

Auroville Today

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The tsunami relief and rehabilitation work

"The Tsunami that struck the Tamil Nadu coast on December 26, 2004 was unprecedented in its suddenness and ferocity. The calamity has caused unprecedented devastation in the coastal districts. The destruction was severe. Huts and pucca houses have been flattened, fishing boats have been smashed, buses and big tankers have been strewn around. Infrastructure facilities have also suffered extensive damage. The families living along the coastline have lost all their possessions. About 100,000 families have become homeless."

(from a Tamil Nadu Government order)

Remendous goodwill has poured out to alleviate the suffering. Apart from the Tamil Nadu government, many non-governmental organizations, voluntary agencies, corporate houses, charities, public and private sector enterprises and groups of individuals have come forward to participate in the various phases of the relief work. Phase I, dealing with the immediate needs of emergency shelter, clothing and food, is now over. Phase II, dealing with the construction of interim shelters for the affected people for periods between 6-10 months is still going on. Phase III, dealing with the permanent relocation and rehabilitation of affected people, has just started. In all three phases, Auroville has been very active. Though the situation in the Viluppuram district where Auroville is located is not as bad as in Cuddalore or Nagappattinam, as there have been fewer casualties, in terms of material loss the damage is quite extensive. In the Viluppuram district alone, close to 9,800 houses have been damaged, rendering 50,000 people homeless.

Immediate relief

Within hours of the disaster striking, Auroville was setting-up a tent camp on a field near one of the Auroville communities. A field kitchen was installed and food, clothing and blankets were distributed to approximately 2,000 people. On the second day, everybody was moved to the Kulapalayam Trust School, as rain was threatening. There, the refugees were spread out in eight buildings and two tents and food was prepared, this time for 1400 people, along with another 500 food packets for distribution. By the fourth day, an Auroville Tsunami Relief Team was effective. An office was opened equipped with computers, telephones and internet as well as ample storage space for goods for the next phase of the relief

work. In the weeks that followed people from the villages, Aurovilians and guests went by buses to affected villages to remove debris and help with clean-up work. The Tamil Nadu government provided first basic relief: rice, clothing and Rs 2,000 cash per family. Auroville, meanwhile, had begun an international fund raising campaign and money started to flow in.

Interim shelters

Phase two of the relief work concentrated on finding appropriate interim shelters. As many organisations had come forward to help, coordination became essential. With the help of a few experts from Kutch, the district in the Indian state of Gujarat that was hit in January 2001 by a massive earthquake leaving 500,000 people homeless, an NGO Coordination Group was set up. Though not strictly being an NGO, Auroville became part of the Coordination Group which assisted the Tamil Nadu Government in defining guidelines for interim shelters. The approved requirements were that the shelters take into account the climatic conditions, because the people will have to live in them through the summer; that the shelters would allow the people to function in their traditional ways, which meant one family per shelter with their own cooking and sleeping space, a place to store their nets and a place do the normal jobs to continue with their livelihoods; and that a minimum of communal infrastructure should be constructed, such as temporary schools for the children.

The Government Order of January 6th followed these recommendations. It not only instructed the Collectors of the affected districts to build 50,000 shelters at a unit cost of Rs 8,000, but also allowed NGOs to put up 50,000 shelters. The order prescribed that the design of the temporary structures and the location should be acceptable to the fishermen in each habitation and should not be seen as a Government plan to forcibly relocate them. But the order also stated that efforts should be made to move most of the people from the relief camps into the interim structures before Pongal 2005. This date (January 14) was too close to the date of the order. "That actually dashed our hopes," says Suhasini, one of Auroville's relief coordinators. "The early date motivated government agencies to speedily put up barracks, using asphalt, galvanised iron sheets and even asbestos as roof cover. The barracks are on average 40 metres long and 4 metres wide and have a common kitchen. So the recommendations were not adhered to. There is no private space and no possibility to do one's own cooking - though ironically each affected family received a kerosene stove from the Tamil Nadu government on Pongal as part of an interim shelter relief



Looking out through a destroyed fisherman's house to the sea: the nourisher, the killer

package. But the main problem is that these shelters are not habitable. The people go there during the night but move out during the day. Already in January it is too hot inside."

Some NGOs, however, did manage to put up some shelters that were in accordance with the recommendations, some of them very nice ones. But then something went wrong. A rumour started that if you lived in a shelter provided by an NGO, you might not be eligible for a permanent shelter when the government would make the final allocation. As a result, many shelters built by NGOs are lying empty. The

lies. The government has the power to forcefully acquire private lands or to allocate government or temple lands for this purpose. But a reallocation has to take the lie of the land into account. The tsunami has hit Tamil Nadu from its most southern point, Kanniyakumari, to Chennai but its effects were vastly dissimilar. In areas where mangrove forests were in place, such as in Point Calimere or Pichchavaram, the coast was hardly affected. Also high-lying areas, such as the city of Pondicherry or the Repose beach community of Auroville, hardly suffered any damage. But the low-lying areas were hard hit. Between Pondicherry and Cuddalore the tsunami came 1.5 kilometres inland. The city of Nagappattinam, situated on the delta of the Cauvery river, was devastated. The government will need to identify high areas for a permanent relocation. To do this, Auroville has offered the help of its GIS (Geographic Information Systems) team. [see AVToday #191, December 2004] "In a meeting of the NGO coordination group of January 16th we showed the government and other NGOs the elevation of the coastal areas," said Prashant. "We simulated on the computer what happens if a 3-metres high wave hits the coast, and what if that wave is ten metres high. The GIS team can not only identify the high-lying lands, but also the drainage channels and the aquifer recharge areas, so that the reallocation can happen at the correct sites. The Collector can then choose an appropriate location, taking into account that the site is in proximity to the place where the people earn their livelihood. For example, you can't move fishermen miles inland."

"Our demonstration also showed that it does not make sense to make a uniform coastal regulation that within say 300 metres from the high tide line no buildings can be constructed," says Prashant. "In some areas, 100 metres from the high tide line would be sufficient as the beach lands are high-lying; in other areas, you would have to prescribe a distance of 1.5 kilometres from the coast!" For cities that border the sea such a regulation cannot be enforced. Pondicherry has meanwhile asked for 80 crores financial assistance from the Central Government.

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Dear Working Committee,
I would like to congratulate the Auroville Community upon the excellent work being done in the wake of the Tsunami disaster, both for direct relief as well as the information and technology resources for official and NGO organisations functioning in Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry.

Karan Singh
Chairman, Auroville Foundation

rumours have been officially refuted, but there is a fear psychosis and the people do not easily believe it.

The time pressure prevented Auroville getting involved in building temporary shelters. "At the time we did not have sufficient human and financial resources to work on the scale the government wanted," says Hemant, the main coordinator of the tsunami village relief work. "They asked that NGOs construct 50% of the shelters required, and in our district this meant 4,900 structures. Meanwhile other NGOs have come forward to do this. Auroville might still be involved in filling some of the gaps, in coordination with the Collector."

Where to relocate the people?

Phase three has now started. One of the first questions is where to relocate the affected fami-



Padma Vibhushan for Dr. Karan Singh

On Republic Day, January 26th, it was announced that Dr. Karan Singh, the Chairman of the Auroville Foundation and the former head of the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir, was awarded the Padma Vibhushan, India's second highest civilian honour, for his work in public affairs. The award will be conferred by the President of India later this year.

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The Auroville International meeting, 2005

Between 14th – 18th January, an Auroville International (AVI) meeting was held in Auroville. This was the third time it had been held here and it was, by all accounts, the most successful so far. This was undoubtedly due to thoughtful planning, but it also had a lot to do with the perception of AVI members that Auroville was at last really opening its heart to those who live outside the community and who work so hard for its manifestation.

The theme this year, 'Auroville's conscious connection with the world' was introduced most profoundly in Sraddhalu's keynote talk. "Auroville is a consciousness, is a revolution," he noted. "Those of you who live elsewhere in the world but are part of this consciousness are also living in Auroville. What you do, the way you live, the way you think, has its effect on the world as if you were here, has its effect on situations here, because you're part of the consciousness and for this consciousness distance doesn't matter...your being away from here has also an effect on the world. Your constant contact with your inner beliefs in life creates the kind of communication, communion, by which this consciousness spreads out to other hearts, other minds. You may not speak it in so many words, you may not even give literature, 'Here, this is Auroville, read about it,' but what you are, somehow, sprinkles into their hearts and minds like a possibility for them, a newness."

The highlights of the 5 day meeting included a presentation on the International Zone as an educational project by Shraddhavan, an introduction by Raman to the planning challenges and opportunities represented by Bharatipuram village (an encroached area close to Bharat Nivas in the International Zone), a walk around Matrimandir led by the Matrimandir Coordination Group, an inspiring talk on environmental studies by Joss, presentations on formal and informal education

initiatives, and a traditional south Indian lunch followed by a cultural performance at Mohanam Cultural Centre. For the first time there was also an opportunity within the programme for AVI members to meet with visitors to Auroville and explain their work to them.

And, of course, there was the 'business' end of the meeting. One of the knotty issues this year concerned decision-making in the International Zone. During the last AVI meeting in Auroville two years ago, an agreement was reached that the International Zone group would be expanded to include representatives of pavilion groups living outside Auroville. However, it was never decided exactly how decisions regarding the adoption of projects in the International Zone would be arrived at, and this led to some AVI members feeling that their input was being ignored or rejected without proper consultation. After several intense discussions between Aurovilian International Zone members and members of AVI, it was agreed that one key was improving communication between residents and those living outside Auroville. This could be done through conference calls and by each national pavilion group located outside designating a member of the International Zone group in Auroville to be their contact and information channel. (On the wider level, it was agreed to improve Auroville-AVI communication by creating an expanded team of three Aurovilians – Kathy, Tine and Lela – as AVI representatives.)

