville, Serge left Auroville to 'squarely face' the French military authorities. "I was ordered to take a train that very evening to join duty with a commando regiment," he chuckles. The experience, though tough and challenging, proved positive. "I had always thought that the 'system' was to be abhorred. But my time in the military made me realize that life was not exactly like that. I met good and

resistance in the face of mounting difficulty. "I understand what it will require of us to make that leap consciously. But if you are a living being, there are certain times in our evolution where we have to make a choice – a choice to make progress or remain ordinary." Serge believes that this mindset is not conscious or wilful since at an individual level people believe in the Dream, and newer people are drawn to Auroville by this very ideal. However it is in a group or community context that the difficulties arise. "Suddenly the freedom of thought, the power of imagination, creativity, and faith all disappear in a group setting! We become prisoners of a 'group' formation similar to other formations of the ego or the mind. And it becomes very difficult to free ourselves of that. There is a tendency to cling to opinions, and this soon becomes political. At that point we are not searching for Truth anymore, but nurturing vested interests for the welfare or comfort of a particular section of the community." This is one reason why he prefers to

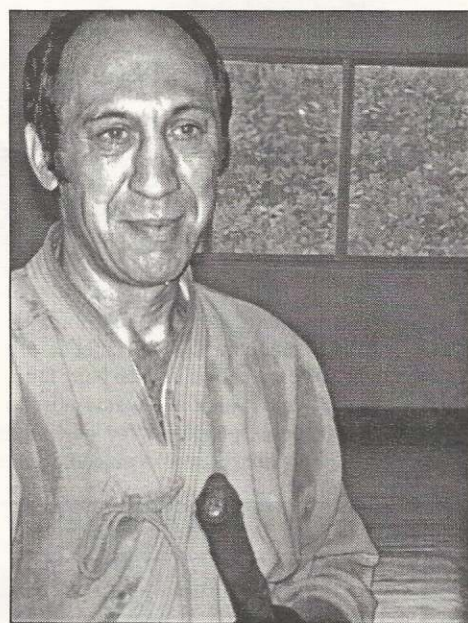
just an ordinary man. It is true. We must feel that 'My God! We have not yet started. I have not yet started.'

"It is okay to cling to what you believe is right as long as you feel it is harmonious with your own truth," he adds, "but if it does not feel comfortable inside, and if one is not a political animal, then one should change." He admits that in the recent years, he has noticed that he is not as rigid as he used to be. "The views I have been holding for a while suddenly do not seem right anymore, probably due to new experiences in life. And I find that something has changed within." He confesses that this sometimes comes with a price.

"You may have to suddenly adjust your entire life, your grounding, even friends and relationships. Everything and anything can change with it! This is what I am slowly discovering. Sometimes it feels like a little death where a part of you dies but you are reborn and of course, of this rebirth you don't know in advance!"

He is convinced that the directions pointing toward the solutions to all our problems have been already given by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, and that our essential work is to search for, find and study these truths. "The more one studies and dwells on these fundamental truths, the more one will become convinced that they are liveable and not just 'truths to talk or think about. They have to be the living truths of Auroville; only then can Auroville truly emerge."

"When Mother talks about an economy with no circulation of money, about Divine Anarchy, about education without diplomas and Free Progress education, etcetera, these are not impossible ideals! And what about all the other things She said." Serge believes that it is a limited understanding of these fundamental truths that causes fear and prevents even an attempt towards an experimentation. "The new world cannot expect results like this." He snaps a finger. "We should understand that our first attempt may fail or only succeed partly. Then we have to try again, understand and open our-



Serge after an intense two hour laido work-out

Serge himself is personally familiar with failed experiments: The 'Divine Anarchy' document which he co-developed and which the community rejected, the 'Experiment' with its Acting Residents' Assembly which got constituted but never got off the ground, and the unsuccessful Matrimandir Design Study Group. "Basically all my endeavours with this community have failed!" he admits. "It is all right. It is part of the experiment. You know a successful experiment has to go through many, many failures. Failure is bound to happen in the beginning, so I have no problem with that. But then again, it is not a total failure because a lot has been learnt from them." His positive outlook and optimism are heartening.

