

Auroville Today

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Auroville's monthly news magazine since 1988

Our neighbours

It's a phenomenon seen all over the world. When a place acquires a certain level of complexity and dynamism, it attracts not only new residents but also people who wish to live close by.

Auroville is no exception. Over recent years the explosion of buildings coming up on the fringes of Auroville – houses, guest-houses and shops – confirms that, whether we like it or not, a 'greater Auroville' is already here.

Some Aurovilians fear the worst; that these people are coming here only to feed off Auroville, not to give anything back. Certainly, in the case of many of the shops and businesses mushrooming up around us, the commercial motive is predominant. Then there are those who just want to benefit from all that Auroville has achieved so far. These live close by because of the greenery, peace and cleanliness, or because of the cosmopolitan nature of the community that manifests in stimulating conversations, cross-cultural performances, exotic food and workshops.

Yet when *Auroville Today* went out to interview our neighbours, we discovered that a surprising number of those living around Auroville are attracted by something deeper, by Auroville's ideals and by the writings and example of Mother and Sri Aurobindo (some have been studying them for many years). Many of these people have an Ashram background or have been visiting Auroville for many years; many have long-time friendships with Aurovilians. While they eat at Auroville restaurants or attend our cultural events, these people are not interested in just benefiting. Some of them make regular financial contributions. Many of them would like a more active exchange, to offer their skills and energy in helping Auroville grow.

However, some Aurovilians believe that there is an essential asymmetry: that it's impossible not to take more than you give if you live in proximity to Auroville but don't commit yourself fully to the experience. So why don't these people become Aurovilians? Some tried but, for one reason or another, (the difficulty of finding accommodation is often cited) it didn't work out. Many have family responsibilities, work circumstances or physical problems that prevent them living here full-time. Some feel unwilling to make the large financial commitment necessitated by building in Auroville if they have no way of recuperating their costs should the experience not work out. Others want to retain a certain freedom – for example, in how they run their businesses – which they don't think possible if they join Auroville.

In other words, for quite a number of our well-meaning neighbours Auroville remains a step too far.

This raises an interesting question – what does it mean to be called an Aurovillian? Is it limited to those physically living on this plot of land or can we conceive of something larger? Then again, if 'Aurovillian' is too precious a term to be shared freely, could there be other relations? Some of our neighbours would like some kind of status that recognises their commitment to our ideals and their wish to help us. Could we revive the Friends of Auroville, albeit in a new form, for people like these?

Or, as one of them put it, would we prefer living in an exclusive club?



Cashing-in on Auroville? Signs on the 'Auroville Main Road' from the East Coast Road to Kulapalayam village.

"Do not close the door to us"

Outside Edaiyanchavady village, near the Red Earth Riding School, is a new settlement belonging to a French woman, Danielle Martheleur. There is a house, a small pool with a beautiful statue of the Buddha, and the four acre holding is being planted out with fruit trees and flowers.

"When I first set foot in India thirty years ago I thought, 'This is my land. One day I will live here and this is where I'm going to die.'" Danielle was working for *Elle* magazine at the time, but every year thereafter she revisited India.

"In 1981 I came to Auroville for the first time. There was nothing here then but I kept coming back. Although I am a Buddhist, I love Sri Aurobindo and have been reading him for almost thirty years. In France I knew Jean Herbert, the disciple of Sri Aurobindo who translated all his works into French."

In 2005 she was in Rajasthan with a friend. "We made an agreement that if one of us died, the other would put her ashes in the Ganges. Fifteen days later my friend was killed in an accident."

Next year Danielle returned to India with her friend's ashes to fulfil her promise. Before going to the Ganges she stopped briefly in Auroville. "I was in a very sensitive state, I was still in mourning for my friend. Then suddenly, in the middle of the night, I felt I must buy land in this area."

She consulted her daughters in France, who agreed with the idea. "I had only five days and everybody said it would be impossible in such a short time but I said, 'Let's see'. An Aurovillian from a local village took me on his motorcycle and showed me three pieces of land outside Auroville that were available. Two were not interesting, but when I saw this piece I immediately felt I had arrived. I went to the Banyan tree and meditated for an hour and then I knew for sure that this was my land."

In fact, 'Maidland' is the name she has given to her four acre holding. It is also the name of a Trust she has set up. "It's a foundation for *nadopasana yoga* which is a singing yoga: you work with your

voice. Bruno, an Aurovillian, will be working with me. We'll have a seven day course here in January, February, and people will stay here because I want this to be an integral experience. It's not just about your body but also your personal sound and your diet, it's about feeling good in a natural environment."

"In future I want to develop this place gradually, to have a stage for performances, a massage room, a library. I'm not interested in making it into a business, I just want to cultivate the art of living. I'm 62 now, I've worked hard and now I want to feel good with everything and to share this feeling with others who are on the same road."

Did she ever consider joining Auroville? "I think if I'd come at the beginning of Auroville I would have been an Aurovillian because I like pioneering, I like creating things from scratch. When I came to this plot of land there was nothing, so I could be creative, unlike in France. In France I am 62 years old, here I feel 20!"

"The other reason I don't want to be an Aurovillian is because I have two daughters and I want to give them something, to leave them something. But I'm here because I like many, many things about Auroville – the ideals, the cultural mix, the fact that it is so cosmopolitan."

"My friends who, like me, live near but are not Aurovilians, are all here because of Auroville. We say we are 'Aurobien' – we are 'Auroville-well' and we wish Auroville well. We say 'thank you' to the Aurovilians for everything you have done; you have made a garden out of nothing and it's wonderful, but please open your minds and hearts to us because we are here to help you grow. We are not interested in profiting from Auroville, which is a suspicion I sometimes see in the eyes of Aurovilians who don't know us."

"Do not close the door to people like us because then Auroville would become a kind of



Danielle Martheleur

club, which is not what Mother wanted. Auroville should be like a heart, expanding and expanding to include all those who love it. Everything is interconnected and Auroville should learn from everything that is happening in the world. So my place is always open to Aurovilians; we can have dinners together, enjoy cultural events, we can talk about Mother and Sri Aurobindo."

Next month Danielle flies back to Paris, where she and her friends will attend the UNESCO event marking 40 years of Auroville. "When I return to Edaiyanchavady this winter, we will put on a concert and everybody will be invited. It's crazy to remain separate. We must share what we know and what is good for us, for that's the way we grow."

