

# Auroville Today

DECEMBER 2004, No.191

Six months ago we featured 'Women of a changing world'—Tamil Aurovilian women who were coping with, and often surmounting, the very special challenges confronting them. This month we profile five Tamil Aurovilian men: Dhanapal, Thillai, Bhoomi, Panneer and Kumar. None of them seek the limelight, yet most have been in Auroville from almost the very beginning and all of them are quietly performing key tasks and upholding important values within the community.

Like the women, the men are poised between an ancient and an emerging culture and subject to pressures from both. Like the women, each has his unique story to tell, each is responding in his own way to the challenges and opportunities of life in Auroville. "Don't colour me in," says one of them, "don't stereotype me". It's a lesson we can all learn.

## Constructing the city

A portrait of Dhanapal



Dhanapal in front of the Town Hall

Few people in Auroville have constructed more buildings than this unassuming man. "Probably about 150," he thinks, but it is clear that Dhanapal hasn't kept an exact tally. "At present I have nearly finished the building of the collective housing complex, Creativity, and the new Ilaingnarkal

School buildings. I am busy with the extension of the Village Action building in Irumbai. The Multi-Media Centre is scheduled to be ready in February. Then I am involved in the student hostel behind the Town Hall. Next month I plan to start a construction outside Auroville to see how it is to work in that environment."

He grins. "Though I have now about 350 people working for my unit Auronimatha, I still have to refuse some new projects."

The story of how Dhanapal got into the construction business starts when he was about eight years old, son of one of the headmen of Kulapalayam village and very curious about the developments next door, where *vellakara* men and women were beginning to build a city. "That was in 1976," he remembers. "There was practically nothing, and people who wanted to see the Matrimandir construction site would often stop in the village and ask for directions. For us kids that was great, we would jump on the hood of the car and tell them where to go." Contacts with Aurovilians were a natural consequence, and that brought the young Dhanapal to his first job as *tambi* in Dana, planting trees and milking cows. "They asked me to come and live in the community, but my father did not like the idea, so one of Dana's gardeners would pick me up and bring me back home when the work was over. Soon afterwards, Gerard asked me if I wanted to join school. I said 'yes!' and was admitted to a school run by Gordon and Jean in Kottakarai and in Fraternity, together with boys such as Selvaraj and Rathinam and other Tamil Aurovilians. But Kottakarai was a bit far away. Soon afterwards, I joined Meenakshi's evening school and came to stay there in the hostel. I must have become an Aurovilian at the age of ten or so.

"Then I joined Last School in Aspiration. It was a great time. I worked for half days with Ruud, Lakshminarayan or André, and would be

at school for the other part of the day. But after about 3 years, I stopped Last School. I was more interested in working at Matrimandir."

He became a bar-bender and welder and began living in the Matrimandir Workers' Camp. While living in Camp he married a young Auroville girl, Vijaya. "There was a lot of pressure from the family. I was senior to her, rather fat at the time and could not believe it when she said 'yes'. But she did. She moved into Camp with me. Because we were young, we decided to wait before getting children—even though the family did not like that very much. Eight years later our son Pradeep was born. Pradeep is the Sanskrit word for 'Light' and we chose that name because he brought light and joy and happiness into our life." When the Camp was razed to make place for the extension of the Matrimandir gardens, the family moved to Prayathna. Vijaya is now working at Solar Kitchen. Says Dhanapal, "We have decided that one of us will work in an Auroville service."

Like many other Tamil Aurovilians, money was a problem. "My family owned large plots of land, and they sold much of it to Auroville. Shamga is largely built on land once owned by my father; the land of Prayathna belonged to my uncle. But the sales did not make us rich. So around 1987, before my marriage, I decided, like many others, to go to Saudi Arabia and earn some money. But when I got my passport doubts came up. Did I really want to go outside? I decided I did not, and instead started my own construction unit, benefiting from all I had learned at Matrimandir."

*continued on page 5*

## "I realized this was my home"

A portrait of Thillai

Thillai was born in a small village six kilometres north of Auroville. "My childhood was not happy. My mother and father quarrelled and my father often ran away for long periods. At first I was top of the class at school, but gradually the family problems got to me and I couldn't concentrate so well on my studies."

Thillai's first ambition was to join the Indian Administrative Service (IAS). As a first step towards this he obtained a B.A. in History from a college in Madras. "But as my father was not supporting my mother and I was the only son I realized I had to give up the IAS idea—it would have meant many more years of training—and look for a job." He heard that a sociology degree would lead to good employment opportunities, so he enrolled for an M.A. at Annamalai University. Meanwhile he managed to obtain a part-time job with All India Radio, Pondicherry. "For two years I did interviews and presented programmes on family welfare. It was here that I developed my writing and editing skills."

Having obtained his M.A. in Sociology Thillai discovered that it did not, after all, open many doors. He took a number of unsatisfactory jobs before, in 1982, he met a poet who introduced him to Meenakshi. "She was very interested in me because I was a sociology graduate from the local area and she and Bhavana wanted to promote development in the villages around Auroville." As they lacked information, they asked him to make a socio-economic survey of the

local villages. "Most of the questions related to the villagers' socio-economic status, but we also asked them about their attitudes to Auroville. At that time people were overwhelmingly positive, mainly because Auroville was providing employment but also because, compared to village landlords and farmers, Auroville employers were generous and gave more freedom to their employees. Yet very few villagers wanted to join Auroville then. They didn't really understand the ideal and the culture was too different from their own."

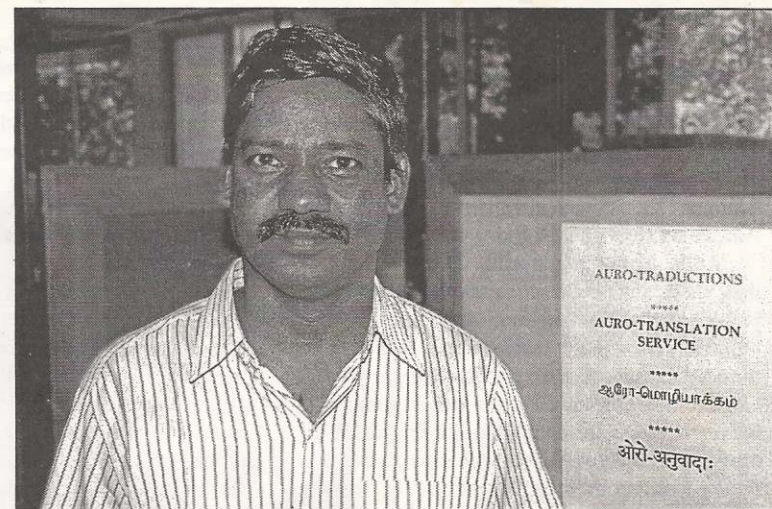
While Thillai enjoyed working for Co-Evolution (the forerunner of Village Action) Auroville was going through a difficult period. Among other things, this meant that his salary was not always paid. He decided he had to look for another job. Through a series of 'miracles' he was awarded the dealership of a petrol station but this didn't work out well: he was cheated by his partners and ended up heavily in debt. "It got to a point when my relatives would run away when they saw me coming because they were afraid I would ask for a loan!" Meanwhile he had married. So now he had a family as well as his mother to support.

"It was then that I thought of Auroville again. I'd been very inspired by what I had seen while doing my survey and I thought it would be interesting to find out more about how the villages were changing under the influence of Auroville. I sent Meenakshi a one page summary of my idea. She liked it and

subsequently SAIER sanctioned a one year study. I discovered that the villagers who benefited most from Auroville were the farmers who had sold their land at premium prices, enabling them to buy good land elsewhere or go into business, and the many villagers who learned skills through working in the community. On a broader level, I learned that the traditional power groups in the villages had lost influence and caste had become less of a dividing factor. Today this is happening everywhere, but it happened earlier in this area due to Auroville's influence."

One day, after completing this study, a friend took him to the Samadhi. "I'd been there before, but this time it was different. I felt a tremendous peace inside: suddenly all my worries and troubles meant nothing." He began studying Sri Aurobindo and Mother. At the same time he decided to commit himself more fully to Auroville. He didn't want to join right away so he decided to look for work in the community. Somehow, in the midst of all his difficulties, he'd managed to complete a B.Ed. degree and now André agreed to take him on as a teacher at New Creation.

"I liked the work very much. It was everything—the students, the teachers, the whole atmosphere—and I was inspired very much by the principal ideal of Auroville: to realize human unity and peace. I realized I had a deep inner contact with this place and suddenly I understood why, as a young barefoot village boy, I'd been present at Auroville's inauguration in 1968. I'd been too



Thillai next to the signboard of Aurotraductions in four languages

young then to understand anything—I remember only a big balloon floating over the Banyan tree and all these strange *vellakaras* (white-skinned people) dressed in white—but now it all fell into place. I realized this was my home, that this would be my home for the rest of my life."

In 1997, soon after becoming an Aurovilian, Thillai became the representative for rural schools on the Representatives Group. Soon afterwards he joined the Executive Council. "It was a very interesting experience. I always felt able to express my point of view although the others didn't always agree with me, for there were certain issues where I was aware that I came from a different background from the rest."

In this context, he mentions that joining Auroville was difficult for his wife at first. "People are so open and frank here, it's quite different from the culture outside. But slowly she learned to adapt, to be more tolerant." Thillai's wife,

Kalaiselvi, now works as a kindergarten teacher in New Creation School.

The Council often appealed for feedback on specific issues from the larger community. Thillai soon became aware that very few Tamil Aurovilians participated in this or attended larger community meetings. "I realized there were a number of reasons for this. The General Meeting process tends to be long and drawn-out and often doesn't have a clear outcome. Most Tamil Aurovilians work hard and don't have the energy to attend such meetings, but there is also the fact that all the meetings are conducted in English, and many Tamil Aurovilians lack language and communication skills."

Today Thillai works for Auro-Traductions, the main aim of which is to make the four languages which Mother specified should be taught in Last School—Sanskrit, Tamil, French and English—central to our community process.

*continued on page 5*

•The future of farming  
•Extracts from the  
farms assessment  
report page 2

•The Free Food  
experiment  
•The Open school  
project page 3

•GIS for Auroville's  
planning  
•German volunteers  
for Auroville page 6

•Theatre of the  
oppressed  
•Concert for two  
pianos page 7

•Gallery Square Circle  
•Monsoon rains  
•The tale of the  
temple page 8



# The Future of Auroville Farming

One of Auroville's long-term objectives is that the community should become or tend to become self-sufficient in food. At present we are far from that. Why? A year-long study of the Auroville farms, which has just been concluded, set out to discover some of the answers.

