

AUROVILLE TODAY

May 1994, Number Sixty-Four

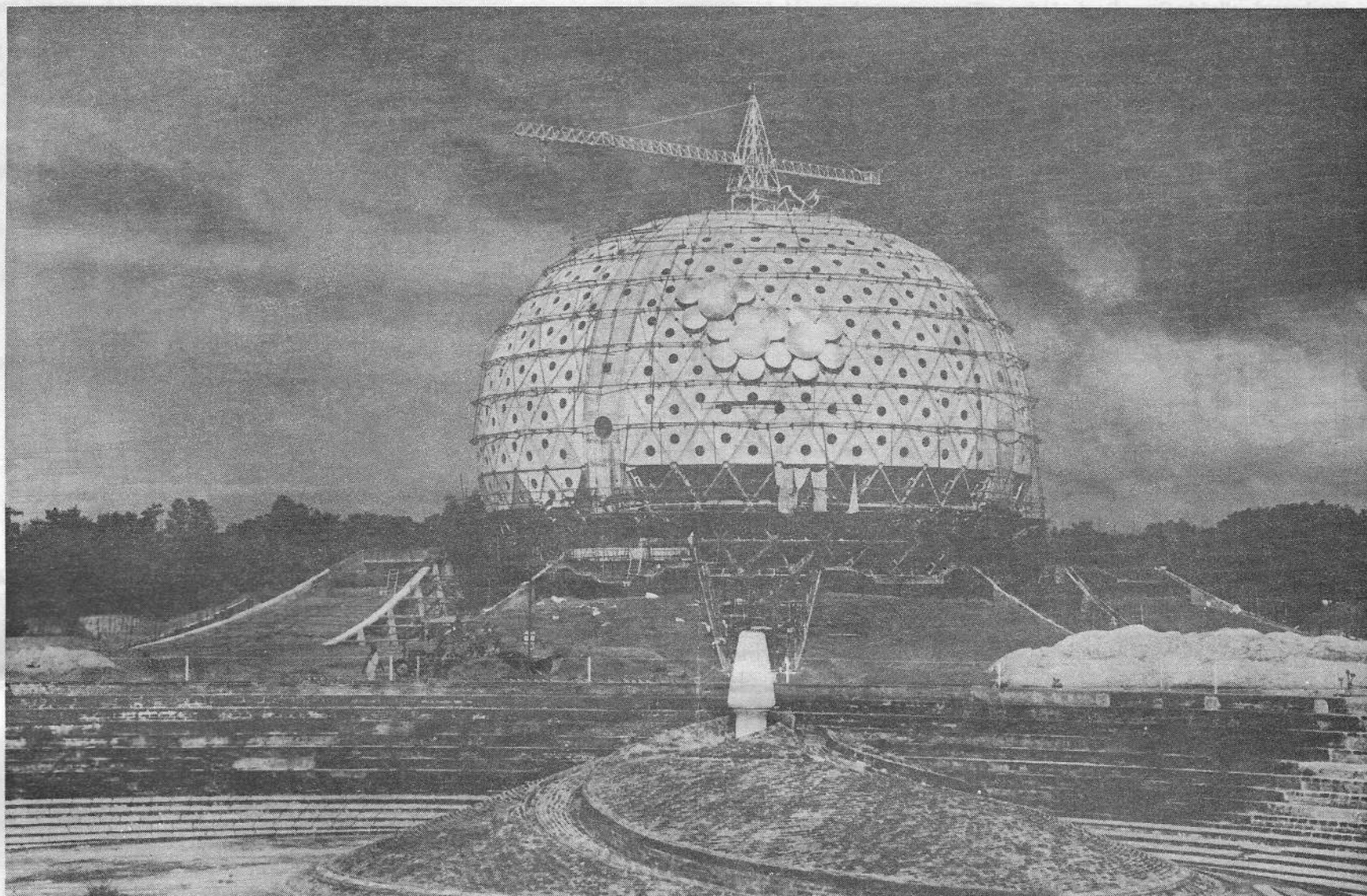


PHOTO JOHN MANDEEN

Matrimandir, January 1994, showing progress on the exterior and the petals

“The only evidence of life is growth”, wrote an eminent Victorian. On that basis, Auroville is clearly alive and kicking! In this month’s issue of AUROVILLE TODAY we feature the Master Plan of Auroville’s future development, which was recently presented to and accepted by the Residents’ Assembly and the Governing Board; we introduce two new economic proposals—one of which is already operational—designed to take us a step closer to Mother’s vision; we preview plans for a solar energy plant to power Matrimandir and its gardens; and we glance at a new group—Unity Service—which has been formed to help resolve conflicts in the community.

Some problems remain intractable, however, and still await creative solutions. One such problem concerns Auroville’s farms, intended to be the basis for achieving self-sufficiency in food, but which have never been able to operate at their full potential; some of the reasons for this are suggested in a report inside.

Finally, we publish an end-of-term report by Bindu, who, in her Creative Writing Workshop—and against all the odds—managed to drag three members of the Auroville Today team into the realm of semi-literacy.

Eds.

“The city will be built by what is invisible to you. The people who have to act as instruments will do so in spite of themselves. They are only puppets in the hands of larger forces. Nothing depends on human beings—neither the planning nor the execution—nothing! That is why one can laugh.”

(The Mother, Sep. 1969)

Planning the City

AUROVILLE’S MASTER PLAN AND ZONES OF INFLUENCE

The Auroville Development Group has recently presented a paper defining the basic principles for a future Auroville master plan and its zones of influence. The proposal was accepted by a meeting of the residents of Auroville, as well as by the Governing Board in its meeting on 27-2-1994.

The most remarkable feature of the paper is that it defines only what is necessary at Auroville’s present stage of development, giving ample space to the so-called “necessary evolutionary freedom of the physical processes of Auroville’s development”. Referring to the evolving spirit of Auroville the report adds that “nothing can be considered as fixed, final and determined until it has finally been put into matter”. The report defines four main areas.

They are the City area proper, the Immediate Greenbelt, the Remaining Greenbelt and two so-called “corridors”, one up to the sea and one up to and beyond the Pondicherry-Tindivanam road, and the bioregion around Auroville. What follows are excerpts from the paper.

THE CITY AREA

Auroville’s city area is the central area of Auroville. It is divided into four zones separated by four parks. The Matrimandir is at its core. In this area eventually all the lands will be purchased and held by the Auroville Foundation. All activities in this area will be relatable to Auroville and those residing therein will follow Auroville guidelines especially regarding property and immovable assets. Approximately one-

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third of the land in this area has still to be bought.

The city pattern evokes the movement of a spiral galaxy. A circular road, called the Crown Road, and a few radial roads linking the centre to the periphery, will be defined in order to allow only controlled traffic inside the city area.

City area: Crown Area

The Crown Area is the area linking the four zones. It is located on both sides of a circular road, called the Crown Road, which is planned as an approximate circle with a radius of 655 m from the centre. The term "approximate circle" is used because the concrete definition of this road will have to take into account the specific characteristics of the land and the existence of a number of long established settlements.

This circular road will be connected with the periphery and the inner areas of the four zones by a number of radial roads. The road system will also be the main pathway for infrastructural necessities such as water, electricity and telecom lines, sewage, etc. The process of defining the first radial roads in each zone is under way.

The main services of Auroville will be located on the Matrimandir side of the Crown Road. The Crown Area will be filled up progressively to the point where it will be a nearly continuous system of buildings with a few breaks corresponding to gardens and parks.

The services to be provided in this area will be located in accordance with the specific zone it is crossing. In the Residential Zone, the principal function of the Crown will be to provide for the daily needs of residents in terms of restaurants, collective kitchens, various shops and services, recreational areas (coffee shops, cinemas,

theatres, exhibition spaces etc.) A Community Centre, which will provide a large community kitchen and other related services, is presently under preparation.

City area: Residential Zone

The Residential Zone is the largest of the four zones in view of the fact that it should be able to house about 80% (i.e. 40,000) of the proposed total population of 50,000. The planned development for the Residential Zone will follow the overall density pattern which is necessary in order to accommodate the required number of residents.

