

Cover Story: Newcomers' perspectives

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Where are the houses? Temporary closing of Auroville continues

In October 1999 the Entry Group, alarmed by the lack of proper accommodation, temporarily stopped accepting newcomers to Auroville. This decision implies that, while applications that reached the Entry Group before that date continue to be processed, Auroville has virtually been closed to people applying after October 1999. What has happened since?

The response to the entry crisis in Auroville has been lukewarm. "There is a real problem with mobilizing this community," complains Aurokripa in an interview with the Working Committee elsewhere in this issue, pointing out the lack of interest in solving the problem of newcomer's entry. Now, more than half a year later, the question "Where are the houses to shelter the newcomers?" remains still unanswered. So far no attempts have been made to find the money for collective house construction, either through a fund raising campaign or through loans.

Obtaining donations for this purpose may prove to be difficult. Obtaining large loans may be possible, if schemes can be conceived of ways in which such loans can be repaid. This is not to say that nothing has been done. The Entry Group realized that the problem goes deeper than just a lack of adequate housing, and has initiated and participated in meetings with many other working groups to find ways to change Auroville's internal economy. It also busied itself with drafting a new entry policy, which still needs to be finalized (see AV Today # 134 and # 137). And it continued to process newcomer applications received before October 1999.

One question begs to be addressed: How do the newcomers themselves feel about the entry process? We found that their experiences are not always positive. Some newcomers responded very carefully, as if afraid to speak out openly. "After all, I am a newcomer" was the observa-

tion sometimes heard as if they were second-class citizens instead of people proud to join this experiment. A novel development is the creation of a Newcomers' Group, a self-help group that aims to find solutions to problems faced by newcomers.

A recent marathon session (see page 6) discussed the situation of many Aurovilians who also are in dire need of better accommodation. Participants at the session spontaneously came forward with offers of help. While this has brought about a feeling of

solidarity within the community, it has not solved the larger problem of providing basic accommodation to newcomers. Auroville still remains closed.

Editors



CARTOON BY EMANUELE

The Entry Group struggles to find solutions

Auroville Today talked to Entry Group members Hervé and Adhara about what has happened since October 1999

Adhara: The initial reason why the Entry Group decided to stop admitting newcomers for a while was that there is no decent housing available for people without financial means.

Living in Auroville is a condition for admission. Most of these people came to live in storerooms or capsules at some friend's place or the place where they found work with little prospect for improvements. This was adding an impossible load to the tight budget of the Housing Service, which already has to deal with the problem of providing housing for long-time Aurovilians who are living in very poor housing conditions.

Since about 40% of the new applicants - an average of four persons every month - were not in a position to provide the finances for their own decent housing, we felt like pulling the brake and referred the problem to the community.

Hervé: It was this concern that triggered our decision. But it developed into a wider concern. We have been witnessing a development that we consider absolutely unacceptable. Affluent Aurovilians are building large houses in the price range of Rs 10 to 30 lakhs (US \$20,000-60,000), while others who have no money struggle to find a decent accommodation and break even with their monthly expenses. A class society is developing. These concerns gave rise to the concept of the Auroville Economy 2000, the attempts to formulate a new entry policy and the marathon sessions which are now taking place. We feel that there is a regrettable tendency

towards individualization in Auroville, where people increasingly care less for each other. The concept of Economy 2000 and the marathon sessions aim at recreating this awareness of being together in a truly joint venture, as a group of inter-connected beings.

Newcomers' perspectives

What are the experiences of the newcomers as they integrate into the community? Our cover story explores these issues through interviews with some newcomers.

Adhara: But on the housing front itself, nothing yet has happened. The community has not come forward with innovative means to find money to build more houses, though a series of meetings have taken place with representatives of the major working groups and Dr. Kireet Joshi, Chairman of the Auroville Foundation, to find ways out of the impasse.

Hervé: The sense of brotherhood, however, seems to improve and with it the awareness that the so-called 'closure of Auroville' is not a problem of the Entry Group, but a problem of Auroville. Right now, there is an incredible pressure to change. In the marathon sessions that happened in the beginning of June, people decided to tackle the problems of housing and entry. We believe that it will not be long before a solution is found, allowing Auroville to "reopen" its doors. *Carel*

Special insert



This issue of Auroville Today carries an insert from Transcript, a participatory electronic magazine available on the Internet. Transcript fosters the exchange of ideas between Aurovilians and the world and is thus a catalyst for Auroville's own culture, creativity, convictions and dreams. Internet users can access Transcript at www.auroville.org/transcript

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Kailash

The birth pangs of a youth community

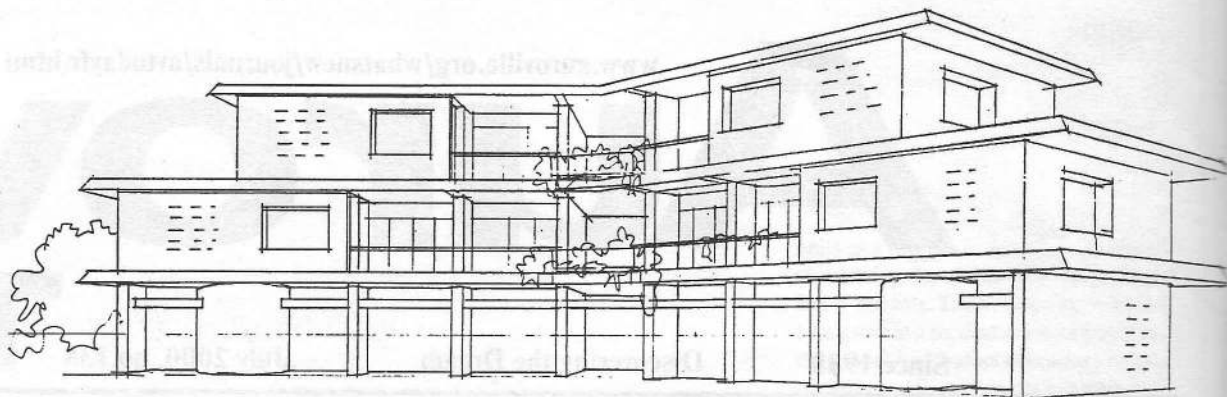
Kailash is the name of a new project that aims at housing youth aged between 14 and 21. Getting the project off the ground is an uphill battle, says Aurokripa, one of the project holders

“About two years ago a bunch of ten teenagers, five boys and five girls, came to visit Jean François and myself,” says Kripa. “They had been talking about the old days in Auroville, when in Ami a youth community existed. They were eager to create one for themselves. Would we help? What they wanted was a community for youth between 14 and 21 years old, without any adults living on the spot. Our roles would be to help them materialize the project, act as counsellors and continue as project

holders after they had moved out and other teenagers had settled in. We immediately liked the challenging concept: a space where young people could live outside their family context, auto-regulate themselves, take responsibility for their own actions and learn to live together. The concept was innovative because the responsible adults will be advisors instead of representatives of the law living on the spot. We felt that it would be interesting to try the experiment, in view of what Mother had said about youth over 14 taking responsibility for themselves.

“According to what I know and see, in a general way, children over fourteen should be left independent, and should be given advice only in so far as they ask for it. They must know that steering their own life is their responsibility.”

(a note of Mother's, July 10, 1968, Mother's Agenda IX:195)



The Auroville response

“The response in Auroville was unbelievably positive. The Development Group welcomed the idea, but wanted us to show a basic financial commitment before they were willing to allocate a plot of land. We met with various architects. One of them made preliminary drawings and an estimate based on the total square meters, demonstrating that our idea had a price tag of Rs 40 lakhs (approximately US \$92,000)

The big surprise followed some months later, when Gateway [see AVToday # 137, June 2000], decided to allocate 20 lakhs (about US \$46,000) to this project. That was such an unexpected grace! It left us with another 20 lakhs to be found, but I was confident that I might raise a good amount in Europe. This confidence, however, was misplaced. In Europe I learned that our project did not fall in any of the usual pigeon-holes. It was not humanitarian, neither a project for delinquent kids, nor a project for the homeless or orphans. I

came back to Auroville with only 1.5 lakhs. The deficit had become smaller, but was still far too huge. Something in me winced – would it really be necessary to make the project smaller or build it in phases as and when we would get the funds?

“At the same time, the housing crises became front-page news in Auroville. Matthias, the executive of Altechs, drew the attention of the Housing Group to the low-cost building he had constructed for his commercial unit and the Housing Group advised him to contact us. Matthias re-drew the plans and calculated that he could construct our building for 24 lakhs. We presented the new plans to the Development Group, showed that we had the money, and they allocated us a plot of land. We were delighted. But we did not realize that the problems had just started.

The problems.

“The DG had allocated us a plot next to the future ring road, opposite the Solar Kitchen, right in the high-

density zone of the city. However, there was nothing resembling a city infrastructure – there were no connections to water, electricity, and sewage treatment system. For technical reasons we could not connect to the systems of the nearby communities of Vikas and Sailam, and we learned that the right to connect to the big overhead water tank near Prayathna would cost Rs 3 lakhs, excluding underground pipes, an amount which was not included in our budget. Many meetings were needed before we could settle these problems to mutual satisfaction.

Then there were neighborhood problems. Some Aurovilians in Sailam and Vikas freaked out at the idea of having a youth community so nearby, fearing constant noise pollution from motorbikes and loud music going on till late each night. That too took many exhausting meetings, until we finally, with the help of the Executive Committee, hammered out an agreement that was acceptable to all of us.

(continued on page 3)



“There’s a problem with mobilizing this community”

Interview with two members of the outgoing Working Committee

The Working Committee is the group that represents the community in its interaction with the Government of India through the Secretary, the Governing Board and International Advisory Council of the Auroville Foundation. The tenure of the present Working Committee's came to an end at the beginning of June, 2000. Auroville Today spoke to two of its members –Aurokripa and Paul Vincent – to get their views on the challenges confronting the community today, and possible ways forward

Auroville Today: How did you perceive your role? Was it different from previous Working Committees?

Paul: I found that some people felt that the Working Committee should only be a rubber stamp, and approve whatever it was told to approve. We didn't agree with this.

Kripa: Because when you're taking certain responsibilities, signing papers and appointing somebody, you try to understand the globality of a question. You can't be a rubber-stamp because your name is there, you're going to be asked at one moment or another, “Why did you guys take this decision?” For example signing balance sheets, approving a land purchase or recommending a new Trust as we did for Gateway and which was controversial at the time.

Paul: Auroville is entering a phase where it is much bigger than it was. And now we have to face problems like legality settlement, court cases, labor disputes and so forth, so the Working Committee has to become more aware of the legal aspects of the problems

AVT: What do you feel about the Foundation, how it's working, and how can it work?

Paul: There is quite an interesting relationship now, with the Chairman of the Governing Board, Dr. Kireet Joshi, involving himself in certain areas without using his legal power, but rather drawing on his leadership capacity. This is something that is quite unique in this setup. Under this chairmanship we could go much farther in the use of the Foundation as a tool. Secondly, we can see that the Foundation is much better recognized and respected by outside authorities now.