The final component of the study was a workshop at which the farmers considered the findings and set future objectives. They identified a common vision for the future of farming in Auroville, namely "a healthy and conscious farming system integrated with and providing food for the community", and they identified various goals for Auroville's agriculture in order to achieve efficiently-managed and financially viable farms funded by the community and outside interested parties. In this issue we present the main findings of the assessment report, we speak to one of the farmers who wrote it, and we profile an experiment in providing free food for the community.

## Conclusions from the farms assessment report

The survival of farming in Auroville depends on its ability to serve the community. Should we continue to invest in farms? Is farming going to continue to make an essential contribution to the vision of Auroville, or will it become increasingly marginalised in parallel with the growth of the city? What is required is a shift from a subsistence rural mentality to a determined effort to produce a surplus for the growing urban population, using the best methods available to us.

Is farming in Auroville viable? In the opinion of the assessment team, viability has three distinct aspects to be taken into consideration namely: economic, environmental and social viability. Without taking into consideration all three of these issues, long-term sustainability will be brought into question.

Regarding economic viability, a shift is required from what is largely welfare-funding to targeted start-up funding, with the ultimate aim of self-financing. External funding is still a key resource for the survival of the farms and is likely to be for the five years to be covered by the strategic plan: initially it is likely there will be an increased need for substantial funding. This means that the farms in the Auroville Farm Group are not yet economically viable, although it should be borne in mind that most of the farms are still establishing themselves. However, with increasing efficiency and, in the longer-term, improved quality and stabilized prices, there is no reason why this cannot be achieved.

Environmental viability implies the need for investment in terms of resources and knowledge. This is not an option. We owe it to ourselves and our customers to farm in the most environmentally-sensitive way possible. Whilst in the short term the twin needs of profit and farming organically may seem opposed, in the long term this is not so. In organic farming, the focus needs to be on ensuring a positive fertility cycle in the soil, followed by the efficient use of water. This is potentially a win-win situation; if we can improve the environment this will allow for an increase in the organic

production of food and pave the way for profitability.

In the opinion of the assessment team, although significant progress has been made, especially when compared to local farming practices, a great deal more needs to be achieved to reach the win-win situation outlined above.

For the continued social viability of farming in Auroville the continued influx of people into the farming sector needs to be ensured. It should be recognised that many of these are likely to be Tamil, with fewer resources accessible to them than their predecessors.

The AVFG should also continue to strengthen the connections between the community at large and the farmers. This is arguably the greatest strength of Auroville farms.

So, is farming in Auroville viable? As things stand, probably not. This is largely owing to an overdependence on external funding, high prices and relatively low output. However, by investing in the environment and building on the proven loyalty of the customers through improving the quantity and quality of produce and setting realistic prices, there is no reason why it cannot be a success story.

## Selected recommendations from the assessment report

◆Newcomers or Aurovilians with the appropriate skills and enthusiasm need to be identified and actively encouraged to take up farming and related activities.

◆Appropriate financial structures need to be established to support the establishment and expansion of farming in Auroville.

◆Testing of Auroville animal products in order to establish and improve their quality is fundamental if the high price of Auroville milk is justifiable.

◆Most farms in the AVFG need to give much greater emphasis to building soil fertility, in particular soil organic matter, to see any substantial increase in production.

◆Water efficiency at both the micro- and macro-levels can be increased substantially on most farms.

◆The AVFG urgently needs to discuss and agree upon a strategy for reducing the current reliance on unsustainable government electric pumping subsidies.

◆Priorities for research and advice for the AVFG and individual farmers needs to be identified and specified.

◆In order to create a fair situation for the organic farmers and transparency for consumers, the AVFG needs to agree on: 1. a code of conduct for labelling; 2. standards for local and / or ecological products; 3. a relevant monitoring system.

◆Improved record keeping of production both on-farm and for the AVFG as a whole requires a comprehensive database and a commitment from farmers to account for all production.

◆Another priority is the formation of a consumers group that would have regular meetings with the farmers to agree on the needs for the following period.

◆Investments in AV farms should be accompanied by a commitment to greater production in the medium to long term. This should in turn, result in stabilising the price of produce attempts to lower prices in line with reduced costs of production.

◆Improved record keeping and documentation should be accompanied by a more collective approach to accessing external funding.

◆A comprehensive five-year plan for funding is needed. This should be matched with a database of potential donors and a long-term commitment from the farmers to become more self-reliant.

## From pioneers to providers?

A conversation between John, who is a member of the farms' assessment team and Brooks, a farmer who questions some of the report's main findings.

**Brooks:** What are the worst bottlenecks constraining the development of agriculture in Auroville?

**John:** There are several. One constraint is that yields on many farms are lower than we believe they should be. Many crops should yield more if given more nutrients and water. The farmers' present tendency to under-apply nutrients and water means that soils remain hungry, so we're not seeing the continuous improvements in productivity that we expected. Farmers have difficulty keeping their fertility up partly because decomposition of organic matter in the soil happens rapidly in our conditions.

Agricultural development is also constrained by the uncertainty and seasonal fluctuations in demand for farm products. This discourages farmers from scaling-up production. The Solar Kitchen has reduced this problem for some farmers because it provides an assured and steady demand. Farmers are also under-funded. After looking at the funding that has gone into the farms over time, I feel that it would have been more effective if it had been better targeted. In other words, it would be better if each year the needs of one farm could be met more fully rather than, as at present, sharing the funding more or less equally between all the farms: this creates dependency.

Finally, organic farming is not easy. It is management-intensive, demanding constant attention from the farmer. There is still much to learn about how to successfully develop and manage an organic farm in this environment.

**Brooks:** In my time in Auroville, I've observed that there is disagreement among the members of the AVFG about the

primary purpose of farming in Auroville. There are some farmers who believe that the purpose is to cover costs. There are others who are farming to feed Aurovilians, and there are others who are farming to regenerate the land. I feel that the assessment report's recommendations place more emphasis on covering the farms' costs than on the other two objectives.

**John:** The assessment team went into this open-mindedly and responded to the priorities that were ranked by the farmers. All farmers gave a high priority to supplying food for the community, but largely within the context of the market: this reflects the reality. Farmers are struggling and the response of the community is not, "OK, let's help you out." Rather, the response is, "What's wrong with you farmers? Why don't you guys do your job properly?" And people buy their food elsewhere. So farmers have to try to stay afloat in the market as it is now, a market where preference is given to consumer choice.

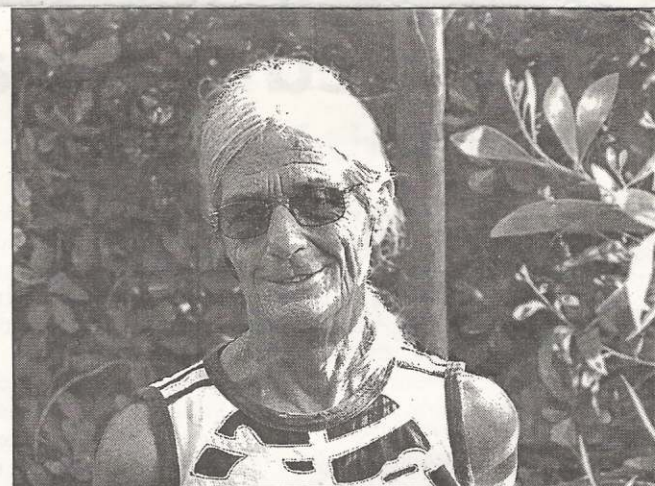
So, although we should be growing food for Aurovilians we've got this situation that we're producing food that some people cannot afford.

ate funds for their own investment then the temptation is to produce value-added expensive products because that's where the profit is.

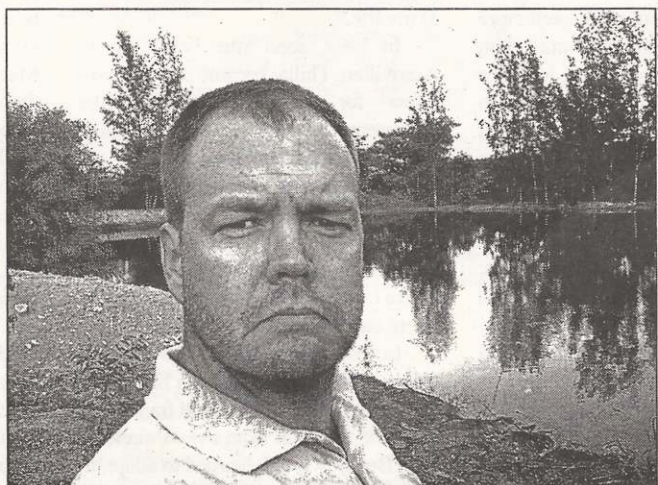
**Brooks:** I am sceptical about the suggestion in the report that Auroville's farmers will be able to pull themselves up by their profits. Generating such profits seems highly unlikely considering the high costs of doing business here, the often unfavourable environment for farming, and the rather small and largely low-budget consumer base in Auroville. Is competing in the market a realistic strategy for Auroville's agriculture?

**John:** If farming is to thrive in the present environment then it can only come from the efforts of the farmers themselves, both individually and collectively. At present they supply only a small proportion of Auroville's food requirements, so there would seem to be scope to fill this gap to everyone's advantage. We were asked to assess the viability of farming in Auroville and I don't think it would have been good enough to say viability is dependent on increased subsidies from the Central Fund, particularly given its present parlous state. In our view, albeit with far greater difficulty, viability can be achieved by a mix of improved output, lower unit costs, better management and a collective approach to marketing, growing and distribution. Initially, investment and hence funding will need to increase, but the long-term aim has to be to reduce dependence on external funding, the supply of which is ultimately beyond the farms' control.

At the same time, there are various schemes under discussion by the Economy Group. The farmers would be only too pleased to participate in any community-led scheme that enabled them to provide food for the community. Meanwhile, however, they have to pay the wages. If we produce a first class value-added product that we sell to the market outside Auroville, this will enable



John at Discipline farm



Brooks in front of the Annapurna kolam

There is a dilemma because if the farmers are driven by the need to make a profit or at least gener-

Auroville's farmers to provide less expensive food within the township.

**Brooks:** I was surprised that the assessment report devotes little attention to some of the alternative economic arrangements that are supporting farms in Auroville, such as the subscription agriculture experiment in Buddha Garden and Maroma's free food experiment.

**John:** The free food experiment was not mentioned because the farms were assessed according to the priorities which the farmers identified. The free food arrangement was not something that the farmers could see being extended, so it was not mentioned in the report.

Buddha Garden's Community Supported Agriculture arrangement has succeeded largely because it runs on volunteer labour, but this requires considerable planning and participation by Priya Vincent. Such as it is, we didn't regard it as a suitable model for many farms. However, Buddha Garden's development of close links with a group of consumers makes great sense. Aurogreen has also developed such links by direct marketing. The township is small and the farms are scattered, so direct marketing from farm to consumer is a system that is good for the farms and good for the consumers. This is an approach to marketing that other Auroville farms should try to develop.