The lowest density areas (sectors I and II on the map) start from the Gaia park between the Cultural and Residential Zones. These two sectors will have between 3000 and 4000 residents, with a slow increase of density from the south east to the south of the City area. Presently five housing

projects have either already begun or are in preparation: Grace (under construction), Samasti II (under construction), Prayatna (low-cost housing, in preparation), Vikas (under construction), Surrender (in preparation). (see also AVToday # 48)

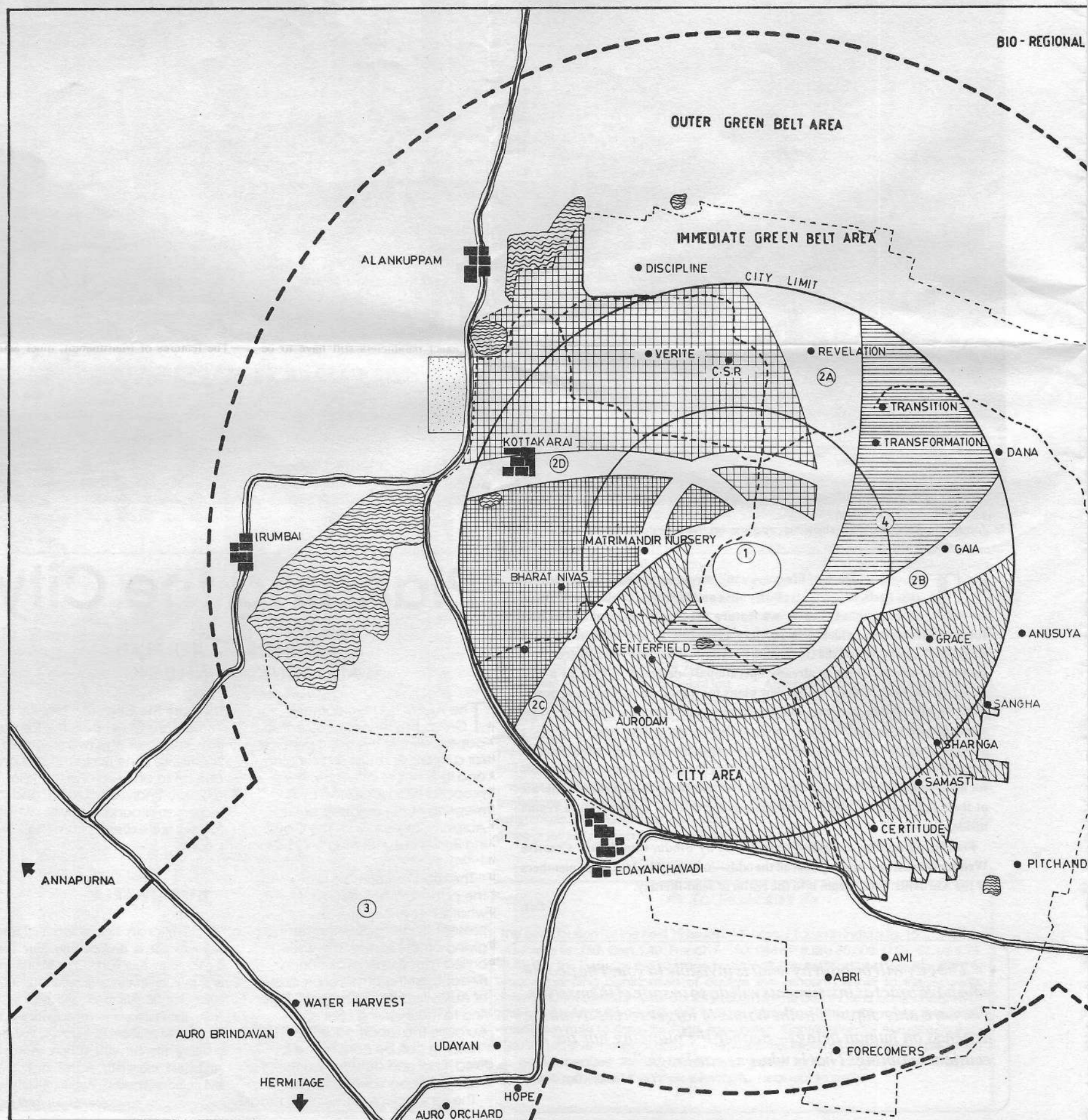
More housing projects will be accommodated within these two sectors so as to produce finally an overall urban district characterized by low density, green areas, specific yet interconnected settlements, adequate services and educational and recreational facilities.

The complete road pattern and the infrastructure pattern inside sectors I and II have still to be finalized.

Some important principles for these two sectors of the Residential Zone have been defined, though not worked out fully. To mention a few:

- No single detached houses

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- Living areas have to conform to certain norms, based on the proposed number of inhabitants.
- The construction of residences and the landscaping of gardens within the City area should be environmentally sensitive and, as far as possible, conform to the principles of sustainable development.

The remaining sectors of the Residential Zone (from south-south-west up to the International Zone) will be sectors of increasing density. Proposals already exist providing for housing patterns of high density, but it has been decided for the time being to freeze the development of the remaining sectors of the Residential Zone until it becomes necessary to choose between various systems of housing able to provide the necessary density. According to Auroville's present pattern of population

growth, sectors I and II of the Residential Zone with a total population of about 3000 are likely to provide enough accommodation for new residents for the next 10 to 15 years.

City area: International Zone

The International Zone will enable each country represented in Auroville to express, through and in its pavilion, what it perceives to be its contribution to the global evolution of mankind. Such contributions have expressed themselves over the centuries through many diverse aspects—spiritual, cultural, political, etc.—which have reflected the special characteristics of the “soul” of each country.

The International Zone will be the primary zone for the reception of visitors and is likely to be the most open sector of Auroville. Two buildings are already functioning inside this zone: the Visitors

Centre and Bharat Nivas, the Pavilion of India (unfinished).

The existence of Bharat Nivas more or less at the centre of the International Zone has dictated the organization of the remaining space. India being the host country is appropriately at the centre and the other specific areas of the International Zone are arranged in a kind of circular pattern around Bharat Nivas. A general layout has already been proposed which defines a few sectors based on the main continents. According to this pattern, there will be African, American, European, and Asian sectors, Russia making the transition between the European and Asian sectors and Australia being related to the Southeast Asian part.

This methodological choice allows at the same time the possibility of giving to each country (despite the relatively small space available in the International Zone) a space sufficient for the construction of its pavilion and the realization of a garden.

The usable surface of the pavilions can vary from 400 to 700 m² depending on programmes and budgets. The main features can be defined in the following way: a large multi-purpose exhibition space, library-cum-“mediatheque”, secretariat, caretaker's flat, one or two guest rooms, storeroom and sanitary facilities. Additional space necessary for large exhibitions can be located in such buildings as a proposed “International House” or large exhibition complexes on the Crown Area.

A lot of work remains to be done to define more precisely, within the space available, the overall pattern of each sector, the mode of relations between the various pavilions in each sector, with the conceptual aim of expressing both unity and diversity.

Apart from the national pavilions, the International Area provides space for the proposed “Centre of International Research on Human Unity” (C.I.R.H.U.), a project whose exact parameters still have to be defined, and for a “Hall of Peace”, a building intended to become a meeting centre, which will house one of the seven Altars of Peace made by the late designer George Nakashima.

City area: Industrial Zone

Auroville's main commercial and industrial activities will be located in the Industrial Zone. The present development process is characterised by the fact that a number of Aurovilians are already residing in this area. The development of this area takes place in coordination with the Monitoring Group for the Industrial Zone, made up of representatives of some units already settled in the zone, representatives of the residents and members of the Environment Group and the Development Group.

The main sector presently under development in the Industrial Zone is the sector close to Revelation Park, which separates the Industrial Zone from the Cultural Zone. In this sector, the first units of the Industrial Zone have been already established, including the Centre for Scientific Research, Filaure, Auromode, Altec and Shradanjali. Other units, such as Aurosarjan, are in the process of finalizing a location and beginning construction. The main effort is to try to create an ambiance of harmony between nature, people, and activities.

A few important principles for the development of the Industrial Zone have been agreed upon:

- It cannot be a dead zone in the evenings. Therefore it is important to also have residents and services there.
- Heavy industry or large scale production units will have to be located on the periphery. The Industrial Zone cannot harbour such units.

- A specific environmental agreement is to be signed by unit holders wanting to settle in the Industrial Zone, which deals with items such as pollution and noise controls, traffic, etc.