Alan

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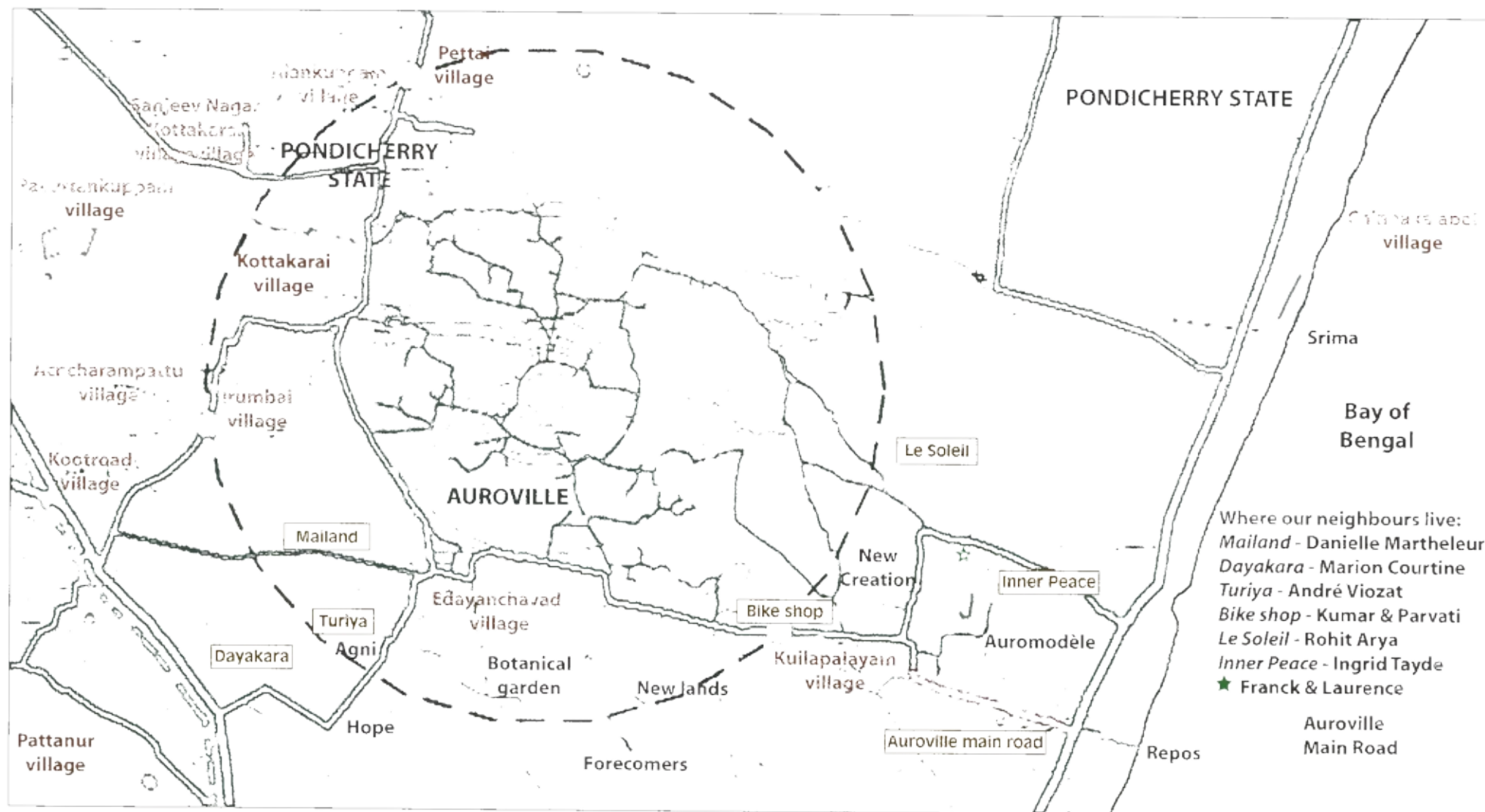
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do not belong anythi

'Turiya' is the name in rose wood letters on the wooden gate that Madras road. It is home to André Viozat, a Frenchman who came to

“Actually, that's not exact,” he corrects. “I do not really feel I belong to India or France or even to Auroville. I do not ‘belong’ to anything. But I have a soft corner for Auroville, and whenever I have some money, I send it to the Matrimandir. Yes, you could say I feel close to Auroville. And for those who will understand, I am not a businessman either...” He looks at me with piercing blue eyes, a red baseball cap worn backwards on his head. Meet André Viozat.

How he came to India, he says, is a story too long to tell. “I was never fully satisfied with the West — I was always looking for ‘something’, from a very young age onwards. When I was 20, I did my civil service in Laos teaching mathematics instead of the compulsory military service. On the way back to France I met Pierre Legrand who told me about Sri Aurobindo, The Mother, Auroville and *The Adventure of Consciousness* of Satprem, which he more or less pressed upon me. I was not all that interested, even felt irritated with sentences like ‘all is in all’, but started to read it out of politeness — it was the turning point. The book went with me to Africa, where I taught math for another two years. And I started imbibing Sri Aurobindo. After that period I wrote to Satprem, asking what I could do for Auroville. He gave me letter to Vincenzo, who sent me a long list of materials to be brought to Auroville, which had just started two years before. I bought all what I could, and then Jean Pougault and I drove two vans through Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan into India. It was a remarkable experience. We passed through the border in December 1970. Few days later it was closed. The war between India and Pakistan had started.

“We landed in Auroville in January '71 — it was raining cats and dogs. We asked for a room — no room was available. We had come with Rs 25 lakhs of materials, we had expected a bit of a welcome. There was none! We decided to continue to sleep in the van for the next months.

“Auroville was fascinating in those early days. Soon I got involved in building the new hexagonal Aspiration huts, under Piero's daily guidance. There were already some small huts, and the foundations for a hexagonal ‘superhut’ had been laid. But because of some financial scam, the work had stopped. Shyam Sunder accepted my offer to construct the new huts, and in less than a year and under half the budget, I finished five double huts. The first one, of course, was occupied by Jean and me. But I didn't enjoy it for long. Jean got himself a girlfriend and needed more space. Again I was without a roof.

“By this time I had started to work in Fraternity: the water tank became my bed, the starry sky my roof! Shyam Sunder wanted me to continue construction work, but amongst the materials we had brought was a kit to make an electronic organ. As electronics was my second passion, I asked for permission to quit construction to finish the organ. It was refused. I then applied to Mother. Actually, I never received a reply in writing, but it was understood that Mother had accepted my proposal and that I would now start an electronics unit. I finished the organ, a huge thing, which went straight to the Ashram musician Sunil-da. He truly mastered it and I am proud that all the recorded music from that time 1972 — 1975 was played on my organ — I personally feel that it may have been the best music Sunil ever did.

“A problem of the time in Auroville was the scarcity of food. I was given one cup of milk per meal, which was my staple diet, and I couldn't go back for another one. As I am a worker by nature, I felt this rationing of sorts a little frustrating. I decided to start a poultry farm, next to my work, at least I would get some eggs! I went to Navajata, who readily agreed to release Rs 10,000.

a private estate on the road from Edaiyanchavadi to the old 38 years ago and who now feels more Indian than Western.



André Viozat

“Those were busy days. You could say that I used to give all of me to Auroville. Early mornings I started for foundation work at the Matrimandir. Then I cycled to Pondicherry to teach math at the Lycée Français — to finance the new electronic unit — and in the afternoons I would return to Fraternity to work in the workshop. At that time, there were no tar roads, so I was always covered in dirt and sweat when I arrived at the college and later in Fraternity. In between, I managed the poultry farm and built a solar pump in Fraternity with Dr. Chamanlal Gupta, a project funded by the Union government. I worked non-stop from 6 a.m. to well after 10 p.m.

