

# Auroville Today

MARCH 2012, No.272

Auroville's monthly news magazine since 1988

## The cradle of the 'overman'



PHOTO COURTESY: SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM, DELHI BRANCH

The Mother giving terrace darshan, 15 August 1972

In the published conversations of The Mother on Auroville, the high expectations She had of the Aurovilians stand out. "Auroville voudrait être le berceau du surhomme" She wrote, 'Auroville wants to be the cradle of the overman.' Georges Van Vrekhem, the author of numerous books on Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, gives his views on this.

The Mother said in a talk to the Ashram students in 1957, commenting on a passage in Sri Aurobindo's *The Supramental Manifestation*, that Sri Aurobindo "surely expected from us" [those present at the talk, and in general his followers] that they would aspire to become 'surhommes', overmen – defined by Sri Aurobindo as "a new humanity", a race of mental beings born in the usual way whose mentality would become an instrument of the Light and no longer remain an instrument of the Ignorance. "At the highest it would be capable of passing into the supermind and from the new race would be recruited the race of supramental beings who would appear as the leaders of the evolution in earth-nature." It was the realization of this intermediary, overmental race that The Mother said She had taken up from the very moment Sri Aurobindo left his body.

In 1969 She also expressed this expectation for the Aurovilians. But while most of those living in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram could at least be supposed to have some basic understanding of the Integral Yoga, this was not the case with the majority of the earliest Aurovilians. The question was asked why The Mother allowed such 'unworthy' people – hippies of all sorts and big-mouthed pseudo-participants in the French student revolution of 1968 – to be the pioneers of Auroville, the City of Dawn, the City of the Future. Why did she not send 'decent' people to Auroville, from the Ashram or elsewhere, who were willing and capable of leading a spiritual life? How could she expect ignorant but pretentious, lazy, half-

clad and not so clean, pot-smoking youngsters to become 'surhommes'?

### The Supramental and Overman Descents

To answer this question we have to look at developments after February 29, 1956, the momentous day when the Supramental manifestation took place. Mother named this day 'the Golden Day' – a day, she said in one of her most lyrical talks to the students of the Ashram School, when 'a new world is born, born, born!' That day was the beginning of a new world when the presence of the Supramental Force in the earth atmosphere became a fact. The Mother declared, "[The Supermind] is at work here and a day will come when the most blind, the most unconscious, even the most unwilling shall be obliged to recognize it."

Then, on New Year's Day of 1969, another momentous development took place. Mother spoke about the manifestation in the earth atmosphere of a new consciousness, and identified it after careful consideration as 'la conscience du surhomme', the Overman Consciousness. It is this consciousness, an aspect of the Supermind, which will establish the link, or the many links, between the supramental and the human being. The Mother's identification of the Overman Consciousness occupies several pages of *The Agenda* and is evidently of direct practical importance for all those who practice the Integral Yoga, but one will search in vain for any mention of it in the literature on integral yoga produced in the latest decades.

One might consider the birth of Auroville in 1968 as part of the powerful and totally unex-

pected worldwide 'tsunami' caused by the Supramental 'earthquake' in 1956. There was the hippie movement, the May student revolt in Paris, the Prague Spring, the American protests against the war in Vietnam, the Beatles, the Indian gurus and the trek to yoga centres in India, Woodstock, etc. The Mother welcomed all these events as signs of and contributions to the birth of a new world – together with what she intended to be the irradiating centre of the new consciousness: Auroville.

The spirit behind those movements was principally a protest against authoritarianism based on the mind. Didn't The Mother stress time and again that the Aurovilians should try not to live in the mind, but according to the inspiration from their psychic being? She emphasized the necessity to go within, to discover the inner being, to let that be the guide of their actions. She insisted that Auroville was exclusively a spiritual undertaking initiated through a direct decision by the Divine, to whom the Aurovilians should open more and more and in whom they should grow. What was asked of them was an absolute spiritual 'one-pointedness' in their effort and a total surrender to the Divine, even in the smallest everyday things – for if all is That, the apparently futile is That, too.

### The early Aurovilians: unspiritual?

In Auroville, at the time, there was probably no one with a spiritual realization, no one who could be recognized as 'advanced'. The early Aurovilians had no pretensions of being spiritual people, and about the Integral Yoga they had rather confused ideas, mixing it with many undigested traditional elements and with their own opinions of how things ought to be. But they were the ones who were given the inner Force to stay and persevere under very difficult circumstances, while the dazed hippies and the arrogant pseudo-revolutionaries left. It was 'the simple

people' who lay the foundations of what was and continues to become Auroville. They were the ones who courageously and tenaciously confronted the huge problems, many of which had not even been considered at the start. They have stayed on, and many of them, now old but ever young in their dedication, are still there.

