

Auroville Today

NOVEMBER 2009, No.249

Auroville's monthly news magazine since 1988

Auroville always seems to be in movement, but one area where experimentation seems particularly pronounced at the moment is education. In this issue we look at four interesting new initiatives.

Two of Auroville's outreach schools, Aikiyam primary school and New Era Secondary School, have started to work with a new syllabus created by India's Central Board of Secondary Education, which eminently fits with the ideals of integral education.

In the Botanical Gardens, some Aurovillian parents and teachers are experimenting with 'open classroom' learning for a small group of children. They call it 'The Learning Community'. Over in Sadhana Forest, an innovative three year Environmental Leadership Course for 'anybody, any age' is underway.

Finally, we profile a programme which, for many years, has been bringing American students to Auroville on short-term courses: Living Routes.



PHOTO GIOSIO

Aikiyam School students (left to right) Immanuel, Velvizhi, Murali, Arul, Vignesh, Surendar, and Darshan (below the camera) learn about camera use from Surya during the Auroville Film Festival '09

Expanding Auroville's educational options

In order to ensure high-quality education for the local population two of Auroville's outreach schools, Aikiyam and New Era Secondary School, became affiliated to the Central Board of Secondary Education. This may benefit Auroville education as a whole.

Rod Hemsell joined Auroville in October 1968. He left in 1983 and returned in 2005, after having worked for more than twenty years as an educator in the USA. Upon his return he got involved with the educational scene in and around Auroville. Here he describes his work and vision.

"Soon after I came back, I started spending time in the classrooms of two of Auroville's outreach schools, New Creation Bilingual School and After School. I discovered that the level of education was deplorable. The teachers and support group were aware of this and wanted to change, but they were handicapped as the local population had acquired a bias towards certificated learning. They wanted their children to get secondary education and maybe college benefits. The easy way to do that was to have the students take the Tamil Nadu State Board examinations at the 8th, 10th and 12th standards. At New Creation the educational level went up to 8th and at After School to the 10th standard.

"Till the 7th standard, the children were enjoying a kind of child-centred activity-based learning programme which had been influenced by Dr. Heidi Watts of Antioch New England Graduate School in the USA. Heidi is an activity-based learning specialist who had been advising the Auroville schools during her regular visits over the past 10 years. Her work notwithstanding, the curriculum they followed was quite haphazard.

"To prepare for the exams, the children were going into memorisation mode. The preparation to pass the Tamil Nadu State Board examinations is very traditional. There is no concept of student-initiated learning, only of pure rote-learning. The students were trying to memorize very poorly written materials which even the teachers were often not able to explain. The teachers would read a paragraph and the students would parrot back the paragraph. The State Board examinations are multiple

short-answer questions. In history, for example, the student would be asked to answer a hundred random factual questions that they are expected to have memorised. I noticed that in those classes the children were not learning anything; and they were not doing very well in the examinations, even after such rote learning.

"Meanwhile I had also started helping as annual report writer and editor for Auroville's Sri Aurobindo International Institute for Educational Research, SAIIER. I looked at all the material that was being presented to SAIIER by the schools. I was told by SAIIER that since a few years they had been interested in applying for some kind of recognition for the outreach schools. But it hadn't gone beyond writing some letters of enquiry to various organisations and getting back information about what they would need to do. Nobody was following up.

Researching the programmes

"I started research to find out which educational programmes and which affiliation might be best. My aims were twofold: to raise the standard of educational study for students from the villages and to try to get beyond this fixation with the Tamil Nadu State Board examinations. The options I studied were the Indira Gandhi Open School, the Central Board of Secondary Education, the Tamil Nadu Matriculation Board, the British 'O' and 'A' levels, and the International Baccalaureate.

"During this research I discovered that in 2005, the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) had published an educational reform strategy. The NCERT is the apex resource organisation set up by the Government of India to advise the Central and State Governments on academic matters related to school education. Earlier, in the nineties, the NCERT had produced a very critical report on the state of education in the country known as the Yash Pal Report. Then they published the National Curriculum Framework 2005 (NCF). I

was very impressed by it. It is an absolutely progressive document, child-centred, activity-based, and as far as the theory of learning goes, absolutely correct. It is what the Auroville schools have done at their best, though not always that well.

"On the basis of the concepts laid out in the NCF, the NCERT started creating textbooks. They were a revelation to me. I rate them as 'excellent', comparable to the best in the world. I have been a teacher and a principal of progressive schools in the USA for the last 20 years and have designed curricula for schools and this is very much on the same line. The textbooks are well-written, colourful, intelligent and have activities on practically every page. A teacher can actually just do the activities and not necessarily teach the text, and the children learn through doing, discovering and being creative. I felt that this material was eminently suitable to Auroville.

The CBSE programme

"The organisation of the Central Government that is responsible for secondary education is the Central Board of Secondary Education, CBSE. They adopted the new NCERT syllabus and textbooks for both primary and secondary education. But the CBSE is an elite educational programme, available to only 10% of the students in the country. The CBSE has created schools around the country primarily for the children of IAS officers, doctors, lawyers, professional citizens who are themselves highly educated and require good education for their children. The schools employ highly qualified teachers, and are accountable to the Central Government.

"I proposed that New Creation Bilingual School and After School adopt this system. The question was, can we do it? In order for students to be in this programme and qualify for the CBSE certificates, the school has to be formally affiliated to the CBSE. I looked at the affiliation process, and it looked doable. I made presentations to the

Auroville School Board and the SAIIER Board, and after some months, with Heidi Watt's help, we convinced everybody that we should go for it. SAIIER, however, did not want to be the agency applying for it so I was given the green light to apply for these two schools independently.

"We started the affiliation process. At the same time we introduced the NCERT/CBSE textbooks and started training teachers to use the materials. That was in 2006-2007. The CBSE sent principals of CBSE schools in Tamil Nadu to inspect our schools and programmes and were pleased that we had everything already in place. After overcoming some legal hurdles – there were some problems understanding the legal status of the Auroville Foundation and its schools, which were solved with the help of Dr. Karan Singh and the Foundation Secretary – we received our affiliation around August 2008. Meanwhile New Creation Bilingual School changed its name to Aikiyam School (the word Aikiyam means 'harmony, oneness, unity' in both Tamil and Sanskrit); and After School became New Era Secondary School (NESS).

Students' results

"As newly affiliated schools we were supposed to wait for two years before sending students for examinations, so that we would have time to properly prepare them. Since we had already introduced the programme, our request to waive this requirement for our 12th standard students was accepted. In summer this year, our first batch of eight 12th standard graduates took the CBSE examinations. It was a success. Only one student failed in one examination, the others passed with quite good marks and are now in colleges.

"All of the students, in fact, did much better than expected. They passed the exams without having had the normal CBSE preparations for the 6th up to 10th standards. They only had been taught the materials of the 11th and 12th standards.

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Expanding Auroville's educational options

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"We expect that the students who will appear for 10th examinations this year (2009-10) will do even better, because they have been better prepared in the CBSE methods from the 7th standard onwards. Moreover, in line with the NCF recommended reforms, the CBSE has now eliminated the 10th standard examination from 2011 onwards for students who stay in the same school until the 12th standard. This means that our students can have a continuous learning experience from 6th-12th, without public examinations.

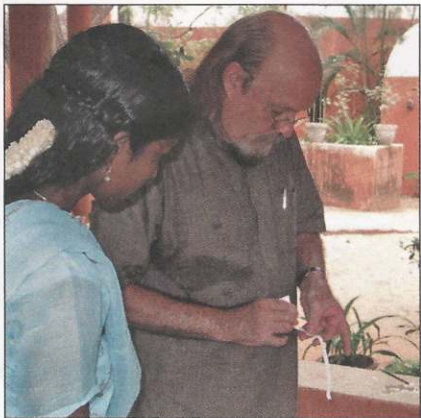
"Today, after three years in the CBSE programme, we see that the students have made considerable improvements in terms of language usage, creativity, quickness of response, conceptual development and engagement in learning. There has been a very measurable success, and the standards of education have been raised by many levels.

"Aikiyam is now preparing students well up to 8th standard; then they can move to New Era Secondary School for their 9th to 12th standards. NESS has also the possibility to enrol students from other schools, such as from Udavi in Edaiyanchavadi. Udavi has an integral education programme, although it follows the Tamil Nadu Matriculation Board system for the 8th and 10th standard. We have already taken in Udavi students and found them to be equal to or better than students from other schools. We have also enrolled promising students from the Kulapalayam Trust School and even from Pondicherry. Most children we teach come from families that are closely associated to Auroville. Many of them are prospective Aurovilians, and like so many previous students of After School, will eventually have a lot to contribute to the community.

"So, as of today, there are three options for students of Auroville's outreach schools. One is the Tamil Nadu State Board examinations. The Kulapalayam Trust School, which has about 1000 students, targets this system. They teach in both English and Tamil and have geared their programme for the population from the surrounding villages, who in general do not have a high level of English proficiency. Udavi follows the Tamil Nadu Matriculation system although they have a strong English medium preparation. And then there are the two CBSE schools.

CBSE for Auroville schools?

"The question has been raised if the CBSE system should also be introduced in the Auroville schools. There are a few problems here. One is that Auroville's primary schools (Transition and Deepanam) don't have a curriculum that follows a 1st to 8th grade sequence.



