

AUROVILLE TODAY

August/September 1989

Auroville Today - CSR Office - Auroshilpam - Auroville - Kottakuppam 605104 - Tamil Nadu - India

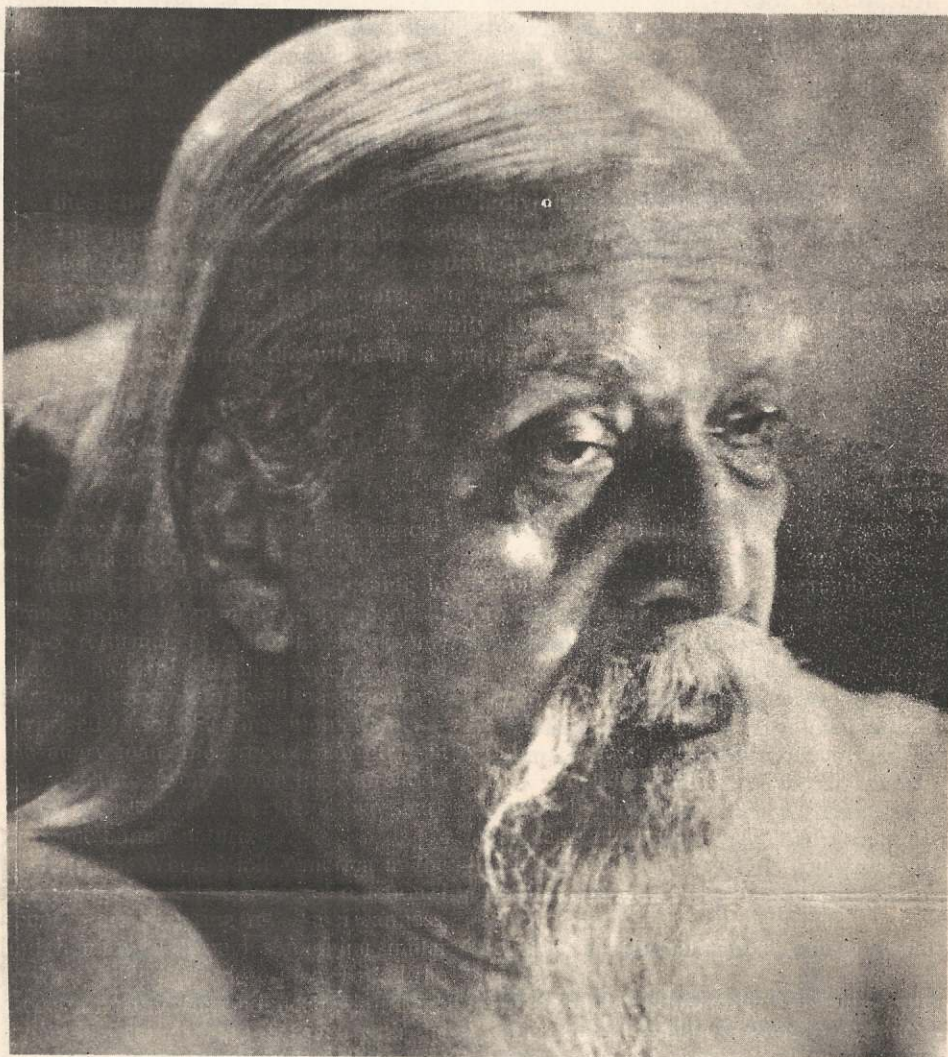
Number Nine

Introduction

We didn't have to look far for the theme of Auroville Today this month. We'd received reports from the AUM meeting in America and the Auroville International meeting in Holland, the Secretariat in Bharat Nivas was being flooded with letters from Argentina, a Russian journalist who had written about Auroville was revisiting us, and we'd been given a poem by a well-known writer about recent events in China.

So it was clear that this issue would have an international flavour. But how far is Auroville itself an international community? What do we mean by 'international'? How does Auroville relate to that larger world which includes the surrounding villages as well as the hi-tech cultures of the West? What have we to learn? What have we to give? How prepared, both psychologically and physically are we to welcome the increasing numbers of those who wish to share this experience?

By raising these questions, we hope to stimulate debate about these issues and to prick those cosy assumptions about internationalism and world citizenship. There are no ready-packed answers. But, as an Aurovilian recently put it, to admit that we don't know many of the solutions is already a powerful way of calling help and opening doors to the future.



August 15th, 1989 — Sri Aurobindo's 117th birth anniversary

"Where all the world finds its home in a single nest".

Is Auroville an 'international' community? How far do cultural differences continue to play a part in our life here? What is our aspiration for the future?

These were some of the questions considered by some long-time Aurovilians recently. Deepti was born in the Punjab, India; Meenakshi is Tamil; Alain is French; Patricia is American; Annemarie is Dutch and Ulli is from West-Germany.

Auroville Today: Many Aurovilians do not like to be identified by their nationality. Why not?

Ulli: It's because people want to separate themselves from their past.

Alain: When I'm asked where I come from, I'm annoyed. Why should I be identified with a group of people whom I don't share many things with? I prefer to think of myself as a human being rather than French.

Deepti: Working in Last School, I realise that the children of Auroville are growing up in a cultural void, as adult Aurovilians want to leave their roots behind, to reject their past. When we wanted to present the essence of French culture in the school, all the French teachers said 'Non! But civilisation is culture, and unless we expose our children to the best, the essence of different cultures, we are depriving them, we are depriving the children of a rich experience because we haven't come to terms with our own roots.

Patricia: Being American, I don't have a sense of many centuries of civilisation. To me, Americanness is more like an energy. Still, it feels like a superficial part of my being and that's why many Aurovilians reject the label of their nationality. Perhaps we won't be able to come to terms with our true Frenchness

or Americanness until we can step out of it and look at it. The French probably didn't want a French week at Last School because they've still got one foot in it. They're still too close to it.

Alain: I think there are two aspects of nationality. One is behaviour, one is culture. The latter can be something beautiful and true, but at the level of behaviour, there are certain traits of the French which I find unacceptable.

So, are many Aurovilians rejecting their roots?

Annemarie: My experience is different. True, when I first came to Auroville, I didn't feel Dutch. I felt 'international'. But through being in India and seeing how lots of people are deprived of even the most basic education, I began to appreciate my upbringing and education in Holland. When I returned to Holland after six years, it was a very positive experience. I became more aware of my own Dutchness and became more at one with my origins. And through this, I began to understand that each nationality has its own peculiarities and good and bad qualities. Through accepting them in myself, I could start to accept them in others. If we can't accept or get in touch with the spirit of our own culture,

The whole process of Nature depends on a balancing and a constant tendency to harmony between the two poles of life, the individual whom the whole or aggregate nourishes and the whole or aggregate which the individual helps to constitute. Human life forms no exception to the rule. Therefore the perfection of human life must involve the elaboration of an as yet unaccomplished harmony between these two poles of our existence, the individual and the social aggregate. The perfect society will be that which most entirely favours the perfection of the individual; the perfection of the individual will be incomplete if it does not help towards the perfect state of the social aggregate to which he belongs and eventually to that of the largest possible human aggregate, the whole of a united humanity.

Sri Aurobindo

then how can we conceive of having cultural pavilions for each country?

Alain: I too appreciate returning to France now and again to keep a contact. Once, returning to Auroville after some time I had this strong experience of humanity being basically all the same. I was surprised to see the same human types — the angry man, the greedy man etc. — in every culture, even though the expression differs. Underneath everything, we share the same human nature.

Patricia: When I left America in the late 1960's, it was in a mood of reaction. I spent years rejecting my Americanness, and then I went through something similar to what Annemarie described. I read the Declaration of Independence and through things like this I came in touch with the American spirit, which I find very beautiful and inspiring. This felt like a liberation. But

recently I suddenly realised that I've been living in India for the past 18 years, that this is my home, and that I hadn't really come to terms with this. This is my quest now.