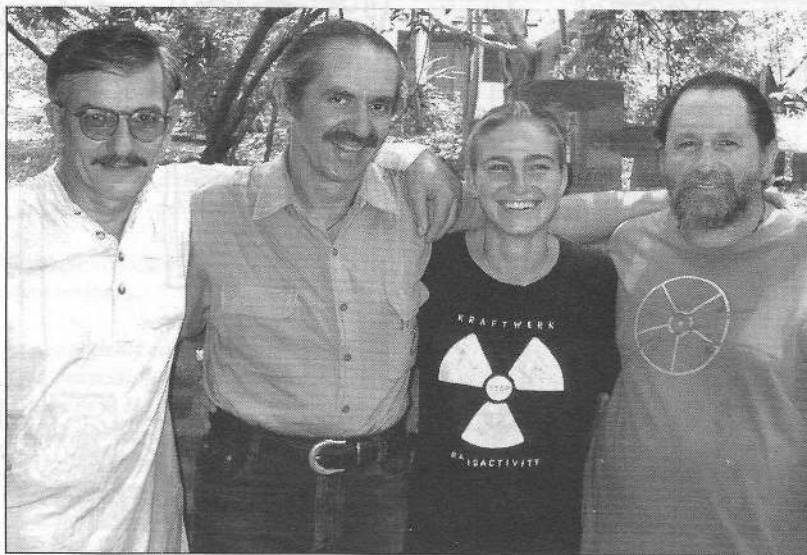
Auroville Today: Has this Working Committee felt unsupported by certain sections of the community?

Paul: In the beginning, yes, but not now. It was rather that people objected to some people in the Working Committee especially when we are asked to look into certain problems. I was nominated to the Working Committee on the issue of transparency so obviously some of the work you undertake provokes reactions.

Kripa: What I see is between the moment we started and now, there is at least more trust. When we started, things were so tensed up; there was such a lack of trust in different people. People would jump at each other's throats for anything. I mean it was terrible being in the Working Committee then. People would tell us, if we disagreed with them, “This is the wrong thing for Auroville, and you're part of the falsehood!” Now I think that things are a lot smoother, a lot softer.

Also this Working Committee started in a very difficult way. We didn't have an office, there was no link between the past Working Committee and us. There was nobody there to explain what we should be doing. We had to discover it for ourselves.

And there was no functioning Executive Council then, so people would come to us for everything and nothing. When the Executive Council became more active we learned with them what our respective tasks should be. After a first year's overloaded work we naturally started functioning as a core group delegating and redistributing tasks to a wide variety of Aurovilians. Examples of this were during the visits of the Governing Board and International Advisory



Paul, Jürgen, Aurokripa and Roy (left to right)

Council and the formation of the all-Auroville accounting service.

Auroville Today: What were your achievements?

Paul: The auditing of accounts is a very serious task. We have maybe two hundred and fifty Auroville units, and most of them have totally different methods of accounting. And we have to combine all that into one thing, which is called a Consolidated Balance Sheet. It's a nightmare! So we need a more open, professional, global and unified accounting system.

In fact, we have a whole lot of grey areas regarding the way we handle money, what we do with money. It's not yet what it should be. On one side, we claim the cash economy should go, on the other side, we are using the worst side of the capitalist system,

One area of progress, however, is

that now we have more or less obtained community-funded food for Aurovilians who are working. The Solar Kitchen has helped improve a lot of things for people who were in great difficulties in Auroville. But there is still room for more improvement.

Kripa: There is a real problem with mobilizing this community. For example, when the Entry Group decided to not send any new recommendation letters for a while, hoping this might create a reaction. I was really happy. I was saying “This is going to be a bomb that's going to explode and everybody's gonna wake up.” What happened? I was hoping that there would be a real collective mobilization to say: “What is the system of entry we want? Do we want an Entry Group? How do we want it to function? How can we see a better way to welcome people who come and join?” There

were a number of general meetings but attendance fell from forty people in the beginning to merely eight. However during Kireet's recent visits a series of well-attended open workshops on this subject did occur. Maybe it comes back to the fact that we are so individualistic today, that everybody is doing his or her own thing.

Paul: If we go on like this, we will never be able to create a city for 50,000. And there is a will in Auroville that we keep it at a village level. The key is with us: we have the power to build the thing we want. We don't even have to ask for money. We have money for further development, we just have to decide to do it. We are here to let the dream come true. And one thing I learned in this process is that it is far better to be part of the solution than the problem.

Kripa: Our four main achievements were to have an open office and involve other people in our work. We also managed to obtain a properly set-up office with a computer, a budget and a secretary for the first time. We also called well-attended Residents' Assemblies and general meetings to interact with the members of the GB and IAC when they were in town.

I would summarize our major problem as a community in one word – communication. We need better communication on so many different levels amongst ourselves and with the outside. Although we didn't publish so many reports in the News open communication existed on a personal level with many members from different sections of the community.

From an interview by Roger and Jill



After School—a portal to Auroville

Nine Tamil adolescents reflect on their learning experience

Roger, who has taught English at After School since its inception, talks to some of its graduates about their After School experience

After School was started as a secondary school in three small classrooms in Fraternity in 1992. It was first intended to offer vocational courses such as electronics, accounting and computer studies but soon adopted the structured syllabus of the National Open School system in order to provide students with a general foundation. It has for the last nine years helped students prepare for their 10th and 12th Standard examinations in five subjects under this system. The fifty students who have studied at After School to date came originally from Transition, Last School and New Creation. Recently, students have started joining from Udavi and the Kulilapalayam School as well. After School was started by Selvaraj and Rathinam because they and others felt that "the Tamil kids were not being given enough attention". Once it was decided to follow the Open School system, teachers were found within Auroville — Rathinam, Rauf Ali, Luc, Shankar and Prof. Somasundram, to name a few, as well as outside, and the first classes began.



Back (l.to r.): Ierumalai, Velu, Kalya, Suresh, Ravi, Prem, Selvam, Jayamurthi, Sutchendran, Arun, Subramanian, Selvaraj.
Seated: Rajendran, Murugan, Satyavan, Martenda, Lakshmi, Renuka and Sarasu.

PHOTO BY JOHN MANDEEN

Furthering children's education

Elumalai, now 25, works in the Auroville bakery and studies Business Administration by correspondence. He remembers: "We were the first batch to follow the National Open School system in After School, but obtaining the course books was difficult. We received half of them after the exams! Studying for exams gives one an aim and After School was a good experience as it enabled me to continue my studies. Sarasu, now studying for her B.Sc in mathematics, recalls that "many of us did not know what to do when we were told to leave Last School and 10th and 12th standard are very important if you want to continue your higher studies. After School helped us to study further."

Palani, 23, works in the Auroville office of Naturally Auroville obtaining merchandise from units to stock the shop in Madras. He attended After School from 1994-98 after having previously studied in Last School and New Creation. "Even though I learned a lot in Last School without exams, preparing yourself for exams forces you to deal with pressure and to commit yourself. The After School program is very good for village children who are oriented towards Auroville." Renuka, who attended After School in

1996, is now a mother and teaches at the Creche "One of my aims was to become a teacher and After School is where I realized how much effort you have to put into your studies. Outside, education is based on book learning, here it is more free and general." After School can also be proud of its accomplishments in sports. Most of the students are fully involved in the AV Sports program in the afternoons; a number of them are members of the AV Basketball Club, and have been chosen to play for the Pondy State team in the national championships. Last year the After School team made it to the finals of the Tamil Nadu State Higher Secondary School Championship.

Integration into Auroville

Going through the list of After School's fifty-odd graduates, it is remarkable to see how integrated they are in Auroville's day-to-day life, working in over a dozen different units. In a recent development nine After School students have been chosen to study for a two-year International Baccalaureate program to be based at the international Pestalozzi Children's Village, near Hastings in England. So far three students have completed this program which was started in 1997 and five are presently studying in England.

The shifting of After School two

years ago to the Last School campus has both brought back a certain dynamism to the campus and created the possibility of the children being more exposed to an Auroville ambience. However, more needs to be done to familiarize the students with the aims and raison d'être of Auroville. Frederick's classes on Sri Aurobindo the Mother and Auroville have been a first step in this direction. Ravi feels that more general knowledge should be added to the curriculum and vocational training offered to students who do not intend to pursue their studies after the age of 20. Palani feels that exams should not be the only focus and that the school should encourage small field projects where the students would be able to learn about the different areas of work such as afforestation, solar energy and agriculture that are going on in Auroville. Selvi feels that there should be more contact with Auroville activities and thinks that the students taking arts and crafts classes with a Last School teacher and attending Kireet's talks on the Vedas and Indian spirituality is a step in the right direction. Martanda, who recently returned from his military service in France, attended the French Lycee in Pondy for a couple of years, but then came back to study in After School. He is now involved in the construction of check dams in the Utility canyon, and feels that that an important role of

schools "should be to impart strength and character for students to step into life".

Looking forward

Jyoti, who grew up in Auroville in the '70's, feels that there should be more integration of the Western and the Tamil kids studying in Auroville schools. He feels that there should be a special status for students, just as there is for newcomers in Auroville, and that the Auroville schools should be more open to outside students. He remembers the schools in Auroville in the '70's where the kids were not all necessarily Auroville kids. Imparting clear ideas about Auroville early on is important, as this will enable the students to

make a choice as regards joining that is based on the right reasons. Suresh, 21, studied for two years in England and is now teaching computer studies at After School. He feels that "After School is where you decide whether you want to join Auroville or not." And Selvaraj adds, "The importance of After School lies in the fact that it is giving an education to select children from the village within an Auroville environment. This at a later stage will definitely help attract local youth to Auroville who are committed or drawn by its ideals and who will be able to contribute to Auroville's development in different fields in the years to come". For Frederick, "the whole of Auroville is envisaged as an educational experiment and field of research" and After School is "one of the various attempts to meet the needs and aspirations of the youth of Auroville."

After School is an endeavor that deserves collective support and has managed against all odds to establish itself in the educational landscape of Auroville. It serves two important functions: providing a basic secondary education in English to kids whose first language is not English, as well as serving as a portal to Auroville for these students when they graduate. Many of the students studying in After School today might one day have a significant role to play in the growth of the city to be.

Roger

Kailash

(continued from page 2)

The main clauses are that we will meet again three months before the construction is finished to fix some guidelines, and that after three years we will evaluate whether the experiment is still worthwhile and necessary. If not, we may change the project for a different educational purpose.

When all of these problems were settled, the Development Group announced in the AV News of February 5, 2000, that building permission would be given unless objections were received. On 28 February 2000, amid overwhelming interest, the inauguration of the building took place. The youth themselves had organised this ceremony. They started work on the spot each free Saturday afterwards, doing basic work like digging and earth moving.

Aesthetics and ethics

If we thought that now we could relax, we were mistaken. The Development Group suddenly woke up and explained that they really did not like the aesthetics of the building. Could we change it? We changed the aesthetics with the help of two Auroville architects and went to a meeting of the Development Group where the changes were accepted and we got the verbal green light.

The report of the Development Group that appeared in the Auroville News a week later, however, was completely different from what had been discussed. The project was described as 'under consideration,' four months after its inauguration, after the construction had started and changes in aesthetics had been made! I freaked. We learned that the Development Group had invited other architects to study the aesthetics and that they had advised to either relocate the building or revise the plans and

stop the construction. Then I really got angry, as this way of dealing is absolutely incorrect, unfair and unethical! How far can you disregard somebody's two years of free work for Auroville? Who wouldn't want to have the most beautiful and aesthetically pleasing buildings being constructed in Auroville, but what if there is not enough money?

"I then talked for more than one and a half hour with a representative of the Development Group, and in that meeting something strange happened. I was furious when the meeting started, but an unusual calm grew upon me when he talked, and I noticed that I was no longer reacting negatively to anything he said. From that calmness I told him that we have no problem in changing anything, because if it has a meaning it is for the better of the project and for Auroville. But there are two conditions: the first is that all proposed changes come along with the cash to realize them.

The second is that we are not going to stop the project, we are not going to send the workers home, so if you want to come up with something, it is within a week from now. After that, it is finished, we won't consider anything.

"Then it really moved. The crisis was explained to Ulli, the person behind Gateway, and he spontaneously agreed to carry the extra costs. Architects Piero and Gloria revised the plans. Within three days everything was settled and approved and published in the Auroville News with a note from the Development Group thanking all for their cooperation.