Vocational training centres and the main administrative buildings of the city are intended to be located in the Crown Area of the Industrial Zone. To keep the unavoidable traffic of lorries, trucks and buses transporting materials, goods and workers outside the other zones of the city, two main access roads are envisaged: one in the southern part of the Zone, and another on the top, roughly following the Northern periphery of the city. One or two radials are also being defined.

City area: Cultural Zone

The Cultural Zone will be a space for self-perfection in the fields of physical education, arts and culture. It will provide space for the Auroville stadium and sports activities as well as locations for various cultural and research centres, artistic centres for fine arts and audio-visual activities, and the main Auroville library. At present, the main projects under consideration are a Sports Centre grouping a few activities (swimming, table tennis, martial arts, etc), and a new large Auroville library. A precise road pattern needs to be defined for this part of the Cultural Zone.

The Crown area of the Cultural Zone will house art studios, audio-visual studios, cinemas, theatres, and exhibition spaces.

City area: Matrimandir Area

The Matrimandir area at the centre is the one area of the city where all the lands have now been consolidated. Precise plans for its development have mostly been worked out.

The features of Matrimandir, inner and outer, have been defined and are in the process of being executed, with the main handicap being insufficient funding to proceed as rapidly as desired. The precise planning of the inner and outer gardens is presently in process.

A final definition of road patterns and access in the area is yet to be worked out.

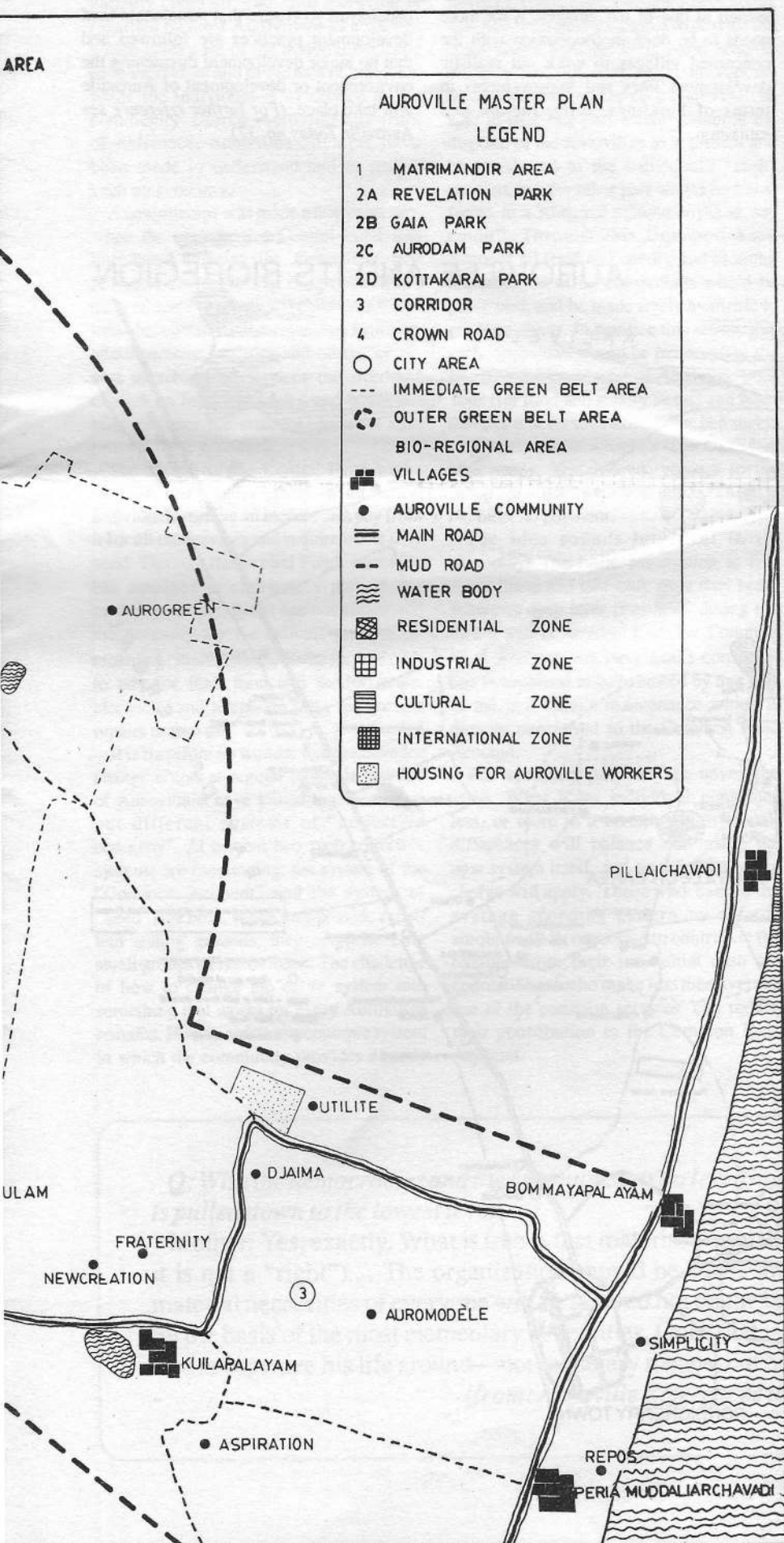
City area: The Four Parks

Auroville is envisaged as a Green City. More than 50% of the city area will be devoted to parks and gardens. Four parks will form the natural boundary of the four zones. They are, according to present denominations, the Revelation park, the Gaia park, the Aurodam park and the Kottakarai park. Those parks will provide natural corridors between the Green Belt and the Matrimandir gardens. All the park areas need to be fully developed as soon as possible.

II. THE IMMEDIATE GREEN BELT

It is hardly necessary to emphasize the crucial importance of Auroville's Green Belt. It can be argued that Auroville could not have really begun without the preliminary sustained effort of land reclamation and afforestation. Nevertheless, it is important to stress the following points:

- The role of the Green Belt is to act as the “lungs” of the entire area. It creates oxygen and moisture, prevents excessive dust, provides a natural habitat for all sorts of animals, birds, insects, etc. It sustains the healthy growth of life in general for the entire area.
- The Green Belt is acting as a buffer between Auroville and the bioregion, in-



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cluding Pondicherry, local villages, etc. It protects the manifestation of the spiritual aspirations of Auroville from the risk of being swallowed up by the unpalatable and uncontrolled development of "modern India".

- The Green belt provides animal and genetic corridors for passage of seeds and facilitates the procreative forces of nature.
- The Green Belt is an important area of food production, including farms, dairies, orchards, and forest by-products.
- The Green Belt, as a protected environment, provides beauty, quiet recreation areas and natural scenery, which are all very important benefits for a nearby urban population.
- The Green Belt continues the process which started more than 25 years ago of healing the land and of turning what was a degraded plateau into a living, healthy area for the Auroville to be.

The total Green Belt Area is very large. It fully encircles the city area, and comprises about 3700 acres, of which about 1500 are presently owned by Auroville. It does not appear realistic to expect that Auroville will own all the lands in the larger Green Belt in the future. The area called "Immediate Green Belt" consists of that part of the Green Belt closest to the City area. This area is considered to be high priority in terms of land purchase, as it is intended that all the land inside the Immediate Green Belt should belong to Auroville to ensure proper development according to guidelines developed by the Environment and Forest Groups. The demarcation of the two parts of the Green Belt has been done with reference to the present pattern of land holdings by Auroville, taking into account the specific importance of certain areas where land should be acquired due to its strategic value for the proper development of the Green Belt.

Nevertheless it should be understood that the ultimate aim of having a full Green Belt remains a very important objective for Auroville. The separation between the Immediate Green Belt and the Green Belt does not exist on the ground: it is only there to establish a realistic sense of priority in terms of land purchase and ownership by Auroville. All efforts will be made to get as much protection as possible of the full Green Belt so that, ultimately, whether Auroville is the legal owner or not of all the lands, the proper spirit of land stewardship is respected over the entire Green Belt area.

III. REMAINING GREENBELT AND CORRIDORS.

This area consists of the remainder of the Green Belt, a large band running up to the sea and another band running up to and beyond the Pondicherry-Tindivanam Road. The latter includes the Aurobrindavan-Hermitage area, where specific developments such as afforestation and land reclamation have taken place on land owned by Auroville.

