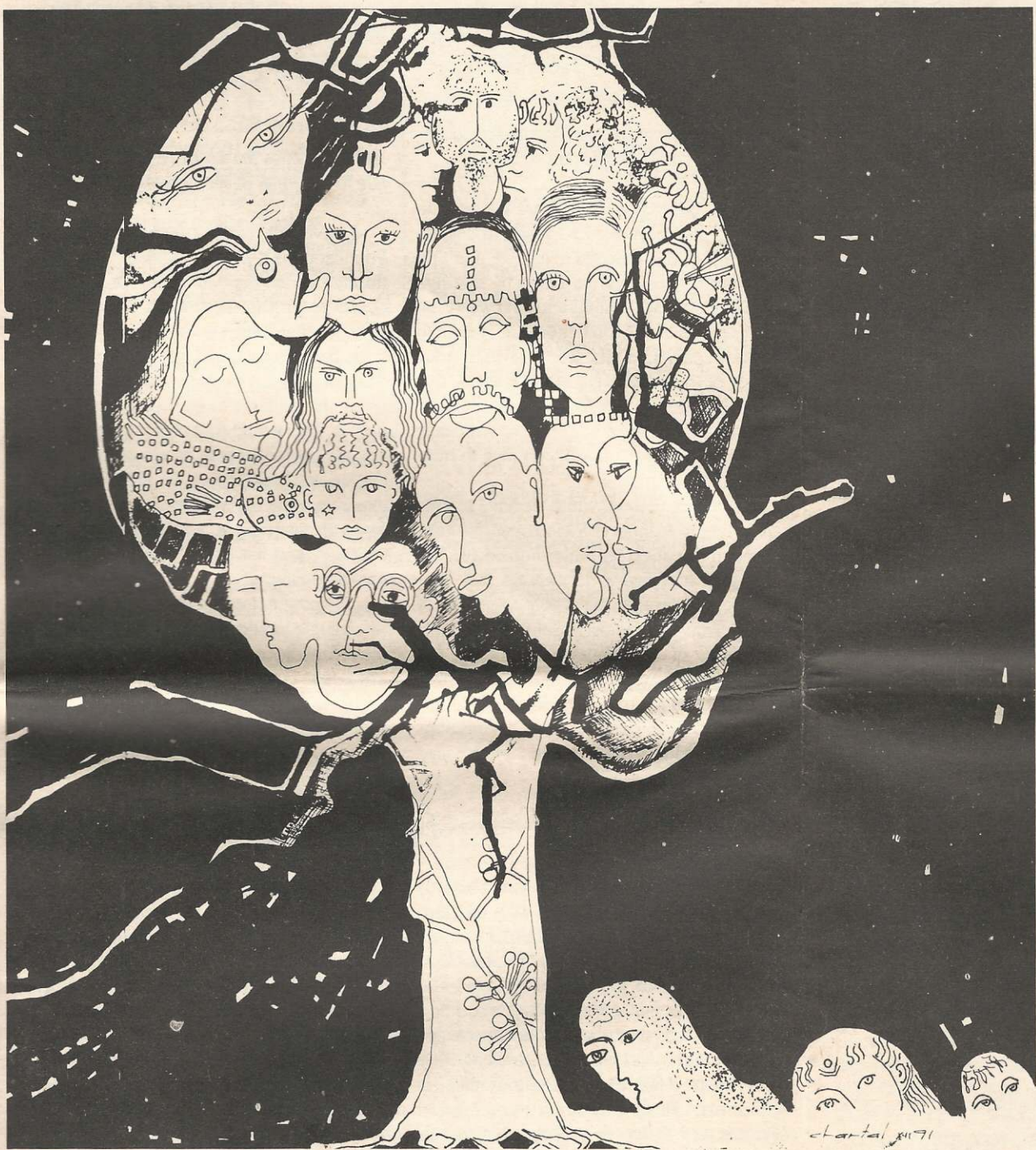


AUROVILLE TODAY

March 1992- Number Thirty-Eight



Chantal 8/1/91
Drawing by Chantal

In sum, it may be safely affirmed that no solution offered can be anything but provisional until a supramental Truth-Consciousness is reached by which the appearances of things are put in their place and their essence revealed and that in them which derives straight from the spiritual essence. In the meanwhile our only safety is to find a guiding law of spiritual experience or else to liberate a light within that can lead us on the way until that greater direct Truth-Consciousness is reached above us or born within us. For all else in us that is only outward, all that is not a spiritual sense or seeing, the constructions, representations or conclusions of the intellect, the suggestions or instigations of the Life force, the positive necessities of physical things are sometimes half-lights, sometimes false lights that can at best only serve for a while or serve a little and for the rest either detain or confuse us.

Sri Aurobindo
The Synthesis of Yoga, pp. 128-29

It's as easy to describe what is happening in Auroville as it is for a fish to describe the ocean. For we, as residents, are so enmeshed in the flux and flow of events here, and so much seems to be moving on so many different levels — both within ourselves and in the community as a whole — that to attempt an "objective" view of what is happening in Auroville risks ridicule, as writers of successive Auroville brochures have learned to their cost.

We lack, in other words, a Sri Aurobindo or Mother, able to plunge their gaze through the surface ripples to the unchanging currents beneath, able to distinguish the tributary from the source, the minnow from the shark, able to plot a clear course through the reefs and shallows of our apparent successes and failures.

However, in this birthday week of both Mother and Auroville, a traditional time for introspection, for searching the flames and ashes of the bonfire for auguries of the year to come, it seems appropriate to make an attempt at self-definition and evaluation before we launch (or lurch) off into the next collective adventure.

For this issue of "Auroville Today", therefore, we asked a number of Aurovilians to talk about what they are involved in at the moment, how they see the state of the community at present and what their hopes are for the future.

None of their responses pretend to be objective or definitive, and all, no doubt, represent a mixture of insight, personal projection, idealism and wishful-thinking. If nothing else, however, we may view them as a series of map references or back-bearings which, taken together, can offer some understanding of our preoccupations, achievements and failures at this fragile moment in space and time—Auroville, February, 1992.

PERSPECTIVES...

"It's the psychic level that's the magnet"

ASTER

AVT: What is your assessment of the present state of the community?

At the beginning of Auroville, we tried to put consciousness into matter, but now the "external" traps us, and we are very fragmented. One feels the need to take up all the externals, all outer experience, and to plunge "within". And only when something has arisen intuitively, then to express oneself outwardly in action. Moreover, the moment one touches a certain depth of consciousness in oneself, there is a reciprocal effect upon matter—I've seen this happen often.

What is important, individually, is to have the right balance between inner work and external action. If you are too much thrown out into action, there's a feeling of depletion, and what you do will make no sense. For many years in the past, I was almost totally gathered within, in the deepest part of my consciousness, placing myself at a certain distance from all but minimal external activity. Thus I created room for an inner fullness of consciousness, a psychic fullness

tangible and dynamic, but not yet coming into direct contact with matter. Without this long effort of much intensity and concentration, the outer work could not even have begun. But once on this path of external action, of dealing with matter, great care is needed to maintain the right and helpful balance between the consciousness within and its movement outwards as it works with matter. It's a very difficult task. The fluctuations are many, the imbalances almost constant!

AVT: What can we do as a community to encourage more inner-directed work?

On a collective level, there's a need to provide the space for this work, to cherish and respect this space in a way we don't do at present. This vibration grows by sharing—by a kind of inner "contagion"—but we're too shut up in our individual modes at present to make a contact on this deeper level. It's the inner, psychic level that is the magnet, that holds us together here, not any externalities. And as long as we don't connect with each other on this level, we will continue to fragment and fall apart.

At the same time, while we have to base ourselves in an inner consciousness, the need to manifest outwardly is also imperative. For me, the challenge is to express that consciousness through the whole spectrum of being, from the inmost psychic to the most physical, in one continuous sweep. To penetrate the core of consciousness that matter holds and to come, as it were, out on the other side—thus uniting all in a conscious "whole" where there is no "inner" and "outer", for all is one.

But if this totality of expression is to be achieved, all the contradictions that Auroville has to offer must be embraced. In fact, the more we shy away from contradiction and diversity, the more we move away from the true Auroville experience. This is the challenge. For sharing in a homogeneous field—where people are united by affinities—is well known. But sharing in a heterogeneous field like Auroville, where all variations exist, is not known, and this is the next step of the human experience that Auroville offers us.

AVT: How does the Auroville Foundation relate to this inner development?

I have felt, since a few years, that the Foundation is a kind of channel, a pipeline, through which the experiment of Auroville could enter that stream of spiritual experience that India continues to hold intact, from her most ancient past to the present. This cumulative experience, so potent and living, is available to us if only we connect with it. This would ease some of the difficulties we encounter here on our path. In particular, we have much to learn from the experience the ancient Indians made of dealing with matter in a "conscious" way from "within", and not from "without" in an organizational way.

