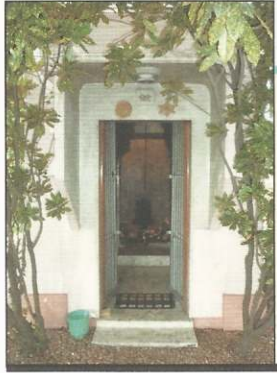


# Auroville Today

OCTOBER 2011, No.267

Auroville's monthly news magazine since 1988



Auroville's Ganesh temple near Auro-Orchard

15 Auroville kids participated in the Life-Saving Swimming Competition in Trivandrum



Visiting a sub centre of the Auroville Health Centre



CARTOON: EMANUELE

## What happened to humour?

“A God who cannot smile could not have created this humorous universe,” wrote Sri Aurobindo. “And, in particular, this humorous Auroville,” he might have added. Because this is a community which, in its yawning gap between ideals and reality, in its inhabitants’ tendency to adopt eccentric positions at the first opportunity and in its blinkered view of its own self-importance and very limited ability to introspect, seems tailor-made for cartoonists and satirists. Yet, very few are sharpening their brushes or pens.

Why? It’s not that Aurovilians are particularly humourless. On the contrary, run into them at Pour Tous or in the Solar Kitchen and you’ll find them, or many of them, to be surprisingly light-spirited. But, somehow, this lightness doesn’t seep into the ‘official’ areas of our existence, the grey General Meetings, the work group encounters, the grinding wheels of our economy, the horrors of housing, the agonies of the entry process. All of these, it seems, are out of bounds to humour. Jokes *interdit, verboten*.

It wasn’t always like this. Back in the 1970s and early 1980s, the Auroville News regularly published cartoons and humorous pieces about our collective life: almost everything then was grist to the humour mill, almost everything then could be laughed at. Now humour, at least in our collective life, has been reduced to the occasional Genius Brother show or Johnny’s kids’ play or an

infrequent cartoon on the cover of News and Notes. It’s as if there is a tacit agreement that our collective life is now too serious a business for levity (when Jesse introduced humour into a recent General Meeting it seemed a truly radical act); that the Genius Brothers are no more than a pleasant entertainment, an evening’s diversion, before we get back to the real purpose of our lives here. For Auroville is about the struggle to change, transformation, and this is no laughing matter.

Or is it? In fact, throughout history we can discern two views of humour in relationship to the important issues of life. On the one hand, from the ancient Greeks onwards, tragedy has been associated with profound statements about the human condition, while comedy has been viewed as a social diversion. On the other hand, many cultures have a rich tradition of ‘divine jokers’ who ridiculed and exploded conventions in order to expose deeper truths. Sri Aurobindo himself, in his letters to Nirodbaran, provides plenty of evidence that humour is not only liberating but also that it is not antipathetic to a deep engagement with the most serious issues of existence.

Of course, when we look at the Auroville of today we can find other reasons why community humour has fallen out of fashion. We’re at a point in our history where the first flush of pioneering optimism has worn off; life, it seems, is far more complicated now, the ideals seem further than ever from being realised. And

the influence of the Foundation, with its bureaucracy and desire for centralised control, cannot be discounted: neither can the threat of Quit Notices, the Damocles Sword hovering over many of our heads, ready to fall if we are perceived by the authorities to step too far out of line.

Then again, the past decades in Auroville have seen major advances in the grey, creeping menace of utilitarianism, with its tendency to judge every activity on the basis of its cost-benefit or immediate practical usefulness to the community. And humour, clearly, is not ‘cost-effective’ in these limited terms.

And yet, there may be a deeper reason why humour is in danger of falling out of fashion here. For when it comes to the struggle to progress, to exceed itself, humanity always seems to have taken one of two paths. There is the Hebraic/Christian, essentially Western one, which glorifies suffering and sacrifice and which sees pain as the spur to progress; and there is the Sunlit Path on which one feasts like a child upon the honeycombs of God. The former sees the world as essentially hostile, a place to be conquered and controlled; the latter is the expression of a profound ‘yes’ to the essential divinity of existence. Could it be that the gravitational force of the Western upbringing experienced by so many of us is once again exerting itself, forcing us into familiar grooves and away from the magic and joy of Auroville mornings?

Perhaps, once again, it is time to choose.

Alan

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# The views of Auroville performers

## Don't laugh! It's Auroville!

Jesse has a background in theatre, he's a member of Genius Incorporated, and runs Theatresports, an improvisation space for the children.

Wasn't it Sri Aurobindo who said words to the effect, "life would be much better if men [we assume he meant women too] took it less seriously"? At the moment we're emerging from a humour-challenged time in our collective life. Again and again we must remind ourselves to see the joy, the opportunity for silliness and play in Auroville, and sometimes that takes a bit of effort. On Auronet, for example, we see a lot of personal attack and grim examination and not a lot of fun. Auroville experiences a very high level of freedom to experiment and play and there are those out there who see that, but for some reason the grim voice of criticism seems to dominate. Why so?

Like most communities, Auroville has its very own small but vocal anti-fun brigade. These people oppose any activity which brings lightness and joy to our (and their) lives, these individuals believe that fun is bad, unspiritual. Yoga is grim, hard, serious, your laughter is disturbing the pursuit of my truth. Like all things, laughter comes and laughter goes. When it goes, the pressure for it to return increases, and now the pressure in Auroville is building.

The community is constantly changing and humour, like all things, must respond and adapt to a rapidly-changing landscape. Auroville's presence on the global stage has become more prominent. We have an increased flow of tourists and visitors and our relationship with the Indian administration has also changed. There's a paranoia that we'll say or do the wrong thing vis-à-vis the outside world, and not without reason. Aurovilians have received Quit Notices in this way. A culture of censorship in our media has emerged. You can't publish anything even faintly controversial in the *News and Notes*, for example, in case it ends up on the desk of someone looking for an excuse to attack, leading to an Aurovillian getting such a Quit Notice. So there's been a loss of innocence and from this we learn and grow.

My recent tour of duty in the Auroville Council dramatically changed my approach to making jokes about the community. Whereas before I freely indulged in making fun of working groups and their excessive bureaucracy, after two years in a working group, I experienced first-hand the difficult, thankless hell it is. You work like a dog and comedians make fun of you.

Genius Incorporated has been an excellent opportunity to study what the community expects from humour. After a five-year break, we returned to the show and a new Auroville landscape with a less critical, more entertainment-based approach and immediately received audience feedback that they missed the criticism. They didn't just want light entertainment; they also want critical analysis of what's going on in the community. The challenge is how to be edgy and critical without making unbalanced personal attacks – we could easily make people laugh by tearing a few individuals to shreds on stage, but none of us consider that good humour. Great humour does not put others down. It focusses on revealing truth, so when you laugh it's the laughter of, 'Ah ha ha ha, that's so true!': it's like an epiphany, and that's a high bar to set.

Finding the right balance is tricky. If you're too radical and separatist, you please most of your audience and make a few people very angry; and if you play too safe the show loses edginess and bite. We're responding to a changing landscape and we're still in the process of getting the mix right, but watch out, the next show might just make fun of you.

## We take ourselves far too seriously!

Johnny has been making the community laugh for decades through his children's plays as well as, more recently, his contributions to the Genius Brothers.

I don't know if we are losing our sense of humour, but we definitely have an enormous and growing sense of our self-importance. When we use phrases like 'The city the Earth needs', it feels like we are pumping ourselves up to convince ourselves we are doing the right thing. But there's a distinction between taking what you do seriously and taking yourself seriously.

I think the first flush of Auroville was built on a wonderful air of flippancy and triviality where anything went. Auroville was such an incredible gift, it was like it dropped out of the sky into our laps. Nobody was breathing down our necks, and the gist of the place was to tear down any kind of establishment or authority which tried to impose itself. We're still trying to do the same thing with the Genius Brothers.

Humour is a wonderful way of pricking self-importance but you can't conjure it up out of nowhere. We've already done all the

obvious targets, like bureaucracy. Personally, I feel I've lost touch with the mechanics of Auroville, so when I think of what next to satirize in one of our shows I have to think very hard about it. It's also complicated by the fact that few cultures share the same sense of humour. With the kids it's easy, they're easily entertained by slapstick. But in the kids' plays we always try to have two levels of humour: one for the kids and one which is a dig at the adult world.

Aurovilians are a wonderful audience; people are so starved of humour here. They love everything which is close to the bone and the appreciation you get is phenomenal. At the same time, we have our own moral police. I was once criticized for encouraging terrible flippancy and triviality in the community when I tried to raise money for fun activities.

And then there is the whole spiritual caution against humour. We did a kids' play once



Genius Incorporated: from left Paul, Wazo and Jesse

## Humour is a kind of liberation

Wazo is a performance artist. Along with Paul and Jesse he puts on the popular Genius Brothers shows which satirize life in the community.

There's a classic belief that humour and spirituality don't mix, so when I arrived in Auroville I was surprised there was so much humour here. In Aspiration in those days, everybody made some humour. But, even so, for some time I thought that art and yoga would not mix; that I would have to stop my artistic work if I was doing yoga because art, music etc. were too 'vital'. Gradually I realized that these things are tools and the important thing is how they are used. You have to ask yourself why you go on stage. Is it for the glorification of your ego, or because you want to be loved? If you are not looking for personal success, if your priority in using these tools is to find ways of bringing people together, then it is fine to use them.

