

# AUROVILLE TODAY

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## INTRODUCTION

*What is it like to bring up children in Auroville? Do parents here have a special responsibility? What are the joys, what are the challenges of raising children in this environment? How much support do parents receive from the community as a whole? Is Auroville, in fact, a child-oriented community?*

*These were some of the questions that occurred to the editorial team of AUROVILLE TODAY—none of whom are parents—when we set out to research this issue. However, after interviewing a cross-section of Auroville parents what is clear is that there are no clear answers! For, as in so much else, Auroville offers a bewildering variety of “styles” of parenthood and what works well for an individual or couple is frowned upon by another; where one person experiences support and guidance in bringing up their children, another runs into endless difficulties. Here, then, is not so much a definitive picture of parenting in Auroville as a selection of parenting experiences.*

Tashi and Rama: Tashi is Tibetan while Rama, her husband, is Tamil. Their “real Auroville kid”, as they call him, is being brought up to speak both languages.

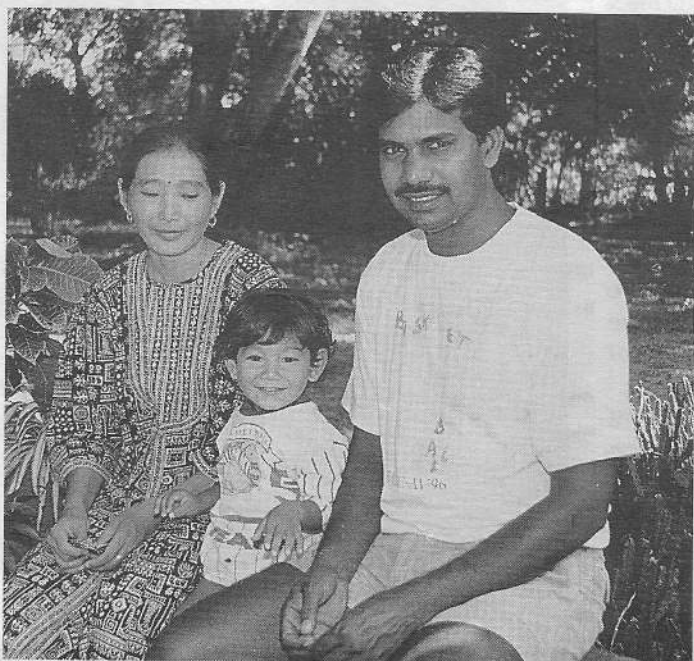
### Beginning at the beginning

One would expect Aurovilians to be very conscious in their choice to have children. From the interviews, this seems to be the case. Yet conscious planning is not necessarily the same as relating to children as conscious beings. Mother noted this in the early days of Auroville when parents would present their newborn babies to her. “Almost all of them”, she remarked of the babies, “are conscious beings” while “the parents are absolutely stupid in their manner of behaving with them, because they don’t know, they don’t understand. I saw one again today (*tiny gesture*): he is 3,4,5 days old—he is just so big—and I saw the consciousness inside him, it’s wonderful. And then they treat him like a little animal—he has no means of defense.”

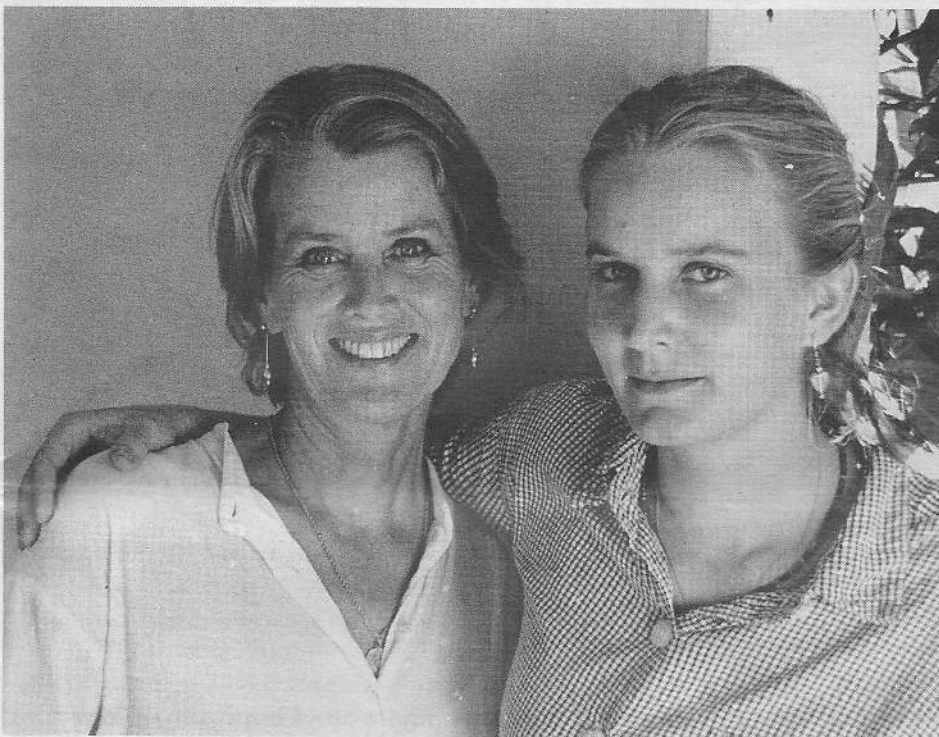
Here, at least, something may have changed. Shyama, mother of six, two of who were born in Auroville, notes that, “Kids here have such a wonderful consciousness... I think the kids are in a higher consciousness than we are, they see things much truer, they have the true reaction to things, are so much more compassionate and generous.” And Srimoyi feels that, “The children who are born here are really Auroville’s children; if they had not been born to me, they would have been born to someone else here. The way I look at it I have a responsibility not only in terms of being a mother, but also in terms of looking after children from Auroville. So I have a special responsibility to see that they have a certain type of education and a certain atmosphere in which they grow up. In short, I believe they are Mother’s children”.

### The good old days

Many of the longer-term Aurovilians look back to the early days of Auroville



## Parenting IN AUROVILLE



SHYAMA WITH DAUGHTER AUROSILLE

**“This is probably the best place on earth to bring up children, despite some shortcomings and inadequacies in certain areas. Young children love it here. Here freedom is true freedom. It is also wonderful for them to grow up with an ideal and an aspiration, a dream of something bigger.”**

as something of a paradise for parents and children. “It was wonderful,” says Shyama. “Mother gave us this dream. We were young and obviously romantic, idealistic. What a wonderful gift. So few people get to live this dream. And the children were totally brought into this. It was one big wild playground: tree houses, canyons, huts... It was one big adventure.” Ange, whose parents live in the Ashram but who Mother sent to live in Aspiration in 1970 at the age of seven, remembers, “In those days, every Aurovillian put their hopes in the kids, we were told we were the future. So everywhere we were welcomed, we were the focus of the community.”

It’s a common refrain from those who remember the early days: “It was more fun for the kids then”. Yet even today, for a single-parent newcomer like Jana from Germany, “Auroville is a place of constant adven-

ture. We spend 90% of our time outdoors and my children discover snakes, insects, flowers at every step. And here I enjoy an uncomplicated relationship with other mothers. It’s just great how one or another offers to take the kids for a day. It’s beautiful for the kids and I feel very supported.” That sense of support is one of the reasons why Auroville-born women like Auradha and Mukta return to the community to have their babies here (“It’s coming home”); it is also expressed in a somewhat different way by Srimoyi, who was brought up in the Ashram and now lives in Auroville. “When I have a problem I communicate it to Mother (I have an inner relation with her) and I feel she looks after me and my children, in whatever way that may come... I never worry. I do my best and the help comes, it has always been that way.”

