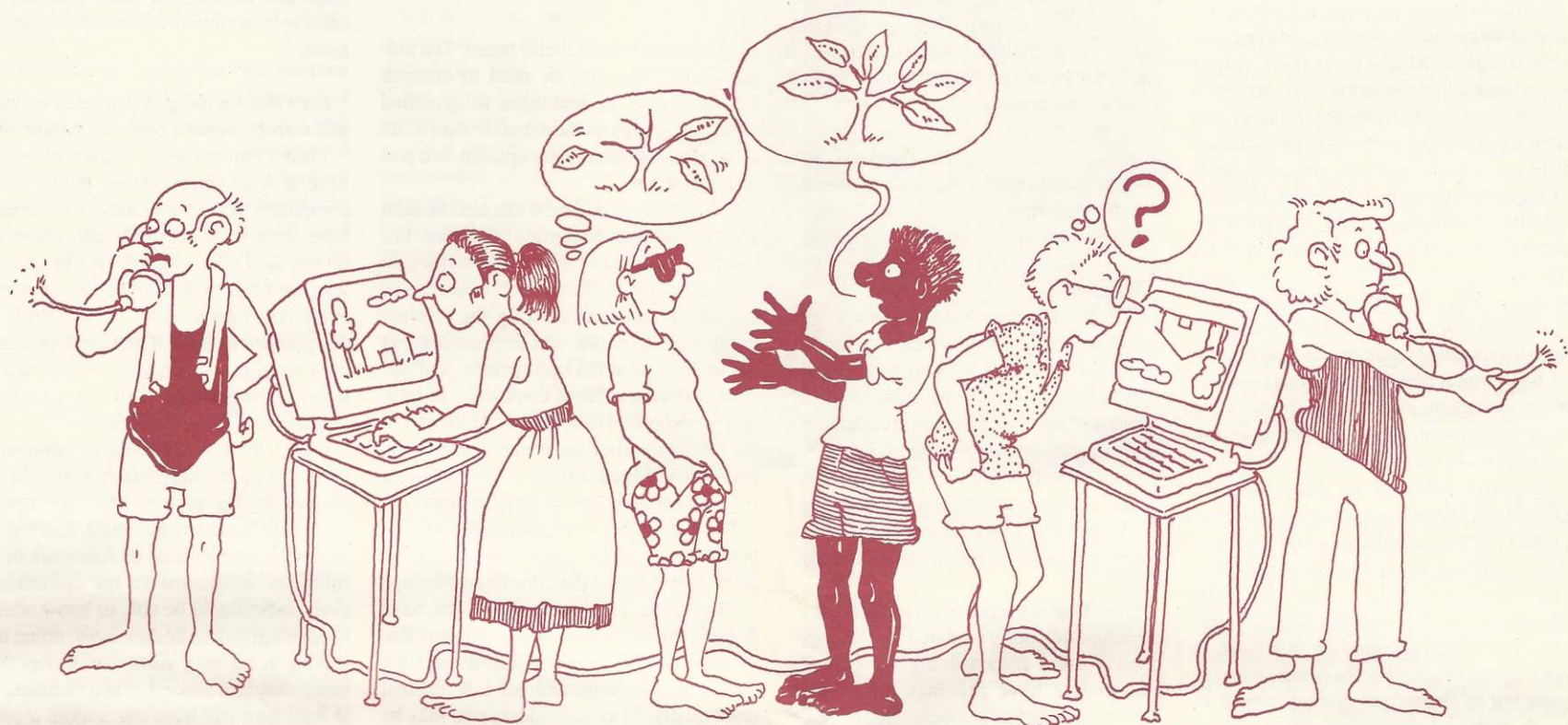


AUROVILLE TODAY

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Communication and the community

The Auroville of today probably has as many telephone and computers per capita as any city in the West, but... how well do we communicate with each other? Alan gives his personal view.

How well do we communicate with each other in Auroville? It's a very difficult question to answer, both because different people have different communication needs and expectations, and because we communicate in many different ways—verbally, emotionally, 'vibrationally' etc.—and for many different reasons; to transmit information, to release strongly held feelings, to 'commune' through deep, inner experiences etc. Nevertheless, two 'levels' of communication can be identified as crucial in terms of what we are trying to do here. There is the level of concrete, factual information, and there is the level of our deeper intuitions and inner experiences.

In terms of the communication of factual information, more seems to be happening today than, say, ten years ago. We have the information directory, for example, and frequent updates on activities like 'Village Action' through the 'Auroville News'. Nevertheless, many Aurovilians—and even more Newcomers—seem to feel that we can do much more to communicate information on topics as diverse as building a house, how the Entry Group operates, or what Sri Aurobindo and Mother wrote about a particular subject.

As to sharing our deeper intuitions and experiences—well, it happens, but generally among friends and in small, intimate groupings. And even there, I would guess, not very often. It certainly happens only rarely in larger meetings. Of course, both Sri Aurobindo and Mother stressed that important inner experiences are not to be voiced indiscriminately as this will rapidly 'dilute' them. Nevertheless, an enterprise dedicated to human unity

seems to require a certain discriminating sharing at this level, both as a means of mutual support and as a reminder of our deep connectedness.

How to improve both the communication of facts and of this inner dimension? The 'technological' answer is to improve the physical modes of communication. More messengers, telephones, linked computers, a weekly newspaper or extended 'Auroville News', an Auroville radio station etc.etc. The assumptions here are that many people want to communicate and that they simply lack the physical means; or that the provision of the means will raise people's communication-willingness threshold. There's something in this—an Auroville of dirt roads, vast distances and no telephones or messengers doesn't exactly encourage communication—but it doesn't seem to be the whole story. After all, the Auroville of today probably has as many telephone and computers per capita as any city in the West. And it's highly questionable that the communication of inner experiences is directly dependent upon the technical means available...

An equally, if not more, potent factor in preventing better communication is the psychological factor. Here we tread on controversial ground. But it does seem that the failure of Auroville so far to develop a genuine communication culture has something to do with a 'siege' mentality that, arising out of the real threats to Auroville's existence in the later 1970's and early 1980's, resulted in the withholding or embargoing of sensitive information from people both within and outside the community. Today the atmosphere is more relaxed. But a certain... habit lingers on which prevents

communication becoming as automatic as breathing.

On a more personal level of communication there are other psychological constraints. Auroville today is not a place that values and encourages an intimate, 'heart-centred' level of communication between its inhabitants. Partly, perhaps, this is due to suspicion of 'sentimentality' and of the worst excesses of the 'New Age' movement in the West; partly it's a feeling that 'we are not here for that', and that the sharing of personal problems is somehow a deviation or distraction from the yoga; and partly, perhaps, it's due to a feeling of personal inadequacy in the face of Auroville's ideals and a resulting embarrassment about communicating ones 'failure' to others.

But when we turn to the next level of communication, of our deepest experiences of the self and of its relationship to the Divine, we touch upon a whole new range of problems which are neither technological or psychological, but which relate to the nature of language and of communication itself.

So let's try to get back to basics. Communication has to do with connectedness; the transmission of 'information'—which may be feelings as much as facts—between two or more points. Once we grasp this, we see that communication is of the essence of life itself. Apart from the most elevated connection—life being upheld and informed by a supreme Will—our individual bodies are processing and communicating within themselves thousands of bits of information every second to keep them in a

This issue of AUROVILLE TODAY touches upon the topic of communication, which is an essential aspect of the Auroville's journey towards an 'actual human unity'. How well do we, as a community, communicate with each other? What types of communication are we talking about? What are the obstacles to better communication? And how can communication be improved?

We also highlight a problem that intensifies every year—the widespread use of pesticides on cashew fields adjacent to Auroville land—and we focus upon the community of 'Eternity', catching up on the efforts of Yuval, his family and friends, to transform a once-neglected stretch of beach into a vibrant contribution to Auroville's future.

state of healthy equilibrium. At another level, physicists point out that everything is interconnected, not just through electromagnetic fields, but also through a continual interchange of energy and sub-atomic particles. The result? We cannot do anything, or even think anything—for thought is energy—without affecting, or being affected by, everything else. We are inextricably woven into a communicating universe, whether we like it or not.

Communication at the sub-atomic or micro-levels in the body normally works superbly. The problem comes when we consider a form of intentional communication like language. Because language is a product of the mind, with all the mind's strengths and weaknesses. Language allows us, for example, to communicate with others across space and time, and to employ useful tools like abstraction and generalisation. On the other hand, language is a set of symbols, not the thing-in-itself. At the level of ordering a meal, this is not a problem. But the more subtle or complex the experience
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we wish to convey, the less adequate language becomes as a container for that experience; Mother frequently noted that language was unable to communicate the full depth of her realizations.