The continuing feeling remains that the Foundation could serve, in a rather inexplicable, hidden way, to connect our present efforts and our experience with this perennial stream that flows past and around us, a connection that we need for our experience to arrive at its fullness. For the rest, the future will tell. □

Both Aster Patel and Prem Malik have been actively involved in community organization and decision-making groups for many years.

Prem has now withdrawn from this aspect of the work, but Aster remains fully involved as a member of the Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation.

Alan and Bill asked both of them about their perspective on Auroville as it is today.

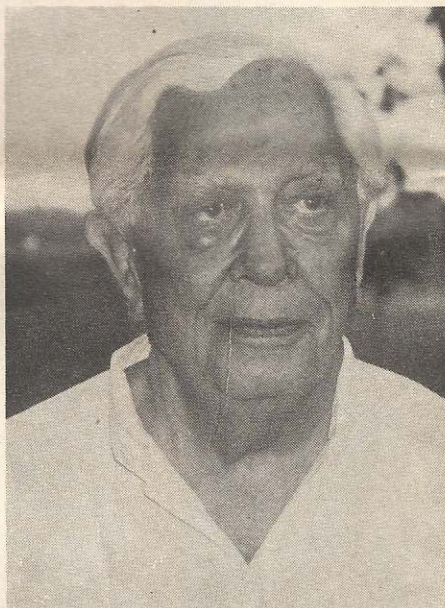
PREM

"If we accept that Auroville means nothing unless it is an attempt towards a spiritualised society - what Mother once termed the "psychicized" way of living - then we need to ask ourselves how we can move towards it. So far, we have concentrated upon the material development of the community, and this has established an indispensable base. The problem with material growth, however, is that it grabs us and we cannot escape. For example, according to me there's enough money in Auroville today to meet everybody's basic requirements. But we are unable to share it as we're caught up in this individualistic, aggrandising movement where everybody takes more and more for themselves. Why can't we share? It's clear to me that it's because we lack the psychic presence, because if the psychic was there, sharing would be automatic.

But how can we reach the psychic level of consciousness? Firstly, I don't believe it can be done collectively in one movement. It's a very individual process. One has to ask oneself if one wants to give all one's life at that moment to manifesting the psychic in material life. If one feels like that, I believe it's necessary to withdraw for some time from those areas of activity that generate vital and mental forces.

The next step is to introspect, to really look hard at one's flaws from another level of consciousness, and then to rise above them. This transcendence is in itself a move towards the psychic because it's a movement towards objectivity. Another way of putting it - to use the terminology of ancient Hindu philosophy - is that we need to move from the rajasic (or vital) level to the sattvic (or spiritual) level of consciousness. (See footnote, eds.)

The majority of material action is performed at the lower rajasic level, where we are driven by our personal desires. If, with a lot of effort, we can rise to the higher rajasic level, our actions will become more free of subjectivity and aggrandisement. At this level, there is more consideration and concentration for others, and more willingness to help them. While this is not truly the



Prem

psychic level, it is the basis upon which psychic life grows.

I believe that we cannot transcend our differences and separations of colour, caste and nationality—which is our aim here—unless we have a very strong psychic presence in our lives. Some Aurovilians have to go for this because, as Sri Aurobindo said, there is nothing like a living example. At the moment, I feel that Auroville is standing on the psychic threshold. If some of us can take the step beyond and bring the psychic into play upon matter, Auroville will be achieved much faster than we can imagine, because the psychic force is very, very powerful.

Finally, Auroville has to show the world that there is another way of living, where there is a beautiful balance between the material and the spiritual, and where life is organized not by the mind but by the soul. If we don't succeed in this, we haven't achieved Auroville."

For a precise explanation of the three "gunas", or "modes of nature" as Sri Aurobindo terms them, see "The Synthesis of Yoga", Part 1, Chapter 10. Eds.

GEO explorers' feed

The Gaia Education Outreach (GEO) is based on a dream about a new way of learning, organized by Barbara and Bruce Kantner from their farm in New Hampshire, USA. With a group of mainly college-aged students from around America, they set off on a six-month odyssey to explore places and communities working on the challenge of a new world. Their exploration took them to Findhorn, Plum Village community in France, and to Russia among other places, before they travelled to India. Their two month stay in Auroville included an introduction week and coordination and support from a small team of Aurovilians.

"Let's meet on the roof." It was to be the final feedback and evaluation meeting for the American students who had spent the last two months working in and exploring Auroville, and as we climbed on to the roof of the Merriam Hill building, squinting in the late afternoon sun, the atmosphere was laid-back and mellow. As the session unfolded, however, what emerged from their feedback was an archetypal pattern experienced by many visitors to the community—initial overwhelming enthusiasm, followed by disillusionment and frustration, succeeded by a deeper and renewed appreciation of what Auroville meant to them.

The GEO students had arrived in Auroville after travelling together for over two months, so the centrifugal forces in the group had been strong from the moment of their arrival here. I really liked to be set free

in the community", one of them remarked, "because while your introduction week was useful, the biggest learning for me happened through experiencing the unexpected." For others, however, the lack of structure was threatening. "I'd have liked to have known much more about the people and the resources in the community before we went into it", said Kirstie, "because then I could have made better use of my time here." Clearly, Auroville took all of them by surprise. "Everywhere there are such incredible contrasts here," said Bruce, one of the group's co-leaders. "I'd walk out of Lisbeth's beautiful house, and in few minutes I'd be in the middle of the village. Always, it seemed we were experiencing extremes." "Daily," said Jonathan, "I'd have experiences that were knocking me flat, things I'll remember for the rest of my life." Not all of these experiences were pleasant. One student had witnessed a Tamil Aurovillian being beaten up by a villager; another had his room broken into twice; a third was depressed by the heavy vibes in one of the communities. At first, they found the Auroville youth unwelcoming. There were problems with the cycles...

"Your information about Auroville has to be honest", one of them emphasised, "otherwise people coming here will expect some kind of utopia—and get a shock."

Many of them felt that education in Auroville needed more energy and commitment from the community. "The kids here are very special, but they need help to bring out this quality, and they're not getting much at

PERSPECTIVES...

"We have to become pragmatic dreamers"

Guy came to live in Auroville at the beginning of 1988, and almost immediately became involved in various aspects of community organization. Today, he manages to combine being a member of the Working Committee, the Development Group and the Economy Group, with coordinating both the Project Coordination Group and "Abundance", the project proposal writing service, not to mention his CSR work; all in all, a fairly typical Aurovillian workload. Occasionally, it is rumoured, he even finds time to sleep! Auroville Today spoke to him recently about the main areas of his work and the challenges ahead.

Let's begin with the newly-formed Development Group. What have been its achievements so far?

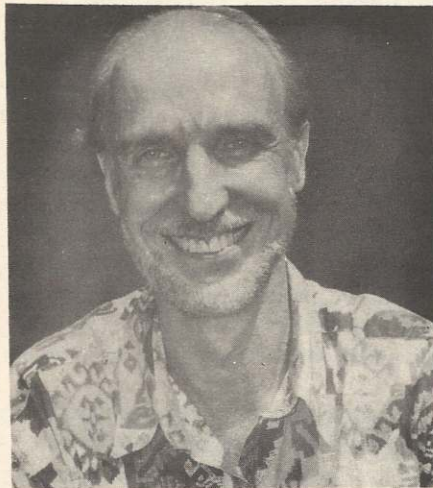
The Development Group was set up on the initiative of the Working Committee and 'Aurofuture', Auroville's town-planning service, because it was felt that a larger group than 'Aurofuture' alone was needed to decide upon the overall development of Auroville. There was a need to harmonise existing differences, like the one between the city planners and the environmentalists.

The Development Group studies zoning, density, locations of residential housing in the city area, and the development of an industrial zone. Now we've identified four areas in the Residential Zone where people

can build. Regarding the Industrial Zone, we have reached a consensus within the Development Group about its location and short-term development. The challenge now is to communicate this to the community, and to include the people living in that zone in our decision-making and implementation process.

In the next few years, I'd say the major challenges are land purchase and the provision of more housing. We need to consolidate the land in the city area and the green belt as soon as possible, both because of the danger of outside development, and because of the need to lay down sensible road patterns and infrastructure.

The projected cost of acquiring all this land at present is approximately two and a half crores (approx. \$1,000,000). I see various possibilities of raising this amount. They include selling off unutilized Auroville land on the edge of the community, and seeking financial assistance from the Government of India and other outside sources. I'm convinced that we could have a lot of interest from funding agencies and private donors if we could sufficiently communicate Auroville as a spiritual and material research and development programme. A programme in which we address the present major needs and concerns of the earth: wasteland reclamation, forest conservation, water resource management, appropriate building technologies, renewable energy sources, alternative healing methods, the integration of city and rural development, educational research etc.—all this connected with the urgent need for a radical change in consciousness. This would mean we would need to bring together, in one comprehensive



Guy

development plan all the aspects we have been working upon separately until now.

