Auroville Today
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Where Parts I, II and III introduced Sri Aurobindo, the Mother, the Ashram and the early growth of the 900-resident Auroville spiritual community, Part IV offers glimpses of life there today through the eyes of those most intimately experiencing it.

Auroville is not for everyone. The perennial ashram-hopper, looking for a rustic place to roost with "meals and meditations served on time," soon moves on. The absence of a neatly-packaged religious ideology can be unnerving for others. And "for those who are satisfied with the world as it is, Auroville obviously has no reason to exist," the Mother adds. Even the visitor brochure warns: "No holiday atmosphere," "No city life" and "Visit first before deciding to stay permanently." But 900 have and 200 are children. Miss Lata of Madras interviewed some of these youths for Hinduism Today. A selection of their statements follow: Aurovilian youths: "The life here is quite different from the 'outside world.' There are no distinctions made among the various members... Yes we, believe in God. But we do not define God in terms of any specific religion, specific customs, religious traditions, practices etc. According to us, God is everywhere-God is within you. It is within me. It is within everyone... Staying here since our birth, we have been able to realize that money is not everything in life. It is not the sole objective. Our objective is in terms of service to the society and realizing our inner Self. What we do, the community is more important than anything else in the world... Every principle of Sri Aurobindo is important to us. We are striving to adopt most of them so that we could make ourselves as good citizens in this world. There seems to be a lot of chaos in the world today. It is the responsibility of the youth to do something about this."

Sidebar: 93 Diary

By Tineke Smits

6:45am I wake up, do a few belly exercises, and get out of bed. I feed the fish. It has rained last night. Nice! I don't have to water my orchids this morning. That leaves me some time to do a few asanas. 7:30 I go to the kitchen, where Silvano, my partner, is preparing breakfast for our 21 guests. 9:00 The morning paper arrives. I take a cup of tea, my breakfast, and start reading. The laundry amma comes for a piece of soap. The gardener does not show up this morning, and the cycle repair boy is late. The phone rings. Someone calls to book 15 people for lunch. I discuss it with Silvano. We think it will be possible. I go back to my breakfast, but one of the guests has my paper. Just when I take another bite of the sourdough bread from the Auroville Bakery with jam made from fruits grown in Auroville, the phone rings again. Someone else wants to book 14 people for lunch. I politely tell them we are already overbooked today with 50 for lunch.

8:30 The phone rings. "Tineke, we are planning a meeting for all the German Aurovilians. Could we do it at the Guest House next week Wednesday?" I check the calendar. There is place for them.

8:45 Just when I am taking my shower, someone calls at the bathroom door. "Could you send a fax for me?" "Right now?" "Yes, it is very urgent!" I try not to get angry and ask to wait a few minutes. "But I don't have time to wait!" "Well, then leave it somewhere on the table," I conclude. 9:00 The carpenter shows up with several helpers and the driver of the bullock cart. They have to cut some wood from a tree which died in our garden. The carpenter insists he needs a lot more wood than we think he needs. After some haggling, we come to a compromise. 9:30 I take the mo-ped to go to the Auroville Today (our monthly newsletter) meeting. As usual, I am too late to cycle there. 9:45 Everybody is already there, talking and drinking coffee. Around 10am we start reading the articles which are ready. Laura, our cartoonist, passes by with her newest designs which are very funny. 11:30 From our meeting, I go to Pour Tous ("For All"), our little shop connected to our food distribution center. I have to buy jam and I also have to give some money to our Financial Service located in the same compound. For each guest, we contribute Rs. 25 per day to a Central Fund, out of which general Auroville expenses get paid. I also will give some money to our Health Center for all the people working at the Guest House. There is not a big choice of jam today. Luckily, there is still some peanut butter. I ask Martina why. She explains that because of a lorry strike, no gas bottles have come in and she has not been able to produce any jam. Before leaving, I buy at the Pour Tous snack bar a cheese bun made from a fresh sesame bun from our own bakery and rush off to Luisa, our hairdresser. 12:35pm Five minutes late.

But Luisa is still with another client, so I relax and look at fancy photos from foreign magasines and discuss how she will cut my hair. She cannot dry it because there is no electricity at this place. There is a fault in a cable and the electricians have been digging for 5 days already to find the problem.

1:15 Back at the Guest House, Barbara joins me for lunch and we catch up on each other's lives. 1:45 The carpenters come back with the tree trunk cut into small pieces. There is some bargaining about the price of the bullock cart, but in the end everybody is happy.

2:00 Time for my afternoon siesta.

2:10 "Tineke, phone!" I get up to answer the phone. "Sorry, were you resting? I just want to know whether you are showing a video tonight?" I go back for my nap. 3:00 After a mad dash to retrieve the laundry from a sudden downpour, I have tea with one of my guests who wants to have information about Auroville. I explain the basic philosophy of this community. He wants to know if I own the Guest House. I tell him nobody here owns anything. Each of us is a caretaker, according to the Auroville Charter which states: "Auroville belongs to nobody in particular." Then we talk about how decisions are made. Each working group which represents a specific working Area (like Education, Handicrafts, Healthcare, Matrimandir, Afforestation) decides how much "maintenance" (a monthly allowance) each Aurovilian receives. The group also talks about policies etc. If there is a problem which this group cannot solve, it will be discussed either by the Auroville Council, a group which specializes in Conflict Resolution, or it will be brought to a Residents' Assembly meeting, in which every adult can take part. 4:00 The cook starts preparing the evening meal. Pizza! One of the boys fills up the pizza oven with firewood and lights it. The cycle boy rolls out the dough. 4:30 I go to my bi-weekly yoga class. It feels good to stretch for one and a half hours. 7:00 Dinner time. The pizza looks and smells good. The guests are delighted. I talk a bit with them until an elderly man who is staying here with his daughter and her boyfriend pulls me aside. "John has just proposed to my daughter Sylvie!" "What did you say?" I ask. "She said, 'Yes!' Would you like to join us in a little celebration?" I tell him that I will come after dinner.

