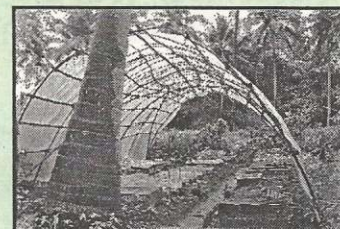


# Auroville Today

JANUARY 2002, No.156

## SPECIAL THEME: Auroville agriculture pages 1, 4 and 5

- Growing Auroville's food
- Developing Buddha Garden
- Helping to realize self-sufficiency
- Seeds of the past, seeds of the future



Seedling nursery at Discipline

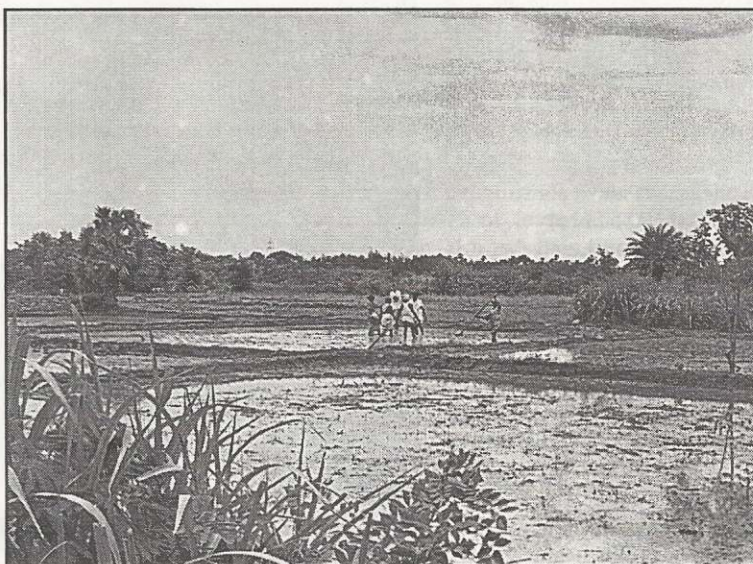
The Auroville Universal Township aims to realize self-sufficiency in organic food production. The Master Plan of Auroville envisages a Green Belt of 3,122 acres surrounding the city area, comprising forests and farms. Today, Auroville owns about 30% of this greenbelt.

Since its inception in 1968, Auroville has been experimenting with ecological agriculture that favours natural inputs and genetic diversity. The first necessity, however, was to restore the fertility of the land and the ecological balance of the environment. The land was severely overgrazed and degraded. The early settlers introduced extensive soil and water control measures, and hardy pioneering tree species were planted to bring back the fertility of the land. Slowly, the soil was regenerated, allowing various tropical food crops to be grown.

At present, Auroville has approximately 350 acres of land under ecological agriculture comprising 13 farms that are coordinated by the Auroville Farm Group. Poly-cultural land use patterns that combine the cultivation of fruit trees, field crops and vegetable gardens are practiced in most farms. Some farmers also maintain poultry and dairy animals. Auroville is currently self-sufficient in milk and some seasonal fruits. It provides for 2% of its total rice and grain requirements, and about 50% of its total fruit and vegetable needs.

Though the farm scene is picking up "organically," progress is still slow. In this issue we feature a visit to Discipline Farm where we talked to farmer Jeff about the Auroville farms situation. Priya gives an insight in what it means to grow vegetables here, while Paul explains why Auroville's commercial unit Maroma helps develop the farms. And we highlight the new, internationally linked, seed exchange network, Annadana.

PHOTO: ANNAPURNA



Left: preparing rice fields for seedling planting. Right: rice fields before harvesting. Photos taken at Annapurna farm

## Growing Auroville's food

The Auroville farms are showing a substantial progress. But it is by far not enough, says farmer Jeff from Discipline.

Discipline is a community situated in the northern greenbelt of Auroville. Like all other greenbelt communities, it started on bare earth, 27 years ago. Today, the area is lush. Discipline consists partly of forest, partly of farmland with a few houses scattered in between.

Australian born Jeff is Discipline's farmer. He is responsible for 15 acres of farmland and for a livestock consisting of five cows. "I joined Auroville in 1982 and started as a teacher. But as things go in Auroville, at one point there was nobody to take up Discipline farm and as it needed to be done, I did it. I keep trying to combine it with my other passions, which are painting and being an actor," he says cheerfully.

Jeff is also active in Auroville's Farm Group, which attempts to represent the interests and needs of Auroville's farms to the community, with increasing success. "The problem in a nutshell," says Jeff, "is that the farms' income is insufficient to allow for any substantial investments in farm development. In fact, many farms run on a shoe-string budget, the income just covers the farms' running expenses. In the best of cases we break even. Lacking money for investment, the efficiency can't be improved. It is a vicious cycle, which only can be broken by large investments from the community or elsewhere. The main part of the farms' income is generated from product sales. Auroville's Central Fund contributes towards the personal maintenance of the farmers with a monthly amount of on average Rs 2,700 per Aurovillian farmer, which is less than 50% of the true needs. For development work, we depend on donations from private individuals, from Auroville commercial units or from outside organizations such as the Dutch Stichting de Zaaier and the American Foundation for World Education."

Discipline is one of Auroville's smaller farms. The possibilities to cultivate the land using a tractor are limited; most of the work is done manually, supervised by Jeff and by John, a Newcomer from England. The farm employs five men and three women. The wages paid are slightly above the wages current in the surrounding villages. Its main products are vegetables - varieties of beans,

cucumbers, pumpkins, squashes, jicama (from Mexico), sweet potatoes, salads, radishes and yams; a large variety of common fruits such as chikoo, mango, guava, bullocks heart, papaya, banana and coconut, and a few uncommon ones such as sour sop, black and white sapota, and cheese fruit. "I just started to grow passion fruit, a fruit very rich in vitamin C which is used in fruit juices and for ice-cream toppings," says Jeff, indicating trellises of neatly bound passiflora plants. "And I experiment with grafting techniques, such as grafting tomatoes onto other plants. Other farmers are engaged in similar experiments to make ends meet. At present, we do the best we can within our limits. Each farmer uses his or her own ingenuity to cut costs, experiment with new products and with new farming methods to increase

farms' turnover is steadily increasing."

Electricity is still a major expense for Auroville's farms. Though the Tamil Nadu government gives free electricity to farmers in Tamil Nadu, this doesn't benefit Auroville's farms. The Auroville Foundation has been classified as 'institutional' and pays the highest rate. However, a change seems to be in the air, which would classify the Auroville Foundation as an educational institution and consequently lower the farms' electricity bills. While most farmers would breathe a sigh of relief, for Discipline farm it matters little. It is not connected to the local grid and uses a diesel generator to irrigate the crops. "We tried solar pumps, but they were not efficient enough. We also installed a drip irrigation system and a pipe system to distribute cow-urine water to the vegetable gardens. But the present water situation is insufficient," says Jeff. "Our existing well needs to be deepened, even a new well may be required. The 2001 winter monsoon has largely failed, so we may expect problems unless there are some out-of-season rains."

Paul's visit brought more than just individual support. It highlighted the fact that in some farms the level of professionalism can be increased, and that though the total farm area covers nearly 350 acres, the farms don't yet make most out of it because they lack the necessary finances. "We also don't have an overall Auroville farm picture as yet," says Jeff. "The

farmers meet, we coordinate what each of us grows and where to sell it, but individual initiatives still determine each farm's development. We do not have a yearly all-Auroville production and development plan. That's why the idea to attract an agronomist to study the Auroville farm scene has been around for quite some time now.

continued on page 4



Jeff relaxing against a papaya tree at Discipline farm.

yields. And we profit from the visit of individual experts such as Paul, a professional farmer from Holland, who has farmed in Auroville in the last three years. He helped to develop farming methods such as the raised-bed farming system, made us aware of the possibilities of growing additional crops and assisted in many other ways. The overviews from the Farm Group show that the

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# Last I.A.C. meeting

On December 10th the present International Advisory Council (IAC) had its fourth and last meeting in Auroville.

The IAC meeting was attended by Dr. Mary King, Dr. Ariyaratne, Mr. Bernard de Montferrand and the chairman, Dr. Kireet Joshi. Dr. Norman Myers could not be present due to health problems. Mr. Bernard de Montferrand, the Ambassador of France in India, was appointed member of the IAC on March 23rd, 2001 in place of Prof. Amartya Sen who had resigned.

"Of all the IAC meetings I attended this one was the most enriching," said Dr. Mary King to an audience of Aurovilians on the roof of the Solar Kitchen that evening. "Someone visiting Auroville once a year, as I have done since 1999, is in a position to see the changes that have occurred. And Auroville has made much progress." The IAC members welcomed the drive towards obtaining a substantial grant from the Government of India towards education projects, the development of the International Zone, the fact that the Government of India had approved the Auroville Master Plan, and the attempts made by the community to manifest an internal organizational structure known as 'the Divine Anarchy' document. "But I question being too absolutistic in operating by consensus for all issues, as it is extremely difficult. One must be selective because of the time involved in seeking consensus," warned Mary King. "I have lots of experience working in the U.S. Civil Rights movement trying to get consensus. Our meetings

used to last three days and sometimes also nights, and consensus was declared by the last person awake or who had not yet left." She also commended the members of the Auroville Working Committee for their work and called upon the community to find a way of valuing people who do this type of service as, as she observed, former members suffer a 'burn-out syndrome' and do not wish to come back, which is a loss to the community. Dr. Ariyaratne suggested that the Auroville youth should be motivated to form its own councils and have a place in the organizational structure, in the way this is being done by the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement in Sri Lanka. He also advised that Auroville pool resources to form an internal banking system, which would greatly benefit the growth of the community and help to create its own economy. "The standard of living is often confused with the quality of life," he said, and Auroville has no choice but to aim at the latter, which requires a strong spiritual basis.