As for housing, we have to reverse the past and present trend of widely scattered development, which is very expensive in terms of infrastructure and maintenance, and move towards a more concentrated development. Mother envisaged a "city" of 50,000 people living around its centre, Matrimandir. We should plan now in this direction, both for practical and for spiritual reasons. A concentrated "critical mass" is needed to make that "quantum leap" in consciousness for which Auroville has been created.

Another main area of your work is the Working Committee. How has this first Working Committee functioned?

One of the promises we made to the community at the beginning was that the Working Committee would function in an open, transparent way. I think we have done this. We wanted to act as bridge-makers between different views and polarisations in the community. We have only partially succeeded in this, partly, perhaps, due to our lack of experience and insight. Generally, our process on any issue has been to begin with no preconceptions, but to talk to all the interested parties involved. Often, in the process, we would get insights into what should happen, and we would initiate action after checking our proposals with the community.

Some of the major issues that the Working Committee has been concerned with in the past nine months include Aurelec and the functioning of the productive units as part of the Foundation, Matrimandir, and how we function in relation to the Governing Board.

Working out the latter has not been easy and is still in process. Basically, we want as much responsibility and self-determination for the community as possible. But this will greatly depend upon ourselves. If the community can be united in its general direction and its concrete proposals, I believe the Governing Board will, within the legal framework of the Foundation, give us this freedom.

As to the Foundation—at the moment, we are in that boat, whether we like it or not, and we have to give it the maximum opportunity to function well. The Foundation gives Auroville credibility regarding governments and large funding agencies—something we didn't really have before—and the members of the Governing Board have contacts on a level not available to us. They can open doors for our future development, although, it must be said, that potential has not yet manifested.

What about Aurelec and the commercial units?

Regarding Aurelec, I think we would have saved ourselves much conflict and pain

if the community had acted with more consideration from the beginning. I believe that if a unit like Aurelec is so adamant in not wanting to function as part of the Auroville Foundation, we should see how it can function outside it, while remaining related to Auroville. This is the line that the Working Committee has been following.

It's very clear to me that there's a difference between the Auroville Foundation, which is a legal framework, and Auroville, which is an experiment in growth and change of consciousness where, by definition, nothing can be imposed. If the Foundation is used by any group or individual within the community as a means of imposition and control, I think we are on the wrong track. In this sense, just as we cannot grow individually unless we release old patterns of fear, the community has to let go of its fear patterns and give up its desire for control and imposition. We should have more trust in each other's intentions and become "pragmatic dreamers".

As for Auroville businesses generally, we have to look carefully as to how the Foundation may affect them. And if it is shown for very substantial reasons that they should function better outside the Foundation, I think that should be a possibility; of course, on condition that a proper relation with the Foundation and the community is established.

Another of the Working Committee's priorities was to accelerate the completion of Matrimandir. How successful have you been?

We have attempted to be a catalyst, to accelerate the work there, because many Aurovillians feel the need to complete Matrimandir as soon as possible, and to have Matrimandir acting in its full potential in the community. This is why, when there was a dispute about the outer skin, we finally recommended going ahead with the option that already has a strong wave of energy behind it; otherwise there might be such an upheaval that the completion of Matrimandir might be delayed another 2-3 years. Generally, while the Working Committee hasn't managed to resolve the deep conflicts at Matrimandir, we have helped to avoid damage that would hamper the completion of the structure in a reasonable time period.

Finally, what about Guy himself? Has your work over the past few years been an aid to your personal growth, or has it resulted in a certain depletion and narrowing of perspective?

I've never gone looking for work in Auroville. When it came, it came naturally, and I've always taken it up in a spirit of service. Sometimes the work is frustrating, particularly the work of the Working Committee, where so little result seems to come out of all the effort, and where we seem to be dealing with the same topics all the time. In this position, you're caught up in the tension field of the whole community, and everybody's frustrations are put upon you. It's a real sadhana, because you have to remain detached, not to become personally involved and attached to results.

Overall, however, Auroville has given me so much! I'm so grateful to that Power, that protecting Presence that is acting in the community and in our individual lives—even when it is creating havoc! It's a real challenge and, at the same time, a tremendous grace to live here.

Interview by Alan

back and evaluation

present. At the moment, it feels like education here is either very loose, or over-structured just like in the West. You've really got to find another way." But there was an incredible confidence in the potential of Auroville youth. "You watch," said one of the students, "a lot of things will change in this place when the Auroville children of today take over!"

Some of the students had been working in the village, or at "New Creation" school. "The young Tamil girls I got close to in 'New Creation'", said Lana, "had no connection with western Aurovillians. This made me sad, because they are so open, so beautiful, and have so much to give. I'll always remember sitting on their beds and hugging them before they went to sleep." Stefan's bed in Aspiration was another kind of power-point, it seemed. "It was so big", enthused Daniele, "we'd all climb on, talk, make coffee, talk, smoke cigarettes, talk." Somebody suggested that the bed—and Stefan!—should accompany them on their further travels in India... He did!

Inevitably, Matrimandir was a talking point. "The dispute about the skin reminded me of *Gulliver's Travels*," said Jonathan, "where two groups go to war over which end they should open their eggs! It all seems so futile. The important thing is to get Matrimandir finished. But, somehow, what is happening at Matrimandir is happening all over Auroville. You've got lots of very special people here, but there's also lots of ego flying around, and this is what keeps people

apart and stops them communicating. You should find fun ways of being together to break through all these trips." Brendan agreed. "In this sense, I missed simple group procedures here—like checking-in or attuning at the beginning of meetings—because this really helps focus people and makes them aware of how others are feeling."

Barbara, one of the co-leaders, perceived another 'imbalance'. "You've done so much to change the external world here through your greenwork etc., but I miss the other side of the coin—a certain intensity of inner work, of spiritual sadhana. If there was more of this, Auroville would be a more complete achievement." "The West is also out of balance," reminded Bruce. "I see Auroville and the West as needing to learn from each other. The West definitely needs your spontaneity. But you could do with a bit more of the West's organisation!"

As the evening sun sank below the trees, and the smell of pizzas drifted up from the kitchen below, the affirmations returned. "A lot of the things happening here are more conventional than I would have expected", said Kirstie, "but I've really grown to love this place because of the people, and the amazing work you're doing here. The gift I'll take away is the inspiring example of so much commitment." "Auroville is what you make of it," summed up Brendan. "Here, above all, I've been given the freedom to be myself, to make my own mistakes, to learn in my own way. I'll be back!"

Alan

PERSPECTIVES... An outsider's view on greenwork

The following words are supposed to contain the views of someone who has just come from the "outside". But as I sat down to write, I realized that many of my "outside" views were no longer "outside" views; that they were already becoming difficult to separate from the ideas I was picking up in Auroville. Thinking back, my first impression of Auroville was of a green oasis, with life bursting from the soil. It occurred to me that Auroville's re-greening held important lessons for a world that was rapidly losing its tree cover and that Auroville's experience could be of great value, locally, nationally and even internationally. Indeed, Auroville's work was most worthwhile only if seen in the context of the rest of the world.

Here's the scenario. A formerly denuded, dying land of two and a half thousand acres has been re-greened. The process still continues as more and more trees are planted with every rain. Regreening is technically possible given the time, the money, the muscle, along with the attention and the sensitivity to adapt and change, even if this means killing off pre-conceptions. The result is both beautiful and inspiring.

I have noticed a number of pathways by which Auroville's experience is passed to its surroundings. It happens informally when, for example, a farmer asks for bunding, shelterbelts and even full mixed planting to control soil erosion or provide cash. Alternatively, it may happen when a spokesman, elected by the village, asks for common land to be planted (always a tricky business), to act as a common resource pool, providing temple flowers, shade, fruit, firewood and fodder for the village as a whole. Aspects of

the greenwork experience may also be passed on more formally through training programmes, village eco-clubs, etc.

All the same, I have often asked myself, "For who is this really possible?" From visiting the surrounding villages, it became obvious that the Auroville method was the result of a particular set of variables. Just because a group of relatively rich people were able to re-green an area of land did not imply that their methods were transferable wholesale. The physical, economic, social and political situations in the surrounding villages (and the rest of the world!) are not the same as those found in Auroville.

This should be remembered when a farmer fails to adopt our well-intentioned advice. The forces acting on him and his priorities are different. The poorest farmers are understandably risk-adverse, as the stakes are malnutrition, hunger and even starvation, if a new land-use system fails. It is here that we hit upon a major problem. Those who most need help are those who are least often helped by Auroville. Only the wealthier farmers have the resources to change their landuse systems.