What does it mean to be an artist in Auroville? For me, it means to identify with everybody, to accept that all the painful issues affecting this community are also inside me. Then, afterwards, there has to be a kind of alchemy which transforms all these problems into something else, in my case something humorous. This is not easy. For me, it was very difficult to start Genius Inc. after the painful way that I and my partner felt we had been treated by the community. I had to go through a deep process until I could refine an inner state of joy. Then I could make humour out of it. It's like the Jewish humour. They carry this pain and they turn it into humour as a kind of liberation. This I think is our job. Humour is a wonderful form. Through humour you have the possibility to express all the frustrations and problems of life in a way which is super-light, minimalist, yet deep. And as a community we have to be able to relax, to make fun of ourselves. It's a proof of our maturity. When the French Consul came to a show and saw the way we made fun of ourselves, he said that confirmed that

Auroville is not a sect.

But I don't make fun of everything. If I am fighting with someone, I try not to make sketches about that: you cannot use the stage to resolve problems that you have with people. Also stuff regarding the government is difficult to put on stage. At the same time, my work is to go everywhere where people don't want to go, wherever there is a problem I must be able to tackle it. For example, we've done a lot of sketches about spirituality and religion; I have no problems poking fun at Auroville's pretensions in this area because I have them inside me also.

Often, what people understand by humour is making fun of others but our intention with the Genius Brothers is not to criticize people personally. That's why the people, the situations, we portray are archetypal, not personal. Also, in an international community you need to discover a form of humour which transcends a specific nationality, one which is more universal.

What I would like to do now for the kids is to create a school for the performing arts where we will learn all the processes involved in making a show. People don't understand what this entails. Anybody can crack a joke, but to be humorous on stage on a particular date and at a particular time takes training, technique, and a lot of hard work. Paul and I worked for three years together in the forest, just getting to know each other, before we put on the first Genius Brothers show.

Of course, in the end nothing changes, we've never changed anything with the Genius shows. That's why we also have to do the yoga of the cells, of transformation. Still, after a Genius show I feel better, I feel the vibrations for 24 hours. But by the next day, it's finished. I like that, that there is no star system or stuff like that in Auroville.



Johnny

CARTOON: CHARU

where we sent up the Matrimandir – it was all about the high priests of the Matrimandir, these characters who inflate themselves – and at the performance some people were getting up and storming out! We also put out a kids' newspaper in which I depicted the Matrimandir at an angle under a headline which said that it's tilting and may roll into the sea, and I got people writing to me and saying this is not something to laugh about. This doesn't put me off: it's actually an encouragement to satirize such people. In fact, nothing is off-limits for me in terms of subject-matter.

I'm not depressed about Auroville. I don't go out much but we run a kind of club in Fertile where if you don't wear a smile you shouldn't bother to come. But maybe Aurovilians are becoming more serious. In the recent film about the first generation of Auroville kids, they are all so earnest, serious. But if you interview old Aurovilians like Diego or Jaap, they will take the mickey out of everything. So don't take yourself too seriously, mate!



# What do the cartoonists say?

## A limit to humour?

During Auroville's early years artist Pierre LeGrand regularly published cartoons about our collective life and the community process in the Auroville News.

There was a lightness about Auroville in those earlier years which we have lost. At one time I was putting out one cartoon a week for the news, it was like a weekly report on our collective life, and it was much appreciated. But you can't do that now. The *News and Notes* people tell you there is no space, no money. Then again, the atmosphere now is less conducive to this kind of thing. Since the Foundation was established there are many things we are afraid of saying; we were quite iconoclastic at one point but we can't be like that now.

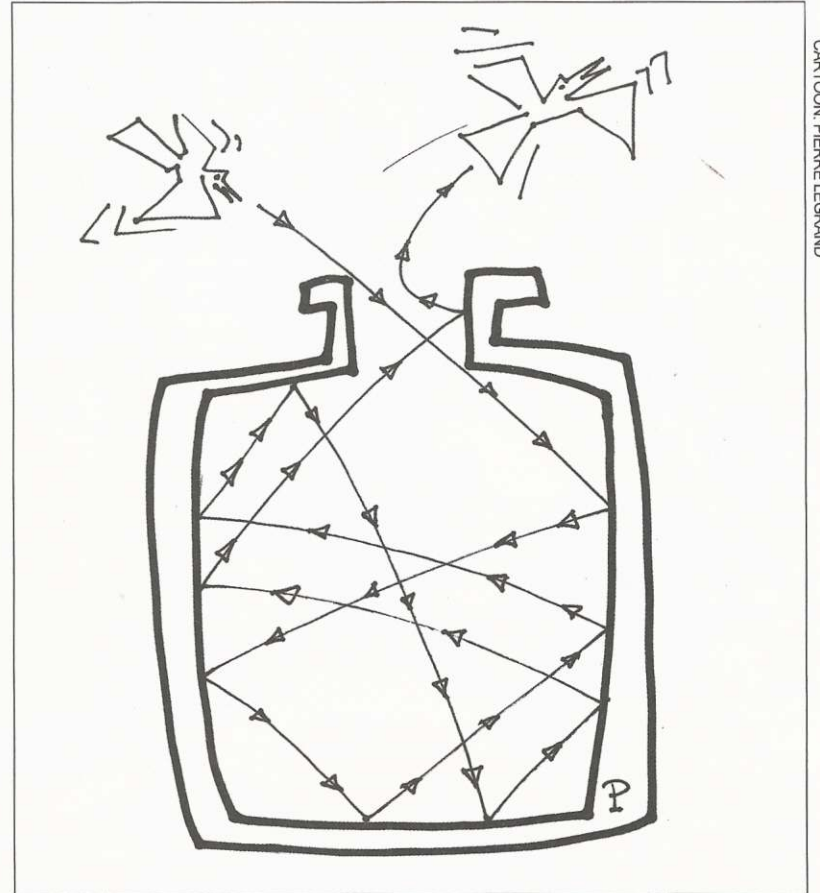
But even when I was doing cartoons regularly I ran into problems. For example, just before the big meeting in the late 1980s which was to decide upon who would be responsible for finishing the Matrimandir, I made a cartoon which showed the Matrimandir shaking. But then an Aurovilian told me I had no right to draw the Matrimandir like this: the Matrimandir couldn't shake. So when you face this kind of humourless response it is very painful. Humour is a very tricky thing. You need a lightness to receive it, you have to be very balanced, really attuned to this level and able to see things from the outside, from a wider perspective. Otherwise you take it as an insult or an attack.

I haven't stopped my cartoon work. In that early series of cartoons I used our collective life as a subject. Now I'm interested in something more abstract, a much

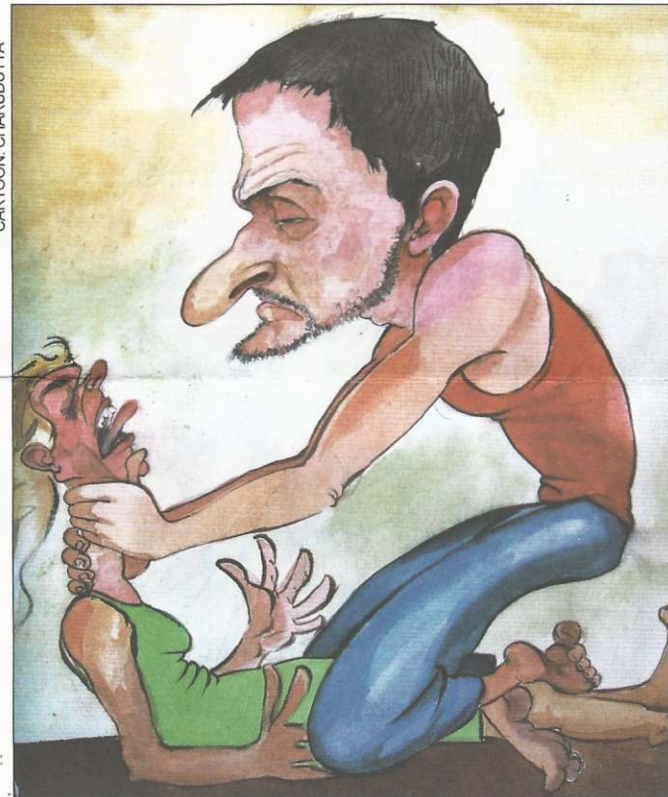
more essential way of looking at the human condition. Sometimes what comes out verges on the absurd, I don't fully understand it myself, but I would like to go more and more in that direction because there I feel I touch something. Another reason I like cartoons is that I have this ambition to make the message of Sri Aurobindo accessible to young people and I think that graphic novels, which are very popular now, may be a way of doing this. Emanuele is working on this but I think there is more to be discovered on this line.

Finally, humour is something you have or you don't have; you can't lose it. But sometimes it is hard to be light. I have some difficulty with the Auroville of today because I believe we miss the essential. I came here for transformation, for the new consciousness, and nothing else counts for me but to get more and more of that. I believe all the rest – beauty, ecology etc. – will come naturally as a consequence of that. To put those things first is a very tragic mistake, I think, and I don't know if that can be represented humorously.

There again, we are very protective of our lives here, we don't want anybody encroaching upon our little paradise. But we are here to build a city to welcome the seekers of the world, not to build our own little paradise. I find it difficult to laugh about this because it's almost a crime, a betrayal. So maybe there is a limit to what can be transformed into humour...



CARTOON: PIERRE LEGRAND



CARTOON: CHARU DUTTA

Easing neck pains

## Few people can really laugh at themselves

Charu is an artist. His caricatures of Aurovilians have appeared on AuroNet and were the subject of two well-received exhibitions not long ago.

Aurovilians are not without humour. When I meet Aurovilians at places like Certitude sports ground, there's quite some lightness between us. But when we get into general meetings and official things, we suddenly become so tight about everything. Perhaps it's because when you are trying to achieve something which is difficult, when you are reaching for something, you don't laugh because you are putting so much energy into the effort.

