

NOT TO BE TAKEN

AUROVILLE TODAY

February 1991

C.S.R. Office, Auroville 605101, Tamil Nadu, India

Number Twenty-Six

"I'LL DO THE REST

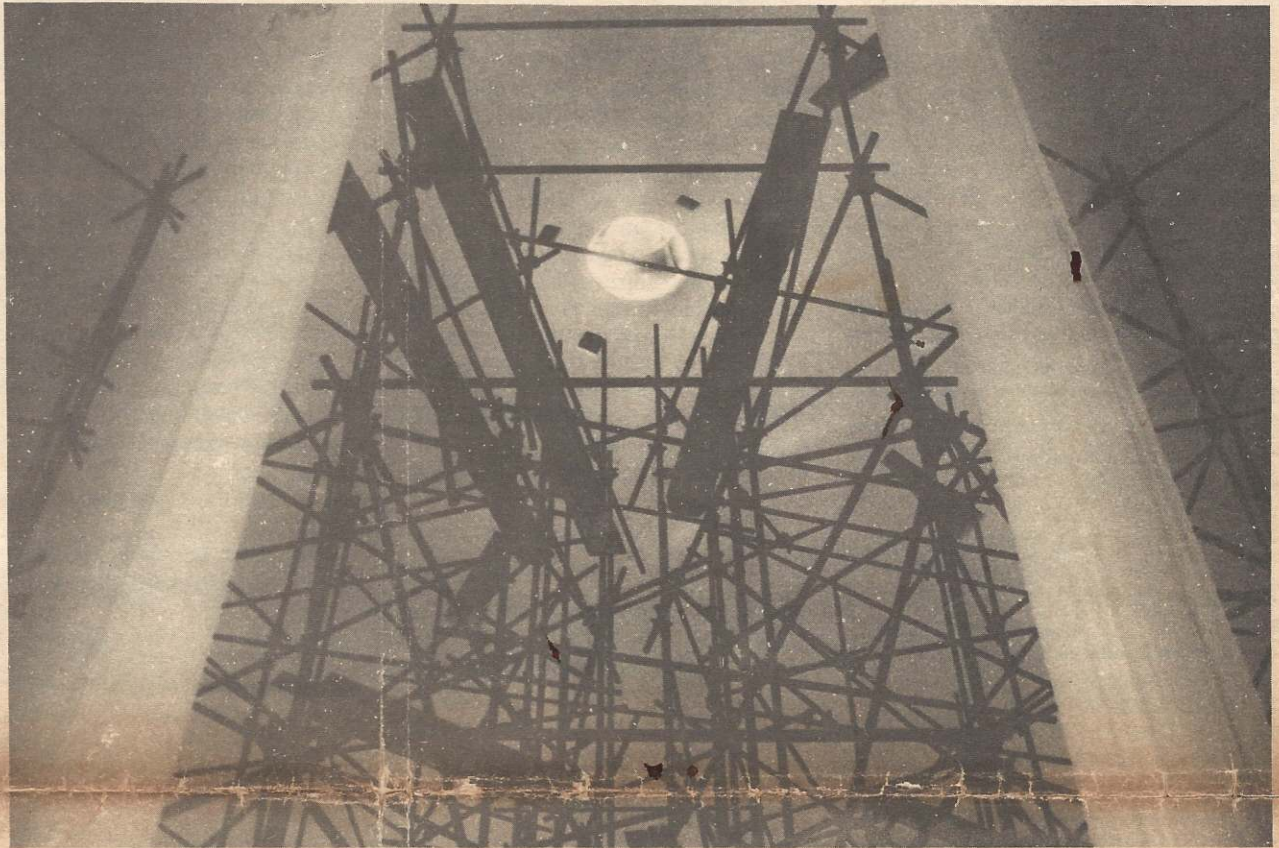
Just finish the room!"
to see
an end to anxiety,
feel
the subtle coil of money
lose its grip,
understand
too much is worse
than too little.

"Finish the room!"
to start
a new politics,
the parliament of inner hearts,
governing each other
inside the Self
each heart
at one
with the Mother.

"I'll do the rest.
Just finish the room!"
to watch
your children grow in freedom,
awakening in awe
to that place outside
beyond the mind
inside the heart,
Divinity on earth.

"Finish the room!"
to live in beauty
fresh
in a pure white dawn,
simple,
illuminated softly,
like the Chamber,
mystic headwaters
of supramental life.

William B. Netter



Photos: Sven

Auroville's development over the years has tended to fall into two distinct patterns. Long periods of gradualist growth—the slow, undramatic striking down of roots—are punctuated by short periods of pressure and activity that pick us up and shake us by the scruff of our collective neck.

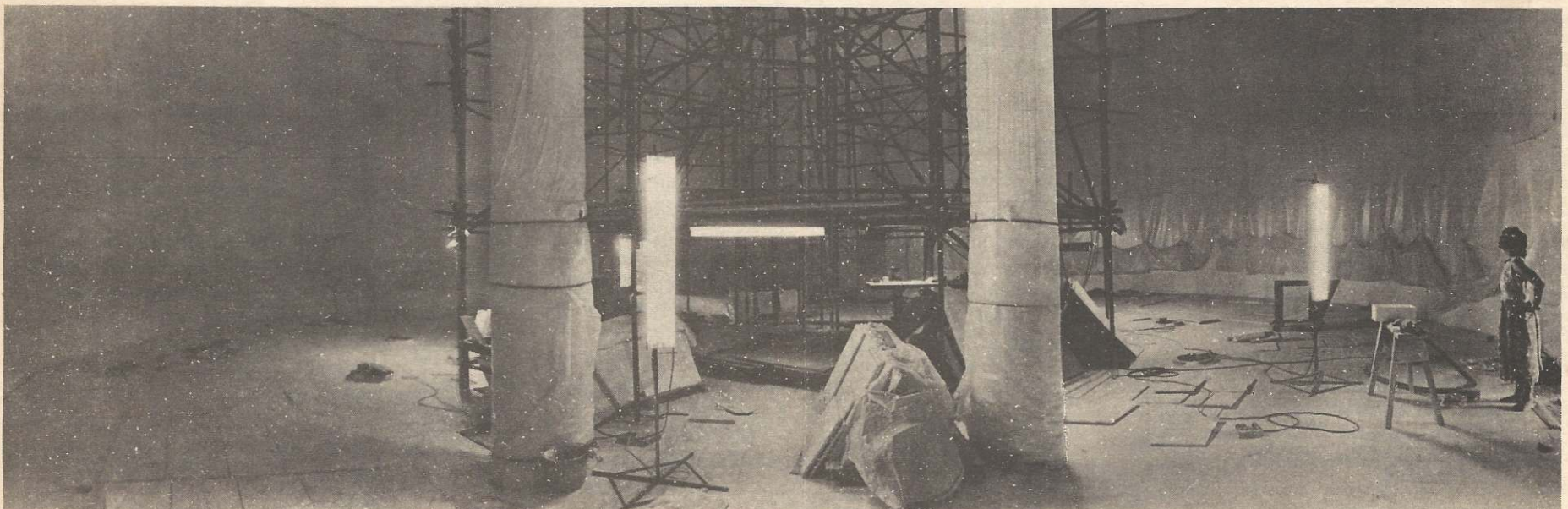
With the Auroville Foundation at last becoming operational, we are being projected once again into that latter, vertiginous tempo, characterized, in this case, by intense speculation and discussion about how the Foundation, this great unknown, will function. Yet, as we are whirled once again into the vortex of

conjecture and opinion, two challenges seem to stand out. One is the need to retain our centre, our true identity and purpose. The other is to have the courage to act from that centre to ensure that any changes in our functioning assist the flowering of our ideal. To have the courage, in other words, to be the shapers rather than the shaped.

In the spirit of encouraging informed debate in the community, and also because the 28th February is traditionally something of an orientation and recatalysing opportunity for Auroville, some of the *Auroville Today* team have attempted to identify some of the

other major challenges confronting the community today, as well as suggesting possible ways forward. There's nothing definitive or necessarily representative in the views expressed—the editorial team has had a very lively interchange of views over the opinions expressed in one or two of these articles!—but we hope they will help focus us on issues that we need to tackle if we are to advance further towards our ideal. For as a massive conflagration envelopes the Middle East, the need for everybody to find ways towards achieving an 'actual human unity' becomes ever more imperative and absolute.

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THE AUROVILLE FOUNDATION COMES TO LIFE

With the choosing of the Governing Board by the Government of India, the Auroville Foundation has become operational. Below is a short résumé of the Auroville Foundation Act, 1988, and a list of the members of the Governing Board. The Governing Board will hold its first meeting in Auroville on the 28th February. In subsequent issues of *Auroville Today* we will bring more information about the workings and implications of the Foundation which, in one way or another, may have a profound effect upon the future of the Auroville adventure.