Edited by Brooks



# The free food experiment

**M**aroma's free food experiment succeeds in accelerating farm development and food production in Auroville

In the mid-1990s production of field crops (grains, legumes and oilseeds) in Auroville remained far below the township's requirements: Auroville's farms provided only approximately 2% of the rice consumed in the township. Although Auroville had abundant lands suitable for the cultivation of such crops, output had stagnated for several reasons – most of them economic. Such stagnation was evident at Annapurna Farm which reportedly had been designated by Mother to produce field crops for Auroville. As of 1997, of its 135 acres only two were producing rice and only 15 were growing other field crops.

Bringing Annapurna's land into production was a very slow process because creating the infrastructure and purchasing the equipment for producing field crops is very costly. The labour required is an additional considerable expense. To make matters worse, such crops are risky. The harvest can be very disappointing if the weather is not particularly favourable.

Tomas, the steward of Annapurna, often found that his production expenses exceeded the crop's market value. His production expenses were high for several reasons. First, the organic methods used to maintain soil fertility and control pests were more costly than the methods used by chemically-dependent farmers. Second, Annapurna's employees were paid more than average farm labourers, partly because Tomas wanted to build a dedicated and motivated team, and partly because he didn't

believe in exploiting the farm's employees. Third, unlike other farms in Tamil Nadu, Annapurna did not have free electricity. This made irrigation far more costly than on conventional farms.

Tomas' predicament illustrates the cost-price squeeze that all Auroville's farmers feel. In order to recover their costs of production Auroville's farmers need to price their crops at a high rate which

ment of field crop production capacity on one or two Auroville farms. Paul and Laura explained that after some years of developing such capacity these farms would be expected to provide part of the subsidized portion of the farms' harvests free to Auroville. This became known as the free food experiment.

Through discussion with the Farm Group, Annapurna and Siddhartha farms were selected for

regular monthly appropriations. In the spring of 2001, as the fourth year of the experiment came to a close, Paul and Laura suggested that the farms should take the next step in the experiment by supplying free food to Auroville.

In 2002, 2003 and 2004, as the acreage under field crops expanded, deliveries of free food from the farms to Solar Kitchen increased steadily. This experiment, together with the opening of the Solar Kitchen, created the possibility for all Aurovilians to eat grain grown in Auroville.

The free food experiment's success in increasing field crop production is largely due to the existence of the Solar Kitchen, which created a very large demand for Auroville-grown grains. Angelika, the manager of the Kitchen, doubts that the Kitchen could afford to use as much of Auroville's field crops if the free food subsidy did not exist. Tomas feels that the free food experiment has accelerated the development of Auroville's agriculture tremendously. It has demonstrated the possibility of rapidly increasing the production of crops which our farmers could not otherwise afford to grow on a large-scale using environmentally-responsible methods.

Annapurna's experience illustrates the scale of investment required to develop Auroville's farms (by August, 2004, Maroma alone had invested US\$ 92,000 in the farms). There is no evidence to suggest that such investment capital could be generated in the form of profit by the farms themselves, or that such investment could ever be repaid if taken as a loan from a lending agency.

Brooks



The Solar Kitchen is a main user of Auroville farm products

makes such produce unaffordable for Aurovilians subsisting on a minimum maintenance. Faced with limited demand the farmers lack both the incentive as well as the means to increase their area under production.

In 1997 Paul and Laura, the executives of Maroma, recognized that market forces were frustrating Mother's dream that Auroville would grow much of its own food. They offered to sponsor develop-

this experiment. Maroma invested Rs. 20,000 (US\$ 450) in each farm every month for a year, from August 1997 to July 1998. The experiment was then reviewed and extended for a second year. Both farms used the investment in ways that increased production.

In March 2000, during the third year of the experiment, the farms each received a contribution of Rs.1,00,000 (approx. US \$2,200) from Maroma in addition to their

## EDUCATION

# The Open School Project

**“W**e don't treat our newcomers and guests very well.” Aurora, one of the first children born in Auroville, knows what she is talking about. She has been taking care of the 'Welcome Group' class in Transition School for almost five years, teaching new children basic English and a few other subjects, as part of the process to get them settled in their new surroundings before they join their future classrooms. For the last three years she has been coordinating admissions to Auroville schools, receiving guests and pre-Newcomers and listening to their difficulties in getting to know Auroville.

“They all complain about closed doors and how difficult it is to make contact with Aurovilians,” says Aurora. She explains how a pre-Newcomer, a person who wishes to join Auroville, is asked to be a guest for the first three months. During this time, the entry guidelines state that the guest is expected to explore the community by ‘observing and/or participating in various activities’ and to ‘further his/her exploration of the inner discovery and the deeper meaning of Auroville’. But these well-meaning but rather grand words don't take into account that Aurovilians, in general, are not really helpful in that exploration. Once a person becomes a Newcomer, he or she has the advantage of being guided by their contact person, an Aurovillian appointed by the Entry Group to help the newcomer integrate into the community. “But pre-Newcomers and guests are left to themselves. And for those who come

with children, the exploration of the community becomes downright impossible. Auroville has no facilities to receive these children and the schools and the sports ground are closed to them. The children suffer and some families, in exasperation, have left.”

To solve this issue, Aurora proposed about 8 months ago to create an Open School, a ‘welcome school’ for pre-Newcomer children and for children of guests of Auroville. It would have four classrooms: one for the crèche, two for the kindergarten level and one for the mixed class of primary school level. The crèche and kindergarten would offer activities with English as medium. The primary school would prepare children of pre-

**“Open School will offer itself as a place where children of guests, pre-Newcomers and visiting family members can come to learn, meet friends and enjoy activities in a welcoming atmosphere.”**

Newcomers for their future schooling in Auroville in coordination with the Auroville schools. “Besides basic English, the children would be exposed to subjects like maths, music, crafts and bodywork so that they can integrate quickly once their parents have been accepted as Newcomers and a spot become available in an Auroville school.” Aurora plans to meet the running costs of the Open School, including the repayment of the loan to build it, through financial contributions from the guest/pre-Newcomer parents.

“For guests and pre-Newcomers the Open School would be a godsend as their children won't lose out on their education. For Auroville's primary schools, the Open School would be a great help as it would prepare the children for their future integration into Auroville. English is a foreign language for many children and getting a child into the classroom, especially a non-English speaking child, asks for a lot of individual attention from the class teacher. As the teachers are already facing a big group of children of various nationalities and cultural backgrounds in their own classrooms, it helps if a new child has been prepared by the Open School,” explains Aurora.

But eight months after the Open School idea was launched, progress has been minimal. So far, a site for the school has not been located, and the reception of the idea by the Auroville schools has been unenthusiastic. “I thought at first that a suitable location would be nearby an existing primary school,” says Aurora, “so that there would be some collaboration. And if the project fails, they would have some more classrooms. But the schools are adamant that there should be no mixing of guest children with Auroville children. The teachers are already facing problems integrating children of Newcomers, many of whom are unprepared due to problems with language, cultural background and habits. I think they are afraid that the process of integration might become more difficult if chil-

PHOTO COURTESY AUROVILLE



Aurora

dren of guests and pre-Newcomers would freely interact with their children.” Aurora has subsequently asked for another plot of land but this too has not been identified. “There appears to be a lot of bureaucratic confusion, each group waiting for the other to make a decision, and the project has been indefinitely delayed. It is very frustrating.”

The fact that schools do not wish to deal with children of pre-Newcomers and guests is the prime motivation for starting the Open School project. Says Aurora, “My main concern is that Auroville has to do better in the treatment it gives pre-Newcomers and guests. The attitude has to change from indifference to one of welcome, especially to their children.” Aurora is not alone in her conviction. “There is support from many individual Aurovilians and the Entry Group for the Open School. Auroville is growing and we need to boldly face the need. I would say: let's trust and move forward!”

In conversation with Carel

## In brief

### New International Advisory Council

The Government of India has nominated a new International Advisory Council, replacing the members which had been appointed in May this year. The new members are: A.T. Ariyaratne, founder of the Sri Lankan movement Sarvodaya (meaning “Universal Awakening”); Marc Tully, who has been the BBC's India Correspondent for 22 years and is co-author of the books *No Full Stops in India* (1991) and *Heart of India* (1996); Diana L. Eck, Professor of Comparative Religion and Indian Studies at Harvard University, USA and author of many books, amongst which is *Encountering God: A Spiritual Journey from Bozeman to Banaras and Darshan: Seeing the Divine Image in India*; Doudou Diagne, Director for Intercultural Affairs UNESCO and United Nations Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance; and Marc Luyckx Ghisi, former member of the Forward Studies Unit of the European Commission, Brussels, (1990-99), active in futurology research and Director of ‘Vision 2020’, a think tank on the present paradigm shift.

### Continued violence

The Security Task Force has expressed to the Working Committee and Auroville Council its concern about the continuation of violence in the Auroville area. Auroville's neighbors are afraid, armed youths have been seen roaming the fields and membership in gangs is said to be increasing. Though no practical solution can be offered, the need for wider access to educational opportunities, especially in Kuilayapalayam is paramount. Auroville has supported the development of two schools in this village, but there are still students who are unable to afford even the minimal fees. The Task Force asked that schools be created to address the needs of those living in the lower strata of the village to prevent dissatisfied and uneducated youth turning towards aggression and violence.

### Regulations

The Auroville Council is preparing Regulations for Entry and Exit and a document on the various categories of people who can join Auroville. After community approval, these documents will be submitted to the Governing Board.

### Matrimandir gardens

Replying to a call to participate in the creation of the Matrimandir gardens made in January 2004, some Aurovilians have presented preliminary studies with plans and models. These studies, exhibited in the Matrimandir office, are now being analysed.

### SAIER grant

SAIER has received a sanction from the Government of India for Rs 62 lakhs for the first instalment of the SAIER development Plan 2004-2005. There is no indication if there will be a 2nd instalment. The money has been allocated for construction of the Information Centre and the Student Hostel; for materials and equipment; and for activities and research. The grant for teachers' maintenance has not yet been received.



## Our man in Pondicherry

Bhoominathan runs the Auroville Boutique in Nehru Street

"I'm an old-timer." Bhoomi is not referring to his age, for he is only 40 years old, but to the fact that he is one of the longest serving business executives of Auroville – and that he joined Auroville when he was only six. "Must have been 1970 or 1971," he muses. "An international school had started in Auroville, and they wanted a few boys from Kulapalayam to study together with the other students. As my mother worked in Auroville they asked if her kids wanted to join and so my two younger sisters and I got our first education – which lasted till about 1975, when the school stopped. Some of us – Selvaraj, Rathinam, Hari – were very unhappy about that. We decided to find our own teachers and continue. After doing this kind of schooling for some three or four years we took the initiative to restart our school in the Last School compound. At the time the school building Swagatham had been turned into a guesthouse. We talked to the guesthouse manager, who welcomed our idea and vacated the place. And school started again. The teachers followed."

