

Experiments with community transport

Auroville Community Transport (ACT) is based in SaraCon, Kottakarai. Taj, one of its executives, explains the need for ACT and talks about its teething problems and hopes for the future.

“Several of us felt there was a need for a regular and reliable bus service for Aurovilians. The traffic on the East Coast Road has become very dangerous. After the deaths of two Aurovilians in road accidents in the last four years, we felt some form of safe and efficient community transport had to be provided. We had noticed that taxi use for Pondy trips had increased over the past few years, especially during the guest season, while the SAIER bus service was only incidentally available for community transport.

“So we started ACT in February last year. Due to the inevitable teething troubles we missed out on much of the tourist season. But by now we have developed a very reliable bus service with two buses and three drivers. The service is full-time; this year only Pongal and Deepavali were days off,” says Taj with a sense of pride.

“Finances, of course, are a problem. We get no funding from Auroville. ACT’s income comes from the pre-paid bus tickets and from individual donations. We fill the deficit from our own pockets. The present deficit is around Rs 3,000 a month, quite an achievement as ACT is an expensive service. We have given ourselves a 3-year period to prove the necessity of ACT; then we will approach Auroville for any deficit funding. After all, public transport in every country in the world is subsidized; there is no reason why it would be different for Auroville.”

The ACT organizing team consists of Chandresh, Taj and Hari.



The Auroville Community Transport team: Hari (back row 2nd from the right), Taj (front row 2nd from right) and Chandresh (front row 3rd from right).

“Hari oversees the operations of the buses in the Service Area assisted by a team of drivers and a mechanic. Anand from the Sri Aurobindo Ashram does the accounts.

“Our most important service is for the Matrimandir concentration. We leave every morning at 7.45 am from the Service Area for Pondicherry. We are back at Matrimandir at 8.30, then at 11.10 go again to Pondicherry and return at 12 noon. These trips are open to residents and guests of Auroville, and are conditional on the Matrimandir

being open, which means not on rainy days. Then, each afternoon, we run from Verité to Pondicherry and back. On average, the bus is now used at 40% of its capacity. Our most successful run is on Friday night, from the Solar Kitchen to Sadhana Forest, to enjoy dinner and the evening film. We are also offering special trips such as for the summer camp, or for sports events or to go to Thiruvannamalai for the full moon walk around Arunachala mountain.”

Future plans? “We are now contemplating Sunday trips to Auroville

beach communities, and possibly a thrice weekly morning trip between the residential zone and Kulpalayam and Aspiration. We would also like to run a regular monthly trip to Chennai, and weekend trips to interesting places like Gingee, Mamallapuram, the Sattanur Dam or the Chidambaram temple.

“ACT is still in its pioneering days,” says Taj with an enthusiastic smile. “We answer to the need for regular and safe transport. It is up to the Aurovilians to make use of it.”

Dianna

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In brief

Entry Service re-starts

The Entry Service resumed work on November 2nd, after almost a year of an interim group taking care of urgent work only. In collaboration with other Aurovilians the new Service has also started to organise five-day ‘Orientation to Auroville’ programmes to help future Newcomers find their way.

Malaria

Three people in Auroville while on a visit to Orissa, have contracted malaria, a disease which is relatively new to Auroville and Pondicherry. The government has sent its Health Inspectors to Auroville to spray chemicals in order to contain the spread of infected mosquitoes.

Voluntary Service

The Guest Service, recalling that from the very beginning voluntary work and service have been central to Auroville’s ethos and existence, calls on guests to contribute their time and energy in vital areas of Auroville and so make voluntary work a central part of their ‘Auroville Experience’. The Guest Service is organising this for short-term visitors, while AVIS (Auroville Volunteering, Internships & Studies programmes) is doing the same for long-time visitors. This participation is considered essential if Auroville is not to become another tourist hotspot or ‘spiritual’ resort.

Integrated Animal Care Centre

Integrated Animal Care, founded in 2005 to care for animals by providing sterilization, anti-rabies vaccination, medical care, adoption of unwanted puppies and education outreach, has at long last found a permanent place near Siddhartha Forest.

Integral sustainability

L’Avenir d’Auroville has approved an ‘Auroville Integral Sustainability Framework Exercise’ led by Alon and Batel. The aim is to prepare a five-year sustainable and Integrated Detailed Development Plan using regular and coordinated input from different activities of the community. In all 22 ‘sector planning teams’ will deal with aspects of physical infrastructure, social infrastructure, and natural environment.

ID-cards for journalists

OutreachMedia, the press-liaison group of Auroville, will provide ID-cards to journalists who are authorised to do film or interviews in Auroville. This is considered necessary to avoid misuse of Auroville’s goodwill, energy and image.