Purpose of the Act

To transfer all the property that was relatable to Auroville and was owned by the Sri Aurobindo Society and by all trusts and organizations of Auroville to the Auroville Foundation, in order to secure better management and the further development of Auroville in accordance with its Charter.

In the period between the coming into force of this Act (November 1988) and the coming into existence of the Auroville Foundation (February 1991) all that property became the property of the Central Government of India, which will now transfer it to the Auroville Foundation.

The Auroville Foundation

The Auroville Foundation will consist of three bodies:

- the International Advisory Council
- the Governing Board
- the Residents' Assembly

There will also be a Secretary to the Foundation.

The Auroville International Advisory Council

Composition: Maximum 5 members.

All of them will be appointed by the Government of India from among people who are devoted to the ideals of human unity, peace and progress.

Term of office: To be determined by the Government of India.

Function: To advise the Governing Board when asked or upon its own initiative. When giving advice, the Council will try to secure that the ideals of Auroville are encouraged, and that the residents of Auroville are allowed freedom to grow and develop activities and institutions for the fulfillment of the aspirations and programmes of Auroville's Charter.

The Governing Board

Composition: Maximum nine members. Seven of them will be appointed by the Government of India on the basis of their individual qualities, such as:

- having given valuable help to Auroville.
- having dedicated themselves to the ideals of life long education, and to the synthesis of material and spiritual research in relation to human unity.
- having contributed to the activities that are pursued or promoted in Auroville, such as environment, arts, industry, humanities and integral yoga.

Two of them will be appointed as representatives of the Government of India.

Term of office: four years. Members are eligible for re-nomination.

Powers and functions:

1. the general superintendence, direction and management of the Foundation;
2. to promote the ideals of Auroville and coordinate the activities and services of Auroville in consultation with the Residents' Assembly.

3. to review basic policies and programmes of Auroville and give directions for the future development of Auroville.

4. to give approval to programmes for Auroville made by the Residents' Assembly

5. to monitor and review activities of Auroville; to secure the proper management of the properties of Auroville.

6. to prepare a Master Plan for Auroville in consultation with the Residents' Assembly, and to ensure the development of Auroville as so planned.

7. to authorize and coordinate fund raising for Auroville.

Meetings: At least once a year in Auroville.

The Secretary to the Foundation

The Secretary to the Foundation will be an officer appointed by the Government of India. The particularities of his function will be determined by the Governing Board.

The Secretary will maintain the register of residents of Auroville.

The Residents' Assembly

Composition: All the residents of Auroville who are entered in the Register of Residents

and who are eighteen years or older are members of the Residents' Assembly.

Powers and functions:

1. to advise the Governing Board on all activities relating to the residents of Auroville.

2. to allow admission of new residents and to decide on termination of residence in Auroville.

This power of the Residents' Assembly has to be executed in accordance with a regulation approved by the Governing Board. (This regulation has again to be approved by the Central Government)

3. to organize various activities relating to Auroville.

4. to make the master plan for approval of the Governing Board.

5. to make proposals for fund raising for approval of the Governing Board.

Working Committee

The Residents' Assembly will choose from among themselves in their own way and for a period they will determine a Working Committee consisting of a maximum of seven people. The task of this Working Committee is to assist the Residents' Assembly and the Governing Board in its work.

The Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation as notified in Delhi on 30th January.

Dr. Karan Singh
(Chairman of Board)

Mrs. Aster Patel
(Aurovilian)

Dr. Kapila Vatsyayan
Member-Secretary,
Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts.

Dr. Ashin Das Gupta
Vice Chancellor, Vishwa Bharti University, Santiniketan.

Mrs. Bilkees Latif
Chairman,
Andhra Pradesh Social Welfare Board.

Mr. M. Krishnan
Dean,
School of International Studies,
Pondicherry University

Shri Kireet Joshi
Member-Secretary,
Rashtriya Veda Vidya Pratishthan

Shri K. Koshalram
Financial Adviser (Ex-Officio),
Dept. of Education,
Ministry of Human Resource Development.

Shri S.R. Tayal
Director (UNESCO unit) (Ex-Officio),
Department of Education,
Ministry of Human Resource Development.

Cycling towards Divine Anarchy

While cycling along the winding paths of Auroville, I am looking for an answer. Phrases echo in my mind—phrases that come up in meetings and conversations as part of an accepted Auroville language. "Divine Anarchy" is one of them. Wise old Aurovilians usually hand out this phrase to visitors to explain the organisation of Auroville. You can tell its effect by that look in the visitors' eyes as they walk away.

"All life is yoga"—another of those phrases. "Finding the psychic being..." "Replacing the ego with our true self..." Okay, but how to go about realising it? Where does the path start? Should I take up meditation? Tennis? Aerobics? Yoga? Tai chi?

In 1907 Sri Aurobindo met Lele (a Maharashtrian yogi) who gave him a meditation technique whereby he achieved the 'quiet mind' in three days. But before that Sri Aurobindo did four or five hours of *pranayama* a day, and other practices for four years. After that he spends, in the Alipore jail, almost all his time in intensive meditation and reads the Gita and Upanishads, which leads to further realizations. Then he spends four years in Pondicherry in an intensive yogic programme before The Mother arrives in 1914. But we are not expected to have to do all that. As Sri Aurobindo writes in a letter to a disciple: "The Mother and I have done a complete experience of all the paths, so that

we could show a straighter and easier road to others, if they would only consent to take it. It is because of our experience won at a tremendous price that we can urge on you and others, 'Take the psychic attitude, follow the straight sunlit path, do not insist on the hard,

Challenges...

hampered, roundabout and difficult journey".¹ Much later, Mother speaks about the 'new consciousness': "I worked for all other realizations, I followed disciplines. This one (*the new consciousness*) came like that, without my saying anything, without my seeking anything, without any effort, without... Only afterwards I paid attention. That's all." But she cautioned that it was better not to speak too much about the spontaneous working of the new consciousness, for people "might take all their impulses for revelations". Mother's work went on in the body, with a constant call to the Divine and referring everything to the Divine "continuously, all the time, even the most microscopic things." Mother concludes that she can't ask this of anyone because it doesn't correspond to anything in their experience.²

How am I to prepare myself for this 'new consciousness'? How to be sure that I will not be taking my impulses for revelations, but

that I will be a clear instrument of this new consciousness? Is an effort, a discipline still needed? Can such a consciousness be collectively manifested?

Divine anarchy... "The world will not understand", the Mother warned. I like to see it as a model not only of exterior governance, but also as a method of inner development. Or better said, perhaps, as an attitude that will allow a free choice of method, of what to do and how to do it, in order to make my own progress. It points to the collective within myself and the individual in the collective, allowing it to be free from imposition and to choose a path towards "the inmost Self, the universal Godhead within, whose very nature of diverse oneness is to realize the perfection of its individual life and nature in the existence of all..." Sri Aurobindo adds rather emphatically, "If this is not the solution then there is no solution; if this is not the way then there is no way for the human kind."³

I make another turn, winding through the greenbelt, and the sun falls on a carpet of yellow snow, work tree blossoms; the way straightens out and transformation flowers are scattered on the edge of the path. Cycling on, the feeling is of being on the right track...

Bill

- 1: SABCL 24 1362
- 2: *Agenda de Mère*, vol. XI, 218-21
- 3: SABCL 14 207

"CREDO!"

I believe in a society beyond morality, free from permissiveness, from blind purism of the ideal and from sectarianism.

Many societies see nowadays the rebirth of an aggressive fundamentalism or a conservative purism in order to halt indulgence and a *laissez-faire* attitude which institute themselves little by little in the name of tolerance. Not to fall into this trap—this is the challenge every new society has to take up, especially if it wants to bring about in man a change in the level of consciousness.

Are we not dreaming of a society in which everybody will have gained enough wisdom to control the movements of their vital and where everybody would live at a higher level of consciousness? A society which would be beyond morality and fixed rules of conduct, and which would not need to act as a censor?

Are we not dreaming of a society in which everybody would have for ethics an aspiration so pure that no rule or call to order would be necessary for him to follow his yoga, where nobody would have to identify himself with the role of defender of a moral code or ethic?

I believe that the Aurovilians have this ethic in their hearts, the aspiration for that which Sri Aurobindo and Mother through their experience give us a glimpse of.

I am convinced (I would not allow myself to judge otherwise) that the beings who are a part of this adventure are sincere, that they are trying to follow, even from afar, step by little step (everybody at his own pace) those who have so boldly opened the way.

I don't think that this new experiment can be defined in terms of good and bad—it would be like reducing it to something very small and like reducing Them to quite ordinary teachers. We must not forget that Sri Aurobindo's and Mother's yoga starts where the others end. Do all have to pass through the same old systems? What can morals bring—morals that oppose what is judged to be good to that which is judged to be bad—to a society which tries precisely to find other

ways of functioning, other reference points, like the identification with one's deeper self (the self which does not acknowledge the rules set up by humans), like the recognition of the divine presence (who can foresee when and where it will reveal itself?), like the unforeseen search to find the passage for man today to the future species.