Bhoomi stopped school when he was about 19 years old. He had started to work a few hours a week assembling computers in Aurelec and Altec. "Then I had a chance to go the USA, participating in the Peace Tree programme. It was a great experience, meeting lots of different students and experiencing a completely different country. When I came back I worked at Pour Tous for some time, and then joined the Boutique d'Auroville in Pondicherry. I started as a part-time worker, but became its manager about 14 years ago."

The Boutique d'Auroville, situated

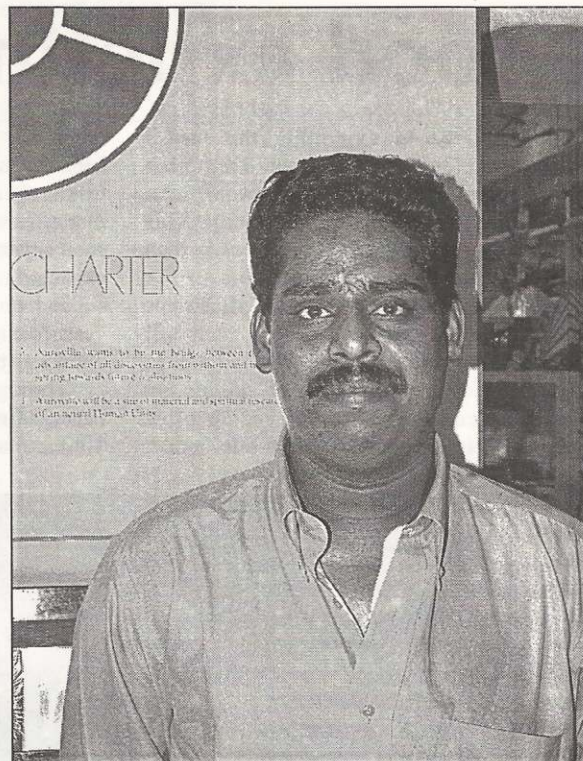
in the beginning of Nehru Street, is a narrow shop. From its inception, the shop was intended to sell products from all Auroville units, which has led to a rather cluttered display of articles. "It looks like a storeroom," says Bhoomi apologetically. "We should have three times the present size to properly display the products. But to rent a good place in Pondicherry is very expensive and our means are not sufficient to buy one. But we need a place which not only displays the products, but also has a coffee shop and a proper office where we can give information on Auroville." For providing information about Auroville is the second important function of La Boutique. "We get many people with questions about Auroville. In my experience, to do a good job you need at least ten minutes to handle each enquiry. It is time I often don't have." Asked what type of questions come up, Bhoomi replies that many deal with the 'what is?' and 'where is?' Auroville, but that increasingly questions have a malicious undertone, like 'why are there so many foreigners in that place?', and about the social conduct of Aurovilians. "I can't answer all the questions," says Bhoomi, "and sometimes I have to duck and dodge them, in particular if I feel that the questioner is needlessly aggressive. But it worries me that these types of questions are being asked."

In order to protect the brand recognition of Auroville, Bhoomi is also careful checking product quality before it enters the Boutique. "We cannot afford to lose our good name. An inferior quality product from one unit could affect the reputation of the other products." Asked why the turnover of the Boutique is lower than that of the Boutique in the Visitors'

Centre in Auroville, Bhoomi points at the large number of nearby shops that sell comparable products. "Auroville's products are good quality but expensive. The Boutique in Auroville doesn't have that kind of sharp competition. We depend on the tourist seasons, so this is actually a six-months per year business, the other six months are a bit dull. But we are doing well, and are happy to be able to contribute to Auroville."

His work in Pondicherry makes it virtually impossible for Bhoomi to be active in a permanent Auroville working group. "I was involved in the Auroville Council and the Entry Group, but the last five years I had no time to participate in permanent groups. I am only part of an ad-hoc conflict resolution group that tries to resolve a problem with three Tamil Aurovilians accused of embezzling money. But as soon as my children become older, I would like to join a permanent working group again."

Bhoomi is married to Valarmathi, a qualified nurse who works at the Auroville Health Centre. Their two children attend a school in Pondicherry. "I would have preferred them to go to an Auroville school, but there was no place for my oldest son when, some years ago, the Mirramukhi school suddenly ceased its activities. I took him to a school in



Bhoomi in the Boutique d'Auroville in Pondicherry

Pondicherry, and my second son automatically followed. But this decision would have been different if I had my work in Auroville."

But the stationing in Pondicherry is ideal for another activity, that of organizing competitions for Pondicherry and Auroville basketball teams that lead up to the national basketball championship. "Pondicherry has thirty teams, each consisting of 12 players; Auroville has eight, six men and two women teams. They play against each other. The best players are selected to represent Pondicherry in the national basketball championship. We have managed to include a few Aurovilians in that team," he says proudly.

Asked about the relationship of Tamil Aurovilians to other

Aurovilians, Bhoomi says he hasn't experienced much of a problem. "Only when I started to build my house I met some opposition. I had been living in Aspiration for 15 or 20 years and was a bit tired of community life. I got married and wanted a family life. With my own money and some I had been able to save from the Boutique I started building my house and was suddenly confronted with some community members who argued that my house and my plot were too big. But they themselves were living in similarly-sized plots." Bhoomi admits that his lifestyle does attract envy of people living in Kulapalayam. "The village looks at us Tamil Aurovilians in a different way even though we come from the same village. We lead a better life and that causes resentment. They expect us to help them, give them a job. But our influence in the village is not large. For example, by ourselves we cannot do much to solve the problems that led to the recent murders."

Talking about village politics Bhoomi reflects a moment on the increase of politics in Auroville, such as became evident when the management of the Matrimandir changed hands a year ago. "This is a very disturbing development," says Bhoomi. "We need to get out of that. We can no longer expect a leader to come forward to tell us what we have to do. Instead, the manifestation of Auroville's vision is the responsibility of each working group, each unit and each Aurovilian on the basis of The Mother's guiding principles. We have to work together, and solve our problems by meeting together. It's the only way to go forward."

Carel

## A devoted worker at Matrimandir

Panneer, the man responsible for fixing and removing the discs

"Just a moment, please." He walks over to the pictures of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, reverently places some Aspiration flowers in the small vase in front of them and concentrates. It is 7.30 in the morning; the Matrimandir site is still fresh and undisturbed.

"I came to Auroville to do my service for The Mother," says Panneer by way of introduction. He is 29 years old, comes from a village nearby Sanjeevinagar and is one of those Tamil Aurovilians who prefer to work instead of attending meetings. As a consequence, he is not 'well-known.' But perhaps he should be. For this is the man responsible for fixing all the golden discs on the Matrimandir – and since the primer for the waterproofing 'Kemperol' failed, also for taking them all down again. And when the new primer and the new Kemperol have been applied, it is again Panneer who will fix the discs back in place – all 1410 of them.

A complicated job? "It is very confusing!" says Panneer. "Each disc is fixed at a distance of about half a meter from the Matrimandir by means of three struts of 10 mm steel. These struts are screwed onto the Matrimandir skin at three points. These points form a triangle, but none of these triangles are of the same size. When I start to fix a disc, I first take precise measurements. Then I weld the rods roughly, and we test if the disc fits. If there is no gap between the struts and the Matrimandir skin, and if the foot of the strut follows the curve of the

skin, I do the final welding. And then, when the disc is mounted, we check if it is accurately in line with the other discs in the same row and around it. It is a slow and precise work. And we were moving along quite nicely fixing the discs when it was decided to take all of them down so that the Kemperol could be replaced. This means that I have to keep very careful and detailed notes of the position of each disc and of each set of struts." He shows the storeroom where many struts are waiting to be re-installed, each set neatly tagged.

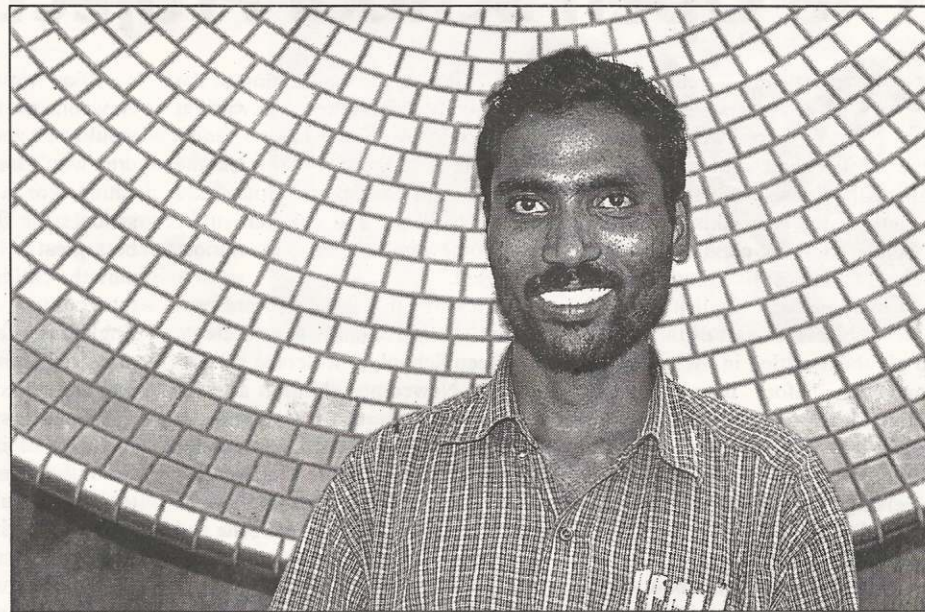
Panneer arrived in Auroville in 1992, when he was only 17 years old. At the time he was working for the Auroville construction unit Atmarati as a metal worker. When Atmarati started working for Matrimandir, Panneer came along. "I was not aware of Sri Aurobindo or The Mother. I was looking at all those foreigners and wondered what they were doing here. It touched my heart to see how dedicated they were doing the work at the Matrimandir and it raised my curiosity about The Mother." In 1995, he moved into Auroville and started living in Kottakarai farm. "I began reading some words of The Mother, which I liked very much. And I became Aurovilian. When the Matrimandir no longer needed Atmarati, I stayed behind. I decided to give my life for the work of The Mother. Earlier, I had been thinking of opening a workshop; now my life became dedicated to manifesting the Matrimandir."

Panneer's decision wasn't under-

stood by his family. He had to completely break-off contact, a drastic decision in Indian social life. "Even when one of my sisters married, I did not go. Now I only go to the Matrimandir, starting at 8 in the morning, leaving at 4.30. I have been doing that now for the last five years, without one day's break. A friend asked me to come visit him in England. But first my job here has to be finished."

Asked if he intends to marry he smiles, "I told myself that first all the discs have to be fixed." And with a grin, "It is actually the fault of the Kemperol primer that my marriage will have to be postponed."