How far has cultural conditioning played a part in our lives in Auroville?

Patricia: Auroville's history has definitely been influenced by cultural bias. But it's not deliberate; it's inadvertent. We tend to be drawn together on the basis of language and then, inevitably, certain national characteristics start coming out and getting magnified. When this happens, when people of one nationality meet or live together, the special Auroville 'magic' can't get in.

Ulli: But national groupisms only apply to certain nationalities. Some Aurovilians seem to lose their national identity, others strive to preserve it. Many French can only

cont. on page 2

communicate in their own language—this leads to communication difficulties and polarisation.

Deepti: There is definitely a Western opposed to an Indian perspective. But I think the deeper we go into finding our true selves, the more we move away from particular cultural perspectives. These only exist in the outer nature.

Alain: At certain times in the evolution of Auroville, certain characteristics of culture and nationality have been useful. For example, during the struggle with the Sri Aurobindo Society, the ability of the French to say 'non' was useful. It brought clarity. But now that it's over, that same attitude becomes a liability. It's as if the Consciousness uses whatever is needed—good, bad or mixed—for what has to be done.

Ulli: Three or four years ago, national focalisation was a hot topic. There was a lot of it then. It's still present today, but it's less acute. There was a lot of it then, even though, as Patricia says, it was unconscious.

Deepti: We take the narrowest interpretation when we talk of nationality. If we talk instead about temperament we can see that we still have definite differences here. There's the Anglo-Saxon temperament, the German temperament, etc. It's not just politics. It's something deeper. And as we go deeper, we find new problems and more interesting solutions.

Auroville has been called an 'international' community. Do you find this an adequate definition?

Alain: I find it very shallow.

Deepti: Tagore used this Sanskrit term to describe Shantiniketan. The words mean "where all the world finds its home in a single nest". It seems a more appropriate expression for Auroville than 'international'. I grew up in an international environment which was very westernized. I

only began to look at my Indianness when I came to Auroville. I discovered I couldn't proceed until I'd gone deeper and deeper in order to discover what this land, in its essence, has given to the world. To find one's inner being one has to seek this too—this something in each culture which has nothing to do with nationality.

Alain: When I think of India, I think of Mother. The Mother consciousness. It means that in India I have an instinctive confidence that I'm in the home of my mother. And I've always felt that Auroville was like a baby being carried by Mother India, until the baby was able to grow on its own. It's because India can be mother to everybody that she can assimilate everything.

Meenakshi: It's true. Since time immemorial we've worshipped the Mother Goddess here. It's beyond all nationality. The whole world is here.

Patricia: We're not an international community. That's a superficial definition. We've come home to India, which has room for everybody, and out of this something new will emerge.

Deepti: What you see in India is that if the inner thing, being, is expressed, then you are immediately accepted. What other country would do this? Look at the Prime Minister's wife. She was born in Italy. But for everybody here, she's Indian.

Patricia: Auroville is not here for our own experiments. It's for the earth. It's essential that at least a handful of people go beyond nationality. At the same time, if we are working towards world peace, there has to be a place where the whole world family finds its rightful place and means of expression and that can only happen in India. It's a work Mother gave to Auroville. To let the whole world family come in and find the essence of its expression. ■

3.8.89

- India shall take her true place in the world only when she will become integrally the messenger of the Divine life.

Mother's Agenda, 6.4.72 (Message to Indira Gandhi)

- India has become the symbolic representation of all the difficulties of modern humanity
India will be the place of its resurrection, the resurrection to a higher and truer life.

...And then it came immediately: Voilà pourquoi tu as fait Auroville.

Mother's Agenda, 3.2.68

HOW MANY AUROVILIANS?

The numbers in the first column include only those who were present in Auroville recently. The second column has the total number of Aurovilians including those who are abroad for a shorter or longer period.

Algerian	1	1	Sri Lankan	1	1
American	33	46	Swedish	9	12
Argentinian	4	5	Swiss	20	24
Australian	10	14	Tibetan	1	1
Austrian	5	5	Tunisian	1	1
Belgian	18	22	West German	112	136
Brazilian	6	7	West German/		
British	23	27	French	0	1
British/French	1	1	Total	684	828
Canadian	13	17			
Dutch	43	49	Number of people who joined:		
French	156	209	1987	53	(8 left)
French/Irish	0	1	1988	50	(15 left)
Indian	200	212	1989 (till July)	24	(3 left)
Irish	0	1			
Italian	23	27			
Japanese	1	1			
Moroccan	1	1			
New Zealander	0	1			
Spanish	2	7			

These data have been provided by the entry and visa service.



Photo John Mandeem

The Annual Auroville International Meeting

The annual meeting of the Auroville International Centres took place this year at Hoogersmilde, Holland, between 23rd-25th June. Carel is the co-ordinator of the Auroville International group in Auroville and helped organize this year's meeting in the Netherlands. Here he talks about the experience.

Auroville Today: When you left for Holland in April, it wasn't clear that there would be an Auroville International meeting this year, as the old Auroville International France had refused to host it and nobody else had come forward. How did it get organized?

Carel: I'd already promised to organize something if France dropped out. I felt very strongly that the centres should meet together with support from Auroville, as otherwise they'd be left in a kind of vacuum. When I reached Holland, I immediately phoned Marie-Noelle in France, as we all felt that, if possible, France should remain the venue. When she was unable to organize it, I contacted the centre in Hoogersmilde which is where we met in 1986. I wasn't optimistic. It was already late in the year to make a booking. Yet, the only dates available were the ones we wanted—23rd-25th June! In one day it was all arranged. But, even then, I didn't know what to expect, or who would come. Auroville International France and Auroville International Italy had dropped out and, apart from a few other Auroville International centres and a few Aurovilians, nobody had responded. For a moment, I was seriously thinking that the time had come to wind up Auroville International. But when everybody arrived, it was like a fresh wave, a new beginning. There was a very good energy from the existing centres and there were new people there who wanted to set up Auroville International Centres in France and Spain. We also had a nice letter from Singapore from someone who is doing a lot of work for Auroville there.

The old Auroville International Centres in France and Italy dropped out. What effect has this had upon the Auroville International organization?

Not much. Many of these people had a rather rigid mental approach to Auroville, which was not shared by the other centres. Now there is a new Auroville International centre in France and some Italian Aurovilians are working to create a new centre in Italy. So, I'm very happy.

By the way, I was very impressed by how the French at the meeting reported what had happened at the final meeting of the old Auroville International France. They were very calm and objective and stressed that we must now look ahead, not backwards. Everybody at the Auroville International meeting fully supported the plans for a new Auroville International centre in France.

On the first day of the meeting, Aurovilians gave reports on topics like the Foundation Act, Matrimandir, the economy of Auroville etc. Was there any interesting feedback from the Centres?

What was unexpected, and very nice, was that the Centres wanted to participate in the new Auroville financial scheme (see elsewhere in this issue—eds) whereby units and individuals are asked to contribute Rs. 200 per person a month for collective expenditure. Otherwise, the Centres mainly asked questions to elicit more information.

Does this mean that the Centres feel they are not getting enough information from Auroville?

Yes. I think the Auroville International group in Auroville can do better. The job has partly been taken over by *Auroville Today*, but the most vital thing remains personal contact. Each centre should have a contact person in Auroville who can give them information they don't receive through the printed news.

What about communication between the centres?

Recently, it's been virtually non-existent, and I was happy to see it revived by this meeting. Two years ago, many people running the Auroville International centres either came to live in Auroville or moved on to something else. Most of these people had close personal friendships and this had created a very tight Auroville International network. In the last two years, there's been a vacuum. But now it's growing stronger again. For example, it's good to see that the new centres in France and Spain will work together to organize the next meeting in the south of France.

What were the most important things to come out of this meeting?