### Auroville not child-centred?

While Ange remembers her childhood in Aspiration in the early 1970’s as “the best time of my life,” everything changed

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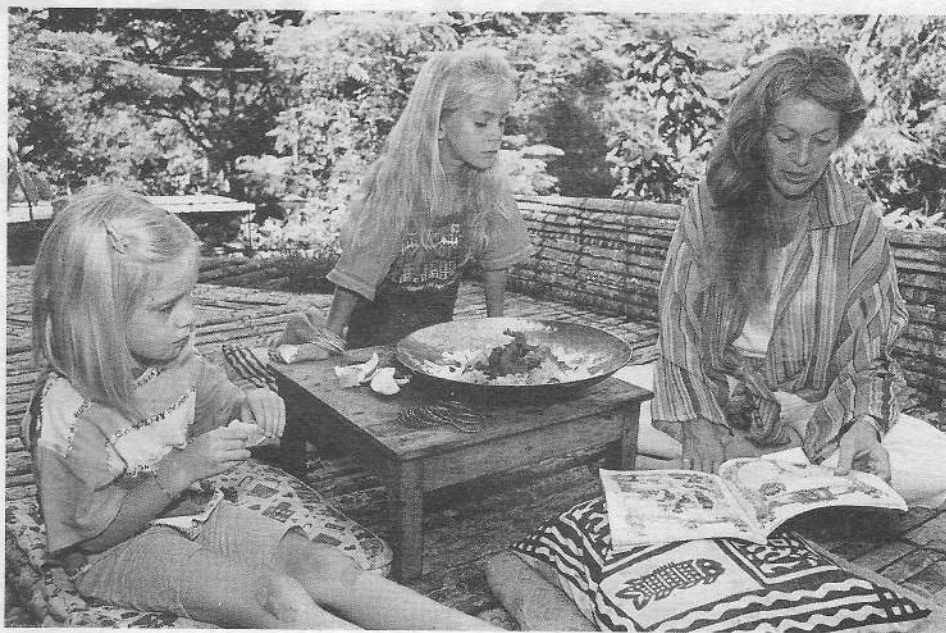


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for her when the conflict with the Sri Aurobindo Society began. "Suddenly we kids, who had felt at the centre of everything, were tossed aside and never taken up again. And the whole world we believed in collapsed." Ange's perception that the present Auroville is not "child-centred" is shared, to a certain extent, by a number of parents. This is not so much due to a lack of some of the facilities or services—child-care shops, maternity leave etc.—one would take for granted in the West: many Aurovilian parents don't seem unduly bothered by the absence of such things and, anyway, services like primary and middle-school education have improved out of all recognition over the past ten years. It's more a matter of attitude. Shyama, for example, speaks for many others when she says that "with teenagers we are not that good.

the community (at last count, children under 18 constitute more than 25% of the total population) and the high Auroville birth rate seems to stem from two preconceptions. Firstly, that children are a drain upon community resources and tie up energies which could otherwise be devoted to building the city. Secondly, that the Integral Yoga requires sexual abstinence and that, anyway, Mother said that Aurovilians did not need to have children as they would naturally be drawn to this place from all over the world. Most Auroville parents dismiss such views, pointing out that children can be one of the greatest learning experiences of all, that they are a vital factor in keeping the community young and future-oriented, and that improved child-care and educational facilities means that parents of even young children can continue to work for the community if they so wish.

Jana's initial contact with Auroville seems to support Christine's view that



JANA AND HER TWO DAUGHTERS

**"I really wanted to be in a space where at least a handful of people are trying to live a spiritual life. So we're here and I'm very, very happy and I find it very, very difficult. These two things are always side by side, mercilessly ever-present. But I have never regretted coming here."**



SRIMOYI

**"I feel my children should be brought up here and I hope Auroville will be able to provide them with a good education. I hope that in future they will be of service to Auroville, which for me means service to Mother."**

Teenagers are always a nuisance. Their hormones are raging. They are going through big transitions. We do not create enough for their needs," Jana agrees: "There seems to be no place for kids above twelve in this community because there's nothing for them. Maybe this shows that there is not enough consciousness of their needs." Christine and Benito, who arrived in Auroville six years ago with five children (one of whom is handicapped), experienced negative attitudes in a very direct way. "Being a large family unexpectedly invited a lot of criticism. 'Have you never heard about birth control?' asked one Aurovilian. 'Why do you have so many kids?' asked others... We explained that we have very much aspired for them to be born, and that we are quite aware of what Mother and Sri Aurobindo said about the place of sexuality in spiritual life... But the heaviness of the criticism made us understand that some Aurovilians simply do not relate well to children."

It is difficult to ascertain how widespread this attitude is, but some people's concern about the number of children in

some Aurovilians do not include children in their awareness. She arrived recently from Germany, a single parent with two children, aged six and seven. "At first I was terribly disappointed because I had no welcome whatsoever from the community. I was greeted at the Entry Group

with phrases like, 'Oh, you really want to come with two kids? Really? Don't fill in the forms. Think about it. Come back another time.'" However, when she finally became a newcomer everything changed. "The kids got into kindergarten, doors opened, we made friends and everything fell into place."

#### The accommodation problem

Nevertheless, in the case of both Benito and family and Jana, the accommodation crisis played a big part in intensifying the problems of moving to Auroville with a family. "It's much harder for a family to find accommodation," says Jana. "Often we were denied a chance to house-sit for people because the occupants were afraid that children would break things, make noise. In guest houses I was asked to maintain absolute silence until 8.30 in the morning. The stress of this for parents and children is tremendous because children are alive—you can't just switch them off!" Benito and Christine's first accommodation was a hut in Kottakarai without water or current, "which was tough as I had just had a baby and there was a lot of nappy washing to be done". Their experience with their handicapped daughter also reinforces something else we are becoming painfully aware of: that Auroville is not a friendly place for the handicapped.

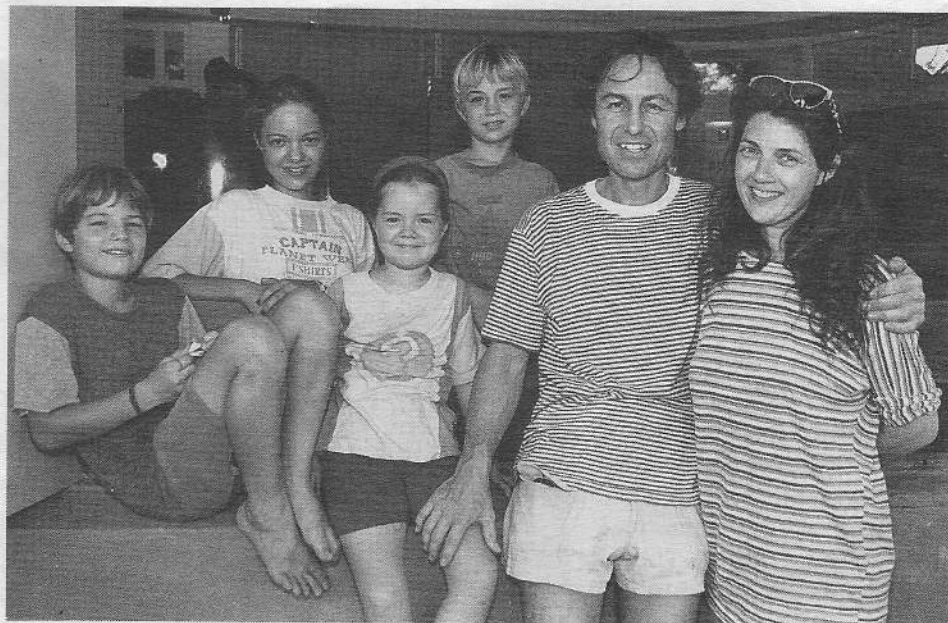
"Looking back at these six years," says Christine, "I would like to point out two serious shortcomings of Auroville which make it difficult for some parents. The first one is that Auroville still lacks a common policy towards children and education. Quite a few children 'run wild', there is an absence of central authority towards them, which is particularly needed for those whose parents (often a single parent) are unable or simply unwilling—or even indifferent—to give the necessary support. Parents in Auroville have no obligation to send their children to school or prevent them from driving mopeds when under-age; some parents have a *laissez-faire* attitude which affects their children who, in turn, influence other children... The second observation is that everyone is virtually alone in Auroville, and has to make it for him or herself. There is support (for example, some people helped us considerably when we had financial difficulties) but not of the type we expected when we came here—the idea of sharing with other people, of being part of a large, vibrant family. Instead, our experiences brought us to a situation where we lived here as a family—but a family on our own, not as part of an integrated community that we wanted."

