

# Auroville Today

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Auroville's monthly news magazine since 1988

*The Auroville Today Team wishes all its readers joy, delight and fulfilment for the year 2007!*

## "Land consolidation is my only target."

At the beginning of November, the new Secretary of the Auroville Foundation, Mr.M.Ramaswamy I.A.S., said that his most important task was to acquire the land for Auroville. One and a half months later Auroville Today requested an update.

**AUROVILLE TODAY:** *You have made acquiring the land in the City area your number one priority. Why?*

**Mr. Ramaswamy:** Matrimandir is the soul of Auroville. All the land in the city area should be part of the soul. If private landholders are allowed to remain in this area they may engage in activities not in accordance with the soul or the ideals of Auroville, and this will hinder our development. So by acquiring all the land in the City area for the Auroville Foundation we prevent any activity which is detrimental to our ideals. We will not allow this to happen.

*But wasn't a Government Order passed some years ago which would have prevented unwanted developments in the city and greenbelt?*

There is a Government Order which says that private landowners cannot develop their land within the City and Greenbelt without getting a no-objection certificate from the Auroville Foundation. However, that Order is yet to be notified and so is not yet in force. I am pursuing this matter and we await the notification at any time.

*How will you go about securing the remaining land?*

By 21st February, 2007 I want, with the Government of Tamil Nadu's permission, to have all the government-owned land around Matrimandir transferred to the Auroville Foundation. There is other government land in the City area, amounting to approximately 25 acres, and we also want to have this transferred. This may take a little longer but the necessary steps are already being taken in this regard. I and other members of the Auroville Land Coordination

Committee (LCC) are also in constant contact with private landowners in the City area. The LCC sets targets and reviews the progress weekly. I want to consolidate all landholdings in the City area either through acquisition of land by the Government, or purchase of land by the Auroville Foundation, or by exchange of land; in other words, through exchanging outlying Auroville land for private

During the tenure of the previous Secretary no land was purchased. Since the new Secretary took office, 5.88 acres in the City area and 2.63 acres in the Greenbelt have already been purchased. A number of other land deals are in the pipeline. In the City area, 220 acres still have to be secured. In the Greenbelt, the first priority is to secure about 500 acres to consolidate existing forest and farming areas.

land in the city.

*What role do you play in the Land Coordination Committee?*

My role is to give guidance. I also take personal responsibility for dealing with the larger landowners and the more difficult cases. Things are moving, we are making good progress.

*What about securing the remaining land in the greenbelt?*

My first priority is to have all the land in the city area. When we have time we will move on to consolidating land in the Greenbelt area. Ideally, my goal is that we secure the entire greenbelt also, but here there are more constraints. There

is a lot of land in the Greenbelt that does not belong to Auroville, and much money is required to purchase all this land. Many landowners are ready to sell their land, but we need more funds to purchase it. Regarding land exchange, we don't have so much land available as some of the outlying Auroville land has houses on it, and we can't remove them.

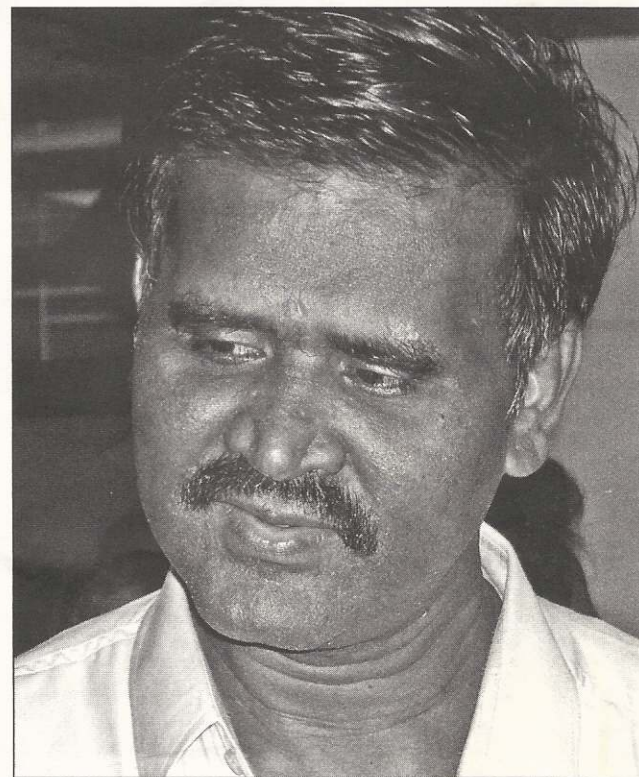
*There is much concern at present regarding a private landowner's plan to build a college in the Greenbelt.*

I am dealing personally with this and I am confident of an outcome that will satisfy all parties.

*You have worked for many years in Maharashtra and held many senior Government posts there. Why did you apply for this job?*

I've known about Auroville for many years as I come from this part of the world. The post of Secretary to the Auroville Foundation was vacant for almost a year because there were no takers. Why? Because the impression of Auroville outside is not too favourable. Also this posting is a very senior one and people at Joint-Secretary level prefer to live in the city rather than come to a rural setting like this.

So after the post had been circulated a number of times and nobody had applied I thought, 'Somebody has to do the work, why not me?' I saw it as a challenge. Not so much dealing with the peo-



Mr. Ramaswamy

ple, but with the land matters. That's what I want to be judged on at the end of my tenure. If I have been able to contribute something towards the consolidation of the land, that will be my achievement.

*Have you set yourself any other targets during your tenure as Secretary?*

No. I am purely an administrator, I am most interested in good administration, and land consolidation is my only target at present. My objective is very clear, there is no dilly-dallying. With Mother's help and the help of all of you I know we will succeed.

*From an interview by Alan*



Map of the City area. Projected roads are indicated with double dotted lines. In dark grey the areas which still have to be bought.

## Sonal Mansingh performs



Smt. Sonal Mansingh, one of India's foremost Bharat Natyam and Odissi dancers who has been honoured with the Padma Bhushan (1992) and the Padma Vibhushan (2003) in recognition of her lifelong commitment to dance, gave a Odissi dance performance at the Sri Aurobindo Auditorium, Bharat Nivas, on December 19th.

• Auroville could be an eco city, says Richard Register

• New book on AV Architecture

• Consequences of compassion

• Seeing without blinkers

• Tsunami team concludes work

pages 2-3

• Forays into new homeopathy

• Goat cheese for gourmets

• Five Auroville farms get organic certification

• Sculpture 'The Offering' donated

pages 4-5

• Amy, a newcomer, speaks out

• Passing: Suresh Joshi and Seyril Schochen

• On learning Tamil

• On teaching English

• Celebrating Deepam

pages 6-7

• The order of the meditation rooms in the Matrimandir petals

• Krishna, the man behind the Auroville Transport Service

• The Rainmaker

page 8

SeenkR.

# "Auroville could be an ecocity"

Richard Register is a well-known advocate of redesigning cities for the benefit of people and nature rather than automobiles. During a brief visit to Auroville with his associate, Kirstin Miller, he made a presentation on 'ecocities'.

For over 30 years, Richard Register has been inveighing against the worst aspects of modern cities. These include urban sprawl, the elimination of natural environments and all the problems associated with the dominance of the internal combustion engine. He contrasts this with the traditional village model which one encounters all over the world. "Here buildings cluster close to one another, they are often from between 2-5 storeys high and there is a defined streetscape. Everything is compact, close together, diversified. People live above their work-place, they shop next door. Everywhere is walkable."

## Traditional cities

Often traditional cities began through the linking together of a number of such small villages. "Due to technological limitations, the early cities could only grow so far before they lost the traditional village structure. But today you can still find something of it at the pedestrian core of many old cities."

Kirstin Miller recalls a recent visit to Nepal where they learned about the traditional cities of the Kathmandu valley. "Over 2000 years these people perfected the art of building cities. For them, the city was a place of the gods and the inhabitants were there to serve the city. Among other things, there were strict regulations about where the city ended and the farmland outside the city began, and they built their temples on the edges of the city so that people would not desecrate these boundaries."

"They were also very aware that when you leave your house you enter a different consciousness – the 'social' consciousness of the street – and they marked this dividing line with a shrine at the entrance. All the streets led to the centre where everybody brought the best of themselves and where the consciousness of all the inhabitants blended together. I find this is a very inspiring way of thinking about community, but it's been destroyed by the modern city."

## The modern industrial city

The industrial city dates from the mid 19th century. It was a time of new inventions, of new possibilities, new problems. The new possibilities included efficient sewage disposal and the invention of steel, elevators and electric lights. "The problems began when cheap gasoline and the automobile came in," points out Richard. "Then serious thought about the organization of cities melted and we ended up with far-flung suburbia."

Richard describes modern cities

as "pathological systems" because, among other things, they cover vast areas of the natural environment, they pollute the air, soil and water, they destroy community, and their inhabitants have to spend huge amounts of

"Cities are the biggest things we build. Modern city structures are also the biggest contributor to global warming, so there's an urgent need to rethink them."

Richard Register

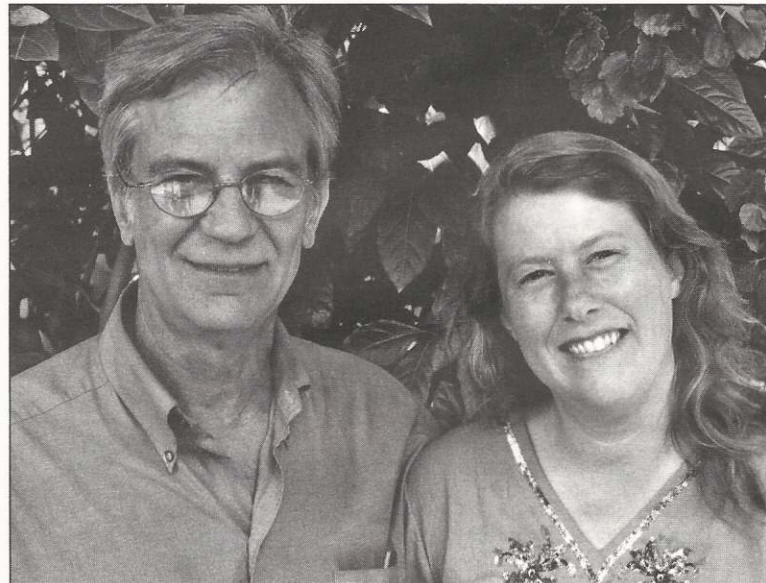
time and energy getting from one place to another.