It wasn't so much resolutions as the feeling that the whole Auroville International thing is alive, and that we still have a network of centres who are deeply interested in Auroville and wish to support it. We tend to assume that a movement is only doing well if it is big. But Auroville International works well because it is a small group of dedicated people who do a lot of work. (I think the Aurovilians present were very surprised to see how much work these people do—and remember, they all of them have full time jobs.) Auroville has also grown slowly. Probably it won't be able to grow faster until a secure basis of brotherhood and responsibility has been established. Otherwise, there's a danger that a sudden, explosive growth would overpower the ideal.

Auroville clearly remains the nucleus of the Auroville International organization. But that organization is full of life, and getting stronger all the time!

9.8.89

A Certain Loss is Always the Price of a Step Further

China – Tiananmen – May '89: Hope
China – Tiananmen – 5th of June: Horror

Thanks to the perfected means of communication, the whole world was able to follow from their armchair the bloody events of Beijing.

Why come back to it three or four months later and, moreover, in an Auroville journal? Very simply because all what happens on earth concerns us, concerns me, affects or favours the experiment of Auroville. And then where I believed I'd found hope, a descent of a new consciousness in this difficult country, there was a wave of barbarism which has shattered and crushed all hope.

Is this ignoble repression the last outbreak of human blindness, of the obscurantism which rules over every totalitarian system?

These young people believed that their smile, their joy, their song would be enough to change a sick and already obsolete power, but no! it was too soon for humanity, too soon for the human race. They have answered with tanks. Once more it is necessary to bury young bodies together with courage and hope.

Yes! I was wrong and I am left with a wounded heart, and the questions arose.

What is a revolution? What does it mean: a million young people singing in a square, demanding liberty and democracy, opening, clarity? Which force of appeal does it represent? But also what an invocation to change, to progress! What a beautiful mantra repeated by millions of lips! What a rousing vibration is spread in the atmosphere of a country! Even when trampled upon, when crushed, the ideals still engrave themselves onto the consciousness, never to be erased again.

"A revolution is an alchemy which precipitates a movement of evolution", says

Sri Aurobindo. Therefore we are the witnesses of an important movement of Evolution. I for one am convinced that a new wave will rise when it will be needed, to regenerate and illuminate China, for the sense of progress is independent of the reason of man, it acts everywhere and often where it is not expected. Today, new demands, new watchwords flourish, once again the mantra is liberty-democracy. Let us not smile at their efforts. What we take for granted is still to be gained for a lot of people.

And dictatorships will collapse one after the other; this social change is inevitable for, before daring to even think of a new man, a political and social system which is simply human will have to be achieved.

The only reason for which the world has caught fire for this young and fresh movement is that it represented a symbol: the symbol of the aspiration of humanity for this new consciousness which will free us definitively from obscurantism, from oppression, from fanaticism, from abjection.

They were a handful, a million, a drop of water in the immensity of this inert people, and China has for some time fallen back into terror, hatred, torture and opposition to change.

The more man progresses towards his humanity, the more the resistances will intensify. He must go on. There will never be any sacrifice in vain. He must again and ever again clear the ground, make fortresses, fall down, start again, believing that it is possible and that that which will be gained for some will be gained for the others.

Courage, amis de Tiananmen.

Yanne

I shan't forget the 5th June, 1989, for on that morning I was shocked by the news headlines: thousands of students ruthlessly massacred in China, a terrible accident in Russia and the death of Khomeini. It was also on that morning, in Delhi, that I met Vikram Seth, a friend since 1964 whom I saw again after a long gap of 15 years. In that time Vikram had travelled extensively, lived in China, mastered the language and culture, and published 3 books: a collection of poems, a travel book in which he told of his incredible hitch hiking journey across China into Tibet and most recently a novel in verse, set in San Francisco.

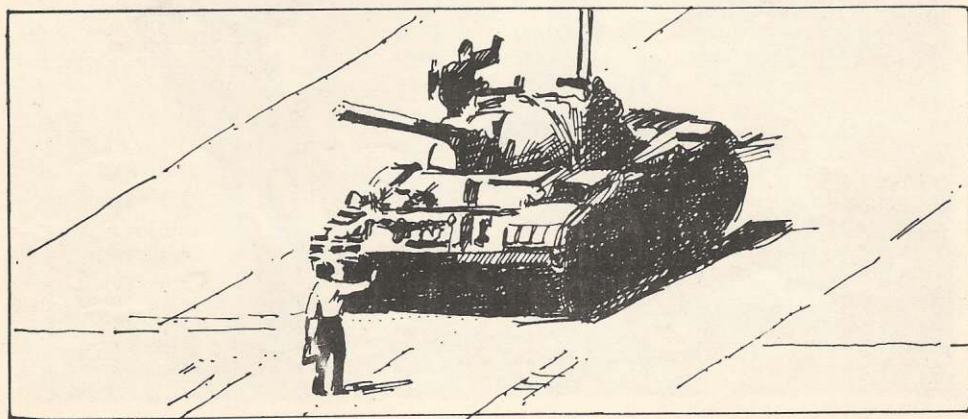
Vikram has kindly agreed to let us print the poem he wrote that day, and we offer it as a mark of our solidarity with those who struggle to throw off the heavy yoke of repression and tyranny.

Angad

TIANANMEN

No miracle will ever clean
The memory, bestial and obscene
Of those who, having fouled their trust,
Grew warped with dread and powerlust –
and ordered fire on the square
On unarmed people everywhere,
Brave people seeking to be free
Of rottenness, of tyranny.

Vikram Seth



Afterword

– by Alan –

I, TOO, WAS saddened and appalled by the concluding events in Tiananmen Square and its brutal aftermath. But after reading Yanne's article and Vikram Seth's poem I felt dissatisfied. Why? Because the response seemed inadequate. Of course, the language is magnificent – and who could fail to be stirred by events like this? But I begin to wonder, as the familiar words – tyranny, oppression, liberty, democracy – roll out again, if our response is not clichéd, if it does not, in fact, feed off that which it overtly attacks, as if it's all cut from the same piece of cloth, point counter-point in an elaborate musical score.

The radical response, it seems to me, refuses the rhetoric, the fireworks, the passion. It transcends the familiar categories and terminology. It simply states the essential – that the only way forward lies in a fundamental change in human consciousness. Nothing less. And then it begins working for THAT.

In the last chapter of "War and Self-Determination", Sri Aurobindo looked back upon the first World War, which had also been seen as an archetypal conflict between Good and Evil. He wrote,

"In the enthusiasm of the struggle a hope arose that it would sweep away all the piled-up obstacles to human progress and usher in with a miraculous immediateness a new age. A vague ideal also syllabled eloquently of peace, of brotherhood, of freedom, of unity, which for the moment partly enlightened and kindled the soul of the race and gave its intellect a broader vista. Men spoke of the powers of good and evil separated on opposite sides and locked in a divisive conflict. These ideas were the exaggeration of sentiment and idealistic reason and in their excessive and blinding light many things took cover which were of a very different nature. The hope could not but be an illusion, a haloscene of the dream mind when it sees a future possibility in its own light apart from existing conditions. Human mind and action are too much of a tangled coil to admit of such miraculous suddennesses; the physical shock of war and revolution can break down stifling obstructions but they cannot of themselves create either the Kingdom of Good or the Kingdom of God; for that a mental and spiritual change is needed to which our slowly moving human nature takes time to shape its customary being."

"China is extremely intellectual; if the Chinese intelligence is captured by the thought of Sri Aurobindo, it would be... But that seems to be the only, only hope."

Mother's Agenda, 19.4.69

一九八九年六月二十八日 廣播

徐 結 語 註 書

神聖 阿羅新村約章

神聖 母親 手訂

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Auroville Charter in Chinese

● ● ● To Receive Auroville Today ● ● ●

The recommended yearly contribution for 12 issues of Auroville Today is for India Rs 66, for other countries: Can \$ 18, French F. 96, DM 30, It. Lira 21000, D.Gl. 33, USA \$ 15, UK £ 9. This includes the postage by airmail. Please send the contribution (or your supporting contribution of double the amount)* either to the Auroville International Centre in your country or to Auroville Trust, Bharat Nivas, Auroville 605101, Tamil Nadu, India, specifying: Contribution for Auroville Today, with your name and address. You will receive the issues directly from Auroville.