“When the organ was finished I realised that I should do something to make some money. After sometime of making electronic gadgets including a wonderful metronome, Vincenzo advised that I should make a measuring machine for animal hides. Many people in India were importing and exporting leather, and the measuring of it gave problems. I partnered with Kalya, whom I pulled from the ashram school. We started *Auroelectronics*, as a unit of the Sri Aurobindo Society, and we slowly developed a leather-measuring machine. But it was a difficult start. We struggled with Indian laws and with import licences. You couldn't do anything without prior permission from the government, and import was almost impossible or only through payment of 250% duty. I had to run to Cuddalore, Tindivanam, Villupuram, Madras — and every time I got stuck because I could not sign the documents as the unit belonged to the Sri

Aurobindo Society. I went to Navajata and requested him to give me my independence. He got the committee together, and they passed a resolution that *Auroelectronics* would be separated from the Society, and the assets and liabilities transferred, which practically amounted to zero. That was in 1976. We were on our own. It is due to this resolution that *Auroelectronics* was never taken over by the Indian Government and never became part of the Auroville Foundation.

“While *Auroelectronics* was involved in electronics, another unit of the Sri Aurobindo Society, *Toujours Mieux*, headed by Vincenzo, was doing the mechanical work. They worked from a keel-roofed shed in Aspiration. One day, in March 1972, it went up in flames, and with it most of the tools I had brought from France. The shed burnt like a torch. The sky was dark red.

There was also a severe cyclone around that time. In both cases we felt that adverse forces were at work. Mother scolded us that it was due to our lack of sincerity and of real aspiration for the Divine that such things were happening. These messages were addressed to all of us and were taken seriously though I could never find what I, personally, had done wrong!

“Like most Aurovilians, I had hardly any physical contact with The Mother. It happened only once, on my birthday in 1972. To be frank I felt shy sitting at Her feet. Then She put Her hands on my head, and She gave me flowers. I felt quite awkward holding this bouquet. I didn't quite understand The Mother at that time. It's only recently that I've started to grow more intimate with her. Before, I felt close to Sri Aurobindo only.

“*Auroelectronics* gave birth to many offsprings. One was *Aurelec*. Kalya, together with Ulli, developed an interest in computers and at some time on their request, we separated amicably. I had meanwhile set up a manufacturing unit in one of Pondicherry's industrial estates to produce the leather measuring machine, with good standards.

“Gradually, *Auroelectronics* expanded. We designed more micro-processor based machines. The most successful is a seven ton 30 metre long automatic plant to spray-paint leather. We sell it in India, Bangladesh, and in some African countries. By now, we've sold about 1,500 measuring machines, and over 650 sprayers. Our machines must have saved India more than 150 million dollars in imports, and allowed leather-finishing units to set up shop at half the cost.

“My latest baby — I owe the initial idea to Silvio who passed away so many years ago — is *AuroZon*. This unit manufactures powerful high concentration ozone generators. The ozone gas is used to eliminate pollution and clean the hazardous sludge produced by dyeing factories in Tirupur and Perundurai. I expect this unit to grow fast. Now we are building a factory to mass-produce this machine.

“Over the years, my work came to occupy me completely and my involvement with the building of Auroville diminished. In the early days of Auroville I attended a few political meetings but soon realised this was not my cup of tea. I am a worker, interested in practical results, with an allergy for politics. I have been striving for 40 years to work efficiently, yet without the desire for the fruit. It's my only objective actually. But I don't feel that I ever went ‘away’ from Auroville. *Turiya's* 14 acres are in Auroville's greenbelt, and I've done my part towards greenwork — I have planted a few thousands trees, I think.

“No, I don't belong — I don't want to ‘belong’. But I have my own soft spot for Auroville. I have faith in our ‘Ideal’ and in the ‘Project’. I guess I never really ended my old love affair with anarchy...”

In conversation with Carel

"We want an exchange"

Frank is a film director, his wife Laurence is an editor. They live in a beautiful house set back from the road which leads from Uthiraly towards Bonmalaypalayam village.



Frank and Laurence

We've had Auroville friends for many years. Eleven years ago we came here for the first time and my wife fell in love with Auroville," says Frank. "I had another job maybe I would stay here all the time, but I love my present job making films. I always want to make a new film and it's too complicated making films in India - there is not at all the same film culture here as I am used to." Eight years ago, however, he did make a film in Pondicherry for which he and his old Auroville friends, Yvonne and Gregoire, wrote the script.

"My wife would like to live here all the time, but it is very difficult to reconcile our commitments in Paris among other things, we have family there - with him here. So we found a solution. Nine years ago we bought land here and built a house. Now we live in Auroville."

"off". The term "off" refers to "Bingo" events in French cultural festivals.]

Frank and Laurence are well-integrated with Auroville. Their house was designed by an Auroville architect. They have many Auroville friends and recently two of Frank's latest films were shown to enthusiastic audiences in Cinema Paradiso.

Nevertheless, "It would be nice if Auroville accorded some kind of special status to people like us who love Auroville, who are here only because Auroville exists but who, for one reason or another, are not able to join Auroville. Everybody in our situation - and there are many of us living around here - would be interested in such a status. Because we want to be involved, we want an exchange. We would like to offer our resources, our skills and be able to participate in your activities."

Alan

"I feel in my heart I am an Aurovilian"

Ingrid Tayde lives in a house nearby called Inner Peace.

Since I was very young, I have been attracted to Sri Aurobindo. I had been doing Hatha Yoga classes in Germany and had very impressed by the calm nature of my teacher. When I found out that he came from the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, it made me curious to visit Pondicherry.

"I first came in 1972 and my yoga teacher's family looked after me. I am a violinist and when I met Dorothea, who was living in Cortado, we decided to give some concerts together. We put on concerts in Lesch School and at the Alliance Francaise. However, Auroville was very much a pleasant experience then and I wasn't staying overnight."

"So I went back to Germany, I married, and I pursued my musical career. For 23 years I played with the Frankfurt Orchestra. All of this made it difficult to search for Auroville, but I always kept in touch with what was happening here through friends like Dorothea."

A few years ago, I determined to return to this area - Auroville is unique, there's no other place like it in the world. I bought this plot in 2001. There were only two reasons then but Dorothea designed the rest. I very much wanted to join Auroville but the entry group said I had to do something for Auroville and I didn't know what to do. Ingrid is physically disabled. Her baby



Ingrid Tayde

Georg also said I had to live in Auroville, to give up this land, but part of this land belongs to my son and daughter and I wasn't willing to do this.

"My whole life has been devoted to Sri Aurobindo - there must be a way for someone like me to become an Aurovilian."

"Actually, now I've given up trying to join Auroville, but it would be good if people like myself could have a special status, like an identity card. It would make a difference. I feel Aurovilian, in my heart I'm an Aurovilian, and I would like to help Auroville in some way. I hope the English Tamil learning book which I have been working on and will probably soon will be useful."

Alan

I came here, after, very slowly in Pondicherry, my father was a driver. As a boy I loved activities and my dream of having my own workshop has now come true. Nowadays I am the pillar of the house for my family. They depend on me. They cared for me when I was young and healthy and now I care for them.

"André and Béatrice used to bring their motorcycles to Pondicherry for more repair, and one day André asked if I would like to come and set up a work shop in New Creation. André, the change completely. I have been here in this workshop for 15 years now and I am happy here."

"I have recently visited an old village in my workshop and saw people there. The place is peaceful and beautiful with the banana trees and my workshop under the banana trees. I like to see the children and teachers on their way to school and they always wave to me."