"In conclusion I would say that the negative aspects of the development of Kailash need to be studied, and means found so that they are not repeated in the future with another project. The positive side is that Kailash has now become an all-Auroville project involving many Aurovilians, something we always wanted."

Interview by Carel



Land purchases

In the financial year 1999-2000, a total of 130.59 acres was purchased by the Auroville Foundation: 44.30 acres in the City Area and 86.29 acres in the Green Belt. The total expenditure amounted to approx. \$815,000 giving an average cost of \$6,230 per acre, including registration charges. Compared to the previous year, the average cost per acre increased by 75%. The "Land for Auroville" cause was particularly supported by foreign donors who gave more than 90% of the approximately \$685,000 received. However, the task is far from over: about 205 acres in the City Area and roughly 2,200 acres in the Green Belt are still required to secure the land for the complete manifestation of the Auroville Township.

GOI not to provide grant for land acquisition

It appears that the Government of India will not entertain Auroville's request for a grant towards land acquisition. The Government has instead been requested to approve of the granting of Rs 50 million (approx. US \$1.1 million) bank credit for the implementation of certain projects. This request is pending.

Regional development plan

The Auroville Foundation hosted a meeting to discuss the possibilities for creating a regional development plan. The meeting was attended by the Chief Planner of the Town and Country Planning Organisation (TCPO), Ministry of Urban Development, New Delhi; a delegation from the Town and Country Planning Office, Chennai and the Chief Town Planner of Pondicherry. The meeting discussed Auroville's work in the bioregion, the high growth rate of Pondicherry and its potential spill-over effects in Tamil Nadu, and common problems such as salt water intrusion. Auroville has offered its expertise in fields such as reforestation and rainwater management.

New Interim Development Council

A new interim Development Council replacing the old Development Group has been ratified and will function until a new organisation is in place. The New Development Council is open to all members of the community—especially women as there are at present none in the group—who would like to participate in a creative process.

New Interim Working Committee

Five Aurovilians have been accepted as members of an Interim Working Committee to replace the outgoing Working Committee members. As all members are new to this work, they will have the support of an advisory body. The term of this interim working committee will begin from July and continue until September when there will be a review of the entire organization.

Welcoming newcomers

Newcomers constitute the unseen population of Auroville. You read about them in the Auroville News, the internal weekly paper of Auroville. You see new faces at the Solar Kitchen that, as the days pass, grow familiar. But one never quite knows, if a person is a newcomer or not. If a person has actually taken the step to commit herself to Auroville or is another seasonal guest. So it was with considerable surprise that in a recent AV News, the community found photographs of some newcomers along with a line of introduction from each of them. Ah! At last one could match names to those seemingly familiar faces.

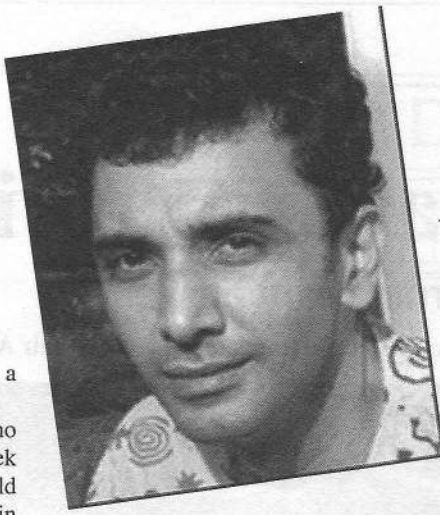
As it turned out, the initiative for this venture came from the newcomers themselves after they had done an "Introduction to Auroville Week" with the Welcome Group. Says Adil, a newcomer who was responsible for the insert in the News, "the Welcome Group was really fantastic. They knitted us into a team and took us all over Auroville where we had a chance to meet old-time Aurovilians and listen to their stories of how they came to Auroville and what they have been doing since. It is only when one gets to meet Aurovilians on an individual basis and shares their idealism and enthusiasm for this place that the sense of belonging to a community grows. I wish we could have an

Introduction month instead of just a week."

Ross of the Welcome Group who offered the current Introduction Week says, "I wish more newcomers would avail this opportunity to participate in this event. At present, during the tourist season, we offer Introduction Weeks to guests and from the money thus earned, we offer one or two Introduction Weeks to newcomers for free. Out of the over one hundred or so people who joined Auroville last year, only 20 newcomers participated in the Introduction Week. Since the Welcome Group started five years ago, we have increasingly got more support from the community. The Entry Group now recommends newcomers to participate in the Introduction Week and if need be encourages their employers to let them take the week off from work. I wish we could together find a way to offer Introduction Weeks to newcomers all year long.

"Ideally, I would like to see newcomers who participate in the Introduction Week form a group with the older ones helping the newer ones to join Auroville. But unfortunately, instead of helping out thus, as the older newcomers become Aurovilians, they tend to get involved in their own lives and forget how difficult the entry process is."

Bindu



Adil from Mumbai

"Keep those halos out of sight!"

Adil Writer. 38. Male. Single. Kinda handsome with a devilish gleam in his eyes. A Parsi from Mumbai, and architect, potter, photographer, cartoonist all rolled into one, Adil joined Auroville as a newcomer last year. Here he voices his opinion on our entry process and his integration into the community

reading Sri Aurobindo and the Mother in depth and learning about the ideals in Auroville.

"Personally, I don't see the need for a formal Entry Group process. Let's first call it a 'Welcome Group' and give newcomers a chance to live, learn and absorb the sounds and tingles of the land. Why judge or fear someone wanting to step in? Especially letting Indians join Auroville? Some Aurovilians say that there are enough Indians here already, and to let in more would create an imbalance in this multi-ethnic community. But isn't it only natural that Indians constitute the majority population, India being the host to this experiment? Wouldn't you have the same phenomenon anywhere else in the world? As it is, I find it a pity that Auroville is so little known in India.

"What I found frustrating about the entry process was that there are no clear guidelines and lots of ambiguities. For instance, when I wanted to join a commercial pottery of Auroville, I was told by one Entry Group member that newcomers should work in service units. That of course, implies that commercial units do not serve the community, an atti-

tude which is really controversial! Luckily, another Entry Group member had a different opinion and I was given permission to work where I chose to.

"At first I thought I was the only one having difficulties figuring out the entry process, but when I met other newcomers through the 'Introduction Week' [see article 'Welcoming newcomers' elsewhere in this issue], we all realized we had similar experiences to share. And this gave birth to the idea of constituting a Newcomers Group.

"I guess having to face serious, blank, impersonal faces is part of the initiation game all newcomers have to brave, but it would really help if a few Aurovilians step forward and make the effort to welcome and integrate the babies of the community. I now live in Aspiration, which for me, beautifully fits into the concept of 'community-living'. Call me naïve, but I see Aspiration as a model solution to our housing, economy and entry crisis. All in all, joining this experiment called Auroville has been something I'd never trade off... Let's just keep those halos out of sight!"

Interview by Bindu

Sankaran from New Delhi

In the flux

"I am a Tamil newcomer who has been with Sri Aurobindo and The Mother for over five years now. That is the time I have been conscious of it. In retrospect, I am positive that The Mother has been with me far longer. I had not planned for a stay at Auroville. As with many other things in the recent past, it just happened. I would like to share with you what I have felt of Auroville in the first intake, while it is still fresh.

"While the spiritual dimension of Auroville is not so much on the surface to see, what is palpable is the search of each one here. A search for an inner meaning... a certitude that can remove all doubts, anxieties in one go. And the difficulties in the ongoing Auroville adventure give this search a keen edge... just sometimes, I think, a harsher one as well. Perhaps Auroville itself is searching for something deep within which it has to bring out.

"In this I find a remarkable similarity with my own search as a sadhaka of integral yoga. In a way it is good that Auroville still has difficulties. Otherwise, it might become a 9 to 5, Sundays off utopia where the need for this search might no longer be felt as keenly, as compellingly.

"Then again, the soul of Auroville is on the verge of emerging in its complete, commanding radiance. Our Matrimandir. And the difficulties would be just dewdrops facing the rising sun. They may linger on a while, but their time is marked already."

Emilie from Paris

Scene shifts

1998 1m 60. 30 years old, short hair, three packets of cigarettes a day. Social situation: promising. Involved down to my fingernails in the Parisian world of television, career on meteoric rise.

Yes, down to my fingernails! Painted deep red by the way as is the fashion right now, and it is important to be a part of those who reflect the passing waves of style. Young hyperactive female, her time totally taken up with work leaving no time to think. Chaotic early morning departure with a plastic cup of burning tar-black coffee which one sips in the car caught up in a traffic jam, half-listening to the sinister news reports. "Bip, bip, bip it is good morning it is now eight thirty in the morning, two children were found strangled next to national highway 15, an investigation is underway. A high-ranking state functionary has been questioned by judges for embezzlement of public funds. Serbian bombs destroyed a Sarajevo neighborhood last night. Power struggle on between two laboratories for the acquisition of the right to produce an Aids vaccine. And now the weather: 5 degrees centigrade in the Paris region, cloudy sky clearing up in the late afternoon. Bip, bip, bip. It is nine in the morning. Have a nice day. "Thank you!" Hop! We park and rush into the office. The telephone rings, the computer warms up, meetings one after the other, a quick sandwich break and then one is off again tar-black coffee in hand.

At nine in the evening one switches off the computer, throws the last plastic cup of coffee into the wastebasket, and one rushes off to a screening of one of our clients. A business dinner, or should we say public relations, maintaining a good rapport with

clients: the old blah-blah. At one in the morning one collapses in bed thinking of the next day's appointments and realizing that the sky hadn't even cleared up. "Really, weathermen just invent what they please." This goes on to the day we are completely fed up and we leave slamming all the doors behind us with a smile.

1999 1m 60. 31 years old, long hair, two packets of cigarettes a day. Social situation: young newcomer mother lost in a tropical forest in Auroville.

It's the great plunge and everything has been stirred up. After a rock-and-roll birth in Stirper, the hospital of Pondicherry where I was the only white woman in a public ward with fifty other Tamil women, the young Parisian that I was has started to lose her varnish. Under a lucky star we find ourselves living together as a family in a large house. I discover the joy of motherhood and confess to feeling a great joy as I spend time with this being who has come from elsewhere. But quickly the pressing desire to do something useful comes over me: impossible to remain inactive just contemplating the navels of my child, husband and myself. In any case I have been told that I won't become an Aurovillian because all I do is take care of my child. So! One is not permitted to do this in Auroville? I do not fully grasp the meaning of unending education. Nonetheless community, human unity these notions still make one dream. We find ourselves facing a new challenge: that of integration. We start trying to figure out how Auroville works and are quickly surprised to find out how many different groups exist



frankly overwhelming. This is perhaps the true meaning of friendship.

2000, still 1m 60 but now flat-footed. 32 years old, short hair, one packet of cigarettes a day (I'm doing better!) Social situation, now labelled: 'Friend of Auroville'.

among so few people. It reminds me of mathematics, which I was never any good at, particularly when it came to division. But we meet lots of people who start showing up at the house at all hours wanting to get to know us. Discussions take off, one rails and complains, "It's normal, it is typical for Aurovilians, you'll find out". "Oh?" In fact one speaks only of Auroville. "Before it was completely different, now, however..." "Yes, now would you like another cup of tea?" We learn new words: power trip, greenbelter, pukka, crocodile, tams, capsule, light, love, puncture, rumba custom, ayoyo, etc... We learn to live in nature which is a sea-change from asphalt and traffic jams! Snakes, brain fever, hibiscus bushes, gourmet ants, frogs, scorpions, rain and power-cuts, colours that dazzle our eyes that one is barely aware of. And then we find work. Yahoo! We exist! We take the plunge and say yes to everything as long as it serves a useful purpose. One day we don white socks and breathe in an experience which is gracious, light, sweet. And there are encounters, meetings that mark you forever and make you believe that one's true family is found in the world. When one discovers this, it is such a strong experience that it is

After a great surge of naive optimism, a gentle reality check: we are only human after all. Our long newcomer period is drawing to a close. We will have to decide whether we become Aurovilians. It is a big step to take but some say it is only an administrative necessity. We do not see it that way. My heart is anchored in India and yet the world is vast. Fed up with the pressures to conform to a label or category we finally decide simply to become friends of Auroville, which will show us who are our real brethren. We are not yet ready to take the final step of complete commitment. We perhaps asked ourselves too many questions, seeking to understand Auroville, but two years is not enough time.