In this area the aim is to ensure that residents, whether Aurovilians, Friends of Auroville, Auroville workers or local farmers, will be encouraged to observe Auroville guidelines with regard to development and the use of chemical pesticides etc. The aim will be to establish a mutually beneficial cooperation between Auroville and the surrounding villages so that ultimately, without Auroville having to own all the lands, a large and effective

"green" Green Belt area will come into existence.

The Aurobrindavan - Hermitage Area has been included in Auroville's third zone of influence because of its environmental and ecological importance for the rest of Auroville. In fact, lands in this area were among the first purchased for Auroville. Although the area is highly degraded, because of its proximity to Ousteri Lake it has a very important role to play in protecting this water body as Auroville's first aquifer surfaces here. In 1982, with the Dept. of Environment grant for wasteland regeneration and afforestation in Auroville, work was started in earnest here and a tremendous number of trees have been planted, and many kilometers of bunds erected; numerous dams, gully plugs and other such measures for water harvesting, soil protection, erosion control, etc. have been implemented in the last decade. The area is currently slated as a site for the study of appropriate afforestation strategies in highly degraded coastline areas (funded by IDRC). Already many species of animals and birds and plants have "voluntarily" returned to inhabit the young forest. In many places the environmental degradation

has been arrested and the healing process well initiated. The land has literally come back to life. In a larger sense, this would mean that the area is becoming a living reserve for numerous species of plants and animals - a genetic bank for nature to draw upon, and for Aurovillian greenworkers to harvest seed and other materials for further land regeneration projects. Ideally, in the future Auroville will be allowed to facilitate the consolidation of all the lands in this area, thereby creating a miniature biosphere reserve.

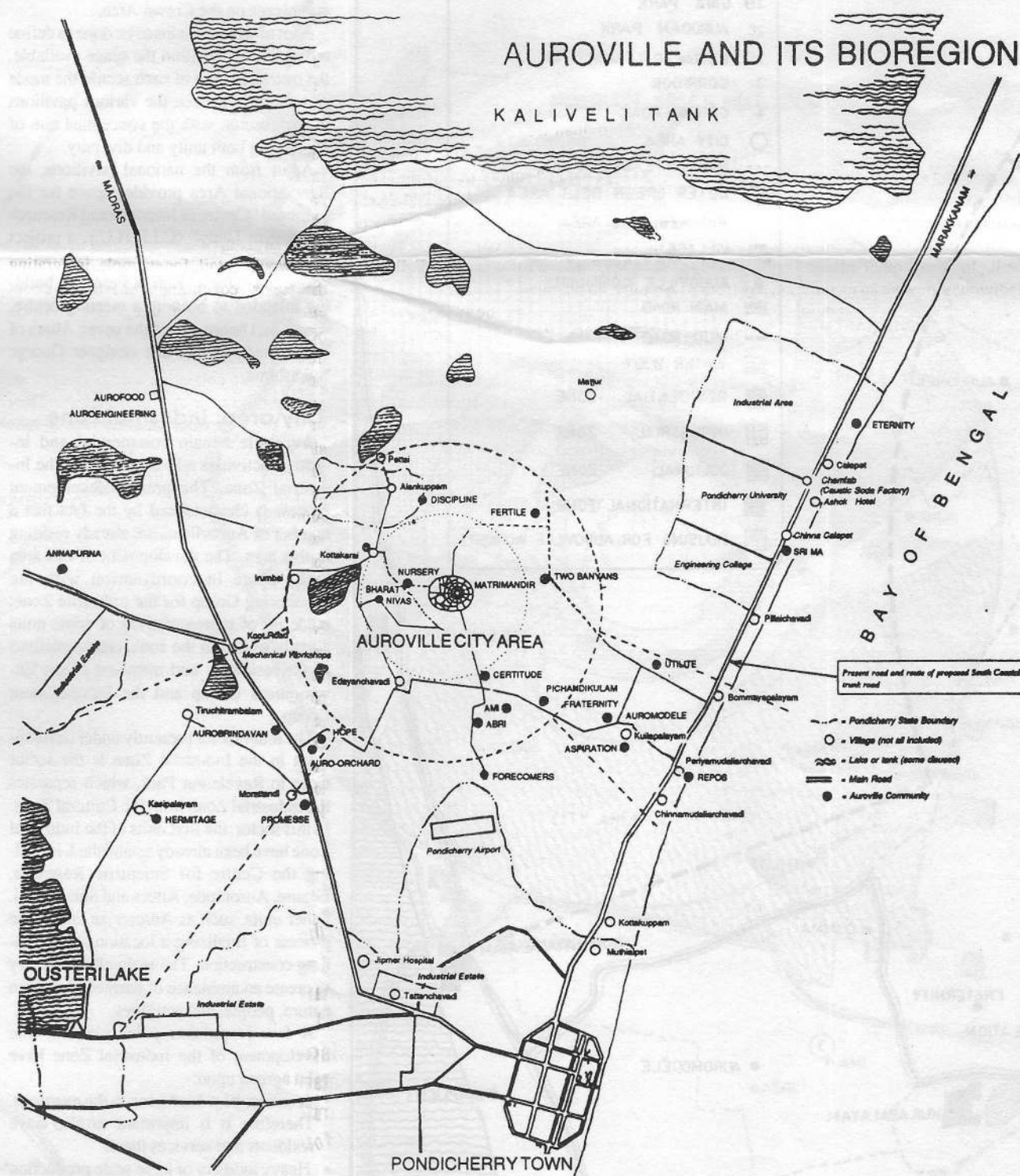
Village Development

Villages exist inside the City area, in the Immediate Green Belt and in the Remaining Green Belt and Corridors. It is obvious that Auroville cannot but be very concerned with proper development of all these villages. Already a lot of work is being done by Village Action and Co-Evolution and sanitation and beautification work has started in one of the villages. A lot more needs to be done in cooperation with the concerned villages to work out realistic development lines and improvements in terms of buildings, infrastructure and sanitation.

Auroville is keenly aware of the fact that having villages inside the City Area proper means a very special interaction with the local people. In fact the hospitality, gentleness, openness and material participation through work of the Tamil people is allowing Auroville to come into existence. But for them, very little of what has been accomplished would have come about. The Mother called them "the first Aurovilians": what She meant by this is for us to discover. Already a growing number of people from the villages have joined Auroville.

IV. BIOREGIONAL AREA

This area is demarcated by the Ousteri lake on the south, Kaliveli tank on the North, and the Bay of Bengal on the east. Within this area Auroville will endeavor to interact with all of the local authorities including the Govt. of Pondicherry, the State Govt. of Tamil Nadu and the local panchayats to ensure that sustainable land development practices are followed and that no major development threatening the environment or development of Auroville will take place. (For further reference see *Auroville Today* no. 37)



Putting it together:

TOWARDS A COLLECTIVE ECONOMIC EXPERIMENT

"... For in this ideal place money would no longer be the sovereign lord... There, work would not be a way to earn one's living but a way to express oneself and to develop one's capacities and possibilities while being of service to the community as a whole, which, for its own part, would provide for each individual's subsistence and sphere of action."

From: "A Dream", The Mother, 1954

Whenever Aurovilians discuss the ideal economic system of Auroville these words of The Mother invariably come up. The ideal Auroville is regarded by most Aurovilians as a society which takes care of the material needs of each individual and of the area of his work, while the individual is of service to the community. During Auroville's 25 years of existence, numerous attempts have been made to understand and to realise such an economy.

A new attempt was made a few years ago, when the system of a Central Fund was introduced ensuring the Aurovilians free access to the services of health and dental care, education, additional children's maintenance, cultural and recreational facilities, administrative facilities and others, or access to subsidized services (no overhead charges on food, electricity, and telephone bills to cover the costs of the units who provide these services).

The system of the Central Fund works well. In many other places in the world individuals receive an income and pay from it for all the services and requirements they need. Through the Central Fund, Auroville has managed to eliminate a part of this money economy. But it has not eliminated the necessity for Aurovilians to continue receiving "maintenance" in the form of cash to pay for their food and sundry items, electricity and telephone bills, motorcycle repairs and so on.