"I'm going now in vehicle maintenance and then see them set up their own business. I find this very satisfying. It is like seeing little birds spread their wings and fly. If they are smart, it takes two years. My main goal is for people to repair, argue breakdowns and, of course, lack of petrol. I often get calls from people who are stuck in the forest with no petrol so I ride out with a bottle and rescue them. I guess I am a bit of a hero here, making oil, making petrol, even there."

"The Western tourists are very friendly. But even though they are new to today they seem always in a hurry and do many things the Indian way. They want things to be done 'fast' and are always rushing out of people. Many of them, however, find they are in their 'second mother's house' when they are here in Auroville so they feel the special atmosphere. They tell me they are sad when they have to leave. After nine or ten years, they find it good to leave, and also for my business."

An upbeat bike repair shop

Kumar works in his motorcycle repair shop outside New Creation with his wife Parvathi.



Kumar and Parvathi

"Although I am not an Aurovilian, I have learnt many things through working in Auroville. Good habits like punctuality, honesty, cleanliness and love of nature. I am not an Aurovilian - nobody has asked me to be, but if they asked, I would like to be."

"A few years ago, I met a Frenchman, called Gerard, who brought me yoga asanas so now when people give me their bikes I go

away and do some yoga and get started. I also go to New Creation classes to learn more asanas. I have doing yoga and learning to improve my body. I work hard and try to take care of my health so I can do good services. I eat only vegetarian food and every day have at least two bowls of curries - one with a very healthy and use natural herbs and medicines."

"I go to the Sarnathi and also to the Ganga Temple. And I like goddess Kali as she is so powerful."

"Mother has given us the good path and we must follow it. We must do our best to be better. There are so many accidents on the road now, mostly due to fast driving. My boys think they are like heroes, but really, a quick and long life is better but I can repair their bikes, but only God can repair their bodies."

"My recent job is dealing with Parvathi. She was working with me for the last six months. I have been in it. I used to see Kumar coming home every night so much that one day I asked him if he would come and help me. I have been working for over six months and I have never been happy in my life. We had an arranged marriage about four years ago and have a 10-year-old son and an 8-year-old son. When we came straight we started the wedding. That is unusual as Tamil men normally are not from the kitchen. In the morning I drop the child on off of the house. Dorothea in Pondicherry. Kumar's grandfather was a Frenchman and he wanted them to go to France. I drive to the workshop and then go back and put the bike up in the afternoon. Our son loves being here and is learning to do bike repairs."

"When I started here I did not know any English, but now I can speak with people all the time. I am very happy."

"Parvathi is still shy," says Kumar. "But she is getting more confident every day. Before she could not even come to work and she now drives to Pondicherry to get spurs for her every day. Her friends see how her life has changed and they are sad. They are beginning to tell their husbands they want to go out and work too. I think she must be the first woman working in a bike shop in Tamil Nadu. It is a great honour. In Pondicherry girls work at the garage, but only serving poles, they do not really have any responsibility."

Kumar is a happy man doing his daily work as a service in the company of his bright and cheerful wife.

Diana

The 'Road'

Twenty five years ago the road from Kuilapalayam meandered down to the 'Beach Road' through a sandy gully. One night, the residents of Kuilapalayam hacked a new straight path from their village through the fields down to the main road. With this, a new roadside community sprung into existence, based mainly on seasonal tourism.

Until last year there was on average, two accidents a day on the road. It was a mass of pot-holes and very dangerous, but now it has been resurfaced. However, heaps of builder's sand and rubble are dumped on the roadside and goats and dogs love to lie on its warm smooth surface, oblivious to the traffic hurtling by.

At the Kuilapalayam end, the road begins with a shrine and a huge, supine, highly-coloured goddess opposite a busy bike repair workshop. As you turn into the road, the first building you see has completely collapsed. It has seen a succession of failed businesses, the last being a Tibetan restaurant. The *Star Saloon*, a men's hairdressers, has sprung up next door, one of three barber shops on the road. And another bike repair shop next door.



Many small businesses dot the road

Across the road from Last School is *Auro Udyog Mandala*, a carpentry shop where a dozen men sit cross-legged on the ground, sawing and hammering. The place never seems to close; in the middle of the night, figures can be seen working chiselling away in the gloom.

In the field behind, half a dozen houses are being rapidly built. They are all substantial; one is four storeys high, and when it is completed it is rumoured it will sell for 20 lakhs (US \$43,500).

The road is now a microcosm of modern India, and in many ways it is not a pretty picture. Raju, who was born here, told me of his experiences. "There has been a tremendous change here, especially in last five years. The price of land has increased hugely and the real estate men are moving in fast. Ten years ago, my plot here cost one lakh rupees (Rs.100,000) and now it is going for six. People are buying a plot then selling it again after 3 months for a profit. My uncle's plot cost 25,000 rupees five years ago and he just sold it for nine lakhs. This is a man who did not know how many zeros there are in a crore (Rs.10,000,000)! This has upset the balance of many families and created stress and greed.

"On my little street three foreigners have built houses, and the rest are owned by people from Pondicherry who want a quieter lifestyle as Pondicherry is becoming more noisy and polluted. We village people have nothing in common with either of these two groups, yet have to live very close to them, and we often have trouble. For example, they complain about our early morning temple music and our loud festivals, and that we do not keep the street clean. They do not understand that these are our ways and we were



Statue of Periyayi Amman in Kuilapalayam on the Auroville Main Road.

here first and they should adapt to us. Just because an Indian family from Pondicherry paid 29 lakhs for a small two bedroom house does not mean that he owns me, his poor neighbour."

Many Aurovilians too run their businesses on the road. *Deepam Candles* is run by Aurovilian Murugan who was educated at New Creation School and taught pottery by Christine, a German lady who helped many Tamil boys. He taught pottery at New Creation School for thirteen years, before opening this candle shop with his wife, Kala. He employs fourteen women from the village. "Things are getting difficult," he says. "In the last 3 months the price of wax, which is a petroleum by-product, has risen 100%."

The *Unity Taxi Service* is another Auroville unit run by Krishna, also educated in New Creation School. He has just started a taxi-share scheme and would eventually like to be able to provide a free taxi service to elderly Aurovilians.

Next to the Taxi Service is *Ritual Tattoo*, a smartly-painted shop run by a French man from Pondicherry, who does tattoos for "girls from Bangalore and foreigners". Next door is *Silhouette*, a beauty parlour run by Ajanta Ganguly who came from Chennai. "I felt a strong pull to come here," says Ajanta. "Although I am a Christian, I have a deep affection for the Mother. I feel I am doing service here through my work, and I get involved in the local community. I do wish Aurovilians would support me more. Most people just speed past on their way to the East Coast Road. It would be nice if we could somehow be more integrated."

A little further down on the left a neatly painted sign says *Amaldi - Working with Volunteers in India*. The *Amaldi* (which means 'peace' in Tamil) house is run by Camille, an ex-Aurovilian from Holland, and Jansi, his Tamil wife.

Camille came to Auroville in 1993, loved it, and even became a Newcomer. But unfortunately his mother in Holland became seriously ill, so he returned for three years to care for her. When he came back he had to begin his Newcomer period again, which he felt was unfair. He went to live down at Quiet, but in 1996, he moved to Pondicherry. He then married a Tamil girl and returned to Holland, but realized he could never live there again as he felt he had changed too much. The family came back and started a guest house, the only way he could think of to make money.