During this meeting the AVI Board, which had reached the end of its tenure, stood down and a new, expanded one was elected. This was not without its difficulties. Indeed, one of the honorary Aurovilian Board members noted with dis-



One of the meetings of Auroville International in the Pavilion of Tibetan Culture

may that the process was becoming politicized and that the traditional AVI spirit of fraternity was in danger of being superseded by narrower interests. However, on the final evening in the Unity Pavilion differences were submerged as attendees spoke movingly of the 'gifts' they had received over the past few days. These included a renewed sense of family and of 'coming home', and a feeling that Auroville now is both a more dynamic and compassionate, welcoming society than they remembered from their last visit.

The members of AVI should not undervalue their own contribution to this. For in their extraor-

dinary dedication to realizing Mother's Dream under often adverse circumstances, they are a source of inspiration, even wonder, to many Aurovilians. As Sraddhalu noted, their contribution, wherever and however it is made, is indissolubly part of the special force field which is Auroville. At the same time, as Soleil and Wolfgang among others pointed out, it's important for Aurovilians to remember that the evolutionary movement is now a world movement: while it may take many different forms and guises, the spirit underlying it is one.

Alan

The ideal of Auroville

Extracts from a talk given by Sraddhalu Ranade, on the occasion of the opening session of the Auroville International meeting, in Auroville.

The ideal of Auroville, the reality that it manifests, has been in existence ever since the universe was born. It has waited through many billions of years. And every time that it seemed as if the idea might lose its hold on the possibility of manifesting itself, the divine has precipitated it upon earth even when circumstances were not ready – simply to keep that ideal alive. You all know of Mother's reference to an attempt in Egypt, which was ahead of its time, which was in between, but it had to be done to keep the ideal alive. And people were drawn to it, were aligned to that ideal. They had come together for that purpose, and had to pass through the pain of the failure of the ideal.

Mother observed once that everyone who has come here, be it in Ashram, be it in Auroville, everyone who has come here, has been brought here because they were promised, long ago, that when the time came for the fulfilment of the ideal they would be given a chance. All of us have been brought here. We do not remember it, but something deep in our hearts knows. When we ask ourselves why we came to Auroville, we probably will find no rational reason, or perhaps a chance event, but the event was only a trigger to bring forward something which knew. And even now it's that thing that knows, that keeps us here, and that makes us struggle against the odds. It's that promise that the divine has kept with us. The time has come for that fulfilment. The whole of evolution has waited for this moment. The human age is about to dawn. And here a nucleus, a seed, has been established...

But why now? Why not earlier, why not later? And again we find that there was a great preparation before Auroville could be established. The Sri Aurobindo Ashram was estab-

lished first. And there, in the concentrated atmosphere, a space has been created in the consciousness where the supramental consciousness could descend and commit to physical matter. In that concentrated space, once that link was established, and the supramental manifested on earth, it was then possible to work on Auroville.

It still took the Mother a decade before that possibility could be organised in external circumstances, the right people found to build the city of the new age, the catalyst, the seed of the sweetness of the future, and then the location, which had been prepared over thousands of years.

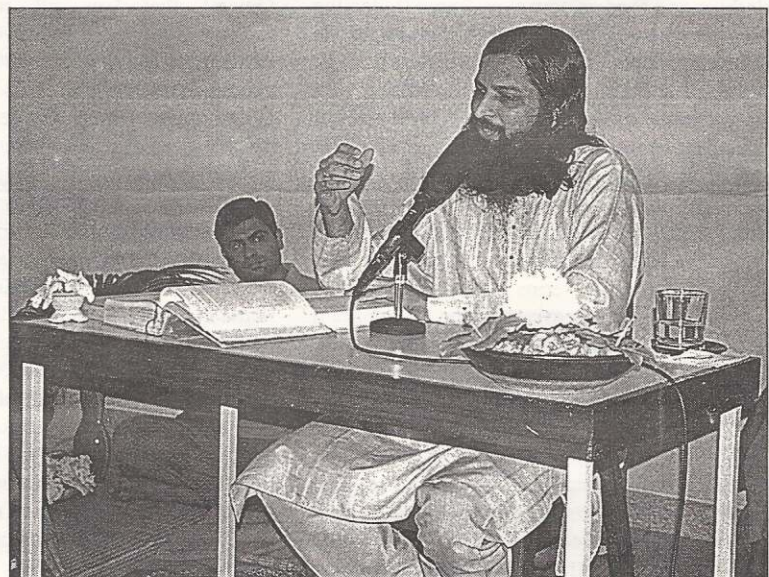
The new age is not to be built from existing forms, it has to be built from scratch, from its very foundation up, so only barren land would do. And you have to begin by planting trees, and to begin with changing the climate, you have to begin by bringing the water, without a single rupee, you have to gather all from scratch. And what will you create, where will people live, what kinds of houses? Nothing of the old is to be working, every step is new on earth, newly perceived, newly created. The first school established here, Mother names it 'Last School'. The end of a mind-set, the beginning of a new line of development.

Then, the time came for Matrimandir to be made. You will recall, someone cycling through had a vision of the Matrimandir and reiterated it to the Mother. Thus far she did not know, but the fact that it was received by a human being was an indication that the time had come for its foundation. That thing waiting had managed to touch the mind of a human being. And the work began soon hereafter.

Each individual here represents a focal point of humanity's aspiration. And therefore, every problem one

sees here is also a problem that humanity has to resolve, after it can be done here. So even if you come with the best of intentions, with the clearest of consciousness, the fact that we come for this purpose makes us a representative of humanity and those problems will manifest around us, whether we like it or not. Because that is precisely the role Auroville has to play. The problems in Auroville seem to be ever exaggerated because they must be solved in the most intense condition. It doesn't help when the problem is solved when it is not intense. If you look from this perspective at the problems in Auroville you may wonder "Is it worth living in a space where all problems are going to be in the most extreme?" But that's the fulfilment, the challenge, the adventure that our souls have chosen. And those very extreme problems can be resolved here because the base of this entire project is the spiritual consciousness; it is the supramental consciousness of unity.

And yet, in our first efforts, as human beings, we have to pass through a few layers in between. So we will try to solve our problems by rules and regulations, by compulsion, by imposition, by conflict, discussion, strategy, and we will have to exhaust those possibilities. We have to come to a point where we feel, "I just can't solve it", and that's where one will turn to something else, to someone else to solve it. As long as I think that I can do it, it doesn't work. When I give up, and ask for some help then I find that, miraculously, the situation will be solved; it will change and recast itself. And immediately after that happens, I fall back into my old ways and illusions, I start believing in myself again. But after this kind of thing repeatedly occurs, I learn to attune myself to this inner way and when enough of us can be conscious of this attunement, then even within



Sraddhalu Ranade

Auroville this crystallisation of that truth in concrete physical form will take root. And I find new possibilities constantly emerging, in the struggle for the new consciousness to keep its grip on matter. It's happening here.

And in the light of Auroville... how do we relate to each other, how do we greet each other, how do we relate to nature, how do we organise the layout of the township? It is, again, new forms that have to be found, it is a continual adventure where even the divine does not give you a pre-set form. It's not as if the divine doesn't have a concrete plan, a master plan which we just have to look at and copy its features. The truth which is manifesting in space and time casts itself into form, and its form changes constantly until it comes to the point where it can settle. In the first shock of that contact there is a resistance from matter, and again the truth has to change its form, mould itself to the needs in reference to the capacity of matter to receive it. If we are conscious instruments and help it to manifest, it can mould itself more easily. If there's resistance, it needs to draw back and come back in a modified form. So there is no form that is pre-set, and our task is to discover the new forms and the seed to unfoldment. A form created, tried out,

ten years ago, and partly successful, is not necessarily the same form that is needed now.

"Auroville is a field", Sonia Dyne said earlier. It is a field in which the concentration of that consciousness has been projected upon earth. The fact that we live here, the fact that we struggle here, automatically "ripples out" the results of our efforts around humanity.

These last few years one can see the ideal of human unity concretely taking form on a vast level in the mind of humanity. The worldwide response to the tsunami relief is an example of that. Many simply took the first plane to come and see how they could help, there's no comparison with that. This has never before happened in human history.

We're at a transition period in human history. And the divine promised us the chance to be part of the fulfilment of this ideal. Let us keep this big picture in mind when over the next few days we discuss plans, problems, initiatives, strategies. It is not what we plan, what solutions we strategise, that will matter. That's not Auroville. It's the consciousness with which we approach the problem, the consciousness with which we stick to the solution. That's Auroville.

Perspectives on Auroville International

Sonia Dyne, Chairperson of AV International



Sonia Dyne, left, in discussion with Mia Berden from AVI The Netherlands

Auroville Today: You came to Auroville for the last AVI meeting two years ago. Was it different this time?

Sonia Dyne: Oh, yes. Last time we felt we were rather talking to ourselves, but this time Auroville was incredibly welcoming towards us.

What were the main objectives AVI wanted to fulfil in this meeting?

We wanted to get the maximum exposure to Auroville, to have a better contact with Aurovilians and to let them know we are working for them in the world outside. We also wanted to know from them how they perceive our role.

How do Aurovilians perceive AVI?

I'm still not very clear about this. However, we are clear what we want to be and do, and that includes spotlighting for the larger world the many important things that are happening here. Auroville has so much to offer, it is a leader in many fields like value-oriented education, body awareness and innovative dentistry (I think that what Jacques has discovered about teaching complex skills in rural areas can have many important applications). We've also been inspired by what we've seen in the wonderful evergreen forest and in the outreach programmes in the villages. Now the world has to know about these things.

Some Aurovilians still seem to feel that the only utility of the AVI organization is to raise funds for Auroville. Does this cause resentment among members of AVI?

No, because fund-raising had an important role in the beginning of Auroville and it still does. However, we do feel frustrated because we've got so much more to offer than simply acting as fund-raisers. We'd like

Aurovilians to come to us with their projects, to involve us and tell us how we can help. This is an open invitation: use us, we are here!

Over the past year it seemed that the AVI organization was facing serious internal difficulties. Do you feel the organization is on a more stable footing now?