Rod Hemsell with a NESS student

Teachers are free to do what they like with their groups and often bring in materials from different countries. This can lead to duplication of effort at different levels and gaps in the education sequence. If you compare the CBSE syllabus to what is now being used at Auroville's primary schools, you'll find that the CBSE syllabus is superior with

respect to scope and sequence.

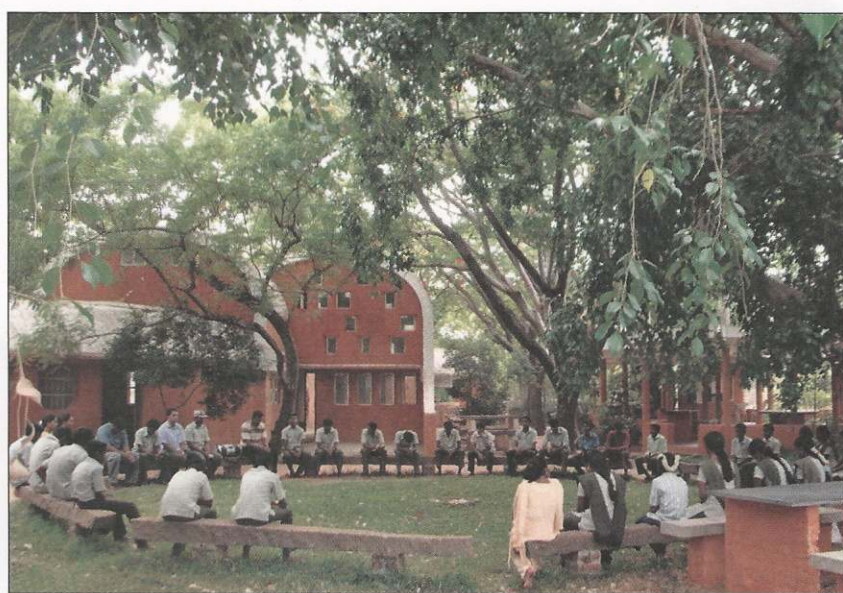
"A second problem is that all Auroville schools work with volunteer teachers, who for the most part do not have any formal training or certification, either in their subject areas or in the field of education. Under the CBSE, we must employ formally qualified teachers. All of the teachers at New Era Secondary School have degrees in their field and in education, and many have Masters' degrees.

"That leads to the third problem. The CBSE schools have to pay competitive salaries starting at around Rs 8,000 a month with regular raises. The teachers at the Auroville schools receive an Auroville maintenance of about Rs 6,000.

"For these reasons, adopting a CBSE affiliation for Auroville schools is not easy. I recommend instead that the primary schools consider adopting the CBSE syllabi without formally affiliating themselves to the CBSE. Then they would cover that area of deficiency which is now a handicap for both teachers and students; and they would have a systematic content in line with the ideals of Auroville while still being able to use their creativity and additional resources to supplement the syllabus.

"I am speaking here about content, not about methodology. However, it is likely that I would find myself in disagreement with those in Auroville who believe that methodology, such as 'free progress', 'integral education' or 'activity-based learning' is always more important than content. Learning about 20th century changes in human geography and the human development index, for example, is important in the content of any methodology. Methodology and content are equally important.

"If there is a common or comparable preparation, the students who leave



Morning assembly at NESS

any of the primary schools can then decide where they want to study next. I expect that Tamil families of Auroville, who so far have sent their children to Pondicherry schools or to Kulapalayam Trust School, would then send them to NESS. Other students may opt to study at Future School for the English 'O' and 'A' levels, which are comparable to the CBSE 10th and 12th standards; or they may decide to join Last School which doesn't specifically educate to pass exams.

Vision for the future

"The CBSE programme may help in bringing new people, like Indian professionals who are familiar with the CBSE standard of education, to Auroville. Our immediate steps are to pursue Government of India funding to build a science lab, because we cannot teach science and qualify for the CBSE science track without it. Right now, we are only entitled to teach the humanities.

"This brings me to a vision of the future. Pondicherry has only two other CBSE schools, one nearby JIP-

MER, the other next to PIMS in Kalapet. It is conceivable that the Auroville CBSE schools would host outside students along with those from the local population and from Auroville. It is also conceivable that, in the longer term, a residential facility could be provided if an adequate campus could be developed. That would enable families outside Auroville to send their children here for education, because we would have a well-developed campus in an international setting.

"We recently submitted to the Auroville Foundation and to L'Avenir d'Auroville a plan for the development of the present Last School campus into a future CBSE campus - once Last School has moved to the centre of Auroville. Both were supportive of the idea. Such a development would guarantee a high standard of education for Auroville's students, students coming from the surrounding villages, and possibly students coming from outside. It might also provide income for Auroville. But this is still a possibility for the future."

In conversation with Carel

"Now, I want you to tell me what life is like in a Tamil village. Tell me the kinds of things you do. In English, remember."

Hands shoot up. "We use our hands when we eat." "Ladies put flowers in their hair." "Men wear lungis, women saris." "We don't use a proper toilet".

"Ah," Shankar pauses. "You remember we talked about Harappa and those other cities from thousands of years ago that are now being excavated?" "Yes." "Imagine that your villages are covered with a huge layer of dust, and many years in the future people excavate them. What conclusions will they draw about how you lived? Well, one thing they will say is that they were an uncivilized people because they didn't have toilets."

The class goes silent. Suddenly a girl puts up her hand.

"Another thing that happens in the villages is that girls get up earlier than the boys."

"Yes," Shankar walks behind two of the boys and puts his arms round their shoulders. "So why do the girls have to get up earlier? Perhaps because our little maharajas here need their morning tea?" Everybody laughs.

"Now," Shankar puts his hands together and glances round the room. "Suppose that somebody comes to your villages from a place far away. He asks about your customs and you tell him, 'Oh, when somebody dies we play music and let off fire crackers.' He will say, 'How can you do this? You should be quiet, dignified. All this has to be changed.' What will you say to him?"

For a moment, silence. Then a small girl in the front row speaks up. "We won't let him change us." "But," says Shankar, "suppose I'm that man and I have lots of money. You know how things are done in the village. I'll go to the headman and offer him some land. I'll get him on my side."

"Then we'll call the police," says another student. "No problem," says Shankar.

The class goes quiet. "You see," says Shankar, "It's not so easy to oppose the powerful. But there have been examples."

He walks to a map of India hanging in front of the classroom and sweeps his hand across Bihar, Orissa and West Bengal. "This area was known as Chhotanagpur and 150 years ago a man did stand up to the most powerful people at that time, who

Learning to think

Shankar is the Principal of Aikiyam School, an outreach day-school for 200 children from the nearby villages. Here Shankar takes a class of 8th graders



Shankar with a class at Aikiyam School

happened to be the British. His name was Birs Munda. He was also standing up to the local landlords who were cheating the tribals out of their lands. Now, what is a tribal?"

"Someone who lives by a river?"

Shankar laughs. "You're thinking that 'tribal' sounds like 'tributary' so the two must be connected. But no."

"Are they people from the Colony?" [The Colony is a part of some villages where members of the scheduled castes, formerly known as 'Untouchables', live separately. eds.]

"No. The tribals have quite different customs from you...."

"Like the gypsies?"

"Yes. But the people from the Colony live just like you. So why do you think they are different?"

Shankar walks around the room. "Now suppose that I'm a powerful man, I can arrange all kinds of things and I find a girl from the Colony for Muni here to marry. What will Muni's father say? What will you say, Muni? Will you marry her?"

Muni shakes his head.

"No? Why not? I promise you she's beautiful. Why won't you marry someone from the Colony?"

"They are low-caste," says one boy.

"What does that mean?" asks Shankar.

"They have no manners, they don't keep their homes nice," says a girl.

"Oh," says Shankar. "And you think everybody in your caste has good manners and a nice clean home?"

"It's always been like this," says another boy. "It's how our grandfathers organized it."

"But your grandfather died twenty years ago," says Shankar, "and today is today. So what do you think? Is it a good arrangement? Because if it's not, you can change it."

"But they look after dead bodies," says another boy.

Silence.

"O.K.," says Shankar, seating himself comfortably on the edge of a desk. "Let's talk about something called 'division of labour'. Have you heard of this? No? It's a very important idea in economics. It's like this. Say there are three carpenters

who work together. One enjoys cutting and planing wood, another likes making the joints and putting together the different pieces, and the third one likes finishing and polishing the product. Over time each becomes very good at what they are doing but none of them is good at everything. So they all need each other if they are making a chair or table. This is a little bit like the difference between castes. Originally each caste had a speciality, but they all needed each other in order to live."

Shankar gets up and walks over to a boy in the back row. "Erumalai. If I give you a pair of scissors will you give me a hair-cut?"

"No."

"Why not? I'll pay you well."

"I don't know how to do it."

"Right. That's why you have people from the barber caste who are trained to do this. And there are people who will come and take away the dead body when somebody dies. Or would you prefer to do this yourself, Erumalai?"

"No!"

"But it has to be done, yes?"

"Yes."

"So caste is like a division of labour," Shankar walks quietly to the front of the class. "So is there anything wrong with caste? Think about your villages, think about the Colony."

Silence. Then...

"It's bad when it separates people," says one boy.

"Ah."

The bell rings. In one hour the lesson has ranged across history, economics, geography, sanitation, local politics, caste. Shankar has moved easily around the room, now joking with, now challenging, this lively class of 12 year olds. Not only does he know them all well, he knows their parents and grandparents as well as the history and local politics of the villages they come from. He is helping them to think about themselves and the society they live in, to engage with the big issues like power and caste, but in a way which includes everybody; which allows everybody to feel they are making an important contribution.

