

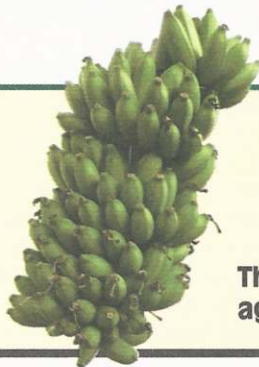
# Auroville Today

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Auroville's monthly news magazine since 1988



**Film-makers  
Doris and Francis  
talk about their film  
"The Children of Auroville"  
part 1, "Early Education"  
and part 2, "Here and Now".**



**The five-year sustainable  
agriculture plan is out.**

**Riding the ACT bus :  
the importance of a  
community service.**



## "They're a different breed!"

In the early 2008, Doris and Francis began collecting footage for a new Auroville video project called 'The Children of Auroville'. Focussing on Aurovilians who had been born here or had come here as children in the early days, they conducted 60 interviews. In 2009 the first video in the series, 'Early Education', was released. Recently, the second video, 'Here and Now', was shown to a packed Cinema Paradiso. It has generated a lot of discussion.

**Why did you decide to focus on the children of Auroville?**

**Doris:** If you look at all the films which have been made about Auroville, it's only once or twice that a younger person is included. Normally it's certain Aurovilians who do the talking. We all know them and they speak well, but we felt it was time that the younger people got a chance to express themselves too.

**Francis:** I had no idea about what they were thinking or how they perceive things, and I wanted to find out.

**At the beginning of the first video you wonder aloud if they will be willing to talk to you. How open were they in sharing their thoughts and perceptions?**

**Francis:** I'm sure they had tried to express themselves before to the older generation and got nowhere because most older Aurovilians are not interested in what young people have to say: as one of them put it, you're always looked upon as a kid if you grew up here. And these guys are in their 30s now! So I thought we were going to meet with some resistance. However, I was surprised at how open they were and how well we were received. But we had to seek them out; they were not going to come to us.

**Doris:** They would never have made a film about themselves but I think they really liked being given the space to express themselves.

**So what was the process of making that first film?**

**Doris:** Actually, at the beginning we didn't have any specific topic. We just started with five questions including, what do you want to say about your education in Auroville? and how was it to grow up here? But when some of them began talking about the time when education stopped in Auroville, you could hear their pain. I knew nothing about this, I wanted to learn more. But none of the adults who had been here during that period wanted to talk about it.

**Francis:** That's because you don't want to remember that we were capable of doing those things. But when Doris asked me to explain, I realized it was time to find out more about that period from the people who were most directly affected. So the theme of the first film became the obstacles that these kids had to overcome to acquire an education.

**Doris:** Some of them are still so emotional about that time that they didn't want to be interviewed. Others couldn't stop talking when they saw that somebody was ready to listen to them after all these years. In the process, they also learned a lot about each other. At a special pre-screening for the participants, one of them said to another that he had never known before how much she had suffered when the school closed down. After watching the first public screening, another Aurovilian said he was ashamed that we let it happen.

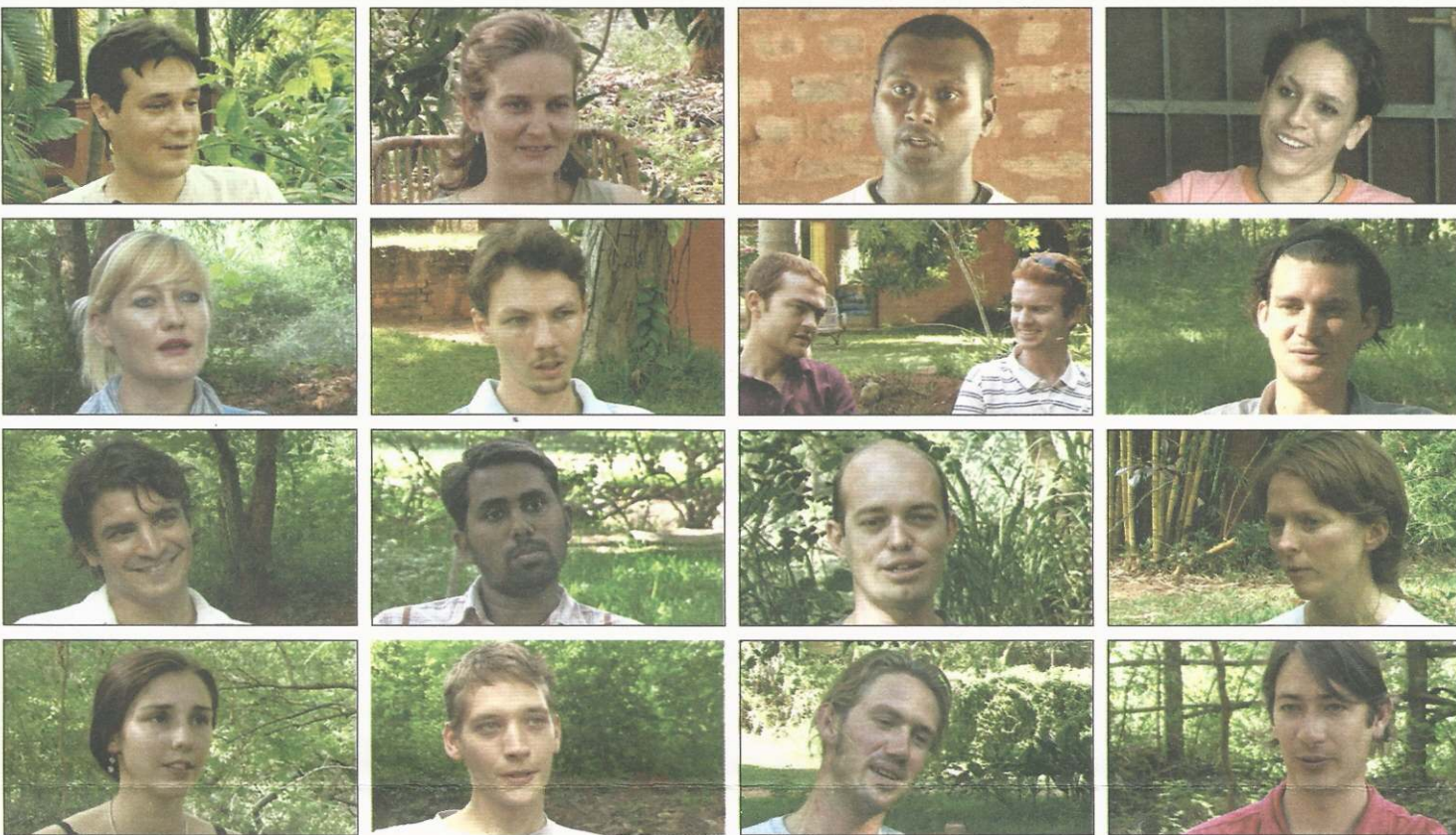


PHOTO: COURTESY DORIS

From left to right top row: Baba, Aurosylle, Balu, Anandamayi. Second row: Chandrah, Coriolan, Samya and Satyen, Kumbha. Third row: Ribhu, Tixon, Akash, L'aura Joy. Bottom row: Shandra, Rishi, Chaitanya, Sukhamuni

**How did you choose the topic for the second video?**

**Francis:** I was astonished that Auroville kids, after leaving Auroville, were getting a full-fledged education from the best schools and being offered great jobs, but were deciding to come back. That got my curiosity going. I wanted to know what brought them back.

**So what did you learn?**

**Francis:** They're a different breed! They are very practical, materialistic, by which I don't mean they are not spiritual, but they want their comforts and a lot of them are willing to work for it. The thing that I liked the most about all of them was their lack of aggression: there's a softness about them that is beautiful. They're just stating how they see things, they're not pushing themselves forward even though, regarding the present organization of Auroville, they all say they would do things differently. As one of them put it, we're not interested in fighting, we've got better things to do.

Then there is a rapport among them, they are more friendly, trusting and loving with each other than our generation. They don't question each other about pettiness. They have this magical quality that I really liked.

**Doris:** We filmed some of them on the litter-free Auroville day. Even though they were the organizers and they were very busy, they answered all our questions in a very friendly way. The situation was very stressful but they stayed calm. They were working with each other, helping each other. That's what they have. They are not mean to each other, they don't manipulate behind the scenes. On that day you could see them in action, it was absolutely beautiful, and I think this is how they will handle things in the future. Of course, they will make mistakes but the way

they support each other is different. Another day I went by and found them sitting, segregating waste. They all had MBAs or equivalents – this was one of the highest concentrations of academics in Auroville! – it was hot, smelly, but nobody was complaining that it was dirty work or that it was beneath them. I really admire that.

**What also comes across from the video is something very matter-of-fact about their approach. There are no big egos on display. They just go ahead and do what needs to be done.**

**Doris:** Exactly. Another young Aurovilian, describing how he set up a guest card for the community, said simply that he and his team thought that Auroville needed it so they just went ahead, and the funds came naturally. These kinds of things touched me so much. At times, I was close to tears.

**But weren't the early pioneers also like that in the early 1970s?**

**Francis:** We were misfits, dreamers who were blessed by the Mother and it created such a euphoric state that we all went out and got happily sunburned. These guys, on the other hand, are practical, sensible, non-competitive and they are just doing their thing quietly in the background while the older Aurovilians are banging on in their meetings in the Town Hall, creating all these sparks and whatnot. I mean, to organize their litter-free day these young guys needed hardly any meetings. If our official work groups had taken up such an endeavour they would have needed two years just to decide what to do.

**One of the most striking moments in the video was when one of them said that the original pioneers were naïve while they are different because they don't necessarily believe so much in a new society and a new man.**

**Francis:** In the 70s you were dealing with a group of people who looked upon themselves as the Mother's soldiers, divine right was on their side. But that doesn't come through with these guys at all and it's not a bad thing.

**Doris:** I think he expressed something about taking things as they come. It's a new outlook which says that if the ideal manifests, fine, but we will not become desperate if it doesn't happen immediately. Some of the older generation, on the other hand, can't wait. That's why they're so disappointed, so depressed, about the present state of Auroville.

**Both of you, at times, seem to have shared this feeling. Has the making of this video changed that?**

**Francis:** While I wouldn't say I'm depressed with the present state of Auroville – disappointed is more accurate – when I view the institutionalization which is taking place and the invasiveness of the government in our affairs I become concerned. Collectively we are definitely stuck, we just keep repeating the same old things with the same old people. But when I talk to this generation I regain my hope for tomorrow. I feel that it's time for the next phase in our collective life to kick in, even though I don't foresee how our generation is going to let go and the next one step in. Individually, however, I have to tell you that I really am happy that I live here.