At the same time, he believes that the modern ecovillage movement has not provided an answer. "People who live in such communities only ameliorate the problem, they don't solve it. They have solar passive heating, they insulate their houses, they drive vehicles which are more fuel-efficient and less-polluting, but none of this changes the basic structure. In fact, they acquiesce in it because their lifestyle still depends on cheap energy. Moreover these 'solar suburbs' are yet another example of sprawl because everybody wants to live on a

your children's schools etc. are all close together, you have 'access by proximity' rather than by gasoline. In other words, it's walkable. An ecocity could be a network of such centres, linked together by rail." Between the centres could be farms – to provide food for the inhabitants – fields or forests. Another key idea is to bring nature into the city itself. This could be done through green corridors, preserving natural features like creeks and cultivating rooftop gardens etc.

## A certain population density is required

Richard has been much influenced in his thinking by Paolo Soleri, the designer of the futuristic city, Arcosanti. "Paolo believes that the direction of evolution is towards more complex, interrelated systems. But such systems must be compact, because if the linkages are too long they don't function well." This is another reason why a certain population density is required, in addition to the huge energy savings that accrue. "But density on its own is boring – it's a bunch of office buildings. You also have to have the diversity.



Richard Register and Kirstin Miller

creating cathedralesque, high-density structures with wonderful interiors which incorporate natural features and where everything runs on renewable energy. That's the kind of legacy we need to leave our children if they are going to live in a society with a big population."

But of what materials would such

Richard and Kirstin had little opportunity to examine the Auroville Master Plan, but they offered some initial impressions.

## Perspectives on the Galaxy Plan

"The idea of the Galaxy Plan is based on a pattern you find in nature," says Richard, "and this is good. However, it seems to have been overlaid with another idea – the zones – which don't relate to anything in the natural world." "In nature," points out Kirstin, "you don't find all the animals sleeping in one place at night then going off to different areas during the day. They are integrated into the environment. So zoning does not make sense if you are trying to build diversity, except for situations where you need protection from things like noise. Also, the designs of the buildings have not been thought through in three-dimensional forms, where multiple linkages are created between different structures."

"What does make sense," continues Richard, "is to encourage high density which, I believe, is the idea in your Residential Zone. As to where you build your city centre, ideally it would be at a place where you have a natural water catchment. Then you could develop a beautiful, high-density, high-diversity experience around this water body with plazas looking out to the Matrimandir and the forest. But keep your city centre free of fuel-driven vehicles, which includes electrical vehicles as they are still dependent upon fossil fuels for their manufacture and fuel-storage, and they still require a lot of space to move about. Use cycles, rickshaws."

Richard finds the idea of a lake circling Matrimandir at the highest point of the land somewhat bizarre. "Clearly, you won't be using the natural environment to keep it filled, so you'll have to pump water up there. But the whole idea of using a lot of energy to create something which you want to look natural is, as my Chinese friend would say, not good feng shui. Clearly, you have some fairly interesting challenges here!"

Richard admits that there are no ecocities in the world as yet. "This is why we desperately need examples. In many respects, Auroville has the potential to be one. After all, you clearly have good architects here. Now you have this tremendous opportunity to introduce consciousness back into city living, to bring the community together and build a city anew with all the technologies and resources you have developed here."

From an interview by Alan



An example of a diverse 'mixed-use' neighbourhood

big plot away from their neighbours and to communicate electronically."

For Richard the answer is not to run away from cities, "for cities are in the nature of people", but to transform them into 'ecocities'. So what would an ecocity look like? "One of the keys is to bring greater diversity closer together, as in the traditional village. When your home, your work-place, the places of entertainment,

"The question is, how do you create a beautiful and human environment for such density? Well, you can have buildings of 10 20 storeys with terracing and little parks in the sky, and the buildings can be linked with pedestrian bridges at many different levels. There can be plazas that open on to an outstanding natural feature or artefact. What's most fascinating to me, as an artist, is the possibility of

buildings be constructed? Richard believes that materials like adobe are fine for low-rise buildings. However, when we talk about large structures of more than 10 storeys, "then concrete and steel turn out to be green building materials! Why? Because although they are expensive initially, they are low maintenance and last for ever. And when a building material lasts that long it is environmentally healthy."

## The point of it all

"For me, the point of it all is compassionate creativity. The environmentalists want compassion for nature, but they run from the idea that human beings can create a beautiful world that has never been before. But there's a validity, a godliness, in being creative, so let's do it very well. I believe that cities can contribute to humanity's creative and compassionate evolution on a healthy Earth. But, clearly, that's not happening at present, partly because those who talk about 'inner sustainability' and the evolution of consciousness have not made a bridge over to building things physically."

## NEW PUBLICATION

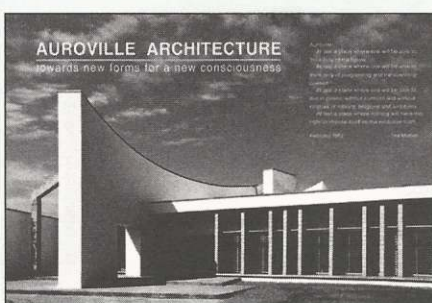
# Auroville architecture

Prisma has recently published a new edition of its popular *Auroville Architecture* book. This beautifully-produced 140 page book includes almost 400 photos but, unlike the first edition, the majority of them are now in colour. John Mandeen's fine photography underscores what interesting architecture we have in Auroville.

The text provides not only infor-

mation about the various buildings featured but also provides an insight into Auroville's town plan as well as what motivates the different architects in their work.

While the book is an introduction to the various architectural approaches in Auroville rather than a specialist publication for architects, it will surely be enjoyed and treasured by architects and amateurs alike.



*Auroville Architecture* can be ordered from [prisma@auroville.org.in](mailto:prisma@auroville.org.in). Price: in India, Rs 480 and Rs 600 by post; abroad 20 Euros. A discount is available for orders of 5 or more.

# Consequences of compassion

**O**n the night of November 29th a resident of Aurodam community caught a young boy from a nearby village who was stealing. In normal cases, the night guard, which was called for help, would hand a thief over to the police. But in this case, seeing that the boy was quite young, compassion prevailed and the night guard decided to bring the boy back to his home in the village.

It was the wrong decision. The boy, perhaps hurt by the consequences of his action and the dishonour brought on himself and his family, committed suicide by hanging the next day. It brought commotion in the village. A group of agitated villagers came into Auroville and threw stones at the Visitors Centre, the Bharat Nivas and the Town Hall, causing damage of well over Rs 100,000.

The family of the boy filed a complaint, stating that the Aurovilian and night guard concerned were responsible for the death of their son. This complaint was taken up under

section 306 of the Indian Penal Code, which speaks about abetment of suicide, a serious crime. The police had no choice but to arrest the Aurovilian and night guard and send them into legal custody at Cuddalore jail. The two were lucky to be released on bail after seven days in prison – the normal time is fifteen days – on the argument that they had been falsely implicated and were in no way connected to the suicide. The mood in Auroville was one of outrage and indignation.

The incident has raised several issues with far reaching consequences. The major one, of course, concerns the future of the Aurovilian and night guard. It is now up to the Public Prosecutor to decide whether or not to file charges. A related issue is how to ensure that bail for Aurovilians of foreign origin can be quickly secured. Normally, bail is granted under submission of land ownership documents. But foreign Aurovilians do not own land. In this case, as the Auroville Foundation refused to submit documents of land owned by it, the Working Commit-

tee, in the words of one of its members, 'had to beg Aurovilians of Indian origin to submit documents of land owned by them' to ensure the quick release. Some complied, but quite a few refused.

A second major issue is that the Secretary of the Auroville Foundation and the Working Committee have decided to initiate legal action against those who damaged Auroville property. This is the first time such action will be taken. Earlier, Auroville quietly suffered when unruly elements entered the community, forcing the closure of workshops and offices under threat of inflicting damage.

A third issue is the organization of Auroville's security. The Security Task Force is studying if security work can be managed more carefully, and whether the night guard should be disbanded and replaced with hired professionals from a security organization. This would substantially increase the costs of security in Auroville, for which a budget is as yet not available.

Lastly, the issue has raised a concern about the safety of individual Aurovilians. In a public plea, the Working Committee requested "Aurovilians to show a forward and stand together to come a strong silent presence whenever there are threats to the physical reality of Auroville. When there is a dispute over land or assets of Auroville, when members of Auroville are being harassed, then there should be a rapid and direct way to alert a minimum of 50 Aurovilians to come to the site and demonstrate quiet solidarity and strength." The call was made not only in view of the violent incidents in Auroville following the suicide, but also as individual Aurovilians who deal with land issues frequently report that threats are made against them. The call of the Working Committee brought memories of the past, when in similar situations Aurovilians would quickly come together to face a threat collectively. Times have changed, and many wonder if this is now the appropriate approach. But there may be little other option. *Carel*

## POPULATION

### Seeing without blinkers

**In the period August 2004 – November 2006, Auroville's population grew by a mere 2%. What can be done to stimulate faster growth?**

**A**uroville's slow population growth is a concern for many, amongst which the Governing Board, whose chairman Dr. Karan Singh stated publicly that he would like to see more young people from India and abroad joining Auroville. Auroville's town planners too are concerned: they would love to start building the city but cannot proceed as effective planning without a realistic idea of the expected population increase is impossible.

Over the last years, that increase has been minimal. Some believe that we can expect an influx once the Matrimandir is ready. Others doubt it. They point to the problems that confront anyone who wishes to join Auroville. Three of them are certainly obstacles.

The first is Auroville's property structure. All immoveable assets such as land, houses, wells, etc. are owned by the Auroville Foundation, which, according to the Auroville Housing Policy, 'holds the ownership in trust for humanity as a whole.' Private ownership of immoveable assets in Auroville is not possible. Consequently, and unlike anywhere else in the world, a person wishing to join Auroville cannot finance a house by taking a bank loan against a mortgage on the house and repay the loan from one's monthly earnings. Instead, a donation to the value of the house or apartment has to be made to the Auroville Foundation for the right to be nominated as steward of an existing apartment or house. If houses are not available, a donation has to be made to build a house or apartment, of which one becomes the steward afterwards. This donation is non-refundable in case someone decides to leave Auroville after being accepted as a permanent resident. For young people in particular, this is a barrier. It is unrealistic to expect that a 30-year old has been able to save the substantial amount required – of the order of Rs 15 lakhs (approximately US \$ 35,000) upwards – to start a life in Auroville. And if he or she has managed it, it takes courage

to make the jump and donate this amount.

An obvious solution to this problem would be that Auroville build and finance its houses and apartments and make them available for free or against a monthly rent to those who wish to join. But this is easier said than done. At present only one project, Citadines, seeks to build apartments, most of which will be made freely available to those who work for and live in Auroville. Funding for this project comes from abroad but construction has not yet begun. Once finished, however, Citadines will be little more than a drop in the ocean and only relieve the present housing crises to a small extent.