It seems to me that Auroville already has its particular ethic, its sacred laws which are so vibrant, so splendid, a beam of light and hope lancing into the earth's atmosphere: THE CHARTER.

I do not at all want to stand up and defend absolute permissiveness which would look too much like immobilism or indifference, but I wonder. How can we judge a level of consciousness by applying moral values? It is not possible to make someone progress by preaching or kicks in the pants. Growth happens in an atmosphere of trust, love, in a rich environment that allows one to make experiments and to develop according to the needs of one's age, one's sex and one's karma.

Auroville does not claim to be an ashram, a convent where one signs moral contracts when entering. Should this yoga not be done in life, with all its dangers, with all its complexity and duality? When crossing temporary deserts, as well as in clear flashes of consciousness in the divine light?

A little humility from the side of the seekers, and these old habits of moral judgement, of classifying people into good Aurovilians or bad Aurovilians would disappear.

Auroville cannot allow itself to be defined by purism, dogmatism or total permissiveness. Otherwise it will, as other experiments before it, rigidify, stratify before having had the time to develop.

Is our new society capable of such an effort, of such a step ahead, of such a leap towards the unknown, towards the future species? There's no doubt about it.

Yanne

Freezing the Frame

"What is this Auroville?" January is the high-season for this question as unfamiliar faces pour in and out of our guest houses. But in the coming years, as more and more people are drawn—for different reasons—to Auroville, and as the pressure mounts upon us to become another stopping-off point on the New Age seminar/workshop circuit, we will be increasingly asked to define ourselves to others.

Of course, we've been doing it for years through our brochures and pamphlets. And, as a member of the 'Abundance' project-writing team, I've written or helped write at least 50 funding proposals for Auroville projects, many of which have an introductory paragraph beginning 'Auroville is an international community situated in South India...' and which goes on to list our achievements in various fields. It's O.K. It's good, solid information, not propaganda. And it's something potential donors ask for. But whenever I read that paragraph, I feel a certain tightening around my heart. Because this is not my Auroville, nor, I would guess, anybody else's either. It's a reduction, a snapshot, a frozen fragment of a tidal wave. It's a neatly-packaged artifact, not a cry from the heart.

The difference came home to me recently when we organized an introduction to Auroville programme for some visitors. Because what helped them to understand Auroville best was not our fact sheets or guided tours, but meeting Aurovilians who were living and breathing something so intensely through their work that the usual questions began to appear superfluous. For Auroville, above all, is a vibration, not a geographic, social or architectural 'fact'. And as a vibration it can only be lived, not described, it can only be tuned to and not dissected.

A truism, perhaps. But we live in a world where governments and many other organizations need definitions in order to be able to act. And if we forget that our self-definitions are no more than makeshifts, fingers pointing at the moon, we are in danger of being defined by our own—and other's—definitions of Auroville, and dancing to a measure that is not ours. We may become a cultural or environmental or technological or educational showcase. We may become, in terms of the world, a great success. But in the process, we may have lost everything...

Alan

Managing Auroville

Consensus or control?

Those who are used to a well structured, hierarchical society, sometimes have problems understanding the way Auroville functions. Auroville is a society that is evolving another kind of organization, composed of different working groups, each working in its own domain, and each exercising its own powers for realizing its objectives. Some of these groups function with a high degree of autonomy, such as the afforestation group. Others, such as the Entry group, the Economy group, the Auroville Planning Group (Aurofuture) and the Auroville Council, need to relate more closely to the community as their activities affect the community and its individual members directly. It is for these reasons that openness and transparency in their work is a first requirement.

Mother, speaking about the political organization of Auroville, spoke of replacing the mental government of the intelligence with the government of the spiritual-

This impasse, this unwillingness to cooperate, is one of the ways which the community uses to express displeasure with the course of action taken by a group or an individual. What actually takes place is a kind of civil disobedience, which takes many forms, from tea shop tantrums to writing petitions and calling for general meetings. When this occurs, it should be an indication to any group or individual that the manner of its functioning needs revision, that it has fallen out of step with developments in the community. It is the function of a coordinating body, Auroville's General Assembly or the Auroville Council, to be sensitive to these kinds of developments, and take immediate action.

The action required is to initiate a process to reach some sort of consensus. Mother, when informed about one of the endless quarrels in Aspiration, stated clearly:

"Each one has its own solution, and that is the great difficulty. To be in the Truth, each one has his own solution. And yet we must find a way for all these solutions to work together. So the framework must be vast, very flexible, and there must be a great goodwill from everyone: that is the first condition—the first individual condition—goodwill. To be flexible enough to do the best thing to be done at each moment."

The need for openness and transparency and the goodwill to reach consensus is not only relevant for the internal workings of the community itself, but also for its dealings with the two new bodies created by the Auroville Foundation Act, the Governing Board and the International Advisory Council. These bodies will be constituted of people well versed in the ideals of Auroville, but who are not required to live in Auroville.

Transparency, openness and consensus are the positive key words for Auroville's management. The negative one is control.

They will need to be kept in touch with the actual growth and development of Auroville. How? To ensure that the views of the community are represented as comprehensively and objectively as possible, we'll have to create an open and transparent process in which every Aurovillian can participate. This will create trust and confidence, and will allow these bodies to fulfill their function in collaboration with the Auroville community.

Transparency, openness and consensus are the positive key words for Auroville's management. We must ensure that the negative one, control, does not become institutionalized in Auroville. This is everyone's responsibility.

Carel

Challenges...

ized consciousness. Mentioning the failures of the existing forms of organizations (socialism, communism, democracy, plutocracy), She states that Auroville should be governed by those individuals who have attained a higher consciousness, irrespective of the class or society to which they belong. These people should have an intuitive intelligence, an intuition manifested intellectually. (1968)

Do we have this quality of people in Auroville? It appears that at present we do not, and it is for this reason that we cannot, as yet, bypass the need for checks and balances, the guarding against efforts to impose a particular point of view, made easier by being a member of one of these groups. For, at times, individuals or groups are so convinced about the truth of their own point of view, that they try to impose it on the community, regardless of any community process, or even of the will of the community.

The question comes up why someone or a group of people would like to impose a view on Aurovilians without asking for their participation in the decision making process. It has been observed that the justification for this kind of attitude is on the one hand a sometimes almost religious conviction that their particular point of view is right—many times embellished with quotations from Mother or Sri Aurobindo—and on the other hand the fear that the purity of the viewpoint held might be diluted once the point of view of others is considered. This may lead to a sense of rightness or even of superiority, to an unwillingness to cooperate with others or even to enter into dialogue and, from those others, the feeling that it is absolutely useless and a waste of time to try anymore to work together. Deadlock is created.

Pitanga

THE 'Pitanga' tree is a Brazilian cherry tree, and its blossoms are believed to spread joy and happiness. 'Pitanga' is also the name of the new cultural hall near Samasti that in the middle of January blossomed. Hundreds of people played through the inauguration programme that was both formal and chaotic, exploring and enjoying this multi-purpose art centre.

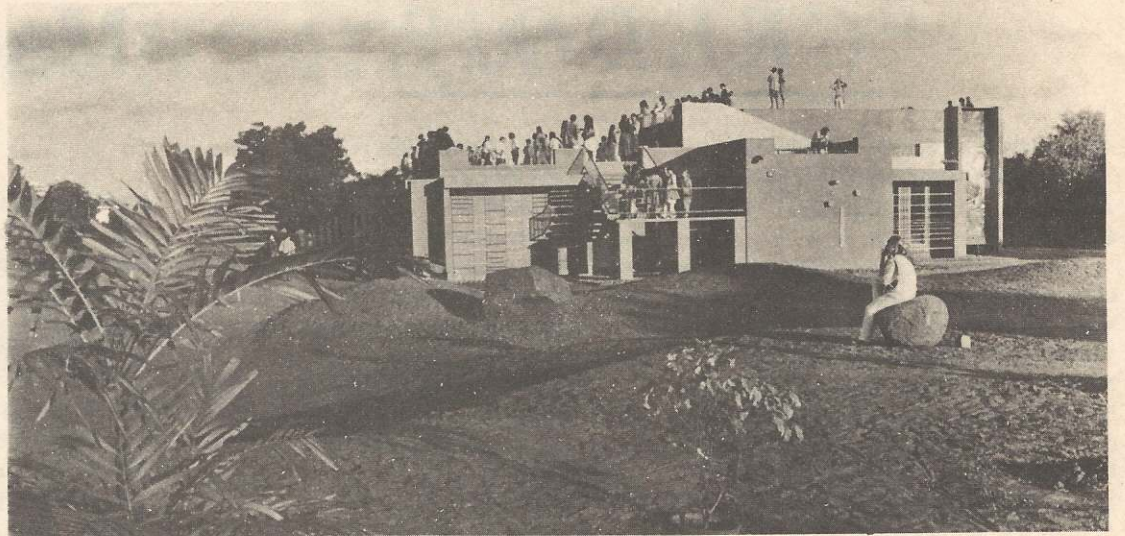
During the entire programme refreshments were served on the roof and though everything seemed to be happening at once—children were playing, there were crowds in every room—the performances went perfectly. Miriam and Carel opened in the early afternoon with three pieces for flute and piano, and by the time the sun was setting everyone had become performers in the three folk dances that spread across the whole roof—bounce, bounce sway, oops wrong foot! In between, Alan and Roger had read their own poetry, Stephano and Philippe improvised on the saxophone and electric guitar, Ila danced, Anu and Joy danced, the Auroville Dance Group danced, Savitri and Veronika played violin and piano, Jürgen magically extended ropes, ribbons and rings,

and the children climbed over and under everything.