It is therefore no wonder that pressure for change erupts at regular intervals. Groups of Aurovilians have joined together to try out different systems of "collective economy". At present two such collective systems are functioning: the system of the "Common Account" and the system of "Seed" (see box). While they provide excellent testing grounds, they comprise only small groups of Aurovilians. The challenge of how to change the entire system into something that works for every Aurovillian remains. How to create an economic system in which the community provides directly

Yes, indeed, you go to the "shop" and take what you need. Full stop. No bills, no payment.

the basic requirements of each Aurovillian without having to provide income in the form of maintenance or salaries?

Acknowledging that Auroville has grown into a complex society and that individual needs differ, and that the freedom of each individual has to be respected, a working group has recently presented to the community a proposal for change. Recognizing that Auroville is as yet unable to provide the Aurovilians with all their basic requirements in kind, the working group proposes that the maintenance of each Aurovillian be split in two: one part would remain at the disposal of the Aurovillian as at present and be transferred to the individual's "cash" account, but the other part would be transferred to a so-called "Common Kind Account". Through this Common Kind Account all food and sundry and clothing requirements of all Aurovilians would be purchased, and be made freely available to all Aurovilians. In practice this means that each Aurovillian would be free to go to the two distribution centres of Auroville: Pour Tous (for food and sundry items) and Nandini (for articles such as clothing, bed sheets etc.), and to take whatever s/he considers s/he needs. Yes, indeed, you go to the "shop" and take what you need. Full stop. No bills, no payment.

The idea sounds beautiful in its simplicity. The basic assumption is that Aurovilians will take only what they need. Whatever they have consumed during the month will be covered from the Common Kind Account. An individual's consumption is supposed to be balanced by that part of the individual's maintenance which is directly transferred to the Common Kind Account.

But spending patterns are never the same. What if an individual consumes less, or more in a certain month? Small differences will balance out inside the new system itself, and no refund or extra charge will apply. Those who exceed the average spending pattern by a large amount will be requested to contribute the balance from their individual cash accounts. Those who make less than average use of the common services can reduce their contribution to the Common Kind Account.

As a safety valve, the study group proposes a computerised system to monitor personal consumption, and a special working group to be responsible for the Common Kind Account. This group will ideally ensure that each Aurovillian participates in the system and if not, find out what is the problem. The group would bear the responsibility of adjusting the contribution to the common kind account in particular cases e.g. people who live on farms, or for some Tamil Aurovilians who up to now have been drawing most of their maintenance in cash, and prefer to do their own purchasing in the village and Pondicherry instead of through Pour Tous and Nandini. And the group would also see to it that people are not consistently overspending for no justifiable reason.

The proposal has been well, if rather cautiously, received. A few meetings of representatives of various working groups were devoted to it. While some hailed it as a step forward from the "failures" of the past which got Auroville into an individualized economy and recommended the proposal as a worthy experiment, others objected that it did not go far enough and that a larger approach remained necessary. This would entail, for example, integrating the farms, educating Aurovilians about eating local produce, integrating products of commercial units such as the clothing industries and Maroma (incense, candles etc), creating collective transport facilities and founding an Auroville Bank. They warned that the proposal should not be considered as a final solution. Some Aurovilians proposed that all maintenances be put into a common pot, so that all Aurovilians can freely take goods in kind as well as cash. This proposal created quite a lot of discussion. It would mean a major shift in our economy, confronting the community directly with the needs of everybody. People doubted if such a big step could be taken all at once. A new system cannot be created fully from the beginning: it will have to grow step by step. And, at the other extreme, there were those who expressed anxiety, as they felt that the proposal was too communistic, attempting to "raise the poor and lower the rich" to one level.

The Common Account

Since January 1994, about 50 Aurovilians have been experimenting with the system of a common account. These Aurovilians work full time and have agreed to put all their maintenance into a common pot, from which they can take goods and cash as per their needs, cash withdrawals being restricted to payment of electricity bills, petrol, wages, miscellaneous and some pocket money. A special contribution is expected from those who do not or do not entirely depend on Auroville maintenance. These Aurovilians make a commitment to donate 10% extra of all remaining personal money to the common account, and 33% towards the collective development of Auroville. They have also agreed not to sell personal goods in Auroville.

"Seed"

Seed is a system which exists since July 1993, in which at present 15 full time working Aurovilians are participating. Their maintenances are pooled together and they can take what they need in cash and kind.

The functioning of the proposed new monitoring group was another debated topic. While the need for monitoring was recognized as a means to prevent misuse and to grow in consciousness about the needs of the community, it was also felt that the group should have a wider function, appropriately described as "caring". The group should have the responsibility to help individuals who pass through difficult times, not only financially or by finding them appropriate work, but also psychologically. Small wonder perhaps that it was proposed that this group should consist of mainly women.

Two other topics discussed are worth mentioning. The first is that the proposed system is a step towards de-linking the maintenance from the unit which provides it: Auroville should take care of the individual, not the unit where the individual happens to work. The other is the frustration felt that some Aurovilians do not wish to share their personal incomes. An understanding has to be created that Auroville is not "a free for all" and a sense of generosity has to be stimulated.

The Auroville economy is definitely shifting from an individualised maintenance system to a more collective experiment. The pros and cons of the Common Kind Account continue to be discussed, and a new system is not expected to start before August 1, 1994. Meanwhile, other attempts towards a collectivity are in progress too, such as collective housing which includes free houses for Aurovilians without personal resources and a community service center which includes a collective kitchen and a collective laundry service. One meeting was beautifully closed with one Aurovillian sharing an experience about Matrimandir as a symbol of abundance and prosperity not only for Auroville but for the whole region.

Carel

Q: With the democracies and the communists it's a levelling to the lowest point. Everyone is pulled down to the lowest level.

Mother: Yes, exactly. What is true is that materially each human being has the right (but it is not a "right").... The organization should be such, should be so arranged, that the material necessities of everyone will be assured not on the basis of rights and equality, but on the basis of the most elementary necessities. Once that is established, each one will be free to organize his life around—not monetary means, but his inner capacities.

(from: Auroville References in Mother's Agenda, page 57.)

(For a description of the development of Auroville's Economy see AVToday #3, 12, 16, 29 and 35).

The Auroville Archives

If it was not for the untiring efforts of Krishna Tewari, the Auroville Archives would not exist today. "It all started in about 1985", he said. "I was a member of the Task Force and the Auroville Council and began talking about the need of archives, but then nobody took the bait. There was no space for it and there was no money. When I continued to pester everybody I was told to have a look at the space below the Sri Aurobindo Auditorium in Bharat Nivas. That space was originally intended to serve as cable duct and for the air-conditioning. It was literally a dungeon: full of muck, insects, lizards and a couple of rats. We had the place cleaned out, painted and rubber matting installed against the dampness from underneath. That was in 1991, the beginning of the Auroville Archives.

"We started with a few cupboards and the material collected by Bhaga from the Laboratory of Evolution. And soon we were able to start protecting the documents against humidity and against excessive heat. The humidity in Auroville is about 95% for some of the year, which is pretty destructive for documents. A de-humidifier was the first priority, and was spontaneously donated by a German visitor. It is now 24 hours a day operational. It reduces the humidity to 50%, but has raised the temperature beyond acceptable limits and we hope to have an air-conditioner soon to bring the temperature down to about 25° C. (75° F.) The material help for all this came gradually, from individual Aurovilians and Auroville units, and from donors outside Auroville. Many donations were given just like that, without our even asking for it, such as the donation of one lakh rupees

from an Aurovillian who resides in England."

We take a walk through the Archives. While Krishna opens a cupboard I look around and see how Andrej, a Russian Aurovillian, is concentrating on cleaning photographic slides, a very laborious process. Another Aurovillian, Sundar, is studying document preservation. Before I have the time to talk to them the cupboard opens and I get absorbed in its contents.

There is much to find in the Auroville Archives. Documents from pre-Auroville days, photographs, slides, negatives, and copies of all handwritten material from Mother on Auroville are but a small part of this collection. Says Krishna: "People have been extremely generous in donating to the Archives original materials. There is, for example, the handwritten 'Book of Births', started in 1967 by Maggi Lidchi. Maggi would record the details of the birth of a child, leaving a space for Mother who would give the child's name. This book goes up to early 1976, when Nolinida gave the names after Mother's departure. And there is a photo book of the babies born in Promesse, kept by the lady doctor who helped to deliver the children, which goes from August 1969 to 1972."