Then a Dutch organization, *Joho*, which sends volunteers to South India, needed someone in this area, and he seemed the perfect person. He now arranges work for Dutch volunteers in schools, orphanages, farms, and they stay in his guest house. He takes them on 'exposure' days to Auroville and sometimes they eat there and buy bread at the bakery. He is full of admiration for Auroville but feels he needs the autonomy to run his own life and business, especially as he has a young family.

Another such family is Cordelia and Giorgio who run *Cordelia Gems*, a spacious shop selling jewellery and crystals near the main road. Cordelia is from Malaysia, Giorgio from Italy. They originally came here

to join Auroville, but found they could not support themselves financially for two years as Newcomers, so they had to start up a business nearby. They plan to take over a defunct pizzeria and create a good Italian restaurant there.

There are two Tibetan restaurants on the road, and yet another one above Yoga Travels. The Lhasa Tibetan restaurant is like stepping into a Tibetan community, with brightly-coloured prayer flags and a large picture of Lhasa and the Dalai Lama on the wall. Aurovilian Dorjee was preparing lunches after her 6-10am breakfast shift up the road at the 'Tea Stop Café' by the Auroville bakery. She lives in Douceur community and is one of the new generation of Tibetans who were born in India. "Tibetan women are strong," she says. "From the age of nine they are taught how to cook, sew, and farm! That is why we have the confidence to start these restaurants in Auroville. It is also a way of financially supporting the Tibetan Pavilion."

Many Westerners live in the little streets behind the main road. They rent houses from Tamils, most of whom would ideally like to join Auroville, but the reasons they usually give for not joining is they cannot support themselves over their Newcomer year and, there is no housing. "We are not allowed to stay in Auroville if we have no house, so we have to rent down here."

A rough survey suggested there must be about 70 private guesthouses in this area, of varying standards. There are more and more each year as local people quickly convert a room to host a tourist. However, except for the period from December to March, there are not enough guests to fill the rooms. Many of the guesthouses use the prefix 'Auro' in their name, and guests mistakenly think they have a connection with Auroville

and therefore must be of a certain standard.

Now the first estate agent has popped up along on the road with an impressive sign that reads *Eastman Real Estate* with his Chennai telephone number and web site address listed. The lady in *Sunshine Pottery* next door says she could get in touch with him and he would come from Chennai right away if one wished to buy land.

Down the end of the road is the *Third Eye* restaurant run by an Indian couple which has branched out into a tours and travel shop, the third travel agency on this strip. Next to it is a 'Bicycles and Scooters for Rent', the fourth I counted. The second 'Art Gallery', with the artist sitting hopefully outside, is next door. Two pottery shops compete for ceramic purchases, as do the assortment of grocery shops for one's cooking needs.

The *Kerala Ayurveda Centre* has been given a fresh coat of paint, and an authentic-looking Keralite gentleman in an orange lungi comes and hands out glossy brochures. There are impressive pictures in full colour of

how one could look after a five week treatment of *pancha karma* using gallons of oil. Their charges for a massage seem rather high, 500 rupees, but then he is from Kerala, and hoping to attract tourists. An equally large ayurvedic establishment is just up the road, so the competition is keen.

From the East Coast Road Auroville is well-hidden. The only indication is a battered yellow sign which points vaguely in its direction and says "Auroville - 8 kilometres". Near it a giant pizza advertisement guarantees 50% more topping.

Things change very quickly on this road. And as Raju says, "It will soon be like a Pondicherry street."

Dianna



Beautician-entrepreneur Ajanta Ganguly



The entry to Auroville from the East Coast Road

The Matrimandir crane

Like a crouching tiger, the new Matrimandir crane is hidden on top of the Matrimandir.



The crane mounted on top of the Matrimandir

How does one clean the outside of the Matrimandir? This question was solved about five years ago when it was decided to position a foldable crane on top of the Matrimandir.

The brief was that the crane should be invisible when not in use, so that the beauty of the building would not be marred.

Three German firms worked out the technical details. In view of Auroville's weather, the crane had to be made of stainless steel. It would

also have to be raised as only from that position could the telescopic arm move outward. It had to be able to rotate 360 degrees, and at maximum extension, be able to bear a load of half a ton.

When the engineering homework was done, the weight of the crane was

calculated at a staggering 12 tons. A thorough engineering analysis of Matrimandir's structure followed to confirm that the building could withstand the stresses that the crane would place on it while lifting half a ton. Then the order was placed, and in February 2007 the crane arrived in various parts in Auroville.

The most impressive was the almost 3 ton base plate. "We had long discussions about how to get it up," says Gilles, one of the Matrimandir's executives. "We couldn't hire another crane to do the job, as none exists in this area whose arm can reach over the petals. Moreover, such a crane would damage the pathways. Finally we built a steep slope of scaffolding, up which the pieces could be winched by hand." The biggest hand-winch available was positioned on top of the Matrimandir, and with four people cranking on each side of the winch handle, the lifting began.

The winch was strained to its very limit. The winch body was seen to flex and deform with each turn of the winch drum. Another winch was added. After hours of nail-biting tension, the piece arrived on top of the scaffolding and the team heaved a sigh of relief. The other pieces slowly followed and then the crane was gradually assembled. By the end of July 2008, the work was ready and the crane could be used.

"This crane is unique. It is a real *tour de force* of mechanical, hydraulic and electrical engineering," says Vladimir, who supervised its assembly. He presses a button and, in a few minutes, the crane rises on its two hydraulic legs. Then another set of motors is activated and the four arms, which are telescoped within each other, glide slowly outward. Fully extended, the arms stretch 23 metres. From its tip, a gondola can be hung.

"From the gondola we can clean any part of the Matrimandir to two levels below the equator," says Vladimir. "It carries two people who will clean each disc with a special soap solution and cotton cloth. The dirt is absorbed by the cloth, it doesn't drop down." The lower levels of discs will, for the time being, be cleaned from a mobile lightweight scaffolding structure.

The crane's expected lifetime is 25 years minimum.

Carel



Vladimir operating the controls

CRAFTS

Svaram – for the joy of music

Svaram is tucked away in the trees just beyond Ganesh Bakery and Lively Boutique in Kottakari. A bold hand-painted sign announces 'Svaram Musical Instruments Research Station' and another sign reads 'Mohanam Musical Instruments'.

Six keel-roofed workshops are full of young men concentrating on sawing, filing, and hammering. In one hut giant gourds are hanging up to dry, in another strange wooden shapes are being meticulously carved, in yet another, long, aluminium tubes are being measured for wind-chimes. In a corner there is a big pit with piles of bamboo stacked on top using the ventilation from underneath to dry them. All the while, wind-chimes tinkle from the trees.



Svaram's latest creation: a musical soundbed

PHOTO COURTESY SVARAM

Balu, who with Aurelio founded Svaram in 2003, explains that the word 'Svaram' in Sanskrit means 'sound' or 'self-development through the voice'. They created the Mohanam Cultural Centre in the village of Alankuppam in 2001 as a centre for local youngsters. Balu explains: "I was very concerned at the speed with which our Tamil culture was disappearing. Our young boys had nothing to do in the evenings, some were unemployed in the day, and they were becoming bored and getting into trouble. We found a derelict traditional house in the village and with help from foreign donors created a beautiful space for teaching skills and education for our young people. We wanted to have a place where the young men could be taught traditional skills and given vocational training, and as Aurelio was deeply involved in

music it seemed logical to create Svaram it now trains about 25 young men in making musical instruments."