(continued on next page)

BENITO AND CHRISTINE WITH FOUR OF THEIR FIVE CHILDREN

**"We came thinking that we were going to join a community where people live a spiritual life, which would help the spiritual awakening and development of our children, who would naturally pick up at an early age things that we only learned after much seeking and suffering. But what we encountered initially was the expression of the normal type of consciousness you find everywhere in the world. Some of that influence was not good, and even downright negative for the development of the children."**

(Christine)





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### What is freedom?

Other parents like Jana have experienced much more support from friends and neighbours. Yet Christine's reference to the problems that may result from the immense amount of freedom here is echoed by many other parents. Shyama, for example, concedes that "sometimes it has been misused, in the earlier days more than now. There was a misunderstanding about what freedom is. Now it is more structured. It is understood that you have to give freedom to the psychic—of that true freedom you cannot have enough—but that the outer nature needs more discipline and order." "There is a huge misunderstanding of the meaning of freedom," observes Jana. "Kids can do what they like, and that's called freedom. I don't agree. Responsibility, clarity and discipline should be part of adult guidance. Kids need it!" Hilde and Tency,



DHANDAPANI

**"When you live together in a community family like the one we had with Jean and Gordon, you discover what you really need: if you have too much of something you immediately give it to others. It's natural."**

whose two boys were born here, point out that one result of this freedom (as well as of the many different cultural backgrounds here) is that, unlike in their native Belgium, there are no generally recognised norms of behaviour in Auroville: different parents bring up (or do not bring up!) their children in completely different ways. Some would celebrate this infinite variety: Isha, a single parent with a teenage son, sees it as a reflection of and contribution to a deeper problem. "Within the community, within the school system, a strong sense of our identity is lacking. Before we can aspire to selflessness and higher consciousness, it is natural to know who we are and to have a sense of our place in the world. This identity, for the child newly arrived in Auroville, is a fragmented one with so many languages being spoken and so many histories competing with so many possible futures."

### Responses

How do different parents respond to challenges like the immense freedom children have here and the lack of agreed norms of behaviour? "It's important for Tency and myself that we feel united as

a family," explains Hilde. "We make a time every day, 'quality time', when we ensure that we are all together and can discuss matters freely. But we also draw clear lines about what the children can and cannot do. This means, for example, that we don't allow our children to go to parties which are not for children, and we don't allow them to drive mopeds until they are sixteen." Tency admits that holding the line on these things is made more difficult by the fact that many of their sons' friends are allowed to do what they like, but he feels that "our children intuitively appreciate that we draw lines for them. It's a comfort, a protection, it gives them the security in which to grow further".

Other parents respond to the bewildering cultural mix in Auroville by ensuring that their children are familiar with their own culture and language. "I insist on speaking Swedish to my children," says Martina whose partner is Italian. "I have all the literature for my children (songs, rhymes, stories) in Swedish so that they don't miss out. When my son Angelo went to Sweden for the first time when he was eight, he just fitted in and understood and could communicate with his cousins. Also I feel that only in your own language can you express yourself fully. My oldest child is a teenager and when he needs help I can discuss deeper things with him only in Swedish."

This need to introduce a child to one's "home" culture is sometimes felt most strongly when the parents are of different nationalities, or when their own parents put pressure upon them to keep certain cultural traditions alive. Tashi is Tibetan while Rama, her husband, is Tamil. Their "real Auroville kid", as they call him, is being brought up to speak both languages. Tashi admits that she wants him to be able to speak Tibetan because this is of great concern to her family. The family was also greatly relieved that he looks very Tibetan!

### Communal parenting

Probably the commonest style of parenting in Auroville today is the tight, nuclear family. This often surprises newcomers who expect a futuristic community dedicated to human unity to be experimenting with other ways of bringing up children, but it seems to be partly a reflection of our present highly individualistic lifestyle as well as the feeling, expressed by Hilde and Tency, that "we can't put the responsibility for bringing up our children on the shoulders of teachers, neighbours etc., when everybody is already so busy." It wasn't always like this, however. In the early days of Auroville there were a number of experiments in communal parenting, and there was even a community—Ami—run by children for children with a minimum of adult supervision.

Dhandapani was born in a local village and is now one of the trustees of Aurelec. In the early 1970's he was one of a group of young Tamil boys who were looked after by an American couple, Jean and Gordon Korstange. "It was a fantastic experience. A group of us boys lived together in a big round house with our teachers. We each had a room and shared all the daily tasks of cooking, cleaning and gardening. Jean and Gordon



HILDE, SUKHAMUNI, CHAITANYA, TENCY

**"We've never pushed Flemish culture on our children. The same regarding Sri Aurobindo and Mother. If they ask questions about them, we'll definitely talk about them, but it's an organic process. When things come up naturally we deal with them." (Tency)**

were not only our teachers: they were like a mother and father to us, monitoring our progress and always feeding us with different activities so that we didn't just hang around... There were no strict rules but we learned a good discipline. We would meditate before eating, we were taught how not to waste food, how to sit at the table properly, how to dress neatly and be on time for classes." After Jean and Gordon left Auroville in the mid 1970's Auroville passed through a period of crisis: the Sri Aurobindo Society cut off funds and many activities stopped. "But we boys had been taught to look after ourselves so that when everything stopped we went out, learned different skills, and began remaking our lives."

"I still dream about those days," says Dhandapani. "I miss that sense of community we had then: it's not there in the Auroville of today. In the future, I definitely want to start a community like the one we lived in, to take in six or seven children and try to bring them up the right way. It will be like carrying on the work that Jean and Gordon began so well."

### Children as yoga

Finally, what often emerges from these interviews is that bringing up children, in spite of all the frustrations and difficulties, is very rewarding if it can be seen as a path of yoga in itself. Hilde puts it well. "Children are like a mirror. When they challenge you, when they bounce back what you are, they make you examine your own assumptions. And when you really dig deep you often find that you're simply repeating what your parents told you. So it makes you work harder on yourself to understand what is really coming from deep within you and to free yourself from those parental influences that Mother said are so pervasive and powerful."

What it comes down to in the end is the need to be absolutely honest with your children because they can tell immediately if what you say is coming from you or from someone else. It's as if, as a family, you are all holding ends of a sensitive thread that runs between you. And only if you are honest, if what you say is what you do, does that connection hold."