But even those who come with sufficient savings face a problem: they can't make a donation to move into an existing house as there are hardly any houses available; and they can't build a new house as, due to stagnation in planning, areas in the Residential Zone where new houses can be built have not been freed for development. Moreover, those new areas are planned for high density living – not to everybody's liking – and the houses or apartments will be small in size. According to the Housing Policy, 'the recommended size of a residence should not exceed 60 m<sup>2</sup> carpet area for an individual plus 30 m<sup>2</sup> for each additional projected inhabitant'. The question arises as to why newcomers are expected to live in small units that are crammed together while many old-timers enjoy large residences in spacious surroundings.

In these circumstances, the condition of the current Entry Policy that 'a Newcomer should find suitable housing in Auroville in accordance with the Auroville Housing Policy,' has become something of an impossibility. Yet, a Newcomer who takes the obvious next step and rents a house in a nearby village is, rather illogically, frowned upon.

While the issue of planning may, in all likelihood eventually be solved, there are two more obstacles the lack of work opportunities and the low levels of 'maintenance.'

Auroville has only a small economic base and newcomers often cannot find suitable work in the commercial units or in the services. If they can, the levels of 'maintenance' paid – Rs 5,000 for those who work full-time for Auroville's services, a bit more for those who work for commercial units – are just sufficient to cover basic living costs, but not to pay for a house, either as rent or by paying-off a loan.

Visa and residential permits for Auroville are granted on the condition that 'one lives in and works for Auroville.' But what if Auroville cannot offer either suitable work or housing? Do we simply have to wait till either is available? If so, the population cannot be expected to show any meaningful growth in the foreseeable future.

A solution might be to think outside the box and create a structure so that Aurovilians can work elsewhere in India. A former Secretary to the Auroville Foundation, Mr. N. Bala Baskar I.A.S., already suggested it, but for unclear reasons it never took off: make an Auroville Employment Unit under the Auroville Foundation. Such a unit could enter into agreements with outside parties to temporarily deploy individual Aurovilians for specific jobs and periods, so that their expertise, skills and talents could be fully utilised. Payment for services rendered can be made to the Auroville Employment Unit (AEU), which in turn would pay the individual's salary. The AEU would function alike any of Auroville's other commercial units which operate anywhere in India and the world and use their income to pay the salaries of their executives and employees, and to contribute to Auroville. As salaries paid outside Auroville are considerably more realistic than what is available in Auroville, an Aurovilian employed by the AEU could also take a loan to finance a house in Auroville, while other income of the Unit could be used to help improve the maintenance of those working for Auroville's services. It seems like a win-win situation for all. *Carel*

## BIOREGION

### Tsunami team concludes work



Painting on the tsunami by Cecilia, a student from Transition Primary School, made in April 2005.

**T**he Auroville Tsunami Relief and Rehabilitation Project (ATRRP) has been involved in relief and rehabilitation work since the tsunami hit in December, 2004. Initially its work focused on the communities that were directly affected by the tsunami. Over time, however, it began to target other populations as well. The programme has gradually widened from tsunami relief and rehabilitation activities to overall development work. On November 15th, 2006, almost two years after the tsunami hit, the ATRRP has officially concluded all relief and rehabilitation work. It will continue its work as the Auroville Coastal-area Development Centre (ACDC), with a focus on long term sustainable development projects for communities in the coastal area of Auroville. The term "Coastal-area" refers to a wide region surrounding Auroville, extending to approximately 30 kilometres inland and covering Villupuram district and the Vanur and Marakkanam blocks.

A similar shift is occurring all over Tamil Nadu in government and non-governmental agencies. As Mr. C.V. Shankar, Officer on Special Duty (OSD) at the Relief Commissioner's office, Government of Tamil Nadu, said recently: "Now we are at a turning point in moving from relief and rehabilitation to more long term and sustainable development of the affected areas and their populations and in reducing risks for future disasters."

Auroville Coastal-area Development Centre (ACDC) can be reached at its office at Aurelec, Auroville 605101, e-mail: acdc@ auroville.org.in

## In brief

### Chikungunya

From the summer months onwards, an epidemic of Chikungunya viral infections swept over India. Auroville and its surrounding villages were also heavily affected by it. Chikungunya is a mosquito-borne disease which debilitates the patient for approximately 30-60 days with symptoms of fever, headache and especially severe joint pain. No allopathic curative medicine is available; pain is controlled through paracetamol and non-aspirin based pain relievers. A homeopathic remedy that effectively deals with the disease is found to be *Eupatorium perfoliatum*.

### Subramaniya Bharati's 125th birth anniversary

A three-day programme celebrating Tamil poet Subramaniya Bharati's 125th birth anniversary was held by the Tamil Heritage Centre at Bharat Nivas. The programme comprised many cultural events such as music, dance, painting, theatre, and creative writing. Participants included children, youth, women from the Auroville region and students from Pondicherry University. A highlight of the celebration was the visit by Thiru Jayakanthan, a renowned Tamil writer and Gnanapeet awardee. He released a new book of Bharati's poems 'Puducherry in the poems of Mahakavi Bharati' as well as the book 'From the city of Dawn', a collection of Tamil poems by Meenakshi.

### Award for Auroville Earth Institute

On November 24th the Auroville Earth Institute was awarded the first prize in the national design competition "Multi-hazard resistant shelter" by the Gandhigram Rural Institute. The shelter designed by the Earth Institute can accommodate up to 1000 people during a natural disaster. In normal times the building can serve as a community centre and comprises a school, a mini-hospital and a market. The prize, which carries a cash award of Rs 50,000, recognized the quality of the concept, the structural soundness and its replicability.

### Auroville Industrial School ranks 2nd

In its first year, the Auroville Industrial School in Irumbai ranked second in the common examination for Industrial Schools conducted by the Tamil Nadu Government in Computer Software & Hardware Maintenance, Data Processing and Computer Applications. AIS students secured 79% marks on average in the above courses.

### Grass planting

Matrimandir management has asked for help to plant thousands of square metres of the world's finest tropical grasses around the Matrimandir. It is a tremendous amount of work which, they say, "is an opportunity to come together in a spirit of harmonious collaboration to participate in this collective karma yoga".

# Forays into new homeopathy

Homeopath Peter Holl participates in developing new pathways in homeopathy.

It was a chance meeting early summer at the Chennai airport. Peter was on his way to attend a conference abroad. At the check-in, he explained that the conference, in the south of France, would be conducted by the renowned homeopath from Mumbai, Rajan Sankaran. "That's someone with an amazing intuition. Some Aurovilians have been studying with him for the last years. All the time he shares new insights in homeopathy. It is an experience all by itself." Sankaran, it appears, is the proponent of a new method of homeopathy, which Peter hails as a dramatic improvement on the traditional methods of homeopathy. As we part, Peter agrees to talk more when we all are back in Auroville.

It's half a year later when we meet again. Peter, while abroad, has been in another encounter with gravity – a fall from his bike which aggravated a shoulder joint, already damaged by an earlier accident – but it hasn't dampened his spirits. With boyish enthusiasm he talks about the conference, Rajan Sankaran and his own love of homeopathy.

## The new method of homeopathy

So what is this new way? "Earlier," says Peter, "the patient would come with the complaint and the homeopath would ask many questions: about the patient's background, family, dreams, and so on. Those first interviews could take hours and were necessary to determine the typology of the patient and match it with the rather limited number of remedies available. We were going from the broad picture to the problem. It was a rather unsatisfying process. Not all patients enjoyed the probing into their private lives, and not all remedies were successful."

"But now we concentrate on the main complaint and follow the patient from there to where the problem has crystallised and energy has been blocked. We question the patient about what he or she is experiencing in connection with the problem; in this way the patient will lead us deeper and deeper into his or her inner experience. Our main question is always 'tell me more...' Interestingly, most people are quite at ease talking about themselves in this way, unlike the old method."

"Usually within the first half hour, the patient will repeatedly use certain words, which for us are the keys to finding the cure. These words relate to various areas or 'kingdoms' as they are called in the new method of homeopathy – the mineral, the plant and the animal kingdom. The key words for the mineral kingdom are about structure and organisation. The related problems arise from a break in this structure or organisation, e.g. breaking of relationships or failure in performance. For the plant kingdom the key words are about sensitivity – sensitivity to changes in the external environment and the capacity to adapt to these changes. The related problems are often emotional or physical strain or hurt. The key words for the animal kingdom all have to do with life, death and survival, 'victim versus aggressor' or 'me against the other'. Through the patient's answers we get a first understanding concerning where, in which kingdom, the remedy has to be found."

Peter gives an example. "The homeopath asks, 'What is bothering you?' The patient replies, 'Pain in the stomach.' 'How does it feel?' 'Like an ache or a bruise.' 'Tell me more about the ache?' 'It feels like a punch in the stomach?' 'Tell me more about the feeling of punch?' 'Oh, actually it was quite shocking to hear from my husband that he had an affair. But I had to say nothing and be in control.' The case went further on, but the word 'punch' was the key."

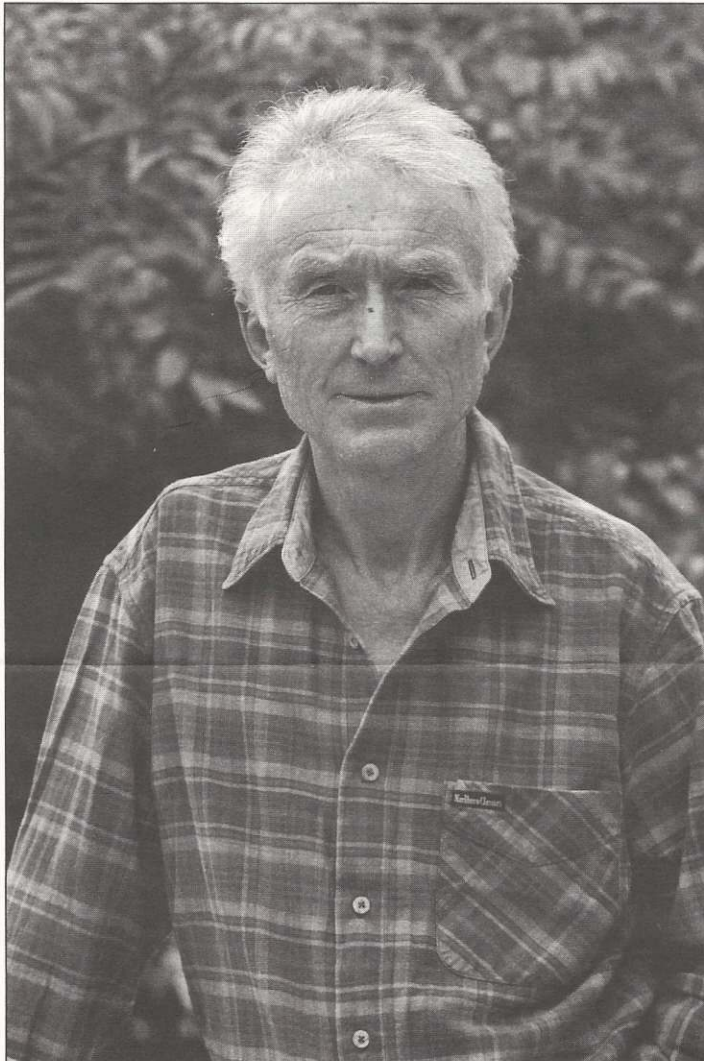
"I concluded that I had to look into the plant kingdom for a remedy as the problem was about sensitivity and adapting to the situation. The sensation 'punch experienced as a shock' led me to the Compositae family – *Arnica*, *Calendula*, *Chamomile*, etc. – which all are used for treating shocks from being injured and insulted. Then we use another classification of remedies in so-called miasms, which describes various issues connected to the experienced situation, such as the depth, the pace and perception of the problem. In this case the issue was 'to be in control'. This is the so-called 'cancer miasm' and its remedy is *Bellis perennis*, the daisy."