* cheque, money order, bank draft all accepted

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FIRE-WALKING

Mother called them 'the first Aurovilians', the 30,000 villagers who share with us this corner of a plateau in South India. Their villages surround us; daily, about 2,000 of them come to work among us. But how much do non-Tamil Aurovilians know about them? What effort do we make to understand the customs and concerns of those whose future is intimately linked to ours? Auroville Today wants to provide an insight into village culture and to stimulate thought about the future relationship of Auroville to the villages.

Edayanchavadi. Sunday, 9th July.

At 2.30 in the afternoon, the neem logs are lit. By tradition cut only that same morning, they splutter and spit, the sap hissing out, before the heart-wood ignites with a flash and sparks fly up into a heavy sky. Meanwhile, crouched by the temple wall, village women in bright saris are cooking special rice porridge (*pongal*) on make-shift stoves, while children rush about exploding fireworks, or stare, wide-eyed, at rows and rows of bracelets, trinkets and brightly-painted images flashing from roadside stalls. For it's the day of the annual fire-walk.

3.30. The fire is burning fiercely, carefully tended by six men who, with damp neem leaves clutched to their burning faces, drag out each log with long poles, hammer it vigorously, then push it back into the inferno. The women, painted earthen pots on heads, are filing into the temple compound to offer their food to the goddess Mariamman while, at their feet, men, women and children roll wildly round the temple on the dusty, stony earth in fulfillment of vows made in the past year.

4.30. The expectation increases. The air is dense with the smell of camphor and the drumming, frenzied, insistent, has entered the blood, welding the crowd into a single organism. Suddenly, three men emerge from the temple carrying trissoles—trident-shaped symbols of the Mother Goddess in their right hands. Quietly, with dignity, they sit on a platform, their faces indrawn, expressionless, ancient, as the chief priest pours pot after pot of oil, rice water, curds, turmeric and chilli water over them. Finally, to a triumphant shout from the crowd, they each drink 3 long draughts of stomach-searing chilli water to demonstrate their fortitude. Then they step down and, accompanied by musicians, dancers and the other prospective fire-walkers, they enter the temple compound for the final stage of preparation.

6.00 The attendants of the fire have broken up the logs and raked the glowing embers across a pit 5 metres square. The heat is intense. Immediately beyond is a shallow pit of muddy water. Through gaps in the compound wall, the spectators catch flashes of the fire-walkers, in bright yellow lungis, processing round and round the temple in a tight mass, crying "Govinda, Govinda" (one of the names of Krishna). As the light begins to fail, the chanting and drumming increases until suddenly they emerge, a bright snake weaving out through the temple gate. They stop opposite the fire pit, their skin and eyes glistening, thin needles piercing faces and bodies. Silence. A dense, compact pause, as if between two beats of the heart. Then there is a sigh, like a collective drawing in of breath, and suddenly the three leaders plunge forward, striding through the fire pit, followed by a crashing wind of bodies leaping, running, dancing through the embers, sparks and ashes exploding around them. In a few seconds it is over, the fire-walkers nonchalantly strolling through the water pit, their feet unsinged, unmarked by temperatures estimated to be 1500°C.

At once, there are shouts behind us and we whirl around to see four men, hooks embedded in their backs, pulling a large lorry along the dusty road. Another drags a minibus, another a cart. As they turn the corner on their way around the village, fireworks flash defiantly into the storm-laden sky and the air is heavy with the smells of camphor, sweat and smoke...

This is the climax of the year in Edayanchavadi, one of the major vil-

lages inhabiting the Auroville plateau. The origins of the village are obscure, but one version is that 600 years ago five families of *Edayans*—members of a shepherd community—settled here, digging a pond for their cattle and building a *chavadi* or resting place for travellers. Today, there are 2,500 inhabitants, but the fire-walking festival is still organized by five 'clans', or related families, who claim to be descendants of the original settlers. The early settlers built an Amman (Mother deity) temple at the entrance to the village and later a Ganesh temple and a water-tank were constructed. In 1922, however, the original temple had disappeared and the other one was in ruins, so the villagers decided to build a new temple dedicated to the original amman, whose local name is *Varna Muthu Mariamman*—the 'colourful, pearly rain goddess'. (This temple is managed by the dominant Vannia community. Only they have the right to worship there and walk over the fire.)

Over the years, the reputation of the village has changed. At one time a quiet farming community, as it grew it went through troubled times. Today, with regular employment provided by an incense factory in the village and Auroville, there is more feeling of stability—but the troubles are not over. This year, for example, the villagers have been involved in a long industrial dispute, there was a violent confrontation with a neighbouring village, and the water shortage has become increasingly acute. The headmaster of the primary school points out that the annual 20% drop-out rate for pupils is due to parents taking them out of school so that they can earn money by rolling incense-sticks at home; 3 kilos of incense sticks earns 3 rupees.

Two members of Auroville's *Village Action* group live in the village. One of them runs a small night-school in her house while the other, Saraswati Devi, is engaged in many activities, including counselling the poor, arbitrating disputes and raising the consciousness of women. "My role is to make them more aware of what they already know, to strengthen their self-worth, for they have many strengths. I also act as a peace-maker, trying to stop violence and to settle disputes harmoniously. Now I've got a reputation for wanting women's rule! But after two years, in spite of earlier opposition, I feel I'm respected."

It is against this background of the daily struggle of village life that the real significance of the fire-walking festival emerges. "It's as if for this brief period, the village is united", explains Saraswati, "and all the difficulties and disputes are forgotten in one big celebration. When I first came, I was annoyed. All that money spent on one festival, when there's no decent water supply! But now I see that it's necessary, it's an expression of the collective psyche of the village, a strengthening of bonds."

A potent symbol of this is the huge concrete pot to which each household brings porridge on the first day of the seven day festival. When the communal pot is full, it is distributed to everybody in need, including relations and friends from other villages and the so-called outcastes. Similarly, while the first five days of the festival are organized daily by a different clan, on the sixth day—the day of the fire-walk—the five clans work together to make their festival the brightest, the finest, the most spectacular in the area. That Sunday evening, looking at the children's faces, I knew they had once again succeeded.

Alan

Firewalking: Some background information

Traditionally, fire-walking is traced back to the legend of Draupadi as told in the *Mahabharata*. Through a misunderstanding, the mother of the five Pandava brothers—whose word was law—told them to share the beautiful Draupadi among them as their wife. At the end of each year, when she changed her husband, Draupadi took a 'fire bath' to purify herself. Hence fire-walking became a symbol of purification and surrender.

In Edayanchavadi, however, the origin is different. In 1922, after the new temple had been built, the priest dreamed that the Goddess Mariamman came to him and told him to organize fire-walking in her honour. It has happened every year since, in June or early July.

Mariamman is a village Mother Goddess who is looked upon as the protectress from all evil, danger and death. The cult of Mother Goddesses is very ancient, being prevalent in matriarchal societies in ancient Syria, Asia Minor, and Egypt. In southern India, each village has its own village goddess, called *grama-devata*. Mariamman has a double nature, both curing and causing epidemics. She may be represented as benign, but generally it is her Kali aspect—the fierce warrior—that is emphasized and that has to be placated. In tribal societies, she was symbolized by the fire itself, and hence fire-walking represents both a surrender and an attempt to placate her.

The neem tree is particularly sacred to Mariamman which is why only neem wood is used for the fire. Afterwards, the charcoal is collected and put in pots with stored grains. Neem is an excellent natural insect repellent!



Photo: Jan v.d. Dikkenberg

CULTURAL BUBBLES...