In fact, if we look, say, at how the body communicates within itself, we discover an intricate network of receptors and transmitters which communicate and receive, at incredible velocities, impulses or vibrations which may originate at any point in space, or beyond. The body, in this sense, has no specific limits, but inhabits, as a concentration of vibrations, a vibratory universe. Interestingly, Mother herself often experienced this vibratory level, both as a direct emanation from the Source, and therefore far more immediate and accurate than any mental language, and as an interchange among people. "The interchange of vibrations among people is something tremendous, and we're swimming in it, all, all, all the time—even when we're alone! Because these things travel: for instance, it's enough for someone's thought to come and strike against yours, and for you to think of him (which means responding) —there is an immediate effect in the body. So to imagine that solitude would make yoga any easier is sheer childishness."

And the solution to this vibratory crossfire? "The only possible solution is so perfect a union with the supreme Vibration that everything is automatically put under His influence." (Mother's Agenda, 4.8.62) This is extremely interesting because it implies that communication, at this level, is not a matter of reaching for communication tools but of 'being', of putting oneself in touch with and resonating with a certain vibration, which would then automatically link the self with all others who are 'tuned' to that same vibration. Mother described this process as 'contagion'.

What are the implications of all this for Auroville? The two key insights which emerge—of the interrelatedness of all, and of the need to align oneself with and act from the highest 'vibration' or level—make it clear that communication, at all levels, begins with the self. For if every thought as well as every act has its effect upon the whole community—and beyond—it's clear that we must, firstly, become much more self-aware about what we are 'transmitting' and how it relates to the needs of the larger community. And, secondly, take responsibility for trying to communicate the highest aspect of ourselves through subordinating our multiple sub-aspects to what Mother called the 'supreme Vibration'.

In practical terms, this does not mean that we should neglect conventional forms of communication, but that we should use them more consciously, and with an awareness of how they can help the process, even while we reach for something else. So we do need to improve the technical means, to link together computers and data bases, to build language laboratories, to create more informal meeting-places, to improve the organisation and process of our meetings. And, on the psychological level, to create a climate of trust and understanding to encourage an opening of our hearts and minds. Beyond this, however, we need—both as individuals and as a community—to allow moments, spaces, 'accidents', for that other level beyond words to manifest; to attune, more and more, to a 'vibratory' language which is more responsive to the movements of the Becoming, and truer to our deepest intuitions and guidance. To reach, finally, that point where the medium and the message are one, where our 'message', our communication, is our lives...

Alan

INTERVIEW

A new communication initiative: the electronic bulletin board

ULLI is one of the managers of computer factory 'Aurelec', with special responsibility for research and development; THEO has recently set up a unit for the specialized processing of computer-related data, desktop publishing etc. Together, they are interested in initiating a project that could revolutionize communication in the community. AUROVILLE TODAY went to learn more...

AVT: How successful are we as a community in communicating information between ourselves?

Ulli: I think we are doing very poorly.

Why?

Ulli: We lack the right tools, or we don't use them in the most effective way. The 'Auroville News', while it does a reasonable job, is not a good forum for the communication and discussion of issues because it only comes out once a week, and there are constraints upon what can be published. As for the Residents Assembly (R.A.) meetings, they have proved ineffective as a means of communicating information.

Theo: One of the problems is that the R.A. meetings are poorly prepared; for example, nobody takes responsibility for ensuring that people have relevant information before the meeting happens. So, over the years, many people have become accustomed to a poor level of communication and are no longer pushing hard for something better.

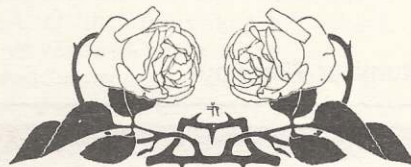
Ulli: It's clear that a R.A. meeting of 60 to 100 people will find it very difficult to work out the solution to a difficult problem. Such a meeting can reflect the mood of the house, or can operate as a final decision maker. But in terms of providing information and debating an issue in depth, we need something else.

Such as?

Ulli: First of all, we should see that we are not without communication tools in the community. At present, we have 180 telephone connections and between 80-100 computers. In other words, for a community with a population of about 700 people, we probably have, proportionately, more telephones and computers than a large city in the West! However, we are not using them as efficiently as we could.

Our suggestion is to set up a computer-based bulletin board system in the community. Technically, this means having a central computer, operated by a full-time system manager, which will be linked with other computers in the community through telephone lines. Each computer in the system will need to have access to a telephone line and will need to be fitted with an inexpensive 'modem' to connect it to this line. Then anyone can use any computer on the network to connect with the central computer and so retrieve information from, or insert additional information into, what is termed the 'bulletin board'.

Theo: One application of the bulletin board is the creation of an information pool or data base. This is useful because we have a tremendous variety of information in Auroville which is not generally available at present. A bulletin board, for example, would allow somebody who is building a house for the first time to draw upon the experiences of others who had 'fed in' what



they learned to the bulletin board. The bulletin board can also be used to transmit personal mail or messages to specified people or groups on the network. And it can be used to test community opinion, in a poll or referendum.

Ulli: The bulletin board can also be used for the ongoing discussion of issues. For example, if there is a problem relating to town planning, the basic information can be put on the bulletin board by the relevant group or individuals, and then anyone can log in, read what has been written, and add their comments. These comments, in turn, can be responded to by others. At the end of the week, or earlier, the system operator can print out an edited version of the discussion for publication in the 'Auroville News'.

The advantages of the electronic bulletin board system is that people don't have to be at the same place at the same time to engage in discussion, and the fact that people have to put their responses in writing means that they are obliged to think a little about what they are expressing, and not just respond emotionally. Also, individuals who may be unable to express themselves in a large meeting would find it much easier on the bulletin board.

The bulletin board would not replace the Residents Assembly meetings or work

groups. It's very difficult, for example, to translate certain feelings, or pick up on a group mood, when using an electronic medium, and meetings also provide a certain opportunity for a group wisdom to manifest. But the bulletin board can provide important information and widen the discussion in the initial stages of processing an issue.

Isn't there a danger that such a system will merely create a communication elite?

Theo: From the beginning it is planned to have at least three or four public access computers where anybody who doesn't have their own computer can come and access the bulletin board. In five years or less, we hope to have linked computers in every community. Also, the system is not designed for experts. If you can type a letter on a word processor, you can operate the bulletin board; if you can't, the basic training can be given in 2 hours.

Ulli: I think it will enlarge community participation because many people will participate in this system who won't go to Residents Assembly meetings. And regarding topics like Friends of Auroville or the rules for admission to the community, everybody should be able to know what is happening, and make their input, rather than leaving it all to a particular group. That group may still make the final decision, but at least they will have much more input to help them make it.

Theo: To communicate or not is a personal decision; it can't be solved at a technical level. But I think the bulletin board can trigger a whole new process of information

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The electronic bulletin board sounds like a great idea. However, it depends on the quality of the telephone lines, which occasionally leaves a little to be desired...

A bad connection...

Caller: Hello?

CSR: Hello

Caller: Hello?

CSR: Hell-o-wo.

Caller: (shouting) IS THAT C.S.R.?

CSR: Siesta? No, I'm fully awake. It's just a bad line.

Caller: Yes, I'm fine. I want to order a press.

CSR: Dress? Contact the Boutique.

Caller: No, not antique. A new one—it's the manual type.

CSR: Oh, channels. You need Tency.

Caller: Ten what? Is that the price? Ten thousand?

CSR: Ten thousand channels? That's enough for a town!

Caller: What? Pounds? You want to be paid in foreign exchange?

CSR: No, not much of a range. They just come in different lengths. And width 70 centis.

Caller: Yes, send it to me when it's ready.

CSR: Right, Mr. Geddy. What's your address?

Caller: Yes, the press. The one they call 'Auram'.

CSR: Ah, Boreham... Isn't that in the U.K.?

Caller: If it's O.K. with you, it's O.K. with me.

CSR: (Suddenly realizing something is wrong) Hey, wait a minute, aie!

Caller: 'Bye.

Alan

'We need to reinfuse knowledge with wisdom'

PHOTO ALAN

MARTI MUELLER is a writer, painter and photographer who has been based in Auroville for ten years. Before coming here, she had been a professional journalist and writer, and had also lectured on philosophy at the Sorbonne University in Paris.