A sudden gust of wind makes a giant silver wind-chime ring from a branch 30 feet up in a *bodhi* tree; underneath, a keel hut showroom is an Aladdin's cave of familiar and exotic musical instruments. There are neat shelves of ocarinas, flutes, xylophones, and the strange looking *killi killip* and *kudukudduppu*. A very nicely-produced catalogue displays an impressive range of their products. The wind chimes alone are available in seventeen different types and sizes.

A young man shows their pride and joy, a beautiful polished black stone with slats carved onto its sides. He explains that it is called a 'singing stone'. This one stands half a metre tall, and weighs 120 kilos. Several have already been sold in Germany. Squatting down beside it, he moistens his hands in a bowl of water then begins to stroke the stone. A beautiful, singing, cosmic sound flows from it.

Suresh Adi, an 18 year old boy from the village of Annai Nagar, sits cross-legged on the ground stretching a camel skin to fit a huge drum. His English is not very good, and as he is shy an older man translates for him. Suresh dropped out of school in 10th grade, like many boys of his age. Luckily, he knew someone who told him that Svaram was looking for trainees, so he applied to become a craftsman in drum-making. He had always loved music, and at Mohanam Cultural Centre plays the drum in a troupe. He loves music from the movies and the popular songs, but since he has been here, he has started to 'open his ears wide' and learn to listen in a different way. His family is proud of him, he says, even though they are poor and so far he only gets a student wage. Suresh, like many village boys, have had their lives changed by the training and inspiration they receive in Svaram and similar Auroville units.

Dianna

A bamboo workshop

A three day bamboo workshop organised by the Mohanam Cultural Centre and bamboo centre was in progress with 25 students arranged in little groups poring over plans, and holding pieces of bamboo steady while the other ones nailed it together.

Sundaramohan, designer from IIT-Bombay who has been working in bamboo craft design for six years is running the course explains. "We had planned for 15 students but the response was so good we somehow fitted in all 25 of the applicants. It is quite labour intensive for us. We have to have men watching the students when they use the electric saws as they are unskilled, and we often find many of our tools are damaged as the students do not know how to work carefully with them.

"We start with a talk on bamboo, its history and tradition and the way it grows. The students are always surprised to know that there are 1,500 species and 130 of them grow in India. Tribal people have always used bamboo in their agriculture but now this knowledge is quickly being lost.

"Many architectural students are on this course as they are beginning to realize that bamboo can be used in construction in many ways. Indoors it can last for 50 years if it is cared for; outside, because of the fluctuations in temperature, only 3 or 4 years. It is excellent for checking soil erosion and the bark for medicine and paper. Tests have shown that it is 60% more efficient than other trees in converting carbon monoxide into oxygen."

Three students, a young woman from Korea, another from Spain, and a young Indian man wrestle with a long piece of green bamboo, trying to attach it to the back of a sofa. "It's been great fun," says the Korean. "I've never done anything like this before as I have always been nervous of machinery but the boys have been very helpful. The tools are light and easy to handle. We have also designed a hammock which we now realize was rather ambitious." She points to a heap of bamboo slats lying on

the ground that don't quite seem to match up. "But I am learning a lot and it is enjoyable. I am told our work will be in an exhibition in Auroville next October so that will be very exciting!"

"This is our 7th workshop," says Sundaramohan. "Our last three-day course was for architects from Bombay and they found it very valuable. Our aim is eventually to have an International Training Centre here where people from all over the world can come and learn. The Auroville Bamboo Research Centre focuses on creating awareness about bamboo and promotes ecological education in Auroville and the local villages.

Dianna



PHOTO COURTESY BAMBOO CENTRE

At work at the bamboo workshop

The Knowledge Society: toward genuine sustainability

A new book by Mark Luyckx Ghisi, member of the International Advisory Council, was recently launched at a function in Auroville.

Knowledge Society: toward genuine sustainability takes as its premise that the present economic, industrial and political system is in crisis because, through its emphasis upon quantitative growth and tangible assets, it is destroying the planet. For the first time humanity is confronted with the possibility of collective death. But Marc has good news. "We possess the economic and political tools to steer the world towards genuine sustainability...we already have the political and economic structures to allow us to tackle the challenges of the 21st century."

Marc believes that we are at a transition point, on the threshold of moving from a modern industrial society into a transmodern 'knowledge society'. A knowledge society, as he defines it, is based upon the exchange of high quality information rather than of goods. This makes it "totally compatible with genuine sustainability". Sharing information is unlike trading goods because whereas the latter works through exchange, knowledge only accretes. "The more I share information and knowledge, the more I receive in return." In the knowledge society, the brain becomes the key tool of production and human creativity, enhanced and shared through networking, is the key to success.

According to Marc, the transition to the knowledge society will happen in two ways. Firstly, we will be forced to change by serious economic and political crises. Secondly, individuals will change the deep values. Here Marc points to the

atives', a term coined by the social researcher Paul Ray for people who reject the values of modern industrial society in favour of a lifestyle which is creative, environmentally-sensitive and humane. According to Ray's research, something like 24% of Americans qualify as cultural creatives. An independent survey initiated by the E.U. puts the figure at between 10-20% in Europe.

The cultural historian, Arnold Toynbee, postulated that a mere 5% of the population need to change their values in order for a major paradigm shift to take place, so Marc is optimistic that radical change is on the way. In fact, he claims that the knowledge society is already with us and that 10-20% of businesses are already operating wholly within the knowledge society.

Marc also notes a radical change in how businesses are valued. Whereas before a company was judged upon its tangible assets and profits, now the 'intangible assets' – the creativity of the workforce, the way a company assumes community and environmental responsibilities etc. – become more and more important factors in how a business is rated. Marc believes that a company's profits will increasingly be the consequence of its social and ethical values.

So why isn't the transition happening faster? Marc points to a lack of vision at the level of political leadership, as well as a general unawareness among 'cultural creatives' that they are not alone, but represent a powerful new vision of the world. This is one of his main purposes in writing the book. "You can't force people to change their

face what is already inside them."

In this sense, the book is a call to action, a positive polemic and, like all polemics, there is a trade-off. On the one hand, Marc sweeps you along with his enthusiasm and with his unrelenting optimism that a new world is at hand. On the other hand, his approach is necessarily broad-brush, generalised. As a lecture-presentation, designed to lay down the broad lines of an issue, this can work. But as a book which can be read, reread and analysed, it is less successful. In fact, quite a number of Marc's key statements are unsubstantiated (why, in a knowledge society, should I assume that if I share my specialized knowledge with someone they will automatically share their knowledge with me? Why should a knowledge society decrease the material throughput which is destroying the planet?) and others come across as distinctly superficial. For example, his admission that that we know little about the matrifocal societies which preceded the agrarian revolution does not prevent him making detailed contrasts between matrifocal and patriarchal societies. Similarly, contrasting the values of old and new business, he states that "brand and reputation are becoming more and more important every day". But was there ever a time when brand and reputation were not the key to a company's success?