Most people respond well to my caricatures, although I've made a few enemies because of the way I represented some of my subjects. Actually, right from the start of doing these caricature sketches I was wary. That's why I wrote a pompous note in the *News and Notes* as a kind of disclaimer. My intention is not at all to ridicule people – you can't do that in small place like Auroville. I just take certain traits of people and exaggerate them. Of course, people always like to appear well and not many people can really laugh at themselves. But that's the whole point. Self-analysis, laughter, has to be there in this community, otherwise we will take ourselves too seriously; we will become pompous.

I lived for eight years in the Ashram. Compared to Auroville, it is a rather serious place, I think. I know what seriousness can do to you. It can kill you. You cease to be a human being, you become an automaton, a dogmatic, boring person. Perhaps, that's one reason why I came to Auroville. I have more freedom to be

myself here. I can live with my flaws and grow at my own pace in Auroville.

Some people may have preconceived notions about yoga itself being very serious. But this is really very curious because Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were so humorous. If they could laugh, why can't we? However, there are certain subjects I wouldn't make fun of. I wouldn't make fun of the idea behind the Matrimandir, for example.

As to how Aurovilians respond to humour, there are definitely differences between the cultures. I've noticed that some nationalities – like the Dutch or, more specifically, Dutch males – seem to have a peculiar sense of humour. And some nationalities are perhaps more sensitive than others to being caricatured. If I caricatured some of my Tamil friends, I would probably get into trouble in certain situations. On the other hand, Dhanapal and Hari were OK with me with them portraying them, and some Westerners who I had already drawn didn't want their caricatures appearing in my exhibition a few years ago. So, ultimately, I think it depends on the individual. Some people are more open to this than others.

Now I've stopped doing caricatures because recently some of my 'serious' work was shown in Goa where my portraits and figures were conceived as 'caricature-like'. This alarmed me because I don't want to be known as a caricaturist. If my line is becoming too illustrative, my work will suffer.

## The Salt of Life

Emanuele is an illustrator, a cartoonist and an artist. He has just released a collection of his Auroville cartoons called 'The Salt of Life'.

These cartoons, from 1991 onwards, represent the closing of a span of work. I have decided not to do any more commercial work but simply to express what comes from within me. Over the years, stylistically I think I've improved a lot. In Europe I had worked as a commercial illustrator, but it was only when I came to Auroville that I began to develop my own style. I'm influenced by Chinese, Japanese and Impressionist styles as well as that of Indian miniatures, but I'm moving towards something freer, more alive, where I try to get rid of all superfluous things without sacrificing density, concreteness.

My subject-matter has always been life itself as well as our spiritual research here. This hasn't changed. What has changed is that I no longer want to be cynical, judgmental, in my work because criticizing people is too easy. You can get a laugh out of this approach but it's a rough humour, the kind you find in *The Hindu* or *New Yorker*. About six years ago I worked with Manoj to transform this kind of humour into something more joyful, more thought-provoking. In a series called 'God's Eye View' we tried to put our everyday concerns into a larger context so we can all laugh at how trivial they are.

Actually, I'm really addressing myself here – it's no coincidence that one of my cartoon characters looks like me. The reason I use the events of my daily life to

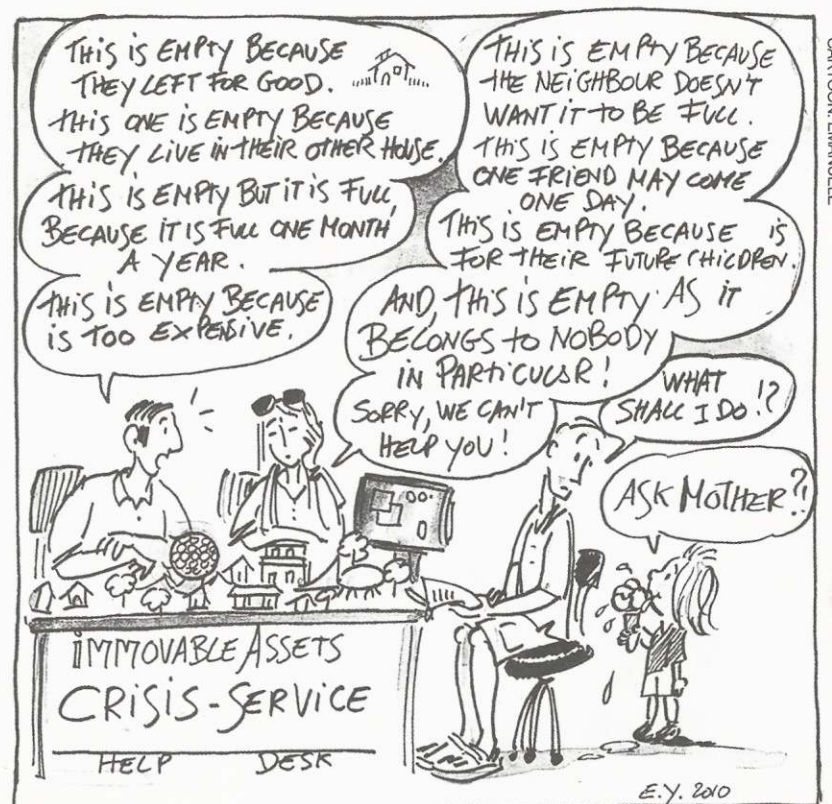
illustrate my books is because I am full of problems, full of fears, and often I find myself enjoying my own little dramas. Then I like to put them down on the page so I can relativize them and share them with others.

The child who appears in my recent cartoons is the part of me which is not 'dramatic', which is full of joy and for which everything is a great adventure. More than a year ago I told him that, from now on, I wanted him to lead my life and I would try to follow.

I think one of our problems is 'the thinker', that part of us which tells us that life and spirituality are very serious matters. Look at the grave expressions on the faces of the people coming out of the inner chamber!

This sense of seriousness is not peculiar to Auroville. When we were doing the book on the gunas, we went to the Ashram to get permission to use Sri Aurobindo's texts. But we were refused because we were told that Mother didn't like cartoons. I don't believe this because Mother was so wide and cartoons are just a tool, it all depends on what is passing through them. So, yes, there is this strong misunderstanding among many people that spirituality is something serious, aloof, dry, but it's the thinker thinking this, not the inner child. When I am experiencing my Child I don't think of myself at all, but all is lightness and sweet mindlessness. I am on 'the trail of the light', as the Rishis called it. At times it seems so far away but then, suddenly, there is a touch of something and ah!, it is there. That's what I try to do through my work, to bring it closer.

*The Salt of Life* is available at various outlets around Auroville and on [www.auroville.com](http://www.auroville.com) Emanuele can be contacted at [lele@auroville.org.in](mailto:lele@auroville.org.in)



CARTOON: EMANUELE



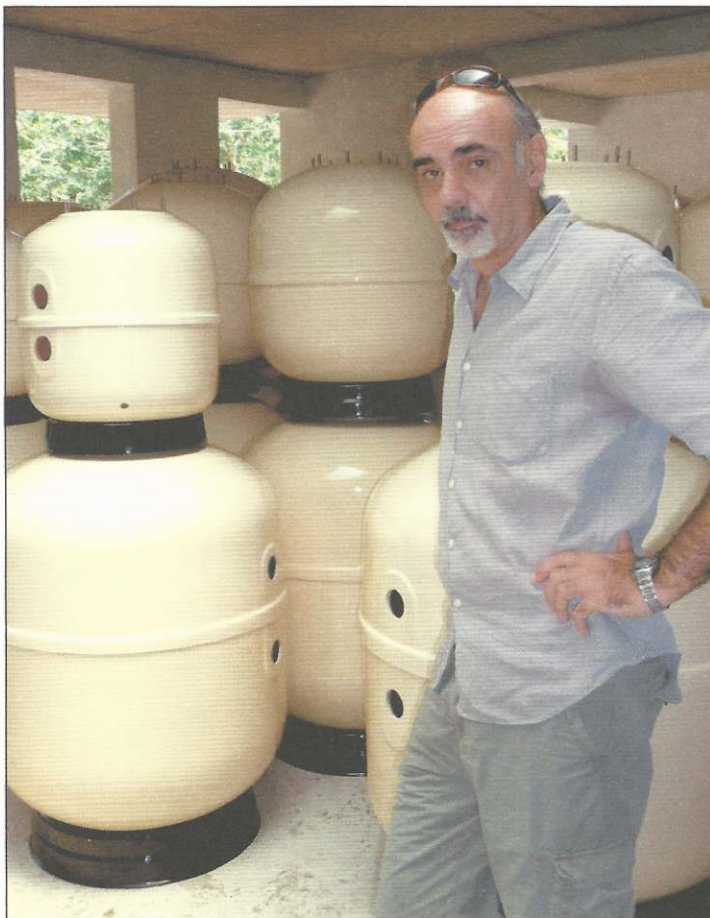
# EcoTeco Pools

**EcoTeco Pools is an Auroville commercial unit that designs and builds swimming pools and supplies its components.**

“Nowadays, in line with the global world economy, many young and successful upper middle class professionals want to have their own swimming pool. Earlier, it was a car. Now a swimming pool is the new Indian style statement,” says Giorgio, who runs the Auroville unit EcoTeco Pools. “I grew up in Italy and worked for the Italian company Ecoteco Piscine that builds swimming pools. There, too, the market targeted the young and rich: all wanted their personal pools. In recent years, I’ve seen this trend coming up in India. The number of swimming pool builders is growing by the month.”

Giorgio first visited Auroville in 1988 and stayed for a few months. “I came back for a visit in 1991, and then came every subsequent winter – that was the lean time in Italy for building swimming pools. In 1995, Diana and I came to Auroville permanently. It was natural for me that I should continue working in the swimming pool business. Together with another Aurovilian I started work on a filtration system for swimming pools around Auroville, and we started building swimming pools. At that time Diana and I were living in a small house. Then our daughter was born and as we needed more space, we decided to join the Surrender project. But the house costs were double the estimate so I went back to Italy to work and earn extra money.”