Clearly, the first thing we have to achieve is unity among ourselves, and definitely a beginning has been made in this. While differences remain, people have seen that we need to communicate with each other better, which is a very big step forward. They have also seen the need to include more differences of opinion – we've greatly expanded the membership of the AVI Board – and that's another big step forward!

Actually, I've come to a different insight about what human unity means. I always knew it wasn't uniformity, but now I realize that unity is a kind of harmony of diverse points of



Evelyn from AVI Sweden and Julian Lines from AVI USA

view, and it is not complete unless you have everybody singing. In other words, I think we have to learn that unity is not achieved by people sitting together and agreeing with each other. Unity is only achieved when people who wouldn't normally agree with each other work towards seeing what they have in common rather than concentrating upon their differences.

Doesn't this inclusion of more viewpoints make your job as Chairperson more difficult?

It certainly makes my job more challenging, but ultimately it makes it more satisfying, more enjoyable.

From an interview with Alan

Toby Neuman, Chairman AVI The Netherlands

"As it was my first time I did not take any standpoint. However, I noticed that there are big differences between AVI centres. Some of them, for instance Germany and the USA, are well organised, while AVI Kazakhstan is just one person without any organisation.

"When I look back at the programme that was organised for us I feel that each meeting was a special experience, but for me the real

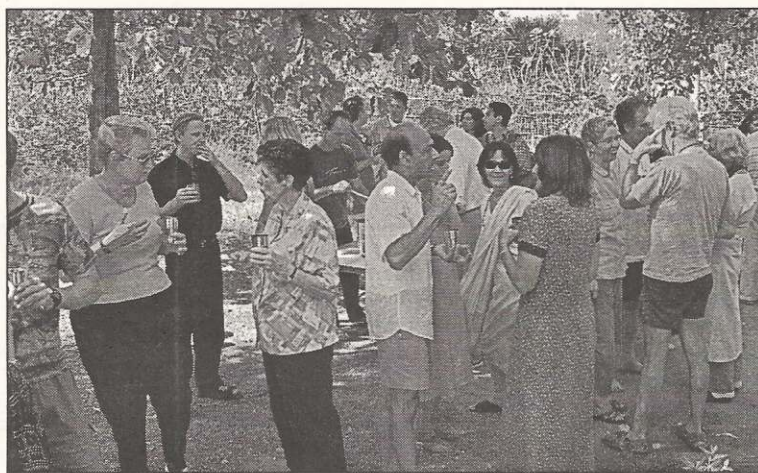
highlights were the contacts on a personal level with the people: people from other AVIs as well as Aurovilians, as well as the people from the villages around Auroville."

However Toby, a Chief Executive Officer himself, thinks that the meeting techniques could be improved. "Sometimes there is no agenda, sometimes the chairperson takes a decision and then someone rises and says, 'Yes, but...' and the whole discussion starts all over again. There was also a meeting in which someone invited strangers who took over the complete meeting. For me this was strange. But we did come to certain conclusions and resolutions. So it worked after all."

Robert Hessing



Toby Neuman, left, inside Mohanam cultural centre



Tea break during AVI discussions in the Unity Pavilion

Martin Littlewood, secretary of Auroville International UK

Auroville Today: Was this year's AVI meeting different from the one held in Auroville two years ago?

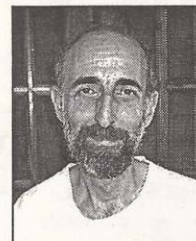
Martin: Yes. Two years' ago I felt there was not enough participation from Auroville's side. This time there was much more involvement of Aurovilians and this created a good

between people here and people living outside.

While this is inevitable to a certain extent, to minimise it all of us have agreed to use the phone more and to draw up basic guidelines for email communication. Regarding decision-making in the International Zone, obviously the major part of the process will happen here in Auroville, but there's a big wish from the AVI centres that they participate in some way: not because they want to impose anything but because they want to be partners in the process.

Would this mean that the AVIs would like to be involved at the conceptual stage while the materialization of projects would be left to the International Zone group here?

Yes. Ultimately, of course, any project in the International Zone has



Martin from AVI UK



Kathy from Auroville with Wolfgang from AVI Germany

to be seen as an independent organization, as much for Auroville's sake as for ours as it's important that we can offer an objective point of view upon what is happening here.

to be approved by the APDC group. But I'm sure that if we create a good partnership between the AVI centres and the International Zone members living here no good project will be opposed.

What were the highlights of this meeting?

Always it is the contacts with the people. On the final evening we talked about being 'bridges', but for me we're not so much building new bridges



AVI delegates visit Matrimandir

Before this meeting there seemed to be some unclarity regarding the role the AVI centres can play in decision-making in the International Zone. Has this been clarified?

Actually a number of misunderstandings had been created which were totally because of lack of communication or poor communication

between ourselves as rediscovering them. If our connections with each other go back over many lifetimes, if we have worked together for the ideal many times before, there can be no question of separation: we are one. So perhaps the real importance of these meetings is to help us become more and more conscious of this truth.

Alan

In brief

Auroville land situation

In December 2004 land held in trust by Auroville amounted to 935 acres (378 ha.) in the City area and 1079 acres (415 ha.) in the Greenbelt area. Land to be acquired is 216 acres (87 ha.) in the City and 1700 acres (688 ha.) in the Greenbelt. Total estimated costs of all lands to be acquired is Rs 25 crores or US \$ 5.5 million.

Roadside lands

Land and Estate Management have warned that commercial development is mushrooming along the two major access roads to Auroville and that further encroachment is likely. Approximately 180 acres of land along the access roads need to be acquired to prevent further detrimental development.

Moving forward together

A two-day workshop 'Moving Forward Together' was held at Vértité. It brought together 20 long-term Aurovilians in the hope of healing deep division which have separated some of them for many years, and which, like fault-lines, hampered the Auroville process. The workshop, considered a success by all participants, was facilitated by Angela Morton and Eric Franciscus, two former long-term members of the Findhorn Foundation in Scotland.

Gold tiles offering

On the occasion of the New Year, Matrimandir offered each Aurovillian on the Master List over the age of 12 a gold tile. A team worked at Matrimandir for four years to manufacture the 2.3 million gold tiles which together make up the 1400 golden discs covering the Matrimandir. Extra tiles were made to ensure there were sufficient perfect tiles for the discs.

Village health mapping

The Health Centre has started an ambitious project to obtain detailed and precise information on the health situation in each of the thirty villages monitored by it, by compiling Village Health Maps with the help of Geographic Information System system. This map will eventually contain all the factors that directly and indirectly affect the health of the residents and will help to plan and monitor health interventions and to carry out educational and communicate activities.

Auroville maintenance

The new Economy Group is developing criteria for people receiving a maintenance from Auroville and being exempt from payment of the Rs 1,500 Central Fund contribution. It is also developing criteria for providing children's maintenance to ensure fairness and transparency.

International Zone

The International Zone Group organized a one day research workshop on Education and the International Zone. Part of the discussion targeted the idea of an International University Centre for Auroville, another part discussed the International Zone as an educational project.

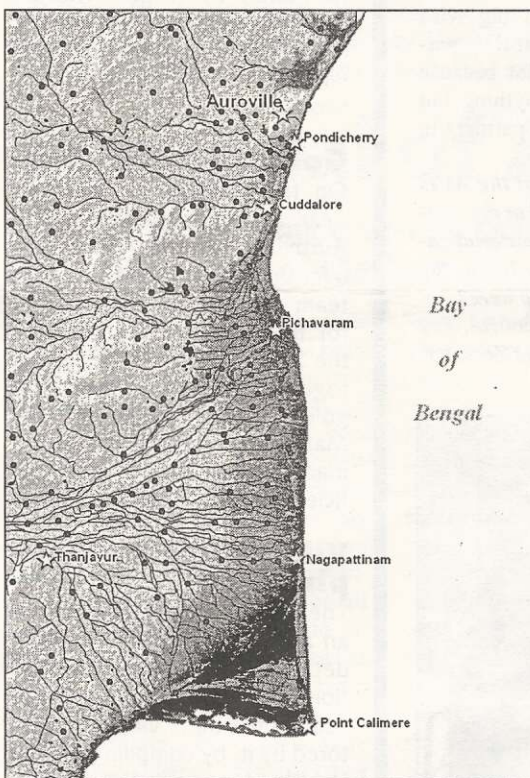
The tsunami relief and rehabilitation work

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This money would be used for the construction of a sea wall along the coast in both Pondicherry state and Karaikal. This request is based on the fact that the existing protective wall had saved areas in Pondicherry town.

The rehabilitation

Many non-governmental organizations and other institutions are ready to build permanent structures, and the Tamil Nadu government has meanwhile approved these NGOs participating in building new settlements. Organizations that wish to undertake one or more specific projects like construction of schools, child welfare centres or hospitals, can be permitted to do so subject to a minimum total investment of Rs. 50 lakhs. They can also participate in building entire habitations. They may select a particular village with the plan for providing permanent housing, livelihood rehabilitation, community infrastructure such as roads, water supply, schools, health facilities, noon meal centre etc., with the proviso that it should accommodate at least 50 families. A proposal has first to be approved by the Collector of the district; after his approval the proposal will be given to the concerned village Panchayat for its acceptance. These type of proposals require a minimum investment of Rs 75 lakhs (for 50 families), with a cost per unit of Rs 50,000.



Map of the south-east coast of India. The dark grey coloured area shows the extent of inundation if a wave of 3 metres high hits the coast, the light grey if a wave of 10 metres high hits.