One thing is sure, that we have gone through an intense learning experience, we have grown and now see things differently. Still curious to see what is happening in the world that is moving ahead so swiftly, we choose to compromise. And why shouldn't we, after all?

"Even the most intelligent words are but small talk if they do not lead to action in one form or the other." Arthur Schnitzler.

Emilie

T r a n s c r i p t

www.auroville.org/transcript/transcript.html transcript@auroville.org.in

THE GENIUS BROTHERS

The Genius Brothers Show happens from time to time. It is badly announced and fully attended, where Aurovillians go for the pleasure of laughing at themselves.

Fertile Kitchen, lunchtime :

'A tape recorder,' says Johnny, "that's dangerous. We're having lunch. What are you going to ask him?"

'Wazo,' I ask, 'is the Genius Brothers Show about Auroville's existential angst?'

'Whhat?!!' Wazo is aghast. 'What is angst?'

'You know existential?' Paul inquires discreetly. 'You know, Sartre..'

'Oh that, yes, I know .. but what is angst?'

'Want the dictionary?' asks Johnny.

'No, er.. no, no, the answer is yes.'

'Okay,' Paul grins relieved, 'so Genius Brothers is about Auroville's existential angst'

'So I am right?' Wazo is surprised. 'Mais..' He turns and whispers to me urgently, "ca veut dire quoi, angst?"

'Oh, tu sais, comme angoisse..'

'Quoi? Angoisse?! Er.. NO!!' Laughter erupts around the table.

"But, yes, yes of course.. it is the same idee. Many people have tried it, Johnny in his way and other people. We wanted to speak of our fundamental problem : life in Auroville, in a way that brings the correct point but with a maximum of humor. To find the truth that does not hurt but which heals. Humor brings the correct atmosphere where you can say the maximum of things. So humor was fundamental, it is an old tradition in Auroville."

Anu



"I DON'T AGREE, BUT I MIGHT DO IT BECAUSE I LIKE YOUR SMILE..."

Santo to Kireet Joshi, Solar Kitchen roof : 18th April, 1999

'Auroville wants to be a universal town where men and women of all countries will be able to live in peace and progressive harmony above all creeds, all politics, and all nationalities, straining to realize human unity'
Mother

More often than not, the strain shows, yet the real aspirations cannot be doubted. For a while the definition of unity became linked with a simplistic idea of goodwill. A collective blueprint for holding hands and so on. As goodwill became an aggressive declaration of 'proper' ideals, the community began to splinter and groups multiplied. Individuals disappeared behind bushes or in business units. A collective discomfort replaced an older sense of collective belonging. With less than hundred days to go for a new millennium, human unity is searching us for a further realization. But what is it? Is it something for official use only? What made Santo change his mind? We asked a random group : Kripa, Anupama, Fred, Roy, Srimoyi and of course, Santo...

To begin, how does a child in Auroville experience unity? Kripa first learned to write in Tamil. It influenced the way she writes in other languages as well. There were other situations. She could opt for good Dutch breakfast at a friend's house, or a French one at home, or enjoy a sapad at another friend's house in the village. Human unity was not something she had to think about as a child. It was something to take for granted. At the age of 11 she 'explained' the Charter to a tourist who had just cycled up the Aspiration road and was trying to find Auroville. She doesn't remember how she explained human unity, except that it was very clear and the tourist was genuinely touched.

"We'll understand it only when it happens, when we realize our psychic beings. Its not about consensus", Srimoyi said thoughtfully over a spoon of curd at the Solar Kitchen. It is tea time at Pour Tous. Santo takes a break. "Real human unity, to get to that, we have to find a deeper level. Mentally we can understand or even accept diversity, but it doesn't change the situation. We have to go deeper, like Ramakrishna, become part of the divine, become a Hindu, a Muslim, a Christian - understand all the gods are the same. And it is part of Auroville's goal, to prevent war. Look at all the ethnic wars all over the world, there is so much intolerance.."

HUMANE DEVELOPMENT

Interview with AMARTYA SEN the Nobel Prize-winning economist and author of Development as Freedom.



Amartya Sen's new book, Development as Freedom, is a broad-ranging, often ruminative work, and a good introduction to the multitude of interests that have defined his career. Although Sen is probably best known for his research on famines, his work on women -- the attention he has drawn to their unequal status in the developing world, and his calls for gender-specific aid programs -- is just as important. A former professor of both philosophy and economics at Harvard, he is also a gifted mathematician -- a skill that has earned him legitimacy among mainstream economists and allowed him to propagate his unorthodox views. Sen has written on such diverse topics as objectivity, liberalism, and agency. In 1998 he was appointed the first non-British master of Trinity College, Cambridge -- considered by many the most prestigious academic post in the United Kingdom. Akash Kapur recently interviewed Sen for Atlantic Unbound. The conversation took place at Sen's Cambridge residence.

Do you think development has in fact changed? Is it more sensitive, softer, than it used to be?

I don't think development is softer -- that implies it's not sufficiently exacting -- but certainly there was a sense for a while that development was a very hard process, and that people had to sacrifice. There was a lot of blood, sweat, and tears involved.

That hadn't always been the case. If you look at the early, classical writings in development you find that it was always assumed that economic development was a benign process, in the interest of the people. The view that you have to ignore any kind of social sympathies for the underdog, and that you can't have a democracy, didn't become the dominant thought until the beginning of modern development economics, which is really in the 1940s. That lasted until quite recently. I think it's fair to say that development these days is not quite as harsh as it used to be.

Why did that change come about?

Well, I think maybe because the previous view was mostly mistaken. There was a tension in it. The market economy succeeds not because some people's interests are suppressed and other people are kept out of the market, but because people gain individual advantage from it. So, I don't really see that the proponents of the harsh model got the general idea at all right. They had some dreadful slogans like, "You have to break some eggs to make an omelet." It's a totally misleading analogy -- a pretty costly one aesthetically, and also it's quite mistaken in terms of understanding the nature of man. So, I think the change came about because it was overdue.

But did something happen in a more practical sense? Why did the establishment suddenly wake up to the error of its views?

First of all, it was becoming increasingly clear that economies like those in East Asia -- beginning with Japan but also South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, Thailand, and China -- were benefiting from a participatory economic climate in which people's entry into the market was made much easier because they had been provided social opportunities through such things as schooling, basic health care, basic land reform, and microcredit. These economies were riding on the success of the individual entering the market. Now, at

"The reason for Auroville," said Fred referring to what was revealed in a dream, "is not uniformity, not even unity, it is a fierce burning Oneness."

In which case : Can this unity be achieved through official or institutional means?

Answer : Unanimous No. But... Therefore it fell upon Roy to say : "For me (unity) is a leap out of humanity into something we don't usually experience, in fact it is a kind of collective threshold that needs to be crossed and must be crossed by everyone and not by some artificial means. I personally see no value in a building or another publication or another group as the experience of Unity is not a contrivance."....

The topic of Human Unity came under scrutiny earlier this year, in April, when Kireet Joshi, Chairman of the Auroville Foundation, who prefers to call himself our brother, gave a talk on Human Unity on the roof of the Solar Kitchen. Though Santo disagreed with him, to everyone's secret relief, he also agreed to collaborate with surprising panache. Subsequently, many like him attended the different talks given by Kireet, dropped their reserve about certain views and appreciated gaining fresh insight to others. People with different manifestos be it High Tension line, or Certificate Exams, or Free Progress system, came away feeling, at last, someone had understood them, at last, they had understood someone.

Why? we asked Santo.

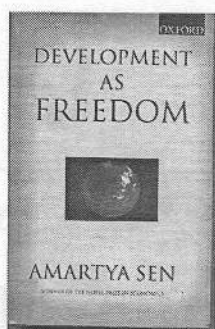
"Because he is a man who does follow his own Dharma and he truly loves Auroville.. also his ability to acknowledge both sides.".....

But can we change?

Certainly, no final solutions are on offer but the collective weather report indicates that the necessity for change can no longer be ignored. A wish to no longer only speak of our ideals but to live them. Because, despite our finest aspirations many working groups continue to deadlock and rumors often gain more relevance than fact. The land situation is acute, the housing problem is acute, our lack of interest in the collective process is acute. The material impasse probably calls our attention to something that needs active focus. For instance, the secret behind a smile that made some people change their minds. Where did that smile actually begin?

Anu





the same time, many of these economies were not democratic. But as many of them -- South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand -- became more democratic, it became very clear that the friendlier economic climate and the friendlier social opportunities were doing the trick, not the harsh political climate and the suppression of individual liberties. Furthermore, these economies didn't have the social securities that you find in the European welfare-capitalism model. Asia's leaders kept on saying that such securities are not needed in Asia because of "Asian Values" -- that community values are such that people will automatically take care of each other in a crisis.

Well, the fact is they didn't. There is a need for a social mechanism, and that social mechanism wasn't in place. And on top of that, since there was no democracy either, you couldn't demand that social mechanism. That is why democracy has become a major issue throughout the region. It is a major issue being fought in Indonesia, and I think it is an issue that will come up in China and other countries, too.

Could you talk about how you became attuned to the role of women in development? I've always wondered about this -- after all, you were writing about the subject quite a while before it became fashionable to do so. When was this?

That's right. In fact, when I first started writing about women, the opposition came from all quarters. I think women became an issue in my writings in the early 1960s. It seemed to me that the inequalities were manifest in every respect. When I was looking at the pattern of hunger or of schooling and at such matters as the allocation of resources within a family, the inequalities seemed so apparent that I was surprised that people didn't talk about it. But of course people did talk about it. A number of others had talked about the subject beforehand -- mainly fiction writers. But in the social sciences, among economists, and in political circles, I was surprised at the resistance I got. There was resistance from the left, which thought that any dilution of the class issue would be a mistake, would have the effect of weakening the class war. I think that was a very shallow analysis -- class is a big divider, but it's not the only one. And on top of that, when you have several dividers, when there is an accumulation of the disadvantages -- women in lower-class families, possibly from lower castes and possibly from a backward region -- you get a dreadful situation. Quite often the left opposition did not do justice to the left-wing position, which is to understand all the root causes of deprivation, rather than just concentrate on one. There was also opposition from people who held a very anti-Western view, and who thought that I was trying to sell a kind of pro-Western position. When I was pointing out how dreadfully deprived the Indian women were, one of my colleagues told me in response that many anthropological studies have indicated that when asked whether they feel deprived, rural Indian women said no, they didn't. But the women didn't understand the question. They were talking about family welfare rather than their own individual welfare. The idea of the

self-sacrificing woman has been so praised, idealized, and idolized, that out of deprivation has been created a heroism that doesn't serve the interests of the women very much. I felt that that self-sacrifice survived only by what Marx would have called "false consciousness" on the part of the women -- that is, a belief that their interests are already looked after by the family, which is not the case. This is one of those contexts in which being more self-interested may do the world a lot more good. I would call this kind of opposition nativist -- it takes the view that the traditional cultures are basically all right, and one shouldn't criticize them. It's taken some time to overcome all this opposition, and it's fair

At the moment access to the Internet is very class-based... if properly thought through, the Internet can do a lot of good...

to say that the expansion of feminist movements across the world has helped a great deal. Even the Western feminist activism has played a very important part in India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan; and in a lot of other countries in the world it has played or is beginning to play a big part.