Panneer lovingly demonstrating the latest tool, a Gas Tungsten Arc Welding machine. "It is incredibly precise, and much faster than the conventional arc welding." Panneer is still improving his skills to be able to handle it. Every evening he cycles to the nearby Mettupalayam Industrial Estate of Pondicherry to visit a company that manufactures machine tools for export. "The factory manager gave me permission to see how they their chief welder, a man from Gujarat, does the work. I look at what he is doing." His self-imposed learning benefits the Matrimandir. Even a layman can see



Panneer in front of one of the Matrimandir discs

the difference between the welds done with the old machine and the new one.

When we walk to the site, Panneer shows how the replacement of the Kemperol proceeds in a phased manner. "We don't want a 'naked' Matrimandir, so we do it quarter by quarter. I remove a section of the discs, they remove the layer of old Kemperol, sandblast the skin, fix the new primer and Kemperol, and then I reinstall the discs." Work is underway at the Matrimandir's lower hemisphere. "I will also soon start installing discs underneath the Matrimandir. But the removal of discs from the top part will only start when the new permanent crane on top of the Matrimandir is in place." Will it be ready soon?

"That is a question I have been asked many times," answers Panneer. "I am very interested to finish Matrimandir and was really happy when I heard people speaking about Matrimandir being ready in 2 years. But the problem is that this is not possible. To remove all the discs, replace the Kemperol and reinstall the discs will in my estimate take more than two years. And I am speaking from experience."

The time is 8.15 and work has started. Panneer says goodbye, and on turning begins an animated discussion with a member of his team about removing the next row of discs. "I love this work," he had said. A greater dedication is hardly possible.

Carel



# My school is Auroville, and I am still learning

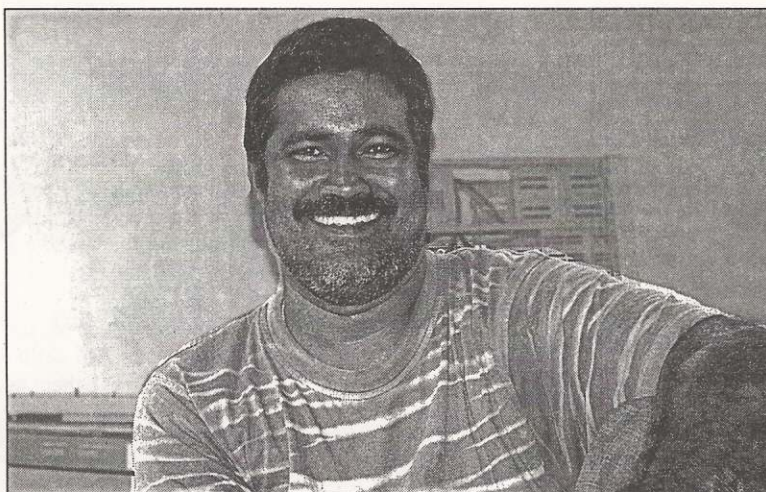
A free-spirited Kumar shares his story

**“H**ey, I don’t want to have this Tamil banner in front of me,” declares Kumar firmly but in a friendly tone. I had just asked him what his perspectives were on being a Tamil Aurovilian. “I was born in Kuyilapalayam into the Tamil culture. That’s all. I don’t regret my background and I don’t take advantage of it. I am a human being and I like to live in Auroville and I don’t want to put any colour on me!”

Born in 1966, Kumar did his early schooling in Kuyilapalayam and then moved to a school in Pondy. “In those days, the village school had classes only up to 5th standard. Then you had to go out to study.” But this was soon put an end to by his family. “I was a bit wild actually,” he says sheepishly. “On the way back from school, I would make trouble with my friends, beat them up and so on. And then there used to be these fields along the way where we stopped to play until it got dark and so we came home late.

All this was quite heavy on my parents, so they stopped me from going to school.”

With nothing to do, Kumar began to hang out with the Tamil Aurovilian youth from Kuyilapalayam. “All of Gordon and Jean’s students – the Rathinams, the Selvarajs – were there. Many of them were living in Udayam, so I tried to stay with them there.” Soon Kumar found himself drawn to Aurelec, an Auroville business unit dealing with electronics. Kumar introduced himself to Ulli, Aurelec’s executive and asked if he could join the company. “Imagine, at that time I hardly knew how to speak English, let alone being able to read or write.” He was taken in as a ‘soldering boy’, assigned the task of joining cables and doing odds and ends. He remained in Aurelec from 1979 till 1991. “It was there I became Aurovilian, I don’t know how and when.” He recalls that time as the most ‘glorious’ period of his life. “In those days lots of resources were available and nobody



Kumar in his house at Djaima

blocked you from learning. So if you had motivation you could do anything you wanted to do.” It was at Aurelec that Kumar taught himself to read and write English, and learn about electronics. “I am 100% self-taught,” he says proudly. “No formal schooling. The management made up of Ulli and

others never treated us like local boys. They encouraged us, gave us money for our education, and kept us psychologically boosted all the time. They always said ‘You are good,’ ‘You’re doing well’. Not once did they tell me that what I was doing was wrong. That somehow kept me going.”

Kumar left Aurelec soon after he met his sweetheart Kala. “It was time for something different.” The two started living together, and two years later, married each other. Did their families approve of their living together? “Both Kala and I are very independent and we do what we like to do,” he replies. “Also Kala comes from one of the first integrated families in Kuyilapalayam and all of them were involved with Auroville one way or another.” Kumar believes that life in Auroville is ‘fantastic’ and does not warrant worrying about what others think about you.

With Kala by his side, Kumar found his entrepreneurial spirit come to the front. “I wanted to be self-supporting now that I had my family. From my experience in Aurelec, I knew I enjoyed electronics and hardware.” So Kumar put the knowledge and skills he picked up at Aurelec to use. He provides services for the power systems that support computers and occasionally assembles computers for private users. “All that I am doing now is totally what Aurelec gave me. For me my work experience was the most valuable gift besides the people with whom I worked, and those who placed their confidence in me.” Kumar has a straightforward

approach to his work. “I don’t run around trying to get x amount of money each month. I work only with people whom I like, and with whom I have good contact – that way I am happy and they are happy. And believe me, I am kept busy.”

Besides electronics, Kumar is also involved in small-scale farming. He stewards a piece of land in Djaima where he cultivates fruit trees, and he supplies the produce to the Solar Kitchen and Pour Tous. “I find farming very relaxing. It gives me a break from the monotony of the computer world.” With the orchards close to his house, he also finds that farming is a great way to have the whole family involved and spend time together.

Kumar feels some concern about the attitude of youngsters in Auroville. “This coming generation does not seem to recognize what Auroville provides for them,” he says. “They do not realise what opportunities they actually have and they are not fully using it.” Kumar and Kala send all their three children to Auroville schools. His oldest daughter Gayatri, plans to do her O and A levels at Future School. About the controversial topic of sending Auroville children to outside schools, Kumar has this to say. “I really oppose it because I feel people who do that take Auroville’s energy and put it outside.”

What connections does he feel he has to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo? “I don’t want to lie. Till now I didn’t even realize these things and I am not a yogi yet,” he says with a smile. How about the Hindu religion? “I am not at all religious. But we celebrate all the festivals; Deepavali, Pongal... and that’s because of the kids. They love it. When festivals come, they get all excited. It is psychological. ‘Oh we have to get new clothes, new this and new that’, and a lot of food has to be cooked.” He adds, grinning, “This whole week, they have only been eating.” (Deepavali ended a few days ago)

Kumar turns suddenly reflective. “I am here and I do my work. There is a lot to really discover within ourselves. I think it’s only in Auroville one can do this.”

Priya Sundaravalli

## Constructing the city

continued from page 1

The year was 1988. Dhanapal started doing small works, until Prem Malik asked him to build a room in his house in Auromodèle for a fixed price. It was his first big job in interaction with the architects Roger and Raman. “Every day I cycled down to Pondicherry to buy the materials, and sometimes I had to go twice,” remembers Dhanapal. “But the work I did was seen by Prem’s neighbours, such as André Hababou, who liked it.” Soon afterwards, André asked him to help build the ferro-cement roof panels of the Auromodèle factory. “Work kept flowing in. In 1992 we renovated a building in Pondicherry where the Kalki shop was to come. I was asked to build houses in Auromodèle and built the Information Center, the Vikas community and elsewhere. Life was good, and my company was flourishing.”

The turning point came in 1998 when Dhanapal was constructing the entire Surrender community consisting of 21 units and a water tower. When the project was coming to a close, the costs had soared beyond estimates and the prices at which the units had been sold appeared to be too low. Various occupants complained about the bad quality of construction and faulty design. The Auroville Fund and Asset Management Committee investigated. It allocated equal blame for mismanagement to the contractor, the project managers and to the architect, though it found that of all the parties to this debacle it was Dhanapal who had suffered the most and had the least resources either psychologically or financially to address the situation.

“I still don’t like to talk about it, even though the issue is now over and good relationships have been re-established,” says Dhanapal. For the blow had been a crushing one. “I was very depressed. I had lost my work and my savings, and my tools had been sold to meet the debts. I wanted to close my unit and give up. But Vijaya gave me unfailing support. She urged me to start again and show my talents, as it was not all my mistake. And also, unexpectedly, I received a lot of emotional support from many Aurovilians.”

And so Dhanapal started once again, now, with Anupama as architect, building SAWCHU at Bharat Nivas. The errors of the past became lessons for the future. No longer would the estimates of a project’s cost be left to the architect. Instead, Dhanapal hired his own quantity surveyors and accountants and became professional. “Today I know what I am doing in all details. And

this works so well that nowadays I work on contracts, on the basis that all the designs are final. It is a fairer system. The client knows the price, and will only be charged extra if the designs are changed. The other system, whereby the contractor charges 15%, has always created the suspicion that the contractor has an interest in increasing the costs.” Dhanapal points out that a good contractor cannot be a desk manager but needs a daily interaction with the workers, suppliers and architects. “You have to be a worker yourself. I come to the site regularly, and will be there when any concreting or any other work goes on at night. You can’t play the ‘I am the boss’ game.”