The building is approached across open fields where you see a large mural of the five elements painted by Jeff; at the entrance is a Sanskrit 'AUM'-sign. The door opens onto a skylit interior garden, as in traditional South India homes, and branching from this interior courtyard are the dance studio, a video studio, a room for hatha yoga, a massage room, kitchen, office and dressing room. The hallway is exhibition space for Auroville art, ending in a wide staircase leading to the roof where plenty of usable space is divided in levels, with a panoramic view that includes Matrimandir.

Paulo and Ila were the moving force behind the building of the 'Pitanga' hall. Auroville Today asked them about the process.

Paulo: It all began with the need for a simple, practical space for dance—which could have looked like a store-room as far as I was concerned. Then, when we were filming our 'Five Elements' dance in Bharat Nivas with Alain and Patricia, we saw they had problems keeping their video room



Pitanga Hall on the opening day

dry during rain storms, and we offered to build them a small room next to our proposed new dance room. They agreed.

Ila: The next thing was that Carel needed a room in which to give piano lessons. And then Ursula said, "Why don't you also include a small room for massage?"

Paulo: About this time, Nolly, a Dutch hatha yoga teacher, came to Auroville. She told us she wanted to build a hatha yoga studio, and I mentioned to her that we were planning something. She was immediately interested, and took up the responsibility of incorporating it into the new complex.

Ila: At around this time, Paulo saw how it could look—the working rooms centred around a small court-yard, which would create a cosy place to meet before and after classes.

Paulo: Finally, the original dance store-room turned into a work-room where we could have a sewing-machine and store costumes and other props for performances. And suddenly we saw the wide corridor leading to the staircase as a good space for a permanent art exhibition.

Ila: We tried to build everything in the simplest, cheapest way. But when it was finished, it took us completely by surprise. It was so

beautiful!

Paulo: The whole process was spontaneous. We didn't start out with any large ideas. The needs came one after the other, and we just tried to put them together. It was like choreographing a dance. Now the challenge is to maintain the spirit and beauty of the place—something much harder than merely building it.

Ila: I see 'Pitanga' as one more place in Auroville where people can come together and work on their bodies and on other aspects of themselves for their individual unfolding. And this will bring more positive energy for our collective growth. □

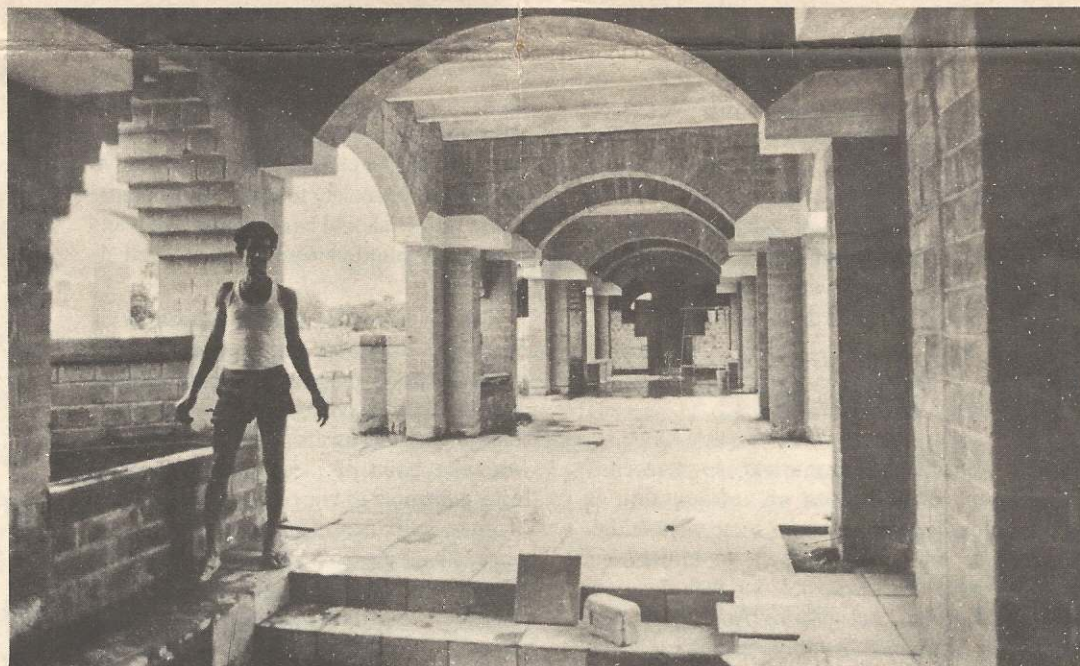
The Information and Reception Centre

In Auroville Today #10 we showed you the drawing for the new Information & Reception Centre. It is now one year later and the first part of the Centre is about to be opened—on the 28th February. Gilles, the coordinator, gave us the latest information.

THE REST of the site will take one more year to complete. Actually it will never be quite finished because it will grow together with Auroville—new possibilities and new discoveries will be added all the time. We invite everyone from all over the world interested in this project to participate.

Participate in what?

The Information & Reception Centre is a 'catalyst' project which allows us to create new possibilities for Auroville and India. For example, the mud architecture department of the project will expand to develop a collective housing complex. We have built an improved mud-brick press that could be a step towards develop-



Inside the Information & Reception Centre—vaults, arches and domes...

ment of mud architecture in rural towns, provided we can overcome the social prejudice which exists in India against construction with mud. A Vietnamese professor from the Asian Institute of technology in Bangkok will come to help us with transfer of technology to construct a ferro-cement gasifier (a combustion chamber for biomass to generate energy for mechanical purposes).

What are the materials used?

The Information and Reception Centre is built with alternative and low cost materials, avoiding the use of wood and steel. This brings

us back to traditional building forms, like vaults, arches and domes. Overall, we would like to demonstrate that we can create something beautiful using low-cost materials and alternative technology. The Centre is an experimental building and was never conceived as a masterpiece. If certain parts prove to be completely wrong, then we try not to hide them, but to learn from them so we can improve our knowledge about mud architecture.

How will the energy be generated?

We have a windmill for pumping water and to economize the use

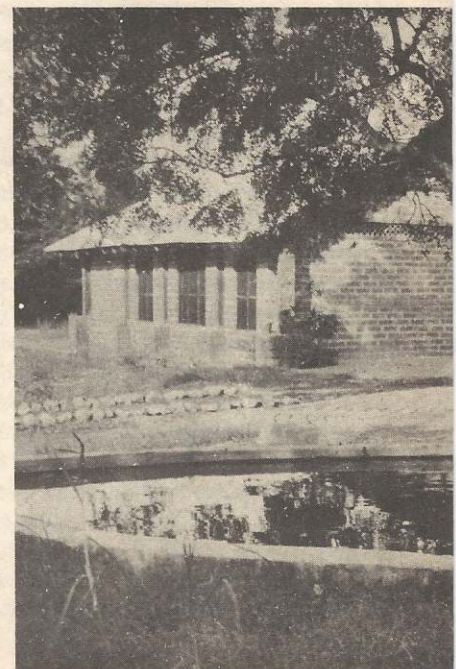
of water we will use drip irrigation for creating a beautiful garden. For electricity there will be a wind generator and photovoltaics.

What else is planned?

Already planned are

- the extension of the Boutique d'Auroville;
- exhibitions, including products of Auroville farms and industries (marble cutting machines, computers, etc.);
- the sale of biologically grown products and plants;
- a video room, restaurant, conference hall, terraces; spaces where Aurovilians and guests or visitors can meet and communicate. □

NE
In the last few Auroville; not just facilities, as feature that all of them ha or small groups. In tive channel for ma mitted individual needs. And that the ful and beau



Newcomers Housing

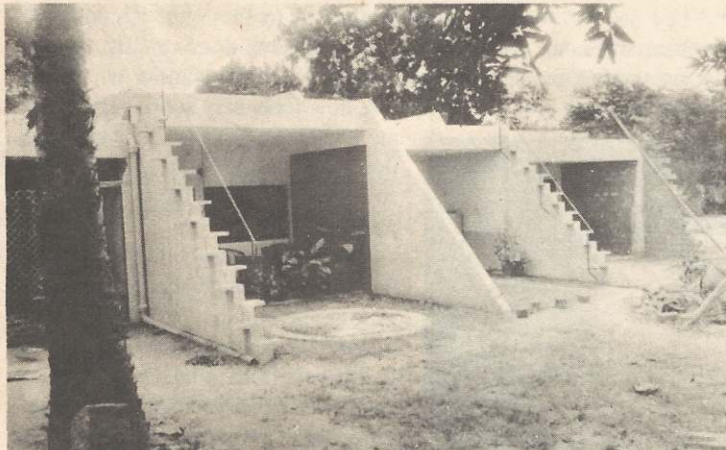
Increasing the housing facilities for newcomers is more and more necessary, to facilitate the arrival of more Aurovilians and, with that, the growth of the town.