Three Tamil Aurovilian women will visit the U.S. soon for a period of 6 weeks. The trip has been made possible by friends of Auroville in America. During the past weeks some Aurovilians have been offering them a 'crash course' introduction to Western culture, using role play and including how to operate airplane toilets and negotiate elevators etc. Tineke has been assisting in the process.

SATURDAY AFTERNOON. I just had my first Bharat Natyam dance class. On my way to Centre Kitchen I pass by Meenakshi for a cup of tea. Waves of laughter are floating out of her windows. Upon entering the house I meet a very jolly group of Tamil women drinking Dutch tea and having lots of fun.

Still full of Tamil jokes and dance rhythms, my mind trying to grasp the intricacies of the dance *mudras*, and my feet still hurting from the vigorous steps, I run into Dhanalakshmi and Kamla. At the end of this month they are leaving, together with Amuda, for a 6 week trip to the US. I look into their eyes and see their longing for the big Western adventure, and their fear of the unknown, and I wonder about the big gap between 'my' world of highrise apartments, elevators, rolling stairs, electronic water taps, compost toilets, and 'their' world of keet roofs, kerosene lamps, morning prayers and hand drawn kolams in front of the doors. I see us all living in our own cultural bubbles, but maybe one day they will touch, maybe merge. Wouldn't that be wonderful? — Tineke



Dhanalakshmi, Kamla and Amuda (r. to l.)

Photo: Tineke



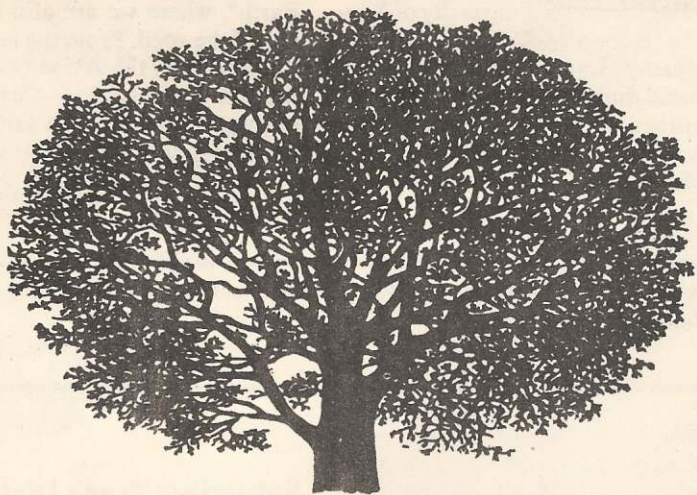
Some regular visitors...

Photo: Jan van den Dikkenberg

How Others See Us...

A selection of comments from the visitors book in the information centre, Bharat Nivas.

- Bof... where is where? (French Canadian)
- It's too bad this concept has not worked. The ideas have such vitality (USA)
- Yes, yes, yes (USA)
- We came with a completely different picture of this place and are very glad we were able to get a true picture — may God bless you all on your noble service (Malaysia)
- It is a world of god-man-nature (India)
- Un rêve (Brazil)
- Rather expensive experiment (Bihar)
- The children liked it very much and would like to come back and study here (Tamil Nadu)
- I cannot judge in so short a time, but it looks like a little Paradise... (Germany)
- India needs a place like this. (Indian student)
- The idea is very sacred and sublime, but why do good ideas take shape so slow as this one? (Madras)
- The city should be developed to its real expectations on which basis the Mother and Sri Aurobindo founded it to be. I want to see the entire world living in this Auroville, living in peace and mutual harmony. (Pondicherry)



'PLANT A TREE IN INDIA'

A project in a Dutch school, with Auroville as the main focus

"WHEN GIVING BIOLOGY lessons nowadays at the primary school, you cannot just bypass the many threats to nature all over the world. The children come with news which they've seen on television, and to make them conscious the teacher has to describe some of the many environmental disasters to them. But too much of this kind of information dulls them, and might give a child the impression that the situation is irreversible and beyond the child's power to do anything about it. That is why I consider it of utmost importance to show the children new, hopeful aspects of environmental developments. When I came in 1987 to Auroville, I saw to my utter astonishment what is possible when human beings with care, love and dedication endeavour to heal the earth."

This the beginning of a brochure, written by Gerard Jak, who teaches in a primary school in the village of Wognum in The

Netherlands. Since 1988 he has been organizing *Plant a tree in India* projects. Through biology lessons and video films, of which the main focus is Auroville, he has been increasing the environmental awareness of his children. In addition, he has been organizing activities to fund-raise for Auroville's reforestation programme. This year for instance, Annemarie, Gerard's wife, did a benefit evening, singing songs with guitar accompaniment in a medieval castle in Medemblik.

Auroville has used the money partly to plant fruit trees and forest trees in the neighbouring village of Thuvai, partly to start water conservation activities on non-Auroville land, and partly to improve the Auroville forest and the demonstration tree-nurseries. Thanks a lot, Annemarie and Gerard, for this initiative and beautiful support!

FROM ARGENTINA AND RUSSIA WITH LOVE

Letters from young people to Auroville

The following letters are responses to recent articles on Auroville that appeared in newspapers in Argentina and Russia in the past months. This is a selection — there are many more!

From Argentina

My name is Carlos, I'm 17 years old and I read about Auroville in "La Nación" (a newspaper). The article was written by Elba Fernández who lived in Auroville for 8 years — you call her Anándi. I am really interested about this place because Auroville is the place I always dreamed of. I live in Buenos Aires the capital of Argentina. I live in the city, and I really hate that, because I'm an idealist, I love peace, nature, humility, and I haven't got anything of that in the city. So I'm very depressed here, I'm tired of fighting with people in school, in the street, in my own house. Nobody likes my ideas, they are absorbed by the society. Of course there are some people who think just like me, I'm not the only one. You think like me, I think that's the reason you live there in Auroville.

Well, here the only thing I like to do is study music. I study piano and guitar, I love music, it is the way I can forget about this life in the city and go somewhere. A place with freedom, peace, love, where I can live with nature, with people working together, with people who work for themselves and not for their money. I found that place, my dream came true. That place is Auroville. I had improvised a song for Auroville and its beautiful people, I forget it now; but when I improvise about something, it is because this thing inspires me, so you are my inspiration and I can only think of reaching to Auroville.

My name is Andrea Verónica Goldberg. I live in Argentina, in the outskirts of Buenos Aires city, and I am quite curious about what happens in the world around me.

I am a girl, 10 years old and I want to know you. I have read in a paper about your place and I would like to live there with you and never quarrel with neighbourhood kids as I like having friends everywhere, so I always answer letters in the children's section of the paper where you always can find brain games, tales, cartoons and so on.

I want to know what you do for a living, what kind of authorities are there, and if you hunt, buy or barter. Do you read Fairy Tale Books there? Do you learn about such things, I find them very funny.

Chers amis d'Auroville,
Je m'appelle Sergio André Madera. J'ai 23 ans et je suis Argentin. Quand j'étais plus jeune, j'étais très idéaliste. Je rêvais beaucoup. Maintenant je suis un peu plus "concret" mais évidemment j'ai toujours mes exigences de justice, de vérité, de bonheur. Je pense que tous les êtres humains ont ces exigences. Seulement la mentalité commune, les mass-média nous font souvent oublier que nous sommes surtout une question qui doit être répondue. Voilà pourquoi quand j'ai lu quelques lignes sur votre expérience j'ai décidé de vous écrire immédiatement afin de savoir encore plus. J'aimerais aussi faire des amis à Auroville. Qui sait. Peut-être, un jour, pourrais-je visiter Auroville... Je sens que j'ai beaucoup de choses à partager avec vous mais d'abord j'aimerais recevoir quelques lignes. By the way, I can also speak English!

Maintenant, je vois qu'il en attendant

avec impatience une réponse.

From Russia

How do you do.

We are a group of young men and girls, united by common ideals and our interest in Indian culture and philosophy.

We believe that the future belongs to the spiritual man, developing in harmony with Nature. It seems to us that Auroville is the first step on the way to the society of these spiritual men, and we'd like to take part in this enterprise.