And what does he really feel about the reputation that he seems to have earned – of being labelled an 'idealist', a 'fundamentalist', one who is 'dogmatic' in nature? Candidly he shares that these epithets pain him. He feels that while he may give an impression of intransigence, his motivations have always been driven by the welfare and future of Auroville. "I have always believed in the Dream, and I always will. This is my life's passion."

About allegations of not being pragmatic, he draws attention to the units he runs with his partner Luisa, all pertaining to his childhood aspirations to pursue a graphic design vocation: a printing press, a small publishing house, two bookshops and a hand-made paper unit. "We have seventy workers working with us. We export our products to a few countries, so we must surely have some practical sense, eh!"

Serge spends his leisure reading profusely, and continues to favour works on history and sociology. Practicing the martial arts of Aikido and Iaido forms his physical Sadhana. Hooked into Aikido since his teen years, he feels that it perfectly suits his personality. He offers classes to children and adults at the New Creation Gym, and is especially proud of the youngsters whom he has been training for the past four years. He reveals a secret, "In Aikido, one sometimes experiences seconds of pure states of being – pure harmony, pure energy, pure joy. And what really keeps me pursuing it over these years is my aspiration to recapture and relive these moments."

Priya Sundaravalli



Serge practicing laido, an austere martial art that demands pure concentration

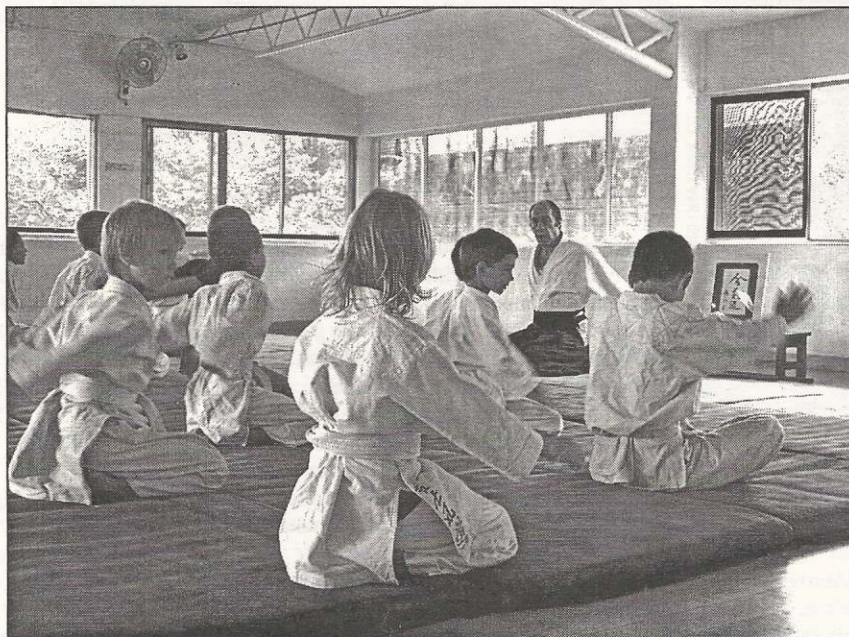
interesting people there." Serge remained in the establishment for about 12 months as an instructor, training conscripts to become lance corporals and sergeants.

When he came back to Auroville in 1981, the scenario had changed. "This time it was a bit more difficult and the atmosphere was different. Auroshika had become a huge factory with watchmen in uniform and all." It was also a period of turmoil on other fronts with a conflict between Auroville and the Sri Aurobindo Society. Serge prefers not to elaborate. "We all made mistakes. Perhaps this battle could have been something very different. But then we were very young, and most of us were not mature. We were only conscious that the dream of The Mother was threatened, and were confident that it would be 'all right' in the end. It was all like a fairy-tale. But many people have been badly hurt. It will take a very long time to discuss it and allow ourselves to heal." Serge believes that it is the shadows of those times that continue to haunt the community through its present divisions and misunderstandings.