Until recently, there were only four or five newcomers houses in Auroville. The latest project, which has added four more, was difficult to get off the ground. But now it's done! After years of temporary and unorganized arrangements, (*cabane bambou provisoire*

ventilated room of 20 square metres with a veranda, bathroom and toilet. They are situated in a pleasant environment and collective facilities like a common kitchen and a store room will soon be ready.

How does it work?

For Rs. 40,000, a newcomer can live in one of these bungalows for his newcomer's period of one year. During this time, the newcomer has the opportunity to discover Auroville and find his place.

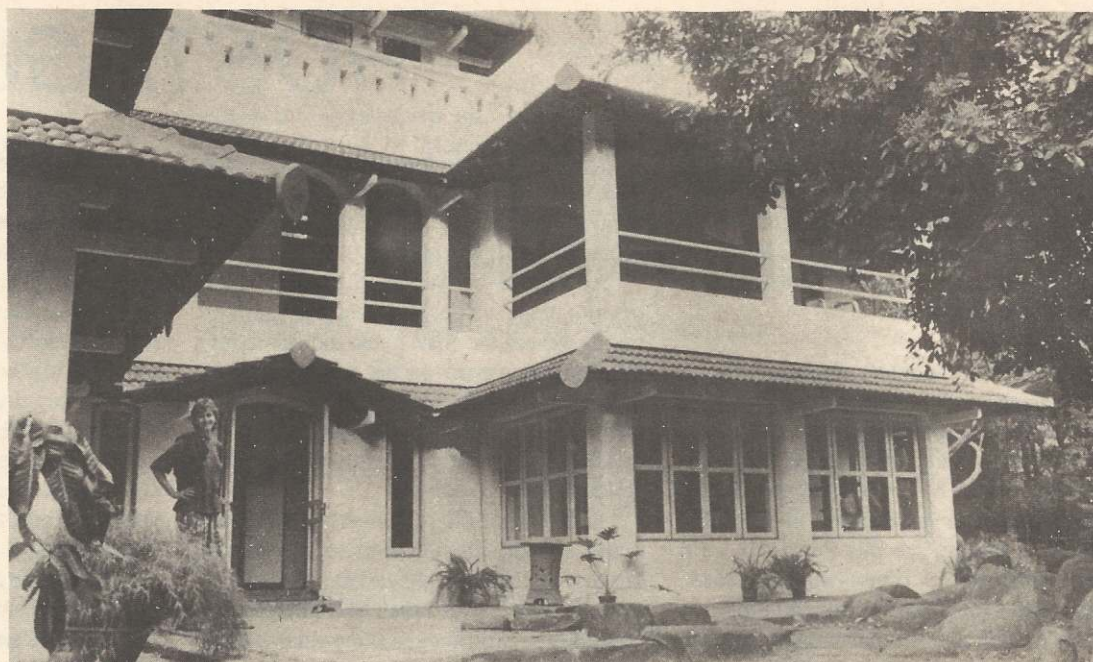


Newcomers studios in Djaima

qui-dure, as the French like to call Auroville's 'temporary' thatched huts) we now can provide newcomers with some more pukka housing. One of the projects which just has been completed is a newcomers housing complex in Djaima, providing four individual studios. Each consists of a well-

At the end of this period, the newcomer must move, but 80% of the money he originally invested will be available for him to build a house or join a collective housing project in Auroville.

(from a talk with Jean Pougault, coordinator of the Djaima newcomers housing project.) □



Merriam Hill Center—bright green doors and 'wild lilac' window frames...

The Merriam Hill Center

“OH, what funny colours!” “How could you paint the staircase dark green?” “It really looks very light and beautiful.” “Well... the colours are different, but actually I do like it.”

These are just a few of the remarks so far from people who have visited the extension to the Center Guest-house, the 'Merriam Hill Center' as it is officially called. The day the first group of people to use the building was to arrive, it looked one big mess. Five masons were very, very busy trans-

forming the chaos out front into a beautiful Japanese entrance. Then all of a sudden flowerpots showed up, adding a green touch, and new bedcovers and pillows were delivered by the tailors just before they left for their Ayyappa pilgrimage. One last check before dinner time, and there comes a call from the dark, “There they are!” “The new chairs we are waiting for?” “No, the Findhorn group has arrived!”

After one month, two groups of guests and a group of Aurovilians have already used the Merriam Hill Center—very much as was in-

tended by the donor, who wanted to create a welcoming meeting space for small groups of Aurovilians and friends. A two-storey building, painted in white with bright green doors and 'wild lilac' window frames, it offers downstairs a meeting room for about 20 people, a meditation room, an office, a small kitchen and common bathroom, and upstairs four bedrooms for seven guests. The three bathrooms have cold and solar heated water. As for the ample roof terrace—that has already been discovered by the sun-bathers. □

NEW COMMUNITY FACILITIES

In months, there has been an explosion in the number of visitors, but also of major new community facilities. And what's interesting is that they have been initiated and powered by individuals. It's a reminder that the most potent and creative manifestation within Auroville remains the community in touch with and responding to community. The opportunity to manifest something meaningful is still very much alive in Auroville.

One more storey for the Centre for Scientific Research

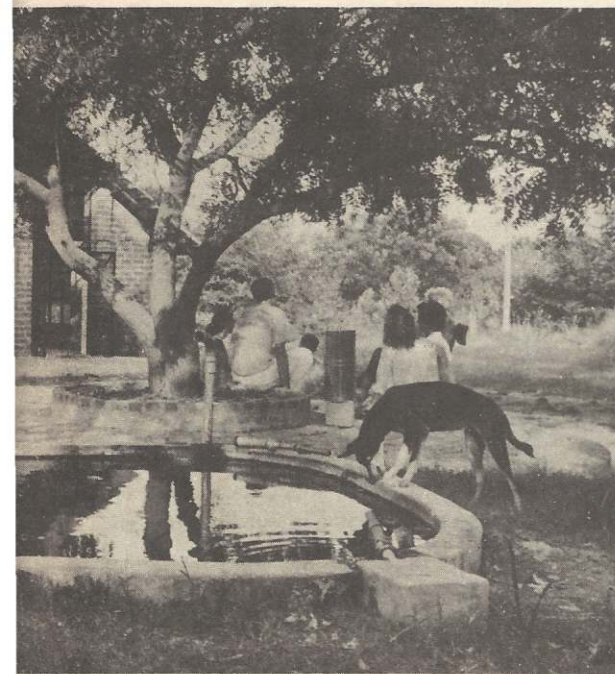
And... the beginning of a new story for Auroville Today!

The Centre for Scientific Research, widely known as CSR, which is a focus in Auroville for promoting renewable energy and appropriate technology, is moving up—upstairs that is. On Auroville's birthday on the 28th of February, the newly completed first floor will be inaugurated. It will provide additional office space, a computer room, conference facilities and a kitchen and bathroom. Auroville Today's new office will also be part of the upstairs complex.

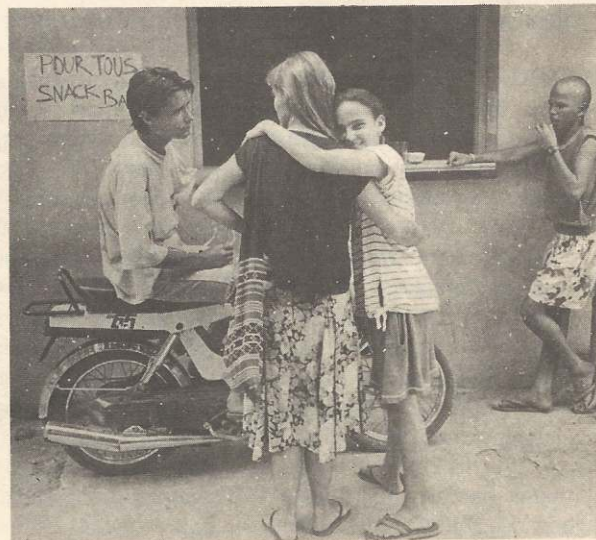
Even in an unfinished, un-inaugurated condition, the space is already in use. From February 18-24, there is the first training course offered for architects, engineers and entrepreneurs in ferrocement technology. Also during this period, from February 22-25, the facility will host the international meeting of the coordinators of the Ferrocement Information Network. □



Extended C.S.R. complex with—at last!— an office for Auroville Today



The construction last year of a large enclosed space for group activities at Vérité has made it possible for that community to host courses. Recently a training programme for German hatha yoga teachers was organized there, and a group of Aurovilians used the facility, called 'the yoga hall', for a course in Vipassana meditation.