He started EcoTeco Pools in 2003, as a representative of Ecoteco Piscine. “We provide a complete package, which includes the design and construction of swimming pools and the supply and installation of all special components; it also includes an annual maintenance contract so that the pool remains up-to-date with the latest innovations in the sector.” But nowadays the main activity is the supply of pool components for water purification. “I carved a niche in the market as distributor of international standard swimming pool products. Some I import from Italy, such as pumps with integrated pre-filters, underwater light-



Giorgio with the FRP swimming pool filters, ready for export

ing and other special components. Others are made here in India according to my designs, such as the FRP swimming pool filter.” This product, he says, has become so successful that it is now also exported.

Eco-friendliness is an ongoing concern, says Giorgio. “We are in the process of changing the filtration system of the pool at New Creation. We are installing a salt-chlorinator which uses the

salt of the pool water to produce chlorine. This sanitizes the pool and prevents algae and other unwanted growth. The pool water will be slightly salted, with a salt content of 3-4 grams per litre. Most people like it. Swimming in a mild saline solution is much like swimming in soft water and many feel the water is more refreshing because of it. I have been installing this type of system for the last few years and the responses have been very positive. The system is more eco-friendly as there is no longer any need to add pre-stored chlorine to the pool water. The system is virtually maintenance-free.”

Speaking from the business perspective, EcoTeco is doing well. “In the last financial year, we contributed Rs 3 lakhs to the community and developed our assets,” says Giorgio. “But we really don’t know if we will be able to continue at the same level as there is an increasing competition from China and the European market is somewhat in decline.”

For Giorgio, running EcoTeco Pools engages only one aspect of his personality. “I am not truly a businessman,” he says. “I don’t like the administrative and bureaucratic aspects of this work and the fact that I have become part of a ‘global system’. I started the unit as I have to secure an income for my family and I have a school-going daughter. That leaves me no choice. But I would welcome it if other Aurovilians would join who would be interested in this aspect of the work. That would leave me free to do other things.”

He explains. “I love to work with my hands – not really in an artistic sense, but in the sense of materialising something to perfection. For example, in construction work. I would also love to travel more, preferably to places where there is not much civilisation. Lastly, I would like to be more involved with other community members instead of being all the time involved with my unit. Maybe this is only my point of view, but I have noticed that in Auroville these days there is too little interaction. We all seem to be isolated in our little cells. But the people around you are important. If you have a problem, you should be able to go and meet your neighbour, whoever it is, and talk about it and vice-versa.”

*In conversation with Carel*

## SPORTS

# Auroville's young life-savers win medals

The News and Notes of 3rd September carried the following:

*A BIG CONGRATULATIONS to the 15 Auroville kids who participated this past weekend in the Life-Saving Swimming Competition in Trivandrum, and a HEARTFELT THANK YOU to the 7 adults who accompanied them and provided support, encouragement and care during the trip. A special thanks to Tanja, the swimming teacher who inspired and taught our kids and gave so much of her time and energy to make this happen. Also THANKS to Sophie for the regular updates, communication and general coordination, and to Transition and TLC teachers for allowing the kids to have the space for this experience.*

*With love,  
Chali (a grateful parent)*

So what was this all about?

“It started three and a half years ago when two boys came to me asking for swimming lessons,” explains Tanja. “Soon more kids joined and today we have 28 children, divided into two groups, who come before school to be trained in the La Piscine, the New Creation pool. We started with different swimming strokes but then it became a bit boring so I added things which made it more fun, like life-saving practices,

ocean swimming and sprinting.”

Tanja joined a life-saving swimming team in Germany when she was five and competed in many swimming events. “Life-saving is more interesting to me because it requires more skills than if you are just trying to swim fast.”

Two months ago, Tanja saw on the website of the Indian Life-Saving Association that it was about to host a national life-saving competition in Trivandrum. “Originally I was going to take just one boy, Sanata, who I had been training for competitions. But when I mentioned it to Sophie she thought it would be nice if the other swimmers could come and watch.”

“The next thing,” says Sophie, “was that they actually wanted to participate! The organizers were very encouraging, they said sign them all up. So then I had to run around, talking to Transition School and to the parents, to get permission for them to go. Some parents were not so sure at first, but in the end 15 children between 10 – 14 years went and some of the parents accompanied them.” In fact, one of the parents, Sunny, played a huge part in making the trip a success. In addition to organizing the bus tickets and looking after the food while they were travelling, he designed the logo and got T-shirts printed for all the Auroville participants.

When they arrived, they found that not only would they have to compete in an Olympic-size pool – much bigger than the one they had trained in – but that they would be competing against 45 other teams from all over India. “And

some were very good,” says Tanja.

In fact, they did very well. Sanata won the trophy for best swimmer of his age group and a silver medal in an individual event, Leela won a gold medal in one discipline, Zidane, Felix and Milla got bronze, and the boys’ team (Perceval, Bageerath, Felix and Zidane) won silver. The girls team (Zea, Marissa, Masha, Leela and Milla) would have won gold if their opponents had not been declared unofficial teams, and Aaron would have surely won a medal if he had not lost a fin.

“They also made a lot of friends,” says Tanja. “The other coaches and teams were very interested in us – nobody had heard of Auroville before – and now everybody wants to come and help teach our kids and set up a life-saving centre somewhere along our coast.”

The Indian Association which ran this event is trying hard to promote life-saving in India. They have set up training centres and have removable pools which they take to beach areas. So far, they’ve trained 250,000 people, not bad for a country where most people don’t know how to swim and where drownings are a daily occurrence.

Even Auroville does not have trained life-savers on duty at its beaches. So perhaps some of Tanja’s pupils will one day take up this responsibility. For now, however, her priority is to improve the training facilities for her students. At the moment, her swimmers are allocated only two lanes in the early morning at La Piscine, “and even now some of the adults complain that we are taking too much space, so it’s a problem if more kids want to join. In the future,

Savitri is hoping to build a sports complex with a bigger pool in the centre of Auroville, but there’s no knowing how long this might take to manifest.”

“But meanwhile,” says Sophie, “the children are very happy by what they achieved in Trivandrum. In the weeks before the competition they trained really hard, and they were up against really stiff competition. So it’s wonderful for their confidence.”

And next year? “We’ll be there again,” says Tanja. “Probably our swimmers will also participate in the national open water events and that requires extra skills in ocean rescue swimming, life-saving with a surf board and sprinting on the beach. Next time we will be better prepared and hopefully have some good results again.”

*Alan*



The start of a race

The Auroville swimming team. Standing from left: Bada, Zidane, Felix, Seraphina, Sanata, Zea, helper Sunny, Leela, trainer Tanja, Milla, Bhuvan with one of the organizers. Bottom row: Kiran, Masha, Aaron, Perceval, Bageerath and Marissa.



# Tanto

The sharp Mediterranean smells of hot cheese and basil greet you as you come up the road from Kuilapalayam village. Below road level, on your right, tables are laid out in a garden next to a pool. You have 28 tables to choose from. You can choose one in the garden or sit inside where you have a full view of the intricacies of pizza-making as you watch a Tamil boy in a chef's white hat roll out the dough, heap on freshly-made ingredients, then with a mighty flourish scoop it into the blazing oven.

The atmosphere at Tanto comes in an oddly assorted, but happy, package. Daniel, the owner, shouts and waves his arms in a very authentic Italian way and Tamil boys rush up and down taking orders for complicated pizza arrangements in ten different languages. The oven's flames blaze as a man in a tall white chef's hat constantly stokes it with wood, scooping laden pizzas into the fire.

The reason for Tanto's success is obvious. It has a 100% Italian lively, noisy atmosphere with a remarkable variety of high quality fresh food. The menu is very appealing; 27 different types of pizza, including exotica like British pizza with roast beef and UFO, Vegan and Snowwhite pizzas. Gasps of delight come from a table where the large size pizza has just been delivered – it is huge. Also on offer are steak and escalope, jumbo prawns, and a variety of salads, pastas and spaghettis. The desserts are excellent and the chocolate mousse famous.

This is how pizza restaurants were before Pizza Express took over the world.

"This place is doing really well," says Daniel. "Too well, really. But more about that in a minute." He jumps up to sympathize with the Friday night crowd who are sitting on the steps, waiting for a table to fall vacant. "For years this place was New Creation Corner. It served basic good food before it closed down. André asked us to take it over in July 2008 and we did a big renovation job. We made the pizza oven first, obviously the most important item, and then little by little added the other necessities. We wanted to have everything open and on show, even the kitchen where people could come in and choose their food. In December, 2008, we opened."

"Had you always wanted to have a pizza restaurant?" I enquire. "Never", he says emphatically. "I knew the hard work it would involve and how it would completely take over my life. Though I guess the seeds were sown when I started free Sunday pizza lunches at Sri Ma many years ago."

"I had run a restaurant in Italy for a few months back in 1971, then in 1978 I had a café in Serenity, which was probably the first café that made chips in the whole of India at that time. Before these ventures I had been a journalist and art dealer in Paris and travelled a lot. I also did radio journalism, so when Auroville Radio started I was able to use my expertise there. Now I don't have the time to work there but try to help financially."

"Nowadays my yoga is the yoga of the fish market. We go to Pondicherry market every morning to get fresh produce and I haggle and shout at the fish ladies. It is a great exercise in equanimity. When we find something special that day, like good lobsters, we make it the special of the day." At that very minute two huge lobsters are delivered to the next table and are greeted with cries of appreciation.