Notwithstanding these divisions, Serge remains positive and convinced that Auroville has the choice to make a conscious step towards a new order. "We have to believe in The Dream," he declares quietly, "we have to believe that we can realize it: today and not in 20 years! When I am told that we are not ready, and that the next generation will do it, I just cannot accept it." He is frustrated by the attitude of taking the path of least

dissociate himself from any large group. Serge clarifies that while he may have a problem with groups, he has no bones of contention with individuals who are part of these groups. "Actually I appreciate greatly all of them, and enjoy my contact with each one."

Has he found a practical way to realize the high ideals that he espouses in his own life? "Please!!" he

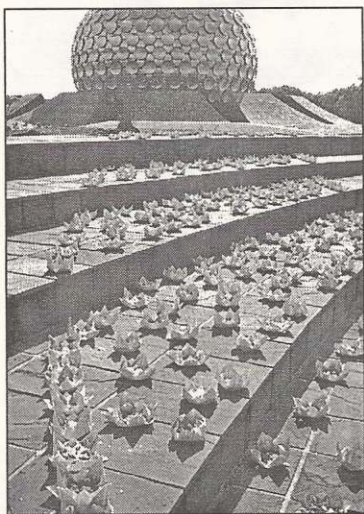


Aikido classes at the New Creation gymnasium

exclaims incredulously. "I don't want to give this impression that I have realized anything. Because, it is not true. I am like everybody; I have my share of difficulty. I am not a yogi,

And then our next attempt will be better. But we don't even want to try! The attitude is: Let's not start because anyway it will not work!" he says indignantly.

Celebrating August 15



It is 5.15 in the morning. Two thousand and twenty-six pink paper lotuses, alternatively filled with candles and jasmine flowers, meander from the urn down to the bottom of the amphitheatre, then to the other side, climbing up the stairs

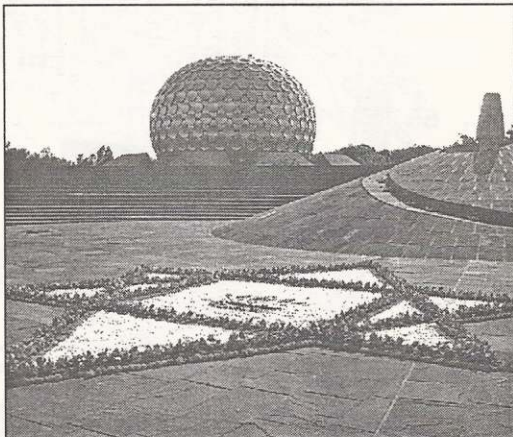
towards Matrimandir in an ever widening flow, emanating light and fragrance. The number is based on the date (15-08-2003) and put together like this: 2000 + 15 + 8 + 3. At the bottom of the amphitheatre Sri Aurobindo's symbol has been laid out in real pink lotuses, 800 of them. A small bonfire is lit, and Mother's recorded voice is heard speaking her message of August 15, 1954. That day, the former French Pondicherry joined the Indian Union and Mother read out her application for dual citizenship – "My purpose is to show that truth lies in union rather than in division. To reject one nationality in order to obtain another is not an ideal solution."

Today not many people have come. When Sunil's music

stops there is silence, and the sun rises behind the urn.

A few hours later India's Independence day is celebrated by the flag hoisting ceremony at Bharat Nivas, followed by short cultural programmes by the students of Arulvazhi, Udavi school and Ilaignarkal Education centre.

Tine



PEOPLE

Cycling for peace

Segar and Velu have just returned from a cycling trip around India for World Peace. They set off on 15th May, arriving back in Auroville on July 23rd. Here they tell their story.

We were inspired by the two young Germans who pedalled all the way to India through West Asia (see AVToday No. 172, May 2003). Their focus was promoting the use of renewable energy. We decided to do something similar, but for World Peace. As our budget wouldn't allow us to travel abroad, we wanted to pedal across our own country. Of course it wasn't a holiday trip. Why would we choose to cycle in the hottest months of the year? Our mission was to spread the message of peace and brotherhood, and to show that each one of us living on the planet can make a difference if we try. It's the effort that counts.