This does not imply, however, that we should throw away our own ideas. It simply means that a synthesis must be reached from two different standpoints. The difficulty is to judge where this might be. It's a matter of consciousness; of not underestimating the experience of the farmer and of likewise correctly estimating the value of our own experience. There is no formula to guide our actions. Each situation must be taken as it comes. Problems may be too numerous to count at times, but this is all part of the

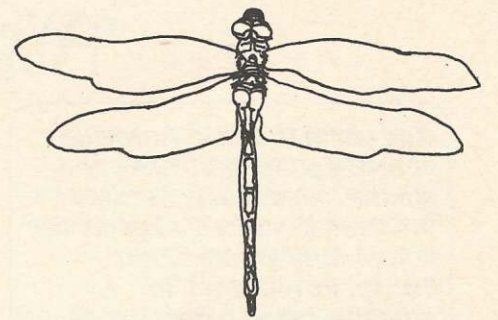
challenge of greenwork. There is nothing new to this position, but it demands from the individual a constant effort to understand the world in which we move from day to day.

At a national and international level, there is a distinct lack of information, in an easily transmissible form, as I discovered when I first came to Auroville. I wanted to know what had been learnt in Auroville. Which trees were used for what purpose, produced healthy organic matter, or were particularly favoured by the villagers and the Aurovilians? Did the trees change the soil? Was it now more capable of holding nutrients and moisture? How did Auroville greenworkers interact with the surrounding villages? What was their perceived role, locally, nationally, and internationally? In short, I wanted to see a "formal" and "scientific" appraisal of Auroville's work, but this was not available.

The lack of written information is understandable. The early greenworkers may well have found life to be too harsh to spare the time and resources for setting up long-term research projects that would become useful at some distant time in the future. And, in any case, it's much more rewarding to be out in the field, seeing one's hard work giving tangible results, rather than fussy pages of black and white!

There is still much to do. Perhaps the newly created "Auroville Greenwork Resource Center" is a recognition of this need. A body of information is slowly growing and it is to be hoped that one day everything that is being learnt by the Auroville greenworkers will spread to wherever it is wanted, with the message that the Auroville forests are beautiful and this is how it happened.

Anil



The Flight of a Paradise Fly-Catcher

Throughout journeys to Europe and Australia during the past years, I have made contacts with and acquired awareness of many other individuals and groups who are working for a transformation of environmental, social, economic and political circumstances. It is humbling to see the efforts being made by others, and to feel the expectations that others have for what should be happening here. In this connection, we in Auroville should be more honest with our publicity, less arrogant, and be big enough to show the shadow as well as the light.

A lot of things are now evident. There is the developed world, and there is the never-to-be-developed world. Are we in Auroville really working for an alternative, or just duplicating what we brought in our mental suitcases from the West? Are we going to wait for a miracle, or are we going to work for it? Are we going to be a retirement village with government protection?

At the moment, it seems we want to employ as many people as possible to produce and develop and build as much as possible. Stop! Because that's what everyone else is doing out there. We should be asking ourselves, can what we are doing be replicated, is it sustainable, or does it need continuous outside aid?

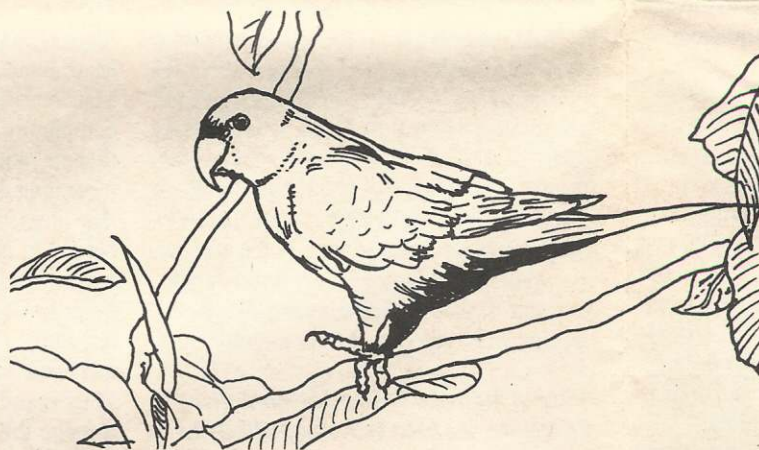
We are so intent on being normal. In Auroville we have been given a chance to proceed without only using the mental, but we have lost our inner direction.

Here, in the community of Pitchandikulam, we are working to refine our knowledge of the energies available in a forest garden. We are working with herbal doctors in documenting and using plants, and environmental education and training in reforestation techniques is one of our main functions here. But this awareness of the importance of the green world must be more than just utilitarian. It is boring to only attempt to satisfy the insatiable needs of the growing world population for fodder and food. If we could really create Auroville in the midst of a forest garden, and if we could live truly in sympathy and symbiosis with that plant world, then we would have something to teach.

I see Matrimandir covered by beautiful flowering vines and creepers, humming with the resonant AUM of bees and the songs of birds; paradise fly-catchers and golden orioles dance with the sun-eyed children of the dawn along the stairway to infinity. Around the crystal centre, a community of joyful players, not workers, indulge in that ultimate game—spontaneity.

Joss

(Joss has lived in Auroville for over twenty years. His main work involves environmental regeneration and education.)



Drawings by Peio

"I do not have innumerable arms like Shiva!"

For many years now I have been a dentist, working under poor conditions, for a community that had to find its own means for survival. It has been a difficult and sometimes shocking experience, but it was acceptable as long as we were on a survival level—by force of circumstances!

At some point in time, many have been forced to manage by themselves, but this was also a trap! With time, we could see how the barriers between us became more and more solid, and the lifestyle of 'everybody for himself' has neutralized our collective energy.

Too much scarcity, for too long a period, brings with it the risk of narrowing down people and their field of vision. Establishing a minimum standard of living—of the surroundings, of food, health and housing—for all Aurovilians would liberate our energies and our formidable potential.

Two dental clinics and a high-standard laboratory for prosthesis have been created during the past ten years, in step with the evolution of Auroville. In a context in which everything demands a disproportional effort to obtain results, it is a miracle. But in this township of experiments, it is nothing extraordinary! One has to go forward and make new experiments in the true dimension of Auroville.

My work is a means of personal expression that is very useful for the community. To be a dentist in Auroville is not to be the dentist for each one but for the collectivity as a whole—a fundamental difference!

The most positive practical point of these last two years has been the creation of an embryonic collective financial system, which eliminated the exchange of money at the dental clinic. It has therefore been possible to give free dental care, but for the prosthesis—with some exceptions—the problem is not yet solved. It is interesting to note that for the Health Centre, which is there mainly for the villagers, foreign funds have come in (about two and a half million rupees), whereas the dental clinics, especially the one for Auroville, have hardly ever received donations! This should raise some questions. How to be autonomous when a realistic investment for reliable equipment, and all the equipment necessary, has not been possible from the beginning? Of course, one can treat patients with financial means living outside Auroville, but to what extent, if you want to give priority to Aurovilians and avoid financial discrimination? I do not have innumerable arms, like Shiva! Dentistry is a game you play with two hands...

Finally, the problem is not really one of money—money is clearly there—but one of attitude. Where is the collective will to put together our resources in order to establish a concrete basis on which to build our day-to-day lives? By finding again the meaning of generosity and sharing, we could make energy and money—the material transcription of energy—flow for the benefit of all and of Auroville. For myself, I still have hope. But things are urgent!

Jacques

ENVIRONMENT "You could have more water than you need, if..."

Harald Kraft has been visiting Auroville since 1974. He is a civil engineer, specialising in all the major fields relating to water—hydrology, health engineering, water management, irrigation etc. Among other projects, he has been involved in drawing up the overall water concept for Vijayanagar steel city—for which he received a major award in Germany; investigating the ecological impact of large dams for the German Government; developing guidelines for the environmental planning of industrial estates for the Government of India; and designing ecological water management schemes for residential areas in Berlin and Hamburg. When he revisited Auroville recently, he spoke to 'Auroville Today' about the need for the community to initiate a radical water management policy if it wishes to avoid major problems in the near future.

Auroville Today: What is your assessment of the general water situation in Auroville at present?

Harald Kraft: At the moment, Auroville has sufficient water, but it is pursuing policies that may bring it catastrophe in the future. For example, in the early years you drilled many wells into the shallow aquifer which is recharged within Auroville and now, as this aquifer dries up—which is already a bad sign—you are drilling into the

table is 50 metres below sea-level. If deep wells are drilled within 6 kilometres of the coast, it is a risky business, because as soon as you extract more water than is flowing from the land to the sea, salt water will be drawn into the aquifer. And once you get salt in your soil, it's probably the end of the Auroville experiment, because you'll never get it out. This has already happened in coastal places close to here, so it's a real danger. And if you don't make a radical change in your extraction policy, it's going to happen here too.

you keep it free of pollution. This approach would be a very good solution.