"While the government order has been welcomed, the top-down approach it embodies has prompted us to propose a few modifications," says Hemant. "There is a risk that the villages will be overwhelmed by the ideas of one big donor. The experience in Kutch has demonstrated that only the habitations that have been built in partnership with the people have been a success. If donors follow their own ideas, it usually creates a disaster. In Kutch, for example, there are still eleven big colonies that are uninhabited as they are inappropriate to the climate and the livelihood of the people. Another problem would occur when different donors wish to rehabilitate the same village. The best solution would be if there would be a facilitating agency that would develop a coordinating plan where big donors and small donors can plug in, rather than stepping on each other's toes. Auroville has offered to the Tamil Nadu Government that it can fulfil this role. But our approach would be dif-

ferent from what has been laid down in the government order. We would work from bottom-up." Hemant explains that this approach implies building bridges, called *palams* in Tamil. "The village, through its existing leadership, would appoint a few people to be part of a village rehabilitation committee together with people from Auroville. This committee would first do a need-assessment study. After this is done, we'll go into the planning, and then into the implementation. This scientific approach has been tested in disaster stricken areas all over the world and it has proven to work. Instead a village being sponsored by an NGO or a corporate house, the village would choose the organisation they want to link to. So we create *palams*: between Auroville and the village, between Auroville, the village and the NGOs and with the government." The idea, it appears, has been well-received by the government. Says Hemant, "It is a new idea for many people but the government has shown an amazing openness and has accepted that the latest government order is not the last. It is an evolving process." Adds Suhasini: "It will also help the Collector. The evaluation of all the rehabilitation projects is an arduous job. The Collector has to ensure that there will be no inequity between the units built by the various donors. For example, if one donor has 80 crores to spend and another donor only 50 crores, how do you prevent one village becoming 'super-rich' compared to another that was built by the donor with lesser means? For you can't permit

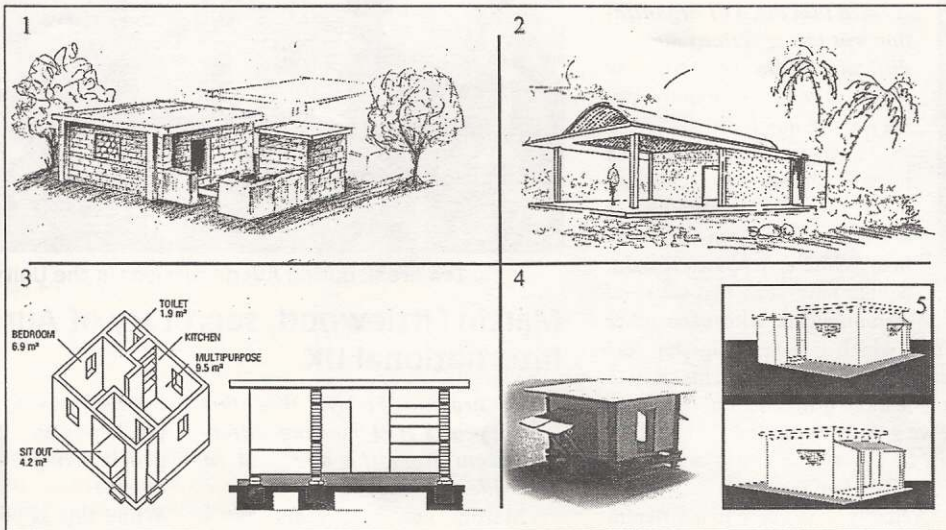
social inequity. That would only bring problems in the long run." She makes a passing reference to the problems encountered during the first phase of the relief work: "People hit by the tsunami benefited, while their neighbours, whose houses were not hit, received nothing. There was a case where help was given to fishermen. Behind their destroyed houses were the huts of the dalits, the caste-less, which were not affected. The fishermen received the benefits. But they were already in a higher income group than the dalits. Also some NGOs decided to cut the normal benefits they used to give to the dalits and give them instead to the fishermen. It created a row, and only after the intervention of the Collector was order restored."

Auroville's knowledge centre

Rehabilitation has two components. One is actually doing things in the field; the other is sharing knowledge of what can and needs to be

done. "We are strong in the second part, and we intend to create a knowledge centre in Auroville where all organisations can obtain the help they require," says Hemant. "Our collective knowledge, be it in the field of sanita-

from the river flows into the sea. At high tide, more sea water will flow in and may cause salt water intrusion into the ground water. This will alter the ecology of that portion of the river. The water supplies of the districts in



The five models proposed by Auroville for permanent relocation. All models, except model 4, have an area of approximately 20 sq.m. Model 4 has an area of 11 sq.m. The costs are around Rs 2,600 per sq.m. The designs use a variety of materials: stabilised rammed earth, hollow interlocking compressed stabilised earth blocks for walls and ferro-cement channels for roofs; or fired bricks, terracotta vault roof and pre-cast beams; or RCC joists and panels.

tion, waste water and solid waste management, renewable energies, water supply, health care, education, housing, infrastructure, planning, environment, or community infrastructure, can be made accessible to those who need it. If funds allow we might even be able to offer advice free of cost."

"We have also created a design cell which will provide settlement designs based on environmentally sound principles," adds Suhasini. "The design cell will propose five climatically and environmentally sustainable designs - e.g. no thatch as it is a fire trap and no tiles as the area might be hit by a cyclone - within the general approved budget of Rs 50,000 per unit. It will also provide information on building materials and technology. The design cell will be open to any organisation that wants to consult it. The 3-D computer models of these five unit designs can be emailed to interested parties, and we will soon erect one model of each design somewhere in Auroville so that people can see and experience what we propose." The design cell has received an overwhelming response from Auroville's young architects who have been working round the clock to come up with appropriate designs.

Environmental regeneration

Lastly, Auroville offered to assist in the environmental regeneration of the affected coastal areas. This would involve consultancy on proper ways of reforesting the affected lands and other coastal areas, identifying suitable indigenous species for dry areas and reintroducing mangrove forests along the coast where rivers meet the sea. Necessarily, involvement in this area would extend to watershed management so that the water that runs down from higher areas is collected and recharged into the groundwater.

Regeneration of the coast also extends to studying how the sandbars that were in place along the coast and have been washed away, can form again. "There was a sandbar separating the Adyar river in Chennai from the sea," says Prashant. "That sandbar disappeared in the tsunami and now more water

Chennai along the river are already being affected. South of Pondicherry runs the Gingee river. That area is ecologically very sensitive. It needs to be regenerated to prevent flooding in future. And these are just a few of the problems."

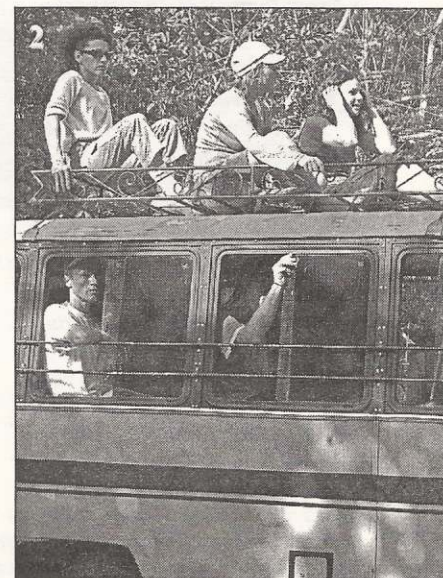
The Auroville village

When this issue went to press, the Auroville relief effort had received more than 1.5 crores as support for village work. "In our district and that of neighbouring Pondicherry about 20 villages and hamlets have been affected," says Hemant. "We need to have a very clear needs-assessment study that will include the environmental regeneration. Then we will see what the villages want and which village is most open to receive us. Certain villages are more open than others. Out of the 20 we will probably identify 4, and start working there. Afterwards others may follow. Our idea is to start with a village of approximately 200 to 250 houses. In this model village we would work in direct partnership with the population. We plan to offer them the model designs, and allow each family to modify the design in accordance with its needs. Small contractors supervised by experienced Auroville contractors would build the units. In the end, all the houses might look different, but it would be a typical village." As Auroville's 1.5 crores won't be sufficient, plans are afoot to do this in partnership with another NGO.

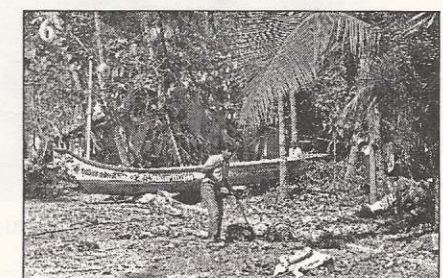
Meanwhile the Tsunami Relief and Rehabilitation Team is assessing the Auroville capability and capacity.

"Once we have the capacity, we can define the strategy of distribution. We would like to create an assembly line: making the essential building products here in Auroville, so that Auroville becomes a source of building products." And Hemant adds: "Money doesn't seem to be the problem now. The problem is the implementation and the monitoring. It's going to be difficult." Asked if the team is exhausted, he smiles: "I believe you can say that we all are fatigued. But we are energised by the work."

Carel



From top to bottom:
1 - Village women receiving aid at the tsunami office
2 - Busloads of volunteers depart for the affected villages
3 - Auroville youth cleaning debris
4,5 - Villagers, Aurovillians and Auroville guests join hands
6 - A boat thrown inland by the tsunami



The damage in Auroville

The total damage to houses and infrastructure and personal and business assets caused by the tsunami is estimated at 35 to 40 lakhs. So far, only 23 lakhs have been received.

Auroville has ten beach communities. To the south is Quiet, the community known for its healing centre. To the north one finds Samarpam, the Youth Camp, Gokulam, Repos, Waves, Halcyon, Simplicity, Sri Ma and finally Eternity.

The tsunami that hit the communities has done little damage in the five southern communities. Waves and Halcyon suffered some damage, as did Simplicity, home to Auroville's spirulina farm. In Sri Ma the material damage was larger. The most damage occurred in Eternity.

"We haven't yet understood why the tidal wave caused progressively more damage in the northern beach communities," says Ashatit. He is a member of the team that concentrates

on solving the tsunami problems in the Auroville communities. "But compared to the situation around us, we can only be grateful that there is no loss of life and that the damage is manageable. We have meanwhile decided on priorities. The first is to reinstall the basic infrastructure: fencing to secure Auroville land and properties, water, electricity and telephone connections. In Sri Ma a new well had to be dug as the old well had become saline. In Eternity the well is still giving brackish water, but is expected to become clean in the days to come. If not a new well will be dug. A major expense has been to install new fences. The old ones have been totally destroyed leaving the communities open to intruders and encroachment. We expect in the months to come to

face major electricity problems as salt water corroded the lines. Because of this, some money has been put aside."