**Doris:** I'm not from this new breed, I still tend to get angry about what I see happening around me. But listening to these young people I'm not afraid for Auroville's future: they give me a lot of hope that the future will be different.

*From an interview by Alan*

The film 'Children of Auroville' part 2 can be downloaded from <http://vimeo.com/27938200>

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# "Auroville's system of collective decision-making is a major achievement."

Auroville's methods of decision-making, which are generally described as cumbersome, may have more sense to them than is normally assumed. They are the topic of the doctoral dissertation of Stuart Leard.

"This work took me seven years, nine months and one day," recounts Stuart modestly. "Correction!" interjects Professor Henk Thomas. "It actually took him 12 years, nine months and 6 days, counting from the day we first started collecting archival material in Auroville." He refers to the year 1998 when Stuart, who at that time was heading Auroville's Social Research Centre in New Creation community, became a co-researcher in the Auroville Economic Research Programme financed by the Dutch Stichting de Zaaier, headed by Henk.

Stuart's research, which started in Auroville, formed the basis for his later thesis which he defended on June 6th this year at the University of Saskatchewan, Canada. "The Examining Committee judged that Stuart had written an excellent dissertation," says Henk, who was one of the seven professors participating in the defence. "The Examining Committee described the thesis as 'original in theory, original in methodology, and original in the empirical testing of a very special case study.' It unanimously decided to nominate the dissertation to the College of Graduate Studies and Research for an annual award for the Social Sciences, a distinction for an exceptionally good dissertation." The degree will be awarded in October.

So what is the thesis about? Entitled *Negotiating Modernity: Habermas and the International Township of Auroville, India*, it deals with the way Auroville took collective decisions in the period 1975-2000. "I worked intermittently in Auroville from 1981, joined the community in 1988 and made my home there from 1994 to 2003. I returned to Canada to do my PhD," says Stuart. "I was moved by the way Aurovilians made collective decisions, which involved a high level of devotion to community participation. I wanted to analyze this dynamic in global terms with the hope that such a work would be beneficial to both Auroville and the field of sociology."

The first step was to discern what could be learned from the extensive database developed for the Auroville Economic Research Programme. Stuart pored through 25 years of Auroville's weekly internal newsletters – from 1975 to 2000 – and arrived at seven main themes. "I found that the effort to reach mutual understanding underlay each of the themes. This effort corresponds to the sociological term, 'illocutionary action'. Contrary to the opinions of many Aurovilians, Auroville's methods of collective decision-making are unique and are, in fact, one of its major achievements."

Stuart found that the seven themes had characteristics in common with the basic premises of the Theory of Communicative Action and the dis-

course ethics of German sociologist Jürgen Habermas. "Therefore the Auroville database could be used to examine, adjust and contribute to Habermas' theory while the application of the theory allowed Auroville to be seen in the context of social development in general." He explains: "The theory of communicative action is not idealistic. It identifies the role of communication in the formation of the self and the character of a society. Habermas makes a very strong argument that communication is central to human personal and social development. He demonstrates the importance of un-coerced communication for personal development, and explains the link between such communication and social organization. He then shows how modern society deprives the individual of what he or she needs most."

"Habermas observes that systems emerge and then threaten decision-making based on the effort to reach mutual understanding. According to Habermas, two such systems predominate: political systems which are steered by power (hierarchy), and economic systems that are steered by money. The goals of the people concerned can be more effectively reached by such streamlined organizations. But ironically, government and economy become out of reach for members of the public: reduced participation leads to lack of learning and personal growth on the part of the public and to an increasing sense of powerlessness, frustration and isolation."

"People in modern countries are often frustrated because their political and economic systems do not correspond to their own values. Participation in decision-making with respect to both political and economic organization is a means for people to learn and grow. The effort to reach mutual understanding, upon which Auroville appears to organize itself, is the means Habermas recognizes as the way to respond to the negative consequences of modern society."

Yet, in Auroville, too, there were tendencies which threatened the patterns of reaching mutual understanding. "The Auroville Foundation represented the attempt to institute a hierarchical form of decision-making (a system steered by power). That is how government works everywhere. My research showed that Aurovilians activated their own institutions, not as a counter-power, but as the means to ensure that the principle of mutual understanding continued to play a role in the steering of its political systems."

At the level of economy, Auroville tried to manifest the ideals of Auroville as set-out by The Mother. "Combined with the practice of collective decision-making, this had a great effect on decision-making in the township. Instead of conforming to a system of private property, which is the cornerstone of Western economic organization, Aurovilians

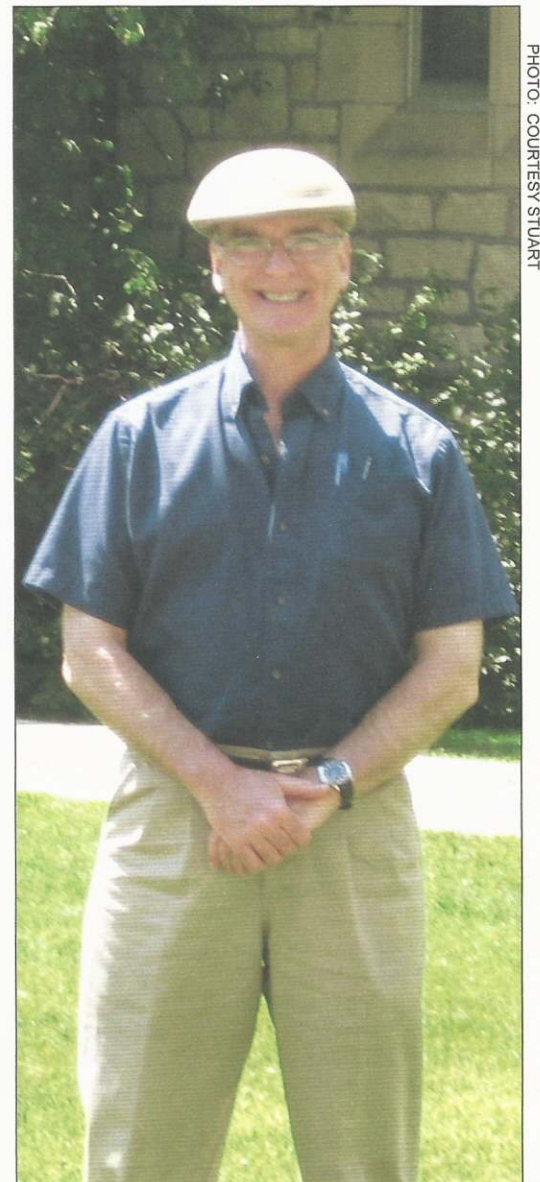
claimed economic organization as one dimension of organization with which to experiment, that is, to decide together. Communication instead of the right to private property was emphasized. This participation in directing the economy expanded the potential for conflict and confrontation. People were unafraid to state their positions clearly and often passionately in general meetings, in the face of opposition, identifying the injustice of the status quo. Aurovilians addressed each other free of any form of economic or political constraint or coercion." In this respect Stuart mentions that he designed his analysis to capture precisely those injustices, such as the abuse of power that might have come with group participation. But he found, "these categories of action did not constitute a trend. They were eclipsed by consensus-building."

It was remarkable, he says, that since the 1970's, although there have been a number of visa cancellations and expulsions, Auroville life did not become characterized by conformity or constraint. "There was definitely a measure of courage in choosing to speak one's mind. Each participant had the opportunity to bring his or her concerns to the relevant working group or to decision-making forums. This was a free participation in decision-making. It worked because Auroville's institutions in that period acted on the concerns of the public."

Stuart elaborates on this as 'a remarkable achievement'. "The effort to reach mutual understanding is time-consuming, frustrating and it frequently results in slow development. But it did not prevent development. The database showed that Auroville demonstrated the ability to use illocutionary action effectively, to be able to influence the steering of its political and economic systems. The dissertation exemplifies how Aurovilians mobilized their institutions in order to participate in their political and economic organization along with the newly established Foundation."

He points to yet another aspect. "Auroville demonstrated a way of acting together which tolerates great differences between people. The township demonstrated that individual autonomy, freedom, learning and expression are complementary to strong identification with and dedication to the community. In other words, communicative action and solidarity are complementary."

Does Auroville's form of organization have a future? "Most definitely. The analysis demonstrated that communicative action is sustainable as an organizing principle for the residents of Auroville and that the effort to reach mutual understanding is a sound basis for social organization. This will also hold true if Auroville's population expands."



Stuart Leard

"But bear in mind that the parameters of this work run from 1975 to the year 2000. The thesis is an analysis of decision-making in that period. If today Aurovilians choose differently, then a future analysis will come out differently. For example, if since 2000 systems have been put in place over which Aurovilians feel they have no control, then Habermas' observations will apply and systems will operate according to the logic of power and money. For Auroville, I believe this would be a potentially dangerous trend. In today's world, people often find themselves subject to the state and economic systems. Auroville has developed an opening to a different workable potential."

*In conversation with Carel*

Stuart's thesis will soon be available on line. He can be contacted at [stuart.leard@usask.ca](mailto:stuart.leard@usask.ca)

## REVIEW

# The Children of Auroville part 1 and 2

The first video focusses on early education in Auroville. It describes the establishment of the first 'proper' school in Aspiration in December, 1970 and early attempts at educating a very diverse group of children. "School was very experimental," remembers Renu, "everything was 'unestablished'." "There was lots of pioneering in education," says Grace, "and all kinds of teaching styles. It was very nurturing but it always broke down because teachers would vanish. And then it was always the children who suffered most."

One of the early experiments involved making the whole of Auroville a learning environment but this soon proved unworkable and a more structured school programme replaced it. That came to an end in November, 1976, when a school meeting decided that henceforth only those who lived in Auroville could teach or attend the school at students (before, some of the teachers came daily from the Ashram). "It was suicide, absolute suicide," says Shradhdhavan, describing how the school was forced to close because it could not run without finance and some of its key teachers. It was also a time of



Litter free day, 29 January 2010

dogma. "The adults saw no need for the school," explains Croquette. "They said the children will learn by themselves. It was all about freedom, freedom, freedom."

"For us children, it was devastating," remembers Grace, "It was like darkness came." "We were lost," says Rathinam, "we had no school, no teachers, and we didn't know where to go."