It's a powerful reminder that, with all the talk about new curricula and teaching aids, there's no substitute for those inspiring teachers who, as Socrates put it, are 'midwives of souls'.

Alan

A comprehensive film on Auroville is not possible

A large number of documentaries on Auroville were shown during the Auroville Film Festival '09, made by visiting film-makers as well as by Aurovilians. The responses of the Auroville public ranged from applause to anger. OutreachMedia talks about the difficulties and challenges of making films on Auroville.

“It’s virtually impossible to make an Auroville documentary,” says Ann, one of the seven members of OutreachMedia. “That was the conclusion of Gérard Perrier, a French film-maker from La Réunion who came to do a film on Auroville. I showed him around. He was overwhelmed; Auroville is simply too diverse.”

OutreachMedia, the working group that helps film-makers film Auroville, admits that a good documentary showing Auroville in all its aspects is still lacking. “Gérard may be right,” says Mauna. “None of the films shown at the festival gave a complete picture; many were one-sided, some gave wrong information, others gave information which was not pleasing to at least part of the audience.”

She gives a few examples. “The film *Auroville City of the Future* by Chander Mathura, produced for OHM TV in The Netherlands, gave wrong information about Sri Aurobindo in explaining the spiritual background of Auroville. It moreover contained many shots that had nothing to do with Auroville. The film *Exploring Alternatives* by Kwon Tae Chul, produced for Arirang TV, Korea, gave a lot of factual information about Auroville but didn’t touch the ideals. The film *Greetings from Auroville* by Gérard Carabin, an Aurovillian, was perceived by some as being ‘too rosy’, with too much talk about the ideals and too little of reality. None of them are really satisfactory, though all of them contain good material.”

Says Ann: “We Aurovilians have a certain Aurovillian ego. We would like a film-maker to show an image of Auroville that is pleasing to us, and we hope, to the outside. But it doesn’t work like that. Film-makers have their eyes and see that Aurovilians are not necessarily angels!” “Moreover”, adds Robert, “they look not only for information but also for some drama, for ‘the salt in the soup’. There is no way in which we can control this.”

Fabienne gives another example. “Take the film *Auroville, the city the earth needs* by Guillaume Estivie. It was disliked by some as most of the people who were interviewed spoke negatively about Auroville; but others applauded the film for its honesty. The film was made at a time, early 2007, when many people were tired and were questioning Auroville. And that’s what the film shows, their uneasiness with Auroville. The film is a moment in time.” Robert adds, “Many people actually liked the film, precisely because it didn’t present a rosy picture.”

Penny, who is a film-maker herself, mentions the need to study films not only for the message they convey, but also for their visual style. “Many documentaries made here are just talking heads with portable imagery, like radio but with pictures. If someone explains the ideals of Auroville against the backdrop of the Matrimandir, it’s experienced as propaganda. But Guillaume was filming people in action and using visual transitions from one subject to the next, a much more cinematic approach. I didn’t mind that some spoke negatively. It made the positive more positive. And the commentary in that particular film was excellent.”

Free shooting?

So does OutreachMedia allow film-makers to film without constraints?

“Yes and no,” says Mauna. “We don’t try to indoctrinate film-makers, but we do try to let them see what Auroville is all about. We talk with them to determine who they could best interview, help them make appointments, and go around with them. We also give them a small list of do’s and don’ts and a ‘press sheet’ of up-to-date factual information. But we cannot impose our views on what or how they should film.”

Penny adds: “Most film-makers come for a limited period with an idea of what they want

to do. For many, Auroville is just one more place, one more subject. But when they are here, all kinds of new ideas come pouring in and often they cannot absorb everything they experience. Then they realize that they can’t shoot a film on Auroville in two to three weeks. But often they lack the time and finances to extend their stay. This leads to confusion.”

“We have learned that the more we try to control a film-maker, the more we get a reaction,” says Tim. “They think we are trying to use them to get a particular image of Auroville or that we are trying to hide something. We have to be careful to steer a middle path, to give all the information and help we can, while at the same time giving them freedom to assess Auroville and draw their own conclusions. We are preparing a list of

very basic information on Auroville which we would ideally like to be included in every documentary on Auroville. But we cannot impose it.”

At times the OutreachMedia team has to say ‘no’ to certain synopses submitted to them as these entirely fall outside the scope of the Auroville experiment. Quite an elaborate screening process takes place before the team issues its ‘letter of recommendation’ to the Auroville Foundation.

Once the shooting is over, OutreachMedia often loses contact with the film-maker. “Promises are made during the shooting, but not always kept. The film gets made at the editing stage, which is beyond our control,” says Robert. “We always ask them to send us the final transcript, so that we can ensure that the facts, at least, are correct. But film-makers don’t always oblige, so sometimes a film contains mistakes. And often the film-makers don’t keep their promise to send us a copy of the final product.”

The spiritual side

“The majority of those who come to film Auroville know nothing about its vision,” says Ann. “They have their own ideas; they always try to equate Auroville with other ‘spiritual’ movements in the world. To explain that Auroville’s evolutionary endeavour is different from spirituality in the traditional sense is a huge problem. I just spent three weeks with a film team from La Réunion, and this was the difficult issue.” Adds Tim, “film-makers usually expect to film collective meditations, bhajan singings and similar traditional expressions of what most people consider spiritual life. But there is none of that in Auroville.”

Fabienne agrees. “Many film-makers simply avoid the issue, partly because they consider it too complicated for their viewers and partly because of the sect-scare. They show the practical work being done, such as the research at CSR, the afforestation work, the units and so on. But those films never truly satisfy us. Sometimes they are experienced as ‘too sustainability-oriented’.” Adds Robert: “The documentary produced for OHM TV was the rare exception. But to our amazement, the film-maker initially didn’t consider it necessary to even mention The Mother. We had long discussions with him about this. Other film-makers often feel no need to refer to Sri Aurobindo.”

“Depicting Auroville’s true aim and call is not only a problem for the film-makers,” says Mauna. “The Auroville International Centres recently asked that the Auroville website be reviewed. They agree with members of the Auroville International Advisory Council who had expressed uneasiness with how Auroville’s ideology is being conveyed to the wider public,



The OutreachMedia team. From left: Rob, Tim, Vinodhini, Fabienne and Mauna. (Missing: Ann and Penny)

and emphasized that they fear this would give the impression that we are a sect. The Centres have been struggling with this notion from the very beginning.”

“It’s very much a cultural issue,” says Vinodhini. “I have observed that Western media often seem uncomfortable with the more subtle aspects of Auroville’s vision. The Indian public has no problem with these. Obviously, what works for one country doesn’t work for another.”

“But I wouldn’t agree to giving Auroville’s evolutionary aspect a backseat in our presentations,” says Fabienne. “Often this is totally overlooked, simply because people don’t know how to handle it. But many of us came just for that. I didn’t come here to do afforestation or alternative energy or even to build a city. I came because I am attracted to Auroville’s spiritual ideals, of which outer work is only a means. I have noticed that also people who originally came to Auroville for an external work got touched – as if their soul had used their interest in that particular external activity to push them to come to Auroville.”

“Even if a film doesn’t talk much about the high vision behind Auroville, sometimes it becomes evident through the interviews with Aurovilians,” says Ann. “I have been present at interviews where answers were given from

the inner perspective, sometimes incredibly intimate, and that is very touching. The impact of those interviews also affects the film-maker. For them, filming Auroville became an experience.”

Perspectives on the future

“You may expect to see many more films on Auroville,” says Mauna. “The government regulations on making films in India are increasingly being circumvented by films shot by people on travel, who use their handycams or mobile phones to shoot a film which they afterwards publish on the Internet. There is nothing we can do about that. Our mandate is to assist official film-makers with their filming, by which I mean those who work for a broadcasting or production company or are freelancers, whether foreign or Indian, because the latter also have to obtain permission to film in Auroville. But of course, any other sincere request is always taken into consideration as well.”

“There will also be an increase of films made by Indians,” predicts Vinodhini. “The procedure to shoot a film in India is not that complicated for an Indian, and there are more local requests coming in. Documentaries are relatively new for India, but they are gearing up for it.”

In conversation with Carel

Conditions for filming in Auroville

1. While most areas in Auroville may be used for filming with due permission arranged by OutreachMedia, shooting is not permitted in certain areas, including: inside Matrimandir, schools, beach areas, meditations and meetings, and at any other events or places indicated by OutreachMedia.

2. Filming in Auroville may be restricted to certain times and dates because Auroville events take precedence over film shoots.

3. No filming will be authorised for advertising, promoting tourism or other promotional ‘commercial’ clips.

4. No filming will be authorised for use of Auroville locations in feature films.

5. The filming permit does not allow unauthorised usage of Auroville archive material or stock footage.

6. Auroville/OutreachMedia is not responsible for any loss or damage to the person/s and property belonging to the film crew during their stay in the township.

7. The name and symbol of Auroville are protected by the Government of India under the Emblems & Names (Prevention of Improper Use) Act; unauthorised use of the same will be subject to legal consequences.

8. The financial contribution towards the services of OutreachMedia will be jointly determined, and paid before the actual filming starts.

9. OutreachMedia will cancel its recommendation in case of violation of Indian law and intimate the same to concerned authorities.

10. In case the film disparages Auroville, one of its projects, or one of its inhabitants, a right of reply within the same film will be given and incorporated in the final broadcast/screened version.