Alan

**During one of her evening talks to the children in the Ashram playground, Mother was asked, "Is the vital distorted from birth?" Mother replied:**

**"If your birth has not been accidental, you could very well think there was no distortion, but what you are at birth is most of the time almost absolutely what your mother and father have made you and also, through them, what your grandparents have made you. There are certain vital tendencies in families and, besides, there is the state of consciousness in which you were formed, conceived—the moment at which you were conceived—and that, not one in a million times does that state conform to true aspiration; and it is only a true aspiration which could make your vital pure of all mixture, make the vital element attracted for the formation of the being a pure element, free from all contagion; I mean that if a psychic being enters there, it can gather elements favourable to its growth... The willed conception of a child is extremely rare; mostly it is an accident... So, in these conditions, how do you expect to be born with a vital being sufficiently pure to be of help to you? One is born with a slough to clean before one begins to live. And once you have made a good start on the way to the inner transformation and you go down to the subconscious root of the being—well, you do see what it is! And all, almost all difficulties are there. There are very few things added to existence after the first years of life."**



Compared to the cultural life in big cities, where on almost every other corner you can watch movies, hear musicians perform, or see plays, not much happens in Auroville. Apart from a few movie showings each month and the weekly video shows, our cultural life is "boring". But take into account that the size of Auroville is that of a very small rural village, and you will find the diversity of the arts here surprising: there is a blossoming theatre group which performed a few times, and there are numerous musicians, painters and sculptors. The monthly exhibitions at Pitanga and the newly opened gallery at the Visitors Centre offer a quick glance at the diversity of graphic arts practised in Auroville. Concentrating on music alone, if you would go on a cycle tour of Auroville, you would be able to hear the clear notes of Baroque music being played by three flutes and a cello, children practising for their weekly piano lessons; a voice singing scales and passagios; fingers performing complicated rhythms on the Indian tabla; a string quartet

## ARTS BLOSSOM IN AUROVILLE

learning to improvise on jazz scales; rock guitars; the soft melodic voices of Indian chanting classes; the children's choir on Saturday afternoons, and the adult choir rehearsing on Thursday evenings.

Taking a look at what's been happening over the past two months, you could have watched the beautiful slide show on the revolutionary work of Sri Aurobindo, listened to a talk on the origins of life in the universe by one of India's leading scientists, or watched a demonstration of Ikebana, the Japanese art of flower arrangement, and participated in a tea ceremony.

Concentrating only on music, the last few months have seen a pop concert on a Saturday night at the Visitors Centre by Armando (vocals and guitar), the two Rolfs (on guitar and percussion), guest Matthew on the sax, and Krishna

on guitar; well-known pop songs which brought all the kids to the dance floor having a great time. One week later on the terrace of the new Solar Kitchen, Holger and his "jazz tambis" (some of the musicians were the same as the previous week) played mellow instrumental jazz followed by some jazz songs, sung by Tina and Holger. The second half of the programme saw Graeme Alwright (known as the French Bob Dylan) performing.

About a month later a completely different style of music was presented by David Hykes (see interview below). A three-week workshop in harmonic chanting (also known as overtone singing) concluded with a concert by David, and most of the workshop participants, and included two solo pieces by David.

While writing this musical update, a "techno-musician" who's planning to spend one year in Auroville walked in, thus completing the whole gamut of musical styles. The only thing missing now is a music centre.

Tineke

## An integral sound yoga

DAVID HYKES, an American, is the first Western musician to study the sacred chanting of Mongolia, Tibet and Tuva. The founder of the Harmonic Choir of New York and the French Choeur Harmonique, Hykes has spent over twenty years developing this form of music which he calls "harmonic chanting." He currently divides his time between France and the United States and has a few albums to his credit. He visited Auroville recently and offered a workshop on harmonic chanting. Excerpts from an interview by Tineke.

What is "harmonic chanting"?

Harmonic chanting uses melodies which contain overtones. "Overtones," which are also called "harmonics," are the high and flute-like notes that are normally heard, very faintly, over the note that is being sung or played. The effect of overtones is to enrich the sound of the principal note. The sacred chanting of Tibet and Mongolia however is principally based on overtones that activate a certain "series of harmonic vibrations." To me, this sort of chanting has a certain universality for it is based not on language or on sounds of the normal scale. Perhaps that is why it speaks so deeply to people. Our hearing and speech are conditioned to the use of the sounds ordinarily produced by the human voice. Harmonic chanting presents the possibility of communicating equally well, or to an even more universal degree, by a vocal and yet non-verbal medium.

To me harmonic chanting is a sacred art form that explores the possibility of a global spiritual music based on the natural planes of harmonic vibration present in all voices, all instruments and all matter everywhere, including the cells of the body. I do not consider harmonic chanting as a series of musical techniques that can be taught or learnt but as an ongoing form of research of uniting one's whole being and of communicating, in a novel and interesting way, to other people.

What is the relevance of such a form of art?

I believe that one of the problems of mod-

*"All problems of existence are essentially problems of harmony."*

*(Sri Aurobindo)*

ern civilization is that it has a very short attention span and demands of its artists that something new be regularly produced: a composer presents new compositions every year, a painter paints new works every year, etc. But this so-called "newness", born out of a superficial necessity, is not "exactly new." And there is still this authentic need for man, especially in today's global quest for unity, to come up with new forms of expression. To find a universal art form is not easy because in the past so much emphasis has been put on the individualism of art. The relevance of harmonic chanting, differing as it does from other forms of vocal harmonics, is that it lays the foundations for a new form of universal sacred music.

I must add here that as a musician, I do not see the point in practising interesting music without having a high aim. There is always this higher aspiration to have art serve an ideal. And I have found that harmonic chanting leads to very deep meditative experiences and can be developed to promote harmony amongst people.

How did you come to Auroville? What has been your experience here?

For me coming to Auroville had to do essentially with my own search in my life and music. The conditions were favourable because I knew (Swiss) Michael from Europe as he was participating in my professional singing group and he made all the necessary arrangements.

It has been a very positive experience. I found the group I worked with very attentive, their listening was good, the singing on the whole quite tuneful, and I appreciated their openness to the meditative dimension of the harmonic chanting. Harmonic chanting has unfortunately become a new fad in the world. But here I found that there was a real understanding of its deeper meaning, a fusion of the-

ory and practice.

Secondly, I believe harmonic chanting is consistent with Auroville's aims, and I felt it provided a great therapeutic relief for many people in this group to intensely work on something together that was not based on language.

The openness of the group helped me in finding some new vistas in the work. I consider it a success from that point of view. I can't speak for the whole group but I heard a spectrum of reactions from "helpful" to "enlightening." I am happy about that. I have often been asked to write or lecture about harmonic chanting but I much prefer working in this kind of a group. It is direct experience, discovering new meanings and not just talking about it.

I felt really happy here, I didn't feel as reticent as I usually do and plunged right in. I hate the whole "new age" attitude. Here I felt people have made a certain commitment to something more serious. There is a certain focus of energy here and people are open to different approaches. On the other hand, in the West, so much is available that people lose their focus jumping from one thing to another or are so firmly rooted in one thing, that they seem closed. I found a higher percentage of people that I could relate

## THE BIG BANG AND BEYOND

At the invitation of the Centre of India Studies, Dr. Varun Sahni, a faculty member at the Inter-University Center for Astronomy and Astrophysics, Pune, led a small group of Aurovilians to ponder on the mysteries of the universe. At the outset of his lecture and video-show, Dr. Sahni, who is a specialist in the Big Bang theory [a theory that explains the origin of the universe], mentioned that he would like to take his audience "to the frontiers of current knowledge in his field without resorting, as far as was possible, to technical terms and equations." And that he did. Eloquently. Illustrating, in lay terms and examples from daily life, the structure and evolution of the universe and the basic concepts of quantum mechanics that govern astrophysics.

Dr. Sahni is well acquainted with Indian philosophy and the writings of Sri Aurobindo and was asked by the audience if there was anything in his field of knowledge that suggested the presence of an "Intelligence" governing the universe. To this, he ruefully replied that scientists were trained not to entertain such hypotheses! But he added that matter is organized in such intricate detail right from an atomic particle to the stars whirling in the universe that one can only presuppose the presence of a Consciousness behind it all.