The new (temporary) snackbar at Pour Tous—awaiting the re-opening of 'La Ventura' in the Information & Reception Centre.

HOSTAGE

Peter, Nicole and their two children recently returned to Auroville after being held as hostages in Kuwait and Iraq. One afternoon, in the Centre for Indian Culture, they told their story. Below are extracts.

Peter and Nicole's British Airways plane touched down on the runway of Kuwait airport about four hours after the Iraqi army had poured across the northern frontier, but before anybody realized it was heading for the capital. "It was all a matter of timing," recalls Peter. "If we'd left Heathrow on time—we were three hours late—there'd have been no problem. If we'd arrived over Kuwait 30 minutes later, the pilot might have been warned not to land."

While they were awaiting take-off, there was the sound of bombing in the distance, and the stewardess immediately told the passengers to evacuate the plane. Even then, many people didn't realize what was happening, and were casually looking around for their baggage. "But we didn't hesitate," said Peter. "The plane had just been refuelled and we were sitting in a bomb!"

The passengers were taken to the airport hotel. A few hours later they saw tanks moving into the airport. "We assumed these were Kuwaiti tanks coming to defend the airport. But then we were told it was the Iraqi army! It was all over."

Then came their first stroke of luck. Next evening, along with some other passengers, they were moved to the SAS (Scandinavian Airlines) hotel in Kuwait, which turned out to be the most comfortable location in the city. While other Western passengers who remained at the airport hotel were taken to Baghdad or installations in Kuwait within a few days, the Iraqi security police did not visit the SAS hotel for a month.

"For the first two weeks," recalls Nicole, "nobody prevented us going out, though few of us knew our way round Kuwait. Some of those who did took four-wheel drive cars and managed to drive across the desert to the Saudi border. With young children we didn't even consider this. But having two kids was actually a great help. We just concentrated upon looking after them rather than worrying about larger issues."

Were the children scared? "They were too young. Vikram, the youngest, was happy all the time. He had nice food, there were acres of carpet to play on, a swimming pool..."

"It wasn't all bad," says Peter. "I'd never stayed in a 5-star hotel before, and here we were in executive suites! The staff were excellent. They kept up the same standards and helped maintain an atmosphere of normalcy."

After 15 days, the atmosphere changed. The Iraqis told all foreigners resident in Kuwait to report to a certain hotel. It was clear they were being rounded up to be put in strategic sites in Kuwait or Iraq. After that, it was too risky for the B.A. passengers to leave the hotel. However, Peter and Nicole made a brief visit to the French Embassy to obtain a French passport for Peter. "It seemed a good idea at the time," said Peter, who is British, "as the Iraqi hatred was being directed mainly against the Americans and

British. When the diplomatic car came for us they were in contact with their embassy by radio and told them, 'We've got the parcel'. Meaning me! It was all very 007 stuff."

At the end of August, there were two developments. The Iraqi security police finally visited the SAS hotel and asked for everybody's papers. At the same time, the passengers saw Saddam's televised interview with some British families, at the end of which he said that all the women and children could go home.

Next day, all the passengers were put in buses and driven non-stop for 12 hours through the desert to Baghdad, where they were taken to a large hotel. The atmosphere there was very different—there were armed

"Being used to living in Auroville, I found it easier than some of the others to put up with the conditions. I had my pocket edition of 'Savitri', and I read it every morning—although one part I avoided was the descent into eternal night! Of course I discussed with the other hostages what might happen if war broke out—some felt we'd be put against a wall and shot. But I never felt this was probable. Nevertheless, for those two months I went into hibernation and tried not to think too much about what might happen. And, at times, Auroville seemed very far away."

Meanwhile Niccle, back in France and staying with her family, was trying to contact Peter. Radio France was transmitting family

been captured after hiding out in Kuwait, were brought in. "I was proud of them", said Peter. "They knew we were getting out, and they knew they were going to be sent to installations. But their morale was so high. For two nights the French and British sat up together, playing guitars, telling jokes, performing charades. These are moments I won't forget for the rest of my life."

The next day, 367 French, including Peter, were flown to Paris. "For months I'd been living in an air of unreality. I couldn't quite believe what was happening to us. And after I returned to the West it continued. There was a sense of discontinuity, like exaggerated jet-lag. But, coming back here, Auroville now feels very solid, very real to me, and I have this incredible appreciation of what Auroville is and a very strong sense of the importance of its purpose."

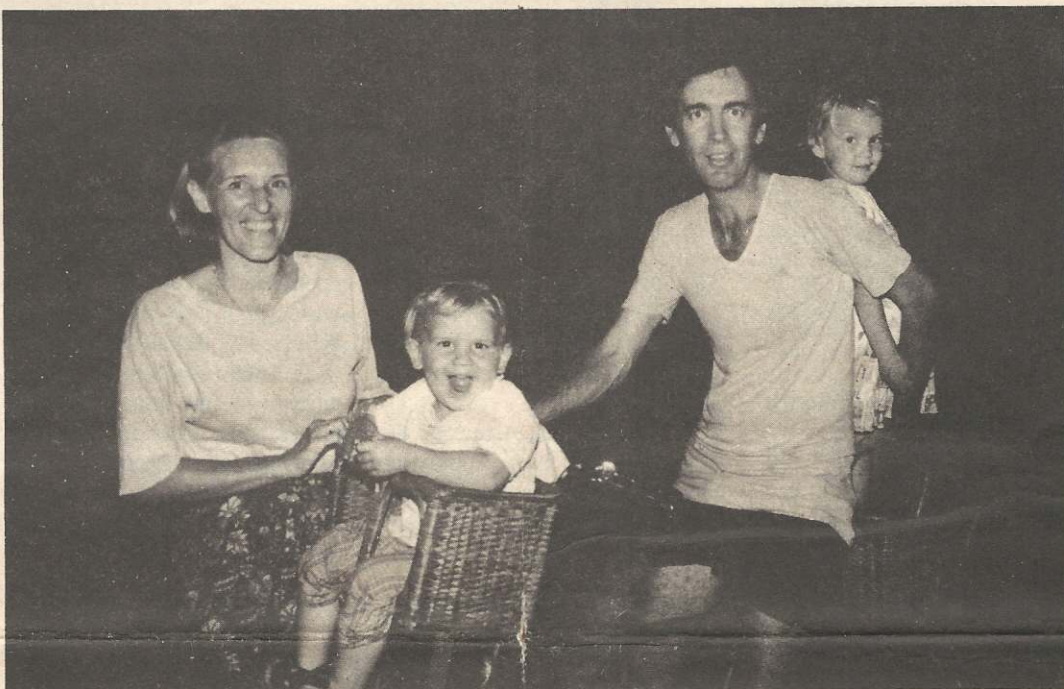
Having lived in India so long gave Peter a better understanding of what was happening in the Middle East. "Countries like Iraq and Kuwait are not so different from India. But because of the flow of petrodollars from the West, the cultural and social development of these Middle East states had been distorted. The result is you get either a military dictatorship like Iraq which spends all its money on armaments, or sheikdoms like Kuwait and the other Gulf states where a lot of money is spent on horses and women. India's a healthier place because here there is a more natural evolution and development. The Arabs had their own culture, but now it's wrecked. When we were driven across Mesopotamia, the traditional cradle of agriculture for the region, all we saw was desert, roads, power-lines and oil flares. Nobody is working the land. All this is somehow the other side of the coin which has made possible the material progress and advance in living standards of the West. But Saddam is admired by many Arabs because he is seen as a strong leader with the guts to challenge Israel and the West, a man who is renewing Arab pride and self-respect."

"I've never before thought about the world situation so intensely as in the last three months," says Nicole. "Mother's reference to Auroville preventing another World War was with me very strongly. And I remember what Mother had said about the two World Wars—about the incredible nervous disruption they caused to humanity. I have the very strong impression that this war will disrupt Mother's work."

"If there was any purpose in what happened to us," said Peter, "perhaps it was to put Auroville very directly in contact with that situation. It's important that that connection, that concentration continues. Perhaps in the future, Auroville should make a more conscious effort to involve in its work people like the Arabs and Africans who are not represented here."

"Finally", says Nicole, "what I've felt in this is the underlying unity within Auroville. I think that whichever Aurovillian had happened to be stuck in Kuwait, they would have acted in the same way." "We've had an incredible welcome coming back and we're very touched by it," added Peter. "It really feels as if Auroville is beating with one heart."