A few years ago, along with her partner Forrest, she initiated an environmental education project, called 'Children and Trees'. Since then, they have written and published a series of environmental booklets which have been translated into a number of different languages, and used at all levels from primary school children to university graduates.

AUROVILLE TODAY spoke to her recently about her work and the motivation behind it.

AVT: What gave you the original idea for 'Children and Trees'?

Forrest and I read an article in 'India Today' about the environmental holocaust in India. We realized that to stop this, there had to be a change in consciousness about the environment—and if this was to happen, it had to happen among young people, who make up 50% of the Indian population. So we looked around to see if any educational materials existed on this topic which related to the developing world. There was almost nothing. So we decided to create the materials ourselves.

The basic idea was to present a problem and a feasible, easily adoptable solution. So each booklet in the 'Children and Trees' series takes one theme and presents it in this way. 'A Child and a Tree' focusses on reforestation; 'Mala the Mongoose' is about land management and water conservation; 'Elephant and the Dragonfly' deals with the need to preserve wildlife habitats; 'The Secret of the Mango Grove' is about biodiversity and the role of women in relationship to nature; and the most recent one, 'Population', is about human numbers and resources. In addition to the booklets, we've also created teachers' packs, posters and a video.

A complement to the 'Children and Trees' project is 'Shanta Books'. So far, we've published three small collections of poetry, an essay on the relationship between the East and the West, and several papers.

Both visually and verbally, the 'Children and Trees' booklets are very simply presented. Were you aiming them specifically at younger children?

We had originally intended them for the 8—12 years old age group. But they have been used, in different ways, by all ages and all levels, from very young children up to university graduates! They have also been used in many different cultural contexts. Their appeal is based upon the fact that the message of each booklet is so simple that it can be understood and adapted by anyone, whatever his or her culture and upbringing.

There are other reasons for making the presentation simple. The world at present is changing and the planet is being destroyed so rapidly that there is only time to communicate the most essential information, to find the really common elements that speak to all, and to communicate them in the simplest way. Also, because the resources we have in Auroville to produce books are

limited, it was clear that we had to come up with books that would be easy to produce and not cost very much to produce in local cultural contexts.

Yet, out of this need to improvise, to make do with little here, something very interesting often results. For example, I recently gave a presentation at the new Auroville College that Janet and Philip have tried to initiate. I had one hour to talk about different cultural perceptions of nature from 50,000 B.C. to the present—and to an audience which included many non-English speakers who needed everything to be translated! At the Sorbonne, I would have taken about ten hours to cover this topic. But here, in refining and refining my ideas, and in deciding to use pictures and symbols, I came up with something essential and precise. And this was a direct result of working with all the constraints here.

While the 'Children and Trees' series seem to be of universal appeal, the books are also rooted in a specific South Indian context. Have you received feedback that has helped you present this culture more accurately?

Yes, we learned a lot from the feedback we received. For example, in the original edition of 'A Boy and a Tree' we showed the boy without a shirt. But it was pointed out that no child in Tamil Nadu goes to school without a shirt as the State provides one for every child attending. Similarly, we were told that we had portrayed the teacher too glamorously—her shoulders were bare!—and that she had to be presented as a 'serious' person who was always carrying a book. Actually, we wrote the first book with my son in mind. But then it was also pointed out to us that the story was a bit too gender-specific; that, in India, girls play a more important role in relationship to trees than boys, because it is the girls who collect firewood and water the trees. So, while we kept the boy as the focus of the story, we retitled the book 'A Child and a Tree'. This feedback stayed with me, however, so that in our latest book—'The Secret of the Mango Grove'—it is the King's daughter who, with her intuitive wisdom and natural connection to nature, is the heroine.

In other ways, we took great care to be realistic about how they do things in the villages around here. When the boy wants to plant a tree, for example, we show him first going to his parents. Then the parents take the idea to the village elders who, in turn, decide how to get the trees that the boy and his friends will plant and care for.

How does this work that you've taken up in Auroville relate to your personal development?

The work is not unrelated to what I was doing before. I have a background both as an academic and as a professional journalist and freelance writer. However, when I came to Auroville, I never dreamed that I would



start writing books for children. It happened, as I mentioned, as a result of necessity. But in Auroville, I am always pushed to extremes, to my limits—to be true to myself. In fact, the very lack of glamorous communication techniques here forces you to be true to yourself, as does the relative anonymity with which we do our work. I came out of a highly competitive scene. What I've learned in Auroville is to contribute in a quiet way—it's a really nice feeling.

Yet, every year you return for some months to the West to work in French television. How do you find it, living in such different worlds?

What I bring to the French context is a calmness which comes from Auroville and from India, from a deeper way of being and a sense of what's really important. On the other hand, what I learn in France is about perfection and excellence. And this is something we need to know much more about in Auroville. Whenever I return to Auroville, I feel a tremendous sense of aspiration and inspiration here. Most of my ideas are generated here—but the quality of the execution, the understanding of whom I am reaching and the confidence to go ahead with it comes more from the Western context. It's a nice interplay of two different worlds.

As a communicator, what do you think is the most important message that needs to be communicated today?

Our planet is dying; we are on the edge of a precipice. What I see is that in the modern world we've acquired a tremendous amount of knowledge about certain things, but that what we need is to reinfuse that knowledge with wisdom. We need a new synthesis where human beings are seen only as a small part of the web. Since the time of the ancient Greeks, we've been parcelling, analysing, focussing upon differences. Now we need to emphasise that the world is truly one, that we are united, that all the parts make a whole. At some level, in spite of our problems, we have all the basic insights here in Auroville. The challenge is to live them and to communicate them experientially.

Interview by Alan,
4.5.93

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collection, discussion and dissemination in the community.

Do you assume that an improvement in the physical communication infrastructure will be sufficient to improve the quality of how we communicate and discuss issues?

Ulli: The bulletin board is not suitable for all topics; you wouldn't use it for dealing with sensitive interpersonal issues. But if you are talking about where, for example, to site a new swimming pool, I think the bulletin board would be a much better tool than the 'Auroville News'.

Theo: Auroville is still, in many respects, a village, cut off from the larger world. We can't afford to be so isolated much longer. Through the bulletin board we could also link up with global information networks—like GreenNet—and so gain access to information that could help us solve particular problems, or assist us in our general development. In the same way, Auroville International members and friends all over the world could log into the Auroville bulletin board from their own computers and get updates or send us essential information. Perhaps they could even participate in our debates!

Ulli: We are not talking about a new technology. Bulletin boards have been standard in many universities for the past 12 years; Auroville International USA is also using them now. The technology is here, it's not a problem of money, and in terms of the availability and distribution of telephones and computers in the community, we seem to have reached a point of critical mass. The moment we have someone willing to manage the central computer, I commit myself to provide the essential hardware. The first step could then be to put the Auroville Information Directory and information for the Auroville News on the network, and it's already working. In fact, this system allows any number of different issues of the 'Auroville News' to be made available to different interest groups in the community each week. Or, the 'Auroville News' could remain basically a summary of the week's events; people would then log in to the bulletin board to read about the fuller details of any issue.

You see the bulletin board as just one way of improving communication in Auroville. What else is needed?

Ulli: Something has to happen in ourselves. We have to be more self-critical and not pretend as a community to have achieved something we have not; to be honest with ourselves and with our children. Also, we need meeting-places for a relaxed, informal exchange of ideas, something that really only happens for me at present on Sunday mornings at the beach!

We all need to become better communicators, to develop an ethic of communication in the community which no longer accepts sloppy or inadequate communication of important information.

For me, the term 'the collective' has always been an enigma, a kind of Koan. I know, because Mother stressed it, that the collective approach is the key to Auroville's relevance, but we haven't yet found the way to unlock that door successfully. Community needs to happen on two levels: on the practical, physical level and on the larger, inner level which is very difficult to grasp. But I think that once we have created the material basis for community through tools like the bulletin board, the other level will be able to evolve and to express itself.

Interview by Alan,
20.5.93

In the West, cashew nuts spill out of beautiful tins and are an ideal accompaniment to a cool beer on a sunny boulevard. But there is another side to it, as Auroville knows to its cost...