But how can we have an integrated water policy for Auroville when we don't own all the land in the area?

You have to begin at the level of the individual communities. Each community should aim for self-sufficiency in its water supply through the methods I have already described. Also, each community should take responsibility for treating its wastewater. In Auroville at the moment, we have

channelled down from the roof into a catchment pond below. This can save a lot of water. Assuming that only 50% of the proposed city area is covered by buildings and roads, the stored run-off from this area would already satisfy the annual drinking requirements of 50,000 people. On a larger level, Matrimandir could be surrounded by a large lake which could supply the rest of the township (see box).

What do you see as the major obstacles to realizing this radical new water management concept in Auroville?

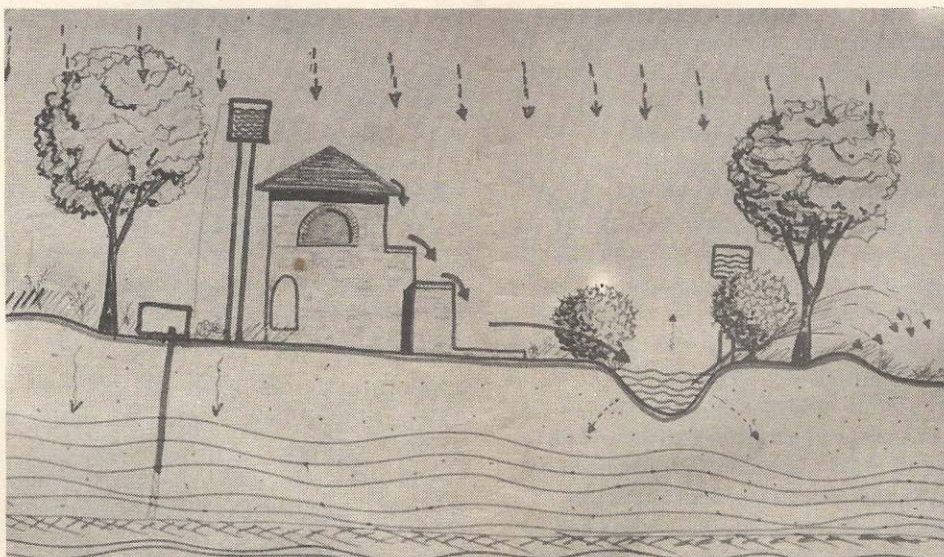
Although there is an awareness in Auroville of the need for a proper management policy, the willingness to do something about it is low, as there is still sufficient water in our wells. Then there is the cost of my proposed scheme. In the short-term, it's undoubtedly more expensive than continuing to drill wells into the water-table. But in the long-term, it's a cheap solution, and would guarantee Auroville self-sufficiency in water—which is the life-blood upon which everything else depends.

Another major problem at the moment is the lack of a topographical map of the area. As a preliminary to doing one, an aerial survey was made years ago, but then the money ran out. Without such information, major water management planning is impossible.

Of course, pollution is always a major danger. In this climate, although the self-purification capacity of lakes and rivers is very high, there are also much harmful bacteria on the surface of the soil; and the structure of the soil here is such that water can travel a long way underground, both horizontally and vertically, carrying bacteria with it. This means that, in order to protect the water-table from surface pollution, the area around wells should be kept like a temple—clean and sealed—and soak-pits and septic tanks should be placed far away. Very few wells in Auroville are kept like this at present. Another means of polluting the aquifer is through the application of fertilisers and pesticides to the soil. In Germany, we have contaminated our water-tables this way, and the cost of drinking water will rise because removing nitrogen and pesticides from it is expensive—and not even completely successful. This is another powerful reason for practising biological farming, and preventing pesticide and heavy fertiliser use in the Auroville region.

Overall, however, the water management policy for Auroville that I have described is both practical and relatively inexpensive to implement in the long-term. Auroville still has a marvellous opportunity to be an example, to India and to the world, of how a city of 50,000 people can be both self-sufficient in water, and minimise its detrimental effect upon the environment. But you have to act soon!

Interview by Alan



An integrated water management system

What can we in Auroville do to prevent this happening?

Firstly, it should be understood that there is sufficient water falling on the area to satisfy all your needs. Over the Auroville area of 20 square kilometres, 24.5 million cubic metres of rain is falling annually; this is 10 times what 50,000 people need for personal consumption, assuming a figure of 150 litres per person daily. But some of this rainfall, particularly from village fields, is still flowing directly into the sea. The ideal solution would be to prevent every drop of water leaving the Auroville area, because then you would have more water than you would need, your water table would rise, you'd have a tropical forest, and there would be a significant change in the micro-climate.

How to do this? In former times, Tamil Nadu had a fantastic system of water management. Everywhere there were lakes and tanks to catch and store the rain, and to replenish the water-table through infiltration. However, with the development of well technology, the tanks were neglected, and infiltration was further reduced by massive deforestation.

Auroville can learn from this. And already you have made a good beginning through constructing some dams, through your bunding and through your fantastic afforestation work. But it is not enough. The topsoil, which could absorb the rainfall and infiltrate it into the aquifer has been washed into the sea. You have to rebuild this - and this will take a long time. Also, you have to achieve self-sufficiency in your water supply, and this means you must stop tapping your deeper water tables. You can do this by constructing enough lakes and dams to catch and store the rainwater, and to infiltrate it into the first aquifer. The stored surface water will be more than sufficient for all your irrigation requirements. Your shallow aquifer would then be recharged, and you could use it simply for your drinking water supply, provided

First World housing, but sometimes Third World waste water treatment! In the West we have seen that the method by which we always passed our waste problems onto the next biggest biosystem—from the rivers to the sea etc.—is no longer working, as even the seas are badly polluted now. In Auroville, you've no real need to recycle your water as, potentially, you will get all the water that you need through your rainfall. So your wastewater can be cleaned at present either by the root-zone method, using semi-aquatic plants, or, at a minimum, through septic tanks, and then infiltrated into the ground through a simple sand filter. It's also important not to waste water. It's estimated that Bombay loses as much water as it uses, and in Auroville there are plenty of leaks because of faulty valves, taps and pipe connections. Drip irrigation is another way of saving water, but it is expensive to install and needs a lot of maintenance. A cheaper possibility is a simple sub-surface irrigation system, using drilled PVC pipes. I experimented with this in Auroville in 1978, and it worked well. But it is only worthwhile for high-yield crops.

As the town grows, you will be sealing more and more of your land surface through buildings and roads. It's important, therefore, that Auroville architects include water-harvesting aspects in all their designs as a matter of course. For example, rainwater can be

A Lake at Matrimandir...

The most efficient way to distribute run-off water from the city for irrigation, and to infiltrate it into the aquifer, is to store it at the highest point of the land. In Auroville, this is the Matrimandir, which is also the meeting-point of different water-sheds. A large catchment lake could be constructed around or near the Matrimandir, and other tanks and ponds could be built on the outskirts of the city and in the Green Belt, from which stored rainwater could be pumped up to the central Matrimandir lake. The rainwater could then be distributed throughout the city by gravity. The water from these outlying tanks would only have to be lifted a maximum of 10—15 metres to reach the central lake, instead of the 70—100 metres it has to be lifted at present from the second aquifer. Evaporation would not be a major problem as the catchment area of the lake would be the entire city.

Imagine the effect of this large central lake. Not only could it be something of great beauty, but it would also have a tremendous impact upon the microclimate of the city.



Harald Kraft

next, deeper aquifer (at about a depth of 100 metres). There are always dangers associated with drilling and using wells—like the danger of polluting the aquifer. If I am optimistic, I would say that only 90% of the Auroville wells are polluted! But when you drill into the deeper aquifers, there are additional dangers. At that depth, the water supply is coming from a source far outside Auroville, and is being tapped by many other wells before it reaches us. It is 'borrowed water', and we have no control over how much is extracted. Also, this deeper water-

'LEARN AS YOU GO'

Auroville enjoys a slow, but steady growth. The population recently crossed the 800 mark, and there are 86 newcomers, including children. One of the first hurdles a newcomer has to take is the Entry Group, Auroville's working group that processes all applications to join Auroville.

This issue of Auroville Today focusses on the Entry Group itself, on its experiences, its procedures, its hopes and frustrations. We talked to Francis, a long-standing member of the group, who gives his own reflections.