Peter gives another example, of a patient who came with tonsillitis and after half an hour talked about the Mafia. "For those who practise the new homeopathy, this is a clear indication of the core of the problem – fear gripping the throat." Exploring the case history, done in the way of the new homeopathy, becomes like painting a picture where, says Peter, "the patient is the painter; the homeopath serves as canvas."

## Listening within

Peter touches here on the different attitude of the homeopath in the new way of homeopathy. "Before," he explains, "we used to listen with a sharp analytical mind, trying to match symptoms to known cures. In the new method, we try instead to empty our mind and follow the patient. The homeopath tries, as it were, to 'take the patient into his own consciousness,' carefully listening to what the patient says and doesn't say – the pauses, the half-finished sentences. At the same time we pay close attention to the patient's body language. What do the hand movements express? Are the arms used to stress the spoken word? For these movements are very indicative of the energy pattern. Why does the patient cry at a

PHOTO: CORIOLAN



Peter Holl

particular moment? – and so on. The best way for the homeopath is to ask no more leading questions, to be very quiet from inside and completely following the patient's words and gestures and direction.

For example, if you see a patient making flowing arm movements while talking, the cure may be found in the animal kingdom, in some type of bird remedy; if a person talks about floating, ocean, water, the cure might be some type of fish remedy. Ideally, the homeopath listens with an empty mind. He cannot allow any of his own preconceptions to interfere or any kind of judgement on

"Each spot of the body is symbolical of an inner movement; there is a world of subtle correspondences. The particular place in the body affected by an illness is an index to the nature of the inner disharmony that has taken place. It points to the origin; it is a sign of the cause of the ailment. It reveals too the nature of the resistance that prevents the whole being from advancing at the same high speed. It indicates the treatment and the cure. If one could perfectly understand where the mistake is, find out what has been unreceptive, open that part and put the force and the light there, it would be possible to re-establish in a moment the harmony that has been disturbed and the illness would immediately go."

The Mother, Questions and Answers  
1929 – 1931

the patient to come in, and he should certainly not try to jump to conclusions. And in our experience, if the homeopath is silent, the patient opens up more and gives additional valuable information." In this way, while keeping the focus on the initial complaint, the interview can go very, very deep. Peter calls this silent listening "a yoga of sorts."

Then comes the moment where the homeopath has to find the cure. Says Peter, "There is always a risk of getting lost in the amount of data given. But though one would logically suppose that the homeopath would analyze all the data and rely on a rational choice, that's often not the case. More usually, homeopaths rely on a gut feeling – an intuitive hunch that this or that is the remedy to be taken." He admits that this is also his own experience. "Often, the cure just stares you in the face. The connection between the problems that are presented to you, the source (kingdom) of the problems, and the possible remedy – it all comes to you in a flash." This by itself doesn't eliminate the need to check the various homeopathic handbooks and review the case against the experiences of other homeopaths. "But," says Peter, "the first hunch is often the right one and is later validated when the patient returns with an evaluation of the effects of the remedy."

## A vast range of medicines

In finding remedies, the new method of homeopathy also accesses a vaster range of medicines than the old school. Each of the three kingdoms provides a rich source of remedies, which increases almost daily when yet another 'proving' of a new remedy is published on the Internet. Remedies have been made using the saliva of a rabid dog; the cocoons of butterflies; the milk of mammals such as the lion, the dolphin and even human; the feathers or blood of birds; and so on. Each remedy has its own characteristics, and each has extensively been proven. But says Peter: "If I have the feeling that the cure lies in a particular remedy that is not yet available, I wouldn't hesitate to develop the medicine myself. I have learned to trust the power of my intuition."

Peter has come a long way. Starting as a bank clerk in Germany in the 1960's, and joining Auroville in 1973 after having received The Mother's Darshan, it wasn't till the 1980's that he first developed his interest in homeopathy. "I was staying in a community in Bavaria – I had left Auroville because of weak health – and there I experienced that homeopathy works." His interest developed further in studies with Auroville homeopaths and he started practicing at the Auroville Health Centre under the guidance of Dr. Kamala Tewari. Yet, he says, he was often tempted to throw his books out of the window and do something else. "But when I got to know about the new method of homeopathy and started studying with Rajan Sankaran this all changed. The new homeopathy has become my 'path,' my own yoga of sorts."

Together with Sigrid, another Aurovilian, Peter has started offering homeopathic consultations at Inner Health in Prayathna, following the new method. Their qualifications were confirmed when attending a homeopathic seminar in Mumbai. "The Auroville homeopaths were surrounded by experienced homeopaths from all over the world. I discovered that we were able to meet them on the same level. That was a big boost to my confidence; to realise that homeopathy in Auroville is on par with the world."

In conversation with Priya and Carel

## Homeopathy: how does it work?

Homeopathy, since the time of Hahnemann, has been based on the clear, scientific collection of evidence, and continues to be so. But homeopathy has also been criticized as being not a physical science, as the remedies used are so much diluted that not a single atom of the original substance remains – even though it yields physical results.

One view regarding how homeopathy works, which is gaining increasing acceptance, is that it is an energy science and that its remedies are purely energy medicines.

Energy supports the entire structure of our physical world. Each particle of matter is energy and every object in our three-dimensional world has an energy signature that is its fingerprint, much like a DNA code. This energy, through the process of 'potentisation' [the process of shaking the medicines with sharp shocks] or 'succussion' [dilution of medicines without sharp shocks] is opened up (dynamised) and energised more deeply and strongly than before. Taken as remedy, its vibration affects the vibration of various fields of the aura of a human being. When the correct potency of the correct remedy corresponds with the compromised field of the aura, 'catalysation' occurs and the person's vital force responds to enable a cure.

## NEW PUBLICATIONS

# The Auroville Experience

Have you missed it? "The Auroville Experience" is out.

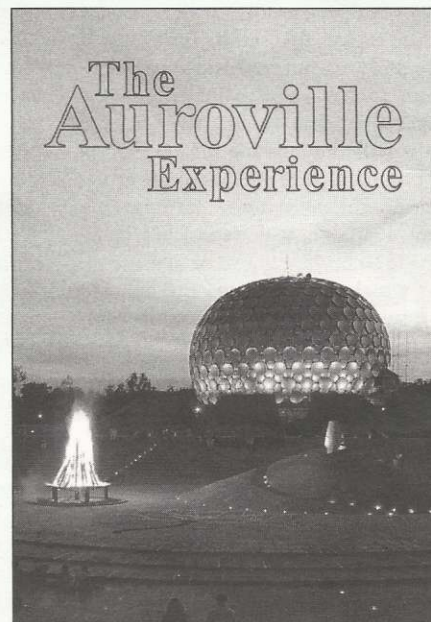
This book of 300 pages, illustrated with about 480 colour photos, contains the best and most informative articles from 202 issues of Auroville Today. It gives a unique insight into all aspects of Auroville, covering Auroville's beginnings, its inner dimension, the work at the Matrimandir, the environment, building the city, the organization, business and industry, the economy, the arts and crafts, education, healing mind and body, promoting alternative energies, evolving with the neighbouring villages, life in Auroville and the perspectives on Auroville of the wider world.

For all those who wish to get a deeper understanding of Auroville, this book is an absolute must.

It is available in the bookshops of Pondicherry and Auroville. It can also be ordered directly from Auroville Today.

Cheques or DD's should be made payable to Auroville Fund, specifying 'Contribution for Auroville Today – The Auroville Experience'. People living outside India can send their contribution to the Auroville International Centre of their country (see page 8 for details).

Price: India Rs 850, abroad US \$ 28.50 or EU € 25.00. The price includes packing and (air) mailing charges.



# For gourmets only: Tellicherry goat cheese

It is as yet largely unknown that La Ferme also produces goat cheese. The question is how long this secret can be kept...

There is only one location in Auroville where you can find Auroville's very own goat cheese – at Farm Fresh in Kulapalayam. But they don't advertise this fact and perhaps quite rightly so. For only six to seven little blocks of this cheese gets made each day, the taste of which one local gourmet swears is "out of this world."

"For the time being, it's a limited edition cheese," says Benny, a Dutch Aurovilian who is responsible for its creation. "Probably we are the only ones in South India who make goat cheese." Benny works for Auroville's cheese unit La Ferme, which produces many quality cheeses, and recently goat cheese, which makes up for 2% of La Ferme's cheese production. "Goat cheese like all our other cheeses is a living food," says Benny. "It can be appreciated at any time – from a few days to a few months. You eat it the next day and it is a different cheese!"

Benny, who comes from the Netherlands, has had a long association with goat cheese. Before he arrived in Auroville, he lived for fifteen years in a place lost in the hills of Auvergne in France, running a goat cheese business with his partner Gudula. "We had a flock of 25 goats and we made our own unique local Fromage pur chèvre. I never imagined I would come to Auroville to continue this work, but it was significant that someone who was also come to Auroville told me how good it would be if something could be done with all the goats roaming around Auroville!"

Benny moved to Auroville in 1999 and immediately got involved with La Ferme's cheese production. "I guess we are all put in the place where we need to be," he says philosophically. "But here," he adds, "I was not making goat cheese as I used to, but other European-type cheeses from cow's milk. Of course, people kept asking us why we were not making goat cheese when there are so many goats in Auroville." The explanation was simple. The local goats produce little milk. "They are raised for meat; what milk they produce is just enough to feed their babies."