My name is Stanislav Prokhorov, I'm 22. I am a student of the Urals University. Long ago I heard of a city, where people from many countries live as brothers, with simple manners and customs. Nobody can tell me something concrete about the city. But some days ago an article of Yuri Lepsky, correspondent of "Komsomolskaya Pravda", was published in the paper. Now my dream becomes real in the name "Auroville".

All the last days I can think of nothing except Auroville.

Twenty years of my life have passed, it is terrible. Life is not like I'd want.

I love my country and it is hard to see many bitter people for whom a piece of meat is more important than self respect.

The situation in my country is very difficult but seeing our life one understands that first of all we must change men's consciousness and then our society. In this situation one idea often comes to my mind. What is life? What is the sense of life? Often I closed my eyes and dreamed about a beautiful town where beautiful people live. People for whom the Highest Justice are mind, honour, conscience and culture.

It was only a dream, I didn't know that in Far India there is the Town of My Dream.

In spite of the article I can't believe in it yet. Is it possible, to be a town where the main aim is happiness for people?

I ask you, please write to me about your Auroville, about your and your friends' life. I want to get to know about Auroville as much as possible.

Please, help me.

J'ai lu dans un de nos journaux un article sur votre ville fantastique et je suis très impressionné. J'ai décidé de vous écrire immédiatement, car c'est bien cela dont nous avons besoin dans l'URSS. Il faut — j'en suis sûr — créer des communes semblables partout. J'y ai réfléchi avant d'avoir appris l'existence de votre ville, mais je n'ai pas pensé que quelque part il y ait des villes pareilles.

A certain time has passed since my returning home from India and Auroville where I spent some of the best and most beautiful moments in my life. It seems to me that the sun of Auroville, the warm-heartedness and wisdom of its inhabitants are still with me.

Once more, thank you for that.

(From Ilona — who attended the *Peace Trees* conference last December)

Contact addresses are available with Barbara, Secretariat, Bharat Nivas, Auroville 605101, T.N., India.

АУРОВИЛАЛЬ

AUROVILLE—(headline in the Komsomolskaya Pravda)

YURI LEPSKY is a foreign correspondent based in New Delhi for *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, the paper of the communist youth union. He is as Russian as a Russian could be: blond with blue, very blue, eyes, a round face, a solid body—a body that has no time to think of itself—and a very sweet look, which trembles on the point of innocence.

We met in the Centre Guest House where he stayed for a short period. It was there that I discovered his secret...

But let's start at the beginning. Ten years ago, Yuri read an article on Auroville, and couldn't believe his eyes. From then on he was never able to satisfy his curiosity about Auroville. In 1988 he finally spent some days in Auroville (during the *Peace Trees '88* youth exchange programme) and he was deeply stirred. Life in Auroville, its aim, the human relations and, above all, the freedom to dedicate oneself to one's own development, interested him passionately. Back in Moscow he wrote a very long article on Auroville, but he doubted that it would be published. The miracle happened: the article appeared in *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, paper of the communist youth union.

In that article, he describes his experience of Auroville with enthusiasm. He writes about Mother's dream, and gives general information about Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's life, and the inauguration of Auroville. He describes how, when he arrived in Auroville in December '88, he wondered where the buildings and the highways were. He met Sanjeev who showed him Auroville and introduced him to many Aurovilians. He describes the people as very friendly. Then he talks about greenwork and the work with the villages and the Tamil children.

He stresses that the children speak many languages. And also that everybody can choose their work and change it when they wish to. He remarks that "Russians learn already in kindergarten to offer their

Matrimandir as a place where one can meditate and find oneself, and what the finished building with the crystal will look like.

He notices that Auroville is an international city, but wonders why there are no Soviets. He was surprised, when he was invited to the bonfire on Auroville's birthday, that there were so many people, quietly sitting there without anybody speaking. There was not one speech!

This was his perception of Auroville and it could be noted that he didn't speak about spirituality. But is that really something one has to speak about?

The impact of Auroville in Russia

Following the publication of this article, 2000 letters reached him from enthusiastic people, who either wanted more details or wanted to come and settle in Auroville. And Yuri returned here with his secret, his suitcase full of smiles and hopes, to see what he could do.

Like the poet Valentin Sidorov (see *Auroville Today* #8), Yuri Lepsky is yet another kind of ambassador for the USSR. Is this a consequence of perestroika? It's only a beginning. After several entertaining encounters with him, a group of Aurovilians overcome by his enthusiasm, wrote a letter to the editors of *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, to serve as an answer to the 2000 letter writers. However, we have been forced to realize that our reception facilities only allow for 15 or 20 of them to remain here for a year. (There is definitely a study to be made on this subject.) Imagine! There are about 800 of us. What would happen if suddenly 2000 Russians arrived! The image amuses me, for I like the disproportionate and the unexpected, but on a practical level it would be a mess! It is really time we woke up! Auroville, international city of human unity???

Letter from Auroville to the Editor of Komsomolskaya Pravda

Dear Sir,

This letter has reference to the article which your newspaper recently published on Auroville. We are deeply touched by the very warm and enthusiastic response of so many of your readers to this article. It is clear that many people in the Soviet Union would like to come to visit or live here, and we are already trying to find a way to make that possible. We are physically unable to answer each and every request that has come to us, so please, if you are one of those who wrote, take this letter as an answer to you!

One of the aims of this international township-in-the-making is to achieve an actual human unity which would bring together all the peoples of the various nations of the world. Though some 25 countries are already represented here, the lack of any single member of the USSR has been felt by us here as a striking omission, and we sincerely hope that this gap will soon be filled by many of the voices which have answered to Auroville's call, first delivered twenty-one years ago but still echoing around the world today:

"Greetings to all men of goodwill.

Are invited to Auroville all those who thirst for progress and aspire for a higher and truer life."

Ultimately, when Auroville has developed more fully, each of the world's cultures will have its own pavilion in Auroville wherein the best and most characteristic testaments to each country's culture, history, customs, language, art and music, etc. will be on permanent display for all the world to see.

In the meantime, while formalities proceed to enable many of you to come here, you might consider coming together to form an Auroville International USSR centre. Such centres already exist in some 10 countries around the world, maintaining regular contact with Auroville and offering information about Auroville to those who are interested. This is one way in which Auroville can grow in the USSR.

14 July 1989,
Auroville.

A.U.M. — All - USA Meeting

The last direction on the map to the meeting says: "Go to the end of the road." At the end of this road is the Pathwork Center, a conference facility nestling in a little forested valley with streams and a pond for swimming and boating. Those who came from New York City, from Brussels, from Quebec or from California, and especially those from Auroville, could not get over the beauty of the setting, and immediately could enter into a special relationship with the place.

As you can guess, lots of hugging of old friends and meeting new ones is how it all started. This was the fourth annual AUM, the largest and the best (commented most old-timers). AUM attempts to gather together people interested or involved in manifesting the new world vision of Mother and Sri Aurobindo and to find out how the 'work' is going.

The meeting was organized by the Sri Aurobindo Association, Auroville International USA and the Foundation for World Education. Numerous study groups and individuals also assisted to make the meeting possible. This year a significant number of people from Auroville were also able to attend. Over a hundred people participated during the sessions that began on the last day of June and continued until the holidays of the United States Independence Day—Fourth of July.

The programme included a very wide choice of workshops, meditations, sports, lectures, dance and play. (When you try African dance for the first time it's unforgettable, and the response is, "Why didn't we think of it before?") For the first time AUM invited three distinguished writers and professors of philosophy and religion who gave joint and individual presentations. These were Dr. Jehangir Chubb, who had taught at Bombay University, Case Western University and Temple University (North Carolina, USA), Dr. Robert Minor from the University of Kansas and Dr. Robert McDermott from the City University of New York and author of *The Essential Aurobindo* which was recently republished. However, the spectre of heavy academic interchanges dissolved in the friendly and personal interaction that

extended from the seminar rooms to path-side conversations and the dinner table. The almost bizarre diversity among the participants in the conference would normally portend some pretty disastrous sessions and exchanges. That did not happen. One started to suspect some maturity among us, however, when one evening performance acted out "All life is yogurt." People did laugh, did jump in the lake, square dance, sing mantras and drink a lot of herb tea.