You've told me that you don't check your e-mail and that you have six thousand unanswered messages. But since this interview is destined for the Internet, do you have any thoughts on how the Internet can help development?

It can help development if the basic access can be made a bit cheaper. People have the talent to use the Internet very easily, even though I shun it like poison. There was a day when I answered seventy letters in e-mail; it took half a day or more, and since I still had several thousand to deal with, I decided that this was a loser's game, and I simply went off it, leaving a mechanical message saying I don't read e-mail. The fact is that e-mail could extend communications into very remote areas. But if you're dealing with the poor sub-Saharan African villager or the poor Indian villager, this could be a very expensive thing. So there is a need for some kind of public-private cooperation to extend e-mail access.

I've noticed that a number of non-government organizations (NGOs) are moving away from what we might call more basic jobs like rural sanitation, health, and education and setting up sophisticated Internet centers -- partly because of the surplus of donor money in this area. Do you think there's a danger of misplaced priorities?

There is danger of that, because at the moment access to the Internet is very class-based, and to the extent that public resources get diverted from those things that benefit the underdog to those things that benefit the top dog, this is a retrograde movement. I'm afraid there's a certain amount of that happening. One has to look at it very carefully, so that it doesn't end up doing more harm than good. If properly thought through, the Internet can do a lot of good. I think it's ultimately in the interest of the world that people communicate with each other much more.

One notable event over the past decade has been the proliferation of small, grassroots NGOs. Some people might say this is a good thing, because they are more sensitive to local concerns. Others might say that these NGOs lack the expert knowledge of larger organizations. What is your view?

I think we need bulk -- big NGOs like Oxfam, Save the Children, Amnesty International, or the Red Cross and the Red Crescent. These organizations have enormous experience in different countries, and they have a well-developed philosophy that they can apply cogently and with great effectiveness. But cut off as they are, it is very difficult for them to deal with particular variations. And this is where local NGOs could play quite a big part. As long as one type of organization doesn't try to shut out the other, there can be a very complementary relationship between them.

Your career has been pretty broad-ranging. Some people would mean that as a criticism -- saying that it makes you less effective, less practical. How do you respond?

I don't know that that criticism is so often voiced. I guess I've seen it sometimes.

It has often been voiced to me. Maybe people are scared to say it directly to you.

I guess I am not very "effective." But I'm not sure I would have been more effective if I'd become a technical economist instead. I did spend half my life in physics, mathematics, and economics, and more than half my work is in social-choice theory. In fact, the main thing that the Nobel citation lists is my achievements in social-choice theory. I'm proud of those works because they're good -- at least I think so -- and I worked hard on them. But I am interested in poverty, I am interested in women's deprivation; I am interested in child welfare and child mortality. I'm interested in the battering of the lives of young women who are constantly bearing and rearing children. I don't see why I should not go into these questions on the grounds that I am broadening myself too much and should therefore stick to social-choice theory. I don't even understand the argument fully. Human beings have the ability to work in different fields. Why can't one work in several different areas without each ending up being an enemy of the other? Sometimes I actually benefit from the insights of one field into the other. The kind of mathematical theory that social-choice theory provides is very important for development studies. Alternatively, the kind of broadening of interests that development studies provide is very important for social-choice theory and welfare economics. I don't really agree with the view that I could have been more effective. That's not to say I've been effective at all, but I don't think I would have reached more than the present level of low effectiveness if I had concentrated myself in one particular area.

"Our culture must have influence on everything else we do."

The way I've heard the criticism, it's more directed at your forays into cultural analysis or philosophy. I think it might be a social-sciences prejudice against anything that appears woolly headed or softer.

Well, I don't see that. First of all, as far as philosophy is concerned, it's always been one of my abiding interests. Indeed, at Harvard I was a professor of philosophy and of economics, and a reasonable proportion of my work has been published in journals of philosophy. The question of woolly headedness doesn't really come in here very much, because it's quite exacting philosophy. Philosophy of science, of logic, or objectivity. I don't see how that work could be accused of being woolly headed. You have to be referring more to things like the work on culture. But culture is very important in our lives. It's very important in my life, and hopefully it's very important in yours. Given that fact, and given the fact that we don't lead lives that are compartmentalized, our culture must have influence on everything else we do. Some of the deprivations we look at in development could be cultural deprivations. Major battles have been fought in the world on cultural grounds -- the Crusades, for example. If one takes the view that just because one cannot measure cultural output in the same way that one would measure the production of tomatoes or the value of the GNP per head, that therefore cultures are uninteresting, I think that is a big mistake. The fact that novels or poetry are not precisely measurable like kilograms of milk or flour does not mean that they are not amenable to analytical investigation. Quite often, when people say that something is not precise enough, they are just underestimating the reach of mathematics. Mathematics is one of the greatest glories of humanity, and its reach is not confined to the things that we did in college -- the differential equations and applied differentiable functions and so forth. I think that's a slander not just on culture but also on mathematics.

Akash Kapur

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SUBJECTIVE SADHANA



For years now William Netter a.k.a. Aurowilly has had a perfectly good reason for visiting California every summer. He has been trying to persuade his brother, who is thick in with the Hollywood crowd, and might know Spielberg to produce his 'Log of a Journey through Savitri', so far without much success, because as his brother finally confessed: "I just don't know what you are talking about"



So when I finally saw the Matrix at Ratna (A.C. booth Rs. 13.50), I was happy for William, and thought he might have a point. Here afterall was a blockbuster straight out of Hollywood, that seemed to be all about cellular consciousness.

To begin with, the name: The Latin root of 'matrix' is 'matris', which means mother and furthermore it is "any non-living inter-cellular substance in which living cells are embedded. So that's already a bit of a clue, and then right near the end I felt totally justified in my hypothesis: in the crucial scene Keanu Reeves stands opposite the keeper of the gates (death) and realizing that to fight death on this plane he would always be too slow. He had to take a leap in consciousness - which he does, thereby entering a state where he has a cellular vision. He sees everything as points of light. (In the movie it is binary information. As Bhaga pointed out it should have been multicolored to be a true cellular vision - Hollywood can't know everything!) Once he is in this state and sees the whole functioning of cells, he becomes immortal and vanquishes his foes.



As I was explaining all this to William and wanted Roy, who has seen the movie 81/2 times on D.V.D. to corroborate, rather than help, he pulled the carpet from under me by actually revealing that: "The whole movie is actually based on the Isha Upanishad, particularly the first line, 'All this is for habitation by the Lord, whatsoever is individual universe of movement in the universal motion', but Sri Aurobindo also points out that the same word for habitation also means clothed, and the whole of Matrix is only an apparent illusion.



As it's conjecture as certain as facts we are talking about, Kenneth can tell you that there is a direct link between what the scientists are doing mapping the human genome, and the work the Mother did in terms of research in the cells. When I tried to get Bhaga's comments on that, she didn't think there was a direct link, but thought, "I even notice with the amount of books around, when there is a healing crisis, people immediately turn to the cells." Whatever sells, William, just get Keanu to be Satyavan and it will be a hit.

Auroson



Agathe from Paris

Smoothing the edges

Although her arms and work clothes are covered with white marble dust, a certain elegance surrounds this small French woman, Agathe. Every morning she climbs up one of the inner ribs of the main structure of the Matrimandir, the so-called 'fountain', where she cleans and checks small marble squares. She used to work with a well-known French fashion designer and lead a very comfortable life in Paris, but after a visit to Auroville, she decided she had to come back. "I love working here and most of the time I feel totally happy. But sometimes I ask myself why I moved to Auroville. I can't complain about my life at present: I'm in good health, I live in a nice house with a beautiful garden, my apartment is being built, I drive around on a new scooter, I'm in love with an Aurovilian, but I've never encountered an environment which is so uncomfortable! I don't sleep well, there are days that are great and others that are terrible. I expected a quiet environment where I could spend the last years of my life but is not quiet here at all, not at all! It comforts me to meet Aurovilians who after 20 years still ask themselves why they moved here."

"When I visited Auroville for the

first time last year, my brother (who lives here) took me immediately to the Matrimandir. I was lucky. It was already 6 o'clock but he brought me straight to the Chamber. I had heard it had a special energy, but it was incredible. Approaching the building I had a very strong physical feeling of turning completely limp. It entered straight into my body! Inside the chamber I felt a very beautiful, very harmonious energy. It was the first time that I immediately went into a meditative state. It was a very exceptional experience. Although I was still very tired from the journey I felt right away that I wanted to do something here. I wanted to cut with my life in Paris and I felt like I had found my place of work in Auroville. So here I am, cleaning, checking and smoothing these famous dirty white marble pieces. I like this manual work and marble is such a wonderful material, but someone told me that it will take about five years to finish! I don't know how to take this. On the one hand it is great that it will take five years, but what will I do after that? That's a question I ask myself often: what are those people who have been working here for years in this famous and energy-wise very strong place in the centre of Auroville going

to do after the Matrimandir is finished?

"Working here is a big yoga. There are times that I enjoy this work, other days I detest it. When you come here just for two weeks on a holiday and participate in the work, it just happens, it is fun, but once you decide to come and live here, you ask yourself if this is the kind of work you want to do for your realization? That would be good for my ego! Oh well, it gave me courage to continue grouting these gaps."

"What is interesting here is that most people working at Matrimandir have no previous experience in this type of work. In the West you would never do this kind of manual work. In France it is unheard of! Maybe in your own apartment you might do some grouting work, but where else? Of course this means that the work goes very slowly, but on the other hand, if you have to redo your work because it is imperfect, then it is better to put some consciousness into your work. Manual work is very good for my head, I can repeat the mantra, meditate at the same time, think. I don't know whether this will be my only work here, I have two or three other projects in mind, but since I feel so well here, maybe this will be it. Let's see."

Tineke

Anandamaya and Vivek from Trieste

Something inside me has changed

Vivek and Anandamaya, two Italian Newcomers talked to AV Today about their entry process and what coming to Auroville has meant to them

Anandamaya: Like many other people, I started my personal path making yoga, looking for many different masters. But I never really found my master. And the moment comes in your life that you think, now is the time to go to India. So I came to South India in 1984 and visited many different places, ashrams and many masters. Then I came to Pondicherry. It was the 21st of February. And I knew nothing about Sri Aurobindo or the Mother, absolutely nothing. I was very surprised to see many pictures of them in the ashram, and the flowers. I came to visit the Samadhi, and something very strong happened to me. I felt such strong energy - material energy - that touched me. I asked my friend, "Who is there?" They said, "This is Sri Aurobindo, the Mother." And when I came back to Italy, I started reading and reading, first "The Adventure in Consciousness," then "Divine Materialism". It was not so easy to understand. I got quite stuck because I understood you have to completely change your way of thinking. I felt, "This is not possible, this is completely crazy." Then I slowly opened my mind and my heart. And then I understood that that was my way. I found my master, my path, and everything became clear.

Vivek: For me the start was slower, not like an explosion. I came also to India, but later, in 1986, as we had a little child. It wasn't possible for the whole family to travel together. For me, the first step was to think, to learn and to understand. I came to Auroville not very prepared. But in two years, I learned many things about myself.

So there was a question of moving here permanently to live in India, rather than just visiting. In some way, this question brought me to a moment of

decision in my life. Because when I came to India I wondered, "Will I never go back to Italy? And if I do go back, then when?" I realize now that I'm here, I have to stay.

Anandamaya: Another thing about newcomers is...there's a process that happens whether you like it or not. For us, for twenty years nursing was our job. We are in some ways identified with this. If someone asks, you say, "I am a nurse." The real work I did during

goodwill, ideas, and aspiration but there is still this old being inside you... In this way, Auroville has to break you down, whether you want it or not.