Dr. Kireet Joshi thanked the IAC members for their willingness to help Auroville with its development. He pointed out that this was the last meeting of the IAC in its present constitution, as the term of office of its members ends on December 16th. The Minister of Human Resource Development is expected to announce the appointment of the new members of the next IAC soon. *Carel*

## "I could have given more"

Dr. Mary King came to Auroville to attend the meeting of the International Advisory Council and stayed on for a few days. She shared with Auroville Today some of her impressions.

**AVToday:** Ms. King, you have been member of this International Advisory Council (IAC) since December 1997. What has your experience been?

**Mary King:** Rich. I've very much come to appreciate the creativity and the dynamism of the Auroville community. The effort of Aurovilians to live their lives by the highest ideals is something that appeals to me, and I felt very privileged to be able to support that effort. I like to think that this International Advisory Council has had a constructive effect on a number of fairly important issues, and that it is a help for Auroville that a group of sympathetic outsiders based in Europe, North America and Sri Lanka are joining hands to help manifest what Aurovilians are working on. During this visit I have experienced a tremendous sense of momentum, more than during any of my previous visits. We could discern real progress actually taking place.

**AVToday:** Mr. Bala Baskar, the former Secretary of the Auroville Foundation, observed in his parting interview that the community has hardly made use of the goodwill of the members of the various Auroville International Advisory Councils to further Auroville's cause. Do you agree with this view?

**Mary King:** I think he has a point. For example, I have never received

a proposed program, in advance, before arriving in India to attend an IAC meeting. The agenda for the meeting and the topics for discussion were until this meeting handed to me after I arrived - when there remained hardly any time for preparation. This time I was also asked to

power and glory. At present they only seem able to deal with chronic problems and crises. I can't blame them for not being able to do any forward thinking, because the day-to-day work is immense. In that respect, the idea to create a separate Unity Committee is excellent, and



give three lectures after I arrived but, therefore, I had to speak without notes. The time of the IAC members when here could certainly be better utilized.

For example, when you have one of the most highly recognized environmental scientists in the world on the IAC, Dr. Norman Meyers, I would imagine that there would be an entire program waiting for him and that there would have been felt a need to consult and obtain his critical assessment. He can offer an objectivity that is otherwise unavailable on what Aurovilians are doing in a particular area. But as far as I know, this hasn't happened.

In between our yearly meetings, we have given help whenever requested. For example, at the request of Auroville International, we wrote letters to the United Nations to recommend that Auroville International be granted observer status. It appears that they were useful, and I think that our recommendations as knowledgeable outsiders helped.

When Dr. Swaminathan was chairman of the Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation, we wrote letters to the Government of India in support of efforts to obtain land for Auroville.

I think all of us would be happy to do more. As the IAC members are obviously not acting out of self-interest, our recommendations are seen as impartial, and as offering a more objective reading of the situation than Aurovilians who, after all, would be pleading their own case. The Aurovilians should try to capitalize it this potential more.

Apart from these actions, there was little or no contact with the Auroville Foundation in between our meetings. To keep the fires burning, I stayed in intermittent contact with Mr. Bala Baskar.

**AVToday:** In the discussion about organization, you observed that the Working Committee needed strengthening...

**Mary King:** Yes, I feel very strongly that the Working Committee needs to be strengthened, enhanced, and revalorized. The Committee works without

it has great potential.

I have heard that some Aurovilians think that people who serve on such administrative bodies are on a 'power trip'. But if one wants power, one would not come to live or stay in Auroville. One is attracted to Auroville because it offers freedom and the opportunity to realize in this world the actualization of certain high ideals. That freedom requires discipline, and the taking of responsibility in order to accomplish one's aims. A minimum of organization and concerted action is required in order to protect the freedom of all individuals involved. Aurovilians should realize that their freedom is reliant on groups that are willing to work and assume responsibility. I don't see 'power' anywhere in this equation. Perhaps there could be a study group to explore the notion of freedom, and Dr. Kireet Joshi could be asked to give a lecture on this topic. To me, freedom expresses itself in the willingness to assume responsibility.

**AVToday:** You observed in your speech to the Aurovilians on the roof of the Solar Kitchen that you had a particular interest in organizations that elect to run themselves by consensus, but you place question marks at the possibility of consistently reaching consensus.

**Mary King:** It is again a question of how you use your freedom. We had received a copy of the document on a new internal organization, called "Towards a Divine Anarchy," and I mentioned in our meeting that consensus as an ideal is wonderful, and I support it completely, but in my experience, it also can be misused. The quest for consensus can open the door to manipulation. It is marvelous as an ideal, but, again, it requires discipline. So I would suggest that Aurovilians must be selective about using it. Every once in a while the community must be able to allow a decision to be taken by other means. Sometimes you have to take a short cut and be pragmatic. There is a time and place for everything. I am not saying drop it, I am saying be clever and be practical.

*In conversation with Carel.*

## A war of ideas

On the evening of December 14th, Dr. Mary King, who is a highly respected educator and political scientist with a background in the civil rights and peace movements, gave a talk about Afghanistan in the Pavilion of Tibetan Culture. Here are some extracts.

"I want to suggest that what we have underway at present is a war of ideas. And that in this war of ideas education can be a powerful and potent tool: education and democratization. It is not accidental that Osama Bin Laden and others came out of oppositional movements in the Arabian peninsula, for this is one of the areas of the world in which the process to democratise has been most difficult. Here the energy which would otherwise have been channeled into new generations of young people governing Saudi Arabia has been thwarted by powerful and repressive elites. Consequently, these oppositional groups have arisen, filled with young men who have nowhere else to go, and they have become the breeding-grounds of Osama Bin Laden and his followers.

The situation is similar in Afghanistan. Here the Taliban, male and mostly orphans, were educated in schools completely unlike the schools in Auroville. In Taliban schools the students were never asked "What do you think?" They were told what to think, and how to interpret the Koran.

I think it's wrong to look at Osama Bin Laden as someone who is demented. In a *fatwa* or edict he issued some time ago against the U.S., he mentioned three issues which concern very much anybody

coming from his part of the world. They are the continued presence of U.S. troops in Saudi Arabia, home to the holiest sites of Islam; the continued U.S. support for sanctions against Iraq; and the continued U.S. support for the military occupation by Israel of land set aside by the U.N. for the Palestinians.

In other words, I think we are looking at a manifesto which is primarily political, not religious, albeit clothed in religion and with very profound religious overtones.

There can be no military solution for this. We must look deeply into the accumulated grievances and despair which make it easy to recruit young men who are willing to commit suicide for their beliefs. In my experience, most of those who go to work for armed cells in seeking some form of social justice don't know there are other ways of fighting. So one of the things we must do in this war of ideas is spread knowledge of political technologies and non-violent tools for fighting.

So far, we have not done a good job of this. Partly it's because we do not speak their language. Literally. Last year, in the whole of the U.S., we graduated only nine people to speak Arabic! In the State Department nobody speaks Farsi, the language of Iran.

It's a cliché to say that the world has changed since September 11th.

But I think there were a lot of things that needed to change. One of them clearly was the position of women in Afghanistan. The evidence is now clear of the connection between gender and peace: of how the fanatical suppression of women - 60% of the population in Afghanistan - allowed terrorism to flourish there.

But another thing which had to change was the attitude of the great powers in preparing its citizenry to understand the world, to understand other cultures and other religions. The U.S. is a huge and powerful country yet it has very little understanding of the world and of its role in it. It is a superpower in which the teaching of geography has all but disappeared, in which the foreign policy is really a domestic policy dominated by money and special interests, and where today we don't even have a reliable press which can tell us about the debate which is going on - a particularly alarming development because of the direct connection between the free flow of information and democracy.

In this need to do a better job of understanding the religions and cultures of the world, and in the need to prevent future Afghanistans, I would like to see much more attention paid to Auroville and the concept of international unity which you are working on here.

*Edited by Alan*



# Views on the International Zone

While a group of 40 Americans is about to start the first building of the American Pavilion complex, a discussion has been raging about the purpose of the International Zone and its manifestation. Here we bring you a selection of the voices on the International Zone.

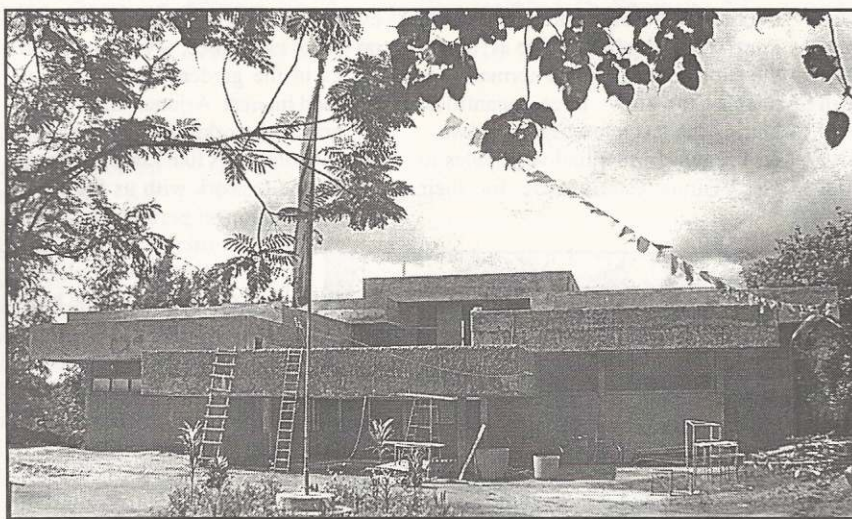
What are the political implications of the International Zone? As conceived, those countries that can afford to build pavilions will be given space. The rest of the world it seems will be squeezed into the Unity Pavilion or have no representation at all. This is terribly familiar: money rules. Worse, as the footprint Auroville will be reproducing will be a microcosm of the current world order, it acknowledges that Auroville condones and supports it. At a time when we can clearly see that the world order's misguided and selfish policies have embroiled humanity in a war against terrorism, this is calous. Couldn't we aim for something more elegant and modest? A single Unity Pavilion that offers nations the space to set up expositions would serve this purpose well.