Many 'advanced' persons came to lecture the supposedly ignorant Aurovilians on what yoga really was, on the way they should relate to each other, on the way they should administer their finances, and on many other ways – but not a single one of those knowledgeable people stayed on to show how to turn their wise words into practice, for living in Auroville has never been a sinecure. Besides, most of their opinions did not express the vision of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, but projected aspects of the traditional yogas onto a yoga which is new and without precedent, "from within outwards" in the words of the Aurobindian formula. The true Aurobindian attitude was invisible to eyes looking for conventional signs like a common dress code, regular and ritual meditations, a 'decent' community life, a beatific smile and frequent embraces of 'brotherly love'. Aspiration, surrender, faith? The total dedication of one's life to the realization of a future ideal of transformation? The cradle of overman or superman? A divinized body? Did not all this sound a little 'overcooked'?

Were those early Aurovilians indeed so unspiritual? Perhaps, outwardly. But inwardly they must have received and answered a call. If you read the life histories of the first Aurovilians – and if you happen to hear the stories of the ones who are joining Auroville now – you'll find that they always mention a moment when there was an experience, a 'contact', and a response to it immediately or after some time. It is the positive answer to that fundamental call which lights the initial spark to become an Aurovillian.

continued on page 2

- Patterns and predictability
- 'The tale of my exile'
- Our daily bread
- Reach for the stars

pages 2 – 3

- Emailing in India and Auroville
- Experiencing Indian and Auroville health services
- Aurovilians and extreme sports

pages 4 – 5

- The challenges of Tamil
- AVI Meeting 2012
- 'What is this Auroville?'
- 'Footsteps through the salad'

page 6

- News in brief
- Photo exhibition: Pondicherry can conserve and be modern

pages 7 – 8



# The cradle of the 'overman'

continued from page 1

The call, of course, does not by itself spontaneously abolish a person's difficulties inherent in his or her character and temperament. The Integral Yoga is an individual path – individual because our life-stories are different as are our karmic histories, the long line of our previous incarnations. So the difficulties of the Aurovilians are a normal part of the process of inner development. Added to that is the communal aspect of Auroville. For everybody's yoga, in the course of time, should result in a growth, a widening, so that every individual path will necessarily broaden into a communal one.

## Development guided by the Divine

Today, we can see that Auroville has developed enormously, a development that is a clear sign of the direct guidance, support and protection of the Divine – and the presence of individuals who have opened to that guidance. The Matrimandir, built by the Aurovilians, is the first tangible blossoming of the Auroville ideal. Together with Sri Aurobindo's and The Mother's Samadhi, it is one of the two highest places of spirituality in the world. Its importance and effect is still little realized.

There have been other concrete realizations as well, both within and outside Auroville. Inside Auroville, a number of buildings stand testimony to Auroville's aspiration. Outside Auroville there are, for instance, the creation of the Adyar Poonga in Chennai, the restoration of Tranquebar and the work done for the weavers in Varanasi which testify to the Auroville spirit and its love for humanity and the Earth.

Some people are disappointed with the slow progress of Auroville and with the sometimes all too human problems, as there are some who have doubted the guidance and even said that "Sri Aurobindo and The Mother have left Auroville and 'moved on.'" An atmosphere of negativity and a lack or refusal of understanding sometimes weighs heavily on all, unconsciously. The Aurovilians represent humanity, and the human condition as

such is a very mixed affair, constantly pulled down by what Sri Aurobindo called "the downward gravitation." Yet one must be badly intentioned to deny that there are really dedicated people in Auroville, people of goodwill, people with a living soul. They were the active incarnations of the Auroville spirit in the grey past decades, when the first enthusiasm had died down, and they will remain faithful to their ideal. Sri Aurobindo and The Mother asked for no more than a handful of sincere practitioners of their Yoga, the other, less stable elements inevitably and necessarily representing humanity. "The flaming pioneers having descended the amber stairs of birth" from *Savitri*, and those who disembarked from the "bateau supramental," must be somewhere – including Auroville.

## A look into the future

Auroville, like the avatic Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, is an adventure into the unknown. When The Mother talked to the students of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram about the Supramental manifestation and the physical transformation, She spoke about "the Great Adventure". This text remains applicable in all circumstances of the worldwide change that is happening, of which Auroville is on the cutting edge.