The first day of our tour we covered 70 km and stopped in the Temple city of Chidambaram. We had an immediate encounter with uncertainty when Velu was not permitted to enter the temple in a lungi, although Segar was allowed in wearing shorts.

The first week was very trying. Our legs hurt, we couldn't walk properly, and we were quite lazy about getting up in the morning. It got better after a week when we reached Kanyakumari, the most southern tip of India. Next we entered the state of Kerala, the land of coconuts and waterways. It was a beautiful ride and we saw the famous beach of Kovalam. People are extremely friendly there, maybe due to the abundance of natural resources.

After a hard ride through the hilly region of the Western Ghats, and a train-trip from Margao to Mumbai, we cycled to New Delhi where we spent one week staying at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. We wanted to meet up with the President, but unfortunately he was out of station. However, we had a stroke of luck. We met the Secretary of Auroville, Mr. Srinivas Murthy, and told him the reason we had come to Delhi. He managed to get us an appointment with Kireeth Joshi in his office

(where we also bumped into Ritam, who used to do Auroville News). We told Kireeth our story. He said that the vibration of a pebble dropped in the ocean ripples

what business two guys from Tamil Nadu on cycles have in the North. Sometimes people are rude to us, but after we explain what we do they become friendlier. We

PHOTO: VELU



Velu (left) and Segar (right) with a cyclist from Gujarat in front of a Kerala tea stall

through the entire universe. Our tour might look like a small thing, but it will make an effect somewhere. By then we felt our mission was a success.

The next stop was the holy city of Varanasi, where we stayed with the family of Sangeeta who works at Solar Kitchen. We cleaned ourselves from all sins by taking a dip in the river Ganga. Varanasi felt like being back home, with all those loving people feeding us delicious home-made food.

The highway running to Calcutta is congested with heavy traffic, so we decided to take a train. After some hassles with officials – who first wanted the cycles to be stripped into parts, and eventually refused to let them on the train at all – we finally arranged things through a travel agent.

The evening of our arrival in Calcutta, we met a guy who was in Auroville in the 70's. We told him about our mission, and he asked us how exactly we spread peace. We told him that we always wear our World Peace T-Shirts; this makes people curious, so they ask us

felt really good after this talk.

After being reunited with our beloved cycles the next day, we waved good bye to Calcutta and set off down the east coast towards Chennai. A few hundred kilometres south of West Bengal we came upon some major roadworks. There is just one lane for all the traffic, and we had to be extremely careful about trucks coming from behind. They did not slow down, or show any respect to cyclists. It was a dangerous business. Segar fell twice, but luckily nothing serious happened.

We became frustrated with the roads, and asked a construction worker about the conditions ahead. The answer was definitely negative! So we had to make an important decision whether to cycle and risk our lives and suffer from all the dust, or take a train back home to Chennai. The rain also played spoilsport and we decided that it was high time to go back home. From Vishakapatnam we took a train to Chennai. We did the last stretch by cycle and we reached home in the evening of July 23rd.

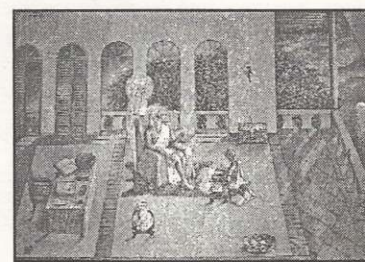
Julietta

LETTERS

Dear Auroville Today Team,

I must say that although I have a very high regard for the content and quality of Auroville Today, I was dismayed to see a religious picture on the front of issue 175 (Aug 2003). Yes, I understand that the picture is pertinent to the article ("Publishing Sri Aurobindo's Complete Works"), but it is undoubtedly a religious image. It portrays The Mother as a force standing behind Sri Aurobindo, both of them with halos, a symbol I associate with religion. Sri Aurobindo is raising a glowing hand, seemingly blessing the scribe who is hunched at his feet, eagerly recording Sri Aurobindo's every word.