There were questions about a yoga without a guru on the human plane, the karma and rebirth issue, integrality and wholeness in life, the supramental action which can be neither a teaching nor a religion—where are those answers? Workshops looked at health and healing, auras, astrology, apparitions, T'ai Chi, parenting, the sunlit path, dreams and visions. The spirit of the USA can embrace profound differences with an openness that risks dilution, superficiality and true discernment. That issue had to be looked at often. A consideration is that "being right" is not a complete truth on the level of human relationship. For the new world to realize an actual human unity given our most obvious diversity, will not more enhancement of difference be required to spice life?

In the evaluation circle at the end of the meeting, where each participant could share the positive and the negative aspects of the experience, the level of honesty, appreciation, trust and love were able to surface. Each one will carry this away and build the future with it. Of course, there is the well known conference 'high' that can't take the return to ordinary life, but it is also a characteristic of the integral yoga that there is no ordinary life or, in the words of the conference joke: "All Life Is Yogurt."

A topic suggestion for the next AUM meeting, to be held in a mountain area near Seattle, Washington, is "Our Mother Earth", where we are also coming to the end of the road. From the end of the road, the view from the AUM perspective is, as Mother expressed it: "Sri Aurobindo's message is an immortal sunlight radiating over the future."

Bill

- The work of the U.S.A. is to provide the financial help needed to prepare the earth for the new creation.

Mother's Agenda, 9th June, 1968

Subscriber Trunk Dialling (S.T.D.) comes to Auroville

Do Aurovilians remember the good old days when they tried to book an international telephone call? Those elevating three-hour waits in the salubrious surroundings of the Telegraph Office, General Post Office, Pondicherry? Or, for those fortunate possessors of a telephone, hanging over the instrument for hours at a time, only to be informed—at about 2 o'clock in the morning—that "there are no lines to Australia tonight. Would New Zealand do, Sir?"

Well, all good things must come to an end, and on 7th July the Auroville Telephone Service announced that an S.T.D. Public Call Booth has been opened in the Kulilapalayam Post Office building. So, instead of the joys of surrealist conversations with semi-audible telephone operators, Aurovilians and others can now deal direct to all the S.T.D. linked cities in India and to more than 100 other countries. It will never be quite the same again...



Matrimandir

Progress Report

This month an extensive report on Matrimandir's progress appeared in our weekly internal *Auroville News*. Many points of progress were mentioned in the report. Work is going on mainly in the **Inner Chamber**, and the main focus here is on placing the marble slabs on the walls. Ten out of twelve rows of marble slabs have been put into place. When the ceiling has been plastered with materials to be received from abroad, all the scaffolding and platforms can be finally removed to reveal an utterly transformed room. Apart from walls and ceiling, the work is in progress on every other element the room will contain. The columns have been fabricated and paid for in Italy and are ready to be transported. The last of four lorry loads of marble for the floor, donated by a party in Bombay, is expected any moment. The four Sri Aurobindo symbols which will support the crystal globe in the centre of the room, are under high-tech processing in an engineering facility near Auroville. The *Aureka* workshop in Auroville is making the required tool for engraving Mother's symbol in marble slabs, to be placed under the Sri Aurobindo symbols. The engraving work will also be done by Aurovilians. The crystal globe, 70 cm in diameter, is still with Zeiss in West-Germany and will come when the Chamber (and we!) are ready to receive it, which will hopefully be in less than a year. Experts have started working on the extensive drawings for the Chamber's airconditioning system; experiments are ongoing on the mirror prototype of the heliostat (device for directing the sunlight through the top of the roof into the

Chamber), which had been fabricated some years ago. The amount of light (and heat!) that can be safely directed onto the crystal globe is being studied on computers by engineers in France and West-Germany. Recently two reflectors have been received for the artificial illumination of the globe at night and experimentation will be carried out.

All the work in the Chamber proceeds under the supervision of Piero, engineer, who has been living in Auroville and working on Matrimandir since the beginning.

The construction of a spiral staircase which will lead to the second level has begun. This is the very last part of the actual structure of the Matrimandir. From there spiral ramps lead up to the Chamber. These ramps, which seem to be hanging in the air and the steel skeleton of which had been completed in 1980, are now being repainted and three prototype plexiglass parapet sections for the hand-rail have been installed, but it will have to be seen if they are the right ones.

Matrimandir's architect, Roger Anger, who lives in France, will oversee the design and construction of Matrimandir's outer skin and 'petals' when he returns to Auroville in September for five months. Research is already ongoing with various engineering companies in India. He will also help in finalizing the design of the **Matrimandir gardens**, so that the Nursery, having been set up so many years ago exactly for this, can actually start planting in the gardens.

For more detailed information, the *Matrimandir Newsletter* is available from *Matrimandir, Auroville Trust, Auroville, Kottakuppam, 605104 T.N., India.*

MATRIMANDIR ROSE AND CEMENT

Grey perfume stains our hands
a strong sweetness,
the future grows,
and in a dovetailing of suns
a ray is caught.

Eternity
seed of fragrant steel.

SLIDING WARM

Sliding warm
under my naked feet
discovering my way
making me possible
this red sand

Auroville
summer.

Poems by Anandi (Argentina)



Matrimandir: plexiglass parapet on ramp. Photo Jan v.d. D.

THE NEW CHILD

The new child
on the ancient beach
awakes

its blue shadow
suddenly unveils
a whole Eternity
of light.

Auroville Today tries to appear monthly and is distributed to Aurovilians and friends of Auroville in India and abroad.

Editorial team: Alan, Annemarie, Bill, Carel, Roger, Susan, Tineke, Yanne. Desktop Publishing: Annemarie. Design: *Prisma* (Franz). Printed at *Auroville Press*.

The 'Central Fund'

An update on the Auroville economy

In *Auroville Today* #6, May 1989, we reported on the recent developments in the Auroville economy in the article "The Auroville Economy: A Small Step Forward". In this article there was mention of a proposal to draw up yearly budgets for all collective responsibilities, such as road-repair, administration, health-care and other services, special funds etc. and to ask every Aurovillian to contribute Rs.200 monthly to one of these budgets. The commercial units would determine how much and to which budgets they would contribute each month.

The experiment started on the 1st of April. So far about 26 budgets have been drawn up, including an 'unspecified' one. The response was encouraging. The priorities the Aurovilians set were clearly visible: a considerable percentage of the contributions were specified for road repair, children, greenwork, Personal Emergency Fund and the Bridging Fund (in this order). Also the 'unspecified' was not forgotten; a sign that many Aurovilians chose to allow the economy group to do the allocating for them.

The individual contributions of Rs. 200 were given by 116 people in June, 109 people in July, and 158 in August.

The commercial units gave mostly specified. Some gave a 3-monthly estimate of their monthly contribution, but most

units leave open how much they are able to contribute every month.

Since the start of the Central Fund, 50,000 rupees (25%) more is available for the collective responsibilities, i.e. services and maintenance!

In the Auroville International meeting in Holland (see report elsewhere in this issue) people of different Auroville International centres abroad expressed their wish to be part of the experiment, by sending monthly an equivalent of Rs. 200 to the Central Fund. The proposal was warmly accepted. Those who wish to contribute can do so by transferring the amount to Auroville Trust, Bharat Nivas, specification: Central Fund, or through the Auroville International centre in their country.

The 'Collective Fund'

AT THE same time as the 'Central Fund', another fund was set up as a first step towards a system of sharing. The initiative for this fund originated among members of the 'Institute', but every Aurovillian is invited to participate. At present this fund, which is administered by Pour Tous, covers only food. Participants' contributions are put together to cover the (food) needs of all participants in a flexible way.