Lyle, Auroville

It is good that the people outside and inside of Auroville are ready to start manifesting the Zone, but it is a well-known spiritual tenet that the ground must be well prepared for any great idea to take root. The International Zone, I feel, is not in the collective consciousness of the Aurovilians...Can we, no matter how difficult it seems, try to build the International Zone (especially given its goal to promote Unity in the world) in a more collective way than we have achieved so far? If the whole of the International Zone could be built on the principle of true collectivity, that is, each nation contributes as per their economic power, but partakes of the funds/infrastructure as per their true need, then symbolically it would indeed be a great step towards Unity in the world. The Unity Pavilion is a token step in that direction but more needs to be done in this field.

Bindu, Auroville

Auroville is a balance between a pragmatic research into cultural and technical alternatives and a courageous attempt to express a marvellous new vision...The real challenge however is to create, for instance, a pavilion building, which is expressing this



Progress at the Pavilion of Tibetan Culture in the International Zone

soul quality (for the yet not united world which runs crazy with their struggling nationalities) and at the same way is serving Auroville's needs in a practical manner.

Wolfgang AVI-Germany

Auroville must discover for Herself, what is appropriate and, perhaps most importantly, address, as honesty and openly as we are able, a most confounding question: What are we trying to accomplish by creating our International Zone? It is not too difficult to envision in Auroville a Pavilion of the Americas that embodies the contours of Her Soul rather than rigid boundaries and inhabits something that must surely extend beyond a history defined by the migration of Europeans, which, regardless of their remarkable impact, represents only the fringes of a vast history.

Roy, Auroville

The International Zone should be conceived as a university where each "donor" can contribute a particular "college" that brings teachers and programs to AV and vice-versa, like Boston, a small, not very flashy urban environment, but one where education (there are colleges and universities everywhere) flourishes, nourishing thousands upon thousands of students

every year.

Gordon Korstange, USA

It seems to me that there is too much haste to build pavilions before we have really thought through the concept of the International Zone....It seems natural to me that of the four zones of Auroville the International Zone should be the last to be developed. The other three, the Residential, Cultural and the Industrial are more concerned with our existential life while the International Zone like CIRHU is a spiritual ideal. So having waited until now - can we not wait a little bit longer to give time for the community to reflect on the meaning of the International Zone? ...for me it is essential that research should be the initial movement... We have before us a vast concept that must be very relevant to the world at large as we move nearer and nearer globally to unity, lets be sure we really understand what is implied by the International Zone which is unity in diversity. It goes beyond the culture of the different countries to the soul of the country, and it is the people that shape the soul, it is a soul in the becoming, and our integral history. A deeper understanding of this will surely produce a greater understanding of oneself and correspondingly a greater appreciation of the other...What I

would really like to see is more study of *The Human Cycle* and *The Ideal of Human Unity* in the community.

Anne, Auroville

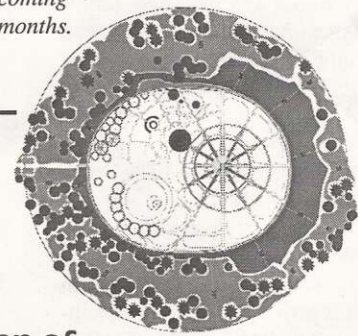
It seems to me that most Aurovilians, do not know that the Cultural Pavilions were meant to be the main feature of Auroville's International University, whose main theme is "Peace and Human Unity". The first time Mother wrote about these pavilions was in an article entitled *An International University Centre*, which was published in two parts in the April and August 1952 issues of the *Bulletin*. The opening of the University classes of Sri Aurobindo International University Centre took place on 10th December 1953, but in 1959 its name had to be changed to Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education. In 1965, when Mother started speaking about Auroville, her pavilion idea had not yet been implemented in the framework of the Ashram; so she decided that they would come up in Auroville's International Zone....I would like to share with you this little-known quote: "The permanent university will be the key to Auroville's raison d'être. It must be a leap forward; so that it can hasten the advent of the future, of a world of harmony, beauty and union" (The Mother) 1969.

Gilles G. Auroville

Is it possible to build something solid if there isn't the gold thread of unity within and between us? I feel first we should build the international zone inside us and then it'll take easy it's physical appearance.

Andrey, Auroville

A seminar on the International Zone for the Aurovilians and the AVI-Centres is proposed to be held in the coming months.



## MATRIMANDIR

### MM area map

The publication of the map of the Matrimandir area in Auroville Today # 154 has caused a lot of discussion in Auroville. Mr. N. Bala Baskar, the former Secretary of the Auroville Foundation, clarified the issue.

Dated 11th December, 2001.

Dear Shri Carel,

This is in reply to the matter regarding Matrimandir lake controversy.

Dr. Subash Kashyap reported the Governing Board that he had discussed the issue of the lake with Shri Roger Anger and Matrimandir Coordination Group (MMCG). Dr. Kashyap said that an acceptable solution has been found which takes into account the concerns and views of both sides. The illustration in Auroville Today represents this acceptable solution.

However the reportage in Auroville Today failed to mention an important aspect of the "acceptable solution". Dr. Kashyap informed the Governing Board that both Shri Roger and MMCG had agreed that the actual dimension of the lake would be as per the expert opinion obtained from engineers given after a detailed study of the problem of water availability and feasibility of storage. Possibly this omission has led to the controversy.

I shall be grateful if you could clarify this point in a future issue of AV Today.

With regards,  
Yours Sincerely,  
N. Bala Baskar

Carel

## ORGANIZATION

### Organisation in disarray

Some working groups fail to attract individuals to participate in the work. Due to this, the Executive Council has ceased to exist.

The Executive Council (EC), the working group that deals with internal matters of the community, has for all practical purposes ceased to exist. From December onwards its three remaining members are all out of station for a few months.

In September, the EC joined forces with the Working Committee (WC), the working group that acts as the interface with the Governing Board and its Secretary. The WC is equally holding the fort with only three members. Together they performed all the tasks of both working groups. Now, in the absence of the EC members, the work normally done by the EC falls on the WC.

The lack of interest in doing this type of community service is not only affecting these working groups, but others as well - most obviously

the Development Group. It is hoped that the disarray will be only temporal. Work is continuing on formulating a new internal organisation. The document entitled 'Towards a Divine Anarchy' which formulates this new structure is now in its fourth incarnation, and will be presented to the community soon for finalisation. But a new structure by itself will not be sufficient to attract qualified people to this type of work. A change of attitude from the community towards those who do this work will be required: appreciation instead of unceasing criticism; a recognition of the difficulty of this work instead of a fear of power trips; and an inclusive and supporting mentality instead of an attitude of exclusiveness dividing the world into 'us' and 'them'.

## In brief

### Matrimandir Access

A general meeting took place on the organization of public and Aurovillian access to the Matrimandir. Points raised were amongst others if visitors' access should be decreased or increased; how the Visitors Reception Centre can be developed; which image Auroville presents to the world - a tourist centre with a temple?; and the objections to signing books for access to the Chamber. A study group has been formed.

### Waste water management

The Interim Development Council has created a Waste Water Management group which will assist it in evolving the Master Plan and in formulating regulations and plans of action regarding wastewater management in Auroville, and assess and certify the building applications for wastewater treatment systems.

### Monsoon failure

In spite of unexpected rains in late December, the winter monsoon has been insufficient for the second year running. The total rainfall in November (143.3 mm) was the lowest in the last two decades.

### Auroville Health Services (AHS)

AHS is a new service that aims amongst other things at facilitating the recognition of foreign medical professionals in India. It also collects information on all the medical and health activities taking place in Auroville and intends to conduct a survey to get an accurate picture of the work done on health in Auroville in the past 30 years. It will set-up an Internet bulletin board on Health in Auroville as an interactive medium.

### LOE-CHU programs

The Laboratory of Evolution & Center for Human Unity have embarked on a programme open to all. During December, every other Wednesday there was a study group on the practice of Integral Yoga. On alternate Wednesdays there were explorations of what is happening in the world for the conscious evolution of the Human Being.

### Fire in St John's Cathedral

New York city firefighters contained a fire at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, the largest Gothic cathedral in the world. The Nakashima Peace Table, the elder sister of the ones placed in Auroville and Moscow, was reportedly undamaged.

### Maroma electronic newsletter

Maroma celebrated its Silver Jubilee with the launch of its electronic newsletter to share its progress and aspirations. The December 2001 issue mentions the setting up of its branch office Maroma USA in Alpharetta, Georgia (e-mail: maromaus@bell-south.net) and describes the Maroma's product innovations in the areas of essential oils, incense and perfumed candles. More information at <http://www.maroma.com/newsletter/december/dec2001.htm>

### Correction

The marble slab containing the words 'Pour Tous' in Mother's handwriting has not yet been placed in the Pour Tous Garden as reported in the previous issue of Auroville Today.



# Developing Buddha Garden

Priya writes about her experience of gardening in Buddha Garden, which is part of Siddhartha Farm

This morning I was in Buddha Garden soon after dawn. The sun was a huge red disc which rose and shone with its slanting light through the morning mist, bathing the garden in a mysterious pink light. However difficult it sometimes feels to start work at 6:00 a.m., this unique early morning vibration never fails to makes it worthwhile. I love being in the garden at this special time. It is now just over a year since I moved to Siddhartha Farm to grow vegetables for the community. The land, when I took it over, was planted with Eucalyptus trees, most of them very miserable looking specimens. Not surprising considering that they were growing on land that had been exhausted through the use of chemical fertilisers and pesticides like DDT. In the beginning none of our first crops grew or produced very well. Things are improving after much hard work making compost and growing green manure like velvet beans, but much still needs to be done.

Today there were three of us to do the work; my Aurovilian assistant Arjunan, a volunteer called Luc who is staying in Auroville for a month, and myself. Being a Friday it was one of the three days of the week when we harvest vegetables. We picked lady's fingers (a very itchy job), two sorts of spinach, brinjal, pumpkin and today was the first day that some of the white Indian radish were ready. All these vegetables are grown on raised beds (thirty in all), which are about one and a half meters wide, fifty centimetres high and thirty-six metres long. On each bed there are two drip irrigation pipes which we

haven't had to use much recently because of the incidental monsoon rain. But as it hasn't rained for three days, the soil on the beds is starting to dry out, and some of the radishes I pulled out consequently snapped in two pieces.