But the thought of fine goat cheese never left his mind. Then, two years ago, he discovered on the internet a certain breed from Kerala; the Tellicherry goat named after the town of Tellicherry (or Thalassery) on the coast of Kerala. This breed of goat, also called the Malabari goat, is indigenous to the Wynad district in northern Malabar area of Kerala, and known for its superior milk production. "Wynad is a hilly area close to the sea. It has a cooler climate compared to Auroville but similar high humidity," says Benny. "So we thought perhaps these goats could adjust to Auroville."

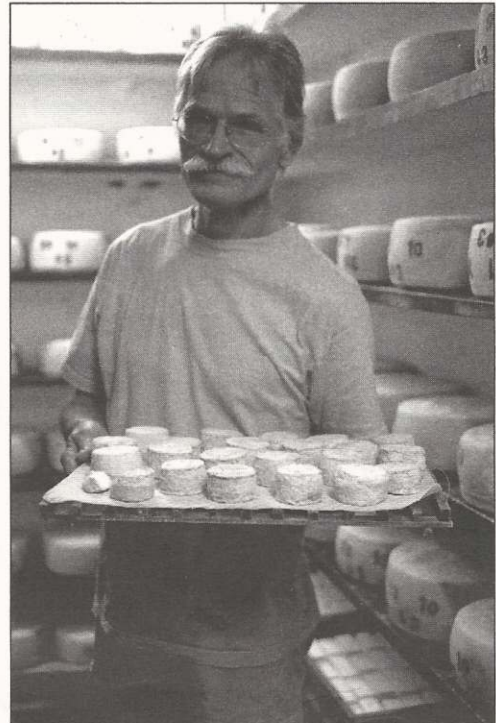
The team at La Ferme hired a van and drove down to Kerala. At the local livestock market, they saw the 'famous' goats. "They were larger than our local goats, with a mainly white coat with some brown." But what caught the team's attention were the heavy and full udders. "It looked as if they could easily produce 2 to 2½ litres of milk!" The thrilled team bought a flock of eight females and a male and drove back overnight. "But back in Auroville, we discovered that they barely gave one litre of milk a day. The goats hadn't been milked for several days – hence the full udders! Of course, we had to base our choice of goats on something," says Benny dryly. "And it was still more milk than what the local variety could give,

so we started the goat cheese production."

The goats adapted well to Auroville, and over the past year the size of the flock has doubled. Besides Benny, Arumugam, a Tamil Aurovilian with an agricultural background, is responsible for the goats. "Right now, we get about 10 litres of milk per day, all of which goes into making goat cheese. This amounts to approximately sixteen cakes of cheese, each 100 grams in weight. Benny explains: "All this demands a lot of time and care, and that is why this cheese is so pricey." La Ferme's goat cheese is in fact the most expensive of their long list of cheeses.

"It has also been a challenge to rear these goats," says Benny. "I quickly realized that none of my long French experience is useful here. It has been like starting from scratch. For example, goats in France are fed hay along with barley enriched with minerals and salt. But here good quality hay is not available, and barley is not grown. Fortunately, Arumugam brought a lot of local wisdom about livestock practices. He knows what plants the herders feed their goats and also comes up with new ideas."

Another issue has been how to increase the size of the herd. "To be more effective, La Ferme could have a flock of, let's say, fifty pure-bred goats," explains Benny. With indigenous varieties becoming extinct due to mixed breeding, maintaining genetic purity is difficult. "When species interbreed, unique genetic qualities are lost, so we cannot allow our goats to roam around freely where they may mix with the local varieties," says Benny. This necessitates that La Ferme's goats are kept in a pen. "Now all our first



Benny showing a cake of Auroville's own goat cheese.

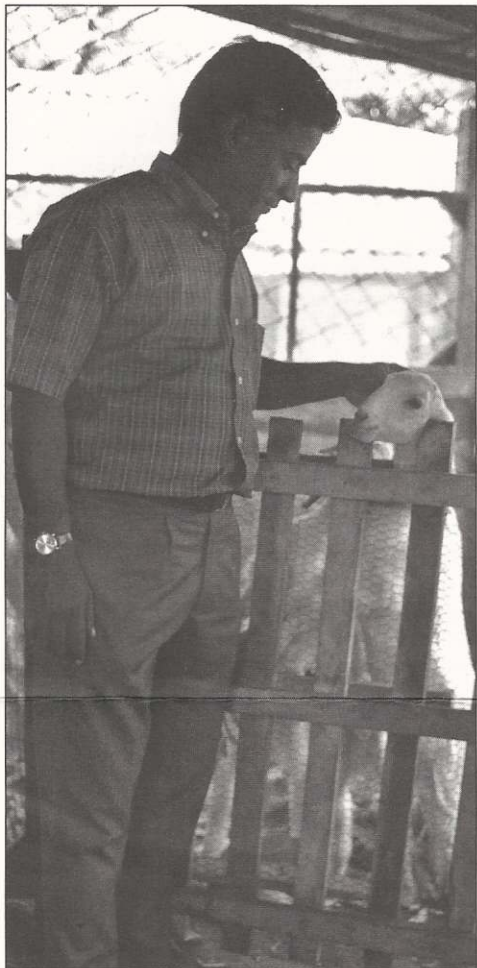
generation of females have the same father, and we cannot afford inbreeding. Soon we have to get another Tellicherry male goat and add it to the flock."

This time a billy goat may be closer at hand. In recent years, a few Government veterinary research institutions in Tamil Nadu have added

Tellicherry goat breeding programmes to their facilities, and information disseminated on the internet. Now Benny and his team can take a scientific approach to their breeding programme and perhaps even go for artificial insemination.

Benny talks about the long-term vision of La Ferme as a speciality dairy unit. "Olivier, La Ferme's executive's original idea was that in order to be competitive, La Ferme has to focus on high quality speciality cheeses unique to Auroville and not produced elsewhere in India. With goat cheese, we are definitely moving in that direction. This is just the beginning of the process and the future looks very promising."

Priya Sundaravalli



Arumugam with the goats.

PHOTO: CORIOLAN



A kid being bottle-fed with cow's milk.

## RESEARCH

### Five Auroville farms now certified organic

Six months ago, five farms in Auroville received organic certification from the Swiss based Institute for Marketecology.

Organic certification is not a breakthrough; it has been around in Tamil Nadu for 20 years. Yet it is only since July 2006 that five Auroville farms have received organic certification. Annapurna, AuroAnnam, Brihaspati, Discipline and Service Farm have met the European Union's criteria for organic agricultural production. In addition to these, four farms with the exception of Brihaspati, also received the certification for processing organic products.

So why this move now? Dr. Lucas of Auroannam explained that there were two reasons to go for certification. One was that AuroAnnam over the years has received enquiries for organic food export, which it couldn't do as the Auroville produce wasn't 'certified' organic. Organic farm products are, however, big business all over India and in Europe. And AuroAnnam, eager to participate, convinced the farms to go for certification and paid for the costs, which, says Lucas, "AuroAnnam will recover from its sales."

The second reason for getting certification was to satisfy a certain curiosity: by going through the process they could

find out to what extent Auroville farms differ from top-standard certified organic farms in India. "We learned a lot – technically of course, but also documentation-wise, discipline-wise, and administration-wise," says Lucas. The experience was satisfactory. Two farms had to improve their documentation, which was not up to standard. The other three had very good records; Annapurna's even dating back 15 years. "This meticulous record-keeping enabled us to be fully certified from the first year onwards."

Are there any advantages in this for Auroville consumers? Not really, as the produce offered will be of the same standard as is currently available at the two distribution centres in Auroville, the old and new Pour Tous. The question is rather how to motivate Aurovilians, and the many guesthouses and restaurants in Auroville, to patronize the organic produce grown in Auroville. Right now, for price reasons only, many people continue to buy non-organic food from outside. But it would be ironic if organic Auroville products had to be sold outside, because they lacked a market within the community.

Priya Sundaravalli

#### Farms' output

Auroville's organic farms – AuroAnnam, Annapurna, Brihaspati, Discipline and Service farm – cover an area of almost 43 hectares. Their total major produce is:

bananas (2000 kg)  
basil (250 kg)  
beans (1200 kg)  
brinjal (500 kg)  
cashew nuts (2000 kg)  
cashew nuts (raw) (1150 kg)  
chilly, dried (15 kg)  
coconut (3,900 pcs)  
coconut, green (1,000 pcs)  
cucumber (30 kg)  
assorted fruits (1,000 kg)  
guava, ramphal and lakshmanphal (1,350 kg)  
jicama – yam bean (850 kg)  
kudiruvalli – barnyard millet (800 kg)  
paddy (20,000 kg)  
papaya (9,500 kg)  
pitanga (2,000 kg)  
sesame (100 kg)  
small millet (2,500 kg)  
snake gourd (830 kg)  
tamarind (20 kg)  
tangerine (1,000 kg)

## ART

### L'Offrande

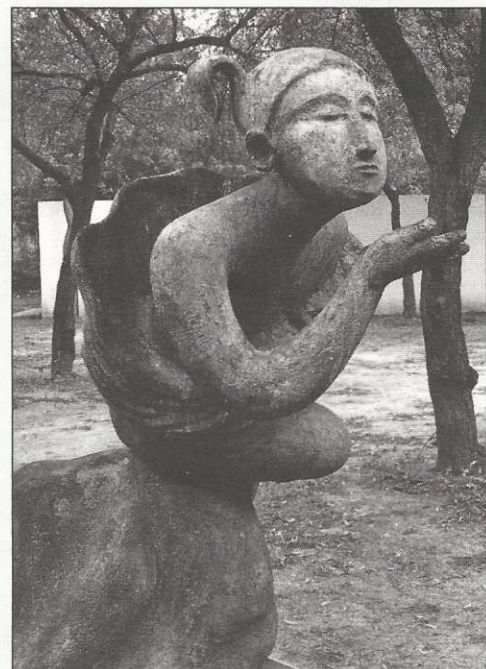
A statue of Canadian sculptor Robert Lorrain, called 'L'Offrande', 'The Offering', has been donated to Auroville and will be installed in the pond near Café Morgan at the Town Hall. 'The Offering', says Lorrain, 'is the result of various inspirations and attempts to express the meaning of 'offering' as described by Sri Aurobindo in his 'The Synthesis of Yoga':

"It is the inner offering of the heart's adoration, the soul of it in the symbol, the spirit of it in the act, that is the very life of the sacrifice. If this offering is to be complete and universal, then a turning of all our emotions to the Divine is imperative. This is the intensest way of purification for the human heart, more powerful than any ethical or aesthetic catharsis could ever be by its half-power and superficial pressure. A psychic fire within must be lit into which all is thrown with the Divine Name upon it. In that fire all the emotions are compelled to cast off their grosser ele-

ments and those that are undivine perversions are burned away and the others discard their insufficiencies, till a spirit of largest love and a stainless divine delight arises out of the flame and smoke and frankincense."