11. OutreachMedia is to be notified of the first broadcast date of the production, and a DVD of the same is to be sent to OutreachMedia. Due acknowledgement of OutreachMedia is to be given in the film’s credits.

12. The filming crew are to be aware of the prevailing cultural sensitivities of Auroville’s bio-region and are expected to conduct themselves appropriately towards local people, as well as towards Auroville’s residents.



PHOTO COURTESY OUTREACHMEDIA

How is the programme structured?

Ethan: We do a three-week orientation where the students discover what Auroville is about, and introduce the programme - many of the students are in a traditional U.S. college programme and it's a very different format here. Then they do a five to six weeks internship when they work in an Auroville unit or work place. We call this 'service-learning' because during this time they contribute their work and time to the larger community.

What choices do they have for internships?

Martin: This time the options included Solitude Farm, WELL paper, Upasana, Rangoli, the Earth Institute bamboo project and AVRradio.

Bindu: What we are looking for are places with a strong mentor for the students. If possible, we also like the place of work to be connected in some way with sustainability. This we define in very broad terms: outer sustainability, intersubjective (working and living with others) and personal sustainability.

Ethan: During these six weeks we also teach the bulk of our seminars. In the mornings the students work in an Auroville unit and in the afternoons they have courses on topics like global and local sustainability, group dynam-

How does this differ from a typical college course in the U.S.?

Ethan: For one thing, we are together much of the time. We call this is our 'learning community': it's where we talk about not only the academic side of things but whatever else we are feeling or concerns us.

Priya: It's a much more integrated approach to education than you would find in a traditional American college. When you learn about environmental issues in Auroville, you also see how they directly affect people. The learning outside the classroom is huge. Also, the component of service makes it stand apart from most other programmes in the U.S.

Bindu: It's very much experiential education. We also consider it transformative. It's very challenging for these students, who have never left the U.S. and come from privileged backgrounds, to be suddenly thrown into 'Third World dynamics' and this can result in huge personal change. We believe each student has a unique gift to offer, so we are not looking at cramming people with knowledge. Rather, we're trying to be midwives of change in them.

Ethan: The spiritual aspect generally would not be part of a traditional academic course. We do yoga and meditation five days a week, we go on a one week meditation retreat and the students



The Living Routes team: Ethan, Priya, Bindu and Martin

Some Aurovilians resent outside agencies bringing students for courses in Auroville because they feel the community is in some sense being 'used'. What is your response to this?

Martin: I've received the same feedback from Aurovilians and I think they have a valid point to some extent. I think the Living Routes syllabus is great and the programme is fantastic. However, I feel it's a pity that this course is mainly run by outside faculty and that Auroville has not yet managed to come up with its own programme.. The internships are crucial here, because this is when the students go out and interact with mentors and other Aurovilians, but it's not enough. So, as a next step, we have initiated a series of seminars on different aspects of sustainability on Saturday mornings which are open not only to Living Routes students but to all Aurovilians.

Bindu: This Integral Sustainability Seminar series, jointly offered by University of Human Unity, is moderated by Living Routes faculty. By bringing together Aurovilians working on different initiatives and by linking local initiatives in sustainability to the global context, we help Aurovilians to work towards more integrated solutions and also remind them that Auroville should not just focus on itself but try to creatively engage with the problems of the world.

Martin: I'm also concerned that the Living Routes students can become a separate entity in Auroville, that they can isolate themselves in a U.S. 'bubble'

Ethan: The Aurovillian inputs are crucial for the Living Routes course. If the Living Routes students don't get connected to India and Auroville, then what's the point? They could have learned the same things in the U.S.

Bindu: Personally, I would wish that rather than rich, bored tourists, young, enthusiastic students come to Auroville. It would be great if Aurovilians could develop their own educational programmes that would attract students. This would most likely result in a greater economic benefit for Auroville. There is some movement in this regard, but to be honest, none of the current educational initiatives have the rigour of an academic university in the West.

Study abroad in Auroville, an international community along the tropical coast of southern India dedicated to promoting human unity. Participate in an academic program that fosters collaborative inquiry, critical thinking, and dialogue while exploring daily awareness practices such as yoga, non-violent communication, and meditation.

Through engagement with a holistic approach to world issues that encompasses inner, cultural, and outer processes, you broaden and deepen your understanding of sustainability issues. ... Empower yourself and learn to empower others through a process whereby what you learn is integrated with how you live.

From the Living Routes website

Open classroom

The Learning Community is a new
consists of seven children, aged
adults with a larger group of enti

Monday morning. A beautiful thatched room in Botanical Inside, small groups of adults scattered around, quietly reading together, their heads bent close. When I approach they look up.

"Let's come together and tell Alan about Community," suggests someone. In a few moments I'm in a circle and I'm facing these shining eyes.

"So, what is The Learning Community? How do you recruit students from other schools?"

"We don't have a fixed schedule." "We months." "All the different ages are mixed together, no *ammass* so we wash our own dishes." "Our class one."

Natasha picks up on the last point.

“Tell him more about the open classroom. For whoever comes by. How it’s open to whatever ha

"The other day a scorpion spider came in," say Edén, "and we spent the whole morning looking at was covered by pincers and he had a broken anten-

"We try to connect a lot with nature," explain "Yeah, when we went to Johnny's we named tried rounding up the chickens," says nine and a ha "Johnny also helped us make furniture and we things."

"For the 'Zoom'," says nine year old Zea. Pardon?

"When we visited my dad's family in England, my grandfather had a go-cart, a zoom, which we all thought why not make an electric one in Auroville. We agreed. So we needed some money."



The open classroom in the Botanical

The prospect of the Zoom made everybody in “One day we went picking tamarinds and tamarind shop. We stopped everybody who passed by and ran to see,” says Edén. “Some were really grumpy but some were happy. I was 100 and we only had to give him Rs 15 back.”

Training enviro

On September 1st 2009, an ambitious Auroville's Sadhana Forest: a 3-year with 16 participants from all over the

“Several issues led us to this programme,” says Avira. “One was the perception that we need to share the knowledge we have in Auroville with others. The second was to pursue the idea of Auroville having a university in the future, and see what that means in practical terms.

"We wanted to offer a long-term residential educational programme. Often courses offered at Auroville are 2-3 weeks, occasionally a month long. But a medium time-frame allows only a certain depth; one can't really get into the subject. I like giving a teaspoon of everything, but if you want a bigger portion, you'll have to go somewhere else. But we have the material available here, why not disseminate it on a more diverse and more in-depth level?"

"So we started. We selected 35 people from the more than two thousand volunteers who worked over the years at Sadhana Forest, and invited them to join the programme. We selected the people as we had noticed that they have potential for leadership. From these, 16 people jumped board. They are very diverse. The youngest is the oldest 35. Four are from India; the others come from Macedonia, Australia, France, Germany, United States, the United Kingdom and Ireland. They have different skills. Some have worked environmental conservation; others have managed a restaurant and so on. They live and work at Sadhana Forest free of cost – this means free food and stay, and some get also a pocket money. The

From an interview by Alan

om, open minds

educational experiment. At present it 7 – 9 years, and a core group of six enthusiastic supporters.

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Garden ventive. hen we made a ade them pay," one gave us Rs

The idea of a different kind of learning experience involving integral learning in an open classroom had been around in Auroville for some time. "But then some of us did a retreat and somehow the idea came to the front with the very clear guidance that now was the time to do it," explains Natasha. "We had no experience," says Fabrice, "but we knew someone who has been doing this kind of work for 30 years and she told us, 'Do it. It's working everywhere else, so why shouldn't it work here?'"

"We had a meeting with the SAI-IER School Board last year," says Matilde, "and told them what we wanted to do. They told us to try it for one year. We get no financial support, except for a maintenance given by the Human Resource Team. We get food from the Solar Kitchen, like the other schools, but otherwise we have to fund ourselves. What we need most is funding for the field trips we take each month."

"We went to Gingee," says Zea. "It was very windy and Luna is so skinny and light she nearly blew away." "We ate Maggi noodles, it was so windy the noodles were flying and it looked like noodle rain. Then we slept in an old granary," recalls seven year old Jasmine.

They have all just returned from a one week trip to Hampi "Hampi was great! We spent all day exploring." All of them were in regular Auroville schools before. Do they miss anything now?

"It's great here but I miss some of my friends," says Zea. "I still see them at sports but it's not like having them next to you at snack." "I miss computer class," says Luna.

Does this mean they have less choice now? "Not at all," says Matilde. "The kids here do all kinds of things – dance, swimming, clay work, aerobics, Awareness through the Body – in addition to more conventional subjects like reading, maths and Tamil. If they want something we cannot provide we find someone who can. Aloé, my daughter, wants to learn German so I found a German teacher. Auroville is the perfect place to do this kind of experiment because it's so rich in human resources."

But why the need for this open classroom experiment? Is there something wrong with the existing Auroville schools?

"This experiment is the expression of a group of adults and children who wish to learn together in their own way, along the lines of integral education. We want to co-exist with other Auroville schools in a harmonious way," says Aikiya.

"I think the Auroville schools are doing a fantastic job," says Natasha. "Everybody is doing their best but they are working within certain limitations. One of them is the large class size."



From the left: Edén, Jasmine, Aloé, Luna, Sagarika, Zea

"When you have a big class, you have to organize it so that all the kids are doing maths at the same time," explains Fabrice. "But only two of them might really want to be doing maths at that time and in that way. So as a teacher you spend a lot of energy attracting the attention of the others and wasting a lot of time on discipline issues because you are imposing things on the kids. In that system you can't cater to what they individually want, you can't implement a natural learning process."