The last part of the video concentrates upon the students' efforts to get an education. At first they tried contacting individual Aurovilians. Later small,

alternative schools, like Johnny's and Croquette's, were established to cater to their needs. Finally, Selvaraj, Jothi and friends requested that Swagatam School, which Aspiration community had been running as a guest house, become a school once again. They succeeded and the second phase of formal education in Auroville began.

The second video begins by asking those who went out and received an excellent higher education elsewhere why they had decided to return to Auroville. "Auroville has a very different vibration," says Akash. "I like the open-mindedness of people here," says Coriolan, "they're open to discussing more than football and beer." "I love this place," says Ribhu, simply. "Auroville is a warm hug."

They are not blind, however, to what they see as present shortcomings in the community and the problems that their generation faces. "It's very difficult for us younger adults to bring in different ways of working," says Anandamayi, "there's so much resistance to the new." Satyen agrees, "The old generation doesn't want to let go." He is relaxed, however, pointing out that change will come naturally as the older generation ages.

"Our generation is completely different and we will do things differently," says Akash. Auroville agrees. "For my generation it won't happen through groups and meetings, these things don't work."

So what are they doing now? "When I came back I didn't want to work for something I didn't believe in," says Ribhu, who today is working in solid waste management. Tixon is "very happy" combining running a boarding facility for younger girls and boys in New Creation with his work in the Graphics section. Coriolan designed a fibre-optic network for part of Auroville, while Akash has been involved in numerous start-ups – including Skynet, electric vehicle design and production, the Aurocard and hydroponics. "When I see something that needs to be done I do it," he says simply.

And *The Dream*? "Our generation is less naïve than yours," concludes Baba, "and maybe we are not so interested in creating a new society or a new man." As he sees it, there are two options. Either Sri Aurobindo and The Mother were right and the supramental is at work in the world, or they were wrong and nature is doing its work by accident. Either way, there is no need to worry because we cannot influence these larger events. All we can do, he believes, is to become good human beings who do the least harm. "As for Auroville, I think this place is great the way it is."

Alan



# Auroville's organization: time for a change?

Auroville's organization is very much in the news again as the community discusses how to select a new Working Committee and Council. Auroville Today invited a number of Aurovilians who have been in major working groups or who have studied our organization to share their thoughts about it. Here are some excerpts:

**Auroville Today: Is our present organization effective in dealing with the present realities and in furthering our ideals?**

**Joseba:** No. I believe that our present systems and structures are inefficient; they are not resolving the main problems. We need to start thinking afresh because nobody is happy with our organization today.

**Angad:** Some time ago I became involved in trying to do something about the pollution from the burning of the Pondicherry garbage. What I discovered was quite interesting. A group of people spontaneously came together, and started doing some very practical things. That energy carried the group along. It was all done in a very non-hierarchical, 'no one's in charge' kind of way, and this led to other people coming in and we actually got some solutions moving. This is how Auroville works, but it is not reflected in our 'official' organization, in working groups like the Working Committee, the Housing Service and the Town Development Council that function with fixed mandates. At present you have the real thing which is going on and the official thing. We have to find an organization which reflects how things are actually happening here.

**Suhasini:** Auroville has an enormous self-organizing capacity but this doesn't get reflected in our larger organization. Besides, if you look at the Auroville population today, economically we have 3 main categories; those with independent means, those with skills, access to capital and/or a network, and those who have neither and who are pushed to find ways and means to survive. In most of our major groups today, people with independent means predominate while those without means come together to get representatives on the groups who will lobby for their interests. This situation does not encourage courageous or innovative governance.

Also, when a group gets formed the community's general mistrust of the group composition necessitates an oversight sub-group: thus we have constructed an organization based upon mistrust rather than it's opposite. Now add the fact we live in a small society, how can we be sure that it is not personal issues which are influencing our monitoring bodies' evaluative capacity?

**Carel:** The worrying aspect for me is that Auroville does not follow the well-accepted standard principle of democratic models, the separation of powers between the executive, legislative and judiciary.

We have our legislative body in the Residents' Assembly (RA), which functions democratically since the community fixed decision making guidelines in 2007. But the RA still has to take up its true role, which is to decide on policies. There is a tendency of working groups to try and determine policies by themselves, bypassing the RA. The RA has to get its own organisation together.

The executive is our working groups; here we see a tendency for them to go out on their own, where the working groups publish very brief or densely written reports, if any, thus avoiding accountability. The problem here is that we do not have a parliament of sorts which can question a working group: individuals can only voice their concern or opposition on Auroville's internal website.

The independent judiciary is completely absent. Sometimes executive working groups, such as the Auroville Council or the Working Committee or the FAMC, take it upon themselves to act as judiciary. But this is an unsatisfactory arrangement. I have seen examples of serious wrongdoing by individuals or working groups which were not addressed, and there was no possibility to appeal or do anything about it. That creates mistrust in the efficiency of our organisation.



From left: Carel, Angad, Suhasini, Alain and Joseba

**Auroville Today: So how can our organization be improved?**

**Joseba:** Mother says we should not fix any model of organisation, that it has to grow organically, according to the necessities of each area of work. This should be our guide.

**Angad:** When Carel refers to the Western democratic system I concede that the separation between the executive, legislative, judiciary is necessary (as well as that between religion and state) but beyond that I think we have little to learn from such a system. If our idea is to evolve as a collective, then the collective has to find the means to express itself, and the people in positions of power have to respond.

**Suhasini:** When you look at the picture worldwide, you see that very few people want to be direct participants in the everyday political process of their society. They look for two things: firstly, that there are clear rules and regulations to marginalize deviancy and, secondly, that there are checks and balances within the civil society that allow them to intervene if the system gets repressive or exploitive. Most political systems evolve to include these two requirements.

In Auroville the situation is different. We have nurtured the idea that everybody has to have their say and that everybody's opinion has not only to be considered but included in the everyday governance process. Since no opinion can be rejected, new subgroups are created to study them. Over time these subgroups became

formalized, even when the reasons for their creation cease to exist, and this has led to a proliferation of groups which has got embedded into our organizational structure. If we could identify the few main areas most people are concerned about – like membership, the socio-economic issues, development and the services – and then have terms of reference with broad guidelines about what is and what is not permitted in these areas, we could streamline our governance to be more effective rather than obstructive.

**Alain:** Most of our groups have ridiculously large mandates. I think that instead of mandates, each group should have a one page mission statement which expresses the spirit of the group. Then we should trust the groups to do their best. We need to retain a few things, such as the 2007 guidelines on decision-making because we need a recognized mode of taking decisions. But otherwise we could drop many things from our present organization. The thing is to remain as flexible as possible.

**Joseba:** I agree. The number of rules and guidelines we have is immense: it certainly doesn't enhance creativity. But this is not to say that doing away with them would improve matters. Our commercial units, for example, are not hemmed in with mandates and regulations: they function in a situation where individual initiative can be given full rein. Yet this sector has shown little dynamism and appears to be one of the most stagnant in Auroville.

**Angad:** Two things need to be done for our organisation to be more efficient. The first is that working groups need to give concise, regular reports pertaining to how and why decisions are being made. If this were done, most of the problems we see today wouldn't come up. For it is a big source of mistrust that no or very little information is given to the community regarding how the major working groups operate. This implies that the members of these groups need to develop skills in reporting and in keeping proper records, something which is not done at present.

Working groups should also be more professional in how they respond to community feedback. If you give extensive feedback on a new policy and receive no reply, or afterwards see that maybe just one of your comments got integrated into the final document, then you start wondering why you have done all that work. It's just like politics: you go to a public hearing, you say your piece and then the person in power does exactly what he or she always wanted to do.

Secondly, we should improve the tools for community feedback. There are some – Auronet is potentially a fantastic tool – but other tools like opinion polls and referenda are not being used enough, and when they are used they are often poorly drafted. It takes a particular skill to design a referendum or opinion poll from which we can get significant feedback.

**Carel:** I think we should also acknowledge that our working groups should have qualified people as members. There is still a belief in Auroville that anyone can be a member of any working group. This is simply not true.

**Joseba:** The problem of the short term of office of major work groups is that Auroville does not profit from the experience that has been built-up. As soon as the members have learned the ropes, often by trial and error, they have to leave. Then new people come in who make similar mistakes. We should create a group of functionaries, a kind of Auroville Civil Service, which would serve successive working groups. In this way there would be continuity and the work wouldn't suffer. It would also ensure that records are properly kept.

**Carel:** I think there should be an Auroville appeal body consisting of independent members who are not part of any other group. This appeal body would deal with appeals of people against decisions of any working group or unit and it would be the ultimate authority. We cannot continue with the situation we have today where Aurovilians who feel wronged run to the Governing Board or the Secretary.

**Alain:** Mother described 'divine anarchy' as the ultimate organization Auroville should have. We cannot go straight to it now, but we should keep it in view as it reminds us that our main problems are always problems of our level of consciousness. Mother also mentioned the need for the members of the main organizing group to have an intuitive consciousness. Of course, any time you mention the need for seven intuitive people the immediate reaction is, 'We don't have them'. I understand. However, my feeling is that when certain things function relatively well here, it is because some intuitive quality is at work.

**Angad:** I think if we really want to change something in our organization, we need to look at the process of our own personal *sadhana* and do something parallel to that in our external organization. It's about looking for the psychic opening. At present, we don't have any spiritual process reflected in our collective governance and I think this is a glaring omission. I don't know exactly how we would do it, but I believe this would be the fastest way to improve our organization. After all, we've tried everything else and nothing seems to have worked.

Interview by Alan

## REFLECTION

### A failure of faith?

I live a double life. When, in the early morning, I sit on my terrace reading Sri Aurobindo or Mother, I swim in vast seas. The grand architecture of their vision and experience fills me with the absolute certainty that spirit is the moving force and mind no more than a receiving-station.

However, when the daily buzzer sounds and I scramble up to organize forest work or write an article or plan a presentation, I slide seamlessly into another mode where mind, liberally mixed with emotions, is king.

Do others live this split existence? I would guess so, because while most Aurovilians are reticent

about expressing themselves on spiritual matters, there is a shared understanding that we are here to develop a consciousness beyond mind. And yet when you look, say, at the organizational structure we have evolved, it is clearly a product of our minds, not of any spiritual aspiration.