The statue is one of two donations from the sculptor to Auroville. The Styrofoam moulds for a second sculpture have also arrived in Auroville, but this one is yet to be cast.

PHOTO: KIM MONROE



# A newcomer speaks out

Amy, a Californian Newcomer, shares her experience of two years living in Auroville.

How did Amy hear about Auroville? "Well, from a travel book actually. I had quit my career in Human Resources in March 2004 and had been traveling for 7 months before I arrived in India. Just prior to that, I had been living in Basel, Switzerland for three months and loved the place. I even thought after my half-year trip around India I would return to stay. I never thought I would live in India – never, never, never!"

What were her first impressions of Auroville? "Not so good. I couldn't reconcile what I had seen on the Web about the spirituality of the place and what I saw with my own eyes. The 'beach scene' didn't look different from anywhere else I had been. I heard about Auromodele and how it was called the 'Beverly Hills' of Auroville, and I saw the poverty in the villages and the starving dogs. Plus the Aurovilians didn't seem very friendly. Nothing moved me here.

"I had already decided to leave for the next place on the map, and was checking bus schedules and all that when something happened. I saw a boy trying to kill a kitten. And in a matter of moments I found myself, a tourist, with a half-starved kitten on her hands. I called Ann, whose Animal Care signs I had noticed in my four weeks stay in Auroville. When I got her on the phone she said, 'Sorry, I only do dogs' but then she drove out to meet me. And that was it.

"Meeting her changed everything about Auroville for me. There was something about Ann, and we connected immediately. I realized she had a very special spirit, utterly unique and she was the most selfless person I had ever met. I wanted to support her in any way I could. It wouldn't have mattered what Ann was doing; I wanted to do it for and with her."

Amy stayed back in Auroville to help Ann in her animal care activities. "I rented a house near the ECR and settled in with my new kitten and started work. The Farm Group had just allotted a piece of land for Ann and her dogs. This was clearly something Ann was not going to be able to deal with alone and so I took it on.

"The project brought me into close contact with many Aurovilians. It was then I began to experience Auroville in a completely different way. Of course, none of us knew that within six months Ann would no longer be with us. She went into the hospital in April and left us in June.

"By then, I was house-sitting in Auroville, committed through to October. I had got my visa extended, but wasn't sure about staying here long-term. I felt there was an awful lot of hypocrisy and I couldn't reconcile the spiritual aspect with the materialism I saw. It was as if some of the people

believed they had tapped into Sri Aurobindo's yoga, and were on a superior level. At meetings, this behavior showed itself in its clearest form. Listening skills were severely lacking. I know this may sound judgmental, but time and time again I saw people talking over one other, not listening to

PHOTO: CORIOLAN



Amy

each other, rolling their eyes up in frustration and rudely telling speakers to sit down even before they had finished. Also, people were not prepared for meetings; half of the gathering seemed to think they were talking about 'this' and the other half thought they were supposed to be talking about 'that', and then they would repeat everything at the next meeting. There seemed to be a constant rehashing of the same thing. I could honestly see why eighty per cent of Aurovilians didn't attend these meetings."

What has Amy's experience been as a Newcomer? "My personal experience has been golden as I have found meaningful work, a great place to live in, that is Creativity, and met a wonderful partner, Chris, whom I adore.

"However, I feel I am mainly valued because of my work. Luckily I have always loved to work; therefore Karma Yoga is a great path for me. In the mornings, I am at the new Pour Tous Distribution Centre and three afternoons a week, at the Future School library. But many Newcomers I've met have a hard time finding work that is suitable for them and they have not received much help or support. When you go to the Entry Group, it is explained in no uncertain terms that you cannot expect Auroville to support you for the first two years; you have to pay your own way, plus you have to work.

"Newcomers tell me they feel scrutinized and that it is a very uncomfortable feeling to live with. They observe a hypocritical situation as many Aurovilians do not appear to work or contribute in a material way, yet it is the Newcomer who is pressured about work and largely not supported during the Newcomer period.

"The other issue is accommodation. When I went to the Housing Service earlier this year to inquire about housing I was told there were sixty Aurovilians and eight Newcomers on the waiting list. I was blown away by this fact. How can you expect to attract more people to come and live here when there is no housing for them? The situation is absurd. Aurovilians are staying in houses designated for Newcomers and they don't leave because there is no housing, so there are fewer and fewer houses are available for Newcomers. For eight months I lived in a twelve square metre room with my partner. I was grateful but it was a ridiculous situation. How can people spend years house-sitting, anxiously waiting for the original residents to return at any time?

"Chris and I were very fortunate to get a flat in Creativity which we love. We had been staying in a small room in Creativity until this flat became available. When we expressed our interest, we were openly welcomed. Here, there is a healthy balance of community, autonomy, sharing and caring. About seventy percent of the residents help in the community, but that is voluntary. Actually, it is like a big family with arguments and hassles, and then a few days later everyone is laughing together. I am really thrilled to be living there. The only 'bummer' for me is the current rule about no pets." Amy adds, "Of course, there are many dogs around here and my work place so I get my 'fix'!"

"Yet another issue for Newcomers is the language. Many are shy and lack confidence because of poor English or because they come from cultures where they are not encouraged to be pushy. I think you could be very lonely here if you were on your own."

What are Amy's ideas on how Newcomers can

make friends in Auroville. "I know very few people even though I have been here for two years. People keep to themselves here; they don't seem to get together socially like in other places. We may go to a film or a meeting together, but don't really speak to each other.

"Chris and Fabrice have had several interesting Newcomer events with introductory talks at Savitri Bhavan and meetings hosted in people's homes. These seemed to be attended mainly by Aurovilians from what I could tell, and not so many Newcomers. If in addition, the new people do not have access to the Internet, don't receive the News and Notes, or read the notice-boards, they may never get to know about these events. On top of this, if their ability to read English is poor they would have difficulty with all the above."

How does Amy like India? There is a long pause before she answers. "I have immeasurable admiration and respect for the ancient traditions here but I find the external environment very challenging. Sometimes it literally feels like my brain cells are boiling with the heat. And of course, there is the endless supply of bugs.

"But I like being with the Tamil women at the Pour Tous Distribution Centre. They have a lovely warmth and simplicity that I find refreshing. It is like a sisterhood, the way they support each other. They are not bogged down with 'knowledge' and their personalities are not loaded with ego. Their lives are so different from mine. They cannot understand how at forty I am not married and have no children. They ask me how my mother and father are and I realize I haven't thought about them in weeks. Family is not a big part of my life as it is for them."

What is the most important thing for her in Auroville? "For myself I want silence; and I need lots of it to cope with this chaotic nature of life here. Auroville is a place of Divine Anarchy and I feel it is still young and evolving. Often the result is five different people having five different ways of doing things. One could go mad if one refused to change! So, I try to be silent, try to step back from the external chaos and be humble. And I try to surrender to 'Truth'. This I feel is my journey of transformation.

"However, the quality of stillness and silence available here, like in the Matrimandir, is like nowhere else. I go there often when I need that extra blanket of silence. It is such a beautiful gift for us, right in the centre of all this activity. Some perhaps find their silence in the Greenbelt, or down on the beach, and everyone is different. Auroville is a good place to do this journey of transformation; in fact it is 'The' place for me. I feel so blessed to be here."

Dianna

## PASSING

### Seyril Schochen

Playwright, Matrimandir Worker, founder of Savitri House, Sri Aurobindo Learning Center, Advisor to International Yoga College and radiant being whose favorite line from "Savitri" was:

*And laughter of the heart's sweetness and delight*

*Freed from the rude and tragic hold of Time,*

*And beauty and the rhythmic feet of the hours.*

Marjorie Spalding lived on 88th Street and Park Avenue in New York City and had been reading Sri Aurobindo for years. It was through her that Seyril, who lived with her husband, Marty Rubin (who taught at NYU and pioneered the use of acupuncture in dentistry in the West) a couple of blocks away, found out about Sri Aurobindo and Mother and Auroville.

Unlike others who may have been content to read and observe from afar, Seyril went to live in Auroville, first at Matrimandir, and later, with her friend, Eleanor, at Verité. Jack Alexander tells the charming story of her early days at the Worker's Camp, greeting him in the morning with her radiant smile while brushing her teeth and saying, "Truooth!"

While older in years, she was always younger in spirit, constantly putting forward her dream of an ocean-going univer-



sity of young people who would travel to Auroville by sea.

She was dramatic in nature and wrote a number of plays, some of which were read during the All USA Meetings. In her early years, she was included in an anthology of the best one-act plays of 1939 and her set designer for "The Moon Besieged" on Broadway was Ming Cho Lee, who went on to become one of America's most celebrated designers with a long career at Yale University. In our circle, it was her play about "Nishita", the daughter of President Woodrow Wilson, who came to live at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, that was the most popular.

She was a good friend of Glenn Olds,

the interfaith minister at Cornell, advisor to Presidents Johnson and Nixon, who visited Auroville and went on to become the President of Kent State University. She also led a delegation to the UN to meet with Under Secretary General, Robert Muller.

Seyril spent her last years living in Crestone, Colorado, where Maurice and Hanne Strong had founded a community linking many faith traditions. June Maher and Rod Hemsell were among those who were closely connected to her work in Colorado. June remembered that over the many years she knew her, she never heard Seyril speak ill of anyone.

Seyril was fortunate to have Suzanne handle her correspondence and outreach and Pavita to look after her during her last months when she was bedridden and on oxygen. The Sri Aurobindo Learning Center, which Seyril founded, will continue its mission.

Even to the last, Seyril was full of enthusiasm and dedicated to the Matrimandir. It was her custom to send a birthday greeting informing the person that a donation was being made in their name to Matrimandir. Hopefully this tradition will be carried on in her memory.

Seyril passed on while listening to Mother's "Prayers and Meditations". Some of her ashes will remain in the Baca and some will come to Auroville.

Julian Lines

### Suresh Joshi

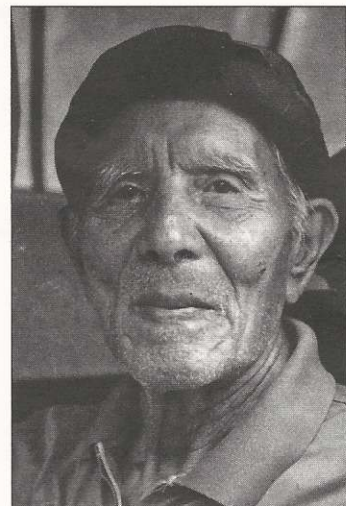
Suresh Joshi, aged 75, peacefully left his body on December 2nd after a long struggle with Parkinson's Disease. Suresh was affectionately known to the early Aurovilians as "Mother's messenger" as he used to deliver her hand-written answers to their letters.