The second priority was to repair damaged houses. "All the well-built structures have withstood the tidal wave with minor damage," says Ashatit. "Only the lightly built houses, with single-brick walls and thatched or vermiculite roofs, have suffered badly." Relieving the financial situation of those who lost their source of income due to the tsunami was listed as third priority. Next will come company losses, while loss of personal properties will be dealt with in the last phase, if money allows.

"Quite a number of Aurovilians who lived in the beach communities are traumatised and are receiving profes-

sional help," says Ashatit. "Some of them refuse to go back and we are in the process of finding appropriate accommodation for them elsewhere in Auroville. In some places, we have to do some renovation to make the new accommodation suitable."

When this issue went to the press, Rs 23 lakhs in donations had been received. "It is wonderful, but it is not enough," says Ashatit. "In all we'll need Rs 35-40 lakhs. Though the inflow of donation has diminished in the last few weeks, we hope that this sum will still be reached. It is the only way in which we'll be able to fully compensate those Aurovilians whose possessions disappeared in the sea and to re-house those who do not want to return to living by the sea."

Carel

Help from Mumbai Lions

Auroville, January 10. Three buses, a few motorbikes and a couple of taxis leave the

villagers and relief workers are working side by side.

Among the labourers are twelve volunteers from the Lions Clubs in Mumbai and Chennai. "We are chartered accountants and businessmen, and one of us is working at a nuclear power plant", says Narendra Mangal, an accountant himself. He took a week off to give his service for free. He is sweating, for he is not used to

half in the Pondicherry Union territory. About 2,000 families lost their houses and 67 people lost their lives", explains David Storey, one of the coordinators from the Auroville Relief Centre. Asked if the villagers have welcomed the support, David points at some problems: "A few villages did not want us to help in cleaning-up. They were waiting for the government to make a damage assessment first. But others were open to receive our help. The major part of the work has been cleaning-up debris and distrib-



The Lions banner in Periyakalpet

Auroville Tsunami Relief Centre for Periyakalpet, a fishing village about 10 kilometres from Auroville. The tsunami has hit here with full power: the death toll is ten people and there are many damaged buildings and huts. Soon after arrival, about fifty Aurovilians and guests of Auroville smash concrete and pieces of brick walls into smaller pieces so that they can be removed. A bulldozer would be handy, but these machines are needed elsewhere. As in other villages, the villagers are surprised at first and just look on. Some of them are still traumatized by the devastating power of the killer waves. But the enthusiasm of the volunteers is contagious, and soon

doing physical work like removing of debris, but no complaint comes from his lips. On the contrary he is smiling, for the work is for a good cause. "We are here to help the people from the coast, they are our brothers and sisters", is Mangal's opinion. "We are helping with relief work and rehabilitation, but we want to extend this to the reconstruction work in the future." The Lions took with them a truck full of tools, rice, dal, spices, medicines and clothes that they distribute among the fishermen.

"We are active in 19 villages on the Coromandel coast. Half of the villages are in Tamil Nadu state and



Removing debris

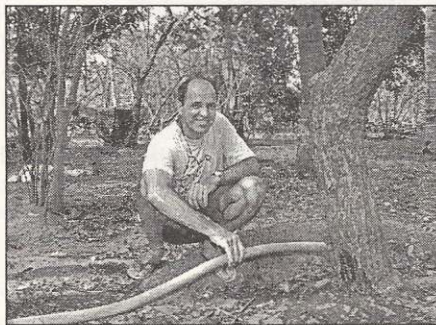
Robert Hessing

AV beach exodus

The devastating waves of the tsunamis have caused traumas for some Aurovilians who are living on the beach. The twelve year old son of "Spirulina" Hendrik, Ami, refuses to go back to his parental house which is by the sea. Hendrik: "At present we are living in a temporary house on the other side of East Coast Road and soon our house in Simplicity will be ready again to move into, but we are not going. Ami fears the water. He is angry with the sea that took all his belongings. So I am looking for another place to stay in Auroville." Hendrik is happy with the help he gets from the Auroville Flood Relief Fund. "We really were helped, with water, electricity, telephone, a fence. He estimates his loss to be about 3 lakhs rupees, 1.5 for the house and 1.5 for his company, Spirulina Farm. "Also in other ways people are helping, for instance by ordering more spirulina than usual, for they know the money is most welcome."

In Auroville's most affected community, Eternity, Yuval shows me around. He and his family made

a living renting out six houses to guests. All the houses are destroyed except for one which is built on concrete pillars. "Everybody is gone", says Yuval, while petting a puppy whose name is Tsunami. "He came here just after the waves", explains Yuval. "My son and daughter will



Yuval watering a tree in Eternity

not return to Eternity. They are afraid to live here. Most of the trees that I have planted over twenty years are dead because of the infiltration of salt water. I am trying to save some of them by giving sweet water, but the result is uncertain. Of course

I am glad that none of us, nor our guests, died in the tragedy, but I am still traumatised, not able to repair anything. From where do you start? So many things are broken, furniture, the computer, the fence." He points at the storeroom where the community used to park motorbikes. "We found the machines 60 metres behind the storeroom. The worst is the loss of personal possessions. Like the telescope that I got from my father, on the occasion of my 'bar mitzvah', a Jewish celebration, when I was thirteen."

In the meantime Yuval's wife, Anna, is visiting the Auroville Tsunami Relief Centre. She asks if the Centre can give help. Anna sleeps for the time being with her daughter, Jitta, who has moved with her family to a temporary house. Jitta still has nightmares from the tsunami. "She is the heroine of Eternity", Anna says. "Jitta heard the waves coming and saved the lives of her baby and five other children". Anna recalls the moment: "We saw a wall of water coming towards us. I screamed 'tidal waves', grabbed a child and pushed

it up the stairs of our house. Jitta ran to another house, where her eight months old son Mael was asleep, grabbed the child and screamed to the children of the neighbours and our guests to come out of their houses and run. Then she ran with the child in her arms through a cactus to escape the water." The needles are still in Jitta's body. They break when you try to pull them out.

A few kilometres away in Sri Ma community, carpenters, painters and gardeners are busy in and around the beach house where Albert and Guustaaf are living. "The building is still standing, but everything inside the house has disappeared and our garden is totally destroyed", says Albert, who works in the Health Centre. All the doors and windows had to be replaced. A team from Auroville is repairing the fence. According to Albert he is too busy to be traumatised. "Maybe it comes later". Nearby Albert's house, Judith's place is badly damaged and also Subashish and Devaki's house has to be substantially repaired. They are traumatised, for mother and daughter were trapped inside the house when the water came. Miraculously they survived.

Robert Hessing

Form & the Formless

Michel reaches for the elusive through matter

These days, it is getting more and more difficult to review shows by Auroville artists. There is no vocabulary to express the inexpressible. How can one review an exhibition like Michel's 'Form and the Formless'...? What does one say? One can only gaze in contemplation at each creation, marvelling at the words of Sri Aurobindo (see box) which seem so fitting a description of the works on display. Words that have integrally captured the essence of true art...

However for my own mental clarity, I feel the need to write about it. And also to share something of it for those who have not had the opportunity to stand in front of any one of these creations.

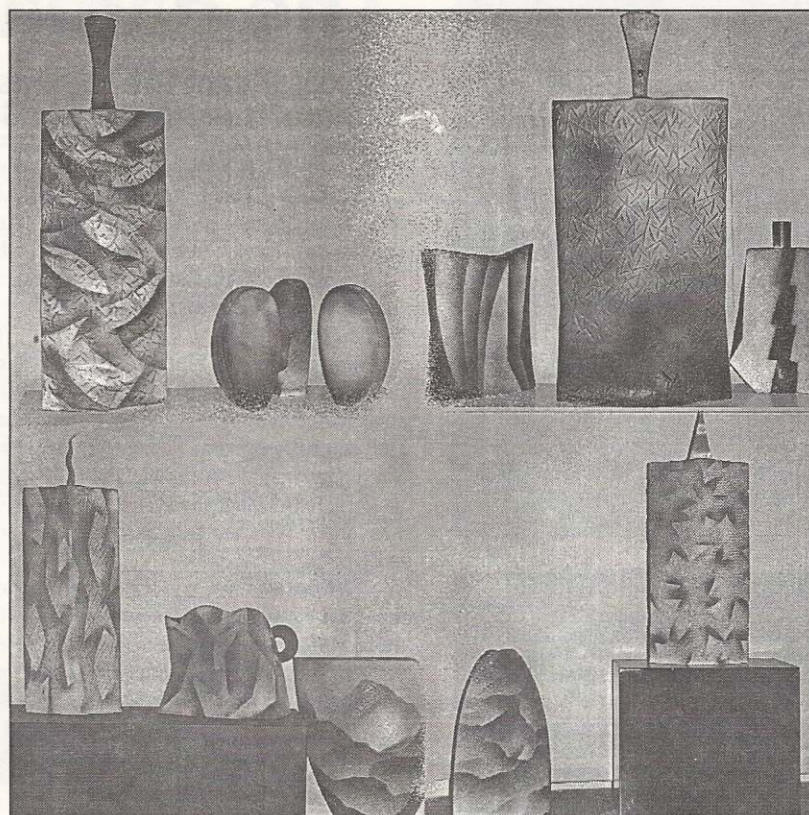
What is striking about Michel's works in this exhibition is texture. Texture with a certain lightness in

quality and almost extra-dimensional sensitivity. There is a delicacy even in the gouged-out grooves buzzing like a textured vibration on the clay surface or in the scar-like reliefs stamped-out on the clay body. The use of matt glazes and slips (coloured clay) gives a supra-dimensional depth to the surface, and each work appears to extend energetically beyond its material boundaries. Any moment you feel as if the piece will dissolve into thin air and disappear into the ether.