"For me," says Paulien, "one of the essentials is that life itself can be the learning: just by being out of a contained space there are so many opportunities to learn just by living."

So is there no structure at all in The Learning Community? Paulien explains that most mornings the students are free to choose what they want to work on but every afternoon there is an hour of structured time, which is generally dedicated to writing or maths. On Tuesdays there are organized classes all day.

"We adults definitely have a directive function," clarifies Natasha. "I don't know if this is ideal but a lot of our daily direction comes in simple things. For example, when we sit together in a circle we ask them to sit up. Then there are times in the day when we decide, O.K. now we going to have a quiet time."

"Since they have so much free time already, it's no problem for them to be structured for two hours," adds Fabrice.

How does this change the role of teachers?

"We think of ourselves as guides, facilitators, not teachers," says Paulien. "Actually, we adults learn from the children as much as they hopefully get from us. Also, none of us had taught in an open school before."

"We had to unlearn certain things," says Natasha. "For

example, the kids would be busy doing something, and then there would be a lull – nothing much seemed to be going on. My first reaction was always to step in and propose something. It's not easy to really allow that gap and see what emerges next."

"I had to stop coming in the mornings," admits Matilde. "I'm very much a 'doing' person and I was terrified nothing was happening – even though a lot is happening. I'm O.K. with the afternoons which are more structured. I guess I need more time to adjust!"

"The idea is for everyone to feel alive," says Natasha. "So if you're at a point where you feel nothing is happening, then you should move out of that space or you come to that space in your own time."

"It's more about being than about doing," says Fabrice. "Everybody in the world is so busy doing, we are disconnected from ourselves. When you reconnect, then something within you will tell you if what you are doing is right or wrong. As adults, most of us have to spend ten years in meditation to undo this frenzy of doing. Why not start early?"

Fair enough. But with a teacher: student ratio of almost 1:1, isn't this a very privileged experiment? How replicable is it?

"We could probably double the size of our little group with our existing resources, but beyond that we would have to find more adults willing to be part of this process," explains Natasha.

"To make this happen in the long term asks something from Auroville at large," says Paulien. "It would mean every unit, every Auroville workplace, would be open to this learning by living. They would be welcoming the children, integrating them into the larger community. We have to stop thinking that only the schools are responsible for the education of the children. Auroville in its totality has to raise its children."

At the end of the year how will they decide whether the experience has been a success?

"We'll simply ask the children," says Matilde.

"You see it already," says Fabrice. "It's the spark in their eyes, the inner fire, the joy of being."

"We are trying hard to keep records, to document the process, but, ultimately, it's intuitive," says Natasha. "If something is not going well, you will see it in them but you will also feel it in yourself. But we're not interested in knowing whether The Learning Community is a success or not just so that we can establish a new structure. It isn't a methodology or a structure, we are simply trying to keep an openness to life and learning, so it will continuously take new forms."

As long as every day is an adventure we go on," concludes Paulien.

"Time for snack," announces Edén.

Alan

onmental leaders

ous educational experiment got rolling at Environmental Leadership Programme ne world. Aviram Rozin explains the project.

his programme started on 1st September 2009, and will end September 2012. "We will give them a very diverse picture of sustainability: of health, community, economy, housing, energy, water, forest, organic farming and interpersonal and personal growth – it is about the many levels of being sustainable. It can be a permaculture workshop on how to design and work the land, a Tai-Chi workshop, a meeting with a classical homeopath, or a meditation. Most of the workshops are happening at Sadhana Forest, some elsewhere in Auroville. In this way the participants will get an all-Auroville experience with Sadhana Forest as their base. While the participants will join the regular work here and do courses, they'll also have the possibility for doing independent research. Sadhana Forest has wifi and a big collection of environmental films and books.

"The response from Auroville was very positive. Many Aurovilians are glad to participate and share their knowledge and offer workshops for free. Also the official bodies helped – the Auroville Volunteer and Intern Service, the Working Committee, as well as the Auroville Foundation office. We are very grateful for their support.

"The big question concerning the programme is funding. We are not very good at fund-raising, but have received some support from Fotosintesia in France, through Claire Chanut who made a film about Auroville. But we have developed a very strong trust that if you are doing the right thing, and your heart is in the right place, things will happen and the support will come from The Mother.



PHOTO COURTESY AVIRAM

The participants in the first 3-year Environmental Leadership programme

Sometimes She puts that trust to the test. Like in the last moment, when you are hanging by the last thread, suddenly the help will come. But then, after a while, you begin to understand what you were supposed to learn from this. So we trust that the funds will come.

"It is a big commitment to guarantee a high quality content for three years. We want to give the participants the best programmes possible, not only from Aurovilians but also from visitors and special invitees. We are collaborating with the Living Routes programme as well as the University of

Human Unity. We will soon host John Button, an Australian who will teach permaculture. He started the reforestation project on Arunachala in Thiruvannamalai. We would also love to invite Governing Board member Dr. B.V. Doshi here. When I read his interview in *Auroville Today*, I realised what an inspiring man he is! Similarly, we want to invite other members of the Board and Advisory Council to visit us here and perhaps give some lectures too. Shri Ajoy Bagchi, Dr. Doudou Diene and Dr. Vishakha N. Desai have been here and were very appreciative of our work.

"For me, the greatest thing about this programme is that young people are coming to Auroville full of motivation to contribute, to give, to create, and to grow. All the participants in the programme are very special people in that they are really on a path of giving and of sharing. I think it is a blessing for Auroville to attract this kind of people. Hopefully some of them will stay and continue being involved with Auroville."

In conversation with Priya Sundaravalli

For information, visit www.sadhanaforest.org

The performing arts are in Srinivassan's blood. His father, and also his mother's father, used to perform traditional street theatre in the local villages around Kulilpalayam. "All they had for props were three poles that acted as a frame for the performance, simple lighting and fantastic costumes. At festival times they would perform the classics such as the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* and stories from the *Puranas*," explains Srin. "The plays would start about ten in the evening and go on throughout the night; they were greatly enjoyed and appreciated by the local people. Since then, television has brought huge social changes. The simplicity of my childhood enjoyment of these performances has gone forever."

Srin's strong family background in Kulilpalayam village has obviously affected the direction his life has taken. "My father worked in the handmade paper department of the Ashram for many years. He remembers having seen *The Mother*. He would take my brother and me on his bicycle to school in Pondicherry. On Thursdays we had school for only half a day and he would take us to see classic films in Pondicherry. These made a great impression on me."

"To please him I did a B.A in Economics at Madras University and for six years worked as a computer technician in Aurelec. I did not enjoy this at all. In the evenings my friend and I would stage performances on social issues such as alcoholism, dowry problems, and issues of youth development. They were a great success in the local villages."

"My life changed completely when Dr. Assumpta, a Spanish doctor who worked at the Auroville Health Centre, took an interest in me. 'I can see you are an artist,' she told me." "And I will speak personally to your father and try and explain to him that it is very necessary for you to develop that side of your God given nature." She told him that I would be working with her in the Health Centre, and that seemed to satisfy him. She encouraged me to do stage shows and films on issues such as antenatal child care, nutritional awareness, personal hygiene, water sanitation, and so on. When she passed away in 2003, I had made 12 such films."

On Srin's *pooja* shrine, standing there amongst pictures and statues of the Gods, is a large photograph of Dr. Assumpta with a red hibiscus flower placed tenderly in front of it. "She sponsored me to go to Chennai to take a

A pilgrimage in the arts

Srinivassan carried off awards at the Auroville Film Festival '09.



Srin working on the set.

Diploma in Film Direction for one and a half years, and this gave me enormous confidence. I realized very clearly that this is what I wanted to do for the rest of my life. Just before she passed away she told me, 'Srin, artists are very few and they must not waste their energy. Do your film work and I will be watching you from above to keep an eye on you.' After her death the next stage of my life began."

"I worked at Palmyra in the editing studio for a year and in 2003 started *Yatra* Multimedia in my own house just outside New Creation. *Yatra* literally means 'Pilgrimage in the arts,' and this is how I see my path in life. My small company has a cameraman, a sound man and production assistants, all tried and trusted friends. Once a week for the Auroville Health Centre's Child-to-Child programme we visit three schools and show educational videos, give puppet and theatre shows on personal hygiene, environmental issues, sanitation – all the usual village problems. We still do the street theatre with twelve guys and we enjoy that a lot. Once every year we do performances for

Sangamam, the festival for Tamil workers. This is our way of contributing to our society."

"Although I am not Aurovilian I am constantly involved with Auroville and realize that I owe it everything that is good in my life. I was born in 1971 when my village was immersed in poverty and ignorance and I have seen huge changes due to the dedication and constant hard work of many Aurovilians. When I go to villages only 50 kilometres away from here and see the difference between their way of life and my village, I am always intensely grateful."

"I am hugely thankful, as many Tamil young people are, to so many Aurovilians who have helped and supported them over the years. Without their support, inspiration, friendship, and financial assistance I would not be doing what I am doing today. A Swedish man, Leif, who stays with our family when he is in Auroville, has become a great friend and supporter. Pallas from Avalokita, Holland, helped me a lot for the activities of the *Yatra* Arts Foundation."