Edited by Alan



guards on every floor. "The following morning", recalled Nicole, "they came to our room and asked me if I was ready to return to the West with my children. I said 'yes', but I wanted my husband to come too. 'Not possible, not possible,' they kept saying. That night, after many delays, the plane took off. Except for one man, we were all women and children who were leaving our husbands behind us. Somehow being in the same situation made us all very strong. It was a powerful vibration."

"For men with families it was a great relief to know their wives and children were out of it," said Peter. "But for single men, it made it more difficult. Because it was now obvious that Saddam was going to hold on to the men—perhaps for a very long time."

A few days later, Iraqi security came for Peter. They put him in an air-conditioned Toyota ('I wouldn't mind having one of those in Auroville!') with an American and another Englishman and drove them south, towards Basra. Finally, late at night, they arrived in a dusty compound of prefabricated bungalows.

"The next few days were quite a downer", said Peter. "We didn't know if the authorities in Baghdad had lost contact with us. We had no communication with our families, and the news on our SW radio was grim. On some mornings, I expected to hear the American bombers coming over..." But again, they were comparatively lucky. They were being kept at a steel plant in quarters which had been used until recently by German engineers. There were books, videos, a games room; they were brought fruit, milkpowder, cheese. And there were no armed guards.

messages to the hostages in Iraq and Kuwait, but at first she had no idea if her messages were getting through—it took one month to receive her first letter from Peter. "It's not easy to get a letter that's four weeks old, and each time it happened, I got depressed. But I and the other wives got a lot of support from the French government who had started a centre where we could phone in and get information about our husbands. Even though the media were always talking of terrible possibilities, I was never scared for Peter. I felt everything would be O.K. and we just had to wait for this thing to pass. Having lived in Auroville so long made it much easier to bear. It gave me a tremendous confidence that whatever would happen would be for the best. All I had to do was to be quiet, hang on, and be in the immediate reality I was in." Meanwhile, Peter was spending his time reading, listening to the radio, playing table tennis and jogging up and down the dusty compound. And writing letters to Nicole. "We had to write in block capitals and then the interpreter would read them in front of us to see if they needed censoring. It made us very angry." After five weeks, Peter heard his first message from Nicole on the radio.

On 22nd October, Saddam announced that all the French hostages would be freed and, on 27th October, Peter was flown back to Baghdad, his British passport still hidden in his hand luggage. He was taken to the same hotel from where he'd departed two months before. "It was an extraordinary atmosphere. We were all meeting people we hadn't seen in two months, and we had all had different experiences." In the middle of this, a group of about 35 Britons, who'd just

DISCOVERING AUROVILLE

"Thank you, thank you, thank you. We'll come again."

It began two years ago with a visit from two members of the Findhorn Community, Scotland. It ended a few weeks ago with an emotional leave-taking, as 15 rucksacks were roped to the top of a bus bound for Mysore. 'It' was a 13-day introduction to Auroville programme, organized by four Aurovilians for a group of 15 visitors, led by three members of Findhorn. During those 13 days, we listened to presentations on Auroville's spiritual foundations, on our history and decision-making process, and our relationship to the larger India; we trekked across Annapurna and

emerged. It was clear, for example, that the most successful contacts between the visitors and the Aurovilians were less to do with what was being discussed than with the vision and commitment of the Aurovilians involved. Who would ever have believed, for example, that a tour of a biogas workshop could be so stimulating! It was a reminder that Auroville's most precious resource is the Aurovilians themselves.

But it was a two-way process. Last year, when the visit had first been considered, a few Aurovilians had expressed reservations, fearing an invasion of 'spiritual tourists' who would dilute the essence of our experience. In fact, the visitors in their openness and appreciation acted as catalysts, evoking from Aurovilians outbursts of idealism and aspiration that had, perhaps, long lain dormant.

The sense of flow, of easy interaction, between us was most evident when the Findhorn community

members met Aurovilians to talk about their community. "How do you remove your Core-group?" "What is the role of business in your community?" "How do you take decisions?" were some of our not-so-surprising questions. But there was a quality of receptivity in the room which suggested that Auroville is entering a new phase, a phase in which we can acknowledge that we can learn from others and, above all, trust ourselves to act more from the level of the heart. As one of the Findhorn members put it, "If you could put the same incredible energy into opening the collective heart as you put into greening your landscape, you'd progress very fast."

As for the future, the success of this programme opens up the possibility of providing short orientation courses for newcomers, as well as further introduction programmes for visitors in the guest season. There's still much scope for improvement, but we know now we can do it!

Alan

"If you could put the same incredible energy into opening the collective heart as you put into greening your landscape, you'd progress very fast."

Hermitage, fired by the vision and commitment of Bernard and Berndt; we visited two villages, and stood silent in the inner chamber of Matrimandir; we meditated in Sri Aurobindo's room; we ate out at Aspiration and feasted at Sonja's on Christmas Day; we were guided around Chidambaram Temple; we worked in the Matrimandir Nursery, the Kitchen, at Matrimandir and Isaiambalam; we walked in the Green Belt, circle danced at Centre Guest-house, drank tea with Prem in Auromodel...

It was hectic, but somehow everything came together at the right moment. The Indian Airlines plane actually arrived on time; the bright new lilac and green guest-house was completed ten minutes before the taxis arrived; an unplanned meeting with an ashram trustee led to a special meditation in Sri Aurobindo's room, a casual enquiry at the 'Aurelec' lunch table resulted in a guided tour of Chidambaram Temple by one of the priests. But beyond the fortunate coincidences and confluences, certain 'truths'

FINDHORN

Founded in the early 1960's, the Findhorn Foundation is an international community of about 200 members situated near the town of Forres and Findhorn village, Scotland. The Foundation is based on the belief that humanity is on the verge of a major evolutionary step which can be achieved through a change of consciousness, and more than 5000 guests a year participate in programmes designed to raise individual and group consciousness.

Auroville has a long-standing connection with Findhorn, and members of the two communities frequently visit one another.



An old butcher's shop in Pamplona, Spain, was transformed into this beautiful boutique to sell Auroville products. On the first floor is an Auroville information centre. It was opened on the 17th November, 1990.

Subscriptions

If it is time to renew your subscription, or if you wish to take out a new subscription for yourself or friends, please fill in the form below and send it, with your contribution, either to the Auroville International Centre in their country or direct to Auroville. For details please see below.

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The Spirit of Auroville

About two years ago the publication of a new book called *The Spirit of Auroville* was announced in *Auroville Today*. This book was to contain all that Mother has said and written about Auroville. Although the research was successfully completed, it is not possible to print the book as originally conceived. However, a book containing all the material on Auroville in *Mother's Agenda* will be printed instead. This new volume, entitled *Auroville References in Mother's Agenda*, is now being prepared and consists of about two hundred and fifty pages. The book will be available from Auroville Press in a few months.

The people who subscribed for the original book will automatically receive this new edition unless they notify otherwise. Those who wish to order before June 1991 can have a copy for the original rate which includes surface postage. The contribution is 100 rupees, 10 US dollars, 6 pound sterling, 60 French francs, or 20 Deutschmark. After June, the rate including postage and handling will have to be increased by 30%. All payments should be in the name of Auroville Fund and all correspondence should be addressed to Bill, c/o C.S.R. Office, Auroville 605101, Tamil Nadu, India.

Brief News

On the 12th of January, Aurovilians gathered under the Banyan Tree to concentrate upon the Middle East and to aspire for a just and true resolution of the immense difficulties involved. On the second occasion, a tape was played of Mother describing Auroville's raison d'être as the prevention of a Third World War, and of the danger of the arms race.

In January, artists from Auroville, the Ashram and from Pondicherry came together for the first to organize an exhibition of their work; first at the Ashram Exhibition Hall and then at the Alliance Francaise in Pondicherry. The exhibition was well received. The artists' group plans to hold workshops and organize more exhibitions.

In a judgement handed down after a hearing on the 21st and 22nd January, the High Court, Madras, stated that 'Aurelec' is relatable to Auroville.

Change of address:
Please note our new address on the cover of this issue, or below.

Auroville Today provides information about Auroville on a monthly basis and is distributed to Aurovilians and friends of Auroville in India and abroad. It does not necessarily reflect the views of the community as a whole.

Editorial team: Yanne, Tineke, Roger, Caryl, Bill, Annemarie, Alan. Photo's: Sven. Typesetting on computer: Annemarie. Franz (Prisma) assisted with the final stage. Printed at Auroville Press.

♦ ♦ ♦ To Receive Auroville Today ♦ ♦ ♦

The contribution for the next 12 issues of Auroville Today is for India Rs. 100*, for other countries: Rs. 450**, Can.\$ 27, French F. 145, DM 45, It.Lira 31,500, D.Gl. 50, US \$ 22.50, U.K.£ 13.50. This includes the postage by airmail. Please send your contribution (or your supporting contribution of double the amount) either to the Auroville International centre in your country (add 10%) or to Auroville Today, CSR Office, Auroville 605101. Cheques should be made payable to Auroville Fund, specifying: Contribution for Auroville Today. You will receive the issues directly from Auroville.