It seems to me that both Sri Aurobindo and The Mother very clearly didn't want themselves to be iconized, didn't want their teachings to become a religion. I personally don't want to see Auroville becoming a religion, or a cult, and propagating images like this, which don't even really represent how the community in general feels, is dangerous. The Auroville International Centers have, for years, been trying to



dispel the notion that Auroville is a cult, AVI Germany had to even fight this concept in court. Publishing images like this in Auroville Today does not help this situation in the least.

I also realize that AV Today does not represent the opinions of the community as a whole. This image depicts one artist's relationship with The Mother and Sri Aurobindo. However, AV Today DOES have some responsibility to not harm Auroville and its worldwide network, which is something that this image can potentially do.

With all the best,

Nilaura

Auroville International USA

EXHIBITION

'Cinquanta Scatti'



Temple guard at the temple of Gangakondacholapuram

Fifty black and white digital photos on the theme of South India by Pino Marchese were exhibited in Pitanga. Pino's slide show 'Kashi' (Benaras) was projected during the opening. The exhibition was later on show in the Alliance Française, Pondicherry.

In brief

Congratulations Matagiri

Matagiri (Mother's Mountain in Sanskrit) in New York State received its name from the Mother on August 2nd, 1968. On August 2, 2003 it celebrated its 35th birthday in the presence of founders Sam Spanier and Eric Hughes and Matagiri board members.

Remembering Sri Aurobindo

As an offering for Sri Aurobindo's 131st birth anniversary memories of Sri Aurobindo were shared at the Savitri Bhavan on August 10th.

Rare photographs of The Mother

Pitanga hosted another exhibition of rare photographs of the Mother: of her playing tennis in France, of when she lived in Japan with Madame Kobayashi and of the latter's visit to The Mother in the Ashram, and of photos taken during Mother's conversation with a young man.

Sustainable consumption

A talk on sustainable consumption as the key to a sustainable future was given by Professor Samdhong Rinpoche, the Prime Minister of the Tibetan Government-in-exile, at the Pavilion of Tibetan Culture.

Carnatic Music Recital

Gordon Korstange, accompanied on violin by Kirupa and on the Mridangam by A. Angappan, gave a flute concert at the Sri Aurobindo World Center for Human Unity (SAWCHU) on August 10.

The reason in turmoil

Georges van Vreckhem, author of *Beyond Man and The Mother, the Story of her Life*, gave a lecture at Savitri Bhavan on the state of the world in the light of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's vision.

Huta's paintings

Savitri Bhavan hosted an exhibition of paintings by Huta inspired by poems of Sri Aurobindo.



From Utopia to Reality

The Woodstock Film Festival, known for its orientation to social, political and musical themes, will feature the documentary *Auroville: From Utopia to Reality* made by a team from Radio Television Switzerland. The Festival is from September 17th-21st.

Indian Classical Dance & Music

As an offering for Sri Aurobindo's birthday and the Independence Day of India guest artists from Pondicherry Lakshmi Santra (vocals), Tapobrat Mitra (Sitar), Debashish Das (Tabla) and Jasmine (Kathak dance) performed in the Sri Aurobindo Auditorium together with six young artists from Pondicherry on violin and saxophone, accompanied on ghatam and mridangam.

Aux Armes!

A French edition of Peter Heeh's 'A Short Biography of Sri Aurobindo' has been published by Le Rocher in Paris. The translation is by Patrice Girardi.

All's well that ends well?

My first experience of well-digging in Auroville happened 15 years ago when the inhabitants of our community, Samriddhi, hired a group of diggers to make a shallow well. Their technique was simple. They had a giant auger with four protruding bars and each man pushed or, rather, flung himself, at his bar. If everybody pushed in the same direction at the same time, the auger would corkscrew into the ground. It was a slow, hard business which tended to attract slow, hard men. Every night they drank heavily. Every morning they began work a little later and the bore drifted a little further off vertical. After two weeks and at a depth of thirty metres they struck rock and announced they had reached their limit. So had we.