Every year, between the months of January and May, Auroville experiences the cashew phenomenon; the heavy scent of its flowers, the cries of village children in the fields, the crash of leaves as the nuts are shaken down... and the pervasive smell of heavy chemicals which sting the throat and sometimes cause headaches and even vomiting. For in this part of the world, at least as far as the villagers are concerned, cashew production and pesticide spraying are now inextricably linked. Why has this happened? What problems does this pose both for the villagers and for Auroville? And what can be done about it?

Beginnings

The cashew tree (*Anacardium occidentale*) is not new to India; the Portuguese brought it with them over 400 years ago. However, for many years it was grown mainly on the West coast of the country, and only in the past 15-20 years has it become a major crop in the Auroville area. This happened because the cashew harvests failed in Africa in the 1970's, and the West coast processors could no longer keep up with the demand from the U.S. and Europe for the nuts—cashew is an export crop—and looked to other areas to make up the short-fall.

In the beginning, the local cashew farmers used natural pest control methods. These included keeping the ground clear of rotting fruits (which attract insects), spreading fine wood ash or the ash of cow dung on the leaves before flowering, and burning the semi-dry leaves of cashew, neem or mango around the trees during the flowering season. As a local village elder put it, 'The pests were there in those days, but never in sufficient numbers to be a problem'. Now the local farmers often complain that the pests are increasing every year, and that the only way they can control them is through using pesticides—even though the cashew is a hardy tree, and in major plantation areas like Kerala pesticides are rarely used. So what happened round here?

The seed of the problem

A number of factors were responsible. In the last few decades, many local farmers left the land, disillusioned—among other things—by a pricing system for farm products that bears little relationship to the cost and effort of raising a crop. Their children, in turn, rather than working long hours in the fields, often preferred to seek higher status, less physically demanding work or more profitable work in Pondicherry or Auroville. In addition, the local inheritance tradition, by which the deceased father's lands are distributed equally among his sons, meant that the average land holdings were becoming smaller and smaller, and therefore less capable of supporting the family through traditional farming. In fact, the average landholding in the area is only 1-2 acres, and nowadays the income from this land is invariably used as a supplement to a regular income earned elsewhere; there are few 'real' farmers left.

In such a situation, the cashew tree seemed a godsend. It is tough and drought-resistant with no appeal to marauding goats and requiring little maintenance. Above all, it offers a good income. The result? The local villagers abandoned traditional dry-crop agriculture and planted these 'miracle' trees in their thousands, creating a monocrop pattern over much of the local

land. Such monocrop plantation is a paradise for pests.

Another factor is the role played by agro-business in the local economy. Agro-business—the production and distribution of hybrid seeds, chemical fertilisers and pesticides etc.—is big business. The income from the sales of the five largest U.S. multinationals exceed the GNP of almost every African nation, and of many of the nations in South-East Asia as well. A large number of the developing nations have become heavily dependent upon the products of these companies, as foreign governments often specify that agricultural aid—which helped to fuel the 'Green Revolution'—is conditional upon buying the products of these companies.

Until about eight years ago, only the most affluent of the local farmers, engaged in growing rice or sugarcane, had contacts with the local agro-business representatives who sold hybrid seeds, fertilisers and pesticides. Then, however, the representatives began visiting the cashew fields and offering free samples of inorganic growth accelerators to a few of the farmers to apply around one or two trees. The inorganic fertilisers gave a quick mineral boost to the tree and caused it to absorb more water, making it very quickly look much greener and healthier. So the farmers bought more. However, the quick growth attracted the pests—some of which were already breeding on the adjacent sugarcane and rice fields—as the tree became cooler and juicier.

What happened next? The cashew farmers had to start buying pesticides from the ubiquitous representatives. For the first few years, all seemed well as the yields were higher and the pests were kept under control. Soon, however, the pests became resistant with new species appearing, and even more toxic pesticides—and more frequent applications—became necessary to control them; a phenomenon known as the 'pesticide treadmill'. Sooner or later, while the farmers pay progressively more for their growth regulators and pesticides, their yield will start to fall off as the inorganic fertilisers will have depleted the natural minerals in the soil, and the pesticides will have killed off the pollinators. A recent study confirms that the pesticide treadmill is well established among cashew growers in this area, and there is evidence that yields are beginning to drop. The major cashew pest—the tea mosquito—is already resistant to most pesticides; as a local farmer put it, "I believe that in five years the pests will get so bad that none will die from the chemicals".

The whole situation is complicated by the fact that the majority of the local farmers don't understand what is happening. Cashew is a relatively new crop around here. Therefore, they depend heavily upon advice from the pesticide merchants (who often employ agricultural graduates to sell their products) or from government agricultural advisers who also share the same 'inorganic' philosophy. Recent enquiries in this area reveal, however, that the pesticide merchants in particular often recommend the wrong products in wrong doses, and tend to emphasise the need for preventive spraying—which accelerates the pesticide treadmill—rather than spraying only after the pests appear.

Some basic facts

So what are the facts? Crop losses are due not only to pests: unseasonal rains also

prevent the setting of the cashew fruits. However, pests there definitely are. The most common ones are the tea-mosquito bug and a reddish brown bug (*Helopeltis antonii*) which suck the stems; flower worms; and various wood and stem boring caterpillars, some of which lay eggs in fissures at the bottom of the trunk, and some of which destroy the leaves. In addition, a fungus sometimes affects the flowers during damp weather, and many flowers and nuts may fall off in the early months due to heavy dew or rain showers.

The preventive spraying of pesticides begins in mid December after the rains are over. Spraying to eliminate specific pests begins a little later. On average, the local growers spray five times during the main season—every 15 days during January and February and the first part of March.

Pesticides are some of the deadliest manufactured poisons. India is the largest producer and consumer of pesticides in South Asia... and in India, pesticides are used more intensively in Tamil Nadu than in any other State!

Among the most common pesticides used in the area around Auroville are Methyl Parathion (Metacid 50) and BHC (Benzene Hexachloride). Both are classified as 'extremely hazardous' by the World Health Organization (WHO) and are either banned or heavily controlled in the West. BHC, which has been banned in the U.S. since 1978, is an organochlorine and is more toxic than its 'relative' DDT. It attacks the organism through being ingested. Methyl Parathion—at present, the most popular pesticide locally—is 60 times more toxic than DDT. Moreover, sunlight converts it to paraoxon, which is 4 times more toxic than parathion! (Some farmers mix different pesticides together in a 'cocktail'; this makes them more lethal still.) Methyl Parathion is most toxic when it is inhaled. Farmers also spray Monocrotophos, which is classified by the WHO as 'highly hazardous'. Until recently, some local farmers were also spraying Endrin, another highly toxic organochlorine, and 2,4-D. The latter was one of the components of 'Agent Orange', the notorious defoliant used in the Vietnam war.

It is estimated that only one insect in a thousand is a pest. Yet all these pesticides are broad-spectrum and kill everything—the pollinators (like honey bees), the predators and vital micro-organisms and organisms like the earthworm—as well as the pests. The organophosphates enter the food and water chain, concentrating in the bodies of animals which are higher up the chain—like owls and eagles—and causing infertility, mutations and birth defects in these animals. Pesticides also reduce the natural fertility and water-holding capacity of the soil, they reduce the genetic diversity of plant species, and they lower the drought resistance of crops; apart from building resistance in many of the pests!

And their effect upon people? The WHO lists among other health hazards: nausea, skin and allergic reactions, lesions, disruptions of the nervous system, cataracts, sterility, delayed neurotoxicity, weakening of the immune system and cancer. The WHO estimates there is one case of pesticide poisoning in the developing countries every minute—and this doesn't take into account birth defects, still births and pesticide-related cancers. In fact, although India uses just 2% of the world's pesticides, 50% of the world's pesticide poisoning cases—and 75% of the resultant deaths—occur here. Studies have shown that those

The true cos

likely to be most susceptible to pesticide poisoning are children and people suffering from malnutrition and weakened resistance, as tends to be the case in the villages around here. All of the pesticides used locally are dangerous or highly dangerous, and require the use of elaborate safety precautions during spraying. However, while appropriate instructions are written on the containers in all the major Indian languages, few of the local farmers can read, and fewer still seem to care. In the area around Auroville, village children are often seen in the fields during spraying, and no



protective clothing is worn by the sprayers. As a local professional sprayer explained, "If we took all the precautions recommended by the companies and the agricultural graduates, we could only spray one acre in the time it takes us now to spray six." But poisoning doesn't only occur through direct contact with the spray. Some organophosphates like BHC are very resistant to decomposition, and can seep down through the soil into the water table; others are absorbed by the food products sprayed. Ironically, the Western countries which have allowed pesticides, banned in their own countries, to be manufactured and exported to the developing world now receive them back on imported rice and fruits. The pesticide circle is closed.