Coming from a Brahmin family in Nainital, he wrote to Sri Aurobindo at the age of sixteen asking if he could come and live in the Ashram. Sri Aurobindo wrote back saying that they could not accept children; but come and see us when you are twenty one.

Suresh joined the Indian army, but ran away and spent the next few years visiting ashrams and rishis in the Himalayas.

At the age of twenty one he came to Pondicherry with two rupees in his pocket. At his first interview with Mother she said, "Stay with me," and so began his many years of Ashram life.

He worked in many departments, usually working twenty hours a day, and walked to Auroville several times a week. He used to open the Ashram gates at 3 a.m., make tea for everyone, then close the gates at 11 p.m.



During the conflict between the Ashram and Auroville, Suresh always spoke very clearly about his feelings for Auroville and gave it his full support. He would cycle out to Auroville with groups of Ashram children and introduced many people to Auroville, including Dorothee, who devotedly cared for him for the last ten years of his life.

He was a gentle, noble soul. Hopefully he will continue to bring us messages from the Divine.

Dianna

## On learning Tamil

When I first came to Auroville, I found it strange that so few Westerners spoke Tamil. People told me it was excruciatingly difficult and even Bhavana, who has spent years with the villagers, admitted to knowing only "a sort of pidgin-Tamil."

I was never really attracted to the harsh sounds of Tamil that I heard in Kulapalayam, but then I heard Meenakshi read some Tamil poetry and realized it could be rich and beautiful. Meenakshi inspired me to have a go at learning Tamil, so off I went to Auroville's Language Lab.

I started the 'Fun With Tamil' classes there with Satye, a bright young Tamil man, and actually did find it fun. The class sat outside under the big tamarind tree. Each session started with a few minutes silence, and then launched into a unique system that Satye had developed. We would say something in English, Satye would say it in Tamil, then we would repeat it back several times in Tamil. By the following week he had printed all our sentences out and they remained fresh in our minds.

But there were only four or five people in the class and this surprised me. When I told some Aurovilians I was going to learn Tamil they were not very encouraging. "Only five people here have ever learned Tamil from scratch," one told me. "Everyone has had a try but everyone gives up," said another. "It's better for the Tamil people if they learn to speak English," said the third.

After the first term had ended I began to see what they meant. It was remarkably difficult and, for some reason, it did not 'stick' in my mind. I would learn three words then forget two; it was as if there was no connection at all between English and Tamil. I decided to learn only words and phrases that resonated with me like '*man-nichikenge*' (I am sorry); or '*ninga enga poringa?*' (where are you going?). The latter was like music to the ear.

Learning to write those beautiful, squiggly Tamil letters helped enormously. It is a delight to learn to write

with all those curves. Actually their forms are not so difficult to identify, it is just putting them together that is hard. And one can practice them practically everywhere as they are on the backs of buses, shop signs and advertisements on the road to Puducherry.

Then there is the ongoing controversy about whether one should learn 'low' or 'high' Tamil. Some say, "It is important we learn the 'high' Tamil as it will raise 'their' standards." Others ask what the point is of learning something nobody in Kuyila-palayam will ever understand? "You will only be laughed at if you use that sort of vocabulary."

When I was teaching seven-year-olds, I asked them for the Tamil words for ten English words. When I showed them to a Tamil person she laughed and told me, "You shouldn't be using five of these words. They are very 'low' words."

After four months of classes I reassessed my situation. I didn't need Tamil for work and I actually didn't spend that much time with those who didn't know English. What I wanted was to be able to communicate with people, not hold an intellectual discussion. I decided I only needed the basics – days of the week, numbers, and such. And then certain phrases that I could trot out at the appropriate moment. Expressions like '*Atagaana ponnu*' (What a beautiful girl-child) and '*Malai varumaa?*' (Do you think rain is coming?). These little phrases brought laughter at my pronunciation, appreciation at my clumsy effort and best of all, huge smiles. Basically, it is all about connecting to people and being able to make a huge cultural step into a very different society. **Dianna**



Dianna

## On teaching English

I had been in Auroville about five days when I was asked to teach English. I had wandered into the Language Lab, opened my mouth to ask for a glass of water, thus revealing my English accent, and was pounced upon. I could hear a

Russian with a heavy, guttural accent teaching

English to some Tamil boys in the classroom next door and it made me feel sad. Surely it is difficult enough to learn a new language without having to stumble through a third language as well. So I said, "Yes, of course, I'd love to come

and teach," and the girl said, "Would you like to start tomorrow?" and I said, "Why not?"

I thought, well, that must be how things are done in Auroville; spontaneously, from the heart. I had never taught before, but there was no going back. I didn't prepare anything for the lesson as I did not know what to prepare. Luckily, I am quite good at 'thinking on my feet', so I got to the Language Lab early the next day and looked through a few books for some ideas on teaching English. They all seemed to be utterly irrelevant to South India, with conversations about holidays and cars and boyfriends. Then the students drifted in, six people from six different countries with six different levels of English. The Korean didn't speak a word of English, the Tamil girl was so shy she hardly spoke at all, and the others were somewhere in between. I quickly devised a plan of asking them to say something in English about their fami-

lies and their country and then the other students would ask them questions. Any difficult words I would write on the board so they could write them in their notebooks, hopefully making them into sentences for homework.

This system seemed to work well at first as the class was lively but then things began to drag a little. The shy ones did not want to talk at all and I had to be careful not to embarrass them. The Italian talked all the time and the Korean just did not know where to start and neither did I. As the class was open-ended, people would drift in and out. This was very unsatisfactory for a teacher as it was difficult to have any continuity of learning. Some people were passing through Auroville on holiday and wanted to brush up their English, while some of the others were Aurovilians who were on their fifth attempt in twenty years. These 'students' came with little enthusiasm, and usually didn't stay long. I learned to accept this strange system of teaching however, and learned to 'go with the flow'.

One day Franz from Aurelec brought in his five Tamil kitchen boys, determined to get them to know at least a few words of English. They sat together in a row, terrified. They never came back; it was just too much for them.

After a few months I became frustrated with this drop-in system. We decided to advertise a proper English course with classes running three times a week for two months. Very few people signed up for it; some said the meeting time was too early, or too late, or the wrong day, or the course was too elementary; or too advanced.

I myself eventually moved out when the holidays came, having greatly enjoyed the teaching experience despite the difficulties. It was an experience that made me aware of how difficult it can be for many in Auroville to live in a place where their native tongue is not spoken.

Dianna

## CULTURE

# Shiva in the form of light

In Auroville, the Tamil festival of Kaarthigai Deepam was celebrated in many ways.

Kaarthigai maasam or the Tamil month of Kaarthigai (November 15th to December 14th), silently crept upon Auroville and the environs.

Driving by the villages after dusk, the visual change in the scenario is evident. Innumerable *agal villakus*, the simple mud lamps, with their flames flickering in the cool December darkness, decorate the fronts of homes, shops, and temples or are tucked away in nooks and corners. Young boys stand around bonfires whirling burning ropes of braided coconut fibre into cartwheels of orange-gold embers. Kaarthigai is also the only time of the year when the girls and the women folk make elaborate *kolams* after sunset. Like strange tropical snowflakes, these elaborate white mandalas lie unfurled upon the dry caked ground, their chalky marble grains glimmering in the night light.

The Kaarthigai season has a connection to Lord Shiva. An ancient Tamil saying enumerates the ways in which one can realize Shiva in one's lifetime: To be born in Thiruvayaru (a town near Thanjavur), to make one's residence in Kanchipuram, or to visit Varanasi in Bihar. But there is one place where just thinking about Shiva



Playing with fire at Deepam

is sufficient for 'realization', and that is Thiruvannamalai, a sleepy town a hundred kilometres northwest of Auroville. In the month of Kaarthigai, the little town bursts into life, climaxing in the Deepam festival.

On the night of the Kaarthigai full-moon, a massive fire is lit in a natural rock cauldron atop the Arunachala hill. Fed by clarified butter, its blazing flames can be seen on the plains for miles around.

Auroville too celebrated the sacred spirit of Kaarthigai through the

Deepam festival.

At sunset kindergarten children accompanied by their parents took part in a festive procession snaking from the Solar Kitchen to the playground in Certitude. It was a magical sight that met the drivers on the road that night – a hushed line of children with their softly-lit paper lanterns bobbing and fluttering upon sticks.

Elsewhere in Auroville, Deepam, the Centre for Disabled Children also celebrated the event inviting the community for 'an evening of light'. Amidst shimmering oil lamps that lit up the courtyard, a group of disabled youngsters and two adults danced to a lilting Tamil film song. In their cupped hands, were terracotta dishes hoding burning candles. Spectators – Aurovilians, villagers and guests, all seated beneath the wide-stretching limbs of a banyan watched the glowing sepia scene in silence.

It is a magical time, Kaarthigai. As the year passes away, symbolically burning off its slumber and *tamas* by offering it to the flames, it prepares for the new season of spring and vitality. The next Tamil month of *Maargazhi* is a holy time dedicated to the female saint Andal with her intense devotion to Lord Vishnu.

Priya Sundaravalli

## LETTERS

### The order of the meditation rooms in the twelve Matrimandir petals

Our article on the petal shields of the twelve meditation rooms of Matrimandir requires an erratum as the sequence in which you have listed the rooms is incorrect. Mother started her list with Sincerity and Humility and then proceeded with Gratitude, Perseverance, Aspiration, Receptivity, Progress, Courage, Goodness, Generosity, Equality, and Peace. Thus, Mother's comment as quoted is wrong. The attitudes towards humanity are Goodness, Generosity, Equality and Peace and not Aspiration, Perseverance, Gratitude and Humility. For me this sequence matters as Sincerity is the first step, without which the attempt to practice other qualities is futile. One can only finally arrive at Peace once the other qualities have been integrated.

You also write that 'two design elements express the specific quality of each room,' while there are in fact three. The quality of a specific room is also expressed by the mosaic arrangement of the Agra stones on the wall of the corridors.

Finally please note that Equality here seems to mean Equality of the Soul, often referred to as Equanimity; it does not mean that all are equal.

Gilles Guigan

## In brief

### Beautifying Puducherry

Quite a few Aurovilians are involved in renovating the Bharathi Park situated opposite the Puducherry Assembly building. Ajit, on behalf of INTACH, participated in making a master plan to revive the entire area, including the Gandhi Thidal and the beach promenade, while Juan, Indra and Island are working on pruning the 170-odd trees in the park. The 10-acre park is scheduled to reopen by the end of 2006.

### Monsoon rains

Auroville Water Harvest, which runs weather stations in Kottakarai and in Vanur and the top class automatic weather station in Matrimandir gardens, and has a vast network of rain gauges and thermometers in the surrounding villages, reports that on December 11, the total rainfall in 2006 was 1117mm against a yearly average of 1283mm (1968-2005).