Last month that shallow well ran dry. Clearly our new well would have to be much deeper; perhaps we would need to be more careful about where we dug it. New territory, in other words. Who would help us chart it? Fortunately, Auroville has never been short of experts. Over the next few days we were informed that a) you can drill anywhere and find water and b) that it is very important to find the best spot; that a) the best drilling method is the compressive method and b) that the compressive method is extraordinarily risky; that a) the government-owned drilling rig is the most professional and b) that private rigs are often the best bet; that a) we need only drill to the second aquifer and b) that we should go as deep as possible.

This being Auroville, we ended up surrendering to a higher power: in this case Harvest, the Auroville well and water service. Gilles, the executive, began by announcing that he would dowse the optimum spot for a new well. He unfolded a map of the area, took out a small pendulum and dangled it over the page. Apparently there were two promising places for a deep well. We strode onto the land to investigate. The first spot turned out to be on village land: useless. The second place, Gilles mentioned casually, was somewhere in the middle of the community. 'That's interesting', I thought, 'so is our house.' As Gilles penduled his way through the undergrowth, that house exerted a strange attraction. He approached it, retreated, approached it again, stopped. So did my heart. 'He's

found water beneath our kitchen', I panicked, 'we'll have to drill straight down through the cooker'. But then he relented. Slightly. The ideal site turned out to be four metres away.

Harvest booked the Pondicherry Agriculture Department drilling rig, then Sivasubramaniam, a charming hydrogeologist, arrived to make an electrical survey as a means of checking out the accuracy of Gilles' pendulum. It did. Everything was going swimmingly. However, on the day that Gilles was setting off on holiday he mentioned that the Pondicherry drilling rig was no longer available. He had booked us instead with a private rig, 'Quality Enterprises', an organization which had never drilled in Auroville before. I swallowed hard. Wished him a happy holiday.

The next evening, a huge truck with a long snout-like boom nosed its way through the forest and parked behind our house. Around midnight a lorry ground its way through the darkness. It stopped. Silence. Then two huge crashes as the sides of the lorry were collapsed. Over the next two hours 63 large pipes and numerous tools were flung onto the ground, accompanied by shouts and imprecations. Next morning we awoke to find a large tent pitched beside our papaya tree and fifteen men sleeping all over our garden on primitive bed-frames and mats.

In other words, drilling a well is an immersion experience. For two weeks or more you share your physical and psychological space with a band of men who eat, sleep and work around you. During this time the familiar landscape changes: plants are amputated or crushed by heavy tools or drivers suffering from night-blindness, one part of your garden becomes a work camp while another part is slowly invaded by grey, viscous sludge dredged up from the bowels of the earth. If you're unlucky and it rains, your precious little corner of the planet soon resembles the Somme.

The work itself goes on 24 hours a day, the drillers working in shifts. Every three metres a sample is taken from the bore hole and placed on a plastic sheet. You scan it anxiously for indications of water-bearing strata. You become a connoisseur of drilling sounds – a dull rumble means clay, soft grinding is sandstone, frantic



hammer strokes means the drill-bit is battering at limestone. Your day, your night, are defined by the work. You are woken by urgent clangs on pipes, you drift off to the rumble of the drill. Sudden silence is balm for the neighbours, bad news for you: something has broken down. Your mind empties of everything that has made you who you are – Sri Aurobindo, Shakespeare, Monty Python – as your life narrows down to keeping the men provided with tea, sugar and milk, making sure the portable lights they use every night are charged up during the day, and wondering when that interminable layer of Otta clay will finally yield to water-bearing sandstone. Above all, there is the constant struggle to provide water.

Water, you say, water? But surely...? Well, yes, if you're drilling a well you're probably not exactly rolling in the stuff. However, in the counter-intuitive universe you've just entered you soon discover that water is essential for finding water. Our moment of enlightenment came on the first day of drilling when the site foreman casually mentioned that he need-

ed 40,000 litres just for the next 24 hours. That's an awful lot. And, of course, it was a Sunday and, of course, it was high summer, when power cuts peak, tanks are dry and most Aurovilians hoard their remaining drops like gold.