8:15 Silvano and I join them and celebrate the occasion.

9:30 Back home I reflect on this day which was like every day-full of surprises, never a dull moment. I am thankful that I am allowed to live in this special place on earth where "all life is yoga" as Sri Aurobindo once said. 10:30 I crawl under my mosquito net with a book, but before I finish the first page, I fall asleep.

-Tineke Smits was born in the Netherlands where she worked as a music librarian. She came to Auroville in 1980. The first two years she was involved in afforestation and erosion control work. At the moment, she looks after the Center Guest House together with her partner, Silvano.

Early Settler

Constance, an American, lived in Auroville from 1968-1978. He is today vice president of Auroville International, a network of individuals strengthening Auroville's international support and identity. He now resides in California. He reminisces: "It was interesting to observe the reactions of newcomers. Some would look across those eroded fields-the view broken here and there by palmyra, neem, and scrub-date palms-and wonder if they had come to the right place. Could this be the futuristic city of Auroville-of monorails and moving sidewalks-that had received so much publicity in Europe? But there were others-those who stayed-who had a different experience. It was palpable. For them, Auroville meant coming home. Cycling along the road, one would suddenly enter a different atmosphere-indescribable but incredibly familiar and quietly awesome. For the Aurovilian, this was the gate where the New World was entering history. Still there was no drinking water, no housing, no amenities. While French architects were busy planning, others of us were busy bringing back the land, totally deforested by the British and French.

I just returned from a recent visit to Auroville two weeks ago. The mood there now is rebirth, just like when it started. We've ended an antagonistic cycle. On August 15th, a true darshan of Sri Aurobindo was felt at the annual bond fire and dawn meditation."

Government Steward

It's uneasy chapter in the history of the community seeking to model enlightened society. Relations between the Sri Aurobindo Society and Auroville's residents so quagmired in the 1970's, the Government of India took over Auroville in an Act of Parliament in 1980. The Auroville Foundation was formed in 1988 and assumed all

assets The government then optimistically proclaimed: "Auroville is to be looked upon as a vision with great potentiality which can be of tremendous service to our country and the world." In 1991, Dr. Karan Singh was named its chairperson. A long Sri Aurobindo admirer, ecologist and Hindu scholar, Dr. Singh also shares Auroville's most vanguard utopian, non sectarian ideas. Aurovilians are delighted with the Indian statesman, particularly his "one world, one family" awareness and interest in global culturalization. "I have lectured at universities throughout the world," Dr. Singh shared in 1991. "Young people today are dancing to the same rhythms, whether it is in Bejing, Moscow, Bombay or San Francisco. The same dress and food habits are developing. We even have a global anthem now, We Are The World. Differences of religion, language, race, caste, sex and nationality, once considered to be insuperable, are no longer so powerful." Excerpts from speeches given at Auroville follow:

2-28-91 "I consider myself part of this great community. And I would like to feel that the fact that I have become Chairman of the Governing Board is in order to work out the beginning of a new phase in the development of Auroville. I am not saying that I will be able to bring about the development, but the Divine forces work through all of us, and we must keep ourselves open to the Divine to see how it works.

"Let me make it clear-the Governing Board is one of the three elements of the Foundation. There is the Governing Board, there is the Residents' Assembly those of you who live here-and sooner or later a Working Committee which you are going to select and the International Advisory Council. The Mother has said this is not a status-quo community where people live happily ever after. It is a community that constantly struggles outwardly and inwardly with the difficulties in evolution.

"Never forget, Auroville is not only important to those who live here. Certainly you are important; you Aurovilians are doing the work and making the experiment, but your work far transcends barriers of space and nationality, and even of time, because what is sought to be done here is nothing less than the transmutation of consciousness.

"I travel widely. I can see the new consciousness developing and I can see the barriers of race, of creed, of sex, of economic status, of nationality, of religion, of ideology breaking. I appeal to you, that with this new beginning, we should break from old moulds, and structures, and be prepared to move on. We have to awaken

and arise and move onwards across the razor-edged path, because on the other side there is the Divine shining in its splendor beyond the darkness. It is this courage to mold a new consciousness, a new civilization, that Auroville has to represent. 6-15-91 "I do not think anybody can claim that Auroville has achieved even a fraction of the vision of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. But it is making the attempt and the attempt is very interesting. It has come up against a lot of problems, difficulties, conflicts which are always there in the process of transformation. The process of metamorphosis is not necessarily pleasant. 8-18-91 (Address at People's Commission on Environment and Development)

"The trees of Auroville are very vulnerable because Pondicherry is growing. Now we have got once again to realize that the trees are temples. Jawaharlal Nehru once said that the new temples of India were the factories. I would say that the real temples of India are trees. Because if you cut down the trees, you destroy the whole eco-sphere... And finally, let us all dedicate this hearing to the great Goddess, Mahalakshmi."