*We are in a very special situation, extremely special, without precedent. We are now witnessing the birth of a new world; it is very young, very weak – not in its essence but in its outer manifestation – not yet recognized, not even felt, denied by the majority. But it is here. It is here, making an effort to grow, absolutely sure of the result. But the road to it is a completely new road which has never before been traced out – nobody has gone there, nobody has done that. It is a beginning, a universal beginning. So, it is an absolutely unexpected and unpredictable adventure.*

*There are people who love adventure. It is these I call, and I tell them this: I invite you to the great adventure.*

*It is not a question of repeating spiritually*

*what others have done before us, for our adventure begins beyond that. It is a question of a new creation, entirely new, with all the unforeseen events, the risks, the hazards it entails – a real adventure, whose goal is certain victory, but the road to which is unknown and must be traced out step by step in the unexplored. Something that has never been in this present universe and that will never be again in the same way. If that interests you ... well, let us embark. What will happen to you tomorrow – I have no idea.*

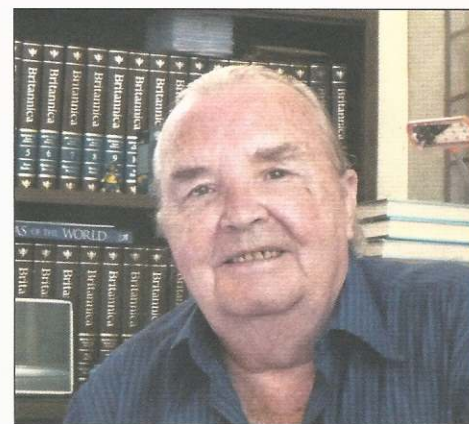
*One must put aside all that has been foreseen, all that has been devised, all that has been constructed, and then... set off walking into the unknown. And – come what may!*

## Auroville and India

The Mother also clearly defined the relationship of Auroville with India and the world.

*India has become the symbolic representation of all the difficulties of present-day humanity. India will be the site of its resurrection, the resurrection of a higher and truer life." And she added, "And the clear vision: the same thing which in the history of the universe has made the earth the symbolic representation of the universe so as to be able to concentrate the work at one point, the same phenomenon is occurring now: India is the representation of all human difficulties on earth, and it is in India that there will be the... cure. And it is for that – it is FOR THAT that I had to create Auroville.*

At present, the world is in the throes of a process of unification in which all existing bearings have been lost, and it is often said that its future hangs by a thread. Dreadful catastrophes have been predicted for the present year 2012 (the past catastrophes like the World Wars and the threat of a general atomic destruction are no more remembered). As Auroville represents the world we should not be surprised if we share in the problems. But if we are tuned to the divine inside, as Mother said, we will traverse any ordeal protected by our inner dedication – *Ce que Tu veux, Ce que Tu voudras* – remembering to tune inward-



Georges Van Vrekhem

ly to the Divine and offering the stuff of our days.

It is to participate in the effort to build Auroville that our souls have chosen to be born at this point in time. The transformative change initiated by Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, the Two-in-One, the Kalki Avatar, when measured against the evolutionary progress, has proceeded at a pace far beyond any imagination (a fact to which The Mother refers time and again in *The Agenda*). This is the evolutionary moment when the transformation of the world is happening. Nobody can predict how it will happen, and few even perceive that it is happening. We are still too blind. But we have been told and therefore know what to do in order to prepare ... for the miraculous. As Sri Aurobindo prophesied in *Savitri*:

*Thus will the masked Transcendent mount his throne.*

*When darkness deepens strangling the earth's breast*

*And man's corporeal mind is the only lamp, As a thief's in the night shall be the covert tread Of one who steps unseen into his house.*

*A Voice ill-heard shall speak, the soul obey,*

*A Power into mind's inner chamber steal,*

*A charm and sweetness open life's closed doors*

*And beauty conquer the resisting world,*

*The Truth-Light capture Nature by surprise,*

*A stealth of God compel the heart to bliss*

*And earth grow unexpectedly divine.*

## REFLECTIONS

# Patterns and predictability

Auroville is a special place, no doubt, but we shouldn't kid ourselves that, as a society, we are anything but very ordinary at present. Like anywhere else in the world, we have our politicians who manipulate and bully to get their way; we have those who enrich themselves at the community's expense; we have a thriving bureaucracy; we have our permanently disaffected ones who seem to draw energy only from protest; we have our freeloaders; and we have those who are intent only on cultivating their own gardens or businesses.

Why? At first sight, it seems an utter contradiction that we can behave this way in the City of the Dawn. Yet we all carry within us habits, patterns, which are very hard to dislodge. They have formed over many years, perhaps – who knows? – over many lifetimes, and at one time they may have had their utility. But today many have definitely outlasted their usefulness. In fact, this is often the real story behind the failure of groups or of our individual and collective difficulty in making progress. It's us, stupid, it's our unreconstructed selves. No wonder Mother emphasized the need to work upon ourselves before we try to change the world around us.

How do these patterns manifest? In many ways. It can be seen in an individual's distrust of new ideas, or of members of a particular ethnic group, or of other Aurovilians with which that individual has 'history'. It can be seen in knee-jerk responses to authority, to outsiders offering advice, to Aurovilians who are perceived to be getting too powerful or acquiring 'guru' status. It is an innate tendency to confront or to flee, whatever the situation, to be a victim or a leader of the pack. It's an inability to question certain dogmas or individuals.