It is extremely difficult to get accurate figures about how many people in the Auroville area have suffered from pesticide poisoning. The most common symptoms—nausea, headaches and diarrhoea—are also the symptoms of other common diseases around here, and some of the most virulent consequences, like tumours, may not manifest for 15 years. Also, the death of a villager by pesticide poisoning—either accidental or intentional—is likely to be concealed by the family, as it would require the body to be sent for autopsy, something they always try to prevent. Nevertheless, in a recent survey of cashew growers and field workers in the area, 71% reported experiencing poisoning symptoms at one time or another. Dr. Kamala Tewari of the Auroville Health Centre also points out that the incidence of respiratory problems among Aurovilians and villagers increases dramatically during the spraying season—normally the coolest and healthiest time of year—and is convinced there is a causal link,

of cashews

"although the villagers don't want to recognise it." One professional sprayer admitted, however, that he had persistent symptoms of dizziness, blurred vision, fatigue and restlessness, which are indications of organophosphate poisoning.

Villagers' attitudes to the health risks vary. "The pesticide illness is not a problem because it goes away so soon," reports one farmer. Another remarked, "If I work with chemicals for 5-10 years, I can build up resistance to poisoning. It's even possible to build up resistance to cancer this way." A more typical remark came from another

This year, the harvest is not good, and cashew prices are already down by at least one third due to competition from Brazil in the international cashew growers market. Nevertheless, the cashew continues to provide a substantial income for the local farmers. At last year's prices, a well-managed field can yield Rs.10,000 of nuts per acre. The cost of inorganic fertilisers and pesticides is now between Rs. 1,500-2,000 an acre, and while it keeps rising—and the pests are beginning to proliferate—the farmers still feel they are ahead of the game. "What other crop can give me this income?" asks one. Subramaniam of AGRC confirms this. "There is nothing else that can yield such a good income on this soil, and nothing else that is so well adapted to the lazy farmer mentality which now predominates in this area."

Any solution, then, should begin by addressing the farmers' needs of a good income. "We have to help them see," says Subramaniam, "that if they continue along the same lines, their income will soon start to fall because the chemicals are depleting their soil." A first, practical step, then, would be to help them break the pesticide treadmill by showing them how to use the fertiliser and pesticide products more safely and economically—to stop prophylactic or preventive spraying, for example, and to enable them to distinguish between pests, predators and pollinating species—and to encourage them to space their cashew trees at optimum intervals—at least 12 metres apart—to encourage better growth and wind circulation. It should be pointed out that, as only 14% of the flowers of a tree are bisexual, many flowers will not reach fruition for natural causes, and not because of pests or viruses. Other simple remedial measures would include ensuring that rotting fruit—which attracts pests—is not left

ques, is more complicated. "We should make comparative studies of organic and inorganically grown cashew fields," notes Subramaniam, "to convince the villagers that they don't have to spray chemicals to get a good crop." Such controlled experiments have not yet been carried out, but Ardhendu of AGRC notes that a group of village farmers did participate in a small experiment a few years ago. The result? "There was little difference between the yield of the trees which were managed organically and those which were managed 'chemically'." But one or two other small experiments seem to indicate that the yield can drop quite dramatically when a farmer changes over to organic methods (the equivalent of what homeopaths term the 'healing crisis'), and that it may take a minimum of five years before the soil has recovered sufficiently for reasonable yields to be attained once more. This fear is a potent reason for the village farmers—who cannot afford a five year 'loss'—to hang on to pesticides, and to the hope that new chemical formulations will somehow manage to keep them ahead of the pests. Those farmers who might want to revert to organic methods would also experience other problems now, because the organic material which was once plentiful in the villages is now scarce.

Other possible strategies involve gradually substituting organic pesticides for chemical pesticides, and the use of biological pest control methods. Two neem-based pesticides are available in India, but their efficacy is relatively unproven, while biological pest control in India is in its relative infancy. Recently, Dr. Manjunath of Bio-Control Research Laboratories in Bangalore visited Auroville and gave a presentation of his work, which involves the commercial breeding of predator species, parasites and pathogens to control specific pests in the farmers' fields. However, as cashew remains a crop of minor importance in India, no real work has been done as yet

on the breeding of predators or parasites that could control the cashew pest population. To remedy this, the Aurobrindavan community in Auroville has already begun to investigate the insect population of Auroville, with a view to identifying such predator species. The next step would be to breed them commercially, and then to convince the local farmers to use them in their fields, thus obviating the need for using pesticides.

The bottom line

Finally, if Auroville is serious about wanting to solve the pesticide problem in this area, it has to get more seriously involved. The Aurobrindavan initiative is one such example. AGRC is

also providing valuable training workshops in organic farming for local farmers, but even many of these continue to use chemicals, albeit more consciously. What is required is a larger movement which either involves the community taking long-term leases on village fields and making them showpieces of organic farming—so proving that 'organic' does not mean

'unprofitable'—or subsidising village farmers to 'go organic' and to diversify their crops. This has already been done on a small-scale by the Auroville organic cooperative, 'Aranyani', which guarantees to buy farmers' cashews at a higher than market price if they are grown organically. The problems so far have been that insufficient money has been available to do this on a large-scale, and the difficulty of monitoring the methods employed by these 'organic' farmers. (This problem should now be solved as the organic food cooperative has just set up a laboratory capable of detecting pesticide residues in the soil, crops and food.)

A larger problem, however, is that the life-style of Auroville is becoming less and less organic. Very few Auroville farmers are involved in growing food for the community, largely due to lack of support from the community as a whole, and more and more good agricultural land is being built upon or afforested. When Aurovilians are not perceived to value self-sufficiency in terms of food, and to cover good agricultural land with cement, how can they be models for a more organic approach to the environment in the eyes of the villagers?

This strikes at the root of the problem. For even if we solve the pesticide problem, it will be like sticking on a 'band-aid' unless we grapple with the larger issue of the values that we here in and around Auroville and in the whole world live by today. In this sense, the way the majority of local villagers 'exploit' their cashews is symbolic of a culture which has substituted the traditional land ethic, however debased it has become in recent years, for a consumer ethic which aims at maximising production while minimising input. It is a mind-set which threatens the future of the planet...

Yet, Auroville CAN make a difference, at least in its immediate bioregion. We can give much more support to our organic farmers. We can raise the present low status of the landworkers by paying them better wages and providing generous in-service training facilities. We can identify the few villagers who are still real farmers, with a genuine attachment to the land, and help them in every way to diversify their crops and to produce good, organic food for the villages and Auroville. We can set up neem and organic compost processing facilities in Auroville and experiment seriously with biological pest control. We can experiment more with growing indigenous grains. We can do many things. But to succeed, we have to care not only about eliminating pesticides, but also about changing a way of living of which pesticides are only a symptom. To replace, in other words, the values of consumerism and the 'quick-fix' mentality by those of conservation and long-term environmental responsibility. And that has to start with us... But are we ready?

Alan

Much valuable information on this topic was provided by Ardhendu and Subramaniam of the Auroville Greenwork Resource Centre and Jurgen Putz of Aurobrindavan. Other sources included:

Health and agricultural aspects of pesticide misuse by cashew growers in India: a pilot study. (Brad Mitchell and Joanne Gilby)

Circle of poison: pesticides and people in a hungry world. (David Weir and Mark Schapiro; Institute for food and development policy, San Francisco)

Pills, pesticides and profits: the international trade in toxic substances. (Ed. Ruth Norris; North River Press)

Pesticide problems, legislation and consumer action in the Third World—the Malaysian experience. (Consumers' Association of Penang)

The Hindu: Survey of the environment, 1992.

CARTOON BY LAURA LOMBARDI

farmer. "I believe pesticides have some ill-effects on the body, but I won't stop spraying because it kills the pests and I need the income from the nuts." Of course, it is often not the larger farmers but the hired labour in their fields who suffer the worst effects of spraying; and as up to 35% of the cashew fields are leased out during the season, these farmers care even less about what is happening in their fields.