Mother didn't want this: she gave clear indications concerning how we should organize ourselves. And for her the prime organizing principle was consciousness: only those with a higher consciousness – which, at the minimum, should be 'intuitive' – should be the organizers.

We've never adopted this. We've never encoded this in our mandates or in the process of decision-making. And we think we know why. Because either we don't believe that anybody of an 'intuitive' consciousness is among us, or we distrust our ability to recognise them and are terrified of giving power to impostors.

But there may be another reason. Because when I look at my own transition from early morning understanding to mind-dominated day, I recognise that it is more than just a forgetting. At some fundamental level, I realize that I doubt that spirit

really is the prime mover; that spirit, as Mother pointed out, can organize matter far more effectively and comprehensively than can mind. At some level, soaked, as I probably still am, in the materialistic perspective of my upbringing, and with no direct (or, let's say, conscious) experience of the power of spirit over matter, I simply don't believe.

Is this true of others? I don't know. But I suspect this may be another, unacknowledged, factor in our failure to incorporate Mother into the 'practical' aspects of our daily lives.

What to do? I know I won't change overnight, perhaps not even over many lifetimes. But I want to try. After all, I don't believe it was mind which brought me here, and Auroville is clearly not sustained by our collective mind-force. So why don't we try that 'other way'? Not, perhaps, full-bloodedly at first: we don't have to leap to enthrone the intuitives, assuming that they can be found. But, at the very least, we could try making a space, a time, during our meetings and work group discussions for something else to come through, a kind of 'time-out for the divine' when we listen and call for something beyond the tired static of our minds.

Alan



# The Five Year Sustainable Agriculture Plan

On August 11, the Auroville Sustainable Agriculture Plan steering group presented the outline of a five year plan. In brief, sustainable organic agriculture can become a reality in Auroville if we change food habits, invest in existing and new farms and have a wider participation of residents in the food and agriculture sector of Auroville.

For the Auroville food and agriculture sector, the time has come for a big jump. That, at least, is the opinion of the Auroville Sustainable Agriculture Plan (ASAP) steering group, an ad-hoc 12 member working group consisting of representatives of farmers and other community members.

"Since late 2009, the ASAP steering group has been studying the Auroville Farms and the Auroville food scenario to assess weaknesses and potentialities," says Jeff, who runs Discipline Farm. "We've come up with a vision statement, a mission statement and a strategy for the next five years. [see box] In brief, we want to ensure a more sustainable and secure food supply for Auroville."

## Farm productivity

"The work," says Priya Vincent, another steering group member who runs Buddha Garden, "involved firstly making an assessment of the Auroville farms. About 320 acres, managed by 14 farms were assessed for their existing and potential productivity. A few new farms from which data is not yet available were not included in the survey."

The ASAP group found that only 49% of the 320 acres were under active cultivation, while the rest was woodland, fallow or unused land, or was used for infrastructure and buildings. "We studied the scope for bringing more acres under cultivation as well as the scope for getting more produce from the same



PHOTO: COURTESY VIVEK

## Growing capsicum in Auro-Orchard

### FoodLink

But even with these additional investments, a link remains to be developed. That is FoodLink, the nexus between all food that Auroville grows and buys, and what it distributes and sells to the outside world. "FoodLink is the essential element of our five-year plan," says Priya. "The existing small FoodLink will have to grow into a large organisation that manages the demand-supply gap. It will develop food production plans, taking production capacity and demand into account; it will procure from Auroville farmers, purchase from Auroville's bioregional partners and from external suppliers; it will store the goods; and it will distribute and sell the surplus to Auroville's collective kitchens, restaurants, food processors and food distributors such as Auroville's Pour Tous outlets; and it may operate sales outlets in Pondicherry."

"Here too, investments will be needed," says Toine. "Initially, we need to expand the existing set-up which will cost something in the order of Rs. 10-14 lakhs. Ultimately, FoodLink will need an entirely new facility. The costs of that new facility are being worked out." And the running costs? "The FoodLink team has estimated their annual operational costs to be close to 8% of the market value of food handled in 2011-12, which is too high. But as volumes increase and processes improve, that cost should reduce to 3% or lower," says Toine.

### Can we change food habits?

But how to increase the Auroville demand for Auroville-grown food? And is there a need to do so if FoodLink could easily sell the surplus that is not consumed in Auroville through its sales outlets in nearby Pondicherry?

"It would be a sad story if all the efforts made into growing organic food in Auroville would result in that food being sold in the external markets while Auroville residents continue to consume mostly non-organic food purchased from the external market," says Toine. "We would rather see the Auroville population change its food habits and consume what Auroville grows with only the surplus being sold externally."

This brought a lively discussion. Angelika, who runs the Solar Kitchen, said that attempts to introduce some Auroville-grown produce, such as varagu, had not been a great success. "The response was conservative. People favour foods that are basic to a culture, such as rice for Indians. We also lack interesting recipes. But with a modern cookbook, and with a positive approach from the Aurovilians, we might be more successful."

Europe, and in many countries in the world, farm subsidies take up to 50% of a country's budget. Farming and food are subsidized all over the world. Nobody in Germany, for example, pays the true price of farm products. Even in India much food is, directly or indirectly, subsidized. Auroville has no choice: it has to subsidize its organic food so that it becomes available to all Aurovilians."

### Can Auroville become sustainably self-supporting?

Many Aurovilians believe it is essential that Auroville become self-supporting. Some use the term "self-sufficient". Toine explains that there is a difference between being self-supporting and being self-sufficient. "The Mother spoke of Auroville as 'a self-supporting township', which is different from being self-sufficient. Self-supporting means that Auroville's economy should support the food requirements of its population; self-sufficiency would mean that you grow everything on your own land, which is impossible in the case of Auroville."

So can we become self-supporting? "We believe we can," says Toine. "But we have to discuss this in a wider context: whether Auroville can be self-supporting in food and agriculture in a sustainable manner." Asked for a definition, Priya explained that for the steering group, the term includes four objectives: conserving an ecological balance by avoiding depletion of natural resources; being economically self-supporting; contributing to increased long-term food security for the community; and stimulating people to be involved in agriculture. "We have concluded that all these objectives are within Auroville's reach. But to realise them needs a committed focus from everyone in Auroville. It is not just up to the farmers or to FoodLink. It is the responsibility of all of us and many more people have to get involved in food and agriculture."

The steering group intends to increase awareness by organizing 'Thought for Food' workshops to provide a platform for all concerned.

Carel



Rice fields at Annapurna

acres. We calculated the need for investments in equipment and buildings, and studied the availability of human resources. Finally we prepared a crop plan for each farm." To a question as to whether any of the existing farms needs to be closed down as they seem unviable, Jony Jos, another member of the task force, responded that "no farms should be closed down. We should put our energies into improving farms instead."

## The Auroville food demand

The second aspect of the work was to study the Auroville's demand for food. Here the ASAP group ran almost immediately into problems. "The demand data were incomplete and there was a lack of information-sharing," says Priya. "But we found that Auroville's consumption patterns show that the food demand of Aurovilians includes a good amount of food that cannot be grown in this area. There is an insufficient demand for Auroville-grown food."

The comparison of production capacity and demand was the next step. Toine, another steering group member, explains. "We used models in which crop plans are mainly based on demand, with two different population growth scenarios: respectively 2850 people in 2015-16 and 5000 people in 2015-16. We then used another crop plan model

"Both models show that all Auroville produce can be fully consumed in Auroville. But they also show that Auroville farms will only be able to meet 15% - 25% of the Auroville demand; the remaining part of our food requirement will have to be bought from outside. To reach the figure of 25%, the total area under cultivation, at present 160 acres, will have to grow to 400 acres in 2015-2016."

### Large investments are needed

So substantial investments will be required. "We calculated that to improve existing agricultural land and to develop new land (existing Auroville land and land to be purchased), a yearly capital investment will be required. These investments are estimated to amount to Rs. 10 crore in the 5-year plan period, starting with an investment of Rs. 56 lakhs in 2011-12."

"We also propose that a working capital fund is created. Our farms have been working all these years without an official working capital, which meant that sometimes land would lie fallow simply because there was no money to get crop cycles started. We propose that a revolving working capital estimated at about 30% of the annual value of Auroville's farm produce will be made available to the farms."

## From the Auroville Sustainable Agriculture Plan

### Vision

1. Create and maintain a healthy and conscious farming system, integrated with and providing food for Auroville.
2. Produce food in a way that is sustainable for the earth, for the community and for the bioregion.
3. Promote and advance sustainable farming practices locally and globally.

### Mission

1. Provide as much healthy, organic food for Auroville as possible.  
*By providing one of the basic needs of the community, Auroville's agricultural sector will be a major contributor to making Auroville a self-supporting township.*
2. Establish and maintain a community-embraced network that guides and supports food production and distribution for Auroville.  
*Create information systems that enable the farms to estimate demand, monitor production and set targets for production of selected items. Setup certification and monitoring systems which will ensure the high quality of our organic produce, and promote the sharing of best practices amongst farmers.*
3. Increase knowledge, awareness and the practice of sustainable organic farming in Auroville and beyond.  
*Provide education and experience for individuals, both within and outside Auroville, who wish to learn about sustainable farming.*

### Strategy

1. Increase own production and decrease dependence on external procurement.
2. Optimize agricultural assets in a sustainable manner.
3. Use educational tools to evince interest and participation in food and agriculture.
4. Make food and agriculture an attractive and creative sector to work in.
5. Change food habits to a more sustainable diet (more locally-grown, organic farm produce, e.g. the community-supported agriculture initiative [see AVToday 265].



# The threshold of the community

Recently, the Entry Service published its annual report in successive issues of the News and Notes. It was both informative and thought-provoking. Here are extracts:

**T**he Entry Service has a mandate to screen all applicants, which is a rather daunting task. While there are only seven of us in the team, the Newcomer process involves many people in the community – including the Newcomer's contact person, and people who work with the Newcomer or live in the same community. Every applicant is held to the same standard, irrespective of his/her origin. All criteria and requirements as listed in the current Admission Policy need to be met by individuals to be accepted as Newcomers and, later, as Resident Aurovilians.

The Entry Service makes all decisions by consensus, but if that is not possible a decision is made by consent and team members' reservations are noted. All in all, thanks to a great degree of flexibility, and to encourage Auroville's population growth, we have accepted roughly 90 % of the applicants that we have met in a formal advisory interview. Reasons for refusing an applicant vary. Some people do not fulfil the basic criteria in terms of a general understanding of the aims and ideals. Some people are merely looking for a pleasant place to retire and/or simply wish to provide an alternative life-style for themselves and family without committing to the community; or are seeking alternative education for their children; or are needing an Entry Visa to live in India for lengthy and uninterrupted stays.