"Italian food depends on the quality of the ingredients," Daniel explains seriously. "Unlike French food, it cannot be camouflaged by the sauces. Even in Italy nowadays they use canned tomatoes, dried herbs, and everything is pre-

pared way in advance. They even use an electric oven to make the pizzas, which is unthinkable. That's why many Italians tell me our pizzas are much better than the ones they can find in Italy. Everything in Tanto is freshly made. Today we are presenting our fresh carrot juice for the first time as we have just had lots of lovely fresh carrots delivered."

"The wood for the pizza oven comes from Land Rescue Management so practically everything is from Auroville."

"I called the restaurant Tanto – which means 'abundance' – as a reaction against those hard times 35 years ago when I began this Auroville trip. In those days once a week I would receive a basket containing probably two potatoes, one onion, one egg, some tofu and a little oil. This was our basic food ration for the week. Actually, it was a very good experience for me to starve. Then I weighed 58 kilos, now I weigh 85!"



Studying the pizza-making process

Paulo, Daniel's business partner, joins us and tells us how he came to Auroville and became involved with Tanto. "I had been coming to Auroville every year for four months. I wanted to join in the Auroville adventure and when Daniel asked me to join him I immediately agreed. In Paris I had been a dentist for 34 years, but here I wanted to do something completely different and nothing could be more different than working at Tanto. I feel so happy in helping to create this atmosphere and seeing people enjoying themselves."

"Our big, big problem" says Daniel with a tone of despair in his voice, "is that a unit has illegally been built on the land behind and to the side of Tanto so we are unable to expand. Our kitchen is tiny and completely unsuitable for our increasing trade. It is only 25 square metres so we have to be extremely concentrated and organized. We now have 22 staff – in the busy season we can have 28."

"More and more people are coming and at weekends we often have to turn people away, which I do not like to do. Last year we once served 700 people in one day – it was a miracle! Normally, on a weekend, we serve about 400 meals a day. But we are finding it difficult to work in these conditions."

"Every day is a challenge here. For the first few months I spent a lot of time training the staff. They were all from the village and had no experience of restaurant work. It took me three months

to train the ladies not to clean the vegetables while sitting on the floor. That is how they do it in their homes, but here we have to have hygienic standards. If I don't remind them, every few days they go back to sitting on the floor to do the vegetables," he says in exasperation. "I have to train the new people we take on, but once they get some experience and confidence they love working here."

"Everyone's favourite is Poonpoolai, a small Tami lady with a white plastic cap and a big apron," says Paulo with an affectionate laugh. "She worked in Dubai for a few years and has a good sense

of organization. She is remarkably efficient and good-natured and everyone loves her. She begins the day here by doing puja, lighting incense everywhere, and saying her prayers."

I admire the tall white hats the chefs are wearing. "Ah, they were difficult at first. We tried lots of different shapes but the boys didn't feel comfortable in them. The problem was solved when a chef from the Sheraton in Bombay gave us some packets of paper hats. Now they love wearing them."

Then there is the problem of the road which

passes close by. "It is very dangerous and surely it is only a matter of time before someone is seriously injured. It is now impossible for two cars to pass each other on the road and our neighbour across the road just last week advanced his front yard by at least two metres so there is now even less room. There is no space for parking and the big cars park wherever they can. It is chaos out there at night."

"But let's be positive" he says with a smile, looking at Paulo, "Even with these obstacles we are both very happy to be here." And it shows, as they jump up to greet friends, shout at the Tamil waiters who are having problems understanding a Japanese family, and direct the traffic of pizzas in the right direction.

Daniel finally sits down again. "When we started Tanto, Paulo and I put in some of our own money. We had a lot of renovations to do – we had to create a whole restaurant – but within three months of opening we were reimbursed. Our policy is to keep the prices as low as we can. If we are not full, it doesn't work. We give a 25% discount to Aurovilians which they really appreciate as it exists for them and not just the visitors. Our August contribution to the Auroville Fund was the highest on the list! We are very proud of that."

"For the last two weeks we have had to pay the 5% sales tax to the Government of India. It doesn't sound much but it surely adds up. We are not running it as a business to make a profit, but with our very large wage packet in the low season it could be a little tricky to make ends meet."

"My dream is that everything in Auroville should eventually be free – or based on a donation system. Till now this has not been possible, I am not quite sure why. One day perhaps... We offer free lunches to the school kids once a week in the low season. We have worked out a formula that they love; fish and chips, pizza and ice cream. Many of them come from families that do not have much disposable income, so it is nice to be able to offer the kids something special."

"Tanto has become an Auroville attraction" he says, justifiably proud. "When people tell their friends they are going to visit Auroville, they often tell them to visit us for a pizza. Indian people love it as it is often their first contact with a European informal, relaxed way of eating. And young people love the whole ambiance."

"I often wonder why pizza has such a worldwide popularity, especially with young people" he muses, looking round the room which is full of Indian teenagers happily sharing varieties of pizzas. "I guess it is because it is a democratic food that you can just pick up and eat. No need for table manners or old-fashioned social graces. It's a happy food and I am glad to be part of it."

Dianna



# Meet Newcomers Muriel and Antim

## Muriel's story

For ten years I had an interesting career in Human Resources in a multinational company in Belgium. I was well-off, successful and single but deeply dissatisfied. I had no time in my busy life to get to know and understand myself. Most of all, I was wondering about the meaning of my life. I eventually decided I had to take some time off so I could travel. Living in another culture had always been a way for me to discover my own cultural conditionings and better understand who I was.

I first went to South America for 6 months. I lived in Ecuador and Peru, learning Spanish and hoping to meet some interesting shaman, which did not happen. I then took a flight to India where I did a one month yoga teacher training course in the Himalayas. One day I heard the teacher say: "The first business in life is to discover the Divine." This absolutely hit me! I had been spiritually searching for many years but never to the extent of putting God in the first place. After the training course I spent two more weeks in Rishikesh, going to all sorts of yoga classes and *satsangs*. Something very powerful was happening to me and I decided to stay on and cancelled my flight back home. My inner life was awakening intensely. Six weeks later I went back to Belgium to move out of my apartment, sell my car and get rid of all my possessions in order to come back East one-way to "Find God."

I spent six months in Thailand then came back to India and stayed in several ashrams and yoga schools. I decided I would just let myself be carried along by things and search for God until my savings were fully gone.

I had heard of Auroville on my travels and eventually drifted down here. I arrived at five o'clock in the morning, alone, not knowing much about the place. The first few weeks were very difficult. All my old inner problems came up, it was amazing. I really felt either I would run away from here or I would con-

front my problems once and for all!

As I came in search for the Divine, I wanted to know more about the Integral Yoga and the vision of Mother and Sri Aurobindo but could not find any organised training programme or workshop on the subject. I felt very alone and did not know how to start. One day I cried really badly – and for the first time cried out to Mother. The very next day I met Antim, my soul partner. Realising he was so knowledgeable, I immediately told him "I want to read Sri Aurobindo with you". Those were the key words that really started our relationship. The more Antim introduced me to the concepts and the practice of the Integral Yoga, the more I felt I was awakening to a new reality.

I have been in Auroville for three years now. The inner work has been very intense and difficult but fantastic. The more one aims at high things, the more the obstacles arise, says Mother. Lots of things came up in my being – pettiness, jealousy, self-righteousness, possessiveness, judgement, etc. I would persistently offer each of these movements to the divine Mother and aspire for transformation. I can't say I'm out of it fully, but my growth has been tremendous.

Even physically I am changing. When I came here I was overweight and tended to be lethargic and get headaches. I hated going to the gym or keep-fit classes back home as it all seemed designed to make the body beautiful to impress. Now I know it is our responsibility to manifest grace and beauty in our bodies. Antim is a very sportive person so we go cycling, swimming and do aerobics together which is also great fun. I have lots of energy and need much less sleep.

My main involvement and passion is with Savitri Bhavan. I try to help Shradhavan and learn from her in any way I can. I am discovering the different aspects of the team work that runs Savitri Bhavan so smoothly. As a researcher, I am working on a students' guide



PHOTO: COURTESY: MURIEL

to Sri Aurobindo's "Human Cycle," and a French dictionary of "Savitri" amongst other things.

I could do none of these things without the love and support of Antim. I had always been a very mental person. I had two university degrees and was always reading and thinking and trying to work things out. I cannot believe my situation now. Here I am, 38 years old with a previous life as a very independent European career girl, surrendering to an Indian man in every way. He is my "manager"; he is the person who transformed my life and opened my heart and after an intense three

years together it is still the same. Actually, our love keeps on growing stronger every day. I am convinced that this is possible only thanks to Mother and Sri Aurobindo and what they have taught us.

I don't know what I will do in the future in Auroville. I am not making any specific plans but try to keep myself open to the divine will. I have begun to realise that the external situation matters less and less. My main concern is to try to contact my psychic being and realise the Divine in everything and I know that all the rest will fall into place around that.