There is much fascinating material in this book, not least the final section where Marc writes movingly about his personal passage from modernism to "transmodernism". In this sense, the

modernism because he has experienced them in himself. At the same time he has the enthusiasm of a convert which makes him over-optimistic or, at least uncritical, of certain trends he labels as 'transmodern'.

Stone Hill publishers are to be congratulated for publishing such a book. It's a brave and thought-provoking call to action. At the same time, more rigorous editing and the provision of an index (no index for a book on *The Knowledge Society*!) would have helped. For, ultimately, there's a feeling that this was a bit of a rushed job. There are many repetitions and some glaring inaccuracies – Newton was not awarded the Nobel Prize for dissipative structures! – which a good editor should have picked up.

Marc's important thesis – which, I'm convinced, is in many respects spot on – deserves a wider readership. Unfortunately, many of the sceptics and 'undecided' will remain unconvinced because his analysis is not rigorous enough.

Alan

The Knowledge Society: A breakthrough towards genuine sustainability

2008

CULTURE

'Faith Healer'

Only about sixty people turned up for a remarkable production by the Madras Players, 'Faith Healer', a play by Brian Friel on a wet Saturday night. It was a production of intelligence and cooperation between a committed director and his three actors.

Although the play was set in England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland and the actors are Indian, Chennai-based actors, their diction in English was flawless. Their ability to catch even tongue-twisting Welsh names showed their meticulous attention to detail.

The play consisted of four monologues that gave very personal accounts of the lives of its three characters. There is the protagonist Francis (Frank) Hardy (played by P.C. Ramakrishna), who very occasionally heals people as a faith healer; it is more the memory of the feeling of power and joy when he was successful that inspires him to continue. In between, he drowns himself in whisky. His wife, Gracie (Tehzeeb Katari) stands doggedly by him for twenty years, until overcome with despair, she commits suicide. Teddy (Karthik Srinivasan), their assistant from London, bounces between the two, and somehow keeps the show on the road. They live as itinerant showmen, performers, healers – they never quite know what to call themselves – but are always on the brink of poverty and hopelessness.

The programme explained that the director, Mithran Devanesan, was inspired by his cousin who had been wheelchair-bound for years until finally cured by a faith healer.

Mithran who also runs a shelter for HIV-positive children, spoke about how simple acts of faith and hope defy logic. He explained that the inspiration he drew from these children made him view 'Faith Healer' in a new light.

Dianna



by Brian Friel

PASSING

Aruna

On the 3rd of September, Aruna (Christiane Roc-Bailey)

had a traffic accident on the East Coast Road and subsequently died from her injuries. She would have been sixty soon after. Aruna came to Auroville in 1970. In the early days she was involved with reforestation. After bringing up her son, she worked at Transition School where she was a warm and comforting presence for the children. Recently she was also enjoying her new role as grandmother to the children of her son Ritam and his partner Ira.

Aruna was one of those quiet, sensitive souls who inspired deep affection in her friends. Here is something she wrote for the children.

La pierre et la mer

Connais-tu cette pierre qui roule, roule sur le chemin, faisant un long voyage?
Un jour, elle arriva jusqu'à la mer.

Elle lui dit:

"Bonjour la mer, tu es si belle! Emmène moi avec toi!"

"Bonjour petite pierre, mais tu es si lourde, tu tomberas au fond de moi!"

"Ce n'est pas grave" lui répondit la pierre, "j'aime me couler en toi."

"Très bien" lui dit la mer, "alors viens avec moi!"

Une grande vague blanche attrapa la petite pierre et l'emmena au fond de l'eau.

Elle était si heureuse d'être là, pour rien, si belle, resplendissante d'une couleur turquoise dorée.

Et encore aujourd'hui, si tu regardes bien attentivement,

Tu verras tout au fond de la mer, une petite pierre d'un vert

Ethelant qui brille, parce qu'elle aime, tout simplement.

The stone and the sea

Do you know that little stone that rolls, rolls on the road, and makes a long journey?

One day it reached the sea.

It said,

"Good morning sea, you are so beautiful! Take me with you!"

"Good morning little stone, but you are so heavy, you will fall to the bottom!"

"That does not matter," answered the little stone, "I like to immerse myself in you."

"Very well," the sea said, "then come with me!"

A great white wave caught the little stone and took it deep into the water.

It was so happy to be there, just like that, so beautiful, shining with a turquoise-golden colour.

And even today, if you look carefully,

You will see, way down at the bottom of the sea, a little stone,

Sparkling green, that shines because it loves, quite simply.

I. brief

Human Resource Team

The Human Resource Team has started to explore the human resources reality and potential of Auroville, which includes assessing the needs of those seeking material support from the community. HRT also wants to look into the ways Aurovilians contribute both in work and money and how Auroville can care for them.

Land exchange

The Land and Resource Management team (LRM) has published a list of lands which it proposes for exchange. Over the past three years it has become increasingly apparent that the only way to acquire the 176 acres of privately-owned land in the city area is through a programme of land exchange, so plans are afoot to pursue this option by exchanging Auroville land located outside the Master Plan area.

Farewell issues

The dreamcatchers are dreaming on the sensitive theme of 'farewell' – how Aurovilians could approach the topic of death.

Cycle paths

The Road Service has clarified that cycle paths are for bicycles only, which includes the new electric bicycles but excludes small electric mopeds.

UNESCO award for Vysial street

Puducherry's Rue Calve Subraya better known as Vysial has won the Award of from UNESCO's Asia-Pacific Heritage awards for Cultural Heritage conservation. The street has now become a symbol of Franco-Tamil architectural identity. The Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) of which Aurovillian Ajit Koujalgi is co-convenor, carried out the work together with Puducherry government departments.

The New Wellness Centre at Arka

A new Wellness Centre for Homoeopathy and Ayurveda has opened at ARKA. For the time being it will function four days a week.

Turning Points

The book *Turning Points – An inner story of the beginnings of Auroville* has been released. This book is not about Auroville as an institution, or an organisation, but about people – and how they came to Auroville. Available from The Wild Seagull bookshop and at the Visitors' Centre.

Power shut down

For the last months, Auroville has been subject to severe power cuts of three hours in the morning and two hours at nights.

Auroville Today subscription rates

Due to going into colour and the increase in postal rates, the subscription rates to *Auroville Today* have been increased to Rs.350 a year in India. The foreign contribution rate is now the equivalent of Rs.2000. *Auroville Today* does not receive any funds from Auroville. Your subscription or supporting contribution will help us to continue this work.

The cat is back! – Pelagius listens...

Five years ago, Auroville Today interviewed the cat who lives at New Creation Corner ("Pelagius Speaks!", October 2003). Our reporter was David Clouston, who wrote this as his last article before leaving Auroville. He recently returned for a short visit, during which time he was graciously received by the cat...

Pelagius: My dear fellow! How nice to see you again.

David C: Thank you. My family is on holiday in India, and wanted to see Auroville.

P: Your charming girlfriend and her children. And what do they make of it?

D.C.: Catherine is intrigued, but a bit mystified.

P: No doubt. The English are natural sceptics, of course.

D.C.: I am originally English, myself.

P: (drily) Quite. And what do you make of it? I heard that you left town for good very soon after our last conversation. Weren't you a Newcomer?