There is a quality to his work that is mellow. When asked about it, Michel says, "It is a choice, of course. Probably it goes with age because I observe that many young people like things that are flashy and colourful, while I rarely find something both colourful and beautiful at the same time. So I am extremely

critical of putting in colour just to make something more alive. There are very few things that I really like integrally. Actually in my last show at the Tibetan Pavilion I was not using any colour. The pots were wood-fired and had earthy tones and flashes to it. The only colours were brought in by the flowers of Valeria, but I was really enthusiastic about that." In fact, over the past year, having discovered new pigments that withstand high temperatures reached by the wood-fire kiln, Michel's works are displaying more colour than ever before.

Michel's works at the show can be divided into four categories – platters, bottles, vases, and sculptural forms. What strikes the viewer about the forms is their size. He confides that it was only recently that he ventured into the world of large surfaces. "I don't even remember how it started. It came from deep dissatisfaction with the work. While I was always involved in production work, it did not bring any fullness inside. And at some point, you have to find something otherwise you just have to stop." Michel's inspiration came without thought or plan. "I just went there and said 'Ah, let's try this'," and discovered that he had hit something. "At the beginning I just liked them for their size, and I was busy with the technique of making big shapes which would not break before or during the firing." It took Michel months before he became comfortable with the technical aspects. In that period of intense creativity and work, he even declined an invitation to the prestigious 'Peace and



Form and the Formless: the pottery of Michel

"For there is, concealed behind individual love, obscured by its ignorant human figure, a mystery which the mind cannot seize, the mystery of the body of the Divine, the secret of a mystic form of the Infinite which we can approach only through the ecstasy of the heart and the passion of the pure and sublimated sense, and its attraction which is the call of the divine Flute-player, the mastering compulsion of the All-Beautiful, can only be seized and seize us through an

occult love and yearning which in the end makes one the Form and the Formless, and identifies Spirit and Matter. It is that which the spirit in Love is seeking here in the darkness of the Ignorance and it is that which it finds when individual human love is changed into the love of the Immanent Divine incarnate in the material universe."

SRI AUROBINDO
Volume: 23-24 [CWSA] (The Synthesis of Yoga), Page: 160

Harmony Show' in New Delhi for International potters. "The announcement came when I was fully into large pieces. I was not into thinking about exhibitions or shows. Secondly there was a ridiculous limit on size – 40 cm by 40 cm – which was unrealistic for me as my pieces were really large at that time." He acknowledges that it was a lost opportunity.

For Michel, the ultimate destiny of a pot is for it to find a place with somebody who likes it. "That's the aboutissement, the end of the process. It is not that you are talking only to yourself. That is also possible, and I could imagine making pots like that just for myself. I do keep that state of mind when I make these pieces; I am not thinking at all of exhibition, or price or whatever. But

in the end, I am very happy when my pot finds a home." And this freedom, he confesses, comes from the stability of a workshop which has been established for over 20 years.

My favourite piece in the exhibition is a vase almost half my height, balanced on a tiny base. With a dark brown body and a horizontal flame of beige-orange girdling it, it plays visual tricks on my eye. It curves up at an angle as if preparing to take a leap. The small triangular mouth at the top edge appears mysterious and dark. As I leave I cannot help leaning over and blowing softly in. A cold draft whooshes back, carrying the scent of moist earth after the rains, accompanied by the sounds of the ocean.

Priya Sunderavalli

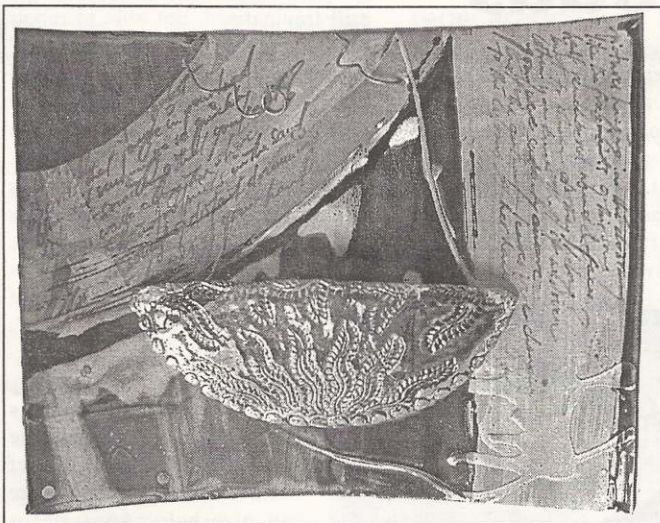
Windmills and mindscapes

"...Pictures hanging in the hallway, like the fragments of this song..."
Adil Writer's ceramic work and photographs were exhibited at Pitanga.

'Windmills of your mind' was an exhibition with a difference. Inspired by the lyrics from the song of the same name written in 1968, the exhibition was a harmonious blend of ceramics and flower photographs that captivated many viewers.

One of the first pieces you come across when you enter the exhibition hall is a ceramic scroll of sorts, made of separate panels bound together with copper wire, on which the lyrics of the theme song have been sculpted. "I decided to take on the lyrics of this song as the theme because its spirals and similes, metaphors and visuals seem to weave themselves into my ceramic and photographic imagery," explains Adil. In most of the ceramic works on display, whether the murals, vases, bowls or platters, Adil has scribbled different verses from the song, or passages from other texts which have inspired him, incorporating words and ideas into matter, interweaving them into the elements, blending poetry and pottery. "It's all part of the composition," he explains, "I take a scalpel and I'm sculpting the words into the clay, or I take a brush and paint them on the piece when it's already been bisque-fired. The focus for this exhibition was this particular song, so I worked with that as a theme. Otherwise, when I'm working with different textures and images suddenly lyrics from a song, or a poem, maybe even passages from Sri Aurobindo's Savitri come and inspire me, so I scribble them on the piece I'm working on. This helps me connect to those texts in a different way."

As you walk around the exhibition, you cannot help but wonder at the sheer diversity of form and multitude of modes of expression on display, be they the photographs, which hang alone or in groups on the white walls, or the ceramics, and the way all of it has been interwoven to form a harmonious whole, creating a unique ambience and atmosphere.



The dila (oil lamp) ceramic mural

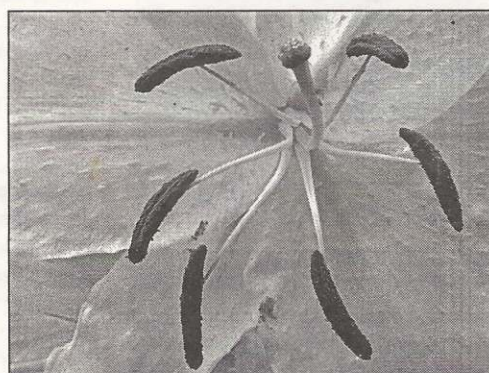
The theme of the photographs is mainly nature, essentially flowers. "There's a whole new world inside flowers," explains Adil. And his photographs speak for themselves, each telling a different story: the galaxies and spirals in the heart of the red rose; the Biblical scene with the cradle, the star and the three wise men, in the heart of the white Star of Bethlehem; or the purple water lily, in the heart of which appear to be hands joined in prayer. Adil uses

digital photography, and the computer programme 'Photoshop' has brought it to "another level altogether". On some of his photographs, the work is soft, subtle and barely noticeable, while on

others, "I've stretched the boundaries of my photography and taken it to another mode. With Photoshop, you can go totally wild and transform the image you started off with till sometimes it almost becomes a painting," he explains. The electric blue wild rose on display is a good example of this. Then there's the Atrium series which give the feel of having been painted in water colours, but for which no touch-ups were necessary. "These were shot in my aunt's atrium in California at a certain time of day when sunlight comes pouring in through the leaves and flowers in the courtyard, through the glass and into the shadows of the house," he recalls.

One of the recurring themes in the exhibition is the extremes of life and death, beautifully illustrated by the photograph of the immaculate white flower lying in a bed of dead flowers and leaves in various stages of decay. "It's all about nature, and a lot of it about life and death: the new and the old, and colours that come from different stages therein... The same kind of earth tones and autumn colours come back in my clay work, giving it a feel of being burned, which is also why I have worked with the contrasts between the glazed and unglazed."

Pottery, for Adil, is essentially a play between the elements earth, water and fire. "For me it is fire, more than anything else," he explains. "When you load a kiln for a firing, there is no way of knowing how fire will transform your work, what it will give you back. We potters call it the gift of fire." There are two lines of ceramics on display at the show: one is



There's a whole new world inside flowers

the natural, earth tones collection, and the other is glazed with an amazing palette of blues in different shades and intensities. Each piece has a distinct identity and character of its own. Whether it be the collection of blue 'gypsy bowls', covered with scribbled words; the sepia-toned mural with a blue splash like a water fall; or the mural depicting two clocks, with a multitude of arms in movement. In making the latter, Adil was inspired by a verse from the song: "...like a clock whose hands are sweeping past the minutes of its face..."

Adil does not call himself an artist, and doesn't want to be labeled as one. "I'm basically a down-to-earth potter, who's also an architect and loves to take photographs," he says. He also doesn't like to talk about his work. "I like people to look at my work and tell me what they see in it, what thoughts and feelings it awakens in them," he explains. "That is also why I do not like to title my work. That diverts the viewers' attention to what you are trying to make them see or look for. At this show, everybody sees something different, which is a vindication of sorts for me."

When Adil talks about his current work, he doesn't even want to refer to it as art... "I call these mindscapes." So maybe we could call him a "mindscaper"... Maybe he won't mind that. But then again, who knows...