"I worked with Dr. Lucas, from Eco-pro, on five films dealing with EM and eco-problems and learned a great deal from his expertise. Now I discuss my scripts with him. I am also grateful to Jill who encouraged me to perform in a few Aurovilian productions. My last cameo role was as a dancing policeman in the spectacular production of *Oliver*. I love performing, especially in comedy when I can fool around. All my films, even when they are dealing with serious and potentially tedious subjects like solid waste management, have a large measure of humour and lightness in them. Otherwise Tamil people would not respond to them in the way they do." Srin proudly points to a shelf which is loaded with awards he has been given for his theatre plays and films. "As you can see our work is very much appreciated here." This year Srin received the Youth Award of the Tamil Heritage Centre from Meenakshi.

"Auroville's first Film Festival in October this year was a challenge for me. I showed *Maatram* which means 'change'. It is an awareness-creating

film on waste management. It won two awards, that of audience favourite as well as a 'special mention' for 'dealing with a burning issue in a simple story with humour and emotions'. We made the 36-minute film in one month and filmed it in six days with rigorous planning. It is aimed at local Tamil people and contains all the classic ingredients of a Tamil film. Yet, somehow, it also appeals to an international audience. Another film was *Dhanamma*, emphasising the importance of education for girls. The film *Yatra – Five Landscapes – Five ecospheres of mother earth*, shows the Tamil lands with children travelling across the five lands of farms, forests, deserts, seas and mountains. It was produced by Mohanam Cultural Centre and was highly appreciated by the audience."

"How do I see my future?" He thinks for a few minutes. "Since the Film Festival I have begun to think differently. I have only been to Chennai and once to Sri Lanka, and until now I did not have a broad vision because I lacked exposure to different cultures and films. I now have to start thinking on a bigger scale, but I am not sure how to go about it. I have got 24 films under my belt and must find some place to show them. I am sure hundreds of schools and colleges in Tamil Nadu would love to see them; it is just finding out how to organize it. Now is the time. My two daughters are getting older and need less care, and the success of my team at the Film Festival has given me confidence."

"I am very clear about one thing, however. My aim is to direct my own feature length film. It must be about social issues and convey a message. I am looking for a producer and have faith that soon one will appear. The latest script I am working on is called *Globalization*, or *Paradise and Paradise Lost*, about the vast changes in the local villages over the last few decades. I am also working on a film about alcoholism and how it ruins lives and families."

"I am very, very blessed," he says. "I have two beautiful daughters, a supportive wife, a good family who live nearby, a dedicated theatre and filming team and I just about get by financially on government and NGO finances. Not many people in this world can live and do as they want in the way that I can. I am grateful to Auroville which has given me this wonderful life."

Dianna

For more information on the work of the *Yatra Arts* e-mail: yatra@auroville.org.in

RESEARCH

The aspirations of Auroville's youth

On September 19th, Aurovilians Martin, Harini and Vikram presented the findings of their survey on the socio-economic development of Auroville. Their research had been initiated by the socio-economic section of L'Avenir d'Auroville, Auroville's town planning department. It needed to know what kind of activities should be part of Auroville's Industrial Zone, and how best to promote a link between the education system of Auroville and job creation opportunities. The survey also aimed at helping Auroville's financial planners understand what type of commercial activities Auroville should support.

As part of the survey, the team interviewed more than 350 youth living in and around

Auroville to find out about their aspirations for Auroville's future.

Our definition of 'youth' was rather broad," said Martin. "Of the 376 youngsters we approached, 81 were in the age group 20-30 living in Auroville; 96 in the age group 20-40 living outside Auroville; 70 students from Auroville's high schools; and 129 students from Auroville's outreach schools. Out of these, 278 persons responded."

One of the most pertinent questions was would they leave Auroville in the future, to which 145 students responded positively. The most popular reason was to pursue further education. Other reasons were earning money, seeing the world or simply being frustrated with Auroville and its ideals. Asked if they would come back to Auroville, 113 answered 'yes', and mentioned as areas where they would like to work the arts, greenwork, humanities, business and new technologies. Asked what inspired them most in Auroville, Auroville ideals came first and Auroville's natural environment second.

The youth had a number of comments to make on the present state



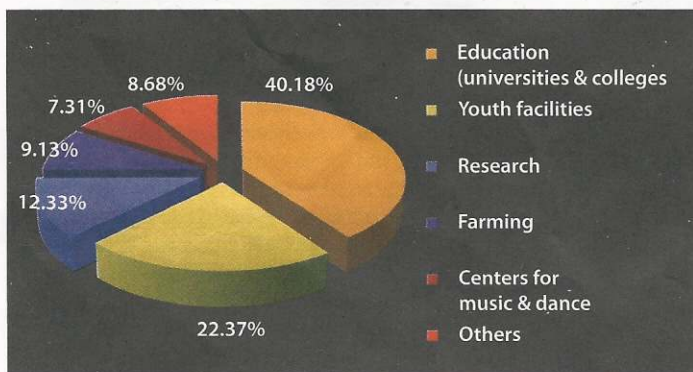
Vikram, Harini and Martin

of affairs. Many expressed frustration with Auroville's methods of decision-making. Also improving youth facilities and youth education were considered necessary. "Auroville should concentrate on helping access to university and college education and create professional training centres for music and dance, art and design, sports and handicrafts," was one of the comments. The housing situation was seen as Auroville's biggest challenge, followed by maintaining the Auroville ideals and developing a system for Auroville's governance. The youth

said that interest-free loans, a job recruitment facility, financial support in starting a unit or project and waiver of housing service charges would help them most.

The majority of Auroville youth now living outside Auroville expressed the wish to return to Auroville. "What holds them back from returning is their ongoing education and their lack of finances. Almost all of them regularly visit Auroville. Work opportunities do not appear to motivate this group to return," observed Martin.

Carel



Areas Auroville should focus on according to youth

The enthusiasts of Freeland

An inconspicuous building on the road from Edaiyanchavadi to the Visitors' Centre carries the name board 'Freeland'. Built in the Tamil style, the low entranced building houses over 40,000 books, for it is an Auroville bookshop.

"Marie Pontacq et Gilles Knopp started Freeland in 2003," says Yagna. "At the time they concentrated on books of Sri Aurobindo, The Mother and Satprem, including the French and English editions of *Mother's Agenda*. In the last years we have expanded." Now Freeland also stocks books from spiritual masters such as Sri Ramakrishna, Vivekananda and Ramana Maharishi; coffee-table books on Indian art, architecture, sculpture and music; travel guides; children's favourites; books on healing and alternative health; 'new age' books; nicely designed diaries, etc. "They make ideal gifts," says Yagna. One also finds the *Agenda* on DVD and videos on a variety of spiritual topics, and there is a small lending library.

Freeland, which was going through difficulties some time ago, now has a new management team consisting of Denis, Sabine, Yagna, and Gudula. "The team is enthusiastic, and each of us has a good knowledge of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, so we can guide our customers," says Yagna.

A recent addition to the stock is a section which Denis proudly calls 'les introuvables' or 'the unfindables.' They are the works of Sri Aurobindo printed on 'bible paper' by All India Press. "This is a real treasure," he says. The story is that Michael Bonke, who wanted to introduce

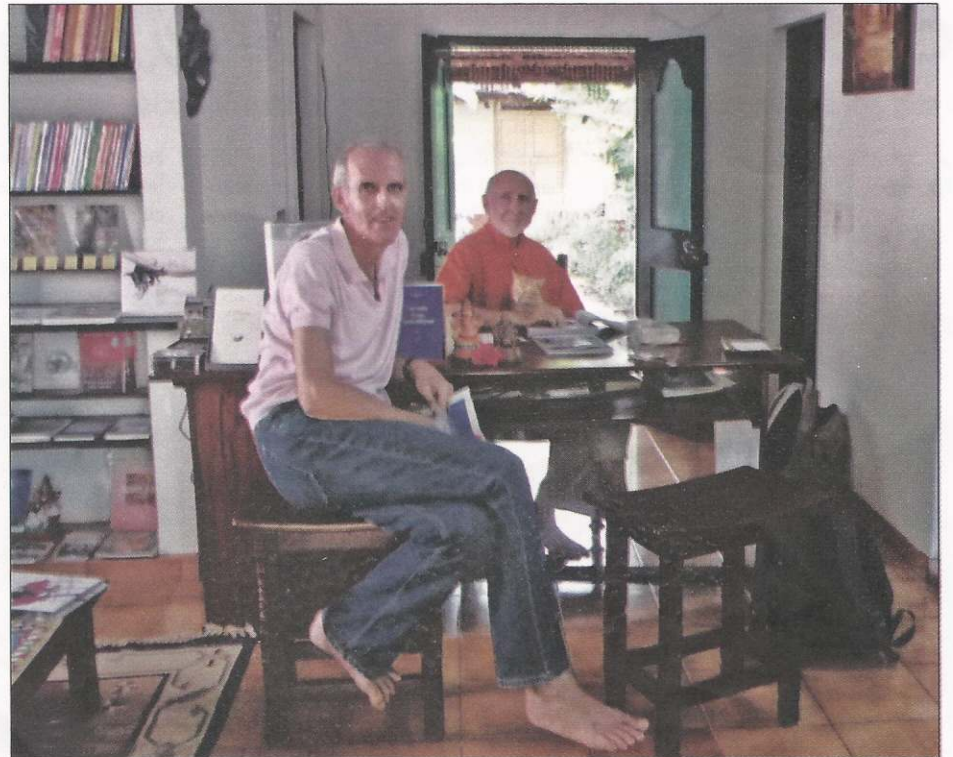
Sri Aurobindo and The Mother to Russia, had bought the entire stock of All India Press and a few thousand other books and shipped them to Russia. At the same time, he started a project to translate the works into Russian.