Auroville's Entry Group consists at present of 9 people. They process all applications for joining Auroville in accordance with Auroville's entry procedure approved a few years ago. According to this procedure, someone intending to join Auroville will be on probation for a period of one year, during which s/he is called a 'newcomer', and during this period s/he is expected to maintain him/herself. During the probationary year the newcomer informs the community by his actions of his compatibility to become a member.

If everything goes normally, the newcomer will meet the Entry Group twice, once at the beginning and once at the end of the probationary year. The initial meeting is to see that basically the person has not got any drastic defects in his character or will not become a menace to the community at large. During the probationary year, one member of the Entry Group acts as a contact person for the newcomer, to assist with his/her integration into Auroville. In the last meeting, the Entry Group sees with the newcomer if s/he has been integrated into the community and

was asked if the Aurovilians should be disciples of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, She stated that people who are in Auroville should know about Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, but that they do not necessarily have to be their disciples or devotees.

"My main objection to this 'checking the spiritual motivation' viewpoint is that it is based on arrogance. From day one some people in Auroville have expressed their superiority feelings, believing that they are the only ones doing the true yoga, and that everyone else is just goofing off. They feel that reading Sri Aurobindo and The Mother is doing yoga. But I understand that this is a place of *karma yoga*, yoga of work. The people who are coming here are surrounded by the atmosphere of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, and if there is any sincerity, they themselves will gravitate to it. To impose it sounds like religious nonsense.

Conditions

"As far as toughness is concerned: we allow nearly all people to come and do their probationary year. In the last 12 months we have asked three or four newcomers to leave, and there was a tremendous reaction from some people in the community because of this. This reaction only subsided when we asked those people to take personal responsibility for these newcomers, and in some cases that changed their views.

"It is difficult, if not impossible, to judge.

It is only natural that there are many comments on the functioning of the group, ranging from 'you let in the wrong people' to 'you are too tough'!

has found a place to live and to work. After that meeting, the Entry Group recommends—or not—that the newcomer should be accepted. If there are no objections from the community to a positive recommendation, the newcomer will become a full community member.

Francis explains the group's functioning as 'a learn as you go' process.

"It is only natural that there are many comments on the functioning of the group, ranging from 'you let in the wrong people' to 'you are too tough'. In Auroville there are always complaints, as there is such a variety of people here. You cannot do anything without one group complaining about it.

Spiritual motivation

"Recently we had complaints that we do not sufficiently check the spiritual motivations of people desiring to join. I consider this an impossible task. Right now we enquire about why people have come to Auroville, how they have heard about it, and why they want to live here. We experience that, in most cases, there is a sincere desire to explore the different levels of consciousness. But who are we to judge others spiritually?

"There are groups in Auroville that I consider terribly frightening in their rigidity. There are people who hold that you come here for Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, and that you shouldn't be allowed to live here if you do not have those two in your banner. But Mother made it very clear. When She

In many cases we give the benefit of the doubt and allow the probationary year, expecting that during this year the motivation to join will get clarified.

"Actually, the Entry Group does not impose many conditions. The newcomers who have financial means are requested to contribute a certain amount, called the newcomers contribution, to the community. And we ask all newcomers to study English. Mother gave four 'official' languages for Auroville (French, Tamil, Sanskrit and English), and the justification that we ask newcomers to study English and not any of the other 3 languages is that it conforms to the reality of the situation. For whatever reason, English is the language for communication within the community, and we find that people who do not have a command of that language have a lot of difficulty to relate to other members of the community.

Housing

"Housing is the number one problem we face at present. More and more families are coming in. Single people have less problems finding a place, but for families it is really difficult. It sounds like a paradox: Auroville needs people so that it can grow, yet it cannot afford to house them. Our present infrastructure is overstrained. We are building permanent newcomer's houses as fast as we can from a limited amount of money available through donations. We have to get away from temporary structures, as they are too costly in the long run to maintain. But for housing

REFLECTIONS FROM A MEMBER OF THE ENTRY GROUP

or for the maintenance of buildings it is difficult to raise funds.

Finances

"The second problem is that Auroville's present economic system is, and has always been, in crisis. There is just never enough to guarantee a certain style of living, and there



Drawing by Peio

are a lot of people who are stretching to make ends meet. We definitely do not want to take people in on a 'have or have-not' basis, but the 'have-not newcomers' are creating an extra strain on Auroville. There are maybe 5 or 6 houses where we can lodge people without asking for money. But that is far too few. Right now, probably one third of all people coming in do not have sufficient financial means to sustain themselves, let alone to build themselves a house.

"For the people who come in without any financial means we have already dropped the policy that they should sustain themselves during the first year, and we allow them to earn a maintenance in one of Auroville's units from day one. But that obliges the newcomer to spend all his time inside that unit, and little time is left to experience the rest of Auroville. This is definitely limiting for them and that may cause their integration to take a bit longer. But this is the present day reality and a necessity of life.

"Recently we have had an influx of Russians. I welcome this, but it also frightens me because of our present overstrained infrastructure. These people seem to have been told that if they make it to Auroville, Auroville will take care of them. But we cannot even take care of our own people!

Work

"We want newcomers to find a place to work. That is another condition we put. And here we are confronted with the Aurovilians themselves, some of whom, it is sad to say, have a lackadaisical attitude in relation to work. We have at the moment a number of people here that will put in 3 or 4 hours a day and go home. But there is no real energy. No real effort to create, build or develop comes forth. Of course this does not relate to everyone, but to a portion of Aurovilians only. And that portion I would call dead weight. They might have enough money to feed and house themselves, but they are not participating in the development of Auroville, they are not working. There is a lot that has to be done, and there are many people here that are not doing it.

"This attitude necessarily reflects on the newcomers. There are, of course, newcomers who react against their lifestyle before coming to Auroville. 'I have worked all my life, I do not want to work anymore' and such kind of things. But Auroville is not a retirement community either for the young or the old.

"It is disturbing to see that the many working groups of Auroville always consist of the same people, in different constellations. As if the same pack of cards is shuffled over and over again. And it is downright worrying that far too few of Auroville's youth and newcomers join in, either in these working groups or in Auroville's commercial units. The commercial units can argue that paid workers are more reliable and less expensive than Aurovilians, and I can understand that.

"Somehow, this whole attitude in Auroville regarding the work ethic has to change. I sense and see a slow change happening, but I am terribly impatient.

Economy

"Not many newcomers leave during their probation year, roughly only 20%. But we experience that after their second or third year more people leave. Often the reasons are to earn more money to build or finish their house. But I think this is a trap. It shows that the Auroville economy is on the wrong footing. We have to work for an economic base that is sound, which means more industries. I do not favour Aurovilians working outside Auroville, for example in Pondicherry, as there is so much that has to be done in Auroville, and I hate to see their energy being expended elsewhere. For the same reason, and for reasons of integration, we object to newcomers working full-time outside Auroville. The true problem, I believe, is lack of organization, and again, the attitude towards work. If Auroville would organize itself better, we would be able to distribute these people better, house them, give them work, so that they can best benefit Auroville. I believe that the money is available to sustain all Aurovilians, and that it is only due to lack of organization that we don't make the best use of it. But organizing Auroville goes against the rebellious spirit of the average Aurovillian. The more we organize Auroville, the more constraints surface. People are still rebelling against the societies from which they came, and it is hurting us.

"Auroville's population is increasing. It had been stagnant for a number of years, but now it has taken a giant leap. We are more than 800 people right now, one third of whom have come from the villages surrounding Auroville.

"Dealing with people from the surrounding villages who desire to become Aurovillian is one of the most difficult parts of our work. It is even difficult to speak about it, as it is instantly interpreted as an issue of racism. I believe that in the past many people from the villages have been accepted as Aurovilians for reasons which have nothing to do with their dedication to the aims and ideals of Auroville. At present, a large number of people from the villages have applied to become Aurovillian. But many do so because they see it as an easy job, like getting hired by the government: no hard work, easy money and so on. That is a bad line. I like what someone recently wrote about upgrading village life, to make it a centre of development, which would make it unnecessary for people with this kind of motivation to apply to become Aurovillian.

"Entry Group work is delicate, and one never knows whether the correct decision has been made to accept or refuse an applicant. The Entry Group, of course, can always improve, but I believe that we are doing the best we can."

Francis, in conversation with Carel.