The problem is compounded by the fact that the Indian Government has, until recently, imported, manufactured and actively promoted—in the name of 'The Green Revolution'—certain pesticides which have been banned for many years in the West. Pesticide poisoning is not a notifiable health hazard in this country, and the Government has set maximum tolerance levels for only 50 out of the 128 commonly used insecticides in India. No individual or organisation has ever been prosecuted for the improper use or application of pesticides. In fact, in 1989 the Director of the National Institute of Occupational Health stated that the use of pesticides was 'absolutely necessary' to increase agricultural yields, and that those spreading 'scare stories about chemicals are doing a disservice to the nation'!

Possible solutions

The continued heavy use of inorganic fertilisers and toxic pesticides is poisoning people, degrading the soil and one day will impoverish the farmer when their land, after repeatedly higher injections of chemicals, hits 'ground zero' and virtually dies as a life-supporting medium. Yet, any viable solution must begin by understanding why the cashew tree is so popular with the local farmers.

close to the trees, regular ploughing and the growing of green manure around the trees, and the timely cutting out of diseased and dead wood.

All of these steps can be taken in the context of their present farming methods, and all of them can help mitigate the worst effects of the chemicals.

The next step, which would involve a transition back to natural farming techni-



PHOTO SUSAN

Manufacturer's instructions for the application of Methyl Parathion:

"It is advisable to wear protective clothing and ensure that nose and mouth are covered. Do not use bare hands. Avoid inhalation and skin contact. Pregnant women and children should not be employed."

Eternity: Auroville's secret pearl

Anna with her five children accor-
dioned behind her on an Enfield
Bullet, and Yuval with his
resolute cheerfulness, are a familiar sight
on the Auroville roads and in the queues
at 'Pour Tous', despite the fact that they
live in a community that has traditionally
been considered as beyond the pale by
some of our more unrepentant town plan-
ners and desk-bound bureaucrats.

Eternity—situated in Pondicherry State
beyond the village of Kalapet—comprises
24 acres of land that were acquired for
Auroville in its early years. It was first
settled by Francois Samson in 1983 who,
living alone, established the first infrastruc-
ture, dug a borewell, erected a Cretan
windmill and oversaw the protection of
hundreds of trees: many of them the result
of Sunday plantings organised by greenbel-
ters from Meadow, Fertile and Samriddhi.
Francois left Auroville in 1985, and it
wasn't until 1987 when Yuval and Anna and
family moved there—after a search for a
place that corresponded to their spiritual
ideals which took them half-way round the
world and back—that Eternity, perhaps one
of Auroville's most valuable assets, was
settled once again. Francois Samson died in

scaffolding and simply thinking to him-
self, "But, these people are crazy!"

Inveterate travellers, Yuval, who is
Israeli, and Anna, who is Dutch, met on
the Greek island of Ios sixteen years
ago. They lived and travelled together
for many years through many countries
and continents, living in Kenya, Israel
and England, before returning to Hol-
land with one goal: to simply make
enough money to leave again.

In 1984, with two small children and
Anna pregnant, they set out again,
travelling on a shoe-string budget on a
trip around the world, which this time
was a quest for a particular place—a
landscape that Anna had repeatedly
seen in her visualisations during a
meditation course in Holland. "I kept
seeing a landscape alongside a beach with
a few small trees and along with it a strange
feeling that I couldn't quite place. We found
many places but not the one I had seen. We
travelled throughout the Pacific Islands, but
they weren't what we had imagined them to
be; they'd become very Christianised and
expensive. We were in New Caledonia for
a few days during an attempted coup, and
then after Tonga, we went on to New



Yuval, Anna and the children

ing I had known before." He made a long-
distance call to Anna and told her to get in
touch with a woman called Ilse, who ran the
Dutch Auroville International centre, and
arrange for an Entry Visa. "I phoned her
up", Anna remembers, "and she asked me if
I knew anything about Auroville, about Sri
Aurobindo and The Mother. I answered "Sri
Who? Whose Mother?" The next day, how-
ever, she phoned me back with some infor-
mation, telling me, "My intuition says that
I have to help you." The same day I got a
book from the library on The Mother and
although I didn't have much time to read
with all my friends and three children in the
apartment, I'd read a section every night
before going to sleep. I liked it because she
was a woman and each section cor-
responded to my thoughts and experiences
of the day."

Anna arrived with their four children
while Yuval was trying to build a capsule in
Fertile. In the beginning they both found it
tough and the people in Auroville unfriend-
ly. "It was an incredible shock as we had
expected to come to a community of
Masters where people shared everything!
Instead we found ourselves in a community
where people were unfriendly and no one
felt like giving you any information! The
kids had impetigo for months before anyone
bothered to tell us what it was, and mothers
didn't want their children to play with ours,
with an attitude towards us which was very
much 'Let's see if they stick it out here
first!'"

When Yuval found Eternity, he took Anna
out and it corresponded exactly to the place
she had seen in her meditations years
before. It had been abandoned for three
years, and when they moved there in 1987,
it was in a state of considerable neglect.
Apart from the trees that had survived and
a windmill that didn't work, there was only
a kitchen, with cow shit on the floor, no
windows or doors, a leaking roof, and one
more little house.

"My heart was bleeding", Yuval says
looking back on those first weeks, "as I
come from a place where water is sacred.
I couldn't understand why such a beauti-
ful place was neglected. I went up to
Madras and bought pipes, we fixed the
tanks and the sails on the windmill, and
made a road. It was pure karma-yoga and
for a place that didn't even belong to us!
The first few years were very exhausting.
I didn't have time to study or read, I'd just
collapse in bed in the evening. But we
found happiness, we had finally come
home, we no longer even thought of
wandering elsewhere, and the isolation
itself was a very special experience. It was

beautiful—one was face to face with
oneself."

At first the relations with the nearest vil-
lage were trying. "On Sundays the whole
village would just come and stare at us!
Offa, our three year old daughter, was ter-
rified, particularly of this woman with red
teeth who chewed betel. She thought we
were in a country full of witches. And they
stole everything!", Yuval remembers, "but
then we caught a thief one night totally by
accident. I brought him to the village and he
happened to be the most notorious and
feared thief in the area. I actually had to
finally interfere to have him released after
the villagers had buried him up to his neck
in the sand. I can explode, but I forgive
easily! Fishermen are very emotional. It
took time, but soon we were on good terms
and have been since then. I've helped them
when they had problems, such as taking
photos for them when their nets got caught
and tangled up in the outlet pipes of Chem-
fab [caustic soda factory]. Last year the
whole village attended the consecration of
our Ganesh shrine which lasted for 48
hours. There have been a few particular
moments though. When Rajiv Gandhi was
assassinated the Army was out in the middle
of the palm trees with machine guns, but we
were left alone. But it was the caste riots a
few years ago, when they were cutting
down the tamarind trees to block the roads,
that had me worried. I've lived in New
York, Belfast and Afghanistan without feel-
ing fear but that was different. It was so
volatile and unpredictable."

Five years of grit, determination and
dedicated work has turned Eternity into a
small oasis, a haven of sorts; and if one
compares what one sees now to photos of
the place taken only eight years ago, the
results are impressive. Yuval has enlarged
the existing water system, dug an open well
and erected a second windmill, with the
help of greenbelters, "who have always
supported us", as he remarks. He has
brought electricity into the place and built
two houses, two smaller guest houses and
two storerooms. This year Yuval plans to
plant a live fence around the 24 acres of
Eternity that are now sheltered by hundreds
of coconut and fruit trees of different sorts,
many of which he still waters himself once
a week, plus a wide assortment of acacia,
neem and banyan trees, and a windbreak of
casuarinas facing the sea.

As we walked around in the merciless
early afternoon sun, Yuval pointed out a
field of eighteen banyan trees his father had
planted during a visit in '92—an ap-
propriate cross-cultural gesture as it was on

continued on next page

PHOTO ROGER



A view from the windmill at Eternity

Switzerland in 1988, without having been
able to return to Auroville. A month later, a
puja was held in his memory and trees were
planted by many Aurovilians and friends in
the community he had done so much to
start.

Today an oasis of thousands of trees shel-
ters the area, shouldering the Cretan
windmill on all sides, and the contrast with
the surrounding village sands is dramatic.

A sea-turtle shell found by their kids on
the beach guards the entrance to the keel-
roofed kitchen where, after a walk, Yuval
and I sat down to join Anna. We talked over
coffee, once Yuval had managed, in a burst
of lively Hebrew, to redirect his Babel of
high-spirited children to play elsewhere.