The Surrender experience also opened Dhanapal’s eyes to a deeper reality of Auroville than he had related to before. “Many people had supported me throughout the experience, and I started to realise how many Aurovilians have a truly Auroville spirit. They had a faith in me and helped me to start again. One day, Roger Anger saw me walking on the road when I was very depressed and he said, ‘Look, you will come back, believe in Mother. Don’t worry.’ I started to learn a bit about Mother, and slowly, I got more involved with Auroville as a whole. You see, many Tamil Aurovilians feel inferior to the Westerners. We do not have their level of education, we do not master English well enough, and we are not so good in expressing ourselves at meetings. So there has always been a tendency to only stick to one’s own work. But especially in the last years, this attitude has been changing.” When, during the discussions on the management change of Matrimandir a signature campaign had been launched warning that Western Aurovilians were taking over the Matrimandir, Dhanapal and other Aurovilians launched a counter signature campaign stating that the Indian Aurovilians were happy with the proposed management changes. “Many Tamil and other Indian Aurovilians signed this petition. It was the beginning of the awareness that we, the Tamil Aurovilians, should be more actively involved in Auroville. We called a meeting which drew more than 180 Tamil Aurovilians. Soon after this event, the Mira’s Women Group was created and we started the movement ‘What we can do for Auroville’. Even though we have our difficulties with each other, the awareness that we Tamilians have to play an important role in manifesting Auroville is growing.” He points at the increasing importance of commercial units that are run by

Tamil Aurovilians. “They will increasingly contribute to Auroville. But you should be aware that Tamil Aurovilians also have responsibilities towards their villages and their family members who are not Aurovilians. My unit sometimes donates to the Auroville schools and monthly to the Auroville Central Fund, but I also make donations to village sport groups and the temple, and I help my family whenever needed.” The fact that Dhanapal is the son of a former headman is also a factor in this decision.

The ‘What we can do for Auroville’ group has not only been successful in organizing some festival events, but is now also dealing with Tamil people accused of embezzling money from Auroville. “In coordination with the Auroville Council we selected ten Tamil people to deal with the issue. It was very difficult and a lot of other problems came out as well. We are still working on it.” Reflecting on the process, he adds, “I think that this has been a good development, creating a pride in Auroville and in us being Aurovilians. Now more Tamil people will be willing to come forward and over time the feeling that Tamil Aurovilians are inferior to North-Indians or Westerners will disappear. For this attitude has to go. We have to live and work together. And a greater Tamil involvement will also help to address the problems of admission that Auroville now faces of people who come from the nearby villages.”

Asked for his views on the future of his son Pradeep, Dhanapal insists that he be given a full education and be taught discipline. “I did not study much; I only received what Auroville gave me. But it is my dream that he becomes an architect or an engineer so that he can follow in my footsteps and join my unit Auronirmatha in due time. But all that is for the future. He is now in the Kindergarten, and I have heard good things about Transition School’s education. But the Auroville High School must be such that he can enter a university afterwards, otherwise I will have to send him to some other school to get a diploma. I want my son to study at a university, just like the children of many Western Aurovilians who go back to their home country to study at a university. It is only by providing equal education that feelings of inequality between Western and Indian children can be dissolved from the beginning. I am confident that our new generation will work together, probably better than we adults do.”

In conversation with Carel

## “I realized this was my home”

continued from page 1

“For the past three years I’ve been translating selections from the weekly Auroville News (now News and Notes) into Tamil. As my target group is the whole Tamil community I don’t go for a literal translation but try to use as simple a language as possible: it reads more like a Tamil newspaper. Every week it goes out to every Tamil household in Auroville and this has really had an effect. Now there’s a feeling among Tamil Aurovilians that Auroville is beginning to take care of them and to consider them important participants in the collective process.” Thillai would also like to bring out a monthly newspaper which introduces the ideal and activities of Auroville to the people of the bioregion for “communication is an essential step towards human unity.”

This is very fine. But doesn’t human unity also imply transcending one’s particular cultural background? How far have Aurovilians succeeded in this? “I think in the early days there was more success – the first Western Aurovilians mixed very easily with the local people. Today Aurovilians are more...territorial, individualistic.”

And what about Thillai himself? “When it comes to something like marriage for my children I certainly won’t take the traditional Tamil route: I’ll advise them, but the choice of partner will be theirs. At the same time, I don’t feel I’m here to set an example to others. The whole atmosphere has to change first and then things like caste and cultural traditions will disappear automatically: you can’t impose anything.”

“Our ultimate aim here is to go from one stage to another: I’m trying for that. At present there is a tendency in the community to approach things very intellectually, but this only brings confusion. We have to concentrate more on spirituality, on Mother’s vision, and to try for perfection in our work, whatever the work may be. And everybody who is working in this spirit should be treated equally: there is still too much inequality in Auroville.”

“Ultimately, I feel the Divine Force is here. If we all call upon this Force it will change everything. I’m the proof of this: because I trusted in the Force I managed to come through all my troubles.”

From an interview by Alan



# A powerful new planning tool

But are we underutilizing its potential?

Lata and Prashant met at the University of Pennsylvania where she was studying regional planning and he had returned to do a project, having previously studied landscape architecture there. In those days, this university was something like the Holy Grail for people like Lata and Prashant who were interested in environmental issues, for the head of faculty, Ian McHarg, was regarded as the "father of ecological planning".

"During the first semester," remembers Lata, "we didn't design anything. Instead, we were given a landscape which we had to study and understand. First of all we studied the natural resources – the topography, hydrology, soils, vegetation, wildlife etc. – and then we studied the human ecology – the people who lived there over time, their occupations, socio-economic condition, demography, the transportation network. Then we were given a land use, like sanitary landfill, and we had to find the location for it which would do least damage to the ecology and to the inhabitants of that landscape."

One of the key tools they were introduced to was GIS or Geographic Information Systems. "GIS," explains Prashant, "is any system of computerized information that has a spatial component to it. In other words, the information is linked to a specific location on the surface of the earth." GIS allows many different kinds of information – ecology, land use, transportation system, electrical connections – about a specific location to be stored in such a way that a multi-dimensional image of that site emerges. Backed by powerful computer programmes, GIS then allows high-speed presentation and reorganization of that data according to the needs of the user. "GIS can and is used in many different fields," continues Prashant. "It can be used to predict natural disasters, to find oil, to monitor the effects of pollution.

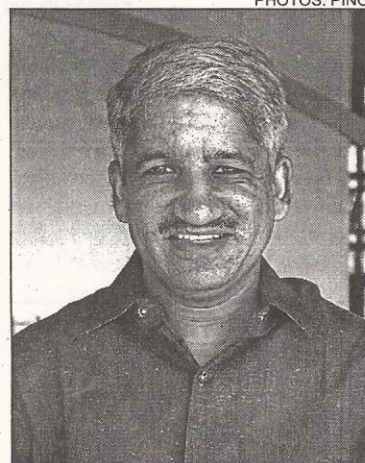
McDonalds use it to determine the best location for a new restaurant! However, the effectiveness of GIS depends upon the accuracy of the data collected and upon the ability of the user to ask the right questions of it. The more precise the question, the more useful will be the answer."

After graduating Lata and Prashant became GIS specialists. They worked for environmental groups and also for the biggest maker of GIS software in the world, ESRI. In 2000 they visited Auroville. "I'd stayed here between 1984-6 as an

been trained would, in turn, train others so that a community of GIS professionals would come into being. This hadn't happened. Moreover, the groups which were using GIS were not clear about the questions they wanted answered. In other words, a powerful tool was being underutilized.

Lata and Prashant looked for opportunities to use their GIS skills. Pashi Kapoor and Joss asked them to assist in a projected Biosphere Reserve project and they started working in the Town Hall. After

PHOTOS: PINO



Lata and Prashant

architect trainee, and later as an Aurovilian," says Lata, "and I'd always promised myself I would return. But in 2000 we came with a specific object – to see if we could help introduce GIS to Auroville for we saw tremendous potential for its use here." As a first step, they enabled an individual working in Auroville to attend training courses in California, from which he returned with GIS software donated by ESRI's Conservation Programme.

However, when Lata and Prashant returned to Auroville two years later they were disappointed at the lack of progress. The intention had been that the individual who had

some months Lata and Prashant made a presentation of GIS to Roger. "He liked it," remembers Prashant. "As he was leaving he said something like, 'Why not overlay the Galaxy and see how it works on the township site?' We never did this as the galaxy was still not geo-referenced at the time. What we did do was a rough and limited analysis: we looked at the locations of the proposed radial roads and green corridors in relationship to the topography of the township area."

"When you look at topography," explains Lata, "the first thing you look at is the water situation. Where is it? Where is it flowing? Then you

try to ensure that these areas are afforested in order to check the water-flow and improve percolation and water quality. Roads are definitely not a good idea, but we saw at once that some of the proposed radial roads are located on water-sensitive sites. Three or four of the radials only require minor adjustment in their alignment to solve the problem. However, two radials – the Aurodam and Prayatna radials – are entirely in the wrong place from an ecological point of view." "Aurodam is a particularly sensitive area," continues Prashant, "because it contains the only water-body in the Auroville township area which exists for almost the whole year. So we were very concerned when we also noted that the Master Plan locates this water-body in one of the highest density residential areas of the future Township."

One of the basic tenets of ecological planning is that you don't examine things in isolation. Consequently, Lata and Prashant also widened their lens to include the immediate bioregion. Specifically, they looked at the route of the proposed access roads to the township, two of them connecting to the old Madras road, two to the new East Coast Road. "When we looked at the latest satellite images we noticed there were problems," says Prashant. "Two of these access roads would run through villages, another very close to a canyon. When we pointed this out to the planners, it was obvious that they hadn't realized this."

So how did Auroville's Future respond to these findings? "While there was a certain openness to make minor adjustments in road alignment," says Lata, "We got the impression that larger changes were not so welcome. When we wanted to understand why, for example, there were twelve radials or why the parks were located where they were, we had to be really persistent to get answers. We were quite prepared for

the "Mother said" sort of answers but sometimes these were also not forthcoming. This was frustrating because we feel that people should be aware of the basis upon which town planning decisions are being made in Auroville.

"We believe that planning is an integrative process. It involves the collection of a lot of different information which is then looked at and discussed by those holding different perspectives. If we look at the Town Plan, for example, the data would include the topography, the present patterns of habitation and communication as well as the Galaxy concept, which is a very powerful concept perspective. All these different perspectives are known in Auroville, but they are held by individuals or groups who don't come together at present. This means that the present planning process is not integrative; on the contrary it seeks to impose a particular concept – the Galaxy – without considering other factors."

"This is very much a 1960s approach to planning," adds Prashant, "this is how Chandigarh and Brasilia were built. It reflects one of the tenets of Modernism – of the supremacy of Man over Nature. But times have changed and planning today is more evolved."

"I believe that with goodwill we can embark upon a collaborative planning process which will result in a solution which optimises all the perspectives," concludes Lata. "For example, the spirit of the Galaxy can be preserved while making it more sensitive to environmental factors. But the goodwill, the willingness to sit together and consider other perspectives is the first prerequisite. GIS is a very powerful tool for understanding different views and for experimenting with different scenarios, but without goodwill even sophisticated tools like GIS can be of little use."