## The Italians got here first!

An exhibition titled, "Ancient Rome and India" was inaugurated on 24th October '97 by the Lt. Governor of Pondicherry, Dr. Bajpai at the Centre for Indian Culture. The Italian Embassy Cultural Centre in collaboration with the Italian Pavilion of Auroville had brought the exhibition to town. The exhibition presents, through photos, text and artifacts (such as beads, tools and pottery), the "commercial, cultural and spiritual links" between ancient Rome and ancient India. Arikamedu, just a few kilometres south of Auroville had been an important trading centre with Rome in the past, as was revealed by the archaeological excavations conducted there. An odd bit of broken Roman pottery or Roman beads have also been found in Auroville, especially in the Matrimandir area and Centre Field, leading the Italians to boast that they were the first to arrive at this international city!



On 29th October, the solar communal kitchen Cuisine Solaire Pour Tous was inaugurated. The evening began with a performance by the Auroville Choir, continued with a Deepavali celebration snack, and culminated with fireworks. The kitchen has been providing daily lunches for Aurovilians from the beginning of November.

PHOTO: BILL



Aurovilians were recently offered a taste of traditional Japanese cuisine prepared by a chef who has been decorated by the Emperor of Japan, and a taste of Japanese culture by the hosting of a Tea Ceremony. There followed a demonstration and workshop on Ikebana, the Japanese art of flower arrangement. The visiting Japanese, sponsored in part by Kalamitra (the Auroville group that promotes artists and cultural events), were from Ikebana International in Tokyo. Bindu records her impressions.



in the silent attention to detail, becoming part of a larger whole that included the rocks, the flowers, the tea and the people.

The Ikebana demonstration held later that evening did not quite capture the same meditative note, but even so, the flower arrangements (some of the blooms had been brought all the way from Japan) were exquisite and expressive in their symbolism. Legend has it that Ikebana evolved from the Tea Ceremony: early Buddhist monks used to witness the

scattering of flowers by a storm and driven by compassion they used to gather them and place them in bowls of water. Later these grew into subtle artistic arrangements presented at a tea ceremony and finally into an independent art with over 300 different schools or techniques. The Flower Master at this show explained that the concept behind Ikebana is not to compete with Nature but to collaborate with it to produce something even more beautiful and to express the deeper relations within the universe, such as the connection between Heaven, Earth and the intermediate principle, Man. As the Mother, who spent a few years in Japan, said of its life and art, "True art is a whole and an ensemble; it is one and of one piece with life... always the right thing is there in the right place, nothing wrongly set, nothing too much, nothing too little. Everything is just as it is needed to be..."

Bindu

Japanese Tea Ceremony at Poppo's house.



A new venture:

## WELCOME KIDS

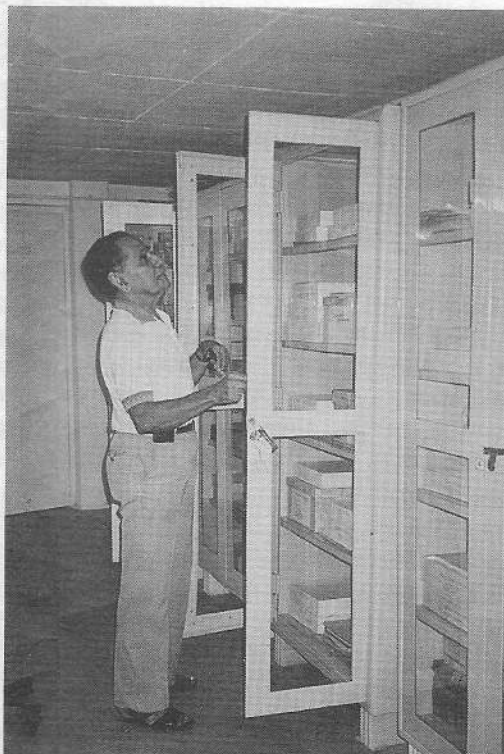
Imagine how it must be for a young person brought to Auroville by her/his parents. Starting school in an unfamiliar setting, with fellow students from all over the world and being taught in a language that is often foreign can be pretty daunting! Often younger children do not comprehend the motivation that has prompted their folks to leave home and move to Auroville. It may be very difficult to be uprooted from the familiar comforts and connections that existed before the big plane ride or the move from the village, and to face the challenges of an unknown setting where most things are very different, including the school.

A couple of months ago, Transition School inaugurated a "welcome" orientation course to help deal with this challenge. Previously, kids joined at any time on a "sink or swim" basis which proved disturbing not only to the individual child but to the whole class as well. Now, new students are taken at breaks in the school terms, and after having completed the welcome course. The course is tailored to the needs of the kids involved and they "graduate" as soon as they and their teachers feel they are ready.

The new introductory course is conducted by Aurora and Ross. Both have some parenting and teaching experiences and enjoy their work very much. At the moment they have three students none of whom have English as their mother tongue. Language, then, is the major focus, but the "class" travels all over Auroville to familiarize itself with places the kids might never go or see on their own. The students also gain a sense of the physical size and diversity of Auroville as well as attending the exhibitions and events that are always going on. They also visit the libraries and other schools and places of interest, but take their snack and lunch at Transition with all the other students for a gradual assimilation. They can also participate in the daily afternoon sports programme as soon as they feel ready for it.

Bill

Krishna Tewari in the dust and moisture-proof room



## REMEMBERING EUGENE FINN

Many people connected with Auroville knew, personally or by legend, "Mickey" Finn from Boston, a man who inspired those whom he met with the ideals of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo to the extent that some of them even left for Auroville or Pondicherry, and many changed their lives. Mickey passed away suddenly on October 19th, 1997. Here we print reminiscences from two people who knew him well.

Mickey had a remarkable experience of choosing to go to his yoga teacher rather than his drug connection and "forgetting about heroin for two weeks". This "cold turkey" conversion experience was part of his inspiration in teaching hatha yoga and pranayama from his one-room Boston apartment for free for decades.

Bob Lawlor called him "the back street bhakti" and Sam Spanier thought of him as a "Golden Bell" ringing out "Sri Aurobindo" in his resonant voice.

Mickey introduced hundreds of people to the fundamentals of yoga, created "Sri Aurobindo Books" on Charles Street along with other devotees, many of whom drove cabs, and pooled their money to support the center. He was the inspiration behind a number of activities in the Boston area over the years, the heart of which was a weekly meditation at his apartment. (Julian Lines)

Will Moss adds:

Here was this old guy sitting on the floor in the lotus position, and talking to me earnestly about some Indian guru who used to be a revolutionary and about evolution, which hasn't ended with us, but which we can continue. And that all the old ways were dying, and we had the golden opportunity to be part of the new World that was seeking to be born

And then this guy talked about someone called The Mother. And all of a sudden, the room got larger, and quieter... and warmer too, somehow. And love poured out of this man, this old street-wise con man, as he described "Th' Mothah", and how She comes to us in response to our aspiration and devotion:

"To walk through life armoured against all fear, peril and disaster, only two things are needed, two that go always together — the Grace of the Divine Mother and on your side an inner state made up of faith, sincerity and surrender." (Sri Aurobindo)

## REQUEST FROM THE ARCHIVES

Krishna Tewari requests all Aurovilians and friends of Auroville to send him any original documents, publications, photos and other records pertaining to Auroville for preservation in the Archives. Krishna says that "it is a pity, given the facilities available at the Archives (airconditioning, dehumidifiers etc.) that important documents on Auroville in possession of individuals are often damaged due to lack of proper care."