Yuval first remembers, as a kid in the
fifties, having heard about Sri Aurobindo
from his grandfather (a Hungarian who
emigrated to Israel after having been a Port
Authority captain for many years on the
Danube) who was a great admirer of Sri
Aurobindo's philosophy. Yuval first visited
Auroville in 1972 and stayed for a couple
of months at what is now Quiet. Bicycling
out to Matrimandir at the time, he remem-
bers looking at the foundations and the first

Zealand where Offa was born. Finally in
Thailand we decided to skip India and
return again to Holland."

Back in Holland they were confronted
with the no-exit situation of a successful
middle-class life. "We had made it and the
next step was simply to get a bigger shop,
move into a larger house, and send our
children to the best progressive schools—it
was a dead-end. We wanted to study and do
yoga and were looking for a community
life, and suddenly Yuval remembered this
community he had visited in the 70's. I
trusted him to know what we were looking
for. So I let him take Jonah, our 7 year old
son, to see if Auroville might just be the
place."

Yuval remembers, "When our rickshaw
reached the Auroville turn-off and started
climbing the hill, it broke down and we had
to get out and push. Suddenly I looked up
and saw a rainbow over the Auroville
plateau. I believe in signs, and That was it!
I felt like Ali-Baba when the gate opened!
That first month I spent in Auroville I
couldn't sleep. I found Auroville unbeliev-
able, a place in the East, the energy in the
air! And a possibility to do things, if you had
the initiative, that was amazing, like noth-

Auroville and Farm Economics

The following article was written by MICHAEL ZARKY, an old friend of Auroville and an active member of Auroville International USA. Michael has supported Auroville's greenwork programme in many ways, both directly and indirectly here and in the USA. He nurtures a large garden of his own at home and has been instrumental in obtaining many kinds of seeds, old-fashioned roses, and rare fruit tree seedlings for experiments here in Auroville. Among other things he is a member of the California Rare Fruit Growers. Michael was here again recently and was immediately knee deep in our greenwork dealing with the psychology and philosophy of it as well as distributing new seeds for plants, and for thought.

How I revel in the greenness of Auroville—the orchards teeming with fruit, the beauty and coolness of the forest areas wafting exotic fragrances, and the attendant symphony of birds singing out their delight in Nature. These days we all reap the benefits of the greenwork, and newcomers can only imagine the deep effort made by the early pioneers to effect this transformation of the land. Still incomplete of course, nevertheless it is Auroville's most palpable contribution to the world at this time. Land regeneration in India, and eventually throughout the world, will continue to benefit from Auroville's inspiration. But from conversations with many farmers and greenworkers, and recent detailed articles in *Auroville Today*, I have learned how fragile the situation even within Auroville itself is, how there is less and less enthusiasm among Aurovilians to work on farms or to manage forests, and how little interest there is in eating certain local foods that are appropriate to grow in this bioregion. If our planet is to survive, to become a place with beings working and living in harmony, surely people will need to give up the destructive practices of chemical farming, of massive consumerism of earth's resources, and live within the confines of sustainable development. Yet, thirty years after Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, only a very small percentage of agriculture has turned to organic, sustainable production. The resistance, the ignorance of the populace at large is very deep, very strong. So if we cannot make it work in Auroville, where people are presumably at least semi-conscious and committed to personal and collective change, what hope is there for humanity as a whole? Auroville must strive to emerge as a shining role model in regenerative farming especially; but to achieve this we need not just a major change in our habits, but also a special insight into the economics of agriculture

and the value system behind it. At present, the community treats farm units as businesses, expecting each to be individually self-supporting; and even greenworkers are given little in the way of maintenance. Dare I say that there is a real fallacy in implementing this policy? For Auroville to help guide the world towards a new respect for Mother Earth, a policy of *extra* support for these activities must be sustained. This must include monetary subsidies if necessary, as well as everyone's increasing personal commitment to follow the dictum "think globally, eat locally".

Can we not see in the broad history of the human race a movement away from respect for the land and its products? Partly this may come from a natural desire for less demanding day-in and day-out physical work. But also, there seems to be a strong but sly movement of the human ego which makes one feel "above" such work. This is of such ancient lineage, permeating our values in such a fundamental yet subtle way, that people are barely aware of it. Yet our whole economic system shows this inclination lurking behind the scene. Always farm and land work have been at the bottom of the economic ladder; the 'sophisticated' values and products of the city, of technology and mental activity (and our attendant feelings of cleverness) have been paid higher wages. Today we easily observe an accelerating devaluation of land that is worked for agriculture, when measured against what people will pay to use it for housing, for factories, for banks—that is, when it is paved over and its life is destroyed. This economic tendency reflects this subtle underlying personal value system - they are inextricably intertwined. Basically, farm workers are still paid slave's wages; so is it any wonder we in Auroville find it difficult to muster the resources to transform our agricultural practices?

Organic farming *has* made some small headway in the western world, but one can be quite clear that it is only in the presence



Sorting produce from an Auroville farm

of a well-educated middle class, with enough leisure time to have come to the understanding of the necessity for self-transformation, and willing to make some monetary sacrifices for its own well-being, that this farming has had any chance of economic survival. Many countries including India subsidize products needed for chemical farming, making the marketing of organic produce even more difficult. Only a few are willing to pay the premium prices, and it takes very little downturn in economic fortunes for people to return to the "cheaper" products of agrobusiness. And we mustn't forget the true costs of conventional agriculture—the poisons slowly accumulating in our bodies, the destruction of the life of the soil, the absence of real vitality in our foods. So how can Auroville possibly expect to create farms that are models of sustainable practices while asking those farms to compete on the open market with Pondy vegetables and the like? Those with the vision of transformation, if they are to be the vanguard of what we hope will be eventually a massive movement of all mankind, must understand that these projects are worth doing whatever the initial cost. If we are to change the standard by which humanity measures cost, that is, to turn the whole economic system right side up (it seems always to have been upside down), we mustn't ourselves perpetuate the error of evaluating what we are doing in truly topsy-turvy money terms. With the current dedicated individual who *should* make up the Auroville population (and I have met many) we would not expect

to find the wastefulness and gross inefficiencies that characterize other subsidized economies. Because Aurovilians are pathfinders themselves, and therefore so much effort must be given over to experimentation, and only later can production be achieved, one sees yet another reason for extra community support. Farmers here are usually expected to get outside money for basic infrastructure improvement, and of course grants are available, but again, the donors are hung up in the same economic environment—they may recognize the value of supporting earth regenerative systems, but their money grows from within the old value system we wish to transform. We don't find rich farmers giving away research money. Naturally one must continue to pursue these sources as well, but unless the community itself has the inspiration to underwrite the green work and agriculture until such time as its own example leads to whole-scale changes in the economic value system of the world, we will *never* see Auroville come to self-sufficiency.

Thank you

A big thank you to all our renewing subscribers of last month for continuing to support us—sometimes generously—and for your appreciative comments.

—The editors

Eternity, contd.

Tu Bishvat, a Jewish holiday when one traditionally plants trees.

Yuval and Anna now live in a simple two storey house that they built with the pension money Anna was eligible for after eight years of teaching in Holland. "We'd like more Aurovilians to move out here", Yuval says, "as with all the work we've got on our hands we've almost become slaves to the place." However, people are still discouraged from doing so, ostensibly because it is too far away. "We've been coming and going from central Auroville for more than six years and Anna even managed to teach for a year at Transition despite all the work we had on our hands. It actually only takes fifteen minutes to get to Matrimandir from here and you can even see the night-light of the crane from the windmill."

Both Yuval and Anna who see themselves simply as stewards of the place would like to see Eternity used more by Aurovilians. It

is an ideal location for certain types of seminars, workshops and retreats, and its empty pristine beach is Auroville's finest. "It would be a perfect place for a hotel in the Auroville spirit for instance, which could one day provide training and employment opportunities for our youth", Yuval observes.

"The Arabs have oil, Auroville has Eternity", Yuval goes on to exclaim with some passion. "It's the most valuable piece of land in Auroville and you'd never be able to buy it back. It's our *dharma* to safeguard and protect this land."

Perhaps the time has come for some Aurovilians to stop seeing Eternity as an expendable possession, and to start viewing this oasis by the sea in terms of the incredible potential it holds. And to start providing it with the encouragement it needs, and the creative input that the work that has made it flower deserves. —Roger

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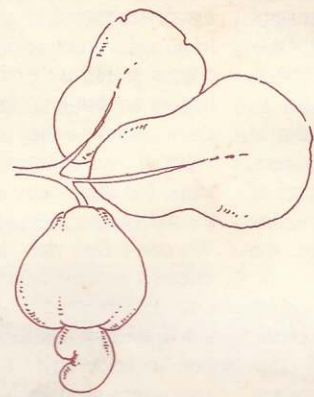
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AUROVILLE TODAY

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In this issue:

Communication: cashews and pesticides; community profile etc.