It took us nearly two hours to finish the harvesting, after which we all sat

that we have been able to grow. Today we had enough vegetables left over to send brinjal and pumpkins to Pour Tous, which is unique as, due to the poor soil quality, we normally are unable to grow large quantities. During the last guest season, however, I regularly supplied vegetables to the Visitors Centre Cafe for their

and consciousness so that the vegetables have an energy that feeds us on every level. For this reason we have no paid assistance; everyone who works in the garden does so out of love and interest. Arjunan and I do all the practical work, together with the help of volunteers like Luc and others who come to work with us for short

garden become more balanced and the quality of the soil improves, the plants are stronger and more able to resist attacks. Nevertheless we still have problems; just a few weeks ago large flying beetles ate a whole bed of ladies fingers. Seeing them eat everything – flowers, leaves and vegetables that we had worked so hard to grow – reduced me to tears.

By 10:00 a.m., as the sun starts to get hot, we have finished all that we planned to do today. Arjunan goes to his computer work, Luc to his dancing and me to my writing and painting. For Buddha Garden is a place where we are in a continual process of finding a balance in our lives, growing food necessary for our survival, but also to dream and create in other ways.

My first year though has not been easy, and several times I have been ready to walk out. In the history of this land, however, I have been here hardly more than the blink of an eye. Not long enough to repair the damage of the last one hundred years let alone rejuvenate the land to its full productivity. So I keep trying. If Auroville is to really be 'the city the earth needs' we have to find a way, somehow, of growing our own food. And to do so in a way that is sustainable for the earth, for Auroville and for ourselves.

If you would like to know more about the first year of setting up and running Buddha Garden read Priya's book 'How My Garden Grew'. For publication details contact Priya; priya@auroville.org.in or write to her at Siddhartha Farm, Auroville 605101, Tamil Nadu, India.

PHOTO: MANOU



The raised-bed farming method used in Buddha Garden

down to breakfast together. As usual this was a mixture of rice and vegetables, most of which had been grown either elsewhere or in Buddha Garden. After breakfast we weighed out the vegetables. Five people come each Friday to pick up a 'mixed bag' – that is a mixture of any vegetables

'organic dish of the day'. Doing this I realised how much I preferred to produce vegetables for those who appreciate and use them in a way that enhances their special qualities. Growing vegetables is not just a question of doing the practical work, but working with a particular awareness

Extract (an organic pesticide made by Margarita at Auroannam Farm) as well as using other sprays made from indigenous plants. To discourage the poochies we also plant strong smelling plants, like lemon grass and basil, as well as using ash on young seedlings. As the energies within the

# Growing Auroville's food

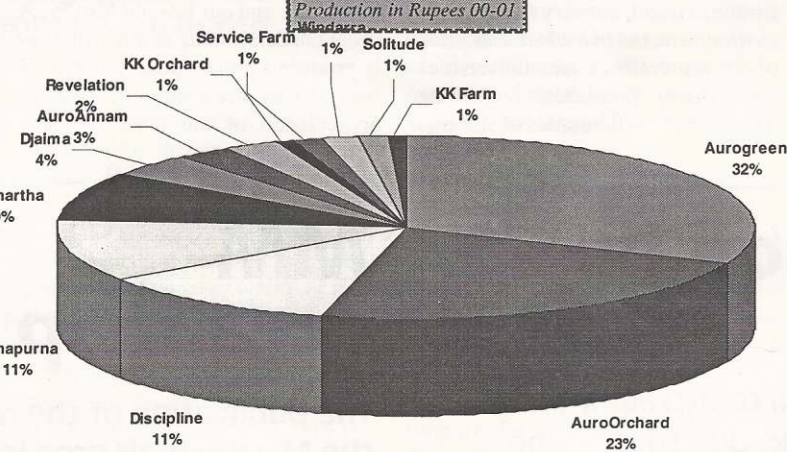
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Such a professional would analyze the farms and Auroville's consumption patterns, identify the problem areas and make medium and long-term action plans. The farms would commit themselves to this plan, producing what the community requires, and the community in turn would assist in obtaining the necessary funds. Prof. Henk Thomas from the Dutch Stichting de Zaaier was very interested in getting such a plan made. But we have so far failed to pull it off."

Donor interest in farm development has not been lacking though. The total donor support over the last five years amounted to Rs 73 lakhs (US\$ 152,000). Apart from supporting the personal maintenance of the individual farmers, the Auroville Central Fund provided help in the form of a contingency and an emergency elec-

tricity fund to a total of Rs. 10 lakhs (US\$ 21,000). Auroville's commercial unit Maroma selected two farms, Anapurna and Siddhartha, and supported them with a total of Rs 28.5 lakhs (US\$ 60,000). Apart from these internal sources, other donors also helped substantially: The Dutch Stichting de Zaaier and the American Foundation for World Education donated Rs. 12 lakhs (US\$ 25,000) each in this period, and Gateway another 9.5 lakhs (US\$ 20,000). "And sometimes there are individuals who help out," says Jeff. "A few months ago a private individual from Germany helped us by donating Rs 20,000, just like that."

Donor interest is a reflection of an



increasing awareness in Auroville that it is necessary to develop the farm scene. This awareness, however, does not translate into the willingness, let alone the ability, to purchase the Auroville farms' products at their real costs. Though the Auroville farms are unable to meet the internal Auroville demand, they cannot sell the products at the prices required. Says Jeff: "If a subsistence farmer from the neighbourhood grows 20 or 30 bushes of lady's fingers in his backyard and sells the produce for Rs 5/kilo, we can't charge Rs 15 or Rs 20 to Auroville's sales outlet Pour Tous. Equally, we have to compete with products that are grown on a large scale outside Auroville using fertilizer and pesticides. Only one Auroville farm, Auro-Orchard managed by Gerard, uses pesticides, and that to a very limited extent. All the

other farms are 'organic'. As we all know, 'organic' implies lower turnover due to non-use of chemical fertilizers and insecticides. In Europe, consumers willingly pay two or three times more for organically grown vegetables and fruits. But in Auroville, we can't charge what we would need." The main buyers of the farms' products are the Solar Kitchen, Pour Tous, Vinod's stall in Kottakarai and the food-processing units KOFPU and Naturallement. The Auroville restaurants don't buy much from Auroville's farms.

"Over the last years the situation has improved," concludes Jeff, "but it is far from enough. If the community seriously wants to manifest The Mother's ideal of food self-sufficiency, it will have to develop a long-term farm policy and make even more substantial subsidies available."

Carel.

## Farms profits and losses

A crude analysis over the financial years 1996-1997 2000-2001 of the farms' profits and losses shows that the farms' income from operations is increasing at the same rate as the running costs. The farm group is not generating enough funds to replace assets, external donations are required for asset creation.

As assets increase, the farms will have to deal with increased maintenance costs. There are no data to determine if infrastructure improvements will result in either lower costs or more sales or both, or generate significantly more profit.

Without sustained subsidies the farms will collapse. Obviously, a more thorough study to determine best investment and marketing strategies are critical for Auroville to establish a solid agricultural base.

Lyle

Average Monthly Turnover (AMT) Overview 1998 - 2001 in Rupees						
Farms	Aurovilians	Total Acreage	AMT 97-98	AMT 98-99	AMT 99-00	AMT 00-01
Annapurna	3	135	12,302	16,550	23,592	29,713
AuroAnnam	2	14			11,133	7,057
Aurogreen	2	35	65,214	67,827	83,979	86,573
AuroOrchard	2	46	55,015	62,418	67,678	61,336
Discipline	2	26	26,618	22,251	29,802	31,379
Djalma	2	10	8,524	10,079	12,222	10,916
KK Farm	1	7	1,477	3,244	1,647	2,313
KK Orchard	1	1.5	3,754	2,853	4,400	2,464
Nilatangam	1	14	4,504	4,868		
Revelation	1	10	9,115	6,129	5,020	6,544
Service Farm	1	12	4,500	4,704	3,937	4,125
Siddhartha	3	15	12,672	13,173	18,050	24,618
Solitude	1	6	500	232	2,195	4,038
Windarra	4	25		394	3,324	3,968
Totals	26	356.5	204,195	214,722	266,979	275,044



# So that the seeds of the past may be the seeds of the future...

In October 2000, Dominique Guillet came to Auroville with his family. He decided to set up Annadana as the base of a seed saving and exchange network that will cover India and South Asia.

Dominique has been a militant ecologist since the past twenty-five years. A decade ago, he founded *Terre de Semence*, a French based seed distribution centre, which had as its objective the protection of natural vegetable genetic resources. This movement was started to counter the trend, accentuated by the Green Revolution over thirty years ago, of systematically replacing traditional seed varieties by F1 hybrid seeds and modern so-called 'high-yield' varieties of cereals.

of Europe and became one of the most important such initiatives worldwide. But in 1997, France introduced a new law, which taxed heavily the possession of traditional seed varieties. *Terre de Semence* had to close down, as it could no longer work on a commercial basis. *Association Kokopelli* was then formed and took up the work *Terre de Semence* had started. Explains Dominique: "*Association Kokopelli* is essentially trying to save all the still existing traditional genetic resources of vegetable plants before

to third-world countries in Africa, South America and south Asia, which have been the most harmed by the adverse effects of the Green revolution and the advent of globalization. Over the years, *Association Kokopelli* distributed, free of cost, hundreds of thousands of sachets of seeds to these countries."