One by one the other cupboards are opened, and I see row after row of neatly ordered acid-free paper boxes with intriguing titles such as: Satprem's letters, Auroville International Centers, UNESCO papers, Seminars, International Youth Year 1985, Correspondence with the Administrator, Matrimandir, Supreme Court Case, Struggle with the Sri Aurobindo Society, Parliamentary debates on the two Auroville Acts, Tibet and Auroville, "Extraordinary" Proposals. And hundreds of minutes: Minutes of the Tamil Committee,

the Agricultural Committee, the Construction Committee, the Comité d'Administrative d'Auroville. Minutes of meetings of the Coop, of Pour Tous, of the Auroville Council, of the Executive Council, of the Working Committee. Minutes of Matrimandir meetings, General meetings, Residents' Assembly meetings. Press cuttings from different parts of the world. Copies of all Auroville publications. Copies of the *Auroville News* from its beginning. A full set of *Auroville Today*.

"Many institutions have agreed to help the Auroville Archives. The team of the Ashram Archives came to visit the Auroville Archives, and gave all possible support and a full photocopied set of all Mother's handwritten notes on Auroville. I have not asked for the originals, as this place is not yet safe enough, but we shall see later. Recently I got the original silk scroll with the signatures of all the people who participated in Auroville's inauguration in 1968. And I hope to obtain the second original of Auroville's Charter, written in French by the Mother which is now kept in Her room. The first original was sealed and put in the urn at the amphitheatre during Auroville's inauguration. And I have been told that there are certain other materials available in the Ashram in the room of Mr. André, Mother's son, along with the flag of Auroville which was used during the inauguration. I hope that I will obtain permission to look at these materials as well. We have also obtained from the Ashram the original recordings of the "Aspiration Talks" by the Mother with early Aurovilians in 1970. Much material must still be with the Sri Aurobindo Society and with others, and I trust that in the course of time people will agree to donate it to the Auroville Archives."

There are three cupboards full of photographs, and a drawer with audio tapes of the voices of Aurovilians. "That is a particular project", explains Krishna. "I keep asking Aurovilians to come and have their voice recorded, but they are very reluctant. However, I will keep the pressure. The tapes we have already recorded are extremely interesting as I ask people to talk about how they came into contact with Mother and/or Auroville, how they came here, what their views are on the future of Auroville and so on. The cooperation from Auroville units and working groups in general could be better. I would like to have a full historical record of all the Auroville units and services. But there still are reservations in the minds of some Aurovilians about giving papers, and I hope that that will change in time. I have invited people through the *Auroville News* to come and visit the Archives. I trust that, once they see the work being done, the attitude will change from reluctance to collaboration."

And the future? "A plan has been made and discussed to modify the unfinished structure of the Karnataka pavilion (originally one of the state pavilions of the Pavilion of India belonging to the Bharat Nivas complex, eds.) into a permanent building for the Auroville Archives. It would consist of three levels: the basement would house the archives, the ground floor the offices and meeting rooms and the first floor a library and accommodation for four visiting research scholars. Perhaps this is still a long way off, but I trust it will be done."

Interviewer: Carel
21-3-1994

SOLAR ENERGY PLANT FOR MATRIMANDIR

Matrimandir has issued a call for funds to build a solar energy plant. Based on observations that coal and oil both are fossil fuels and belong to a dead past, and Mother's remarks that solar energy would be the energy of the future (Mother referred to the sun as the physical sign of the Supramental), the Matrimandir Group decided to initiate a special project. It envisages using photovoltaic cells to power the inside lighting, and around the twelve petals and the gardens, which would require an average daily energy of about 28 KW. The lights will be energy-efficient compact fluorescent lamps with electronic ballasts.

The plant consists of 780 photovoltaic modules of 35W each giving a total capacity of 27.3 KW. A battery bank of 240 cells of 2V, 800 Ah each will be connected to give a storage capacity of 1600 Ah at 240V or the equivalent energy requirement for 5 days. The plant requires an area of 800 sqm and will be located outside the Oval area of the gardens with a special architectonic shape.

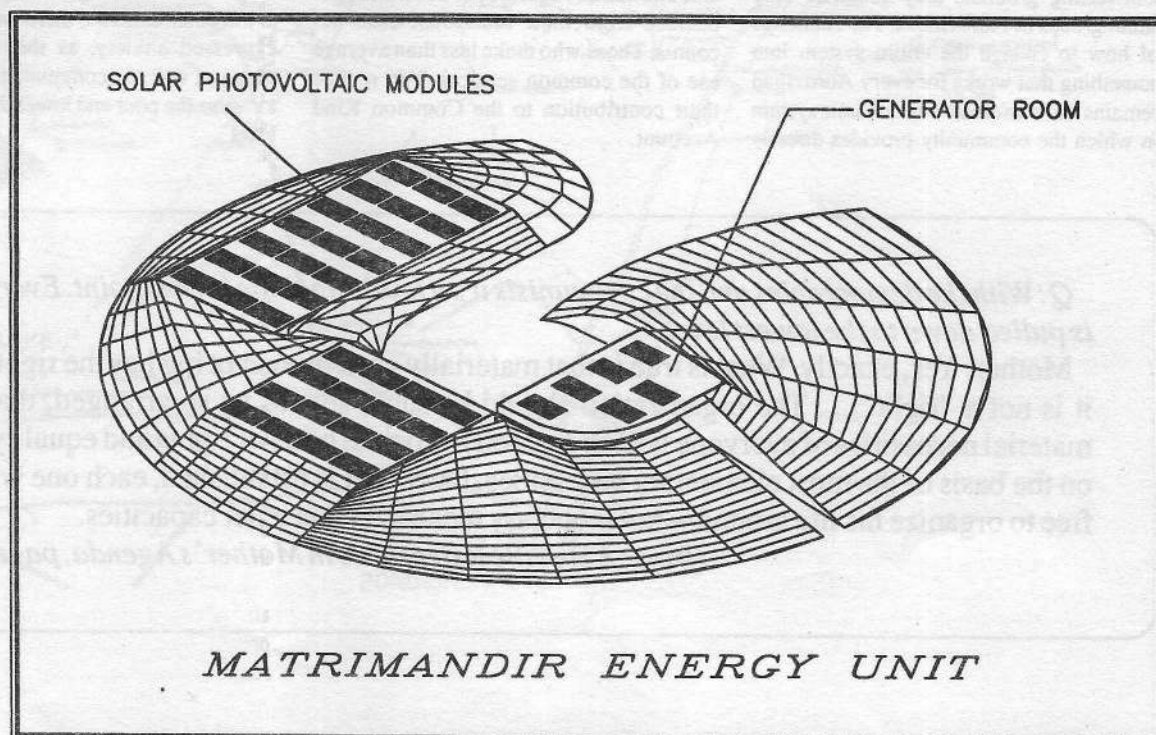
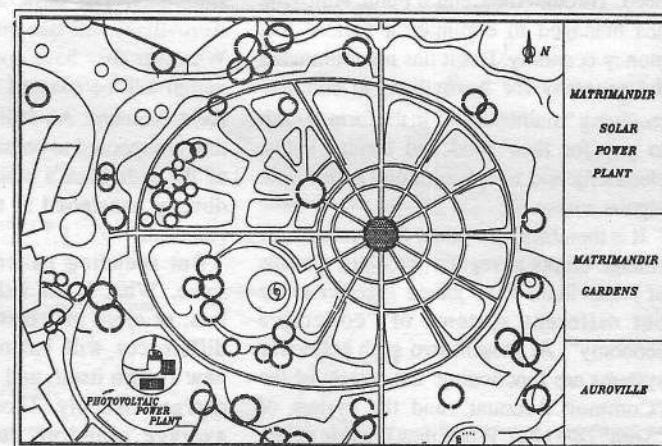
The Government of India will grant two thirds of the total costs (Rs 70 lakhs, approx US \$ 220,000). Matrimandir will need about US \$ 120,000 as a matching grant.

Work in progress

At Matrimandir, the work of polishing and waxing the exposed concrete surfaces on the inside of the structure has been completed. The production of the triangular, light-orange panels of the inner skin is now starting.