Materials can be mailed to Krishna Tewari at: Auroville Archives, Bharat Nivas, Auroville 605101, India.



# Reviewing the internal organisation

## Are we ready for self-government?

*Two years after its implementation, Auroville's re-structured internal organisation is still functioning. How well it is functioning is debatable. Recently four reviews, one of each committee, appeared in the Auroville News. They had been made by the Executive Committee (EC), who had also reviewed its own functioning. Carel makes his own assessment.*

The reviews generally reflected the positive approach of the EC to the four committees, but the public remained largely indifferent. Meetings called to discuss the EC's reviews failed to excite anybody. On an average only four people turned up. Does this apathy indicate that the new organisation has failed? Some Aurovilians think it has, or criticise the reviews as "too rosy." The reviews, for example, do not mention why some committees, such as the Concepts and Communications Committee, did not function well, or why the Working Committee on a few occasions felt the need to act beyond its mandate.

There is a human aspect that has been largely overlooked in the reviews of the Executive Committee. Not many Aurovilians have the ability, willingness or the commitment to do a time-consuming and difficult job in one of the committees. Take, for example, the Executive Committee itself. Originally, more than 16 Aurovilians agreed to rotate in order to do the work. But some of these never even attended a meeting, and the membership of the EC gradually dwindled to three people who continued to carry the burden. This, in turn, affected the image of the EC, which is now rather poor. The same fate befell the CCC: the original seven-member team dwindled to one, and though three others were nominated, the CCC ceased functioning altogether.

Sanjeev, in a privately circulated essay "The Auroville Organisation: A Next Step" makes the assessment that the attempt to create four committees was not successful, and "that the distinction sought to be made between the functions of the various groups were quite unreal." "Auroville lost a centre of responsibility and authority," argues Sanjeev, "as a result of which the internal administration is moving towards a chaos where each one feels free to do as his fancy chooses. It is necessary that there should be one centre, by whatever name called." Such a central body, then, would need dedicated and competent people, ready to be unpopular and do a difficult job. "That work," says Sanjeev "is self-effacing and self-sacrificing."

Is Sanjeev's a lone voice in a desert of indifference? Not really, though his paper

## FROM THE REVIEWS OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

### The Auroville Council

In the beginning regular sessions with all four committees present, [the Charter Council was re-baptised Charter Committee—Eds.] were held. Though these first sessions (which became known as "Council Meetings") dealt with certain broad topics, it was very difficult for the four committees to define their individual roles in relation to the functioning of the New Organisation. The Working Committee (WC) had very clear and pressing business to attend to, while the Executive Council (EC) and Concepts and Communications Committee (CCC) were very new and unclear. (...) The large meetings were abandoned eventually so that the individual groups could pursue their individual work (...) As the committees discovered the work they had to do, there was less interest in holding additional common meetings. An attempt was made to meet between the WC, EC & CCC, but this was abandoned in favour of sending one representative of each to all the other committee meetings. This did not include the CC as it was not a case of seeking their advice on a particular topic. Further attempts to meet between EC and CCC also collapsed.

### The Executive Committee (EC)

The key issue with the effectiveness of the EC is that of policy implementation. (...) Members stated that "executive power" has never truly been vested in the EC and this system works only when there is consent or consensus, or when the collective decision power is achieved through collabora-

tion between the EC and the other relevant working groups. Direct implementation by the EC could only be more effective if the community were to empower it to act. The usefulness of the EC is that it presents a regulating option in the consideration of internal affairs. Because there are few clearly defined policies, deliberations are lengthy. Its major role has been defined as referring cases to the appropriate working group and assuring follow-through, while at the same time actively reviewing the function and membership of working groups themselves, and forming subgroups.

### The Concepts and Communications Committee (CCC)

The CCC sees its present function as "taking the pulse of the community", speaking with individuals and working groups to identify issues and themes for further discussion. Their strong point is in the realm of "concepts". Communication within the community is not immediate enough to effectively resolve pressing issues, and becomes easily too complex. Present members do not want to be responsible for co-ordinating communication within the Council.

They also feel that the Local Area Meeting (LAM) process is useful as a way to elicit feedback from the community, but should be combined with regular Residents' Assembly meetings. They are open to conducting a couple of LAMs per year, but feel the LAM process is too slow and more work can be done in more general circumstances, with LAMs serving best for issues of ongoing concern.

### The Working Committee (WC)

The most difficult thing for any WC is

that it is answerable both to the Auroville Foundation and to the Auroville Community. The WC is recognised by the outside as the legal representative of Auroville and decisions must be taken continuously on behalf of the community, yet there must be transparency and clear communication links to all sections of the community. It requires very close collaboration with the Secretary and the Chairman of the Foundation.

WC members need to have an overview of all issues in Auroville, to be able to translate between the understanding of the Governing Board, the government and the community. Combined, they should represent a variety of inputs, with a high degree of patience, and a talent for public relations. The community rarely realises the long-range effects of the actions of the WC in India—these have the potential to be very positive or very negative. The work is full time.

### The Charter Committee (CC)

The idea of including a Charter Committee into the set-up of the New Organisation was much debated. Those who felt positive about the idea argued that a politically uninvolved group could act as a reference point to the Charter and Mother's Dream. Others, pointing out the negative side, foresaw that political involvement of this group could not be avoided as its members were likely to be individuals of long standing in the community. The debate ended with the inclusion of the CC with the clear mandate that they would advise only on request.

The CC were requested to review the subject of "Work in Auroville" for a seminar on the economy, "Private Property in Auroville" and "Spirituality in Auroville", and some high quality papers were submitted by them.

## THE NEW ORGANISATION: THE ORIGINAL CONCEPT

AS APPROVED BY A RESIDENTS' ASSEMBLY MEETING IN FEBRUARY 1996

### 1) The Auroville Council, composed of

a) the Executive Committee. Mandate: to take care of Auroville's internal matters, and to resolve conflicts among working groups, between working groups and the community, and between individuals and working groups and the community. Term of office of its members: two years.  
b) the Concepts and Communication Committee. Mandate: to prepare plans, proposals, policies and guidelines, and to facilitate communications between the Auroville Council, Working Committee, working groups and the community at large. Term of office of its members: two years. The Auroville Council will meet regularly to exchange information, review each Committee's functioning and take common decisions; will activate local area meetings; will have, together with the Working Committee, monthly open forums with the community.

2) The Working Committee. Mandate: to take care of all official matters related to the Auroville Foundation and to any government and international body. It is the liaison between the Residents' Assembly and the Auroville Foundation (Secretary, Governing Board and International Advisory Council), and acts as the sole interface with the Secretary on all official matters related to the Auroville Foundation, and follows up actions related to the general development and protection of Auroville with local, state and central government bodies. Term of office of its members: two years.

3) The Charter Council. Mandate: to advise, upon request, on major issues in the light of Auroville's Charter. Term of office of its members: five years.

4) The Secretariat. A strong impartial secretariat will call meetings of the Residents' Assembly and general Meetings, and answer all queries regarding an issue dealt with by the committees, and organise the periodic renewal of membership of the committees. Term of office: indefinite.

5) Monthly Local Area Meetings (LAMs), General Meetings and Residents' Assembly meetings will guarantee the community's involvement in decision-making processes.

(continued on next page)



# Living with moving ground

**Arnold Mindell is a psychotherapist and analyst who, together with his wife Amy, has travelled the world running workshops in global conflict resolution. In his recent book, *The Leader as Martial Artist: Techniques and Strategies for Resolving Conflict and Creating Community*, he describes how the energy locked up in destructive conflicts in groups and societies can be released for transformative solutions.**

**Alan summarizes his argument as another contribution to the continuing debate upon how to make our community organisation more effective.**

**A**rnold Mindell, like many others, believes that the world today has a choice between self-destruction and global transformation. As he sees it, the present destructive tendencies are the result of individuals, groups and societies being locked into fixed perceptions and roles which frequently clash with each other. Thus energy which could be used to creatively solve prob-

lems is locked up in fortifying positions and attacking others who are perceived as threats.