From an interview by Alan

## AUROVILLE INTERNATIONAL

# Volunteering for Auroville

Young Germans do social service in the community

For almost four years now Auroville International (AVI) Germany has been authorized by the appropriate ministry of the German Government to send up to six young men per year to Auroville to do a year of social service. This is an alternative to them doing military service or other forms of social service in Germany. AVI Germany receives more than 1,000 applications per year for this programme, but most of the applicants lose interest when they learn the details, particularly the very little money they will receive. Those who are still determined to go are invited to the annual German AVI meeting, where the members have several intense sessions with them, explaining the various rules and requirements and getting to know them better.

So far, more than twenty volunteers have come to work in Auroville. The ministry specifies that they must work in the fields of village development or health so, among other things, they have assisted in village-oriented Auroville schools like Udavi, Isaibalam and New Creation, in village cultural centres, and in programmes for the promotion of renewable energy and sustainable water management. In their spare time they have helped organize village tours for visitors to Auroville, started a toy workshop for village children (for which funds were raised in Germany) and

developed a partnership between Isaibalam and a German school.

The first volunteers had to display a real pioneering spirit: AVI Germany could offer some contact addresses but they had to discover for themselves where they could work in the community. Moreover, Auroville was not enthusiastic at first due to a negative experience with a similar French programme in the past. Over the years, however, more and more Aurovilians have appreciated the energy and enthusiasm of these young volunteers, many of whom revisit Auroville after their period of service, and two of whom have even joined the community.

The volunteers are required to send AVI Germany biannual reports of their experiences in Auroville. These make interesting reading. So far, not one of them has regretted volunteering to work in Auroville. On the contrary, they emphasise how it has assisted in their personal development: "The last year has been a catharsis from which I emerge strengthened", "It has given my life a new direction and showed me a path to follow. May many more get this chance!", "I find the perspective on life I've experienced here very important for a more conscious perspective on life in Europe", "Values like responsibility, work ethic and regularity are more important for me than before", "What is

most interesting and special about Auroville is that it is what you make of it! Here I have stopped moaning and grumbling and started to work on myself. To people who are open and prepared to serve truth and goodwill and who have realized that we must start to rethink how we live our lives I would really recommend coming to Auroville."

But, of course, they also see and report on the shortcomings they experience. For example, as many of them are interested in sustainability and eco-friendly, holistic thinking they seem rather shocked by the apparent lack of ecological consciousness and activity in "The City the Earth Needs". And then there is the matter of Auroville's relationship with the villages. All the volunteers do at least some work in the villages, where they were struck by the friendliness and openness of the people. As one volunteer put it, "I guess the contact that has been established between us, young people from Germany and young adults from the neighbouring villages of Auroville, is a bridge between the cultures which will not be destroyed in a lifetime." In Auroville itself, however, they missed this spirit of togetherness and sometimes experienced what they termed a "colonialist" attitude towards the local people.



German civil servant Lloyd working in the Aurowind workshop of Mohanam

A third point mentioned in many reports was the feeling that they were not welcomed by some older Aurovilians, although some Aurovilians were very helpful and went out of their way to support the young volunteers. Contacts with young Aurovilians were also unexpectedly difficult to establish. One issue which has still not been resolved concerns a donation made by the father of a volunteer two years ago to create accommodation for the volunteers. So far, there is no agreement within the community concerning where such accommodation could be constructed.

Until now, the German ministry has only authorized young men to do

volunteer work in Auroville. However, more and more young women who want to do a year of social or ecological service in the community are contacting AVI Germany and, with support from AVIS (Auroville Volunteering, Internships & Studies programs), some have already managed to work here as volunteers.

As a member of AVI Germany puts it, "We are confident that these young people are the best bridge-builders and will certainly help to spread the Auroville spirit to the world. May they be genuinely welcome!"

Friederike  
(Friederike is a Board member of AVI Germany)



# Theatre of the oppressed

Colombian guest Hector Aristizabal's 'revolutionary' theatre

My first contact with Hector Aristizabal happened through sound. One late Friday morning at the gate of Future School, Auroville's high school, the sound of a narration by a male voice accompanied by a rhythmic drum beat spilled out from the seminar room. "We have a Colombian story-teller with us today," whispered Li-Mei as I walked in. Later I learnt that Hector had spoken about the situation of youth in the USA and specifically the incarcerated youth he works with in Los Angeles. He had introduced the topic through a traditional Mayan story based on their ancient belief that all children are gifts and bring gifts to the societies they belong to.

Short and stocky with a square face and a matching jawline, Hector Aristizabal exudes a forceful presence befitting a man of the theatre. In Simone's classroom at Transition school, his darting eyes catch every movement of the rambunctious 10 year olds. His gravelly voice, incongruous with its soft Spanish-accented English, issues sharp commands. "Think with your body, not your mind." The group is in the middle of a theatre game where players enact movements that contradict what they verbally express. "I am sleeping," he says while miming a football player launching himself mid-air to kick an invisible ball. "What are you doing?" he asks the child next to him. The children move unselfconsciously, responding to his quicksilver transformations of persona.

"In my country and most of South America, theatre is about social issues, and we all started with it," says Hector. "Popular theatre, revolutionary theatre or Marxist theatre, are its many names and it aims to raise awareness of the common people." As a native of Colombia, he found little peace under the ruling dictatorial regime, and so theatre became a central part of Hector's life. He says, "The Colombian government did not like people expressing themselves. Artists, thinkers, writers, theatre people were all targeted or prosecuted." He himself was tortured at the age of 22, and his younger brother kidnapped and killed at 33. Fearing for his own life, Hector fled Colombia fourteen years ago, and moved to the United States. Having a professional training in psychology, he practices during the day, and gives himself to theatre the rest of his time. "It is not possible to exist and support a family on theatre alone," he explains.

In the USA, Hector found himself gravitating towards Augusto Boal's

'Theatre of the Oppressed'. It is a style where theatre is seen as a 'liberating art form to bring out critical consciousness and sow the seeds of imaginative cultural transformation in both audience and actors'. "It uses techniques to activate passive spectators into becoming 'spect-actors'," explains Hector. "We explore peaceful alternatives by acting out our conflicts. We believe that it is through the exploration of conflict that conflict can get transcended. We use the body energy to change situations. As energy gets expressed through the body, solutions also get discovered by the body, and in this way, theatre becomes a safe space to express and explore what one feels or desires."

Hector offered a variety of theatre and performance related workshops in and around Auroville. In one of Hector's largest workshops at the Sri Aurobindo Auditorium with over 40 participants including a smattering of children, the subject of personal conflict was explored. With a group of 10 year olds in Transition School, the concept of what community meant to them was examined. The issue of Peace was explored at the Unity pavilion around George Nakashima's 'Peace table'. At the Mohanam Cultural Centre, he offered community drumming sessions and did theatre workshops with the village children. At Adishakti, Veenapani Chawla's theatre, he did a workshop for its performers and youth from the surrounding villages as well as some Aurovilians. It was in this workshop that a very powerful image got played out – the situation of Sydo's death, the Dutch Aurovilian who was murdered in January this year. "It was so courageous, so hard to bring out and present it as it was," he recalls. "And we could see that they were very careful in presenting it. The energy was pulling away from the scene as if it was hard to face the situation." Hector picked this tableaux for the group to explore further encouraging the participants to go deeper. "And then not only did we see how things could have developed in this scenario in real time but we also



Hector Aristizabal in an animated discussion with children of Transition school

witnessed how things could have gone in other directions." In the discussion that followed, the participants, including some local Tamil youth, expressed how painful it was to see this scene and how bad they continue to feel about what happened. "Not only this, but also how they have internalized this shame. 'We did that!' Murders happen quite frequently within the Tamil community, but this was a killing that happened to a European." Hector believes that these enactments call attention to where the connection lies between Auroville and the villages, and highlights some of the perceptions they have of each other.

Theatre according to Hector may also be used as a diagnostic tool for learning about a community. In the workshops at Auroville, Hector observed recurrent issues of communication, hierarchy and/or privilege coming up. He also noticed something unique about the community: "I have never been in a place where the presence of the spiritual is as present as it is in Auroville. It always comes up in the images – comes up in solutions, and it features a lot in the discussions that follow. What was most interesting was this 'magic thinking' about how we're going to find the answer from The Mother" He continues, "I noticed that every time there is a rupture somewhere or when people are not clear how to proceed with a scene, the Mother shows up – someone recites the Mother or calls her energy!" Hector feels that while this can be expected in a spiritual

community like Auroville, he also has a slight word of warning. "It can become a very easy way to avoid exploring more genuinely into things because the Mother will take care of them."

What has his experience been in Auroville? "When you come from the other side of the world and you are tired, this is not a welcoming place, and you want to be welcomed as a guest. At the Visitor Centre it is like 'What is your name?', 'what do you want?', 'where are you going?' – no one tells you that you may need a bike or a motor cycle... On the internet, this place looks so together and you imagine a little village where here is this, and here is that. No way! It is roads that go nowhere, or they all look the same and the maps are old." It is only in the last five days of his two and a half week stay that his contact with Auroville happened and a deluge of workshops were requested from Hector. "Once you get to know people, it is incredible!" he beams.

With his stay in Auroville being so rich and varied, at least towards the end, Hector is already planning to come back for a longer period. "I would love to experiment with different things in one place. I can see so many ways I could work with here, with youth, with people involved with groups and organizational stuff, but mostly with the community and the villages. I feel there is great potential for creating bridges between Auroville and the villages."

Priya Sundaravalli

## Première concert for two pianos

Salle Auropax is quiet as the artists sit at the two Yamaha grand pianos. Contrary to tradition, they don't sit facing each other but next to each other, as they had only one day to prepare for the concert. Sylvia Hewig-Troesch, the German pianist who has performed in Auroville before, came on a lightning visit of three days, during which she packed two concerts: one at Pitanga playing music of Bach, Mozart and Chopin, the other at Salle Auropax. Here, together with Heinrich, she gave the first concert for two pianos in Auroville. How exactly Heinrich managed to get two grand pianos into Auroville – one of which is a 2.70m concert grand – is a tale of grace. "One was a gift from friends," he says, "while the other was inherited."

Having two grands in one space makes it now possible to perform in Auroville the repertoire written for two pianos. Until the twentieth cen-



Sylvia and Heinrich

tury, this repertoire was sadly limited. It consisted of only twenty-two works by major composers such as Couperin, the Bach family, Clementi, Mozart, Mendelssohn,

Schumann, Chopin, Brahms and Dvorak. But it increased dramatically in the twentieth-century when composers such as Ravel, Debussy, Stravinsky and Bartók wrote

enthralling works for two pianos. The growing interest among these composers in writing for two-piano was linked to the increasing number of piano duos on the concert circuit.

It was no wonder then that Sylvia and Heinrich chose, with one exception, to play music from the 20th century. The exception was the *Variations on a Theme of Beethoven* written in 1874 by French composer Camille Saint-Saëns, with which the concert opened. Afterwards followed the *Variations on a Theme by Paganini* written in 1941 by Polish composer Witold Lutoslawski, and two works by the French composer Francis Poulenc: *L'embarquement pour Cythère* (1951) and *Elégie* (1959). The concert ended with the captivating *Scaramouche* (1939) by French composer Darius Milhaud.