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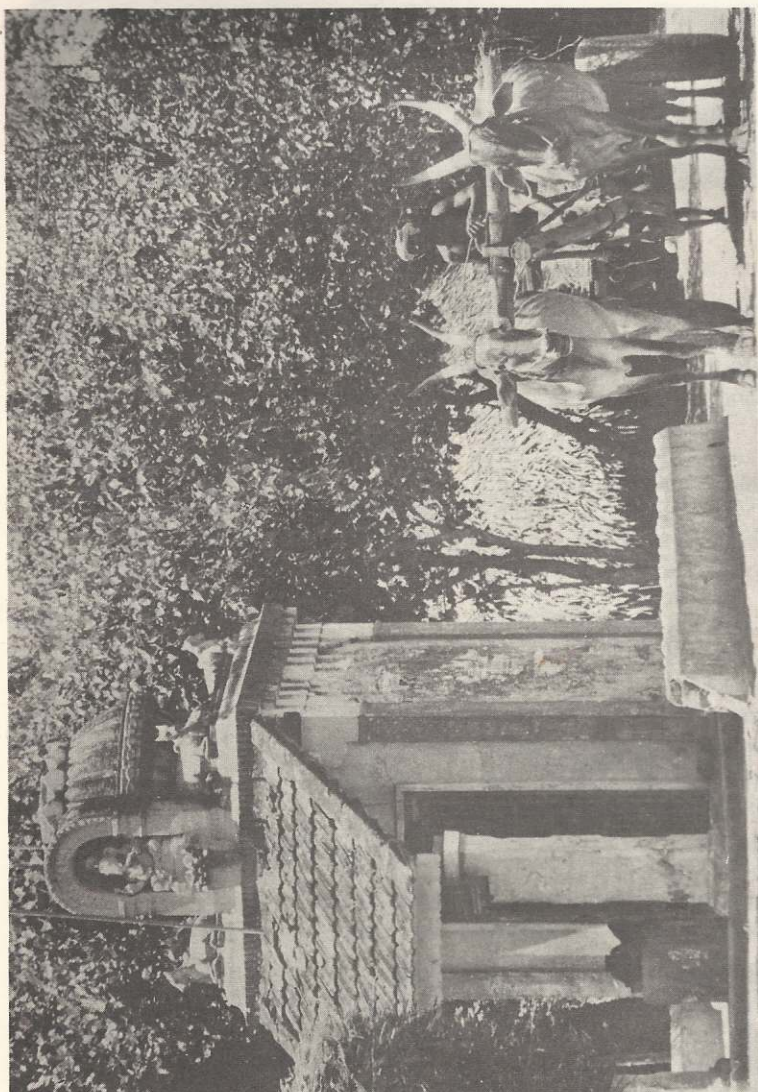


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A QUIET VILLAGE SCENE

REPORT: THE INTERNATIONAL AVI MEETING 1993

Understanding, Appreciation, Cooperation

In a beautiful woody setting somewhere near Koblenz, Germany, the 13th annual meeting of Auroville International was held, with representatives from all the Auroville International centres except Italy, Japan and Canada.

From the morning of the 20th May to the early afternoon of the 23rd, approximately 50 people gathered in a circle to talk about the current situation in their country, to share ideas, frustrations and joy: to laugh together, and even grieve together. It was often emotional, with space given so that people could express their sadness and their happiness in a free and supportive atmosphere. It was clear that each person had come because Auroville really meant something important to him/her, and was somehow central to his/her life.

For the eleven Auroville residents who were present, it was a wonderful opportunity to feel first hand the energy of the centres and to relate a little of the experience of living in Auroville.

Friday, 7 a.m.: a breakfast of cold cereal, yogurt, hot fruit compote, coffee/tea.

It had rained the night before and there was a soft light through the trees as we sat for a moment in silence. Then each centre made a short presentation, telling everyone how their office was organized, where donations came from, what projects they were working on and how many members or supporters they had. Then the centres spoke about some problems they all share: how to communicate more effectively with Auroville was the most pressing concern. AVI Germany feels frustrated in their attempts to bridge the gap. The term 'living bridge' was used—so that the centres could continue to feel useful to Auroville, and at the same time, feel that Auroville recognized and appreciated their efforts on Auroville's behalf. The lack of appreciation was felt very keenly by some.

For example, the centres need to have video material to show to potential supporters. Video is the most effective visual means of presenting Auroville, and yet Auroville has not been able to respond to requests for more video material. On the other hand, many centres were not aware of the difficulties in producing videos in Auroville: the lack of equipment, time, money and energy, the frequency of breakdowns in equipment and the problems of getting the machines repaired. The underlying problem seems to be a lack of sensitivity to the needs of people working on both sides. How has this lack of sensitivity developed, and how can it be changed? These were questions that were given much time and concentration as the weekend progressed.

Gioia Miazzi came from Switzerland to introduce herself and request permission to open an Auroville International centre in her country.

It became apparent that three issues were important enough to require letters to Auroville from the meeting: the East Coast highway and its destructive effect on the environment; a request to the Visa Service for names and addresses of non-Indian visitors to Auroville; and a letter to Dr. Karan Singh asking for a general letter of endorsement to be used by the centres for more effective fundraising.

Saturday. Presentation of projects. Many Aurovilians had come to present project proposals. Among the most pressing were the projects devoted to health and healing. Barbara spoke about the new healing centre which would create a non-hospital atmosphere where holistic healing could be practised. Angelika presented her idea for a

children's home, which would be a multi-purpose facility for the care of village children. (Construction behind the Health Centre has actually begun.) Pavitra wants to start a documentary on Auroville by the end of the year, and needs funds for equipment and information about what the centres need. He would like to edit the documentary in a professional studio, and also needs to find a producer. Tine spoke about the Gokulam Youth Camp next to Repos, an inexpensive guest facility which could be used by visiting students and teachers; Alain Grandcolas and Louis Cohen presented a project for housing for Auroville employees. This is the project being supported by Meenakshi and Ponnuswamy to provide a halfway place between the village and Auroville for Auroville workers, as described by the Mother. Already money has been collected to begin construction of three houses. The most extensive project proposal discussed was the Community Centre for Free Services, supported by CSR. This facility would contain a laundry, cooking for 1,000 persons, a dining hall for 300-400, a laboratory for food hygiene, a tailoring service, a hair-cutting salon and Prosperity free store. A portion of the money has already been donated; total projected cost is 23 lakhs (roughly 80,000 US dollars). Marti gave us information about the Earth Restoration Alliance, a project that came out of the international conference in Rio. One of its goals is worldwide youth employment for restoring the earth, and Auroville hopes to play a major part.

Saturday afternoon. Lunch. Delicious meals are being served to us throughout this meeting by a friend of Auroville, Mathias. Chocolate pudding and cream. Oh my!

On behalf of the Development Group, Guy presented the outline of their well-documented Development Scheme for Auroville. General applause and appreciation for the thoroughness of the effort.

Pavilions. Endless and wide ranging discussions about the appropriateness of pavilions, and what they should represent for each country. Feelings varied from indifference to enthusiasm. Above all, if there are pavilions, they should unify not divide us, expressing on the physical level the idea of unity in diversity.

Saturday evening. Surrounded by candles and flowers, Devasmita performs four dances from Orissa. We are all enchanted. Afterwards people mix and mingle. One group goes outside to gather around a bonfire and sing songs: happy, silly, joyful above all—we are happy to be there, holding hands and feeling good. Our last night together!

Sunday morning. Breakfast and picture-taking to the peacock's call. Letters are presented for approval. Someone has a package to send to Auroville. The next international meeting: Holland, May 1994.

How much do we feel ourselves to be Aurovilian? This is a question that opens the last circle. Everyone takes a deep breath and then plunges in. Each one of us is an Aurovilian in spirit, no matter where he or she lives. A wonderful image is given to us: the centres are like the new roots of the Great Banyan—our one great, over-arching tree with so many air roots.

Good-byes are said after lunch, cars and passengers arranged, flights have to be met, we are all a little sad to leave. It's been a good meeting: open, caring—a weekend which has brought us all closer together. Thank you. Om Shanthi. Until we meet again.

—Jill, Tineke