One of the twelve large petals is almost finished. The earth filling is being tamped down to prepare it for the red Agra stones and grass which will cover the outside surface of the petal. Inside the petal, the steel reinforcement for the first of the twelve meditation rooms is ready and the final shape is under review.

drawings: courtesy
Matrimandir Newsletter



Service Farming

Before Auroville began in 1968, the first large plot of land west of the Madras Road had already been purchased as it had looked as if Auroville might be located near the Lake Estate. Mother named this area, which covered all the lands from Promesse to Aurobrindavan to Hermitage, "Service Farm" and said it was to grow food for Auroville. When the present 'city' area on the east side of Madras road was identified as the site for Auroville, this large plot was broken up, but the name lived on in twelve acres located behind the village of Moratandi. For many years, Varadarajan, who lives at Promesse, looked after these lands. His teaching work with village children left him little time for the farm and he asked for help in 1989.

Walter, a landscape architect working on the Matrimandir gardens, was asked to take care of it. He was already settled in his work and was building a house in Pitchandikulam and so recommended Mechtild who had been a professional fruit tree gardener in Germany.

Mechtild began commuting daily to Service Farm from Matrimandir Nursery in 1989. "I knew my place was temporary in the nursery and also it became clear that the Service Farm couldn't really develop unless I moved there", recalled Mechtild. She first built a thatched house there in 1990. Then she moved into a solar-powered earthblock house two years later. Raji, who had worked on the farm with her, moved into the thatched house. Raji also joined Auroville and now does full-time computer work at the Auroville Secretariat but still is "a good support" on the farm, says Mechtild.

A two-woman community next to a village is not an easy situation, but Mechtild

prefers this to a residential scene that would take up the farm land. "If someone would come in a few times a week to do vegetables or some crops—there is space and water—that would be best as now I'm concentrating on a fruit tree nursery and the orchards that are here," comments Mechtild. She is just now converting another part of the farm to drip irrigation to end the need for hose pipes and flood irrigation which is neither economically nor environmentally the best approach. Mechtild favors the natural farming methods of Fukuoka (author of *One Straw Revolution*) but not as a "dogma". She manages with five workers and a night watchman.

"During harvests there's a lot of work and marketing is a problem. I had some terrible experiences trying to sell the surplus in Pondy because Auroville wouldn't take it. Some people still seem to prefer the pesticide-sprayed apples in the Pondy market to the locally grown organic fruits—guavas, papayas, chikoos, lemons, coconuts, mangoes and the rest. But things are better now with the new shop in Kottakarai and we will start working more on the marketing problem in the Farm Group."

"There is not yet much gratitude for Auroville products, but I think the change of consciousness is coming. My work is to try and improve the quality of the fruit along with the quality of the working atmosphere on the farm. It goes together. The changes and the future direction are shown in the work itself. In agriculture, as in everything



PHOTO: BILL

Mechtild in the Service Farm guava orchard

else, that new way of working—from within—has to be discovered".

Mechtild said she feels that Service Farm "is just at the beginning. We have done some experiments but there are no answers. We have a long way to go toward self-sufficiency in healthy food for Auroville but we will be shown the way. Each second we make the choice of what will happen. I used to travel a lot but now I'm glad to have found my place. Now I can be here, and I am grateful for it. It is a never ending school, an ongoing process, and the best I can do is to be open to the Divine Guidance."

Bill

A Farm Survey

One of Auroville's ideals is to become a self-supporting township. Recently, a survey into Auroville's food requirements and the ability of its farms to meet these requirements has been made. It shows that this ideal is far from the reality. In 1992 Auroville produced only two to three per cent of its total rice requirement (approximately 44,000 kg per year); only two per cent of its 'other grains' requirement (such as dal, chick peas, gram, and ulundu) and on average only 35.7% of the vegetable requirement. Auroville is self-supporting only in seasonal fruits and in milk and milk products, such as butter and cheese. The majority of Auroville's food is bought in Pondicherry.

All the farms are in a financially tight situation. Some are only able to survive due to investments of personal money or through side activities, such as hiring out bullock carts. One farm, Annapurna, also acts as a training and research center for ecological farming in the tropics. The coordination between the farms themselves and between the farms and Pour Tous, Auroville's food distribution unit, appeared to be marginal. Telephone connections are usually missing.

The survey concluded that the community must be prepared to make heavy investments in the existing farms if it wants to take the ideal of self-sufficiency seriously. Auroville's farm infrastructure cannot be created and maintained from the private incomes of the farmers. An investment of approx. Rs 6 lakhs (US \$ 20,000) will be needed to upgrade the facilities of Annapurna, the only farm of Auroville which can meet (part of) Auroville's rice requirements, and a minimum of Rs 2 lakhs (US \$ 7,000) to upgrade the facilities of other farms. But this is not enough. The Auroville population is growing, but so is—and far more rapidly—the population of the nearby villages and Pondicherry. New farm land will have to be purchased soon.

Storage is another problem to be solved. Auroville has the possibility of purchasing first quality organic rice from the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, but until now has not been able to make use of this offer due to lack of storage facilities. The survey recommended, therefore, that the community create storage facilities immediately, and suggested a study to find out to what extent the ferrocement tanks made at CSR can be used as grain silos. At a later phase they could be used to store Auroville's own harvest.

The survey also looked into a persistent complaint from the farmers that the community has not been able to deal with a harvest which exceeds the immediate requirements of Auroville, and so they are forced to sell the produce in Pondicherry at give-away prices. The report recommended that the community stimulate the creation of food processing units and the construction of cool rooms. It also suggested a close coordination between the major food users, such as collective kitchens, guesthouse kitchens and Pour Tous, and that Pour Tous asks Aurovilians who take a regular basket to agree to receive an occasional 'surprise packet' in their basket when the amount of vegetables or fruits offered exceeds the requirements or processing facilities of the major food users.

Last but not least, the report pointed out that Auroville has done good work to make the Auroville children aware of the value of trees and land regeneration, but that the awareness of farms and the growing of food products is still underdeveloped. It suggests that the Auroville schools give more attention to this part of the education.

The Development Group and the Funds and Assets Management group are at present studying how and from which funds Auroville's farm situation can be improved.

Carel

Conflict Resolution

The Mother dreamed of a place of "peace, concord and harmony, where all the fighting instincts of man would be used exclusively to conquer the causes of his sufferings and miseries, to surmount his weaknesses and ignorance, to triumph over his limitations and incapacities. . ."

Even if there is an aspiration to do this, it is natural that conflicts do occur, and when they do, it is important to realize that they too can help to accelerate inner growth and/or open up new solutions. Some conflicts are easier to solve with help from a third party.

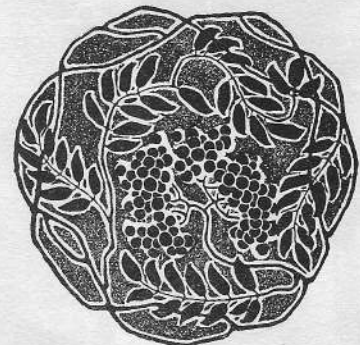
To meet this need, a new service was recently created. The Unity Service (US) consists presently of nine women and two men and is coordinated by a core team of two people. Rather than creating a team of experts who will manage other people's conflicts, the team aims at building up skills and experience in conflict resolution in order to share them as widely as possible. This will hopefully result in better communication and working together, and prevent future conflicts from escalating and hardening. □

A 'SANE' Network

When the Centre for Scientific Research (CSR) in conjunction with the Friedrich Naumann Foundation, New Delhi, decided to host an exploratory workshop for non-governmental organizations (NGO's) aimed at setting up a 'national sustainable alternatives network' (SANE), there was little idea what the outcome would be. The 16 Indian NGO's attending had well-established programmes running in areas like water and watershed management, organic farming, renewable energy systems, appropriate building technologies and village and tribal development. At the end of intense discussions, the participants agreed to set up a network and gave it a name, 'Santulan', which is Sanskrit for 'balance'. They defined its aims as:

- integrated action of its members for achieving a larger social change, based upon sustainable values;
- countering forces for unsustainable change;
- enabling members to develop and disseminate sustainable alternatives.

A Steering Committee, which includes one member of CSR, has been appointed to draw up suggestions for how the network will function. This document will be discussed by the 17 founder organizations in a few months' time. □



AUROVILLE TODAY provides information about Auroville, an international township in South-India, on a monthly basis and is distributed to Aurovilians and friends of Auroville in India and abroad. It does not necessarily reflect the views of the community as a whole. Editorial team: Tineke, Roger, Jill, Carel, Bill, Annemarie, Alan. Proofreading: Barbara. Layout & DTP: Annemarie. Printed at Auroville Press.