The advent of globalization and the development of bio-technology has given multinational seed companies a monopoly on the global seed market. Ten companies today control almost 50% of the world's seed production and distribution, and 60% of the agro-chemical market. "This is a disastrous development. The seed is the beginning of the food chain and those who control the seeds control mankind," says Dominique. "At present, farmers are enslaved to multinationals which have created a captive market. Farmers the world over have become totally dependent to buy from them their hybrid seeds and high-yield varieties for every season. These seeds produce crops. But the seeds have been manipulated to become either sterile or not reproduce true to type – in other words, the farmers cannot use part of their grain harvest for future sowing. Nature has been stripped of its right of fertility. This has resulted in the destruction of a great part of the earth's bio diversity. On top of it, in many third world countries the governments have drastically reduced subsidies to farmers. In India many farmers are now deep in debts and are forced to sell off their lands. Some are ruined for life. Many others commit suicide. Something must be done to change this situation."

*Association Kokopelli*, by saving, producing and distributing open pollinated and fixed variety seeds, and promoting the creation of seed exchange networks, hopes that farmers and individuals the world over will regain access to genetic resources and will redevelop their own sowing autonomy. It also aims at reviving the traditional knowledge and know-how of the farmers to produce their own seeds for the next season, skills that have been lost since the Green revolution. And it wants to restore to women their major role in the food cycle to support and provide for the family, which in some developing countries in the past decades, has been denied to them. Says Dominique: "*Association Kokopelli* encourages people to take up home gardening, which is the ultimate fortress against the erosion of bio diversity and malnutrition. Amongst other things, the standard diet of the inhabitants of those countries has been badly affected by the Green Revolution, and today it lacks in many of the necessary vitamins and minerals. Home gardening is an initiative, which can be taken up even

PHOTO: DOMINIQUE



Participants at the workshop organised by Annadana

by the very low income generating groups."

The work of *Association Kokopelli* got extended when Dominique and his family settled in Auroville and created Annadana – Sanskrit for "gift of food". Backed by *Association Kokopelli*, Annadana benefits from its financial support and its existing seed collection. It intends to grow into a network for the collection, conservation, production and exchange of seeds. The network will include farmers, associations and NGO's working in sustainable agriculture in India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Pakistan. Annadana will act as its initial seed bank and central distribution centre. The network philosophy is to exchange seeds without any financial transaction. Says Dominique "It is high time to depart from the prevailing concept of the seed being an

ed. "The art of bee keeping," says Dominique, "although indirectly, is very much related to our work as we work with open pollinated seeds." Two vegetable gardens have also been set up: one in Revelation and the other in the Botanical Garden grounds, where vegetable plants are cultivated for seed production. It is hoped that in the future the work of Annadana in Auroville and the surrounding villages will serve as an example to be replicated in other parts of the country and elsewhere. Says Dominique: "From March 7th to 9th, 2002, there will be a conference in Auroville for the representatives of the various farmers Associations and NGO's with whom we have established a contact. The conference will benefit our mutual interaction, support the existing initiatives for the protection of local genetic resources, and lay the basis for the seed saving and exchange network." In the next year, Annadana hopes to start a one-year Tropical Agro-Ecology course in Auroville for some forty students. Explains Dominique: "Traditional seed varieties can not be saved if there are no agro-ecology and sustainable agriculture practices that go with it. Bio diversity will not be saved if it is not cultivated and will not be cultivated if it is not consumed. This all requires training. The students would also learn how to produce and conserve seeds and create exchange networks in different countries of the developing world." Annadana has received the enthusiastic help and active support from quite a few Aurovilians, among which Stephan and Poonam and Bernard and Deepika. It is significant that Annadana has been set up in Auroville. For Annadana's objectives "to empower the people to regain access to their natural genetic resources and recover their sowing autonomy and to protect bio diversity which does not belong to anybody in particular but is the legacy of the future" is relevant to Auroville and what it stands for.

Emmanuelle



Compost making at the garden in Revelation

Over the years, *Terre de Semence* grew into a large seed saving, producing and distributing network, which slowly spread over the whole

it is too late. It has built up a collection of over 1200 varieties of vegetable, pulses and minor cereal seeds. It has been extending its work

## Helping to realize self-sufficiency

Over the last five years, Auroville's commercial unit Maroma has contributed Rs. 28.5 lakhs (US\$ 60,000) to the development of two of Auroville's farms.

Paul, who along with Laura manages Maroma, says that these donations reflect a move towards Auroville becoming self-sufficient in food production. "Mother always envisaged that Auroville would have its own farms so that it would produce sufficient foodstuff to feed its population. When we became motivated to help the farms in 1996, we realized that all farms were in a pretty bad state, and that, as everywhere else, the only way to develop farms would be to provide substantial subsidies. We had several meetings with the farmers, and finally we selected two farms, Siddhartha and Annapurna, for our support. This was not exactly to the liking of the other farmers, who would have preferred it if Maroma had made a donation to the farms in general, allowing them to reallocate the donation to the various farms. But we felt that by earmarking these two farms, this donation would have an eventual substantial impact rather than becoming diluted. These two farms have since made big progress in improving their

infrastructure. About two years ago we had a meeting with the Annapurna and Siddhartha farmers. We reviewed the situation and asked them if they would be able to make part of our donations flow back into Auroville by providing free grains to the community's Solar Kitchen. Of course, we did not ask them to give the equivalent to the subsidy. We asked them to provide for free whatever they can, even if it would be only one kilogram of rice. Since July Annapurna is doing that. It has started to supply complete rice and waragu for free: from July to November it delivered 550 kg of rice and 238 kg of waragu to the Solar Kitchen. The amounts are still pretty small but are increasing. Basically it is a move towards what Mother said: those who grow food would make that available to the city. The mathematics of it all is very simple. We donate money to the farms, they produce something for Auroville, what is produced is made available for free to the Solar Kitchen."

In conversation with Carel

PHOTO: DOMINIQUE



Seedlings being grown under 'baby-nets' for their protection

object of business." A recent donation of Rs. 10 lakhs (US\$ 2,000) from a French foundation will be used to set up a genetic resource center in the Auroville Botanical Garden nearby the village of Edayanchavady.

So far, Annadana has already been sending tens of thousands of seed sachets to various farmers associations and NGO's and to all Tibetan refugee camps in India.

The Annadana seed bank is also open to Aurovilians. Over the last year, various workshops have been held in seed sowing and production, soil preparation and compost making. In November Maurice Chaudiere, a master in the art of bee keeping and fruit tree grafting, was in Auroville for a month and gave workshops and seminars on both subjects, which were widely attend-



# Life-energized drinking water

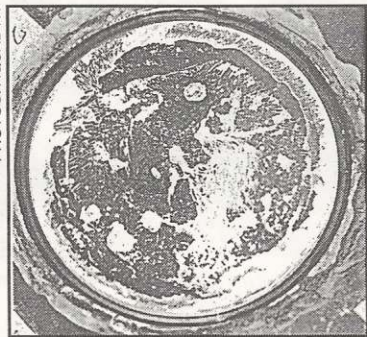
AquaDyn's bio-dynamised water recently obtained ISI-BSI certification, clearing the way for its commercialisation.

Following the dirt track past Pour Tous, one arrives at AquaDyn, a small commercial unit consisting of a room annex laboratory. The converted know this as the place from where to obtain energized, or 'life imbued' water. For many, a trip to Pour Tous is not complete without a refill at Bhagwandas's bio-dynamic water tap.

The refills are free. "Our main aim has been research and service, giving freely to Auroville," says Bhagwandas setting the tone of the interview. This spirit has guided the AquaDyn venture from its inception five years ago. Gradually AquaDyn made its foray into the commercial domain with both bottled water and water purifying and bio-dynamising equipment. The latter proved to be a commercial mistake and led to a big loss. Business deals were hampered due to technological and distributor problems. "We were too early," says Bhagwandas. "We stopped that part of our activities and concentrate now only on supplying bottled water. A major achievement has been the recent acquisition of ISI-BSI certification, which guarantees that our water is indeed pure according to official standards. We needed to upgrade our plant to obtain this certification. Certification became mandatory when the Government

discovered that less than about 10% of the 400-odd water-bottling factories in India were truly supplying safe drinking water.

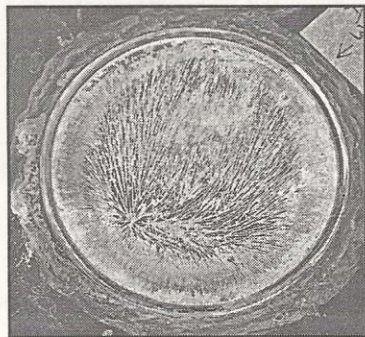
The ISI-BSI certification doesn't say anything, however, about the bio-dynamised aspect of AquaDyn's water. "This is so new that nowhere in the world, not even in France, its country of origin, is there a standard for bio-dynamised water," says Bhagwandas. "We sell it as 'extra purified with life-energizing qualities.'"



Copper Chloride crystallisation defining the energy patterns of a substance. From left to right: ordinary tap water, biodynamised water (according to the Violet process), and biodynamised water with the sound of Mother's mantra Om Namo Bhagavaté.

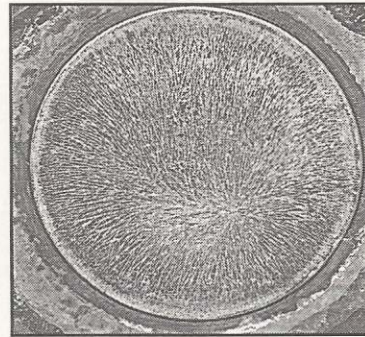
What exactly does bio-dynamisation imply? Jean-François, AquaDyn's technical researcher, explains that the water is enriched with life-energy. "The process was first discovered by a French scientist, Marcel Viollet. In

the period between 1950-1970 he tested his enriched water in thousands of experiments in hospitals and schools. Viollet said that the water was energized by 'cosmic waves'. Here in India, you would say that the water is energized by *prana* or life force. Viollet's research proved that using bio-dynamised water boosts the immune system, acts on deficiencies and increases energy levels. You can compare it to spring water or water taken from the source of a river – it is completely different from water



from the tap, and that is because the life energy is present there". Can bio-dynamisation be scientifically proven in a laboratory? "There is as yet no scientific equipment available to measure the extremely subtle

changes in the water," says Jean François, "but there are techniques and systems that can be used to characterize water, such as the Copper Chloride Crystallization process. The photos show the difference between untreated tap water, bio-dynamised water and water which was exposed to Mother's mantra 'Om Namo Bhagavaté.' The chaotic patterns of tap water have turned into beautiful, regular groupings." How successful was the introduction of bio-dynamised water in Auroville?



exception to this rule. But this has changed. The feedback we now get from Aurovilians is positive, and confirms that bio-dynamised water has health-giving and energizing properties. And the concept that water can be 'life-energised' is now gradually being accepted. The average Indian consumer, by the way, accepts the idea of bio-dynamised water with fewer reservations than the average Westerner. Traditionally, rivers are sacred in India and consecrated water is an important component of Indian religious rituals. Water is not simply reduced to its chemical components, but occupies a role that goes beyond mere functionality."