Certain polarised roles—oppressor/oppressed, organizer/disrupter etc.—can be seen to be played time and again in many different contexts. Mindell terms these “timespirits” and sees them as particular energy fields which suck us in and make us behave in certain ways. Timespirits, however, are not immortal: they are capable of changing into something else if they are handled, or “processed” as Mindell terms it, in a certain way.

What does this entail? Mindell notes that all groups and societies have a self-balancing tendency: if one grouping becomes dominant it will inevitably throw up an opposition, or if there is an over-emphasis upon order then anarchic tendencies will surface. Typically, this self-balancing tendency results in a predictable recycling where revolution follows repression only for the revolutionaries to become repressive themselves. This closed, uncreative situation is kept in being because each polarity tries to dominate or eliminate the other.

However Mindell's experience is that when all sides, all roles—even the seemingly destructive ones—are respected and allowed to play themselves out at a certain point the old formations collapse, the timespirits transform and energy is released for new solutions. It is this awareness of the need for all the different roles, for all the components of a situation, to be respected and played out that he terms “deep democracy”.

Underlying Mindell's philosophy is a faith that each situation embodies exactly those problems that we are meant to solve, and that each situation has within it the seeds of its own solution. The crucial ingredient in transforming a closed, recycling system into an open, evolutionary one is awareness. “Awareness implies understanding that what is opposing us is a part of ourselves which we need.” Not everybody in every group has to be aware, but there must always be somebody who is sensitive enough to ascertain which roles are being played out and which “shadow” roles need to be expressed. At the same time, this facilitator should be unattached to any role and be able perceive the deeper patterns

which are trying to be expressed. One way of sensing the deeper patterns is to become aware of a group's forbidden territory because it is precisely what a group fears to talk about which often represents the key to the next step in its evolution.

For Mindell, life is ever-changing, fluid; even harmonious systems must have dynamic fluctuations between equilibrium and chaos if they are to grow. “A new order can be discerned in apparent chaos if we have the patience to follow it instead of trying to programme nature, to live with moving ground instead of pressing for solutions.”

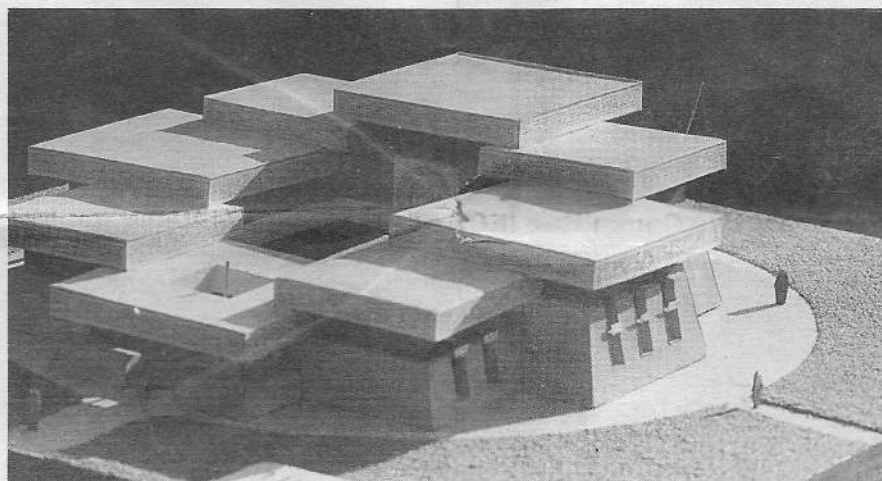
Mindell concludes that in a world of global fields “nothing can be solved only in one locality, with one group (...) Inner work on conflict as well as local and global group work must all go together.” But at each level what is required is essentially the same—that we “must cease to cling so stubbornly to our identities as groups and individuals (...) Identity is meaningful and can even be a matter of life and death. But like all images, identities are not static pictures but gates to an even more numinous and unknown spirit.”

## THE PAVILION OF TIBETAN CULTURE

**I**n March this year the final model for the Pavilion of Tibetan Culture was presented to His Holiness the Dalai Lama who, after making some suggestions for minor modifications, blessed the model. He later donated Rs. 1 lakh towards the construction.

On 20th June, there was a small function for the casting of the first pillar, led by two young Rinpoches from Mundgod Monastery.

The responsibility for the construction of the Pavilion has been given to the Auroville Building Centre. The construction is seen as an opportunity to train Tibetans living in India in alternative technologies developed in Auroville, with a view of transferring these technologies to their own settlements in India later. The participation of Tibetans in the construction of the Pavilion is also a return to the great tradition of public building in ancient India and Tibet which involved the participation of volunteers. For the past two months, the five large Tibetan settlements in the south of India have contributed five masons for the first phase of the building.



**New model of the Pavilion of Tibetan Culture: construction has begun**

One of the first tasks on the site was to manufacture the mud bricks for the walls and the vaults. This has now been completed. The foundations and the main pillars which are traditionally the most important elements in Tibetan architecture are also ready. The plan of the Pavilion is based on a traditional Tibetan Mandala.

(continued from previous page)

centralised authority is an opportunity for so-called ‘outside’ bodies to attempt to take over control. The recent constitution of a Matrimandir sub-committee by the Governing Board, ostensibly created to further the building of Matrimandir, is regarded by some Aurovilians as an example of just such an unwanted interference from ‘the outside’.

**T**he question of control brings us to the role and functioning of the Residents' Assembly, one of the three components of the Auroville Foundation. Residents' Assembly meetings have so far failed to function well. It has been said that these meetings, while being an excellent forum to air opinions, are not really

suitable for making decisions. Normally, between five and fifteen percent of the residents of Auroville attend such meetings and the experience is that a meaningful dialogue is impossible when over 60 people are huddled together in one room. It is also questionable whether those five or fifteen percent should have the power to take decisions which also affect all those who have not attended the meeting. The introduction of “Local Area Meetings,” in which residents in different geographical areas meet to discuss issues normally discussed in meetings of the Residents' Assembly, was a good attempt to give more people the opportunity to express themselves. But these meetings have not yet grown into adulthood.

Meanwhile, the Governing Board has asked the Working Committee to partici-

pate in the drafting of the Regulations of the Auroville Foundation, which would include a written code for the functioning of the Residents' Assembly and the Working Committee, and details about entry into and expulsion from Auroville. At first sight, it looks as if there will be more red tape. But it also seems that outside pressure is necessary in order for Auroville to regulate itself. Says Sanjeev: “If we are interested in Auroville's autonomy (without involvement of the Indian Government or of the Auroville Foundation), we need to be able to demonstrate that we are able to administer Auroville in a responsible way. Only then is there a hope of the supervisory role of the Indian Government receding in Auroville.” Are we ready for self-government?