On occasions we delay the process of an applicant between 3 to 6 months to give the applicant, our team and the community some time and space to reflect. Rescinding someone's process is the end result of a series of discussions with the concerned person and various working groups. The number of rescind cases that we have had to make is an indication that too many applicants in the past were not screened properly prior to being accepted as Newcomers.

## Orientation Programmes for Newcomers

Two separate Newcomer Orientation programmes have successfully been running over the past 18 months. The purpose of these programmes is to ensure a smooth integration of new people wanting to become Newcomers. It plays a significant part in providing the needed background to aspiring applicants and Newcomers already in an entry process.

## The Tamil Orientation Programmes

These programmes, held in the Tamil language only, are especially for our Tamil-speaking population. A varied group of committed guest speakers have covered the *Auroville Charter*, *The Dream*, Mother and Sri Aurobindo, Auroville and Integral Yoga and human unity and have also touched upon the more practical aspects of education, housing, waste management, health and hygiene and farming. Meeting locations vary so as to expand the participants' knowledge of the community. So far meetings have been held at Ilaigarkal School, Isai Ambalam School, Creativity, the Pavilion of Tibetan Culture, Buddha Gardens, Solitude Farm and Savitri Bhavan. Out of the regular 30 or so Tamil participants in the programme, 3 have become Aurovilians, 8 have become Newcomers, 10 have submitted an application and met with our team in a formal advisory interview but not been accepted as Newcomers as of now, 3 have had their Newcomer process rescinded. The remainder have either not come to our office to check with us or were told that we did not feel they are ready to submit an application yet.

## The Newcomer Orientation Programme

This programme is run by Sonja, Rakkhal and Shivaya and lasts five full days. The programme focuses on the participants themselves: forming the group and fostering relations between the participants. The feedback from participants is impressively positive and our team has made this Newcomer Orientation Programme part of the Entry process for all Newcomers, irrespective of their background. Since its inception in November 2009, the team has held 9 programmes. Each group consists on average of 20 participants from all origins: foreigners and Indian nationals from the nearby villages and elsewhere in Tamil Nadu and other Indian states. So far, out of the 187 participants, 33 have become Aurovilians, 81

Newcomers, 17 will be returning with a letter of recommendation with an Entry Visa towards becoming Newcomers, 18 have not been accepted, 4 left Auroville. The rest of the people have cancelled their application or are waiting to have an advisory interview.

## Newcomers for Newcomers programme

This is a programme organized by Newcomers themselves for other Newcomers. After an excellent start in 2009 with monthly events that were attended by an average of 30 newcomers, this programme, which promotes knowledge and integration, went through ups and downs in 2010. Events were fewer and not as well attended. However, it has recently regained much popularity thanks to the active participation of the Unity Pavilion team.

## Field visits

We have managed a few "field visits" to communities which host a high number of Newcomers. Our team has visited Aranya, Saddhana Forest, Well Paper, Swaram, Marthuvam Healing Forest, the Pony Farm and Equality. There are many more places that would need such visits, but we have not had the time. It is always refreshing for both sides to be able to meet face-to-face and exchange our respective positions and views on the Entry process on an informal basis.

## Recent recommendations

Over the past 12 months from May 2010 to April 2011 included, the Entry Service has recommended (subject to community feedback) 80 new Aurovilians (38 women + 42 men). Of these, 17 come from the nearby villages, 11 from elsewhere in Tamil Nadu and other states of India, 52 are foreigners: 69 new Newcomers (37 women and 32 men) Of these, 6 come from the nearby villages, 12 from elsewhere in Tamil Nadu and other states of India and 51 are foreigners; 3 Returning Aurovilians (1 woman and 2 men, all foreigners); 20 Friends of Auroville (13 women and 7 men of whom 18 are foreigners, 2 Indians)

The Entry Service has also announced that 12 Newcomers left Auroville on their own (11 foreigners and 1 Indian from another state of India). 20 people had their process rescinded (8 women and 12 men of whom 14 come from the nearby villages, 1 from another state of India and 5 are foreigners). 1 foreign Friend of Auroville had her status revoked.

## Newcomers

Currently there 99 Newcomers in the process. 3 have ongoing processes dating back as far as 2008. 11 started their process this month, 4 are on hold as they are not able to give even a part-time work commitment to the community. Out of the total number, 55 are women and 44 men. There are 57 singles, 6 couples without children and 37 come as families, either single parent with 1 or 2 children or couples with children. Our seniormost Newcomer is 70 years old and our youngest is 21 years old.

As of now, we have some 40 children of Newcomers registered in our various schools. The remainder are babies up to 3 years old not attending the pre-crèche and being taken care of by their parents.

## Friends of Auroville

Presently there are some 40 Friends of Auroville; some of them are officially registered, some of them are currently completing their registration towards confirming their status. Our team has announced 20 new Friends of Auroville over the past year. All of them substantially contribute to the development of Auroville abroad, mostly through their work with AVI Centres, and in Auroville through various activities ranging from photo exhibitions to fund-raising, marketing Auroville products, practicing their expertise in education, marketing, medicine, alternative energy, etc.

## Fresh applicants

Our group has agreed in principle to 93 fresh applicants who were granted letters of recommendation towards returning as Newcomers within a time frame of 3 months to 2 years. We have already scheduled some 20 advisory interviews in July.

## Information requests

We have also answered about 200 information enquiries from India and foreign countries from people interested in joining our community. They either visit us directly at our office or write to us. Most of the time, we redirect these people to the Guest Service at Solar Kitchen. However, a significant number of them have already been here and wish to become Newcomers and therefore need our attention.

## Sharing our reflections and directions with the wider community

The Entry Service is the threshold of the community and Auroville needs to welcome genuine people that have a true aspiration for progress at the individual and collective levels. Many conflicts that we have come from having people in the community who do not share common values. While we can agree to be flexible and see each case as a special case, there are some basic points to look into for the sake of clarity towards a smooth future in the interest of the wider community.

We handle several hundred requests at one time and with limited personnel. Not accepting an individual, delaying his acceptance by 6 or more months or rescinding someone's process is sometimes met with resistance on the part of the individual who feels "rejected", and with even more resistance by a group of supporters who may have sympathy for a person but may not have the full picture. While we acknowledge that it is absolutely impossible for our team to fully know a person on the basis of a few interactions, we need a lot more understanding of the work, and support and participation from the community. Gossip about an individual, group intimidation, accusations of dishonesty, corruption and racism and maintaining double-standards often come to our ears. We infrequently but still too often receive lectures, insults or threats as individuals or as a team. While this is not directly affecting our work, it undermines at times our energy and enthusiasm for this demanding task for the community. This is hardly compensated for by the many support letters from services/working groups or individuals we receive: one could say that this is a thankless job. Regardless of the challenges, the team has a common appreciation for teamwork and a feeling that we are all going in the same direction, along with the other working groups in the community. This is the key factor in our cohesiveness and sustained interest for the

## Challenges and Concerns

As much as we would like to embrace all the genuine goodwill in people that come and ask to join as Newcomers, there are limiting factors.

**Housing:** The lack of housing facilities is the biggest difficulty we encounter by far. To satisfy a legal requirement from the Auroville Foundation and to facilitate their integration into the community, aspiring Newcomers and Newcomers need to live on Auroville land from the very beginning of their process. At any given time, there are 300 people in the Newcomer pipeline, but there is no new major housing development coming up in the near future.

**Work opportunities:** A certain freedom has been given by the Mother to allow an individual to do the work he/she really feels like doing and our team would not want to force people to do something in Auroville simply because it corresponds to their education or previous work experience as they may want to do something completely different. However, the community has needs that need to be fulfilled. We need an active group to guide Newcomers in this particular field: to find meaningful and regular work that matches the various community needs – preferably in services – with the Newcomer's field(s) of competence.

**Finances:** Many goodwill people, mainly youth, need to be encouraged to join despite their lack of financial means. Availability of maintenances from services/groups/units through work is still scarce. However, the housing and maintenance groups have agreed that they will allocate roughly 10% of their budget to deserving people who really have nothing. Moreover, Newcomers can now receive a maintenance and get their Central Fund and Health Fund contributions taken care of if they are doing essential work for the community.

**People from the local area:** In many cases, when the people come from the local area we have co-dependency concerns that may inhibit their process. In some cases, an applicant may come to rely heavily, and solely, on one Aurovillian only for their housing, their work, their financial support and friendship. A certain level of co-dependency may develop that stunts their growth and inhibits the necessary integration into the larger community. There must be a sincere aspiration and effort to become involved, to understand the community, to explore, to grow and try new things. There must be something different between working for the community and becoming a member of the community. This difference is something individual and interior: a choice made at the soul-level in response to a wish for change, for growth. We regularly urge people to explore larger options if we feel their living/working situation is too small, so that they do not remain stuck in the contained space of their work environment.

**Over-representation of the local Indian population:** Our current population census shows that out of 2224 Aurovilians, 938 are Indians. Out of these 938, 71% come directly from the nearby villages. These figures do not include members of the family that do not have the status of Aurovilians but nevertheless have implications for the Auroville economy. If we want to retain our international spirit, the diversity of our population needs to be better balanced.

**Aging population:** There have been twice as many Newcomers from older age groups (60-80 years of age) than younger age groups over the past 5 years. We would like to encourage more people from younger age groups and individuals with especially-needed skills.

**School admissions:** We need to come to a common understanding regarding Newcomer children with the School Board and the school admission coordinator, given our limited capacities.

Our first concern is that currently one primary school has 15 children of Newcomers plus a sizable number of guests whose parents are aspiring Newcomers. While we very much welcome the fact that this school accommodates the needs of those children who need schooling, a balance needs to be restored. All these children come from abroad and other states of India. In many instances, their parents are involved in the school itself in teaching and/or administration.

Our second concern is single parents wanting to join Auroville while the other parent is unable or unwilling to join. We favour full families joining and wish that schools see it as a priority to accept children when both parents are Newcomers and future Aurovilians. We also favour the idea that parents be willing to work for services other than the school their children join.