What is AquaDyn's future? "After our first misadventures, we are slowly struggling to clear our debts. Now that the certification has been acquired, our concentration is on selling bottled water, creating a market by concentrating on health clubs and hospitals. In due time, we also plan to manufacture water purification and bio-dynamising machines in various sizes, ranging from household appliances to machines to be used in schools and hospitals. A more distant dream is to sell bio-dynamised water machines to the villages in India, so that bio-dynamised water becomes available to rich and poor alike."

Parimita

## COMMUNITY AFFAIRS

### "Prevention is better than cure"

During the past year, thefts and assaults in the Auroville area have been on a sharp increase.

"The recent incidents can broadly be classified into three categories," says Paul Vincent, the Auroville Police Liaison, who has years of experience in the field. "The first is road assault and robberies, which usually happen in the evening, though there have also been day time assaults recently. The second category is the theft of motorcycles, mopeds and cycles. In the recent months ten motorbikes were stolen, either from parking places or from community storerooms. The third category is house-breaking to steal expensive valuables." Paul Vincent says that over the years the patterns have changed. In the past there were mostly petty thefts. The new trend is house breaking and thefts of expensive items – amounting to more than 10 lakhs (US\$ 21,000) in the last few months – excluding motorbikes.

Auroville is spread out over a large area. Many communities are isolated and far removed from one another. The roads are, for the most part, deserted in the evenings and at night. All this encourages thefts and other criminal incidents. Another reason is that security is not yet a prime concern of the Aurovilians. "Auroville, compared to the surrounding villages, is very rich," says Philippe of the night guard. "But Aurovilians don't take enough precautions to discourage theft. When they go out, they leave their houses without a presence. People in communities should organize themselves so that they can watch their place together." Adds Paul Vincent: "Prevention is better than cure. Aurovilians have to take responsibility for themselves and for their own security. For example by not traveling alone at night and by not displaying their valuables. For Auroville is developing fast, there is much display of wealth in the form of big houses and expensive motorbikes. Some people are tempted by all that display." Auroville has created a few groups to discourage such incidents from happening. For the past eight years the Auroville night guard has guarded the roads, stationing itself at strategic points.

Recently, they also started motorbike patrols. The day guard, comprising young men from the surrounding villages, patrols the roads in daytime. A few months ago ASP (Auroville Security Personnel) was formed, comprising a group of young Aurovilians who spontaneously volunteered to start patrolling the roads and communities of Auroville. But these initiatives act more discouraging measures. They do not have the power to prevent thefts and assaults from taking place.

"There is still an insufficient support from the community," says Paul Vincent. "We are in need of funds and equipment. We need a jeep to patrol the roads and move fast when it is necessary. We need walkie-talkies and cellular phones. All this would go a long way in improving the security environment in Auroville." Philippe, of the night guard, on the other hand, feels that what is most needed is people to join the guard activities. "But there is really not much response. At present the night guard comprises just over half a dozen people, which is not enough. If more people joined us in patrolling, it would really make a big difference; the presence on the roads would be greater, and therefore more dissuasive."

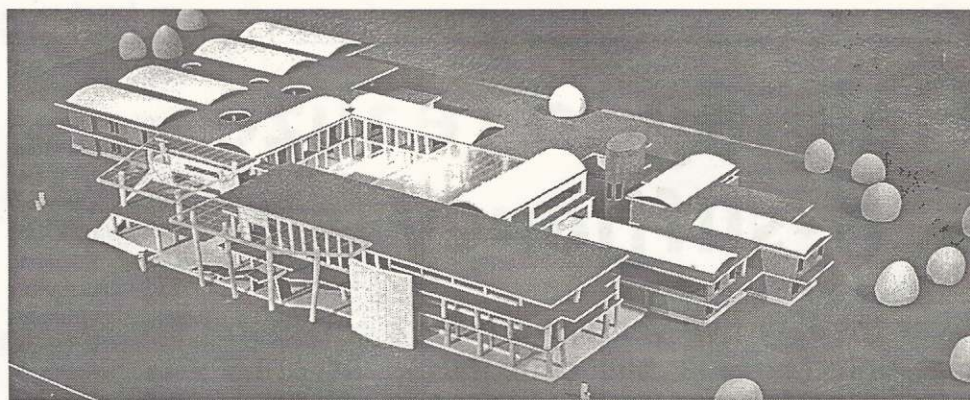
Until a few weeks back, none of the thieves or individuals responsible for the recent assaults had been tracked down by the police. Then the night guard, together with a group of Aurovilians, managed to catch two thieves. Some stolen material was recovered and the thieves were sent to jail. A promising development is the help from the surrounding villages. Recently, Paul Vincent and Selvaraj of the Working Committee had a meeting with the *panchayat* (local government) president of Bommaiarpalayam, a neighbouring village. The president promised his help to improve the situation, and more stolen materials have since been recovered. It is hoped that this cooperation can also be established with the other village *panchayats*.

Emmanuelle

## BUILDING THE CITY

### ARKA started

A residential project for the older "youth that never ages" has been started.



The ground has been cleared to start Arka, a residential and multipurpose centre for older Aurovilians. It is located in the Residential Zone opposite the community of Surrender. For better access and mobility it opens out onto the Crown Road, which encircles the city centre of the township. Arka is also situated close to the Kindergarten and hopefully this will build a relationship between these two age groups, which at present hardly exists.

Arka aspires to manifest physically the Charter of Auroville and the Mother's vision that "progress is youth. At a hundred years old one can be young." It addresses itself to the needs of older Aurovilians who feel the physical and psychological need to live in a communal and protected environment while at the same time continuing to have an active and useful role within the community. It is felt that age or physical limitations imposed by age should not restrict Aurovilians from participating in the growth and evolution of Auroville. Getting old is generally not an easy process. There is the fear of physical or psychological changes. And in a township like Auroville, with its bumpy mud roads and wide-flung civic amenities, mobility is drastically reduced for the aged. This can result in feelings of solitude. Arka seeks to address such issues in a positive way.

Arka is envisioned as a self-sufficient, multipurpose residential centre for 30 inhabitants

where the residents can shape – with the greatest possible freedom, and according to their own needs and wishes – their internal organization. Arka will have a total built up area of 2,500 square metres. There will be also ateliers for painting, embroidery, ceramics, etc. to help the residents maintain a sound physical and mental condition. Cultural activities, such as singing and music, and a library which will include a space for lectures, shows and concerts, will help them to maintain an interest in life. A computer center with Internet connections will do a lot for their communications with the outside. There will be a restaurant open to the public. A "Therapy Zone" would allow each individual to be treated according to her/his needs. There will be also be a dispensary with 24-hours nursing assistance, a massage room, a small gymnasium, and a swimming pool for therapeutic treatment. All these facilities could be open to the public as well. An internal transport service would help them to move around in the community.

Arka wouldn't be complete without accommodation for staff and visitors. Old age should not be "the last painful step" of existence, but can be the bridge, a transition towards another life. It is a time for harvesting the fruits of existence, and to be able to share them with others. Arka, which means "a ray of light", offers itself for such a progressive outlook and experimentation.

Maria Grazia



# The Vedantangal bird sanctuary

Ninety kilometres northwest of Auroville one finds an international community of a different type: The Vedantangal bird sanctuary, a swampy area where over 40,000 birds of different feathers have literally flocked together. But this is not a stable community. The main breeding season is from November till March, the high season is in December and January. After March most birds will have migrated to cooler wetlands in Northern India, though some of them will fly as far as Turkey, Iran or Russia.

The best time to see the birds is shortly after sunrise. So off we set for an early motorbike ride, bravely defying the cold. The sun had just risen, casting a soft orange glow on the still misty landscape. Half an hour later the mist had gone and we enjoyed the fresh green of the paddy fields. Another hour later we stretched our backs and warmed our hands holding cups of sweet hot tea from the local tea stall. Then it was bird watching time.

I had visited Vedantangal before, during a seed-collecting trip outside the season. That was a silent time and I saw only a few birds. Now an almost deafening noise produced by thousands of birds greeted us when we mounted the banks that surround the swamp. There was so much activity going on that it was hard to decide where to look first. We saw cormorants, egrets, storks, ibises, herons, spoonbills, pelicans, grebes and many other birds taking off and landing, nesting in the water-rooted trees, diving for fish or having a brawl with their neighbour. My expectations were far surpassed.

The cormorants are the busiest birds, flying non-stop and making spectacular dives to catch fish. As they are good underwater swimmers, it is difficult to predict where they will pop up next. Once feeding time is over, they perch upright on a stake near the water, drying their outstretched wings. In the past people used to tame them for commercial fishing. Happily, this

practice has stopped.

There are also many varieties of herons around. I see the grey heron, the cattle egret, the large and the little egret. The cattle egret, as its name suggests, is a welcome visitor for cows and water buffalos. You see them sitting on their backs, eating their ticks and the insects that fly up from the grass when they move around. The little egret is also found in Auroville, fishing in the ponds and ant-channels around the houses. The white feathers of this bird, in particular the ornamental dorsal plumes called 'aigrettes,' were highly fashionable at one time, which nearly caused the bird's extinction. But the fashion changed, the trade has become illegal and the bird is no longer endangered.