I started working in the Matrimandir nursery. It was the first time I touched a plant! I felt that was my work. So I worked, I learned so much. I liked it, it was completely new. I can stay alone, in silence, work like in a meditation. Before coming here, in my heart I had this wish: to work with plants and



When you come here, you are full of energy, goodwill, ideas, and aspiration but there is still this old being inside you... In this way, Auroville has to break you down, whether you want it or not.

my first year here was starting to live without "being" this or that. If someone asks, I no longer say, "I am such and such". Something inside me has changed. I no longer identify myself with this. It's a very strong change, a very important work to be done. When you come here, you are full of energy,

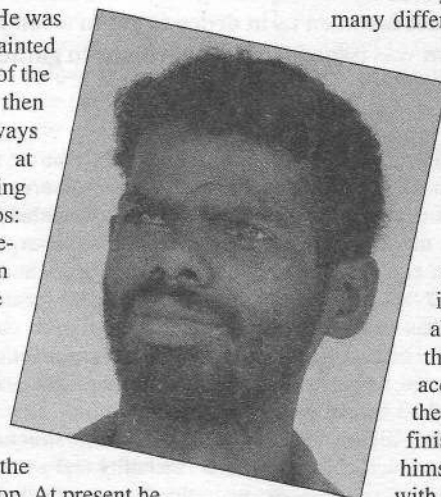
flowers and now it is happening and I feel very happy planting. I'm in charge of the Bougainvillea and Plumeria sections: Psychological perfection! (laughter). I know now that this is the job Mother and Sri Aurobindo have given to me.

Jill

Saravanam from Pondicherry

A big smile at Matrimandir

Saravanam is a young man from Pondicherry who has been working at the Matrimandir since 1991. At that time he had applied for a job as painter. He was hired and he painted the crane on top of the building. Since then he has always worked at Matrimandir, doing all kinds of jobs: fixing the ferroce-ment triangles on the outside of the structure, building scaffolding, making frames for the discs, and cutting glass in the guiding workshop. At present he is working in the glass workshop which is producing the orange tinted triangular glass pieces for the inner skin. It is his job to fix the large glass pieces into frames, which then will be put in place. In June last year he



applied to become a newcomer and he has just been accepted as a new member of our community. "I like to work here and to live among people from so many different countries. I

also like Sri Aurobindo and Mother.

First my parents did not agree that I want to live here, but after slowly explaining to them about Auroville they now have accepted it." Once the Matrimandir is finished he sees himself involved with the maintenance of the building. "Or

wherever help is needed. I like to work," and off he goes with a big smile on his face, checking the glass frame.

Tineke

Guna from Bommopalayam

It is not easy being a newcomer

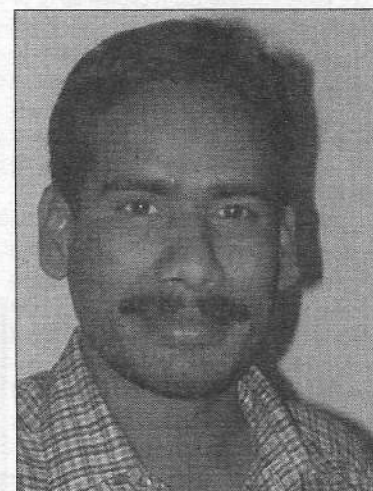
"I can't really say that my newcomer's experience so far has been an easy one," says Guna. Guna hails from Bommopalayam, a village nearby Auroville. He did a B.Sc. in chemistry and then a Masters in Ecology at the Pondicherry University before joining Auroville in July, 1997. He is 28 years young and single. Asked about these problems, he says: "I think that the root problem is that newcomers are mistrusted. We are seen as a potential liability, not as a future asset. The Entry Group sees itself as the body that needs to control the entry into Auroville, rather than helping the newcomer to find a place to work and live and to understand Auroville."

"It starts right away when you first contact the Entry Group. You can only get an application form when you give a letter of recommendation by an Aurovilian to the Entry Group. My first Auroville employer refused to give me that letter for reasons I have not understood. The second employer, however, gave me the letter and only then could I apply to become newcomer. So there is the first barrier."

Then there is an implicit fear that people from the local villages want to join Auroville for economic benefits only. I had previously worked for an Indian company and earned about Rs 6,000 a month. The maintenance I got in Auroville was Rs 2,000 a month, which was insufficient and I had to use my savings to keep to a minimal living standard. So this was clearly not an economic improvement. I am aware that some Tamil Aurovilians can enjoy the benefits of family support, but that does not apply in my case. My family heavily objected to my joining Auroville and to the humble room in New Creation where I came to live.

"Last but not least there is the Entry Group's policy of enquiring from Aurovilians about the behaviour of newcomers. This in itself is understandable. But it can also lead to the undesirable situation in which an Aurovilian obtains a kind of power over the newcomer, a "you behave as I want it or else I'll write to the Entry

Group" situation develops. This is very unhealthy, and I have heard of many a case where there has been a serious misuse of that power by Aurovilians. The newcomers as a rule do not dare to complain, for the experience is such that the word of an Aurovilian is trust-



ed more than that of a newcomer. In the best of cases the newcomer gets an extension of his newcomer period.

"It is perhaps also out of fear that newcomers do not wish to change their jobs easily. After all, an employer might consider someone fickle just because he changes jobs too quickly to suit the Auroville employer. But this goes against the idea that newcomers should try out and understand many places where they can work and live before becoming Aurovilian. The result is that many newcomers stay put in one job, and start moving around after they have become Aurovilian. And that, in turn, gives rise to the negative idea that newcomers keep quiet during their newcomer period and change as soon as they have become Aurovilian, and that therefore the newcomer period should be extended from one year to two or even three years!"

"I am happy that a Newcomers Group has been formed, which should present the views and fears of newcomers to the community at large, so that the entry process can be more warm and welcoming."

Carel.



Let's re-think Auroville!

Results of a marathon

In the weekend of May 27th-28th, 2000, the foundations were laid for what has come to be known as "the marathon sessions". Realizing that a few hours of meetings were not enough to work out very basic differences between us in order to get to a common vision for implementing Mother's dream, an open invitation was issued to all Aurovilians to gather for two days at Bharat Nivas to "re-think Auroville"

Over a hundred Aurovilians attended on one or both days. Some of them stuck it out through the entire weekend, others floated in and out. The attendance illustrated the strong concern that Auroville has reached a stage where our interaction and common understanding need to be re-viewed and amended. And so, in between intense stretches of silence and meditation and also aerobics, chi gung and other body awareness sessions in which, amazingly, all participated, a great many issues pertaining to our social structure could be discussed.

There was general consensus and discipline to go beyond polarity, to abstain from (mis)judging each other and to not go into lamenting but to look for ways and steps to go forward. In fact, it was a pretty courageous endeavour of parties that haven't been able to trust each other for long, to

now say "Come on, folks, for the sake of Mother's Auroville, let's give it a full and wholehearted try to work together." This exploration happened in a very open, honest and constructive manner, creating a safe space where each one could freely express his or her aspirations, hopes, and ideas for a more adequate and effective organisation. The ideas expressed moved from structure and control to flexibility and participation. It seems that, very gradually, an overall picture of our ideal organization is taking shape. The marathon meetings continued into the late afternoon and evening hours in the weeks that followed.

One item that has been quite inspiring and enlivening in the discussions is the concept of a 'platform', which could become an excellent working tool and mechanism for collective interaction - in whatever over-

all framework. The platform would be a space that embodies the qualities that we wish our collective meetings to have: openness to each other's visions, trust, a non-judgmental attitude, dedication, intuitive intelligence. Those who wish to speak come forward into the centre of the meeting, from where they address the meeting and then step down. Stepping into the centre implies a commitment, an inner dedication to speak from one's highest level of consciousness with an attitude of selfless service. Doing so not only enhances the level of one's contribution, but also helps to raise the level of consciousness of the other attendants. Interaction takes place on a positive basis, for the aim is to uphold harmony, equanimity, progressiveness and the spirit of service. Those who listen are not allowed to interrupt. The platform is a neutral and safe space and enhances the quality of listening. There is no judging, no discussions, no 'hitting back'. The spirit of listening brings an awareness of a potential direction, which gradually becomes more and more defined.

Someone asked what constitutes the difference between the platform and the Resident's Assembly. The answer is power. In meetings people felt they had the power to decide or more often to block decisions. The platform relieves people from power, and gives the power to a space. You



CARTOON BY EMANUELE

step into the space and you have some power. You step out of it, and you have none. The space however is defined by a set of ideals everyone can understand and by stepping into it you become a servant of these ideals. When the space is given, each of us can express his or her goodwill, and that will draw out a lot of the potential that this community has. Last but not least, the platform will be able to draw the participation of capable people who do not want to get involved in politics. We have many high quality people here who need to be inspired to come forward and give their help to take the next step in every field.

Once an overall organization will have been formulated, and agreed upon by the residents of Auroville, logistics will have to be worked out as to how decisions reached on the plat-

form will relate to the community at large. For it to become a well functioning tool, an efficient and flexible set-up can be envisaged on the basis of certain guidelines to be agreed upon by everybody. A kind of secretariat could be created whose task it would be to ensure that the guidelines are respected, to organize the processes and the platform interactions, and to inform the community through AuroNet, the Auroville computer network, and the Auroville News. In that way the community would be kept informed of the platform activities and decide whether to participate or not.

Meanwhile, the marathon-platform sessions continue and the new tool is being tried out.

Based on reports from Mauna and Ange



Open Forum

The spirit of commercialism or "Auroville Yesterday"

Ulli's statements on economy 2000 published in Auroville Today's last issue seem to me representative of a particular mindset, namely the spirit of commercialism which presently rules our modern society, and whose principle is that everything - knowledge, science, art, education, spirituality - has a commercial, utilitarian or productive value.

Since all of us came to Auroville because we were dissatisfied with the world as it is and because we aspired to fulfil the ideals proposed by the Mother, the best way to understand these ideals is to examine in a non-dogmatic manner the main practical indications given by Mother for our economic life:

1) The age of capitalism and business is drawing to a close.

2) For in this ideal place money would no longer be the sovereign lord.... There, work would not be a way to earn one's living but a way to express oneself and to develop one's capacities and possibilities while being of service to the community as a whole, which, for its own part, would provide for each individual's subsistence and sphere of action.

3) There will be no taxes as such but each will contribute to the collective welfare in work, kind, or money.

4) I would like there to be no money within Auroville (...) I would like money to be retained only for relations with outside.

Many attempts have been made to reach these goals but, for reasons inherent to our shortcomings and resistances, they have not succeeded, with the result that today the spirit of commercialism is regulating Auroville's life in a great measure.

When 300 Aurovilians try to come closer to these goals, the reaction of Ulli is to declare that it is "frustrating that the name of Mother is used to justify the experiment". As if these goals had been invented by these 300 individuals and then falsely attributed to

Mother in order to give credibility to their attempt to realize Her dream! One is free not to agree with Mother's ideals, and nobody is forced to join Auroville, but in the case of individuals who have responded to Her call, we fail to understand Ulli's indignation. Sensing perhaps the weakness of his argument, Ulli then declares, at the risk of being "dogmatic", that Mother "warned very explicitly not to take her words as a dogma. But we do precisely that. The no-money economy, for example, which She herself even declared could take a long long time to materialize, we try to implement with one jump, instead of developing steadily and slowly, small steps at a time with a long-term perspective." Notwithstanding the fact that this is precisely how the new economy intends to proceed, we are still waiting for Ulli and those who share his views to explain to us what this first step towards a no-money economy should be. So far, they have not been able to prove that their methods could bring us a single step closer to the objectives proposed by Mother.