## Need to review the current entry policy

Our team sees the need to make revisions to the current entry policy. The following suggestions, that would have to be approved by the Resident Assembly, have been sent to the Working Committee and the Auroville Council:

1) The formal status of Aurovillian and member of the Resident Assembly should be granted only after 3 to 5 years. Meanwhile Newcomers become Residents of Auroville. Housing investments can be returned within this period if the Resident decides to leave or is asked to leave Auroville.

2) The process of an Auroville child automatically gaining the status of Aurovillian is questioned. The status of Aurovillian and member of the resident Assembly could be granted in due time when a child of Auroville makes a very conscious choice to become a Resident and an active member of the community and follows a process to be defined.

3) The guidelines of Friends of Auroville need further reviewing.

4) The guidelines of Associates of Auroville need to be completed. For those employees who do not satisfy the requirements to become an Aurovillian, Associates will be integrated employees who will have some rights – still to be defined – in our community without them having to give up their employee rights, traditional lifestyle and beliefs.

5) The status of partners and relatives who do not want to join the community needs to be fully reviewed.



# Savitri and the New Creation sports ground

The New Creation sports ground campus is the creation of Savitri, an American/French woman who first came to Auroville in 1972. She left for several years then came back in 1991 for good. "I had been taking fitness classes in the U.S.," Savitri says, "and had become very interested in sports and the process of keeping the body fit. I understood the Mother's emphasis on physical fitness. It was not just the Western approach of keeping fit or looking good, but much more. Mother had written: 'We do not want to reject the body, but transform it. For this, physical education is one of the means most directly effective. Our base is our physical being in our body. There is no better way to prepare the body than physical exercise; sports, athletics, gymnastics, and all the games are the best means to develop and strengthen the body.'"

"When I moved back to Auroville, I saw there was a big need for a sportsground. I had been left some money and decided to build a basketball court on the ground outside New Creation Community. I had the ground levelled and put in a bathroom and water connection and one thing led to another. The race track was reshaped and the Youth Camp developed from our shared facilities."

"The basketball court was an immediate success with the local Tamil boys and gradually Auroville kids joined. Twenty years ago very few kids or adults did sports here as there were no facilities. This place was a dust field. Now all these facilities are constantly used and open 12 hours a day."

Savitri not only loves the place, but lives on the place. She has a small two-storey apartment above the gym. "I love the space and the greenery," she says. "There are no neighbours here and I can be as loud as I want."



Savitri (middle) with children and teachers at the New Creation sports ground

"The idea for a swimming pool came from Silvio, who is now deceased. 'I want to build you a swimming pool,' he told me. 'No, thank you,' I answered, knowing how many complications there would be. Three times he made me this offer, so eventually I gave in and bought this land opposite the basketball court. It took three years to build the pool because we had very little money. Actually people thought we were crazy to do this and that the pool would never support itself financially. They were wrong in every way!"

One problem is keeping the staff motivated. "There always has to be a lifeguard with some training who can discipline the kids who jump in and refuse to keep to the lines, so training the staff is an ongoing process."

"The spot for the pool is quite perfect as it is surrounded by fully-grown palm trees. We had a strange experience this summer when a local landowner broke into the swimming pool grounds and set up a hut, claiming the land was his. It is an old story of family inheritances but is now a legal matter and is being dealt with by the High Court in Chennai."

The tennis courts are always well kept. "Clay courts require a lot of maintaining," says Savitri. "Every morning the courts must be swept and watered and the lines redrawn. The players organize their own bookings and our most enthusiastic player drives here every day from Pondicherry. Surprisingly, there is no good tennis club there. The court here is very well used as many children from Auroville learn tennis as part of their school sports program, and of course, there is the Auroville tennis tournament each year."

The Dance Studio has a very active programme. There are 15 classes a week, open to all, including Pilates, Five Elements Dance, Aerobics, Step aerobics, African Dance and fitness training. "Aerobics, Pilates and African dance are probably our most well attended and long-running classes" says Savitri, "and the guests love them!"

The throbs of African drumming and aerobics funky jazz music ring out over New Creation most evenings but no one seems to mind. The Studio is on the first floor above the gym so the exercisers and dancers look out over the tree tops and are serenaded by whistling birds.

The fully-equipped gym below the Dance Studio has a picture of Mother playing tennis when she was around 80 years old. Savitri explains that most of the equipment has been donated, but each year she manages to buy some new equipment as well. "The Tamil boys love the gym. They are here first thing in the morning when it opens at 6.30 a.m. I have to keep an eye on things and the users have to take good care and be responsible themselves. No children are allowed in here for safety's sake."

"I would love to improve certain things here," says Savitri. "For example, the running track needs levelling

and proper surfacing. This would cost a lot of money. We get some money from SAIER and the small monthly contributions people make for using the various facilities as well as the occasional donation. It all adds up somehow. If we need something special, like last year we needed a net to cover the swimming pool, I make an appeal and people give. They recognize the value of this place and the pleasure it gives to so many people."

Savitri talks about the huge amount of maintenance the sports ground, the tennis courts, the studio, the swimming pool and the gym takes. "We have four full-time staff to help maintain the large area. We have to have a decent standard of cleanliness as we are dealing with people's health. The pool requires constant attention for reasons of hygiene and safety. It can be hard work."

"A few years ago I went to England for eight months to study Pilates and fitness training," Savitri says enthusiastically. "I wanted to learn something new and be able to present something different to Aurovilians in a professional way. It was a marvellous learning experience. It was also good to spend time outside and see what was happening in the big world outside Auroville."

"In September I am going to England again. This time to start a B.A in Sports Science and Nutrition at St. Mary's College in Twickenham, outside London. I studied physics, chemistry and biology at Future School in order to be accepted at this English college. It was very stimulating but quite tough as I had to work at it every night. I am doing this course as I want to improve my knowledge of the body and of physical expression and I want to be able to teach nutrition, body maintenance and also how to train people. Eventually I would like to set up a Sports School here in Auroville with a good systematic training programme."

Dianna

## Surf's up!

If there is one aspect of the yoga that most Aurovilians take seriously, it is the aspect of the yoga in the physical. Almost everybody I know is engaged in some physical activity or other. A programme of physical education is mandatory for school-going kids. The yoga and aerobics classes at Pitanga and New Creation Gym are generally overflowing with the young and the old, there is a determined gang of cyclists who spend their Sundays cycling over a hundred kilometers in and around our bioregion, enthusiastic joggers pass by my house in the morning... honest to God, I have even seen an esteemed Auroville Today editor jogging! Yep, we are a determined bunch when it comes to working out the body.

And neither do we lag behind when it comes to competitive games. Since the good old days, the good old oldies have been puttering around on the badminton and tennis courts. Soccer is played regularly, and occasionally one catches some action in cricket as well. But few sports are taken seriously enough to compete with outside teams. There is basketball, the number one game of Auroville. For many years now, Auroville has hosted and participated in regional competitions. Kabbadi, a local game, has a smaller but dedicated following and participation at the regional level. A more recent phenomenon is Ultimate Frisbee; a couple of months ago the Auroville team did us proud by bagging the national championship. But, honestly, who wants to run around, chasing a ball or disc (or run around, period) when there are ways of being cool and looking cool?

Surf's up guys! From a marginal weekend activity at Repos, surfing has emerged as a popular activity among Auroville teenagers. I did not realize to the extent that it had caught the imagination of our youngsters till I caught some surfing action this weekend at a national championship at nearby Mahabalipuram (Auroville's most popular weekend getaway town).

True, there were subtle signs all along: there was that time when my stepson Kareem, not yet in his teens, asked if he could have as a gift from New Zealand wax and glue for his surfboard, and yes, a pair of surfing shorts (Billabong please) would do

quite nicely. Next we would hear his bike roar out at the ungodly hour of 5.30 am, for the best waves were in the morning, just a 100 meters south of the Quiet beach where Aurovillian surfers and trainers, Samai and Juan had set up a surfer's club. I'd occasionally catch him and his pals cooling off, after surfing for the better part of the morning, with soft drinks at Kuyilpalayam, bare bodies smeared with grayish white zinc oxide as protection against the sun. And finally there was a request from these daredevil teenagers if they could borrow my motorbike to pick up a surfing board from Mahabalipuram (You want do what? Drive down the East Coast Highway cradling a 4-foot finned surfboard on the motorcycle?!).

I had to check out this madness – this utter devotion to surfing – myself. So off I went, on the motorcycle of course, to the competition at Mahabalipuram to see what the fuss was all about.

The first thing that I noticed was the Indian surfers. We Indians are not an adventurous lot. Few of us ever learn to swim. But out there in the waters of Mahabalipuram were dark skinny Indians surfing the waves like pros. Later I learnt that there was actually some sort of a surfing school in Mangalore, and the rocky coast of Vishakapattinam has some of India's best surfing spots.

And then there were the Aurovilians, from toddlers to teenagers, accompanied by friends and family, all at home in the water. And strangely enough, quite at home on the trashed beach of Mahabalipuram with its shanty overnight development geared to tourists (sometimes I feel that children growing up in Auroville are more at home in India than me). So OK, it wasn't the Ugumbe bay of Sri Lanka famed worldwide as a hot surfing spot, it wasn't the pristine beaches of Hawaii, New Zealand, Australia – all reputed to be surfer's paradises. It was Mahabalipuram, India where one shares the beach with fishermen and their motorboats (well, now that the fish is mostly gone, the motorboats more often than not take tourists for a joyride in the bay), restaurants offering the much



Dylan catches a wave

sought-after sea views and temple views, and, of course, the delicately carved 7th century Shore Temple of the Pallavas. Where else but in India do the modern and the ancient world coexist so harmoniously, if incongruously?

Right in front of the monolithic rock with its intriguing carvings that the tsunami of 2006 had washed up on the beach, a multicolored "shamiana" was erected and served as base camp for the judges and the participants. From there, the surfers would venture out on their boards, paddling with their arms, like sleek young seal pups swimming upstream, bobbing around in the waters till the right sea wave came along, high and curved. If you were at the right spot, and were paddling fast enough to stay just ahead of that deep sea swell, chances are (assuming you had some experience in surfing) you would get it right and ride the wave out, till it crashed on the shore. Not an easy feat, by

any means. It all boiled down to technique and experience, knowing when to catch that wave, when to crouch, when to stand up, or adjust your body ever so slightly to maintain that balance. More often than not, the waves were merciless and tipped over inexperienced surfers, dragging them into the crashing foam. But the best ones were oh so graceful, riding out that wave, half-in-water, half-in-air, rocking the board, even doing flips, and never ever losing that precarious balance till they reached the beach.