Emmanuelle

'Kado', the way of the flower

Valeria brings the Japanese art of Ikebana to Auroville

"You do Ikebana to touch the heart of the flower," says Valeria softly, "and to do Ikebana you have to listen to the voice of the flower." Her recent two-day exhibition in Auroville was commissioned for the Integral Psychology Conference, but she knew nothing about it. "When Aloka passed on the request from Aster Patel to me, I accepted. And it felt very nice to do this at Transition School where the children can also visit." The show was in the school gymnasium, a spacious and airy room with a high ceiling. Converted into a pristine gallery space complete with white linen curtains covering the windows, it was the perfect setting for Valeria's Ikebana exhibits.

This is Valeria's second showing in Auroville. "Last year I did an exhibition with Michel and Kenji, my husband, at the Tibetan Pavilion." She shares her experience of the artistic collaboration. "For me it was very good working with them. It is not easy for three artists to work together, but there was not even a second of tension. People who came to the show said they could feel the harmony in our work."

Valeria is originally Italian, but professes a deeper identification with the Japanese and Japanese culture. She is married to Kenji, a Japanese, who works artistically with wood in Auroville. She shares her and their story of coming to Auroville. "My first visit to India was over 27 years ago. I was very young, and at that moment decided that I wanted to come and live in India." She went back to Italy to finish her studies in psychology. "After I finished university, I started to work in a hospital and saved up some money. I decided I wanted to come to India by yacht so I bought myself one and I travelled in it for 8 years." However her dreams of sailing to India were constantly thwarted. "Always some obstacle or the other came up – war, sickness – and I never reached the Indian shores." It was then that she met her husband Kenji. "He was also going around the world by yacht like me. We got together and sailed back to Japan. We settled in the south part in Okinawa, small semi-tropical island. It is a very beautiful place." It was there that her desire to revisit India came up. "Kenji had never been to India either. The closest he had been was to Sri Lanka. At that time, I didn't want to come to Auroville, because the guidebooks often wrote bad things about it! But a very strange situation happened

and we landed up here – this was 14 years ago, when I had just started to learn Ikebana in Japan, and it was only the second month of my learning. I was near the Eucalyptus grove. At that moment I felt something inside me say, 'You have to come to Auroville and teach Ikebana.' And it is not easy to get a diploma in Ikebana ... also I didn't speak Japanese!" Valeria and Kenji went back to Japan. She studied Ikebana for 10 years. And three years ago, Valeria and Kenji, along with their 6-year old daughter, arrived in Auroville.

why she nurtures the dream of a Japanese pavilion in Auroville. "It will be so nice, but Kenji and I are not so good at fund-raising," she says apologetically. "It can be the centre for many of the beautiful things that Japan has to offer – Ikebana, shiatsu, the tea ceremony, zazen, Aikido, yukiye (woodblock prints), a zen garden..." She feels that though there are only three Aurovilians of Japanese origin, there are many in Auroville who are in some way connected to Japan. Valeria herself identifies strongly with the Japanese and

tion, and quietness. If one does Ikebana in an agitated state or with a competitive attitude, it shows. Ikebana looks simple to do – just a few branches put together. But when you try it you realize how difficult it is. I stood behind my beloved teacher in Japan for ten years, always feeling gratitude towards her for having the opportunity to learn. I never felt offended or frustrated when she rearranged my Ikebana: I was only there to learn. But in Auroville I feel that sometimes the student finds it difficult to be taught."

Valeria shares the experience of one of her students, Tom from Dana. "When he signed up for the classes, I did not expect him to continue. But one day he said to me, 'For the first time in my life, I see plants.' Many practitioners of Ikebana feel that the Zen aspect is very important: it helps you to 'live in the moment' and to appreciate things in nature that previously had seemed insignificant. In Ikebana there is no hierarchy; a simple grass is as important as an orchid because it is not the beauty of the flower that will make a nice arrangement, it is the harmony you try to create. So once your eyes open for Ikebana, you can open your eyes for something else, and so on..."

Valeria's connections to flowers have influenced Auroville. She shares, "When I arrived here, Pour Tous had no separate flower section – just a big bucket in the vegetable counter where all the flowers were crowded together. And I had to tell them how the flowers should be treated with respect; that each flower needed its own type of container; that the water had to be fresh; that the stems needed to be trimmed in a certain way... Now all is changed. I once even caught Sid at Pour Tous using a water mister to keep the flowers fresher!"

Silence pervades the space. It seems as if the visitors are floating gently from piece to piece, thought processes at a standstill, perception operating from a higher level. There is an overwhelming sense of absolute perfection – a collection of miniature arrangements of single flowers in the middle of the room is exquisite in detail. "Divine Love governing the world"; "Remain only with him who offers it to the Divine"; "Mental goodwill"; "Power to reject adverse suggestions". It appears as if the spiritual significance of the flowers as expressed by the Mother has best been revealed through Valeria's Ikebana in Auroville.

Priya Sundaravalli



Valeria teaches Ikebana through silence; her students learn by observation. Each Ikebana arrangement has 3 essential elements – Heaven, Human and Earth

Joining Auroville and offering her skills in Ikebana to the community was not easy. "One member of The Entry group told me that Auroville does not need more artists, it needed people to do practical work." But she stood firm and determined. "I was quite stubborn. I came here to do Ikebana, and I wanted to do Ikebana." Now she looks back on the experience with humour. "Even though it was a little hard at the time, now some of these same people have even asked to learn Ikebana!" Valeria offers regular classes to Aurovilians and newcomers, and workshops to guests, but keeps the enrolment limited. She explains, "You need a lot of preparation and material for Ikebana arrangements and especially for teaching. Fresh flowers, other plant elements, vases, bases..." Over the last three years in Auroville, her collection of raw material has grown, which has brought up the issue of storage. "Right now they are all in my house, and I am already running out of space."

This is one of the many reasons

Japanese culture. "I don't see myself as Italian," she explains. "When I speak about Japan, I always say 'we in Japan', or 'we Japanese' and I didn't realize it until people pointed it out to me."

She confesses that she loves Japan and does miss it in Auroville. "Especially the strong sense of respect that the Japanese have. Respect not only for people but for everything – for each flower, for each material thing." She shares a distressing experience of witnessing one of her Ikebana arrangements being dismantled by a child at a recent art exhibition in Auroville. "And this happened right in front of the mother's and many other people's eyes and they did not do anything!" With such experiences, Valeria believes strongly that the children in Auroville and Aurovilians themselves need to develop a greater respect for material things, and her way to help to do it is through Ikebana.

Valeria's approach to teaching Ikebana in Auroville is through silence. "It needs a lot of patience, concentra-

VILLAGE OUTREACH

Improving children's health

Fighting malnutrition through health checks and improving food awareness

The Auroville Health Centre's Child Growth Monitoring Programme covers seven villages around Auroville. It was started in Royapettai, Annainagar and Mathoor and has since then spread to four other villages. In these villages, with the help of our local health workers, all children under 5 have been identified and about 80% of them have been registered on a Growth Card. Each child is weighed once a month. Knowing how much these children weigh, in combination with personal information on vaccinations and medical history, the health worker is now able to make a risk assessment in terms of the child being undernourished or being in the severely malnourished zone.

A lot of effort has been put into motivating mothers to participate in the registration. Initially, many of them were skeptical about weighing

their children. There is a belief that weighing a child will bring bad luck and the child will lose weight. The health workers worked hard to convince the mothers otherwise. An additional motivation is a bowl of nutritious chickpeas for the children when they come for the monthly session.

The monthly weighing sessions are being used as a perfect opportunity to give health and nutrition classes to the mothers of the children. Many mothers have no clear knowledge about what a child needs, what is nutritious, cheap food and when to give certain food to a child. In small groups of mothers, the health workers discuss with them issues of nutrition, how food can best be prepared and how to store food and ingredients in a hygienic and safe way. Also mothers are made aware of how to maintain a level of

personal hygiene and how to prevent water and sanitation related diseases. By improving knowledge the children as well as the other family members profit.

Our efforts in ensuring that all children gain weight have shown positive results so far. In all seven villages, children who were previously severely malnourished are slowly improving and gaining weight. Malnourishment in various degrees is a serious problem in India. Estimates are that 4% of the under-fives is suffering from severe forms of protein/energy malnutrition. A much bigger percentage of the children is suffering from milder forms of malnutrition. Our project covers a total of 228 children of which 177 (77%) are improving towards a healthier weight. We have found 9 children to be severely malnourished. They are under constant care

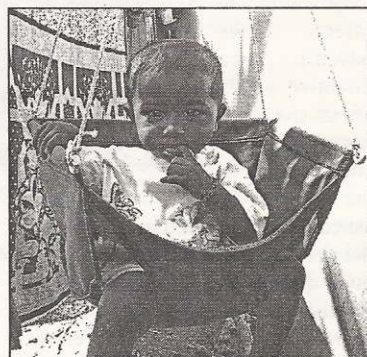


PHOTO COURTESY KUVIL

of health professionals both at home and in the health centres.

Malnutrition during the growing years can result in serious health problems later on in life. In general, there is a growing level of awareness among the population through the media of the importance of personal hygiene and nutritious food for growing children. In combination with health education from our health workers, we hope to offer a little help in securing a better and healthier life for the children living in the villages around Auroville.

Dr. Piyali

In brief

Integral Psychology and Transformation conference

A three day conference on Integral Psychology and Transformation presented by reputed scholars of India and abroad was held at the Sri Aurobindo World Center for Human Unity, Bharat Nivas. The conference concluded with an Indian Classical Recital (Santoor) offered by Pandit Tarun Bhattacharya.

Fourteen kimonos

An exhibition of collages featuring fourteen kimonos made by Franz with Buddhist inspiration was held at the Aurelec Cafeteria.

Nature's Love

"Flowers are Nature's Love for the Divine" was the title of an exhibition of photos of flower mandalas held in Savitri Bhavan.

Bodh Gaya photos

Photos from Bodh Gaya, the place where Siddharta Gautama received enlightenment and became the Buddha, were exhibited in the pavilion for Tibetan culture. The photographs were by Karsti Stiege and the music played was composed by Johan Zachrisson.

Benefit Concerts

For those affected by the tsunami, Holger, violin, Mishko, bass, and Suresh on drums held a benefit concert for the victims of the tsunami in the new amphitheatre of Kalabhumi. This was followed a week later by another concert given by Nadaka and friends.