World Youth Event 2010

A world youth event called Anima Mundi will be held in Auroville in March 2010. Anima Mundi is Latin for the cosmic breath, the world soul, the life force, the spirit of nature. 25 to 30 youth from around the world in addition to youth from Auroville will participate. For more info write to: nikolai@auroville.org.in

Missing donor

In our report on the Auroville International meeting in Holland in the June-July issue, we mentioned that the Auroville Dental Clinic had been promised a donation by an American dentist of US \$ 16,000 for village dental projects. Repeated enquiries, however, have failed to discover the donor. Anyone with information please contact aurodentalcentre@auroville.org.in

INTERNATIONAL ZONE

Mapping the Divine Manifestation

Recently there was a discussion in the AVI-group The Netherlands about a Dutch pavilion. During this, Jan Lohman wondered how it was possible to think of such a pavilion as long as it is not clear what the International Zone should be. With this in mind he wrote down some ideas that came to him and worked them out later. Here he presents the result of his musings on the International Zone.

The Mother said that all countries should be representing features of their country in the International Zone. What did she really mean by that? There are so many countries and the political situation is so unclear that countries that exist today will be gone tomorrow and new countries will be created. What did the Mother mean by ‘countries’?

She insisted that we have to go into the soul of each country. So it is not the political material unit that is important, but the soul. In this context a country is a formation by a group of people with a common interest and background. In the political situation at any moment the existing countries do not always represent these groups.

The soul is the central point. By going into the soul people can discover their own uniqueness and their place in the whole comity of countries. When I try to find the soul of my country, Holland, I discern at least two levels: one more exterior that is characteristic of the Dutch mind, and one underlying level that we have in common with surrounding countries. On that level I am aware of being part of a greater cultural zone which I shall call the Western European culture. That culture was formed after the fall of the Roman Empire, after the invasion of all those Germanic people from the Far East: Franks, Alemans, Vandals, Goths and Visigoths, Huns, Longobards etc. All

these people were bound together into one empire, with one religion: Christianity.

These people had one thing in common; they were earthbound, more interested in terrestrial and material things than in spirituality. This disposition has greatly influenced Western Christianity, which has been dubbed ‘the Germanisation of Christendom’. In this they were different from Christians in the Levant where this religion came from, and even more different from other eastern people like Indians.

Seeing this I began to wonder if it was the intention of the divine spirit in his manifestation to create great cultural blocks, each with its own interest and particularity that they had to work out in order to prepare this world for the divine descent. As a bundle of white light, falling upon a prism, is broken into different colours, each with its own vibration, so the divine will to manifest, touching the earth, invoked – from inside or from above – in the different races around the world the will to work out one particular facet of the divine, each according to its own character and situation. Thus, in the course of history, blocks of different cultures were created around the globe: India, with the emphasis on the development of spirituality; Western Europe based on the analysis and development of Matter, Egypt with its focus on the occult and Greece on the preeminence of mind, etc. It would be interesting to research this in detail and to make a map of the actual divine manifestation.

This ‘map’ will look different from the political map of the world for example, the USA and Canada, would be part of the Western European culture. If America would be represented, then it is rather by the cultures of the Indians or the pre-Colombian cultures of Aztecs, Mayas and Incas. The number of cultures will correspond with the number of facets of the divine manifestation to be worked out.

The overall vision in this ‘map’ can lead to better understanding and international cooperation. The feeling of being part of a worldwide movement will improve human understanding. This will also become a stimulus for people who, due to political circumstances, have lost the contact with their original culture. I am thinking in particular of Central and West Africa. All these cultures together are preparing the earth for the divine manifestation.

Seeing this it is logical that the International Zone will be organized according to this ‘map’ of divine manifestation. But what will be the place of the different nations and their pavilions?

Everyone will represent in the first place one’s own country by which one is formed and through which one is part of the whole block. Each country will work for the same object, but each will contribute in its own style. It is the individual who will contribute to the totality its colour and balance. So national pavilions will be very useful, though always within the context of the cultural block.

Every culture has, apart from its particularity, also its own black spot, the

shadow side of its particularity, which becomes evident as soon as it is separated from the total divine manifestation, but which is also necessary to intensify the concentration on its particularity. India, for example, neglected the material life so much that it came to be regarded as an illusion; Western Europe was so immersed in its interest in matter that God, soul and spirit faded away from its consciousness and were looked upon as fantasies of the mind.

But even if this regression is an indispensable phase in the preparation for the divine manifestation, in the end the black spot must be healed. The shadow shall disappear as soon as the link with the overall view of the divine manifestation has been re-established. The many becomes the one again, the ‘White will be restored’.

This can best be done in Auroville, as it is the place created by the Mother for trying to manifest human unity. Cultures can be studied anywhere, but Auroville is the place destined to unite people into a greater context and thus be instrumental in the formation of an actual human unity. The Auroville International centres can play an important intermediary role in it. In this perspective Auroville’s Charter: ‘Auroville belongs to humanity as a whole’ and ‘Auroville wants to be the bridge between the past and the future’ will be understood in a deeper and more realistic way; Auroville will truly be the city the earth needs.

Jan Lohman
AVI The Netherlands
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