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AVI Brasil, Caixa Postal 96, 45660 Ilheus-Ba, Brazil. AVI Deutschland, Bismarckstrasse 121, 4900 Herford, West Germany. AVI España, Apartado de Correos 36, 31.610 Villava, Navarra, Spain. AVI France c/o Marie-Noëlle, 14, Rue Nungesser et Coli, 75016 Paris, France. AVI Nederland, Marco Polostraat 287/3, 1056 DN Amsterdam, The Netherlands. AVI Quebec, Boîte Postale 2236, Succursale Delorimier, Montreal, Quebec H2H 2R8, Canada. AVI Sverige, Borgholm, Broddebø, S-59700 Atvidaberg, Sweden. AVI U.K., Boytons, Hempstead, Essex CB10 2PW, United Kingdom. AVI USA, P.O.Box 162489, Sacramento CA 95816, USA.

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BHARAT NIVAS INFORMATION CENTER
BHARAT NIVAS
AUROVILLE



February 1991 - Number Twenty-Six

In this issue: Hostage, new communal ventures; AV challenges...

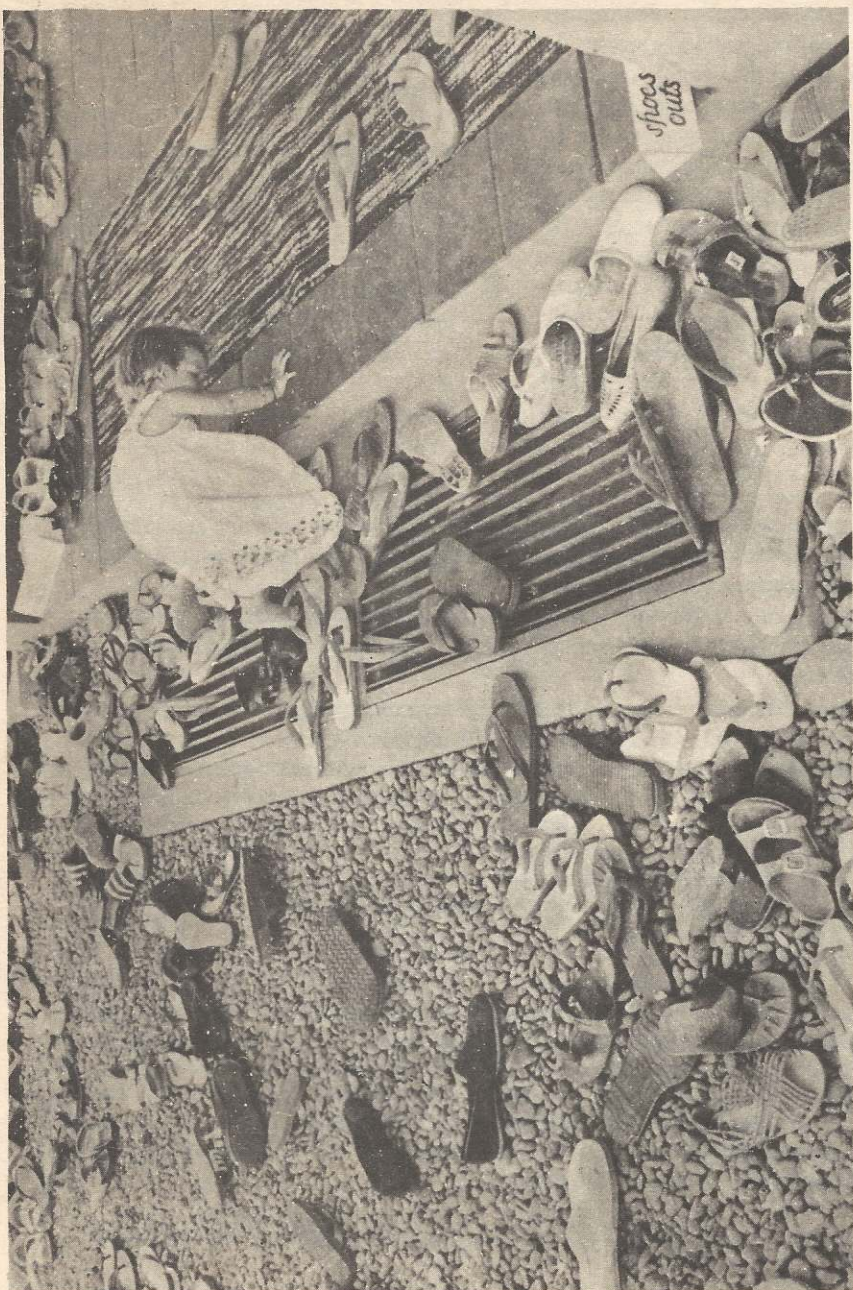


Photo Sven

IT IS NOT ENOUGH TO CONCEIVE PLANS, THEY MUST BE REALIZABLE TOO!

Auroville Today met with Suhasini in 'Samasti', where she lives in a house of her own design. Of Tamil origin, she studied architecture in New Delhi and came to Auroville in 1983. She is 29, and as an architect she has already had interesting opportunities in Auroville to exercise her skills.

At the age of 12 I dreamt of being a painter, but I realised very soon that with paint I could only create an image on a two dimensional scale, whereas as an architect I could construct an 'image' in three dimensions and then hang my paintings on it.

At the end of your studies, you did a training course in Auroville. Why?

I wanted to be close to the ocean, so I asked for Pondicherry. But very quickly I started to find it extremely boring. Somebody then proposed to me to try my luck in Auroville, at the Architecture Office of Poppo at Bharat Nivas.

How was your first contact with Auroville?

At first very shocking. All those photos of Mother and Sri Aurobindo, those flowers, incense... appalling. I have been always been pulled back and forth between two worlds—that of my parents who you could call modern and yet traditional brahmins, and the American-style college where I did all my studies. And I found the project of Auroville very ambitious. Then, well, one day at the Amphitheatre where I was doing a course in Odissi dance, I became aware of the Matrimandir just above me, which is a high-tech achievement, and at the same time an Aurovilian passed by on the road, on a bullock-cart... At that moment finally I became convinced that the project of Auroville could succeed exactly because it brought together all the contradictions, the paradoxes of the world. After that I had six months to prepare my thesis on Auroville.

... which you passed successfully in spite of the resistance of your professor. And six months later you joined Auroville definitively.

I first lived at Bharat Nivas and at that time hardly anything happened in Auroville in the sense of construction: just some private houses here and there. Then Gilles—a French engineer who later became my husband—and I started up the A.R.C. (Auroville Resource Centre). The first work we did was collecting all the different maps of Auroville and updating them. But making maps was not at all what I dreamed of, I wanted to build. And one day Tineke asked me to make the plans for a small bungalow for the Centre Guest-house. The budget was very limited but I was madly happy. Finally I was going to build.

Then you moved, first to 'Sharnaga' and then to Samasti, where you live now.

It was our dream to live in an apartment in a more densely populated residential complex. As Sharnaga, a horse farm, was not the place for this and the town plan was not progressing very much, we contacted all the people who we thought were interested by this kind of project, and soon the first piece of land was bought. The cost of the infrastructure was shared by all, Peter A. designed the first houses there and we started to work. But several times the thing got stuck. So then Gilles and I thought we had to make one more step and started with our own house... to prove that it was possible!



And how did you happen to take up responsibility for the Information and Reception Centre?

During the two years I stayed at Bharat Nivas I saw a considerable number of tourists passing through and I realized what a nightmare it must be for the Aurovilians to have to explain Auroville to them and, at the same time, for the visitors to form a realistic idea of Auroville. So Gilles and I worked on this project of the Centre for Information that passed through several phases before finding its definite form. After a conference on the use of earth in architecture that inspired me, we decided to show that it was possible to construct big buildings with this technique. We obtained funding and I started to draw the plans, alone, all the time waiting for other Auroville architects to join me. As I had no self-confidence at all, I begged for the opinion of many of the Auroville architects and their advice has been very precious to me. But I was very impatient to see it built. When Serge (a French architect with ample experience in mud-brick architecture) arrived, I knew then that we could bring the project to a good end. I learned a lot, and I don't consider myself at all the architect of this project for on paper everything is possible, but when it comes down to realizing it... that is yet another adventure!

How did it go with your integration into Auroville?

I never had any problem. I was here to do my work and nothing ever came in between. I've never had any money but at the same time I never lacked anything. On the spiritual plane I was always attracted to Sri Aurobindo because he addresses the mental level, but as I function essentially by intuition, my contact with the Mother became very direct. I am convinced that if you are not open to the spiritual level of Auroville, you cannot stand life for long for here there is no social life, no distractions and little comfort. So at every level it could only be frustrating. There is something very strong here that holds the Aurovilians together. I always think that in order to be able to create more than just a simple three-dimensional space here, you must have a spiritual aspiration.

Interview by Yanne