Somatic exercises

Pitanga introduced Somatic Exercises, guided by Guruprasad (Gupi), working with "cat-stretch exercises" deriving from Moske Feldenkrais, an Israeli scientist of the 1930s. They were further developed by Thomas Hanna.

Gurdjieff sacred movements

Pramada, a teacher of Gurdjieff sacred movements in Russia and a frequent guest of Auroville, offered an introductory workshop Sacred Movements to beginners. These dances are based on the sacred dances discovered throughout Asia by the Armenian mystic George Gurdjieff.

Breema

Jörg Müller, a psychotherapist and Breema teacher since 25 years in Switzerland, offered a course in Breema, which comes from the Sufi tradition and is a teaching of the heart, an expression of the unifying principle of Existence.

Swedish writers

Eleven Swedish poets and writers visited Auroville on a tour through India.

Meditation in Stone

A documentary on Indian Sculpture by Amrit Arya called 'Meditation in Stone' followed by a slide show and talk by Sri Debashish Bannerjee was given at SAWCHU.

Ilaignarkal Education Centre

Ilaignarkal has shifted its educational activities to a new campus north of Matrimandir. Workers from units and communities in Auroville and their children are eligible to join its educational programmes.

Tackling health problems with yoga therapy

"Instead of running to PIMS hospital, Aurovilians with health problems can travel inward to find the problem, because we can heal ourselves".

Gala is speaking, a yoga teacher from Siberia who gives yoga therapy classes in Pitanga. "There are good yoga teachers in Auroville, but I put the accent on the therapeutic effect of asanas in my classes, which not so many do", says the slightly built but energetic graduate from Irkutsk University. Three times a week she teaches enthusiastic students how to heal themselves through asanas. She explains: "The ascetic people who invented yoga were healthy, mostly vegetarian, and did not drink nor smoke. But now Westerners try to do the same asanas without purifying the body first. This gives problems." Gala has not invented the therapeutic yoga she teaches, but learnt it from books by masters from Korea, Japan and Tibet. "For beginners I give different techniques that look simple, but gives a deep effect on the body. They are called The Five Tibetan Ritual Movements. It only needs four minutes a day to do the exercises. A sixth movement is called Uddiyan Bandh (speak out: Uddiana Bancha) which gives a rejuvenation effect. Gala warns not to do the Uddiyan Bandh practice if your partner is about to come for a romantic night, for it turns your sexual energy into a higher form of energy and sexual desire will be absent. Another exercise is called Vajrasana. You sit on your knees, stretch your spine up, put your chin down and put your hands

on your knees. According to Gala if you do this exercise regularly your hair will not go grey. In the past these practices of rejuvenation were only done by Tibetan monks and were kept secret. But now they are open to the world. Gala learnt of the secret asanas from an old book by British writer Peter Kelder, which was published in London in 1938. In it he describes the life of his friend Sir Henry Bradford, a retired officer of the British army, who spent years in a monastery in the Himalayas. After his return to London Bradford looked 30 years younger. In the British capital he started to give classes for old people about what he learnt from the monks.

"My practises work on the heart chakra, the spine, the lungs and also on the magnetic field of our body and organs. The latter is important as many people nowadays have problems because of the changed magnetic field of the planet. If you are often having a headache, for instance, you could have a problem with the magnetic field of your body. Rotation is the key word to adjust this magnetic field. Any rotation around the spine is good". According to Gala electric household equipment can be a danger to your health, as they can cause imbalances of the magnetic field of the body. She advises to use electric hair dryers and cell-phones as little as possible and to keep some distance from loudspeakers and computers.

To check the magnetic field of her students' bodies Gala does a simple meditation in her class. "I teach my students to readjust their arch, which is a kind of crown around your head, just like you see on old Russian icons. Sometimes this arch has shifted, and then the person lacks direction, he or she does not know what to do in life. With a simple meditation technique it is possible to put your arch back in the right position."

Pranayama

"My asanas become really effective only after cleansing the body", she says. "For cleansing I use the tiger – or lion – asana. With this pranayama you take in a short breath and then make the sound of a lion while breathing out. At the same time you make a movement with your arms, as a kind of workout. It cleanses the lungs." According to Gala, for smokers this exercise is the only way to get rid of the nicotine in their body, because otherwise it stays for years, even after you stop smoking. "The practises also make your respiratory system stronger", claims Gala, who even cured children with asthma with this technique while living in Russia. "I also teach self-massage, a therapy I found in a book of the Korean Taoist master Mantak Chia. For people from Europe or America self massage can be a relief, for in their countries going to a masseur is very expensive."

Healing sound

A third part of Gala's yoga-therapy is the Six Healing Sounds, for problems with lungs, kidney, liver, heart or stomach. The sound you make with your voice, like a "shhhh" or a "hooo" heals the organ, but also works on the energetic level of the organ. A special technique, which she calls Triple Warmer, used to be practised by Tibetan monks when their body temperature had lowered too much. This technique was secret but is now revealed to the outside world. Gala: "You sit on a hard surface and stretch your arms to the sky. Then put your hands together and lower them. At the same time say 'heee'. This is how you can regulate your body temperature when it is too low or too high."

"Everybody can manage his or her health by him- or herself," states Gala. She is enthusiastic about the possibilities that Auroville gives for healing therapies, on both the physical and the psychological levels. "There are so many good teachers here, but there is not nearly enough space to house them all." She would



Gala

welcome an Institute of Health, where you could come and learn how to be healthy – practising all types of sports and meditation techniques. "There should be in one building teachers and masters for tai chi, meditation, pranayama, hatha yoga, martial arts, homeopathy, ayurvedic medicine etc." That is my dream."

Robert Hessing

EDUCATION

The Auroville Winter Integral Studies Program

WISP is seeding new educational activities through a diverse range of offerings. They express something of the many ways in which Aurovilians approach the question of what it means to practice Integral Yoga.

You want to know what neuroscience, emotion research and attachment theory have to teach us about opening the psyche? You want to understand EM Technology? Learn about Systems Inquiry? Or study basic Sanskrit? WISP, Auroville's Winter Integral Studies Program, offers it all and a good fifty courses more. Through the months of January to April, approximately 25 Aurovilians and selected guests teach a wide variety of topics through evening lectures or regular courses around the theme of transformation and integral learning.

WISP is the brainchild of seven Aurovilians: Abbey, Bhavana, Dhanya, Kathy, Paulien, Peter and Wim. All of them have been involved in education in one way or another, ranging from organising education for the surrounding villages to guiding visiting groups of students during their courses in Auroville. "A few years ago, we were preparing a programme for a group of visiting students. We interviewed over 100 Aurovilians to find out what it is they are doing and if that could be translated into a learning opportunity," says Kathy. "It was amazing to see what interesting people we have here. Last year, when the WISP idea took shape, we

approached them again to see if they would be willing to give a short course or a lecture or whatever. Many responded positively, and that is how the studies programme got shaped." And she adds: "But this is still a pilot programme – an experiment in developing Auroville as a learning society. The theme of integral education and transformation was used as an umbrella. But we left people free to decide what they wanted to offer; we haven't been directive, either about the contents of their course or about the fee level asked. We had talked at length about the fee structure and how to ensure good quality of the lectures. But we finally decided that as supporting organizers, we did not have enough experience or knowledge to evaluate the teachers. So we left it all up to them, to see what works and what doesn't. When the programme is over, we will call the presenters together to hear about their experi-



Kathy

ences. We have asked each of them to keep a record of how many people came, Aurovilians and non-Aurovilians, what feedback they received on the course and how the fee structure worked. Based on that input, we intend to design a new programme, probably running from September 2005 to March 2006."

The ultimate aim of WISP is to help develop Auroville as a continuous learning society by 'providing a platform for transformational learning'. It will not only benefit Aurovilians, but also visiting guests and students. Kathy points at the big inflow of energies from outside Auroville. "Many institutions in India and abroad are discovering Auroville as a place where their students can go to learn and be involved. Since 1992 we have had students from the University of New Hampshire, USA, who came to Auroville to study as the 'GeoCommons group'. In subse-

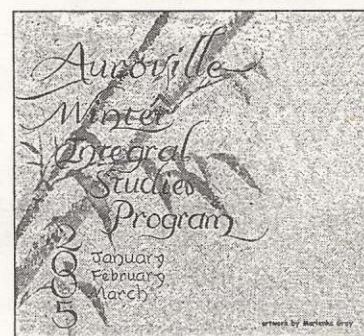
quent years, many other groups of students have followed. This year we have students from the California Institute of Integral Studies. Likewise, the University of Santa Cruz, California, the TATA institute in India and the German Breuninger Foundation have expressed interest to bring their students to Auroville for periods of up to three months, because they recognize Auroville to be a learning society. So we can expect an increasing inflow of students."

But Kathy is concerned that there are not sufficient qualified Aurovilians who can shepherd future visiting student groups. "At the moment the potential inflow is not matched by the carrying capacity of Auroville," says Kathy. "We do not have enough people as yet who are willing to dedicate themselves to this work. Few are qualified with a Masters or Ph.D. which some universities require. But there are many other levels where Aurovilians can be involved. Many student programmes incorporate a kind of 'immersion experience' in Auroville, and here Aurovilians can speak about the reality of the Auroville experiment as they experience it. And that includes, of course, the spiritual dimension of Auroville which we try

to make part of each visiting group's curriculum. For it is important that Auroville not only receives people who are interested in aspects of what Auroville has to offer, such as environment, building technology or fashion design, but that we also welcome those who are interested in integrated projects which include that spiritual dimension. Here, people can develop their inner and outer being in parallel. We hope that WISP will encourage Aurovilians, especially those who are not experienced teachers, to come forward and discover that they have a lot to offer, not only to fellow Aurovilians but also to visiting students."

In conversation with Carel

For more info on WISP see www.auroville.org/index/wisp.htm



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