'Scintillating,' was the overwhelming response. We look forward to more.

Carel

## In brief

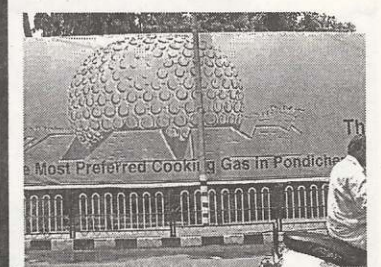
### AVI 2005 in Auroville

The annual meeting of the Auroville International Centres 2005 will take place in Auroville from January 14-18 at the Tibetan Pavilion. The theme for this meeting is Auroville's connection with the world. For more info contact [tine@auroville.org.in](mailto:tine@auroville.org.in)

### Youth Conference

Auroville will be hosting a UNESCO sponsored youth conference during the week of February 21-28, 2005, on the theme of 'Youth for Human Unity – exploration for new values through intercultural and inter religious dialogue.' The conference will be open to about 100 youth from 18-25 years in the SAARC region (South Asian countries including India, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Bhutan, and Maldives). Selected religious leaders who have demonstrated commitment to intercultural and inter-religious dialogue are being invited to participate. This conference is part of a series of conferences sponsored by UNESCO as part of a broader inter-religious dialogue programme.

### Matrimandir misuse



A popular cooking gas supplier in Pondicherry has been using a picture of the Matrimandir to advertise his product. Some Aurovilians did not find this a gas.

### Indian psyche

Shri Manoj Das gave a series of talks at Bharat Nivas exploring the Indian psyche through myth, legends and folklore.

### Speed breakers

Much to the delight of many Aurovilians, most speed breakers were removed for security reasons for the visit of the President of India. An appeal was made not to rush to restore them as they do little to improve driving conditions on the roads and can at times be dangerous.

### Water videos

A series of short videos on topics connected to water, made by the Centre for Science and Environment, was shown in the Town Hall.

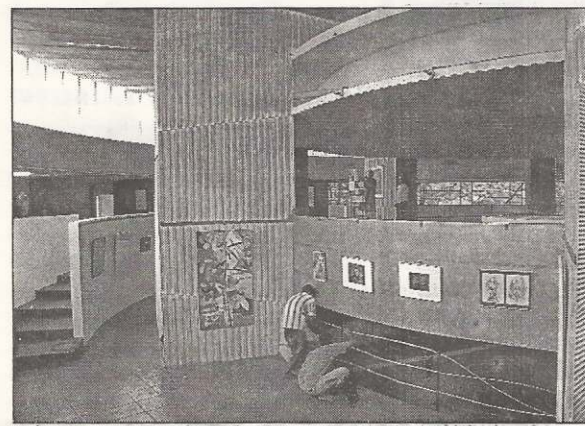
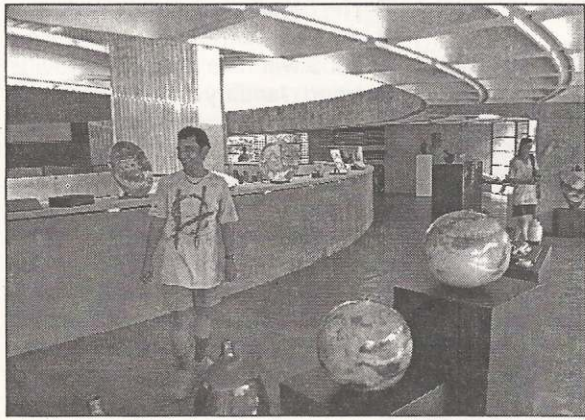
### Corrections

The November issue of Auroville Today contained a few errors. The article on the Water Seminar stated that the Suryajal desalination system using solar photovoltaic energy to energize reverse osmosis plants was designed in the UK. It is in fact designed in India.

The last line of the article on Savitri Bhavan has dropped away. It should have read: But Shradhdhavan is not anxious about the future. "If we stick to our ideals and objectives, if this work is of real value, this will be taken care of. The Supreme Lord will finance it." The article was written by Carel.



# Opening night at Gallery Square Circle



**G**allery Square Circle, named after the Indian architectural philosophy of the square representing the earthly dimension and the circle the divine, threw open its doors and planted its avant garde presence in Auroville on November 10th 2004. Hosting as its first event, YATRA, the Auroville artist's Group Show, it presented the artistic talents of over 50 Auroville artists, both professional and amateur. The result was an exuberant display of the diverse expressions of the residents of the township.

The gallery has been created at Bharat Nivas out of the old restaurant building and is refreshingly modern. Dharmesh of Buildaur has cleverly managed to create an illusion of an unending spiral, resulting in a quirky and strangely playful space. Comments Adil, one of the artists, "For me, it is a space which we all need in the City of Dawn."

The opening night was grand and festive both in the overwhelming turnout, bonhomie, diversity and vitality of Auroville. In a remarkable coincidence, the Deepavali celebration hosted by the Tamil Aurovilians followed the event in the neighbouring space with a spectacular firework display outdoors and an hour long cultural show at the Sri Aurobindo Auditorium. The celebrations concluded with a grand banquet at the Solar Kitchen. November 10th 2004 will definitely go down as a very special day – new life has been infused into Bharat

Clockwise from top left: (1) admiring the sculptures; (2) Auroville artists united; (3) fun at Deepavali; (4) part of the exhibition; (5) the youngest artist Jiyeah next to her work. Photos: (1) Ireno; (2 and 4) Adil, (3) Mahesh, (5) Priya Sundaravalli



## MONSOON

### Exceptional rains



ground get filled up. At this stage, run-off starts. The run-off fills larger holes, dams, canyons and finally the Kolams and Erys. Then, the interconnecting canals from tank to tank start to operate. Finally the water reaches Ustery or Kaluvelly swamp and then flows into the sea. This is happening right now.

Auroville gets on average 62 days of rain per year. The maximum was 91 and the minimum 35 days. Most of these are light rains; there are only 31 rainy days per year with more than 10mm of rainfall, 19 days per year more than 20mm, and only one day per year with rainfall exceeding 100 mm. Heavier rainfall is definitively not common. The maximum rainfall in Auroville was 324mm on November 4th, 1978, followed by 272mm on December 10th 1998. Since 1968, only 6 showers of more than 200mm rainfall have occurred. This year on the 30th of October a rainfall of 201mm was recorded. Gilles (Auroville Water Harvest)

left: Irumbai lake, full once again

Monthly rainfall (mm)	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov
2004	1.4	0	4	3	344	1	22	92	196	478	329
Average	17	25	13	12	46	46	74	121	140	381	335

Seasonal rainfall (mm)	Winter January – February	Hot Weather period (March – May)	South-West monsoon June – September	North-East monsoon October – December
2004*	1.4	351	312	807
Average	42	71	381	792

\* UNTIL END OF NOVEMBER

**T**he North-East monsoon has been average, contrary to preceding years. For the first time in 5 years the Erys (irrigation tanks) of our area filled up and overflowed. Irumbai tank is full to the brim and has generated a beautiful cataract at the overflow structure, where children of Kottakarai come to play. This only happens when the previous storage areas have all been filled. At first, when the intensity of the rain exceeds a certain value, the soil gets saturated, and the vegetation absorbs the rain-water. Then the small holes in the

## BOOK REVIEW

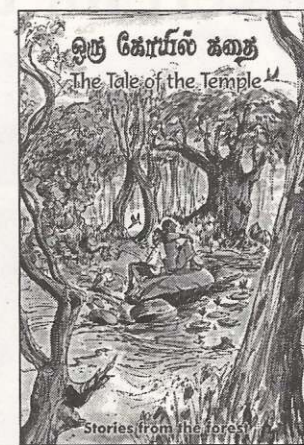
### The Tale of the Temple

**T**he Tale of the Temple is an illustrated short story about two children who manage, with the help of classmates and their eco-club teacher, to save a remnant of old forest from being destroyed for the purposes of development. The story, written by Paul Blanchflower, is aimed at schoolchildren and entertainingly conveys not only the magic and importance of indigenous forests but also the dangers of unconscious

garbage disposal, the need to take a practical first step when confronted with what seem overwhelming challenges, and the possibility of win-win solutions. At the end of the book are quizzes (winners will be sent a poster of the forest) and an opportunity to colour in a drawing.

The Tale of the Temple, which is the first of seven stories about the forest, is beautifully illustrated by Emanuele and printed on high-quality art paper. It is written in Tamil and English (the Tamil translation is by Thillai) and as the translations are on facing pages the book can also be an enjoyable way of improving one's language skills.

Alan



The Tale of the Temple: Stories from the Forest. 30 pages, price Rs 50. For further information contact Pitchandikulam Bio-Resource Centre, Auroville 605101, Tamil Nadu, India. email: tdef@auroville.org.in

#### Subscription information

◆ One year subscription rate: India Rs. 250; other countries Can \$51, € 37, US \$38, UK £25.  
◆ Two year subscription rate: India Rs. 450; other countries Can \$92, € 67, US \$68, UK £45. 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.  
◆ Through our website [www.auroville.org/journals&media/avtoday](http://www.auroville.org/journals&media/avtoday)  
◆ Send your contribution to one of the following Auroville International Centres:

◆ **Germany:** Auroville International Deutschland e.V., Solmsstrasse 6, 10961 Berlin, tel. (49).(0)30-42803150, Fax (49).(0)30-92091376, email: [info@auroville.de](mailto:info@auroville.de). GLS Gemeinschaftsbank, BIC: GENODEM1GLS, IBAN: DE16430609678019389200.  
◆ **The Netherlands:** Auroville International Nederland, email: [info@auroville-int-ned.nl](mailto:info@auroville-int-ned.nl), Postbank account: 3948138, account name: Auroville Int. Ned. Account address: Generaal Knooplaan 85, 5623 MV Eindhoven, (IBAN: NL80 PSTB 0003 9481 38, BIC: PSTBNL21)

◆ **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](mailto: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](mailto:info@aviusa.org); or to  
◆ **U.S.A (2):** Auroville Information Office, PO Box 676, Woodstock NY 12498, tel: (1) 845-679-5358, fax: 5853, email: [AVINY@aviusa.org](mailto:AVINY@aviusa.org)

**Editorial team:** Alan, Carel, Emmanuelle, Julietta, Priya Sundaravalli, Roger. Proofreading: Navoditte. All photos, unless otherwise attributed, have been taken by Shiraz. DTP: Carel. Photo editing: Shiraz.

Printed and published by Carel Thieme on behalf of the Auroville Foundation, and printed at All India Press, Pondicherry, and published at Surrender, Auroville 605101, Tamil Nadu, India.

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