The grace, the adventure, the sheer thrill of mastering the watery element. Ah! I think I finally gained an insight into why surfing has such passionate acolytes. As for the competition, it kind of frittered out, as the surfers seemed more interested in just riding any wave they could than in following the minimal rules laid down by the judges.

Bindu



# Auzolan

The pathways at Pitanga are moist after yesterday's downpour, but there are no water puddles. "The foot-paths are permeable, water seeps through. They have been made from a mixture of red soil, small granite chips, lime and a little bit of cement," says Eric, the inventor of the product. He smiles. "I call it Percolime. It's the ideal product for Auroville's foot and cycle paths." Is it expensive? "It isn't cheap," he responds. "But it has a long life, and, you must admit, it is very beautiful." Eric got the idea about three years back when he was reflecting on his days as a young man. "I'd stopped school early and was temporarily working in a construction company which was making tennis courts. They used a green gravel dry mixed. I realised we could make something similar here, using locally available materials."

Eric runs Auzolan, a unit he setup in 1998. "I first came to Auroville in 1992 and got completely bowled over. I went back to France and I told my wife Ane and the kids that this was the place we should live! It took three years, but in 1995 we all joined. I've never looked back." He started fixing marble at the Matrimandir, and after one year decided to start his own company and create a team of qualified construction workers.

"I had the idea to make machines to produce hollow mudblocks using the locally-available red soil. Aureka gave us the space and help we needed, I put in a few lakhs of my own money and we designed and built the machines." As an aside he also developed a new model wheelbarrow, a small crane, and props and scaffoldings.

"I then used the machines to produce the hollow bricks for building the Auzolan workshop at Rêve as a test. This was followed by phase I of Auroville's first Line of Force, which is now called 'Progress'. It was a success. We made hollow bricks from a mixture of red soil, lime and cement and plastered the walls with lime mortar. As the bricks are hollow, they have very little thermal mass and provide a good insula-



Eric next to an Auzolan vortex

tion to sun exposure. As a consequence, the interior of the building is very cool, even in summer."

Yet, the idea didn't catch on. He is disappointed, he admits. "They've recently used hollow bricks for the houses of the Maitreya community, but these are baked hollow clay bricks brought from Kerala. It is definitely a good product, but the fabrication process (lots of wood is required to fire the bricks) and the transport don't make it sustainable," he says. "I think we should try to produce as much as we can locally, and not import bricks from another state. I built the machines and did all the research to show that we have a suitable alternative. If funds would materialize to develop a block factory and get the machinery to prepare the soil, we can start production. This would go together with introducing this building technique to local labour, architects and constructors, and promote this material through workshops."

Auzolan has been doing a lot of house repair and renovation work in the last years. "We have been able to see all the architectural and construction mistakes that have been made. Sadly, some of these mistakes continue to be made. Architects should adapt their design in order to minimize maintenance costs, pushing their builders to use quality materials and new techniques. An adequate site infrastructure and machinery helps control construction delays and quality, while keeping hand labour manageable," he says.

Eric would like a rethink of the way in which Auroville is being built. "I believe we are thinking completely wrong. We all the time think in terms of costs and encouraging people to purchase everything outside and build as cheaply as possible using outside labour. That's wrong. We should be building Auroville from the inside, not depending on the outside. For me it is basic that we

should teach and train our young people to participate in the building of Auroville!"

That is what Eric would like to bring to Auroville: an institution to teach teachers the basics of construction. "Such a facility would also be good for Auroville youth; those who are not motivated to go to school could learn to work manually. Many youth nowadays work on environment, but construction work has not yet been taken up with the same enthusiasm. Auroville should create human and material facilities to teach construction. It is a matter of making construction more fun!"

Is there sufficient incentive to be doing construction work? "For me, it's very gratifying work. I have a fantastic team of 20 employees from various villages who have become completely attuned to working in Auroville, and my unit is well-equipped. So I enjoy the work. But 20 people is the maximum number I can deal with to produce quality. Quite a few Aurovilians who were engaged in construction in the past have stopped as the work was too heavy. I believe this was often because they were doing large sites with just one or two Aurovilians organising and supervising a large workforce."

Auzolan is also involved in wastewater research. "About seven years ago we started building wastewater treatments, under guidance of Jean-François Audic who is experienced in water management, using anaerobic baffle reactors, a kind of improved septic tank. We also introduced vortexes and open-air flow forms to clean and energise the wastewater. Our pilot project, in 2004, was the wastewater treatment plant of Lumière, Auroville's silk-screen printing unit, which produces quite challenging waste water. We have managed to minimise the environmental impact successfully. Since then, we have succeeded to install quite a few new systems or redesign old ones. The Centre Guest House has been our last project." Auzolan's vortex, he says, add a nice aesthetic component while the water flowing through the flow forms sounds

like a mountain stream.

Eric's latest endeavour is his dismantable house intended as a 'starter' house for people with no accommodation. "Quite a few people have expressed interest, even though it is not the cheapest option." The house is a modular structure, extendable to accommodate the changing needs of the occupants, and will last a long time. "We cannot tell Newcomers that the temporary house will only be for one or two years," says Eric. "That's simply not true. At the present moment, no new housing projects are taking off, while the housing projects that are under construction have all been fully booked. That means that 'temporary' may not mean short-term! So these houses have to be comfortable, practicable and still be dismantable and reusable after 10 or even 20 years. We are waiting for L'Avenir d'Auroville, the town planning department, to give a place to build."

Asked about the financial health of Auzolan, Eric responds that in Europe the unit would have closed down. "I have developed this company with my own money, initially investing 22-23 lakhs. During the first years, I was giving my profits to Auroville. But soon I realised that I couldn't expect to be financially supported by Auroville. So I stopped contributing to the community, and instead invest all profits in the equipment we need for our work and in research."

Auzolan, says Eric, is in fact an Auroville service unit. "I have come for Auroville, and I do not care to work anywhere else in India - I did it once, in 2004, it was a fantastic experience to share with my workers for 4 months. It was interesting work and well paid, but at that time I realised that Auroville was definitely my priority! I am completely dedicated to Auroville and have no other aim than to contribute to this project. I love my work, and I don't count the hours. I'm learning to interact with as harmoniously as possible with the local workers and the Aurovillian clients, because after all, the human brick IS the important one!"

*In conversation with Carel*

## Riding the buses

In the last five years, five people from Auroville have been killed or seriously injured on the East Coast Road. Each year the road gets more and more dangerous and unpleasant, so we should all be extremely grateful to the Auroville Community Transport team which provides us with a choice of 14 journeys to Pondicherry by bus each week.

"It can be a jolly way to travel," says a regular bus user. "It gives us about three hours to do our shopping, visit the Ashram Samadhi and Indian Coffee House. We all bump up and down together as we rattle through Auroville, picking people up on the way. We clamber off in Pondicherry outside the Hotel du Parc - then wave to each other as we pass on Nehru Street doing our shopping. We arrive back in time to get a good seat and the ladies often show off their shopping purchases to the assembled audience. The driver always leaves precisely on time and we collapse into our seats in the noon day heat and are driven back to Auroville. It is an excellent service and a very good community sharing. The Saturday bus is the most popular one as Saturday is traditionally a shopping day and I have met many nice people on the trip. The rest of the week's buses are emptier, so you have lots of room to spread out your shopping."

An elderly Aurovillian adds, "I love using the bus. If it were not for the ACT bus service I would find it very difficult to get to Pondicherry. Taxis have become expensive and sharing is not always possible or convenient. Sometimes, if I have a long appointment or a visit, I get the bus to go in and catch a rickshaw to come back, or the other way around."

The service has been going for three years now. Previously the only service was the Saturday, Monday and Wednesday yellow school bus provided by SAIER. SAIER also has a large van that picks up elderly people from the Auromodèle side of town and takes them to and from their work at Bharat Nivas and SAIER offices. "Without this service it would be impossible for us to work," says one 85 year old.

"I have to admit one factor that prevents me from using the bus," says an elderly Aurovillian, "is

that I have to take rickshaws to get around Pondicherry when the bus drops me. It can be quite costly if you take a few, and dealing with the rickshaw drivers can sometimes be a nightmare, even though I am Indian and am used to their way of dealing."

Chandresh, Taj and Hari created ACT in 2008 and run it from their office at Saracon. "The number of weekly passengers varies considerably, according to the season and weather," says Taj. "I just checked the records for the first week in July this year and found that 192 people had travelled to Pondicherry on the buses that week." That is an awful lot of petrol saved, and maybe a few body parts as well. If 192 people used the buses that week it means that 3,455 miles of hair-raising driving was avoided. In the guest season it would easily be double that figure.

"We have three paid drivers - Manikandan, Senthil Murugan and Hariputhiri - who have been with us since the beginning and who are given regular training in safe driving. They'll also assist elderly passengers to get in and out of the bus as the bus has a high and awkward first step."

Amongst ACT's most popular trips were the Friday night runs from the Solar Kitchen to Sadhana Forest where people were given a tour of Sadhana Forest, watch an eco-movie and then enjoy a vegan dinner. "This trip has been suspended because Sadhana Forest now have a van and they are currently using it to ferry visitors to Sadhana Forest from the city centre on Fridays," says Taj. "Nonetheless, we probably will rekindle the ACT service when the guest season is peaking and more capacity is needed to accommodate the number of people travelling to Sadhana Forest on Fridays."

Another ACT service is ferrying passengers to Thiruvannamalai for the Girivalam, the monthly full moon walk around Thiruvannamalai's sacred mountain. The bus arrives around 7:30 in the evening and leaves at midnight, so that one has about five hours to perambulate the 13 kilometres around the mountain. "It was an exhausting but fascinating moonlit walk," said Helmut, a young German visitor. "You get back to Auroville absolutely exhausted, but very satisfied with your-



The ACT bus in Pondicherry

self. I met many new people. If this special bus trip had not been there, I don't think I would have had the courage or energy to get to Thiruvannamalai on my own. I think it will be one of my most treasured Indian memories."

"Most of the passengers on the Thiruvannamalai trip are guests," explains Taj. "But our Sunday trips to Vedantangal Bird Sanctuary are mostly booked by Aurovilians. This is more of a local community occasion and this trip too has proved very successful."