As told to Dianna

## Antim's story

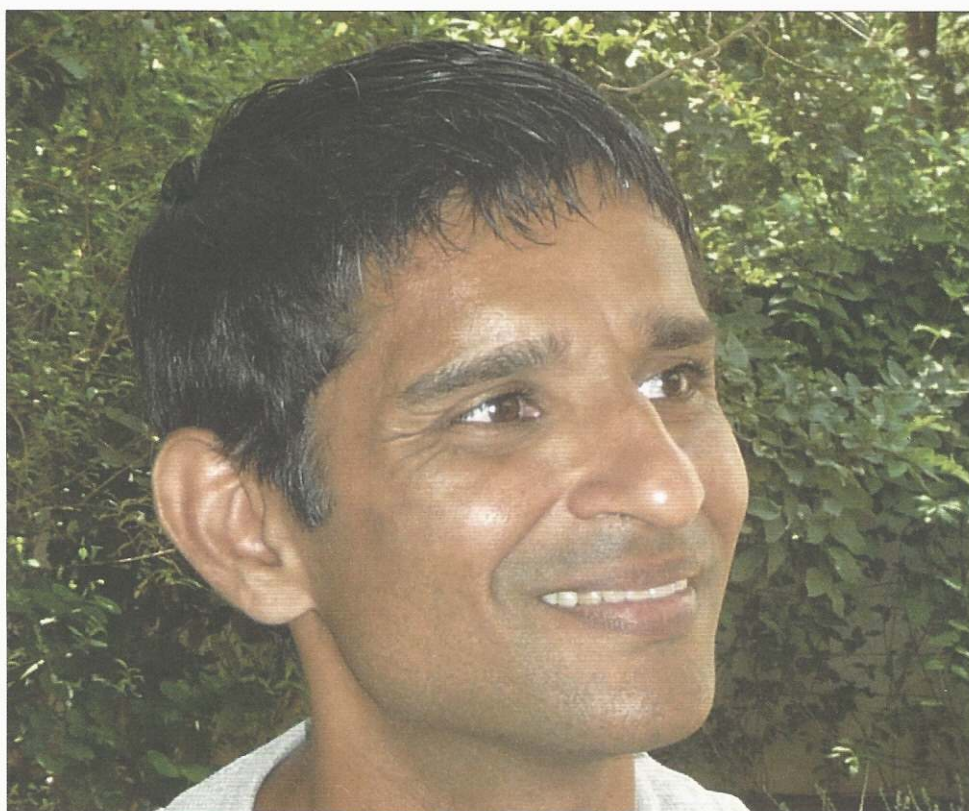
My name means 'the last one' in Hindi as I was the third and the last son of a Rajasthani Jain family. We came to Chennai when I was a child and I grew up there. My parents were quite reasonable and we used to visit the Jain temples from time to time, but always I rebelled against this 'reasonableness.' I felt it could never solve anything. I became an atheist against all these traditions and rituals. I was always asking myself the Why and How of things. I was weak in constitution and I was full of negativity but I did not know what to do.

The first breakthrough I had was when I picked up a copy of Norman Vincent Peale's *The Power of Positive Thinking*. It became a kind of yoga for me and opened my mind and heart a little to positivity. Then I joined a Christian movement *Jesus lives* for a few months and was very impressed with their concept of love and charity and the promise that Christ, the divine incarnate would return one day to save us. After three months however I came to a mental wall so I abandoned it. I tried Jainism for two weeks, but the same thing happened.

Then my sister gave me the book *Vivekananda – a prophet of divinity*. I remember reading the first two pages of it and crying tears of joy for having finally found my Guru. The shift from religion to Yoga had commenced. I still feel Vivekananda was my first Guru and Sri Aurobindo will be my last.

During this period I was playing snooker and I was a junior champion in Chennai. I remember when I had saved up 200 rupees for a new snooker cue which I badly needed; I spent the money on buying *Vivekananda's Complete Works*.

One day a snooker referee with whom I was friendly told me that Mother and Sri Aurobindo were the Supreme and that they have seen the obverse and the reverse side of the coin. Somehow that sentence got stuck in my mind and a desire to know their philosophy arose. One day I was looking through the mysticism rack in a library of the Ramakrishna Mutt and randomly placed my hand on the book titled *The Great Adventure* which is now renamed *The Sunlit Path*. I borrowed it and started to read it as I was sitting on the bus. The first thing my eyes fell on was Mother's invitation: "I invite you to the great adventure." I felt a deep happy calm right at the centre of my chest and this time knew for sure that I had arrived. That calm has never left me.



I spent my snooker prize money on more of Mother's books. I shifted to Bangalore, since it was more conducive to read Mother's books and for practicing snooker without the vigilance and interference of my parents. I tried to apply what I read and found myself progressing faster than ever. Everything I had come across before always seemed to be rigid, narrow and bound in tradition. This was very, very different.

I read that the Divine is everywhere and that Integral Yoga could be practiced anywhere and so I could not see the point of going to the Pondicherry Ashram. But when I came across a letter of Sri Aurobindo which said that all work was the Divine's, I decided to go to the Ashram to offer my work. I worked in the Dining Room for two years while going to Chennai to play snooker.

In January 1996 I decided to live in the Ashram permanently and I had the best time of my life. I worked as a groundsman in a sportsfield and loved it. My mother was horrified when she saw me as I had become very dark with being out in the sun so much. My parents objected to me staying there, however, and it was very difficult for all of us. They have now

reconciled themselves to me living in Auroville as when they came to visit me they saw I was so happy and satisfied and were fascinated by Matrimandir and Savitri Bhavan. They now call me their most intelligent son.

I wasn't really interested in Auroville at that time. I had first visited Auroville in 1995 and found myself not yet ready. Something told me, later, later ... My life in snooker was supporting me at that time and it gave me an income to be independent.

In March, 2008, I visited the completed Inner Chamber and started visiting Savitri Bhavan for the evening classes. I suddenly felt that I was home. "I am home, I am home," was the only thought I had as I cycled up and down the Auroville roads.

I love physical work and so I worked in the Realisation housing project making earth bricks. I was still playing snooker and I used to practice the moves in my head as I had begun to realize, through starting to practice the yoga, how to get better results with less effort. I still had the idea that I could continue living this way, three days making bricks in Auroville then the rest of the week working towards my pension with Indian Rail.

That was the time I met Muriel and everything changed, I felt it was the sign I was looking for.

We got married in Chennai which pleased my parents and also helped with the visa problem. Muriel had to go to Nepal then back to Belgium for a visa and then the Entry Service was closed so we had no status. In one and a half years we moved 32 times! Guest houses were booked up well in advance so we had to keep shifting around, going to the village, then to Park Guest in Pondicherry. It was quite a struggle.

In August 2010 we both became Newcomers. We recently moved into a new house in Grace as luckily we had just enough savings between us. We are blissfully happy to have our own place after so much moving around.

We both had a clear call to work for Savitri Bhavan. I help with the Listening Space and generally try to help in the most effective way wherever needed. I want to play my small part in Savitri Bhavan's development and try to let Mother guide me. Trying to understand Mother and Sri Aurobindo is my main focus. *The Human Cycle* especially fascinates me and I see it as a basis for Human Unity. To teach history through its concepts would be a marvellous thing to do.

As told to Dianna



# Ganesh Puja day

"Irrespective of class, creed or religion, Sri Ganesh can be a most excellent friend to each and all."

There was no mistaking that the first of September, Ganesh Puja, was a very special day. The village celebrations began at 4.30 with music and firecrackers, families went to celebrate and make puja at the temple and the children had a holiday from school and workers from their jobs. In Kuilapalayam village a fifteen foot brightly-coloured Ganesh was created, and in the evening taken down to the sea to be dissolved in the water.

Ganesh is everyone's favourite God as he transcends all castes and is very approachable with his fat belly signifying a love of good food and contentment. He is the bringer of good fortune and is always consulted before any important event – every wedding invitation has a small picture of Ganesh in the corner.

This year, as always, a notice appeared in the *News and Notes* inviting everyone to celebrate Ganesh Chaturthi from 9.30 to 11 a.m. at the Ganesh temple in Auroville. The temple is secluded behind a wrought iron gate with no notice, except for a small sign on the right saying Vinayaka Koil. On the west side it is now shielded from the National Highway by a very high wall.

Inside was a haven of beauty and calm. A well-tended garden and large pond created a meditative atmosphere. The granite Ganesh



The Auroville Ganesh shrine near Auro-Orchard.

statue was black from years of being oiled and it was surrounded by heaps of rice, sweet corn and coconuts. People sat on straw mats and leaned against trees with an air of quiet devotion, chanting *slokas* to the accompaniment of a harmonium.

Afterwards people quietly mingled and we were offered *prasad* and a *tilakam* mark was placed between our eyebrows.

The temple is cared for by Divakar, a French man who worked in Matrimandir for

thirty years and now spends every morning sweeping the leaves and cleaning the shrine.

He explained how Auroville came to have its own Ganesh Temple. "Mother originally saw Auroville being established near the Lake Estate, but there was a problem with the Madras road which cut through the centre. She then started looking for other places. In 1965 a large plot was available where Auro-Orchard stands today and it had a Ganesh shrine in its northwest corner. Traditionally a Ganesh shrine is always built at a corner of two roads, symbolising that Ganesh leads the way and that he should be acknowledged at the beginning of a journey. The story goes that the owner of the land had been seriously ill and a *sadhu* advised him that if he built a shrine to Lord Ganesh he would recover.

"This is what happened and now he was willing to sell the land to Auroville, but insisted that the Ganesh shrine be cared for and be accessible at any time. This was reported to Mother who said, 'We will take care of it.' At first, a local Brahmin was employed, but this was not very satisfactory. Then, in 1971, a Jain

lady from Gujarat called Kusum arrived. She had been a freedom fighter and later been involved with the Gandhian movement and Vinoba Bhave. She visited the Ashram in the later 1950s and wanted to stay with Mother but had two sons to care for. When her sons were older she came to live in Auroville.

"Every morning she used to walk up the road alone to the Ganesh temple to clean it and do puja. Mother had instructed her; 'Do according to your heart – no rituals or formalities'."

Divakar continued, "I first met Kusum when she asked us at if we could help with a welding job as the temple bell had been broken when someone tried to steal it. In this way, I gradually became involved with the temple. We built a wall, as even in those days the traffic was annoying. When she passed away in 2004 Kusum left a letter saying that I was the person she would like to continue looking after the Ganesh Shrine. I had just left Matrimandir at that time and so was free to do her wish. Now I spend every morning here which makes me very happy."