BRIEF NEWS

- ✦ We have heard that Maurice Strong, eminent environmentalist and organizer of this year's U.N. Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, has agreed to be a member of the International Advisory Council. Other candidates have been approached. The Advisory Council will consist of a maximum of five persons of international standing and will advise the Governing Board.
- ✦ The new Development Group has made a few proposals for the Industrial Zone. In an open meeting, it was concluded that residents of this area, together with the Development Group and the Environment Group, should work out guidelines for the future development of the area.
- ✦ A series of meetings at Last School between teachers, students and their parents were held in which some long-standing problems surfaced. The process continues.
- ✦ The Secretary Designate to the Auroville Foundation, Mr. L.K. Tripathy, who was expected to take up residence in Auroville last October, finally arrived here on the 17th of February. Auroville's assets, which were acquired by the Government of India during the take-over and are being held by a government Custodian, are awaiting transfer to the Foundation.
- ✦ Meetings are being held to generate ideas for Auroville's Silver Jubilee celebrations in 1993.
- ✦ Another sample for the Matrimandir skin has been attached to the space-frame, as part of the experiment to find a satisfying solution. The prototype element consists of orange-coloured glass mounted on a triangle.
- ✦ From January 12th. to 18th., a pottery workshop was hosted by Michel and Angad at Shilpikam Pottery, Dana. The workshop was organized by the British Council. Walter Keeler, a renowned potter from England, demonstrated his work and technique to 20 Indian potters, mostly from South India, and Aurovilians. The exchange was warm and fruitful. An exhibition of the work created during the workshop was inaugurated by the Lt. Governor of Pondicherry.
- ✦ The Lt. Governor of Pondicherry, Mr. Har Swarup Singh made another visit on February 15th, and met informally with a group of interested Aurovilians to discuss proposals and ideas for the sustainable development of the bioregion.

Auroville International Meeting

The annual meeting of the Auroville International centres this year will take place between the 28th and the 31st of May at Gaunt's House, Wimborne, Dorset, in England. Anybody who wishes to attend should contact Martin Littlewood at the following address as soon as possible for further details: 'Canigou', Cot Lane, Chidham, West Sussex, PO18 8SP, U.K.

LETTER

Reflections of a Visitor

Some months back, I had the privilege of visiting Auroville for the first time. A long-time admirer of Sri Aurobindo and his yoga, I was very excited to be able to see first-hand this City of the Future inspired by his and the Mother's vision... I must say: reading through the literature moved me to tears. That a place like this could really exist!

I felt like I had come to Heaven on Earth practically. At the Matrimandir Information Center I looked through the Plan for Auroville 1989 - 1994. I kept saying to myself, "God! This is incredible; all the attractive pathways, innovative architecture, trees and flowers..." It was almost too much and I felt a bit dazed...

I volunteered to help with sanding pillars for the Matrimandir. Up to this point, my experience had been one of practically unalloyed wonder. Then, while working, one lady casually pulled out something, put it in her mouth and lit it. I assumed it to be some special herb mixture as my mind could not imagine anything else. I asked cautiously what it was and she replied matter-of-factly, "It's a cigarette, finest Indian tobacco. You want one?" As she lit another one for a fellow worker, I was stunned!

In the evening, I received my second shock. The same lady was preparing dinner for everyone. I happened to see some chunks of something in the spaghetti sauce. I automatically assumed it was some soya chunks but considering what had happened earlier, I asked what it was. You know the answer: yes, it was meat. At this point, I was totally incredulous.

When one is realized, one is free to do what the Divine wills, which may include taking non-vegetarian food. But for sadhaks still caught up in egoism there is no excuse for it unless one is in a situation where one's life depends on it. It is, besides, common knowledge now that vegetarian fare is superior in almost every way to non-vegetarian, and Sri Aurobindo himself discourages it. Not fanatically, to be sure, but still. That should be enough to give it up—at least in the City of the Future. To argue for eating non-vegetarian food seems to me to only be excuses to be lazy and indulge the lower nature.

And smoking! In our time, there is no place for tobacco in sincere spiritual seeking. Everyone knows today that tobacco is not healthy physically, vitally, mentally or spiritually.

While these two aspects most decidedly cast a wet blanket on my initial enthusiasm, the most depressing aspect of life in Auroville I experienced to be the almost total lack of overt interest in things spiritual! Most of the Aurovilians I met struck me as basically friendly and helpful, but quite ordinary and a bit *tamasic* (dull) in their "auras". They were reminding me more of tired, mainstream Christians than of spiritual pioneers aspiring for supramental heights. More than one struck me as even being a little decadent.

I tell you all this makes me very sad. With such extremely lofty and noble ideals it just makes the contrast all the more harsh.

I recall hearing during my stay of the community's difficulty in attracting new members. Well, my humble opinion is that if you want to attract more people to Auroville, a spiritual renaissance is needed. The Center must be (re)discovered if the whole endeavour is not to degrade into an ordinary mental movement.

Dana Hofford,
Sweden

(We have shortened this letter for space reasons - eds)

Rainbow Week

From 14th November, 1991, six Auroville children spent an interesting week in New Delhi attending the 2nd Asian Rainbow Week events.

What is Rainbow Week?

It was in 1979, the International Year of the Child, that the first Rainbow Week was held in Toulouse, France, on the theme "How sports and games can answer a child's need for personal development and independence." Since then, more and more Rainbow Week Associations have been formed in different countries. This year, in addition to the New Delhi meeting, an international Rainbow Week was held in Moscow, with 75 countries participating.

Next year, it will be held in Chile, and the years after that in Belgium, South Korea, Central Africa, Taiwan and France.

All the children were aged between ten and twelve, and came to New Delhi in delegations of six. They were from Afghanistan, Auroville, India, Indonesia, Lithuania, Mauritius, Nepal, Philippines, Sri Lanka, U.S.S.R., and Vietnam. They slept in dormitory rooms at the International Youth Hostel. At the inauguration ceremony at Talkatora Indoor Stadium, all of the delegates were dressed in their traditional costumes (the Auroville team was in 6 different costumes!) and gave demonstrations of gymnastics, yoga exercises and dance. The daily programme, which ran from 6 a.m. to 11 p.m., included yoga and meditation, inter-action games, a theatre workshop, and visits to places of interest in and around Delhi.

Young Mi, an Aurovillian from South Korea, prepared and guided the Auroville delegation. Upon her return, she commented: "Most of our children have never had the occasion to meet so many children their own age. Although we had only a small budget, we could take full advantage of the experience."

"I wanted to keep the inauguration performance as spontaneous and simple as possible. Our presentation seemed a bit poor in comparison with the professional performances of the other delegations, who presented folk dances, etc., but how could we present one tradition when we are 25 different nationalities in Auroville? Therefore we concentrated more on the aspect of integration of different cultures, and our children were very natural, spontaneous and without pretence."

"It was a rich and eye-opening experience. One example: when they wanted to know the reason why the Russian children were given extra food, the Auroville children were surprised to learn that certain food items were unavailable in the U.S.S.R. During the train journey, they learned that not everybody had their environmental awareness for they were disappointed and shocked to find that paper and plastic food utensils were just thrown out of the window."

"Friendships were made rapidly, without any language barrier, and there were tearful moments at departure time. It was very good for the Auroville children to get out from the very small village that Auroville sometimes is, and participating in international events is very much in line with Auroville's aim to further human unity." □

SAVE THE TIGER BUT DON'T FORGET THE TURTLE

The sea turtle, like many other creatures on our planet, is not having such an easy time in this late twentieth century period. The turtle is often deceived by plastic bags floating in the ocean which look like their daily fare of jellyfish but have fatal digestive complications. Fishing nets are another trap because they drown turtles who need to come up for air regularly. Turtles have to go ashore to lay their eggs on beaches, and those deserted beaches have become very scarce. Birds, dogs, people and many other species eat turtle eggs. If the eggs hatch, birds, dogs people and many other species then eat baby turtles!

Around the world and along the southern coast of India, groups of volunteers have attempted sea turtle conservation projects. Auroville recently contributed a sea turtle hatchery to the world conservation movement at the health and healing project known as "Quiet". The hatchery is a little plot of beach, protected by wire mesh above and below the sand, where the turtle eggs can hatch without danger from predators. The hatchery was dug and constructed mostly by some Auroville young people and a visiting group of students from the Gaia Educational Outreach Programme, based in New Hampshire, USA. Guidance for the project came from Christy Williams, a graduate researcher at the Pondicherry University School of Ecology.



Aurovilians working on turtle hatchery

For a hatchery you need eggs. The scientific information said the turtles would come at night about an hour before the high tide. So patrols of volunteers searched the beaches to the north and south of Quiet, hoping to discover the fresh track of a turtle plowing its way up the beach to nest. After a couple weeks of frustration, two residents of Quiet were on the beach in the afternoon sun when a turtle crawled right up near the hatchery to donate 140 eggs. Soon twenty people and two dogs witnessed the egg laying, which took an hour. To transfer the eggs to the hatchery posed a problem because some villagers wanted the eggs. At that moment, Meenakshi, one of the Auroville coordinators of Village relations, happened to turn up and explained the project to the audience. Mother turtle returned safely to the sea. In two months, hopefully, 140 baby turtles will do the same.