Taj explained ACT's financial state. "Our financial state is healthy, but not sustainable. We have not recovered our initial costs and will not have money to eventually replace the buses, but we feel quite satisfied with the way it is going." ACT is asking a monetary contribution from the passengers on a strictly voluntary basis. The amount is left up to the sense of responsibility of each passenger, to contribute according to their means. "At ACT we feel that it is not satisfying to refuse transportation for reasons of no payment or too little payment. Everyone should have the opportunity to do a reality check with their actual goodwill once in a while, and contributing to one's transportation on the ACT bus is such an occasion. With this system, the generosity of the ones who 'have' can help offset the cost of covering up for the needs of those who

'don't have'," says Taj. "True, we did mention a specific amount to help people understand the actual cost of a trip to Pondy. And just for the sake of clarity: when we receive a contribution of Rs. 30 for a one way trip to Pondy, ACT is breaking even." ACT published its very transparent annual report on the Auroville internal website on 13th May, 2011.

ACT's main administrative headache has been the introduction of the Aurocard. "In shops, guest houses and services the card is simple to use. But on the buses, it is a completely different situation," says Taj. "The dust and the constant jerking on Auroville's bumpy roads have proven fatal to the electronics of the Aurocard reader. Guests now have to pay cash, which is not ideal in the context of Auroville. It is even more difficult when they want to pay for a trip that requires advance booking. For ACT, the Aurocard has to be reviewed."

ACT has become one of the essential services of Auroville, and we may expect that it will extend its activities. One possibility is to provide a regular bus service between the city centre and the residential zone to Kuilyapalayam. "I am confident it will happen one day," says Taj. "Auroville's bus services show by their efficiency and community spirit that there can be an alternative to the concept of privately owned cars or motorbikes."

*In conversation with Dianna*



# News in brief

## Auroville Housing Survey 2011

175 people responded to a housing survey done by L'Avenir Communications Platform. 70% of them are Aurovillian, the remainder are Newcomers and friends of Auroville. The survey's main findings are:

74% of people need homes within a year. There is a fairly even divide in the types of units needed with 37% being family, 34% single and 29% couples.

41.6% of those surveyed are willing to steward outlying Auroville land.

78% want to live in the residential area, 75% say they need 2-3 rooms and the most popular housing preference is clustered detached or semi detached houses, followed by apartments and row houses.

51% of people have some financial capital, 46% of those have 5 lakhs or less, 26% have 5-10 lakhs, 20% have 10-20 lakhs and 4% have more.

41% would like to have a rental option, 57% of those could offer under 3,000Rs, 20% could offer 5,000Rs, 7% could offer 8,000Rs and 5% could offer more.

An analysis of these people's current housing situation shows that 79% are living in Auroville housing assets; 12.4% pay rent inside Auroville and 6.2% outside.

## City Services budget

The Budget Coordination Committee has submitted a budget for the financial year 2011-2012 to the FAMC. This year, expenses are expected to exceed income by Rs. 40 lakhs. The deficit will be covered from the reserves. Aurovilians getting a full-time maintenance will have their overall maintenance increased by about 10%. Aurovilians getting less than a full-time maintenance will not get an increase in cash, kind or Pour Tous but will get the increase in the lunch and health funds covered.

Other major features of this budget are an increase in the contribution commercial units pay for every Aurovillian working there from Rs. 2,200 to Rs. 2,400 /month and an increase in school fees for guests from Rs. 5,000 to Rs. 6,000. Commercial units are to give their minimum unit contribution (33% of net profit before contribution) fully unspecified, unless approved by the BCC. The units at the Visitor's Centre will contribute 2% of their turnover, of which 1% will go to the Matrimandir Reception Centre (to be built).

On the expenses side it was agreed that the maintenance budget, from which maintenances to Aurovilians are paid, will increase by 11%. Individual maintenances (cash, kind, and in-kind) will increase by 9.6%; the number of full-time equivalent maintenances will increase from 443 to 448; and there will be no new capital grants issued.

## Termi-fauna survey

The Centre for Pollution Control and Environmental Engineering (CPEE) of Pondicherry University has been conducting a systematic survey of termite species in North-eastern Puducherry. As a part of this programme, a survey is now being conducted at Auroville in collaboration with an Auroville team.

CPEE's interest in the local termite species is to further its recently introduced concept of termigration as the basis of a new solid waste management technology. Termigration involves the use of locally-available species of termites in ex-situ or

in-situ termi-reactors. They have translated the concept into viable processes that have the potential to handle ligneous and other types of 'hard' bio-wastes which resist microbial attack and hence cannot be treated by existing solid waste processing technologies like composting and vermin-composting.

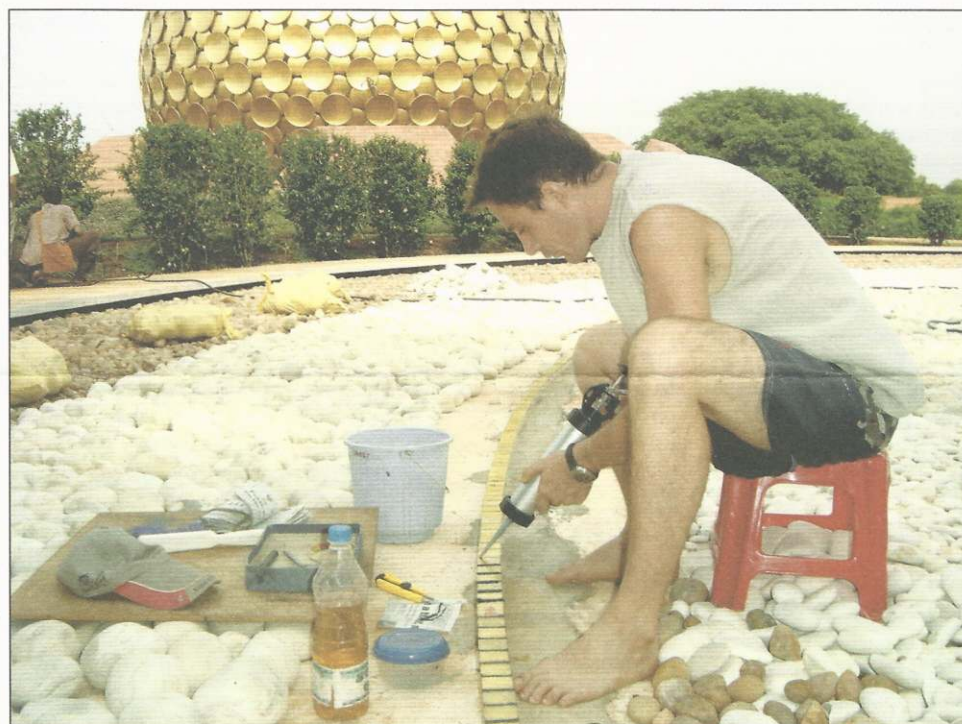
## Progress in the Matrimandir Gardens

The concrete pool of the Garden of Consciousness and the seven descending pools that slope down from it have been completed. The base of the fountain has been clad with slabs of granite.

In the Garden of Existence a golden thread has been created that will run through all gardens. The thread is made by glueing golden tiles onto thin aluminium strips. The tiles being used are the leftover tiles from the two million tiles fabricated for the Matrimandir discs.

## Auroville Arts new website

The new Auroville Arts website (aurovillearts.com) functions like a window for all those interested in purchasing art from this international township. Potential buyers can view art directly, or will be directed to the specific website of the individual artist. The site is a service for Auroville artists who do not pay charges to participate.



Creating a golden thread in the Garden of Existence

## Matrimandir Gardens Support Group

Further to a vote of the Residents' Assembly on some issues in the Matrimandir Garden, which was not heeded by the management, and following the recommendations of the Matrimandir Gardens Forum, the Auroville Council has constituted a nine-member Support Group for the Matrimandir Gardens. The function of this group is to assist the Matrimandir gardens design team and be a communication channel and bridge between the Garden Design Group and the community as a whole. The aim is not to create an arena where opposite ideas confront each other but to initiate a learning process to discover in common the condition of a progressive unity. A first exploratory meeting took place last week with members of Matrimandir garden design team, Aurovilians working in the Matrimandir gardens, Matrimandir executives, the proposed Aurovilians and the Council.

## New roads

In July the Vikas radial road and the stretch of

the Crown Road between Arka and Surrender were completed. Work has started on another stretch of the Crown Road, from Kailash up to the Pour Tous Distribution Centre. The work will be completed by mid October.

## Land encroachment

Members of the Working Committee, Land Resource Management and Auroville Security have been dealing with a number of cases of encroachment of Auroville land.



Work on the pool in the Garden of Consciousness is almost completed

## Rain Drop healing

Quiet Healing Centre offers a new treatment called Rain Drop healing, an application of nine key essential therapeutic grade oils which are dispensed like drops of rain and massaged lightly into the feet and back. This healing method is described as a powerful non-invasive technique utilizing the antiviral, antibacterial and anti-inflammatory action of the nine essential oils to assist the body in maintaining normal spinal curvature, to support the immune system, relieve body and joint discomfort, relax stressed muscles as well as balance energies and lift the spirit.

## Lost hibiscus varieties

The Matrimandir Nursery workers are seeking to complete the collection of all the hibiscus flowers that the Mother named. Seven varieties remain to be found. Contact earthyoga@hotmail.com for help.

## Sunlit Future

Sunlit Future has developed two Solar Home Systems: a 1 KW system @ Rs 2 lakhs and a 680 Watts system for Rs. 1.58 lakhs. Solar panels have a 10 year warranty, batteries a 4 year and the solar inverter a 2 year warranty.

## Cité Universitaire

In response to the needs of an increasing number of volunteers and interns who want to participate in the building of Auroville, a project called 'Cité Universitaire' in the International zone has been initiated. The project has received site permission from L'Avenir d'Auroville. The 'Cité' wants to provide a 150-bed apartment for students, teachers, researchers and technical experts volunteering in Auroville. It hopes to reflect the higher ideals of Auroville in its architectural quality and concept. The 'Cité Universitaire' should be conducive to inner growth and personal development.

## Passing: Erica Schumacher



On August 22nd, Erika Schumacher, who lived in the Surrender community from 1993 till 2007, passed away in her home in Arnis, north Germany, in the presence of her family and friends.



Sampling the termites from Aurodam

ment technology. Termigration involves the use of locally-available species of termites in ex-situ or

## SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION

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◆ The Netherlands: Auroville Internationaal Nederland, email: [penningmeester@avinl.org](mailto:penningmeester@avinl.org), (Triodos) Bank account 19.84.20.927, account name Auroville Int Nederland, Account address

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