### WISP 2007

The third Auroville Winter Integral Studies Program (WISP) has begun offering a range of lectures and study programmes on the theme of transformation and integral learning. The courses, presented by over 28 Aurovilians and others, will run throughout the months of December, January, February and March. More info: [www.auroville.info/WISP](http://www.auroville.info/WISP)



### Sacred Art 2007

is the title of a calendar portraying traditional sacred subjects from different spiritual traditions, made by using Thanjavur techniques and materials. It has been published by Jocelyn from Janaka Art Studio. Price: \$16.07 Available from: [www.lulu.com/content/560159](http://www.lulu.com/content/560159)

### Deepanam School reorganized

With effect from October 2006, Deepanam primary School has been reorganized. A new team of teachers will endeavour to put the ideals of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother in practice, with a focus on the Free-Progress education approach, where each student is taught as an individual in accordance with his or her unique needs, interests and abilities.

### From the Roof of the World

The Tibetan Students' Association, Madras and the Pavilion of Tibetan Culture, Auroville, organized a two-day cultural extravaganza with cultural dances and songs, Tibetan traditional food, video shows and an exhibition showing Tibetan traditional costumes and religious instruments, photos and books on Tibetan medicine. Some 130 Tibetan college students from Chennai helped in organizing the festival.

# Krishna the taxi man

Krishna runs the Auroville Transport service.

I have had many pleasant journeys in his taxis so I was looking forward to meeting him at 3 p.m. on a Tuesday afternoon. He was exactly on time and when I commented on this he said, "Well, that is the first duty of a taxi man, isn't it?"

He is a charming 37 year old Tamil man, who in between the constant ringing of his cell phone, tells me how the taxi service had developed. "Basically, like everything in Auroville, it grew from absolutely nothing and took years to become what it is now."

Krishna himself comes from Kuyilapalayam and was in the first batch of boys that Andre took as boarders in New Creation. He remembers living with Andre's family in a keet hut when New Creation was a desert with a few palm trees. "The land had been used for farming and there was a pump house and a couple of huts. Andre's first school was in Fraternity, later we moved to New Creation."

Krishna left the school when he was 15 and Andre got him into Aureka engineering works for evening classes where he learnt basic technical skills. A few years later he was working in a small company called Technica making water sprinklers. Though it grew into a unit which employed 100 workers, eventually it developed problems and had to be closed down. Krishna went back to New Creation to look for other work.

"There were now fifty children at New Creation school and they used to borrow a van from Aurelec to drive them around. One day someone told me about a very old van that was 'totally junk' lying around somewhere, so I did some tinkering work on it, put in a new engine and had a pucca vehicle." At that time a bullock cart used to go to Pondicherry every day to get supplies for Pour Tous. Krishna quickly saw that his new van could speed things up so he replaced the bullocks with his van. "I would go and get the supplies in the morning and deliver

the baskets in the afternoon; and this went on for about five years."

At that time, if Aurovilians needed a taxi they would have to phone Rajaram in Pondy. He was the only taxi man and had only one taxi. One day Andre said to Krishna, "Why don't we start our own taxi service?" It seemed an obvious idea but of course there was no money to buy a car. A few days later a friend told Krishna of an old Ambassador car abandoned under a cashew tree. "So we hauled it out with a rope tied to the van, and quickly got it in good condition. Luckily, I had learnt mechanics so I could do these things," says Krishna.

"People soon began to call us to take them to Pondy for a visit to the Ashram or a hospital, and we became very busy. It was a service that was much appreciated." Krishna taught two others, Joseph and Ramalingan, to drive, plus some New Creation boys used to help. "And all this with one car!" says Krishna.

One day as they were giving Emil a lift, the car broke down....again. "Is this old thing the only car you have!?" he asked in disbelief. "How much would a new car cost?" They told him - about two and a half lakh rupees, and he bought us a car with the provision that he could use it for himself when he wanted to. They now had two cars and many customers, but no office; and Krishna was finding it very difficult to run the business. Boys were helping him but they were neither reliable nor committed. He had also just got married to Lakshmi, who had been at the boarding school with him. "I went to Andre in despair saying it was all too much for me," recalls Krishna. "There were always breakdowns or accidents; it seemed to take up my whole life. But Andre was always there to give me a boost when I needed it. I remember him saying, 'Krishna, I am always with you and we will succeed.'"

Eventually a small office was secured at the entrance to New Creation, and by now, the taxi-service became even busier, with airport trips

to Chennai. "At first, these often turned into nightmares with emergency midnight calls, with people waiting at the airport and very stressed taxi men."



Responsible for 22 cars and 30 people:  
Krishna of the Auroville Transport Service

Auroville Fund gave Krishna a loan and they now have a fleet of nine cars of their own and manage ten 'outside cars' which give a percentage of their profits to Auroville. "We employ thirty drivers and staff and as you can imagine, this is a big project to run." With this increase in size, their office has also moved from outside New Creation school, to up on the road outside New Creation Corner restaurant. "It was getting too close to the children and becoming dangerous for everyone. But now we have to pay quite high rent as it is privately-owned land."

Krishna's dream is to have a large area on Auroville land with a proper car park, a place where the drivers can sleep in comfort, and a service area complete with a vehicle washing service and bike and car repair workshop. "I have been trying to get land for ten years now and I don't know why it

hasn't happened." He believes that it is very necessary for Auroville to have these services in one convenient location. "Now I have to go into Pondy maybe ten times a week to get spares; it is terribly time consuming and frustrating."

He also dreams of having a free taxi service for older people who have given so much to Auroville. "I would like to take them shopping or into

sort it out. He tells me, "I am carrying the lives of other people." Every morning he prays to the Mother that there won't be an accident on the road."

I asked him about his clients. Were there any problems or difficulties with them? "The main difficulty", he told me, "Is the language problem. Some passengers are Korean or Chinese and don't know any English. They can get confused with the booking dates and times, how much things cost, which is left or right, what is stop or start. If anything bad happens they tend to blame the driver as they don't understand our traffic problems with delays for all sorts of Indian reasons. They do not understand the traffic has doubled in five years yet the roads remain the same size. We have to share them with cows and bicycles and children and drunkards; it is very difficult for our drivers and they have to concentrate a lot which is exhausting."

I asked him about his drivers. "I try to train them well as they are unfamiliar with what a Western customer expects. I show them how to open the car door for the passengers, help them with their luggage, ask for permission to put the radio on and pay attention to their requests for driving too fast or too slow. Once a month we discuss any complaints we may have received. I am always trying to raise their standards. A difficulty now is when clients ask for a particular driver, because the one they had last time could speak English and knew where all the shops were in Chennai."

The Chikungunya disease has caused us many problems as many drivers have been off sick. They can't drive for quite a long time as their joints are affected. Festivals and holidays are a big headache for me as drivers insist they spend time with their families and yet that is the time when we are busiest."

Krishna looks around the New Creation Taxi stand and smiles. The drivers are quietly polishing their white taxis under the big trees. "Yes, it often is a big headache but I love my work. I don't treat it like a business but as a service for Auroville. After all, we are one big family and these cars belong to all of us and of course, Mother. I consider it a privilege to be part of this service."

Dianna

## CULTURE

# The Rainmaker

The Auroville Theatre Group presented us with their first play of the season "The Rainmaker" written by N. Richard Nash and performed at Bharat Nivas Pavilion. The play is a minor American classic set in the American Midwest sometime in the nineteen-fifties.

It portrays a widowed farmer and his two sons and daughter whose lives are thrown into chaos by the arrival of the dashing Starbuck. In exchange for one hundred dollars he promises to

bring rain to their drought-ridden farm. At first this sounds like a preposterous offer but slowly each member of the family agrees to his offer for various personal reasons. The plain daughter, Lizzie, who is the despair of her father as no one wants to marry her, is kissed by Starbuck, who tells her she is beautiful. He convinces her she must follow her dream, which she does, even though it is only marrying the boring, widowed local policeman.

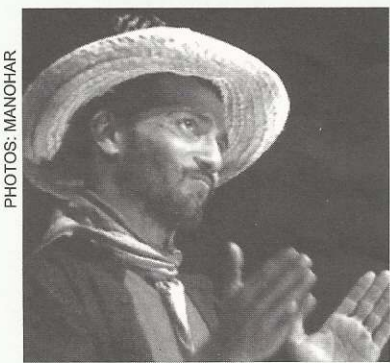
Otto as the weary father convinced us with his cowboy walk and Texan drawl and Jimmy, played by Annadi was excellent as the bouncy younger son ready for anything life could throw at him. His older, more conservative brother was played by

Partha, and the dashing outlaw Starbuck gave Floyd a good opportunity to demonstrate his energy and charisma. The play revolved around the fact that the daughter Lizzie, played by Sonja, was plain and lacked feminine wiles, but Sonja always looked flirty and pretty and so the character lacked a certain conviction.

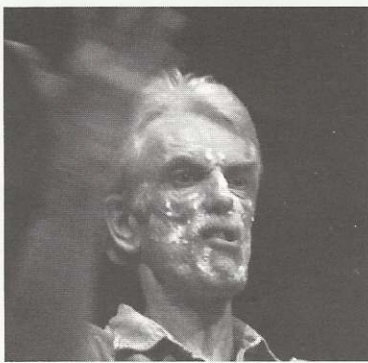
The set (thanks to Coco and Clemens) caught the starkness of the American Midwest of that period, but despite an advert in the News and Notes for some Stetson cowboy hats, straws hats had to suffice. The music was well chosen and added atmosphere and authenticity to the play. Jill kept to Aaron Copeland's music throughout and included a lively rodeo dance which was welcome as there was no intermission and the play was nearly three hours long. Jill said it had been very tightly written and she didn't feel able to make cuts to make it shorter. It must have required a lot of stamina for the actors who handled their roles well over this long period.

Despite the play's length it never dragged, though in many scenes, the pace could have been quickened and the acting tighter. We look forward to the Auroville Theatre Group's next presentation.

Dianna



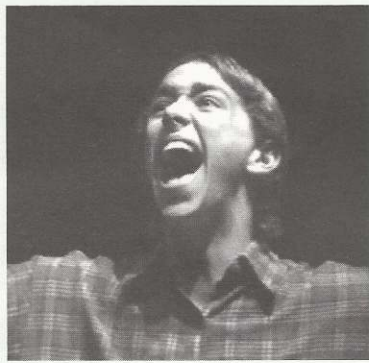
The rainmaker, played by Floyd



Otto, as weary father



Sonja as desperate Lizzie



Brother Jimmy, played by Anadi

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- One year subscription rate: India Rs. 250; other countries Can \$51, EU € 37, US \$38, UK £25.
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