AUROVILLE TODAY

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

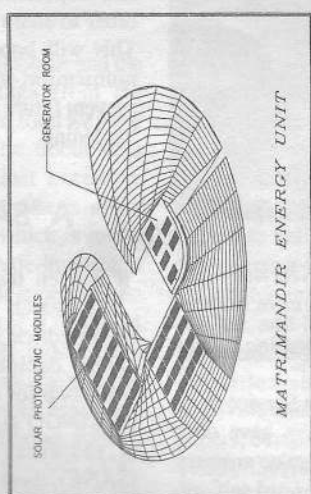
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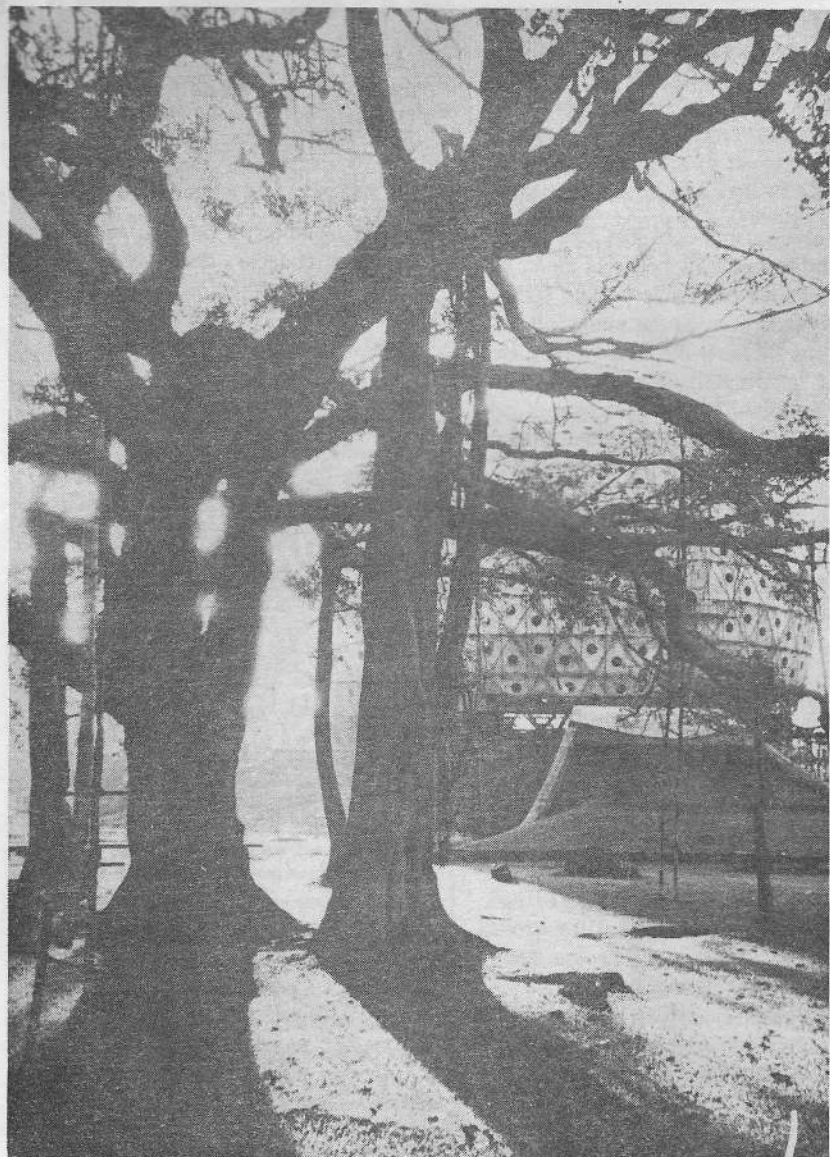
DIVAKAR
SINCERITY
AUROVILLE

May 1994

Number Sixty-Four



In this issue (8 pages):
Auroville Master Plan; Economy in progress; Archives; Farms; etc.



Home

It was a bright, sunny January afternoon. I sat within the thatched, open shelter that served as a classroom and waited somewhat apprehensively, for my students. I loved Auroville, but scarcely had any contact with Aurovilians. I wanted to know the community better, wanted to belong to it, but I felt unwanted. The Aurovilians all seemed so stern and unsmiling. Then, one day, instead of moping about this apparent unfriendliness of Aurovilians, I started asking myself what I could offer to the community. The only skill that I possessed was a love for reading and writing, duly backed by a M.A. degree in English Literature. So I hit upon the idea of an Autobiographical-cum-Creative Writing Workshop to be conducted weekly for three months. A writing workshop that would deal not with techniques of writing, but would use writing as a process of discovering one's inner self. With the help of Janet who was experimenting with the idea of an Auroville college, I put up a notice about the workshop in *Auroville News*. Five Aurovilians and a couple of visitors signed up.

Footsteps on the brick-path. A student was approaching. The first. A well-built man, close to six feet, with flecks of gray in his hair. I rose to greet him: "Hi! I am Bindu."

He neither smiled nor took my proffered hand. "Are you the teacher?" he enquired, staring at me with obvious disbelief. "Yes, I am," I answered, drawing myself to my full height of five feet and trying, unsuccessfully, to stare back at him straight in the eye.

"Oh!" he grunted, "I expected someone older." And then in a resigned voice added: "I am Carel. I am with *Auroville Today*. I would like to improve my language. Alan always chops up my articles with his red pen."

"Oh No!" I inwardly groaned, "Can't he read?" I had clearly specified that this was an autobiographical and a creative writing workshop. And here he was, all six feet of him, expecting me to correct his comma splices and passive voice constructions. Having long since thrown my high-school grammar book out of the window in defence of the freedom of thought and language, I now wondered what I was letting myself in for.

My worst fears were confirmed when two more students turned out to be from the editorial board of *Auroville Today*—Tineke and Annemarie. Tineke looked lost and said that she was not sure if she really wanted to join this workshop. Annemarie, thankfully, was more enthusiastic declaring that she used to keep a journal earlier and wished to get back to writing.

As the weeks rolled by, the interest of the students grew. They liked the variety of the assignments that I handed out each week. Some of the assignments were designed to

probe the hidden secrets of the past; others challenged the writer to be observant of the world outside; and still others got the students to think about the meaning that certain concepts held for them, concepts such as "Home", "Death", "Auroville", etc. Annemarie, for instance, after a couple of false starts of trying to define what home meant to her, wrote: "Home for me is being in contact with people who have, not the same ideas, not the same opinions or the same feelings, but the same secret aspiration to surrender to a Wisdom that is greater than that of any individual or all of us together."

Participation in the workshop entailed each student reading his or her work out loud, and then allowing the others to comment on it. And yes, at times, we even got down to nit-picking about the grammar, correcting sentence fragments and misplaced commas. But most of all the students enjoyed listening to one another's pieces and sharing their views. Even Aurovilians who thought that they knew one another well were often pleasantly surprised to hear what a fellow-Aurovillian chose to write about. As for me, and I guess for the visitors, the workshop provided a rare glimpse into the hearts and minds of Aurovilians. There were times when I was moved to hear what sacrifices the Aurovilians had made in order to stay at Auroville and work for the realization of Mother's Dream.

There were times however when I felt that Aurovilians were not open enough to accept people from other faiths. This feeling was reinforced when Rod, a visitor from Scotland, handed me a moving poem to Jesus accompanied by the comment: "This poem is very important to me. Please, help me to improve it. I thought of throwing it open to the class, but for most Aurovilians Christianity seems to be yet another taboo."

But then as the weeks rolled to months, we learned to trust one another more, to share not only our writing but our opinions and feelings, and mental barriers started breaking down. Rod became comfortable enough to read his poem to Jesus out loud. And Carel admitted that while earlier he had seen writing mainly as a means to convey information, he now saw that there was a joy in writing, in striving to clothe one's thoughts in carefully chosen words. Tineke commented that the workshop had taught her to be more conscious of the people and things around her while Annemarie was pleased at being able to write regularly again.

As for me, I realized, that once you get to know them, Aurovilians are open and friendly. And on the last day of the class, as we all sat there within the thatched, open shelter, drinking tea and talking about writing, Auroville, and spirituality, I suddenly felt that I belonged. I felt as though I had finally arrived Home.

Bindu

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