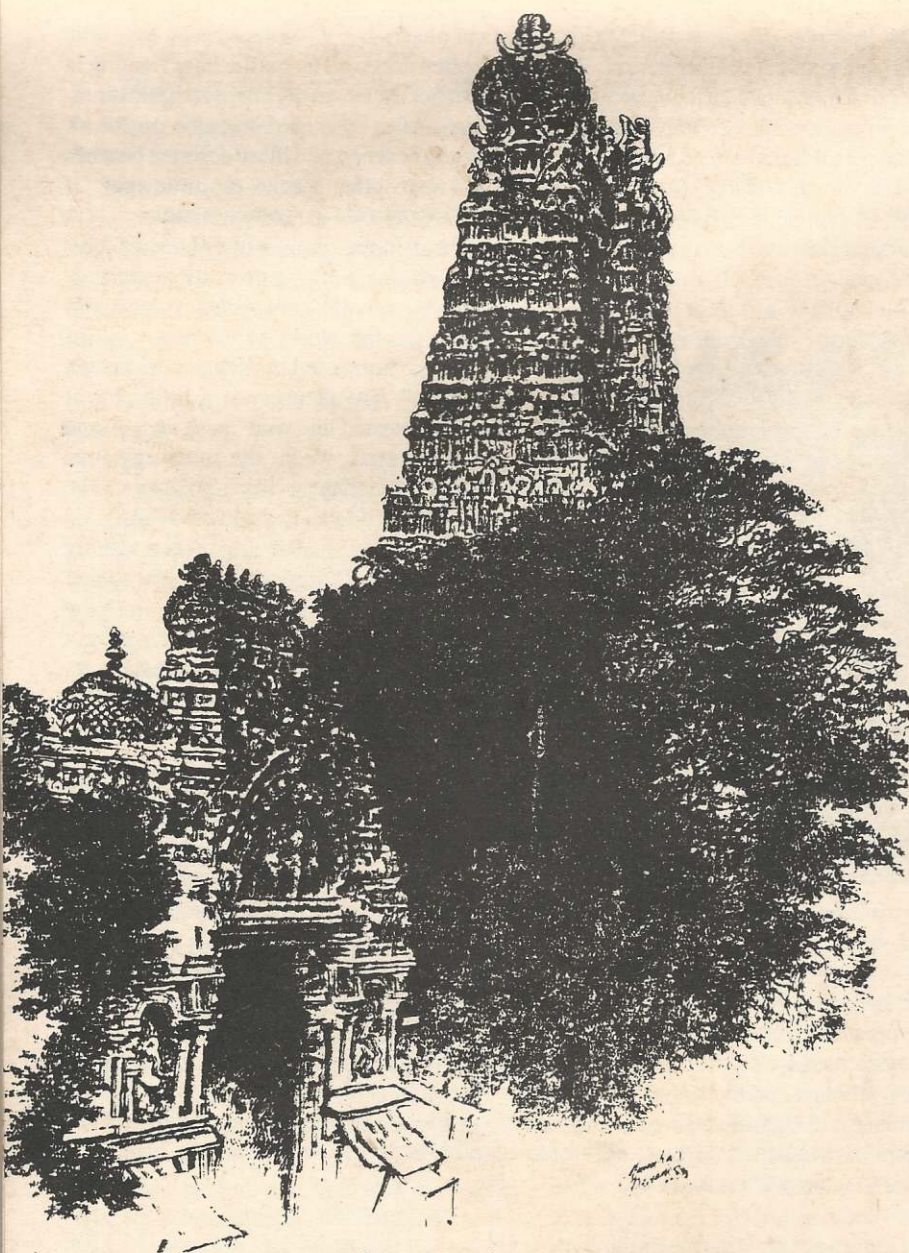
Bill



March 1992- Number Thirty-Eight



In this issue: Reflections on various aspects of Auroville



South-Indian Temple with Neem Tree

Kirstin George is an American college student who came to Auroville in December and January with the GEO (Gaia Educational Outreach) Overseas Program. Her passion is learning about the relationship of humans to their natural environment. While in Auroville, she interviewed Aurovilians—both European and Indian—and Tamils from nearby villages about their cultural and personal beliefs about ecology and, specifically, about the Neem tree.

The Magic of Neem

On my second day in Auroville I was introduced to a neem tree. It was love at first sight. I knew at that moment that my quest during my two months here was to satisfy my burning curiosity about this sacred Indian tree covered with thousands of toothbrushes. In my culture trees are valued in dollars and toothbrushes come from petroleum. So I set out to fill my cup with all the neem knowledge I could extract from Aurovilians and Tamil villagers.

Traditionally, neem trees are planted beside temples and houses because they are said to purify the air and invoke good spirits. The Mother of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram must have sensed the same energy from the neem tree because she called the flower, "Spiritual Atmosphere". Indians hang neem leaves over their doorways during all religious festivals and special occasions such as marriages, births, and the girls' puberty ceremony. Sometimes a white milk comes from the bark of old neem trees. When such a tree is found, or when a neem tree is found growing beside a peepal (Bodhi) tree, a festival is held to honour the sacred neem tree and make a temple around it.

Neem is the symbol of Mariamma, the Hindu Goddess of rain, who prevents smallpox. When someone has the chicken pox they lie on a bed of neem leaves and garlands of neem flowers are tied to the sick bed as an offering to the Goddess Sitella who restores health. And healers and priests wave neem boughs over their patients in healing ceremonies.

The neem is a classic "giving tree". Every part—the leaves, seeds, bark, flowers, fruit, and wood—has a special use for Indian people. Ancient Sanskrit writings describe medicinal uses for every part of the tree except the fruit. Today Tamil villagers (and some Aurovilians) go to the nearest neem tree rather than the pharmacy and make their own medicines.

Boiling neem leaves makes excellent antiseptic for cleaning wounds, bath water for any skin disease, and tea for decongestion. Most of the Tamil people I met swallow three neem leaf balls every Sunday. The balls, made from ground neem leaves, spices (eg. black pepper, cumin, and garlic), and a little water, are said to clean the stomach, kill intestinal worms, and purify the blood. (A Tamil friend recommends having water and a pinch of sugar after each ball because neem is exceedingly bitter!)

Indians extract oil from neem seeds to treat rheumatism, leprosy, syphilis, malaria, and head lice. Soaps, varnish, and lamp oil are also neem seed products. The sweet

grape-sized fruits are usually just eaten for enjoyment, but laxatives and skin cream can be made from them too. In April, tiny, white, fragrant flowers adorn the neem trees and symbolize the arrival of spring and the Tamil New Year. They are used as a bitter flavour in cooking: especially fried in ghee with young neem leaves and served over rice.

Although birds, squirrels, and insects love neem fruits and help to spread the seeds, they dislike the smell and taste of the rest of the tree. Storing rice, clothes, and books with dry neem leaves prevents insect and moth infestation, the smoke from burning the leaves is a mosquito repellent, and the wood is termite-proof.

Farmers used neem products as natural pesticides and fertilizers long before the petroleum-based chemicals existed. Neem seed cakes (the substance remaining after oil is extracted from the seeds) were added to the soil to serve two functions: enriching the soil and preventing root diseases. Neem leaf spray is a very effective pesticide because insects dislike the taste of the sprayed plant. The beauty of these neem products is that they do not kill the insects and soil pests, but allow the organisms to play their vital role in the ecosystem. Unfortunately, Tamil farmers now use DDT and other highly toxic chemicals subsidized by the government. But Germany has recently begun using neem-based pesticides and fertilizers, so the economic value of the neem seeds and leaves is increasing. Each June and July when the fruit ripens, there is more and more competition among the children and women to collect the seeds for a secondary income.

Perhaps the most extraordinary thing I learned is the story of a modern day Goddess who is a neem tree. She stands between Auroville and Madras. Ten years ago a clairvoyant man received a message from the tree and he began a religious sect. It is the first sect which respects women and allows them to touch the idol and perform a Puja.* The devotees of this neem tree (who dress in red) have established a school, and the numbers of followers is now in the thousands.

And the toothbrushes? Chew the tip of a neem twig into a brush and rub your teeth and gums. Neem sap will kill mouth bacteria as effectively as any toothpaste.

My cup is spilling over and the neem tree swaying over my head makes me feel completely content. I'm filled with awe for nature's magic.

* A Puja is a ritual offering to a god or goddess.

♦ ♦ ♦ To Receive Auroville Today ♦ ♦ ♦

The contribution for the next 12 issues of Auroville Today is for India Rs. 150, for abroad Rs. 650, Can.\$ 30, French F. 150, DM 47, It.Lira 35,500, D.Gl. 52, US \$ 25, U.K. £ 14. 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% for admin. and bank charges) 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. Personal cheques are preferred to bank cheques. Please avoid postal money orders. Subscribers will receive a reminder when their subscription is about to expire.