As the translations came out, interest in the English editions diminished. Finally Michael decided to ship the remainder, about 35,000 books, back to India. Apart from the 'crown size' and the reduced facsimile editions of Sri Aurobindo's major works, the collection also contains the *Collected works of The Mother* in reduced facsimile edition and reprints of the *Arya*, the magazine in which Sri Aurobindo originally serialised his major works."

"As might be expected," says Denis, "now we also stock all the Russian translations, as well as other language translations of Sri Aurobindo's and The Mother's books." He shows the Tamil translation of *Savitri* by Dr. A.M. Ravi. Elsewhere, one sees books in Spanish, Italian, German, Greek and Hindi.

The pride of the shop are four new publications: *The Mother, selected photos*; the *Carnet d'une Apocalypse 1988*, the last journal of Satprem; the English translation of Satprem's *Notebooks of an Apocalypse Vol. 2 - 1978 - 1982*; and the book *Roger Anger - Research on Beauty*.

"We have the distribution rights to Mother's photo book," says Denis. "By the way, Auroville



Denis and Yagna at Freeland

Today's announcement of this book in the August issue contained a few errors," he adds tongue-in-cheek. "Michael Bonke made the selection from photos taken from Tara Jauhar's compilation of 12,000 photos - the selection was not by Tara herself. There are 186 photos, not 250. And, of course, it is available from us, not only from SABDA."

Is the Freeland location on the

Edaiyanchavadi road good for attracting customers? "I believe so," says Yagna. "We target a rather specialised public. So far, our turnover has doubled compared to the last year; this proves that people know where to find us. We also respond to email and can ship books anywhere in the world."

In conversation with Carel

For info email freeland@auroville.org.in

NEW PUBLICATIONS

Roger Anger - Research on Beauty Architecture 1953-2008

In this well-illustrated book author Anupama Kundoo deals exclusively with the architecture of Roger Anger, someone who, she writes, 'never spoke about his past achievements despite all the direct access I had to him.' The few times she quotes him, he speaks about his architecture or his concepts of urbanisation. This is a pity; for reading the book, one gets a desire to know more about Roger the man.

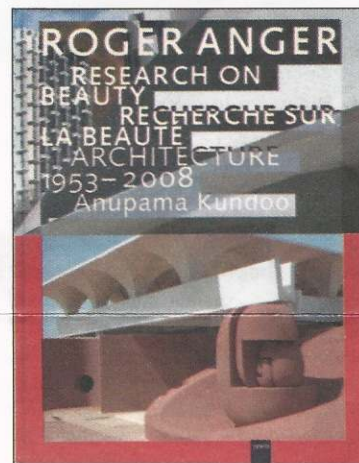
His explorations of forms that seem to change depending on the perspective of the viewer; his experimentation with light to enhance building façades; his research in building materials such as glass, acrylic, polyester and ferrocement; his views on the principles of urbanism of the future and the Lines of Strength; his research into high-rise housing projects while keeping a human scale: they all are detailed in

well-documented chapters. Similarly, an extensive chapter is dedicated to sculpture and painting as an integral part of Roger's architecture.

However, an explanation of why this award-winning architect withdrew at the height of his career from his booming architectural practice in Paris to dedicate himself to that utopia in India, Auroville, is missing. Doubtless, it was because of The Mother. While a quarter of the book deals with Roger's architecture in Auroville, one looks in vain to find something from Roger on his life-changing interaction with The Mother, or on the content of Her discussions with him on Auroville. One reason for this might be that Roger would not talk about his experiences with The Mother, except when explicitly asked. But it also seems that it wasn't the purpose of the author to go beyond Roger's architecture and urban visions into his spiritual side.

Before he took up Mother's request to be Auroville's Chief Architect, Roger Anger was well-known in France. In 1965, the magazine *Architectural Design* rated Roger's office as one of the five most important contributors to French Modern Architecture. In 1967, together with architects Pierre Puccinelli and Mario Heymann, he was awarded the Belgian international prize for architecture for his Residential Towers at Île Verte in Grenoble - at the time the highest residential towers in Europe. But then comes the long silence: Roger appeared to have withdrawn from his architectural practice. This is perhaps the reason why no book on Roger Anger had been published before.

In India, on the contrary, Roger Anger is only known because of his contributions to innovative and



inspiring architecture based on his achievements in Auroville. 'But very little is known about his background, his accomplishments and his method of working prior to his arrival,' writes Anupama. It is the great achievement of this book to provide a compelling insight into Roger's architectural work - not detailing project after project, but attempting to extract the essence of Roger's life-time research

on beauty. For in Roger's words, 'Beauty has the power to uplift the consciousness, spontaneously.' Those who visit the Matrimandir will have experienced this.

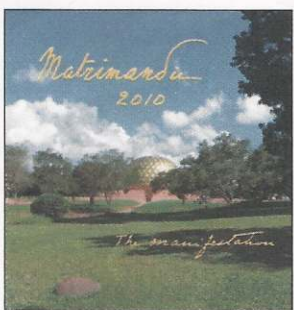
The Auroville chapter deals with the evolving city design, now known as 'the galaxy'; the Lines of Force; the schools; Auromodèle and the Matrimandir. Anupama's testimony to the work of Roger is a must for all those who wish to understand his architecture and urban vision. A small critique is the random placement of the footnotes and their inaccuracy, which makes finding the source of some quotations difficult if not impossible. But this can easily be rectified in a future edition.

Carel

Roger Anger - Research on Beauty - Architecture 1953-2008
By Anupama Kundoo. Published by Jovis Verlag GmbH, Germany.
ISBN 978-3-86859-006-7.
Available from Freeland.
Price in India Rs 1600

2010 CALENDARS

Matrimandir desk Calendar

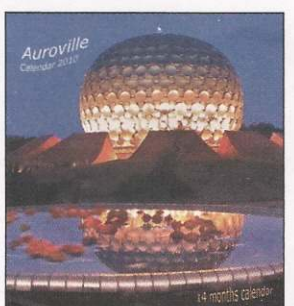


The theme for the 2010 Matrimandir Calendar is "The Manifestation" looking from the gardens towards the Matrimandir. Photos by Giorgio and Paulette are accompanied by quotations from Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*.

It is available from Auroville shops and can be ordered through the Auroville International Centres or by emailing tine@auroville.org.in or matrimandir@auroville.org.in

Size: 19.5 x 20cm. Price: Rs. 150 excluding postage and taxes, if any.

14 month Auroville wall Calendar



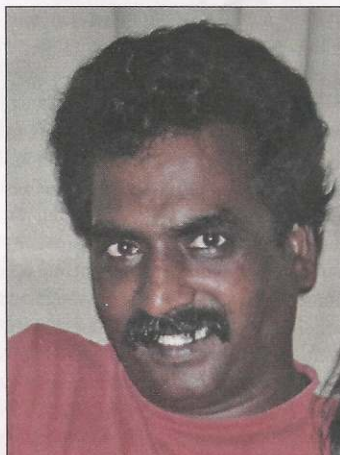
Ireno Guerri's 14 months Auroville wall calendar (December '09 to January '11) contains images of Auroville life and landscapes.

The calendar is available at Auroville shops and can be ordered by emailing ireno@auroville.org.in
Size: 28 x 30,5 cm. Price abroad: Euro 6.50 / U.S. \$ 9.50 including airmail postage. Price in India Rs. 275 including postage.

For a preview, visit:

http://www.auroville.org/calendar/auroville_calendar_2010.htm

PASSINGS



D. Perumal

more than a year and a half, but his physical body was too weak to keep going. His last week was spent in a beautiful room at the Auroville Health Centre where he passed away on Saturday, October 24th, at 00.45 am, his face finally calm and serene. He was just 41 years old.

Narayan

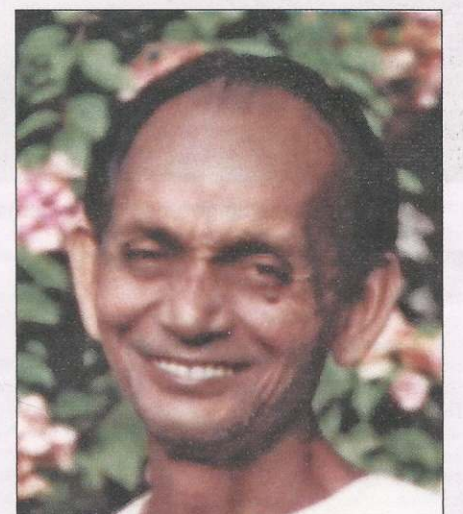
Narayan, who lived in Shanti near the Matrimandir, passed away on October 26. He was 89 years old.

Narayan first came to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in 1950. Circumstances called him back to his home in Bihar. When he returned in the early seventies, The Mother directed him to Auroville where he stayed ever since. He is remembered as a feisty, determined and devoted worker who, with his wife Bhavani at his side, dedicated himself to the Matrimandir and its area.