## Subscription Information

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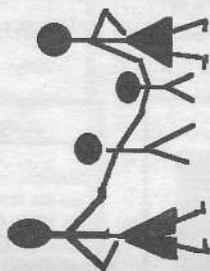
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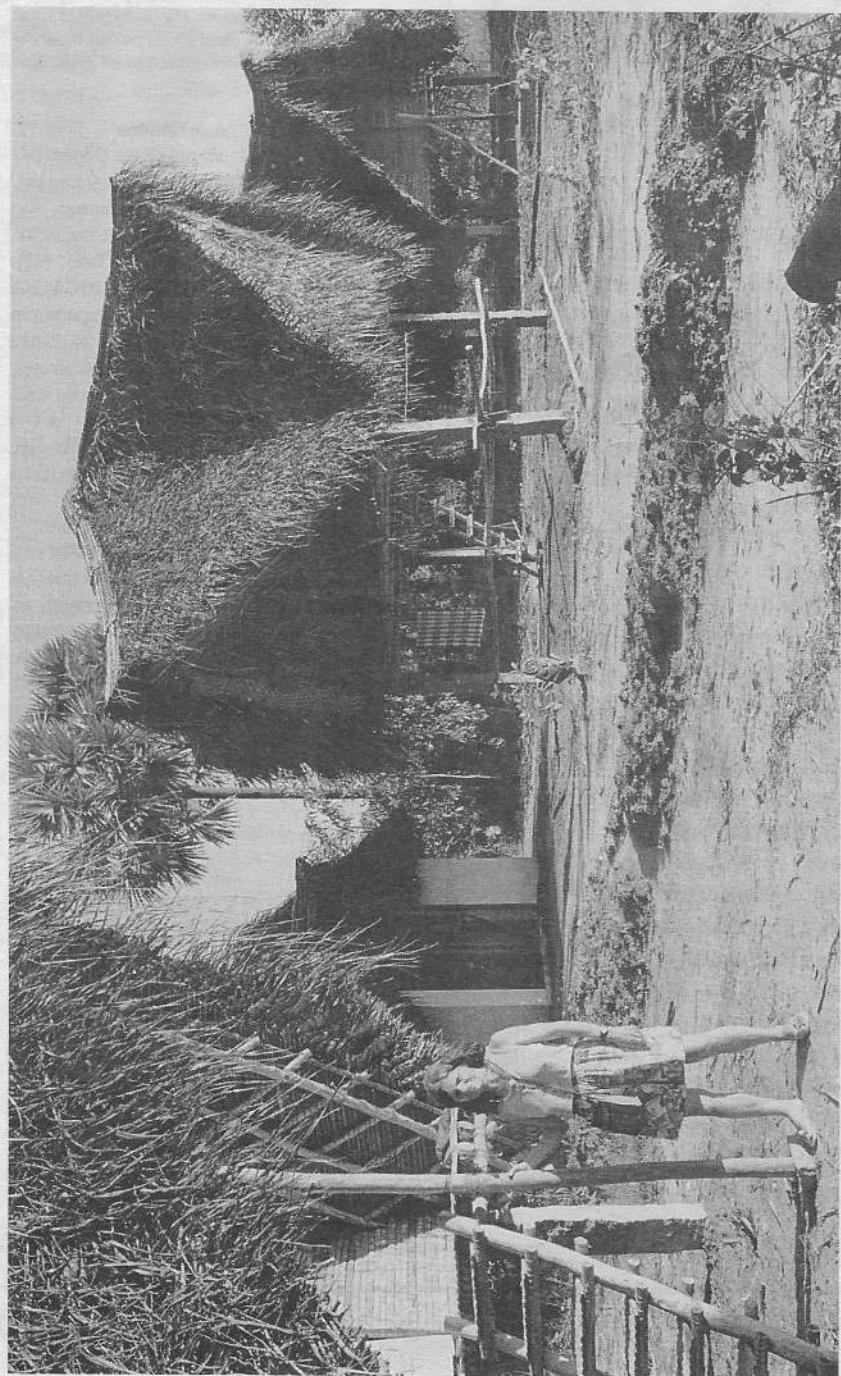


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- REVIEWING THE INTERNAL ORGANISATION
- ADVENTURE

AUROVILLE ARCHIVES  
C/O KRISHNA T.  
BHARAT NIVAS  
AUROVILLE

December 1997  
Number 107



Priya at the new Adventure settlement

## Our Adventures in Adventure

*PRIYA documents the growth of Adventure, a new greenbelt community near the village of Edayanchavadi.*

We think of the birthday of our community as February 28th, for on that day all of us pledged an equal sum of money and we opened a community financial account. The most important thing that we needed on the land was water. We therefore decided that our first priority was to dig a hole for the water tank.

In the beginning there were four of us to dig this hole—Horst who is German, Dirk who is Dutch, Doris who is French and myself, a Brit. As you might expect from such a diverse group of people we each had our own ideas about how things should be done but that did not hold up the work. And that's been the pattern since... Eventually however we employed villagers from Edayanchavadi to help us dig the hole and then with other jobs. At the same time the hole was being dug, it became obvious that we needed some kind of proper road access for four-wheel vehicles as without this everything would have to be delivered by bullock cart! We cut the grass to make a road as well as a cycle path across another part of the land. I just love cycling along the cycle path which goes through the lonelier parts of the land and feels very magical.

When we first started work on the land it was the end of summer and the land was rock hard. It did rain once or twice but we needed shelter from the sun much more than the rain. We found that old cashewnut trees make great outdoor rooms. Their branches come right down to the ground and by cutting out a few branches and sweeping away the leaves we had a cool place to sit. Eventually we decided to prune the trees, especially those around the ten acres or so where we were intending to build our houses. Pruning the branches made an enormous difference as immediately the land seemed more open. They ended up looking very like English apple trees and the whole place rather like an apple orchard!

Another priority was to fence the land properly from cows straying onto the land. They can be very destructive although fortunately they do not like eating cashewnut trees. We planted what is known as a 'living fence.'

As we did more work we began to accumulate more tools and building equipment which needed a place in which to be stored. We originally planned a simple windowless room in which we were going to store tools but it grew into two rooms, one of which we designated "the Adventure office" and which has bookshelves and a safe. It also contains the three computers owned by various people in the community. In fact

we decided to build the extra room as an office after a night of very heavy rain when we thought that having a computer in a damp thatched hut might be rather bad for it. We have set up a solar system to power the computers and various other necessary electrical tools.

The storeroom/office was built of bricks. We had decided, however, that we would live more lightly on the land in 'capsules.' Our first keet structure was the community kitchen which was built in a hexagonal shape with a cement floor and small wall all the way round. In the last weeks we have added shelves, seats and are having some wooden tables made.

And then finally our huts were ready. My elder daughter, Emma, said that she would not move onto the land unless she had a 'proper' toilet, which means one that is flushed by pouring water down it. She felt that none of her friends would come to visit if they had to 'go in a hole'. We are therefore the owner of a very beautiful toilet and shower room which boasts a keet roof and tiles on the floor. Both Emma and Rachael, my youngest, have their own huts together with an extra hut which they use as a sort of sitting room. With four huts and a five-star bathroom this little patch has become known as 'Priyapuram' (i.e. Priya's village!). As soon as the store room was finished we added a keet roof on the top which afforded shelter to Horst and Kathy. They have since moved to their own capsule which has a large veranda, and they have also built a high platform in the palm trees where they can sit and watch beautiful sunsets. Doris and her husband Robert have moved the hut that they had in their previous community to Adventure and are able to spend some nights here. They will move here permanently with their other daughter Leah as soon as they have built their house. Santap, another member of our community arrived from Germany about two weeks ago and has moved into the hut on top of the store room while his hut is being constructed.

In the last few days the monsoon rains have started so everyone is very busy planting. We have acquired indigenous trees and bushes from various Auroville nurseries and dug nearly two thousand holes all over the land to put them in. We have seventeen chickens that keep the community very well supplied with eggs, and we plan to have fruit trees and a vegetable garden. We are also hosting two experimental organic cashew projects... so many wonderful things are happening and we all feel very blessed to be here and this is only the start of the Adventure!

THE AUROVILLE TODAY TEAM WISH YOU A

**HAPPY  
NEW YEAR**