D.C.: Yes. I had previously spent about nine months in Auroville at different times. I decided to come and join as a Newcomer in 2003.

P: And you lasted, let me see, six or seven months?

D.C.: Correct. I realised very quickly that living here was completely different from being a Guest. And that Auroville wasn't going to be my home. Not an easy realisation, given what had been involved in getting here. But very clear.

P: Any regrets?

D.C.: Quite the opposite. Auroville has been one of the great blessings of my life. The opportunity to live here, strange as it may sound, gave me a perspective on "the West" that



I would never have gained otherwise.

P: What sort of perspective?

D.C.: Back home, our social structures largely derive from three concepts: ownership of land, enforcement of contracts (agreements) and the rule of authority. Like almost everyone raised in the West, I took these things for granted. But in Auroville I experienced a society where no-one owns land, no agreements can be relied upon even for five minutes, and there is no final authority on anything. And I could see the consequences.

P: Which are?

D.C.: It's very difficult to build anything here, either literally or metaphorically. What does get built tends to be the result of efforts by individuals or very small groups who manage to sustain a common purpose for long enough. But in terms of a society almost nothing can be built, because you have to start all over again from the beginning every day. In fact, there really is no Auroville "society" in the usual sense of the word. There are just individual Aurovilians.

P: Whereas back home...

D.C.: There is an established society, and things get done with great efficiency because so much can be taken for granted. Of course, there are two huge problems with this. Firstly, the wrong things get done just as efficiently as the right things. And secondly, while we take great care of anything that belongs to someone, we are terrible at looking after the bits that don't belong to anyone – the air, the sea, the planet.

P: Aurovilians would say that these problems cannot be solved within the framework that created them.

D.C.: I agree. Auroville is constantly groping for new ways to make these important collective decisions. But there is another challenge, which is implementing decisions once they are made. This requires sustained collaboration, often over the course of years, by people who may fundamentally disagree with one another. The West ensures long-term collaboration by literally enforcing agreements. It is a powerful tool, for which Auroville has not yet evolved a substitute.

P: Salvation by force of arms. How novel. But I see you have brought some sandwiches, my dear chap. May I? (Helping itself to a salmon and cucumber roll.) Delicious. I have lost weight while New Creation Corner has been closed. Now, where were we?

D.C.: You were being sarcastic.

P: Forgive me. Tell me, what do you miss about Auroville?

D.C.: The aspiration, most of all. The West seems to be politically and philosophically exhausted at the moment. Even the suggestion that things could be – in any meaningful sense – "better" is almost un-sayable.

P: No revolutionaries left?

D.C.: The energy of the 1960s, which

helped create Auroville, seems to have burned-out completely, at least in the English-speaking world. Hope is in short supply. Even students don't want to be subversives – they want to be stockbrokers.

P: Is this despair?

D.C.: The world must dream. Dreams of survival, first of all. Then dreams of safety, sex, success and surfeit. In the West, we have largely realised these aspirations. But we haven't noticed that the satisfactions they bring are limited. Having more will not make us happier: yet we continue to chase them, faster and faster, because we don't know what else to do. We badly, desperately, need a new dream.

P: And Auroville?

D.C.: Auroville has a revolutionary dream. "There should be somewhere on earth a place which no nation could claim as its own, where all human beings of goodwill who have a sincere aspiration could live freely as citizens of the world..." This is true aspiration. And no matter how imperfectly it may be realised, all that ultimately matters is that it exists and is embodied somewhere on the Earth. Here.

P: Good heavens! You're quite a Pelagian yourself, my dear fellow. You sound very grateful to Auroville.

D.C.: I am. You nutters are caretaking a precious, precious cargo on behalf of an uncaring world, while I am working for an insurance company in Ipswich! The least I can do is be grateful. Grateful that you are here; and that I have had the opportunity over the years to make my minuscule contribution to this beautiful, ludicrous endeavour called Auroville. God willing, I'll be back.

P: You'll be welcome. (Peeks into the bag) Is there another sandwich? Oh good...

YOUNG PERSPECTIVE

"We became a dance family"

A sixteen year old reflects upon a recent salsa workshop.

Everybody has a love for something – a passion, an interest – which one seeks to develop. It is even more exciting to pursue this passion with the help and guidance of professionals. For a young girl interested in dance, there is nothing more wonderful than having the opportunity to learn from expert teachers.

When I received an email that two famous salsa dancers from Europe, Pedro Gomez and Nadia Boccatonda, would come to Auroville to give a 10-day workshop of salsa, I immediately signed up. In exchange for the dance lessons, each student would show them around and share with them the uniqueness of this place. Some students also took them home for dinner or showed them some aspects of India, such as the Ganesh temple in Pondicherry.

The salsa intensive has been one of the most enriching experiences I've ever had. I learned delightfully fun steps, understood how partner-dancing really works, and came to appreciate the rhythms and sounds of Latin music. All of us were very happy and tried to learn as much as possible in that

short time. As we practiced to improve our dancing, invented new steps, met outside the classes to chat and got to know each other and discuss our future dance plans, we became a dance family. Together, we were bonded by our shared love for the dance.

This salsa workshop also showed me that when dance is one's passion, it is most enriching to learn more than one dance style.

Recently I have taken up Bharatanatyam again, a South Indian classical dance form, which I had started learning when I was seven while living in Chennai. I find it very valuable to relate to many types of dance as it helps develop a wide range of techniques. I find it also leads to a deeper understanding of each dance's history and significance, and an appreciation of the similarities and differences between Western and Indian dance.

For me, learning salsa and bharatanatyam has brought an identification with the spirit of dance within, and I feel it helps me to dance more wholly.

Vasanthi Argouin
Future School



Vasanthi (left foreground) practicing with Monica

Subscription information:

- ◆ One year subscription rates: India Rs. 350; other countries Rs 2,000 equivalent
 - ◆ Two year subscription rate: India Rs. 650; other countries Rs 3,700 equivalent
- Those for whom the subscription rate is an obstacle are invited to contact *Auroville Today* for information on reduced rates. *Auroville Today* does not receive any funds from Auroville. Your subscription (or your supporting contribution of double the amount) helps us to continue this work.

There are three ways to subscribe:

- ◆ Send your contribution directly to *Auroville Today*, Surrender, Auroville 605101, Tamil Nadu, India. Cheques sent directly to *Auroville Today* should be made payable to Auroville Fund, specifying: 'Contribution for *Auroville Today*'. Personal cheques are preferred to bank cheques. Please do not send postal money orders or cash.
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◆ **U.K.:** Auroville International U.K., c/o Martin Littlewood, 30 The Green, Surlingham, Norwich NR14 7AG, tel. 01508-538300, fax 01508-537122, email: info@aviuk.org

◆ **USA:** Make checks payable to Auroville International USA, and send to either: U.S.A (1): AVI USA, P.O. Box 1534, Lodi, CA 95241-1534, Tel: (831) 425-5620; email: info@aviusa.org; or to U.S.A (2): Auroville Information Office, PO Box 676, Woodstock NY 12498, tel: (1)845-679-5358, email: AVINY@aviusa.org

Editorial team: Alan, Carel, Dianna, Hero, Priya Sundaravalli, Robert. Proof-reading: Alan, Hero. DTP: Priya, Carel. Photo editing: Jean-Denis

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