High above we see storks drifting easily on thermals. They have not come to breed, but are here on winter holidays and will eventually return to northern Europe. They give me the impression of being proud birds, looking down condescendingly on the swarms

below. A pelican swims by, sifting fish from the water with its large beak, collecting it for the little nestlings in its expandable pouch. Most interesting are the spoonbills, truly the punks of the area with their strangely formed beaks and spiky head feathers. They wade through the swamp continuously, moving their beaks non-stop in the muddy waters, raking up the bottom mud with the tip of the lower mandible, catching small tadpoles, frogs, molluscs, insects and vegetable matter.

That this bird sanctuary still exists has a lot to do with the beneficial effect it has on the surrounding farmlands. Thousands of birds produce a lot of guano, and the water from the swamp is channelled to the paddy fields. This water not only contains a natural fertilizer, but it also dispends with the need



Cormorant

to use chemical pesticides. The farmers, who enjoy a rich paddy yield at comparatively low costs, convinced the authorities to declare Vedantangal the protected nature reserve area it is today. Bird lovers cannot thank Mother Nature enough for having created this eco-system where man and bird can live together in harmony.

Kireet (Gerard Jak)

## CULTURE

# A communal ecstasy

Critics and dilettantes of theatre have often argued that only certain themes, in keeping with our high ideals, are suitable for expression in Auroville. This myth has been recently demolished by two superb actors from Mumbai – Atul Kumar and Sheeba Chadha.

Atul and Sheeba first made their entrance into the Auroville theatre scene a few months ago with their production of an "absurd" comedy, Eugene Ionesco's *The Chairs*. The chairs exploring the futility of life, mocks an old couple's fantasies. As such, its theme could not be further away from Auroville's attempt to invest life with a higher and truer meaning.

And yet, the quality of Atul's and Sheeba's acting left the Auroville audience hungering for more. So when they returned recently with their "Home Theatre" production

of *The Seduction of Lady Anne*, a scene from Shakespeare's *Richard III*, they performed to packed houses. The concept of "Home Theatre" is something Atul's theatre group experiments with in Mumbai where the group enacts short extracts from plays in people's homes in order to revive the interest in theatre. In keeping with this, *The Seduction of Lady Anne*, a self-contained scene which explores the situation of the cloistered woman, was staged in the homes of two Aurovilians.

Theatre elements that the audience had already seen and appreciated in *The Chairs* were back in this production – the use of minimal space, minimum props, dramatic silences, and body-based acting. Added to this were recognizable elements of the Koodiyattam dance-drama form of Kerala such as the definition of the stage using black drapes and candlelight. Once again, it was the

quality of the couple's acting – where each movement, each modulation of the voice, each quiver of emotion seems to naturally arise from the pose of the body – that held the audience spell-bound. With their flawless enunciation, Atul and Sheeba also did justice to the richness of Shakespeare's language.

For both Atul and Sheeba, enacting Shakespeare, particularly a tragic and emotionally-charged scene, was a challenge as they were more at ease with the buffoonery of comedies. But if there was anything amiss in their rendition, it went unnoticed. The actors and the audience were wrapped in a shared experience that transcended time and cultures. Atul and Sheeba had amply lived up to the expectations of their director, Kenn Phillips, who seeks to share with the audience the experience of communal ecstasy. Explains Phillips, "in the absence of a common belief and shared rituals and myths [in the modern audience], this ecstasy can only be transmitted through a quality of energy embodied by the actor".

It is perhaps this "energy," embodied by an actor and shared with the audience, that makes any theatre form, regardless of its theme, truly great, and, if one may dare say so, spiritual.

Bindu

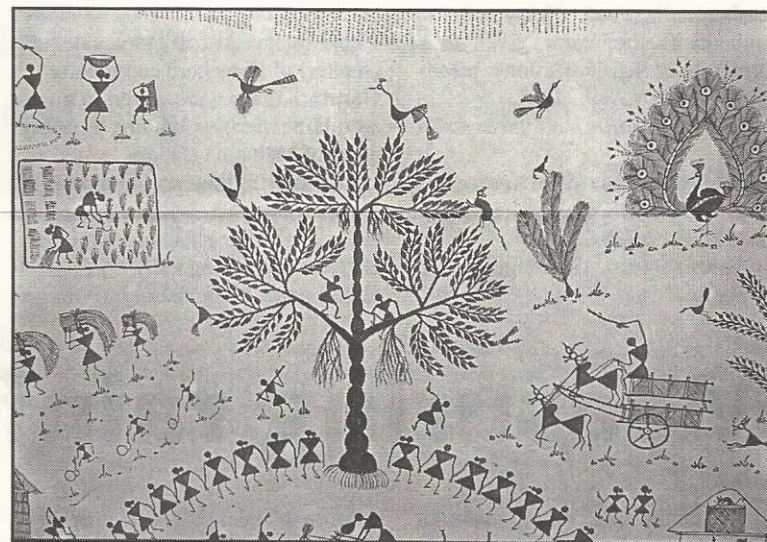
# Folk and Tribal Art

MADHYAM, an organization from Bangalore, brought three tribal artists to Auroville to do wall paintings and give a presentation.

A few months ago, when the internationally famous Parisian artist, Messnager left his trail of "white ghosts" in public walls in Auroville, another visiting artist, Visser, mentioned that it was a pity that neither Messnager nor Aurovilians seemed to be aware of the rich and ancient mural tradition that exists in Indian folk-art. [see AVToday #149-150, June-July 2001] Recently however, Aurovilians had a taste of the intricate folk painting, particularly murals, which different regions and tribes in India have developed.

MADHYAM, an organisation from Bangalore brought the different art forms to Auroville. PHAD comes from Rajasthan, WARLI from Maharashtra, PITHORA from Gujarat, CHITTARA from Karnataka, PATUA from West Bengal and MADUBANI from Bihar. Also as part of this event, two artists, Kalyan Joshi from Rajasthan doing PHAD paintings and Dilip from Maharashtra doing WARLI, stayed in Auroville for a week and decorated many houses and public buildings in Auroville and the surrounding villages with their paintings. It was an absolute joy to see them at work and also to see their work.

In a PHAD painting colour, costume and culture is reflected. The colours are vegetable dyes which



Warli Art at Samasti Guest House

the artist prepares, as also the canvas. The paintings have a mythological meaning and depict the story of Pabuji, a Rajput revered for his deeds. Done usually in scrolls of 30 feet, they show Pabuji's victory and life style. The colours are done on an off-white background used in an order starting from Orange-Yellow, Brown, Green, Red and finally Black. White is used for decoration.

An innate simplicity marks WARLI art executed by tribal cultivators, with rice paste on walls coated with cow-dung. As a MADHYAM information

leaflet says, "Typically these paintings show a multitude of tiny human forms hunting, dancing or cultivating the land. They rely more on line than colour. Stick figures throb with an exciting energy when Warli artists from Maharashtra get to work." Warli art has always been appreciated in Auroville with the Auroville Press developing a line of stationery with Warli-based designs. All in all, the exhibition gave Aurovilians a taste of the amazing cultural diversity of India.

Supriya

## In brief



### Fourteen Kimonos

Fourteen Kimonos, an exhibition of "Collages with a Buddhist Inspiration" made by Franz, took place in Pitanga.

### Auroville Renaissance Cappella

The Auroville Renaissance Cappella, consisting of Anandamayi, Nuria, Firooza, Eliane, Ane, Tineke, Paul, Martin, Gilles and Tom, and conducted by Eugene, gave two performances of English, French and Italian Madrigals. In the breaks, the recorder trio Pushkar, Merry and Nishtha played renaissance recorder music.

### Hindustani music concert

Sri Vasant Karnad gave a Hindustani classical vocal concert in Pitanga. Sri Karnad explained the unique blend of ragas that are a trademark of the Jaipur Atrali Gharana school of music, of which he is an exponent. Later in the

week he gave a workshop on the basic concepts of classical Indian Music in Verité.

### Astad Deboo

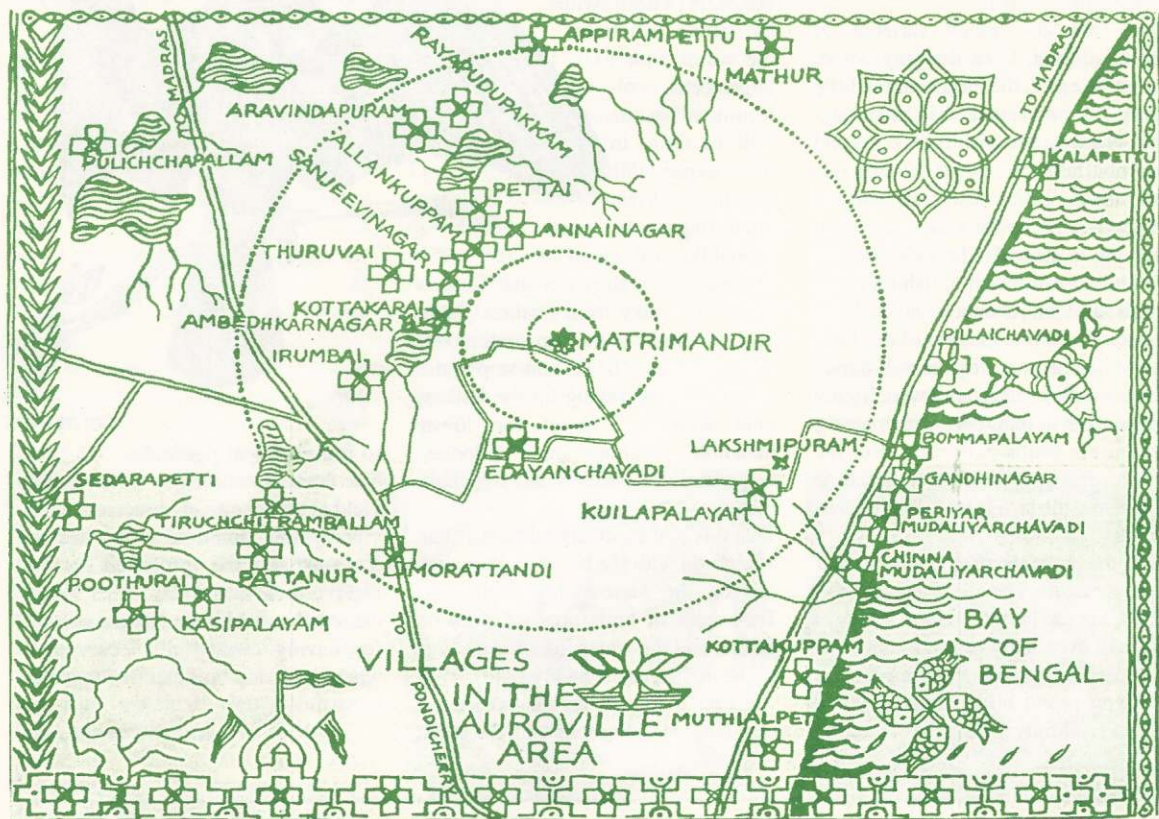
Astad Deboo, a contemporary dancer from Mumbai who has created his own unique style, gave a full-day dance workshop and a performance at the Sri Aurobindo Auditorium.