D. Perumal

D. Perumal from Kottakarai village made Auroville his home from childhood onwards. In the early years of Auroville he roughed it out in many different communities, always ready to contribute with hard, honest work and never shied away from hands-on work. Over the years he grew to love mechanics - he worked with the Auroville Water Service for many years, helped Gilles put together water speedboats and dedicated three years working at the Matrimandir, finishing the spiral staircase amongst other things. He will be remembered, and surely missed, by many whose motorcycles he serviced and repaired skilfully. Perumal courageously lived both cultures of East and West, and would not let others influence his way of life. He was a fun-loving person, did not mince his words, and would not easily give up or let something come in the way of his beliefs - honesty was his strength.

In April 2008, returning from a work-trip to Sudan, he collapsed upon his arrival from a massive brain stroke. He fought a brave battle for



Narayan

Catching the line – Little by little

A story of a young Aurovilian mother and her small publishing house

“I must say the more East I go, the better I feel,” says Julie Sauerwein, a French-American who made Auroville her home 3 years ago. Julie is an illustrator and the creator of *Little by little*, a small children’s publishing house in Auroville. She is also the mother of three-year old Arie and six-month old Nila.

“Ten years ago, an old woman in Paris told me about Auroville,” says Julie. “I had just come back to France after a year in the South Pacific. I was disoriented, not able to adjust to Europe and Western culture. And Annie was my grandmother’s friend.

“When I showed her some drawings I had made in Vanuatu, she told me I had to visit the international city of Auroville. When she mentioned that it is in India, my first response was, ‘Oh no, not India!’ But she persisted. ‘Don’t be judgmental’, she said. ‘You should just have a look at it’.”

Annie put Julie in touch with her son Gilles Guigan, who has been living in Auroville for more than 25 years. “So I started writing to Gilles. It was a wonderful correspondence and that gave me a real opening to Auroville.”

In 2002, Julie decided to make a trip. “I stayed for a month. I began working at the bakery, a job I enjoyed, but I was not really ready to be here. At first glance I didn’t understand Auroville, not at all!” Julie left for Dharamsala where she lived for 2 years before returning to France. Three years later Julie came back permanently. “It was my newborn son, Arie, who put the idea into my head,” she says. “One night in Paris as I was breastfeeding him, I had the strong feeling that I had to take him to Auroville. I didn’t want to raise him in that crazy material life.

“I believe Auroville is unique. It is here that I want to evolve. But there are other wonderful places in the world where the culture gives importance to having an inner self-knowledge.” Julie says this she discovered in the South Pacific. “There, in the eyes of the tribal people, my cultural background, heritage, or traditions meant nothing important – all that counted was ‘who’ my soul was.”

That year on the archipelago of Vanuatu was a turning point in Julie’s life. “I was deeply affected by my time

there.” Being a museum curator, she had been invited on a one-year assignment to document Melanesian culture through photographs and film. “But when I began to study the archives, I did not understand anything I was looking at. It was so different from any European or Western type of documentation.” Julie decided to take the time to travel the islands and understand the culture.



‘S’ is for saris from the A to Z cards

“This meant a lot of time sailing between the islands. It was a period of spiritual opening. I learned a lot about myself, and I discovered that I didn’t want to be afraid anymore, and quite a few issues got cleared up... Most of all, I found myself wanting to draw and sketch.”

Julie, who grew up in a family of artists, had learned drawing at home. She began making sketches documenting the life in the islands. “As a child I used to watch my family members draw, and I remember having had a ticklish sensation in the back of my head that told me how much I like it.”

When she returned to Auroville, Julie channelled her bubbling creativity into a small publishing unit, *Little by little*. “It was perfect because I could express my love for putting printed matter and art together – a little bit like being a curator of my own production. Also because I was the mother of a young child, I wanted to do things for children.”

Little by little’s first project was A to Z, a set of 26 flash cards for the English alphabet. “I did all the drawings with my son on my lap,” says Julie with a laugh. “They were for Thamarai, the after-school education centre at Edaiyanchavadi. A Dutch volunteer was complaining how unsuitable the alpha-

bet flashcards were, with their images from American or British culture. The images were not something the village children could relate to or identify with. For example, ‘S’ for strawberry meant nothing to the village kids who perhaps will never see or taste a strawberry in their lives; and ‘Q’ for the ‘Queen of England’ also doesn’t mean anything to them!”

Julie came up with a set of 52 images culled from her visual experience of Auroville and India. “The idea was to make two sets of flashcards that could be used in rural schools, but our budget only allowed for the printing of one set.” Colourful and generously-sized, the cards carry quirky and unusual images that are quintessentially Indian. Some are even tongue-in-cheek, like the illustration for the letter ‘L’: a pair of mating ‘love bugs’, a common sight in Auroville’s forests.

Almost three years old, *Little by little* completed several small projects – a *Wise Water Management* book for EcoPro and paper boxes designed for cheese made in the bioregion. Its latest work is *The Marching Flowers*, a bilingual book of poetry in Korean and English by YunSung Cho, a 13-year old student in Auroville.

“YunSung’s book was a great experience,” says Julie. “The idea came when I met his parents, Padha and Haandi, at the swimming pool one afternoon. I was with Arie. They asked what I do and I told them I was involved with children’s books and illustrations. They said their son has done a poem book, and would I like to see it? I said ‘sure’. They showed me the book which was like a scrapbook full of doodles, sketches, and writings. His poems I thought were really marvelous for his age, especially since half of them were written when he was 8 years old and the other half when he was 10. They were gentle, deep and fresh, most of them short like Japanese haikus, and expressed a very mature child’s perspective.”



“Speechless, we said a whole lot of things to each other” Julie with the Bunlap girls on Pentecost island in Vanuatu

The *Marching Flowers* took 2½ years to mature, and was released in Korea this summer. “It was a long process; but we wanted it to be very *pucca*,” says Julie. The only clue that the book was conceived in Auroville is a one-liner that reads, ‘This book was made in the forest and gardens of Auroville’. “We decided not to write too much about Auroville – just that that one sentence which says it all. If



The latest offering from *Little by little* – bird motifs made of handmade paper to be cut out and assembled by children

people are interested, they can find out more through the website.”

Waiting to be printed is a research on Auroville hand-made papers. Julie cut-out shapes of animals, peacocks, roosters, elephants, and hung them as

mobiles. “The challenge is that the children will cut the shapes and mount the mobiles themselves,” explains Julie. “So they have to be simple but also clearly recognizable. So far the children have liked them, and I am hoping to have them screen-printed soon.

“For me, drawing is how I make thoughts and stories, reality and dreams, all mingle in one line. What touches me most is the act of drawing the line; giving ‘body’ to a figure out of the blank – just that thin line, hanging in the void, which all of a sudden holds things together. Then comes the colour, background and patterns but all these are secondary; the main gesture for me is the line.

“One could compare it to creating music, like when a composer hears a melody from within; just a few notes that seem very important all of a sudden. And then one hums these notes and then one has to write them down. After a while, these notes may develop into an orchestral piece, or a simple solo, or not be developed at all.

“Actually it doesn’t matter if it gets developed or not,” she says philosophically. “There are many melodies and drawings around us – we just have to catch them!”

Priya Sundaravalli

A to Z cards are available at Freeland

ENVIRONMENT

Caring for our lifelines

Just before the onset of the monsoon, the water harvesting work in Utility canyon was completed.



A view of the heightened check-dams in Utility canyon

“We can’t prevent over-exploitation,” says Kireet, “but we do our part to prevent the coastal aquifers from becoming saline.” He points at a flooded coconut plantation on the beach. “Farmers don’t have to pay for electricity, so they don’t bother about water consumption. The result is depletion of the aquifer. Experts are predicting that salt water will intrude into our groundwater not too far in the future. Our work in the canyons just pushes that future a bit farther away.”

Kireet is one of a small group of Auroville stewards who are tending to Auroville’s canyons and turning them into vast rain-water catchment areas. Over the last two decades, this group has erected over sixty checkdams across the various canyon systems criss-crossing the Auroville plateau. The work continues throughout the year with repair, maintenance, and upgrading.

This year Kireet has focussed on the Utility canyon. “The last concrete check-dam and its adjoining dykes have been raised by a metre,” he says. “This means that the catchment volume has expanded by an additional 10,000 cubic metres.”

That the canyon work is effective is apparent for all who live in the area. “For example,” says Kireet, “the former headman of

the Bommaiarpalayam coastal village recently told me that the groundwater level there has not fallen. This can only be because of the checkdams.”

Kireet calls the Utility Canyon a ‘beautiful’ disaster. “The top layer of soil in Auroville is often rock-hard. When these torrential monsoon rains fall, most of the water runs off into the canyons as it cannot percolate. But the soil inside the canyons is like a sponge and allows the water to percolate very quickly into the underground, often within a couple of hours. The canyons have become one of the bioregion’s lifelines.”

Apart from being natural rainwater catchment areas, the canyons are also a haven for wildlife. “Canyons are very special ecosystems in themselves and offer microhabitats which one can’t find anywhere else in Auroville,” he says. “The queen of the canyon is undoubtedly the big horned eagle owl, but you’ll also find monitor lizards, mongooses and a large variety of birds. The canyons have become corridors connecting natural habitats.”

When the monsoon arrives, Kireet and many other stewards will be walking the lands in pouring rain, checking dams and spillways. The watertable is at stake.

Carel

For more on Auroville’s canyons see *Auroville Today* January 2009 Issue # 239

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Published by Carel Thieme on behalf of the Auroville Foundation. Printed by Brihat Consultants, Pondicherry, and published at Surrender, Auroville 605101, Tamil Nadu, India.

Auroville Today does not necessarily reflect the views of the community as a whole.