LETTERS

Reading the last issue (#7) of *Auroville Today*, I felt compelled to refresh your memory and go back to your early issues and your noble yearning, for a dynamic paper, a Forum for many voices etc. But unfortunately things now seem already a little different and the general tone of the magazine seems bent on glorifying our "aurovilianness" with all the lofty attitudes we may uphold, most of it giving little idea about *what's Actually Going On In This Place*, and little substance for us to chew on. I've been told that publishers tend to fabricate and edit their articles to size and shape as to fit their package. I for one can vouch for that, 'cause once printed, not much was left of the long uplifting conversation on music I had with Yanne and Roger one fine afternoon. So, I'm told that it would have made good material for a "Guitar Player Magazine" but that most of it would be irrelevant to your readers who after all are only concerned with our aurovilianness. Hey! I understand, but I'm not so sure about that. Don't forget that Auroville publications have a dubious history and are notorious for taking what is our common goal and printing it into something that reads as an incurable communal disease. If you don't know what I mean, try reading the *Auroville News*. You'll just want to die!!! It's O.K., Don't worry guys, I'm just getting back at you for your inexcusable erratum: I came in '74, not '78 which would reduce me to a mere newcomer: this despicable lot that speak french and ride kinetic Honda's on the wrong side of the road. Now, don't think I'm being opinionated. There were some good articles in your last issue, Meenakshi's interview for example was genuine and interesting and Roger's article was a refreshing undercurrent of A.V. life. But then!! "Cheese making at the farm", God spare me! 'TOWN PLANNING', You've gotta be kiddin'. Now, what about a good gossip page instead; "Madame X, ou le courrier du coeur".

O.K. now, — don't edit this. I hope that you can take some light criticism in a good spirit and not get upset just cause I'm having some fun. Also why not a little controversy for a change.

Hip up guys.

Nadaka, Auroville

Congratulations on a really excellent issue. Wonderfully down to earth (literally) by comparison with last issue (#7). Very readable. Very interesting. And full of thought provoking important points for our future here. Thanks to all of you.

P.S. Your typing printing error rate is also impressively low!

Tim, Auroville

Meny thanks. (Eds)

Thank you for bringing a touch of Auroville to those of us in places other than Auroville. Recently, a small group of us began to examine the dynamics aspect of the Collective as a part of our group process. As with all such examinations, several questions were raised, (...) questions that Alan's comments in his article *It's Not What You Do, It's The Way That You Do It*, (issue #6) helped to address.

Elements of the Auroville experience also seem to be present in our early unfoldment as a collective. It would seem that our microcosm would also be present in other budding collectives that are similarly engaged in the pursuit and examination of the yogic process on the collective level. The openness with which you report the Auroville condition can only serve to enhance and advance the awareness of those of us who are just beginning our own mini-Auroville adventure.

My thanks and regards to all of you who are serving to create a forum for the Auroville process.

In Her Light,

Mitra Varuna, Canada

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N.B.: The editors may shorten letters for reasons of space or interest.

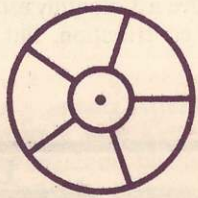
AUROVILLE TODAY

CSR Office - Auroshilpam - Auroville
Kottakuppam 605104 - Tamil Nadu - India

BOOKPOST

Address Correction Requested

Krishna Tavar
Auroville
Auroville



In this issue:

The international aspect of Auroville; firewalking; China; letters.

August/September 1989 - Number Nine



Photo: John Mandeon

OPEN LETTER

Franz answers Savitra's letter which appeared in Auroville Today #8.

Dear Savitra!

Greetings also from across the waters. I am sitting at the Auroville Repos beach, looking towards the east and I imagine if I could get in a boat I could go on sailing, crossing the Indian Ocean and the Pacific and one day I would reach the coast of California.

I read your letter in *Auroville Today*, where you asked us Aurovilians to look for an approach for energy systems when we do the town planning for the future city. You are right. We should not fall back on the already overloaded power grid of Tamil Nadu. We should be courageous now while we still can choose, and maybe the world will come forward to help Auroville find solutions and the funding for them.

Savitra, one solution I can see for our electricity problems is solar energy, and since this kind of energy research is much better established in the West, or looking out from Repos beach, in the East, than in the third world, I ask you to find out something about one of the existing solar energy farms which are able to compete profitably. You do not even have to go out of California to find one of these places.

Kramer junction is in the middle of the Mojave Desert and when you take Highway 395 coming from the south you will see first what seems to be a big shining lake in the dry landscape. But only as you near will you recognize a near unending maze of mirrors, thousands of acres of them mounted on steel frames and positioned in long rows, harvesting solar energy.

Around 1984 some Israeli and American engineers and a businessman, Arnold Goldmann, started to build the first solar farm in the California desert. Now the turbines, with a capacity of 200 megawatts, are humming and last year Arnold Goldmann could sell solar energy to the value of 155 million US dollars to the national grid. Enough electricity, clean and noiselessly produced, to supply about 25,000 people.

And this is only the beginning. In Harper Lake, a few miles distance from Kramer Junction, the first of five 80-megawatt solar power stations is under construction. Eventually this company will supply electricity similar to the output of a medium sized nuclear power plant and at a cheaper rate than most other power stations.

Arnold Goldmann is planning other solar farms—in Nevada, Texas, Brazil and INDIA!! Compared to photovoltaic installations, Goldmann's solar thermic electricity farm is a typical "low-tech enterprise" — simple, cheap and easy to maintain. This functions in principle like a magnifying glass. The parabolic mirror, positioned by a computer always towards the sun, focusses the light on a plastic pipe, in which synthetic oil is circulating. This liquid is heated up to around 450 degrees Celsius and it causes water to evaporate in a central installation. The steam drives a turbine with a generator in a conventional power station. The current travels in the usual way via high power lines to the user.

For a solar thermic installation you need space and normally eight hours of sunshine a day. I think an installation like this could fit in our sunny South-Indian environment. Also an existing electricity network is needed, as well as some water to clean the mirrors regularly and a method of protecting the mirrors from sandstorms. It is puzzling why more companies or countries are not using this kind of solar farming.

Dear Savitra, I think there are many possibilities to discover in California, which could be of tremendous help and use here in India and Auroville. Of course I don't know if it is possible, but since the solar farms are in your neighbourhood, why don't you take a day off, make an appointment with Arnold Goldmann of the LMZ International company and ask him every detail about his solar thermic solar farming and tell him about India and Auroville. Maybe you can interest him in starting a pilot project here.

For myself I can see an ecological, clean solution to our local power problems only in big scale solar energy farming.

Good Luck!

Love, Franz

Editorial note:

There are now over 300 solar photovoltaic panels in use in Auroville, making it one of the foremost field research centres in India for solar energy. The electricity produced is utilized for pumping water, lighting houses, running fans, charging batteries - and even for operating a computer! More details in a later issue.

GARDEN FRAGMENTS

*This is the season when the rainbow-gods
come visiting the City of the Dawn;
looming at evening behind high-piled
clouds
they show no faces, only aureoles,
and pace their chariots slowly to the sea*

*—
leaving at night sometimes behind
a benison of longed-for showers.*

*Frog-song and cricket-shriek
as rain begins...
music for parched ears!*

*My tree has caught the stars
like fishes in its net;
but just one little one
has slithered through:
a glow-worm glitters in the grass.*

AT MORNING'S CALL

*At morning's call —
hungry cat, quarrelling crows, or
kitchen clatter —
we pop up like corks
to bob on the surface,
flipped this way or that
by the day's ripples or storms;*

*only as night draws in
do we grow heavy;
our eyes fill with secrets
and slowly we sink under
to drown again
in darkness, and in dreams.*

Poems by Shraddavan, Auroville.