### ENDURO race

The first annual ENDURO race took place at the school sports complex in Dana. The main objective was to help each child build up the cardiovascular endurance capacity. Juniors aged between 6-9 years walked 10 minutes, juniors aged between 10-12 years ran for 15 minutes, seniors (13 years and above) ran for 20 minutes.



# Names of villages around Auroville



**Acharampattu:** A small village surrounded by certain plants (thorny bush Nerunjil, drumstick trees etc.) Another meaning – a place with a workshop for making bullock carts axles.

**Akasampattu:** A tiny village connected with Akash – the sky.

**Alankuppam:** A small beautiful seashore village full of banyan trees. Ambethkarnagar: name given to a former dailit (harijan) colony, meaning place of Dr. Ambedkar

**Anpakkam:** Village of cow shepherds

**Annainagar:** name given to a former dailit (harijan) colony, meaning place of The Mother

**Appirampattu:** Community of shepherds

**Aravindapuram:** name given to a former dailit (harijan) colony, meaning place of Sri Aurobindo.

**Bommayarpalayam:** This was called Brahma Puram and later Bomma Puram. Here there is a spiritual center called Thirumadam – Samadhi of Balayananda Swamy.

**Chinnamudaliyarchavadi:** A shelter named after the younger Mudali Edaiyanchavadi: A way side inn (shelter) of a cowherd community

**Gandhinagar:** name given to a former dailit (harijan) colony, meaning place of Mahatma Gandhi

**Irumbai Maakaalam (Irumbai):** Shrine of Mahakaleswara (Just like the one in Ujjain) housing two mothers (Kali and young kali).

**Kalapattu:** A fishing village.

Catchment area of the fish Kala. (sturgeon)

**Kaluperambakkam:** Large village in marshy delta land.

**Kasipalayam:** This has the strong Hindu connections with Varanasi. 'KASI' means Varanasi (Benares)

**Kattarambakkam:** A village in a forest with rare species

**Kenipattu:** A village around a big well

**Kodur:** A village for gatherings

**Koluvari:** A village which is placed in a 'polder'.

**Kottaikarai:** Edge of the Fort

**Kottakuppam:** The bank protecting the seashore.

**Kuilapalayam:** Village of koel birds. (The koel bird is the symbol of Jeevatma)

"What's in a name? That which we call a rose, by any other name would smell as sweet," observes Juliet in Shakespeare's drama 'Romeo and Juliet'. But Juliet might have spoken differently had she had occasion to visit India, where names of persons and places always have an exquisite meaning. The names of the villages of Tamil Nadu, for example, reveal their spiritual, cultural and environmental heritage.

**Lakshmiapuram:** New village named after Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth

**Mathur:** It comes from the old name 'matrur' meaning another village.

**Morattandi Chavadi:** A shelter dedicated to a siddha – a mendicant who was known for his stubbornness and service.

**Muthialpet:** A place where they traded in pearls and gemstones (muthu and muthial mean pearls)

**Nesal:** Derives from Neydhal, meaning village with the particular character of seashore culture. Another meaning is water lily. A village with the character of a water body.

**Olundiypattu:** A village named after a king wearing a garland, 'uliginai', to mark the victory over a strong enemy by capturing his territory.

**Pattanur:** Village of a guru or a sage

**Periyamudaliyarchavadi:** A shelter named after a senior Mudali, one who holds money or capital

**Pillaichavadi:** Pillai means one who is youthful. It also denotes a caste name. A shelter donated by pillai.

**Poothurai:** A water source with flowers.

**Puducherry ( Pondicherry ):** 'Cherry' means community; so Puducherry means a new community. The original name of Pondicherry is Vedapuri – the city of Vedas.

**Pulichapallam ( Pullisaipallam):** Birds singing around the pond.

**Puthupattu:** Tiny village with sacred ant hill.

**Rayapettai:** A market place named after the Raya, the chieftain

**Rayapudupakkam:** A new small village named after the Raya, the chieftain

**Sanjeevirayan Pettai ( Sanjeevi Nagar)Sanjeevi:** The Lord, Hanuman, protector with medicinal plants. The village of a chieftain named after Hanuman Sanjeevi Rayan.

**Sedarapettai:** A village full of ixroa coccinea flowers

**Tailaparam:** Village for herbal oil pressing

**Thiruchitrabalam:** Most revered hall of consciousness. (refers to Chidhambaram)

**Thuruvai:** A sheep farm.

**Vanur:** (Ur – is a habitat ) A village connected with the sky.

Meenakshi, Ilaignarkal

## Measuring rainfall

Rainfall varies from place to place. You might have got drenched in Kuilapalayam but there wouldn't be anything in Certitude. Sometime it rains in Alankuppam but not in Edayanchavadi. Why? It is a matter of condensation and direction of wind flow.

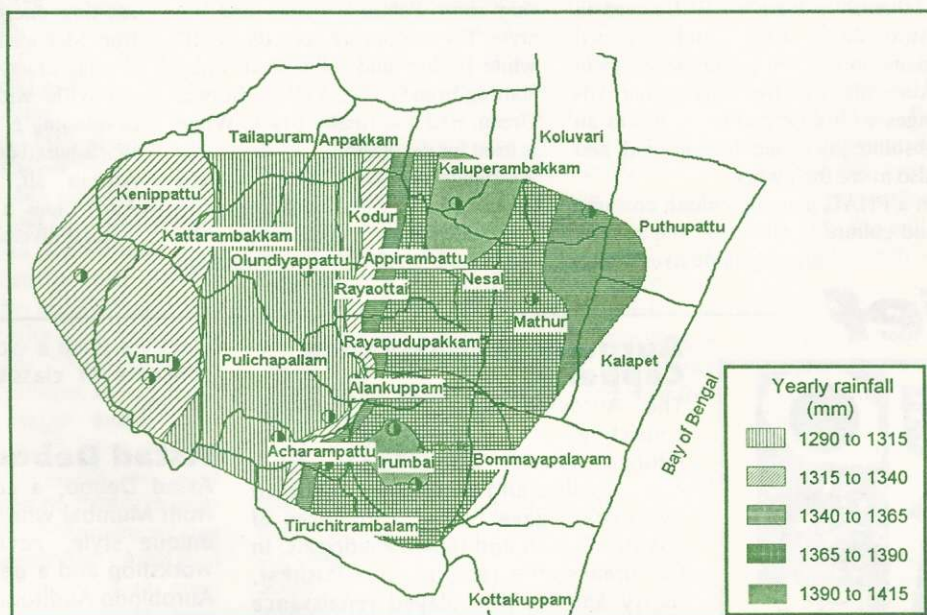
At a micro level, these differences may not be much. But they matter to researchers and developers. Micro level climate studies can give an error free derivation from the calculations like runoff, infiltration and other water related studies.

Auroville's unit Water Harvest, which is concerned with water harvesting and water management in the bio-region around Auroville, embarked on an initiative to

measure the micro level weather differences in the Auroville bioregion. It distributed 14 rain gauges and thermometers to the village volunteers who are participating in Harvest's Hydrological extension study. The Tamil Nadu Council for Science and

Technology sponsored the study. Appropriate training was provided to record the rainfall data and temperature. The data collected helps to generate maps, which indicate the exact rainfall scenario of the region

Murugaian



### Subscription information:

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

## AUROVILLE INTERNATIONAL

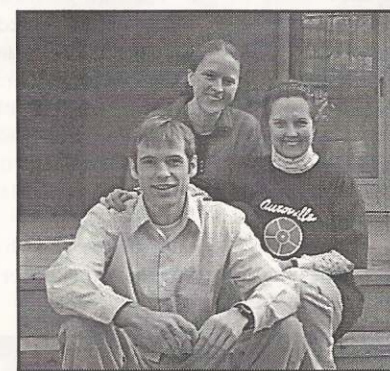
### AVI Canada-Ontario

This is just a quick note to all friends and supporters of Auroville around the world: you now have brothers and sisters in Ontario, Canada! Auroville International

Canada-Ontario was founded on November 13, 2001, after being an Auroville information office for two years. All the legal and founding documents have been completed and filed with the authorities.

The rest of the foundation work is steadily proceeding and nearing completion. Founding directors are Catherine Blackburn, L'aura Joy and Andrew Rattee. Other members are Devan Nair, Auromira Parks, Tripat

Bratch and Vijay Kumar. We already held an Auroville Holiday Fair, on December 2nd, where we sold Auroville products, the 2002 calendars, the CD of Joy, and T-shirts with



Back left: L'aura Joy and Catherine Blackburn, front, Andrew Rattee

the Auroville logo and our name on it. With our strong core group of members, we are sure to progress. We are proud and happy to be part of the international community, and would welcome news and exchanges with other international Auroville centers. Keep the Faith!

You can contact Catherine at blackburnca@yahoo.com Or Andrew at aratee@hotmail.com