We should have been warned. On the other hand, it's probably best not to know everything that can go wrong. The drillers, they knew. During their two weeks with us they only twice made a puja: within twelve hours of each invocation there was a well-threatening crisis. Once it was 'mud-loss', the other time siltation. Each time we skirted disaster. Later, we learned there are many, many ways to mess up a well – one neighbour had his new well collapse because the bore hole was only partly cased, another has a large drilling bit nestling at the bottom: it broke off during the drilling and couldn't be retrieved. Then there are the stories of those who drill and drill and never strike water. We were lucky. We found it – 9,000 litres an hour of the beautiful stuff – although we had to go far deeper than we'd originally planned. Down, down,

down 180 metres. I still can't grasp how an eight inch hole can disappear down two full football pitches... (Since you ask, it's a mere 4,000 miles further to the centre of the earth.)

So we were lucky? Partly. But it has to be said that, in the country that helped define the term 'credibility gap', 'Quality Enterprises' really lived up to their name. Unlike our rough-and-ready crew of hand-diggers, this team was professional to the core. Everybody knew his job, everybody worked as a team. Day or night the team leader would be perched on the rig, his hand on the juddering drilling lever, while his assistants would be keeping the circulation channel clean, taking samples or preparing to hoist the next pipe into position.

Hopefully, this well will serve Samriddhi for many years to come. Ultimately, however, puncturing Mother Earth, drilling deep holes in her to suck out water doesn't feel exactly like the way of the future. Is this why, weeks later, I still feel a lingering unease, an obscure sense of having participated in a slightly shameful act? **Alan**

BOOK REVIEW

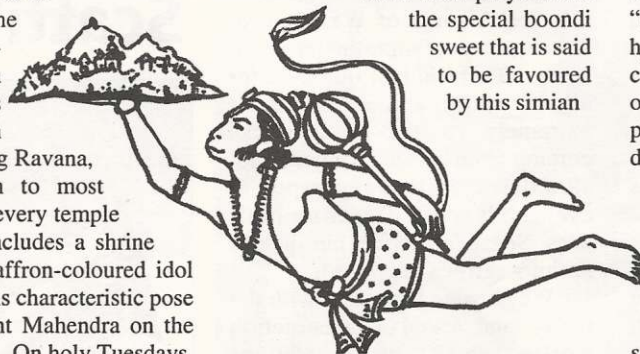
Hanuman or The Way of the Wind

If this neatly-bound, slim volume were to be judged by brevity alone, then the editors are to be congratulated at the outset. In the space of 60 odd pages they have retold the story of Hanuman, the Monkey-God who inhabits the upper reaches of the populous pantheon of Hindu gods and goddesses. But what is perhaps more noteworthy is that they have been able to construct a composite, contextualized portrait of a key character from the vast, often times meandering, mythic canvas of the Ramayana, an epic that houses

several hundred heroic beings.

The adventures of Hanuman, the faithful messenger of King Rama who rescues Queen Sita from Lanka's evil King Ravana, are well known to most Hindus. Almost every temple in north India includes a shrine containing the saffron-coloured idol of Hanuman in his characteristic pose of holding Mount Mahendra on the palm of his hand. On holy Tuesdays,

devotees visit Hanuman temples to offer their prayers and the special boondi sweet that is said to be favoured by this simian



divinity. While the priest offers the sweet to the deity, he chants the 'Hanuman Chalisa,' the Sanskrit hymn that in the short space of 46 couplets describes Hanuman's extraordinary parentage, his remarkable physical powers and his undying devotion to Lord Rama.

Although primarily directed at a Western readership unfamiliar with the topography with Indian/Hindu culture, the volume, the third in the series *Stories and Legends of India*, is suitable for young Indian readers as

well. Extracts from Hanuman's escapades are interesting in their own right, but Devin and Harris invite the reader to go a step further and discover Hanuman's shakti and bhakti, power and devotion.

Abha Prakash

Hanuman or The Way of the Wind. Stories and Legends of India, volume 3. Adapted by Christine Devin and Roger Harris. Auroville Press International, 2003. Pp 67.

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