The sketch illustrating the interview is quite significant: the charts - of the US and Japanese economies showing a sky-rocketing expansion and the chart representing Auroville, a linear and knotted economy - seem to suggest that the methods to be followed are to be found in the outside world rather than in the place that Mother wanted to be the cradle of the new one.

The first step towards the new economy is to undo with patience, love and care the knots formed by the sense of fear, insecurity, mistrust and separateness due to the imposition of the spirit of commercialism in Auroville.

Lastly, we are all aware that this simple step is more an act of trust in the Future than an economic system. But what are we here for if not to try again and again to open the gates of the future?

Serge, Auroville Press

A new radicalism

Reviving the radical spirit in Auroville

Radicalism in the past

Radicalism--from the Latin "radix" for root--is a movement for fundamental change, but the term is also often applied to revolutionary fervour, iconoclasm, a violent overthrow of old ways in pursuit of new dawn. In Auroville there has always been a strong radical element, in both senses of the word. Many of the early settlers were "children of the '60s", nurtured on a diet of student protest and/or hallucinogens. Even the desolate beauty of the landscape in those days--the sun striking laterite vastness like a knife--accentuated the sense of new beginnings and reinforced a refusal to consider subtler shadings.

Above all, Mother's call to the new adventure, to voyages on seas unknown, evoked the radical spirit. Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive--for those who knew what Mother was working so intensively upon fully expected that she would soon manifest the first supramentalized body on earth. And if Mother was the first, wouldn't others follow?

In late 1973, when Mother departed, that dream faded. But in Auroville radicalism soon found new expression in the struggle against the Sri Aurobindo Society. At the same time more and more of The Agenda was being published, revealing for the first time the astonishing dimensions of Mother's transformational work in her last years. Satprem's postscript to the final Agenda, his revelation that Mother's work continues ("No obsta-

cle, nothing will stop"), was another crucial boost to the radical spirit.

At some point, however, radicalism in Auroville took a wrong turning. It became hard, narrow, fanatical. "Truth or the abyss" became a matter of sorting the sheep from the goats as some Aurovilians turned against their brothers and sisters in the name of combating 'anti-evolutionary forces'.

As Sri Aurobindo put it, "There is a difference however between the fanatic of an idea and the true idealist: the former is simply the materialistic, executive man possessed by the idea of another, not himself the possessor of it; he is haunted in his will and driven by the force of the idea, not really illumined by its light."

When Luc Venet sent a letter which some of Satprem's more enthusiastic adherents wrongly interpreted as confirmation from him that Auroville was finished, many of them left.

Tensions abated. However, something important was lost with their departure--a fire, a call, an uncompromising drive for self-exceeding. For this is one of the means by which humanity is shaken awake, shocked out of its comfortable paths and cast up on the shores of the unknown.

The present situation

Today Auroville is on the way to becoming a respectable success. We do good work in village development, in bioregional regeneration, in

afforestation and renewable energy applications. Yet I feel that, somehow, we've lost our edge. We've embraced common-sense--which, all too often, is common ignorance. We've largely locked away the radical spirit, either because of past deviations, or because it doesn't sit well with the donors and the government agencies which we court so assiduously.

But if Auroville is to become that something else, "l'autre chose", that Mother clearly intended it to be, common-sense alone won't do: we need nothing less than a new radicalism. Not, as in the past, one which uses the radical banner as a cloak for self-interest or for paying off old scores. Not one which condemns compassion as weakness, or which uses ends to justify means. Not one which simplistically divides humanity into angels and devils. But a true radicalism which, in calmness and integrality, goes straight to the root of the problem and acts exclusively there. "The only way is that the ego must go! That's it. It must annul itself. Only then can something else come in and take its place. That's the whole secret."

In Auroville today there are signs of a radical revival. There are fresh attempts to make fundamental changes in our economy, in our system of governance, in our approach to education. Only time will tell if we have learned the lessons of the past, or if the ego, that master of dissimulation, will succeed in donning yet another of his many disguises.

Alan

The Jazz cafe

An artistic platform for experimentation

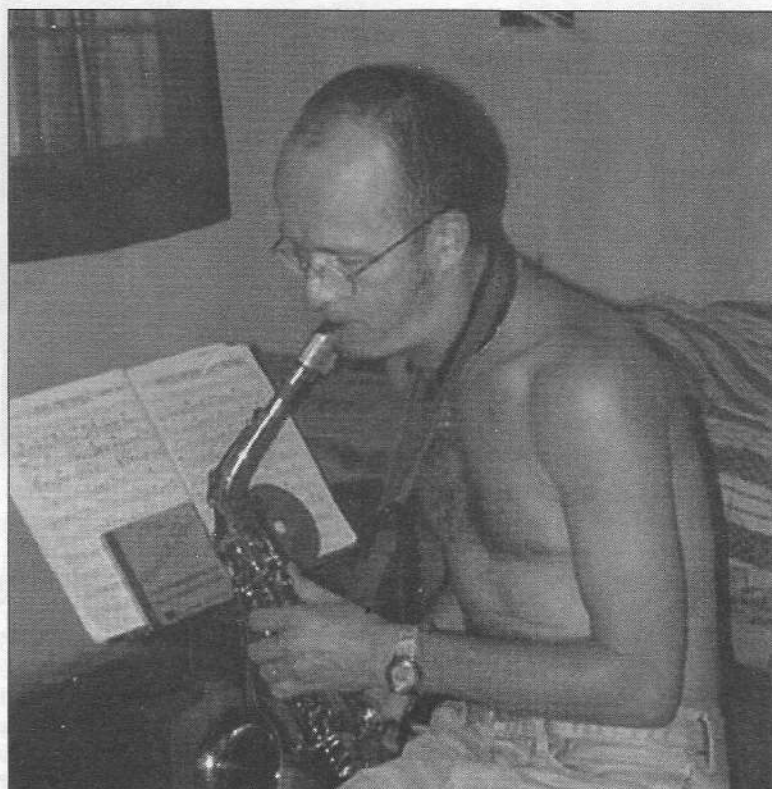
Pascal writes about the music scene in Auroville and reflects on his experience running the jazz café for the last two years

One Sunday evening in February '98 on the Visitors Center's stage, the jazz café was born.

The idea was sprouted in Fertile by Ange, who regretted that there was no convivial place in Auroville where people could simply meet without the pretext of spirituality or politics, and Paul, who's always there when there's a need to shake up things with a new venture. A few objects for stage décor, a tea shop, the goodwill of a handful of musicians, and the Jazz café came into being at the Visitors Centre. The first nights had the freshness of novelty, improvised sessions where each musician brought his own instrument. On one of our very first evenings the whole audience of fifty or so was covered in talcum powder because of prickly heat. It was like performing for an audience of ghosts! Then Paul left for England, and the question was, do we stop everything or continue?

Rolf, who plays guitar, and myself decided it would be a pity to stop as the endeavor seemed to have everyone's support. We then took on the responsibility of transporting the equipment and organizing the evenings. The guiding principle of the happening was slightly modified: the first part of the evening would be devoted to a prepared concert and the second part to more spontaneity, the equipment being available for all to use (Jam sessions or just informal music).

It is with this formula and with the same team that the Jazz Café continued. The idea was to maintain the same spirit: a sincere sharing of musical moments and an authentic conviviality based on totally voluntary participation. The dosas were crisp, three charming young women ran the tea stall, a car was kindly put at our disposal, and some people even spontaneously made donations. And whenever we



invited musicians from outside, Tapas Bhatt offered to help cover the costs.

The Jazz café was both something of a springboard and a meeting place. Some musicians performed for the first time in public and others played together there for the first time. In fact the project was intended to create a place where one could exchange music with the outside world, a place of international musical encounters of all styles and forms of music.

We had festivals or special concerts to raise funds for the music studio of Kalabhumii and the studio equipment. I remember an evening of incredible energy when we hosted the Madras-based rock group "Grasshopper Green". It was the first

time that they performed in front of a largely Western audience. This was very important for them as the West inspires their music and it was also the first time an Indian group had come to Auroville to perform something other than classical Indian music.

It was Paul who came up with the name Jazz Café. I think he was referring more to a notion of a warm and

those of us who were organizing it, a perpetual miracle that it happened at all. I realized that I was no longer finding pleasure in this work, after several vain attempts to organize evenings in such a way that the quality of the music improved. Having to replace musicians who dropped out at the last minute was an unpleasant experience. Problems concerning the equipment, the lack of serious work on the part of musicians and even the type of music being offered, along with all the problems of organization convinced me that it was time to hand the responsibility of the café over to someone else whose enthusiasm was still intact. Unfortunately they encountered the same obstacles.

The musical situation in Auroville is no worse than the musical situation of any village with 1500 inhabitants... but not much better either. There is a cruel lack of cultured music, the records one listens to are either those brought by the first inhabitants or the latest FM commercial music from the West. Musical curiosity has not developed and only Tapas Bhatt, who does an immense work on a limited budget in her sphere, which is Indian culture, manages to offer the community concerts of a professional quality. There are nonetheless people who make music in Auroville whose efforts are perfectly praiseworthy. But one has a tendency to judge them with a lot of indulgence on the basis of friendship or the time spent on this or that project but rarely on its intrinsic merit, which may do more harm than good. It seems that there is also laboratory music, but musicians in front of their computers in their private studios practice this....

If Auroville is a place of experimentation, it should provide itself with the means to experiment. I envision Auroville as a site of mutual cultural exchange, an artistic platform that could be known throughout the world as a place of experimentation. For this, one would have to perhaps create cultural interface sites whether real or virtual, and create link-ups with all the creative sites in all the artistic domains.

I truly believe in this opening through culture, which alone will enable artists to arrive at that experimental phase from which the music of Auroville could one day emerge.

Silent gathering at the Amphitheatre

The summer heat notwithstanding, a silent gathering took place on May 29th at the Amphitheatre. It was on this day in 1976 that the concreting of the ring at the top of the Matrimandir was finished, completing the structural skeleton of the Matrimandir.

Dhan professionals visit Auroville

One hundred and twenty professionals from the Dhan Foundation, Madurai, spent four study days in Auroville. The Dhan Foundation is an NGO working mainly in the areas of women's empowerment and tank rehabilitation in rural south India.

Auroville presentations in Russia

Tine, of Auroville International, has given two Auroville presentations in St. Petersburg and one in Moscow on the invitation of the Aditi Publishing House, which publishes books by and about Sri Aurobindo and The Mother in Russian. Dimitri Melgounov, one of Aditi's translators who visited Auroville this spring, translated Tine's words into Russian.

Reading in mystic poetry

Shri Maharaj Krishen Kaw, Education Secretary, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, visited Auroville from June 6th to 8th and gave an evening reading of his mystic poetry.

Auroville International Website

Auroville International is presenting itself with a homepage of its own. On this site one can reach most of the 16 Auroville International Centres and liaisons in the world. The address is www.auroville-international.org.

Classical music

Marcello and Pushkar gave a performance of sonatas for cello and piano by Beethoven and Shostakovich in Pitanga.

Pulse

AuroNET!, the electronic communication medium of Auroville, recently introduced a system called Pulse to solicit the opinion of the community on particular issues.

The poll results of Pulse on the question "Do we need an Entry Group?" showed an equal percentage for and against. One person observed that a minimum of screening of people who wish to join Auroville is necessary, but that there is nobody in Auroville who can truly know who is and who is not 'ready' for Auroville. Another person feared that the government of India may step forward if Auroville has no clear entry process. Yet another stressed the need for a formal and friendly guidance to provide some orientation and clarity to people who wish to join Auroville.