Dianna

You see, this is how it happened: there's this Ganesh ... We had a meditation (this was more than thirty years ago) in the room where 'Prosperity' is now distributed. There were eight or ten of us, I believe. We used to make sentences with flowers; I arranged the flowers, and each one made a sentence with the different flowers I had put there. And one day when the subject of prosperity or wealth came up, I thought (they always say that Ganesh is the god of money, of fortune, of the world's wealth), I thought, 'Isn't this whole story of the god with an elephant trunk merely a lot of human imagination?' Thereupon, we meditated. And who should I see walk in and park himself in front of me but a living being, absolutely alive and luminous, with a trunk that long ... and smiling! So then, in my meditation, I said, 'Ah! So it's true that you exist!' – 'Of course I exist! And you may ask me for whatever you wish, from a monetary standpoint, of course, and I will give it to you!'

Mother's Agenda, June 22nd, 1958

## Visiting a sub-centre of the Auroville Health Centre

The car left the Auroville Health Centre at 9 a.m. on a beautiful clear morning. Shrinivasan, the sub-centre nurse, was driving Dr. Shano and her lab technician to one of the sub-centres. We drove through Alankuppam and Rayapettai, passing through bright green fields of rice and tapioca plants, on the way to Rayapudupakkam sub-centre, a small two-roomed brick structure, where we were greeted by half a dozen elderly people sitting on the steps.

Dr. Shano explained that these sub centres have been running since 1995 and were originally started by Dr. Assumpta. "They are financed by two German companies which also help Deepam and other centres. But their donations are gradually being reduced; if they ever stopped completely we don't know what we would do," she said.

"The Auroville Health Centre has established six sub-centres around Auroville. Four are within biking distance but the other two necessitate taking the van as we need to carry supplies. We visit a different one each day. Today is Friday, so it is Rayapudupakkam day. On Monday we visit Edaiyanchavadi, Tuesday Poothurai, Wednesday Thuruvai, and Thursday Appirampattu and Mathur. It is a very busy schedule."

"We see about 20 to 25 patients a morning, and often children come, but today they are in school," explained Dr. Shano. "There is no health care programme in the Government Schools, so the children come here. The most common health problems we see in these villages are anaemia, diabetes, ulcers and hypertension. Poor nutrition is the cause of many problems. The previous generation was much poorer but they ate nourishing local grains such as ragi and varagu. Nowadays they eat mainly white polished rice that has hardly any nourishment, few vegetables and fruits, and far too many spices. The spices cause stomach ulcers which are very common, and very painful."

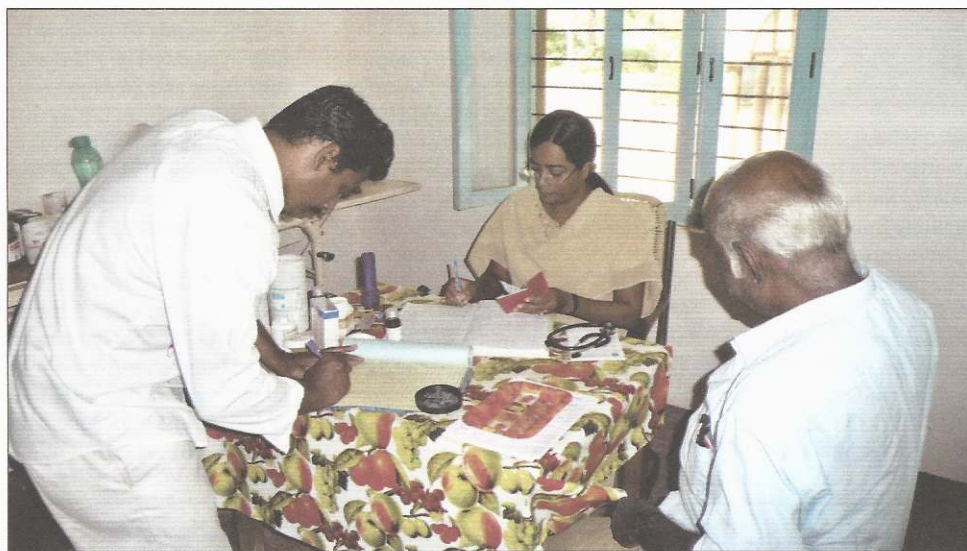
She examined an old lady with bad teeth who was complaining of stomach ache. "Stop chewing tobacco," she told her. She also added; "Alcohol is also a big problem in this area, but of course no one is here to stop that."

Shrinivasan counted out some pink and white tablets and put them in a brown bag, giving the patient instructions on how and

when to take them. "One of the health workers will come to their house to make sure they are taking them," Dr. Shano said. "They visit them several times a week to change their dressings and keep an eye on them. The patients are asked to pay 25 rupees which includes their medicines, but if they cannot pay we treat them anyway. Some people are very poor around here."

Dr. Shano explained the duties of the two health workers. "These girls are trained for two months to do wound dressings, take blood pressure, and give basic advice. They do not give out any medicines."

"One of our health workers, Maniammal, is a very intelligent woman and she hopes to be elected president of her village. Bhavana from Auroville Village Action used to come to this village



Nurse Shrinivasan, doctor Shano and a patient at Thuruvai sub-centre

and offer suggestions to the women about how they could improve things. She had a huge influence on these village women and confident young women like Maniammal are a direct result of her love and care over many years."

"We have an education programme and Shrini from Yatra Arts has made some excellent short films that help the people to understand basic health principles. They love to see his films as he shows basic concepts in a very fresh and simple way."

I sat outside and chatted with a very large lady who started



The sub-centre at Thuruvai

singing to me. She showed me her medical records from a Chennai Hospital written in a child's exercise book. The latest one said: "Obese. Fatty liver." When it was her turn, Dr. Shano shone a torch in her eyes and looked at her tongue to check for anaemia then took her blood pressure which proved to be dangerously high. Shrinivasan dealt out some red tablets, then Dr. Shano gave her a quick talk which I did not understand, but gather it was about improving her diet.

By then it was 11.30 and Srinivasan had to leave to pick up his little son at the pre-creche in Auroville. The boxes of medicines were quickly put back in the cupboard, farewells said, last minute advice given and we drove back to Auroville.

I told Doctor Shano how impressed I was by their efficiency and the quality of care. "I have been doing this for 12 years now", she said. "It is a worthwhile and satisfying work, and very necessary."

Dianna

### Errata

The article "Be true - not violent" in the August 2011 edition of Auroville Today mentioned that the project is now being tried out in three Auroville Schools - Udavi, New Creation and Transition. The reference to 'New Creation' should have read 'Aikiyam School'.



# Art on Sunday

'Art On Sunday' is a meeting place in Henk's house in Petite Ferme where all those who regard 'art' as an important ingredient of life can meet and talk about it.

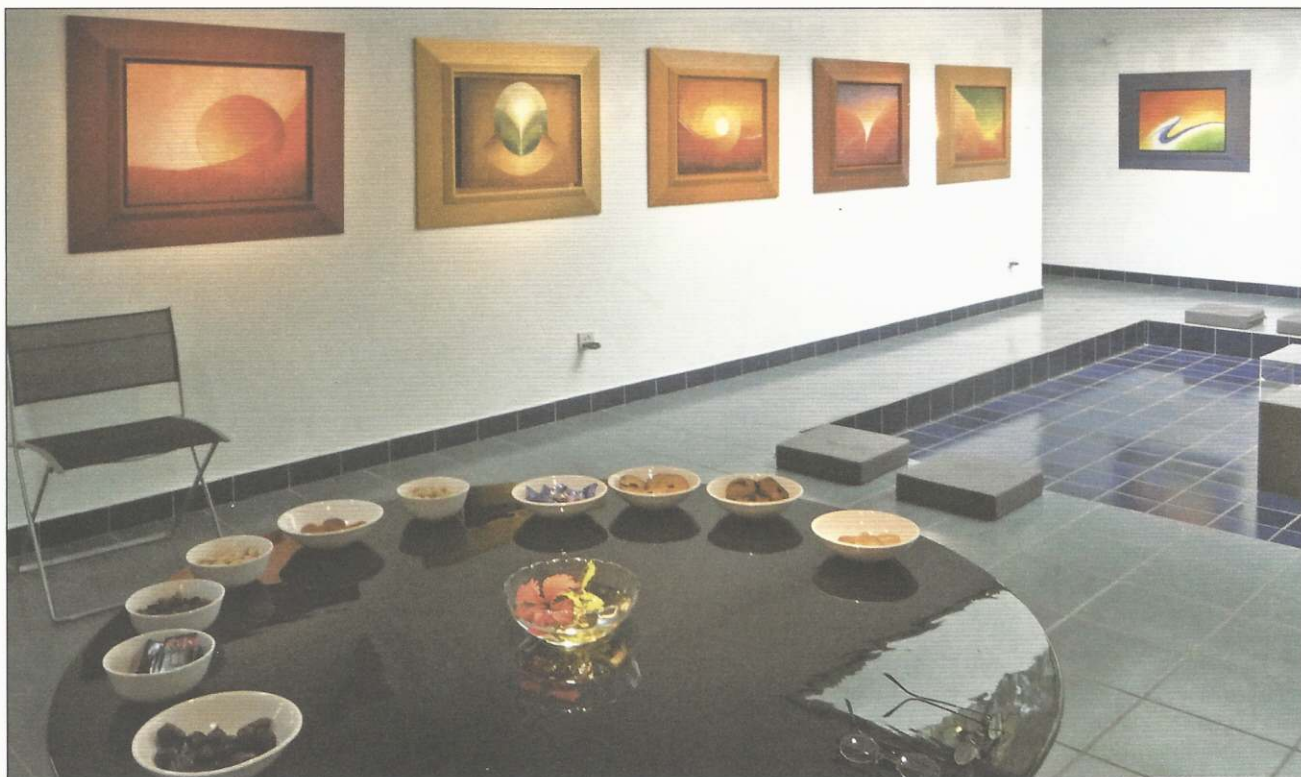
On Sunday 11 September, Art on Sunday opened with a retrospective exhibition of the work of Agnus Gastmans, who passed away last year. "34 people came," Henk said happily. "It was wonderful to see so much interest and appreciation."