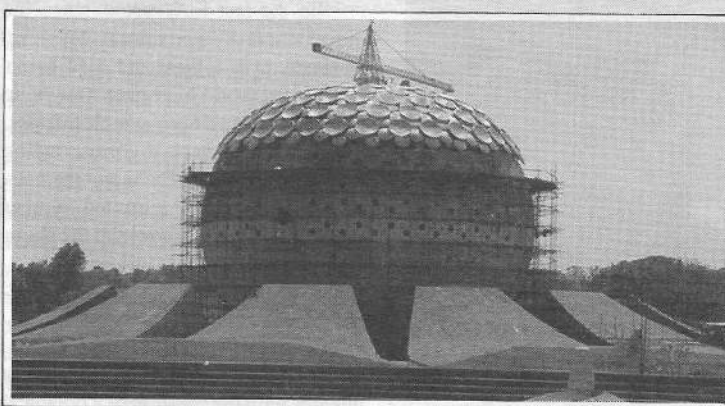
Auroville Beloved: Matrimandir Within

*O build in us a temple of the soul
With gilded panes to catch the fires of dawn
Where no duality longing could survive
The swift embrace of night by ecstasied morn.*

*In a secret room behind the body's walls
Install a crystal sphere reflecting Thee
For all within our yearning being calls
Thy descent into the waiting sanctuary.*

*In emerald canopies and scented groves
Where sun-bright Rishis meditate
And change the course of destiny by prayer
The acolytes of the future congregate.*

*All these stages on the rising stair
That joins our lives by a single golden tie,
A unitary vision and embrace
Of silence from the spheres of melody.*



*Surrounded by gardens reflected in pools of blue
On laden boughs the blossoming messengers sigh
And yield their perfumed splendor to the hours
An aspiration soaring to the sky.*

*No heavens above could lay such wondrous claim
As this setting on the conscious soil of earth,
A treasure realm transformed by sudden grace,
Harmony's cradle rocking a new world's birth.*

*And world-creating splendors shall arise
Reflecting the heavenly beauty of Her eyes;
Her godly gifts She gladly does impart
To all who build Her Mandir in the heart.*

At Mother's feet, Narad, May 21, 2000



Berijam summer camp 2000

Since 1984 annual summer camps have been organised for Auroville children in the cool hill stations of Tamil Nadu. In the beginning, camps were organised in Yercaud, but when participants started complaining of "Yercaud stomach" caused by the low quality of the drinking water, alternative sites were explored. A decade or so ago, Berijam near Kodaikanal, was discovered by Aurovilians and special permission was obtained from the Tamil Nadu Forest Department to allow Aurovilians to camp in this nature reserve. Julietta joined this year's camp and writes of her experience

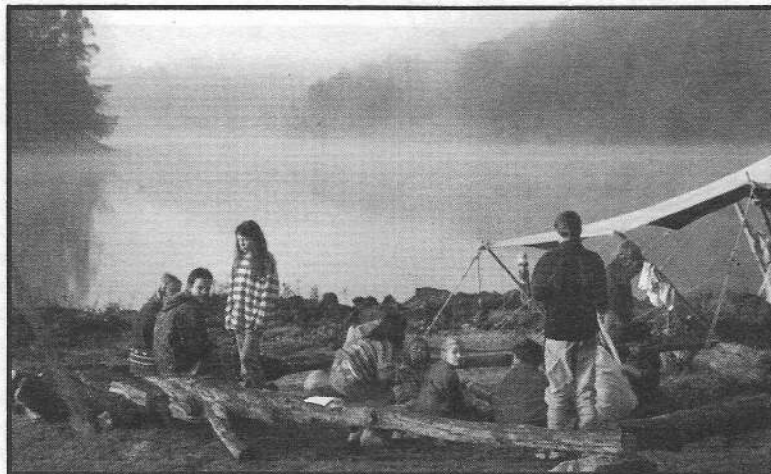
"Six o'clock already, I was just in the middle of a dream. I was kissing Valentino by a crystal blue Italian stream." (Manic Monday, The Bangles)

I wake up. Same time, different place. No Valentino, but Valli and Kuppu, who are already up to prepare breakfast. No crystal blue stream, but a lake the beauty of which does not need to hide behind travel catalogues for holidays in paradise. Not Italy, but Berijam, in the middle of nowhere atop the Palni Hills, an hour's drive from Kodaikanal, that reminds one of the untouched scenery of Walton's Mountain. No romantic tête-à-tête, but a camp full of hungry kids from Auroville on their yearly vacation adventure.

I close my eyes again hoping to get some more sleep, but in vain. I am in the "big girls tent" together with the two kitchen helpers, courtesy of Aurosoya, Auroville's tofu unit, and Alma, one of the accompanying adults who tries to keep a watch on this circus

of fleas. My duty is not the mending of wounds gotten during playtime, telling stories or reading books with the small kids, collecting firewood or water with the bigger boys, playing cricket and volleyball or doing the laundry. I have to take care of 60 empty stomachs to be filled five times a day, snacks included.

When Jaya, who had done this work for the last few years, announced that she needed a break, I was the logical choice. Firstly because I work as the cook at the cafeteria of Auroville's Visitors Centre, and secondly, because the children of Nicole, who runs the Visitors Centre, were among the camp participants! Drawing on Jaya's experience I soon discovered that she had done a perfect job, bringing not only some organisation into the rather wild kitchen tent, but also adapting the menu to the requirement of creating a homely feeling far away from home. In the beginning she had been thinking in terms of simplicity - that food should be healthy and good. But that by itself was not enough. Food should also be yummy. Since that time, desserts,



sweets, cakes and cookies made by an additional baker are part of the daily menu. Notwithstanding this extra help, cooking at Berijam is a challenge. No matter how much you cook, it is never enough. "Can I have seconds?" are the words that still ring in my ears. But when, at the end of the camp, I read in the Berijam 2000 guest book that "we had very good food" I realised that I

had passed the test.

We are back in the summer heat of Auroville. The kids, after a 12-hour bus drive, could only collapse happily in their parent's arms. But I still see the images of the beautiful hills and the open skies, the ice-cold lake, in which, with the help of a surfboard, the kids managed to dip themselves before breakfast. I still dream of the fresh air,

which you inhale on your treks through wild forests, accompanied by experienced young Aurovilians, watching deer, bison, wild dogs and an enormous variety of flora and fauna. I still hear the laughter of the children, having fun all day long, and the songs at the night's campfire. And I'm grateful to have been part of this journey into pure nature and this adventure of inner growing.



Kokopelli dreams

Dominique Guillet, founder of the well-known French seed company, Terre de Semences, was here for two weeks in April. In this short period he has sown the seed for an important venture in Auroville

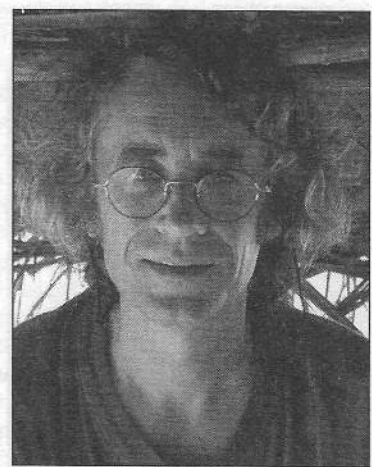
In the legends of the Hopi Indians lives a hunch-backed flute player associated with fertility and germination called Kokopelli. It is said that his humped back is actually a bag of seeds that he sows with the wind and that he plays melodies on his flute to charm their growth. In a modern day incarnation, Kokopelli is a source of inspiration for Terre de Semences (Earth of Seeds), the biggest seed saving-and-exchange network in Europe, and for its sister organisation, Association Kokopelli.

Says Dominique Guillet the force behind Terre de Semences, "seeds are the essence of all life and civilisation. Without seeds, the basis of food production, civilization will wither and life cannot exist. For ten thousand years human beings lived in a cyclic ritual where they sowed seeds, produced food and saved seeds for the next sowing. Seeds were given or exchanged but never sold. And every country, every great civilization, had their totems like Kokopelli, their songs and rituals that were associated with the sowing of seeds and the nurturing of plants.

The commercialization of seeds

"Today, gigantic companies control the rights to the sale of seeds and to food-production. Ten multinational companies such as Monsanto,

Novartis, DuPont, etc. control 40% of the seeds in the whole world. (Not surprisingly, the same ten companies also control 40% of the agro-chemical market). Seed production which was essen-



Dominique Guillet

tially a natural, self-sustaining process is now governed by industrial and market concerns. Seeds are engineered in the laboratories of these companies so that they no longer have the capacity to reproduce. Even a hybrid produced by cross-pollination of two varieties of the same species does not have a high viability rate for continued reproduction. And at the extreme end of this engineered madness is the "terminator" seed developed by Monsanto that is genetically manipulated to self-

destruct--to sterilize not only the seeds produced by the mother plant but also seeds of other plants that come in to contact with it through pollination. As I see it, by stripping the seeds of their inherent capability to reproduce, we are destroying their essential creative feminine power.

"In the last forty years, since the introduction of international patenting of seeds, over a thousand seed banks all over the world have been bought up by the multinational conglomerates. There has also been a corresponding loss of bio-diversity for to suit the marketing process only a limited number of hybrid varieties are sold in the shops and supermarkets.

Terre de Semences and Association Kokopelli

"I came into this field in the early nineties with the creation of a botanical garden to help protect the genetic biodiversity of plants. The garden was part of a social rehabilitation project that I was involved in. And Terre de Semences, a commercial outlet for naturally occurring seeds, was started in 1994 to give the necessary economic base to the social rehabilitation project. Slowly, the network of seed growers and buyers increased and Terre de Semences started operating throughout Europe. Terre de Semences has a seed collection from all over the world comprising 400 varieties of tomatoes, 100

varieties of squash, 150 varieties of lettuce and so on.

"One-and-a-half years ago, France passed a new law that requires a fee of US \$200 to be paid annually for each traditional variety of seed possessed by a seed company but not registered in the national list. It will be financially impossible for Terre de Semences to meet this requirement. So I started a non-profit seed-exchange association, Association Kokopelli with over 5,000 members in different European countries that will continue the work of Terre de Semences in protecting the bio-diversity of plants. The members of Association Kokopelli support it by paying a membership fee in exchange for which they get our catalogue and free seeds. We ask our members to grow and collect seeds so that Association Kokopelli can distribute them in the poor countries of Asia and South America. This humanitarian cause is liked by all. Luckily we have the support of the public and the sympathy of the press, for without it we would have been wiped out by the political-commercial nexus of seed business long ago."

The Revelation project

As chance would have it, the first person that Dominique met in Auroville was Stephan from Revelation Farm, and the Farm Group had just received a grant from Stichting de Zaaier to start a seed-bank.

"Essentially the ground is ripe", says Dominique, "to introduce the seed-exchange programme of Association Kokopelli in Auroville. I propose to start 'Annadana' (meaning 'gift of food' in Sanskrit), a network of

small farmers and growers in India and other countries of South East Asia who will be given free seeds for sowing. Bernard, who for long while headed a national organic farmers association, has many contacts in India, and I myself am in touch with some growers in Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. Auroville would act as the seed bank and the central distribution centre. I already have the necessary know-how to manage a database of seeds and to make a catalogue. So with a small grant, the whole enterprise would sustain itself. I have already given many varieties of seeds to Stephan which are suitable for this tropical climate. And in a few months time, I will be coming back to Auroville for a year or two with more seeds in my bag.

"India is perhaps the most suitable country in which to host such a programme. Seventy percent of her population still depends on the land, and it has an ancient tradition, still alive in certain areas, of preserving seeds, exchanging them and giving them away. The multinational seed business has already come to India, but the laws are not so stringent yet, and if we can establish a wide network of small growers, truly start a people's movement, then it cannot be wiped out by some commercial giant.

"Auroville has a crucial role to play in this. And it has to learn to give. I do not want the seeds to be sold. I want them to be given away free. I hope this seed-exchange project effects a spiritual change; for after all seeds are the gift of life and the promise of the future."

Interview by Bindu

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