The motivation behind Art on Sunday, says Henk, is "to create a relaxed space where people can come, see and talk about art. There is too little interest or support for the arts in Auroville and it is not easy to create or maintain it. If I lived in London or Amsterdam I would be able to visit galleries which would educate and stimulate me, but here in South India we are very isolated. It is important for all of us that we keep in touch with the outside world, especially artists who tend by nature to be rather reclusive."

"Mother and Sri Aurobindo were both interested in contemporary art and encouraged us not just to copy nature but to strive for new expressions. They were also very much aware of the importance of the creative process and how it should be encouraged, especially with children. Today many people tend to think that art is only for highbrow people, but art has always been an important part of human culture."

"We have several fine artists here in Auroville and I would like to see them being encouraged through regular exhibitions here. We could also do a group show and perhaps show art from outside Auroville. But it's too early to plan at this stage."

Henk, who is himself a sculptor, would "like to see more public sculpture in Auroville. The nearest we have got to it so far is the wonderful upturned painted car at the Youth Centre, the beautiful



Paintings of Agnus Gastmans on display at Art on Sunday in Petite Ferme, Auroville

bronze statue tucked away behind the Town Hall and Roger Anger's sculptures at the side of the Town Hall. Don't you think this is a sorry situation after 40 years?

"Helmuth and I have been working on a black granite slab, about six feet high, that has a line from Sri Aurobindo's Savitri carved into

it: *All can be accomplished if the godhead is there.* We hope to sculpt and place more of these Savitri pillars round Auroville, but so far L' Avenir has not been able to decide where to put this one."

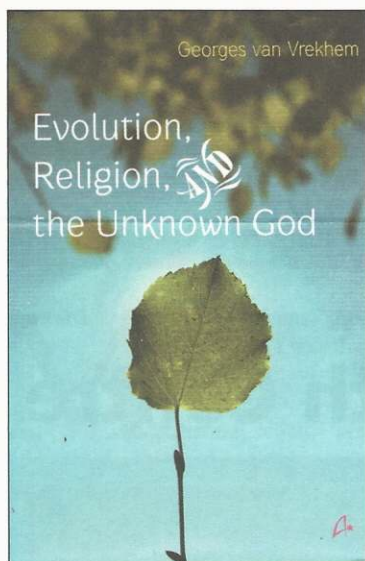
Dianna

For information contact [henk@artonsunday.com](mailto:henk@artonsunday.com).

## New publications

### Evolution, Religion and the Unknown God

by Georges van Vrekhem



The term 'evolution' is well-known. Most people understand it in the context of the evolution of physical forms and connect the meaning to Darwin. But few know that what is nowadays labelled as 'Darwinism' hardly resembles what Darwin wrote in *The Origin of Species*, and that after Darwin, many different theories of evolution have been postulated.

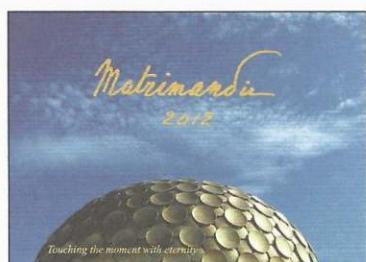
In *Evolution, Religion and the Unknown God* Aurovilian Georges van Vrekhem narrates the relevant events in the history of 'Darwinism' and the resulting Social Darwinism and Socio-biology. The book stresses the antagonism of the scientific materialism at its basis and the religious teachings of the origin and evolution of life on our planet. It is this antagonism that has inevitably resulted in the ongoing controversy between the various branches of creationism, the positive scientific view of evolution, and 'intelligent design.'

The foundations of physical science as adopted by the biological sciences are examined, as are the motives for the attacks on religion by authors like Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennet and Stephen Jay Gould.

Van Vrekhem concludes the book with a description of Sri Aurobindo's vision of evolution: "Instead of a mechanical, gradual, rigid evolution out of indeterminate Matter by Nature-Force we move towards the perception of a conscious, supple, flexible, intensely surprising and constantly dramatic evolution by a superconscious Knowledge which reveals things in Matter, Life and Mind out of the unfathomable Inconscient from which they rise."

*Evolution, Religion and the Unknown God*  
by Georges van Vrekhem  
Published by Amariyllis  
292 pages. Price in India Rs 595

### Matrimandir Calendar 2012



The theme of the Matrimandir 2012 desk calendar (size is 14.8 cm x 21 cm) is *Touching the moment with eternity*. Quotations from Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* are on each photo page. The photos have been taken by three Aurovilian photographers, Giorgio, Lalit, and Paulette. On the calendar page, the months and days are printed in English, French, spoken Sanskrit and Tamil. Darshan days and other important

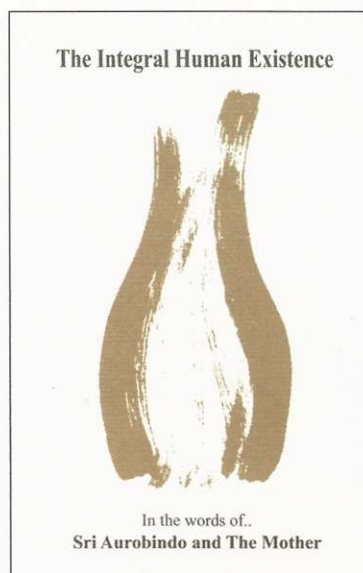
days as well as moon days (full/new) are indicated.

Price: Rs. 135, excluding packing and postage. The proceeds from the sale of the calendar go to the Matrimandir Publication Fund.

For orders email  
[tine@auroville.org.in](mailto:tine@auroville.org.in)

### The Integral Human Existence

in the words of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother



The Sri Aurobindo Centre for Indian Studies, Bharat Nivas, Auroville, has published a compilation 'The Integral Human Existence'.

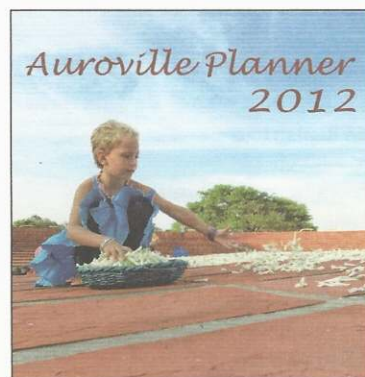
The authors have grouped suitable texts from the works of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother into nine themes. They are: (1) The Experience of the Subjective; (2) A Growing Need of the Spiritual; (3) A New Dimension of the Objective; (4) Matter Refining Itself; (5) The Search for a New Methodology; (6) The Line of Yogic Experience; (7) Presence of Supermind; (8) Future Perspectives of Life – Individual and Collective; and (9) The Present. The

texts outline the nature of the world's existential crisis and describe how mankind can move forward in an evolutionary ascension towards an integral human existence.

*The Integral Human Existence in the words of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother.*

Published by the Sri Aurobindo Centre for Indian Studies, Bharat Nivas, Auroville  
Available from Wild Seagull, Auroville Visitors Centre, and from Sabda. 207 pages.  
Price in India Rs 350

### Auroville Planner 2012



The Auroville Planner, a lightweight agenda of 16 cm x 16 cm is now available. The Planner has 172 thin pages and 24 pages with art photos taken in Auroville by different photographers. The photos cover a wide variety of activities such as culture and art, healing, sports and play, transport, housing, Matrimandir and more.

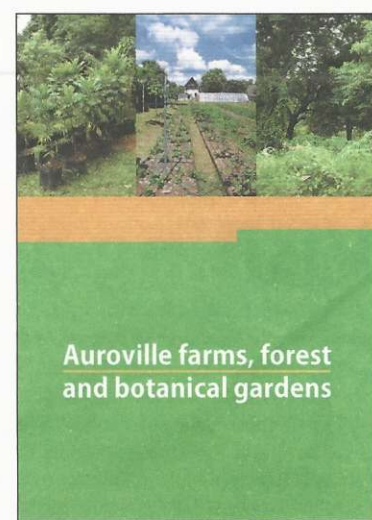
Quotations from the Mother about Auroville are on each photo page. The Planner has a map of South India with Auroville marked on it, and extra pages for notes, addresses and telephone entries. Darshan days and (full/new) moon

days are indicated.

Price in India: Rs. 180, excluding packing and postage.

For orders email  
[tine@auroville.org.in](mailto:tine@auroville.org.in)

### Auroville farms, forest and botanical gardens



PRISMA has published a new publication "Auroville farms, forest and botanical gardens" covering Auroville's early days, a short history of farming and greenwork in Auroville, profiles of each of the farms, and write-ups on three major forested areas, as well as the Matrimandir and Shakti nurseries, the Botanical Garden and Buddha Garden. The book also has a tuck-in foldout on Auroville green practices.

*Auroville farms, forest and botanical gardens*

Published by PRISMA, Auroville  
Available from Wild Seagull, Auroville Visitors Centre, and from [prisma@auroville.org.in](mailto:prisma@auroville.org.in).  
108 pages.  
Price in India Rs 160

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- ◆ One year subscription rates: India Rs. 450; other countries Rs 2,000 equivalent
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**Editorial team:** Alan, Carel, Catherine, Dianna, Elaine. Proof-reading: Alan. DTP: Carel. Photo editing: Jean-Denis. Published by Carel Thieme on behalf of the Auroville Foundation. Printed by Brihat Consultants, Pondicherry, and published at Surrender, Auroville 605101, Tamil Nadu.

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