These patterns make many of us all too predictable. Of course, most of us don't recognize that we are driven by these patterns. We believe that we respond freshly, in a psychologically uncluttered way, to every new situation or topic. Furthermore, we are adept at rationalizing our knee-jerk responses. Thus a perennial fear of change may be disguised, rationalized, as a need to gather more information before a decision is made. An aversion to a particular individual is disguised as a purely rational disagreement with the argument that that individual is promoting. A tendency to manipulate groups is rationalized as a need for decisive action to set Auroville on the right path, etc.

The writings of Sri Aurobindo and Mother have

obligingly provided us with many ways of disguising our patterns. In my case, for example, I recognize a pattern which makes me want to stand apart from disputes and disagreements. The real basis of this, I think, is a wish to remain popular, not to jeopardize friendships by taking sides, as well as a certain inability to make decisions when confronted with a mass of conflicting information. But I can readily justify this pattern to myself as a form of spiritual equanimity or as a need to allow everybody to express their 'truth'.

Of course, this is not the whole story. Mother talked of good habits as well as negative ones. Moreover, we are complex beings, not merely habituated automatons, and are subject to all kinds of influences. Our patterns can be weakened through our interactions with each other, through insight, or through sudden incursions of the Grace. But they can also grow stronger. In fact, as we grow older there is a tendency for our habits to concretize. Then we grow into bad parodies, caricatures, of ourselves.

I don't know if I have reached that stage yet, but I'm not truly comfortable in my skin. I don't feel adequately defined, understood, by how other Aurovilians see me or how I see myself. I imagine that many other Aurovilians share this feeling; that, having recognized or at least vaguely sensed their patterns, they would like to shed these accretions and step into the light, to become flexible vessels of the spirit rather than armoured cars of the ego. Auro-stereotypes.

But how? At a personal level, I know that the more I get into contact with my inner being the less I will need to armour myself against others and the more flexible I will become in my responses. And then there is faith. In the context of the yoga, Sri Aurobindo and Mother talk about the crucial role of faith, a faith that precedes knowledge, or, rather, that represents a form of knowledge not accessible to the rational being. Sometimes I wonder how far my habits, patterns, are merely a reflection of the body's lack of faith in anything else but its habitual round. I need to be constantly reminded, to have faith, that our limits, our patterns, are not immutable. That, as Sri Aurobindo puts it in *The Synthesis of Yoga*,

*... this being we are is or can be whatever it has the faith and will to be – for faith is only will aiming at a higher truth – and cease to set limits to our possibility...*

Alan

## NEW BOOKS

# The Tale of my Exile

Barindra Ghose, popularly known as Barin, was the younger brother of Sri Aurobindo. Barin was one of the accused in the Alipore Bomb Case, along with his elder brother and others. However, while Sri Aurobindo was acquitted, Barin was convicted and sentenced to death. On appeal, this was commuted to transportation for life to the Andaman Cellular Jail.

Barin was released in January, 1920 thanks to a general amnesty and soon afterwards he published an account in Bengali of his experience. This was subsequently translated into English by Nolini Kanta Gupta and published in 1922 as *The Tale of my Exile*. It was reprinted in 1923 but has been out of print ever since. However, last year the Sri Aurobindo Ashram brought out a new edition with an introduction by Sachinanda Mohanty.

The question is, why should anyone want to read a prison narrative that dates back almost a century and which features a penal system which is now thought to be extinct. Devotees of Sri Aurobindo will want to read it to glean new information about Barin's elder brother, but they will be disappointed. Others may read it out of an interest in prison literature, a genre which has produced some of the world's literary masterpieces. But Barin is no Koestler or Solzhenitsyn.

The real interest of the book lies in Barin's detailed account of his incarceration on the Andamans and his reflections of what this version of 'justice' does to the inmates. For while the cellular jail in the Andamans is now no more than a tourist attraction, there remain plenty of examples in the world of penal dehumanization masquerading as justice.

Exile to the Andamans, as Barin describes it, was in those days a virtual sentence of death. Malaria and other diseases were rife and the local tribals were head-hunters. The convicts were forced to do heavy labour, the most dreaded of which was oil-extraction, by cruel

prison authorities. The Governor, for example, greets the new inmates as follows: "My name is D. Barry. I am a most obedient servant to the simple and straightforward but to the crooked, I am four times as crooked. If you disobey me, may God help you, at least I will not, that is certain. Remember also that God does not come within three miles of Port Blair..."

It's not surprising that, of Barin's companions, one committed suicide and another went mad.

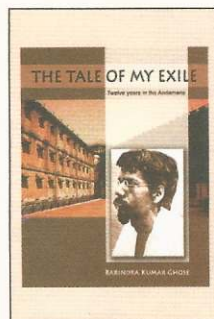
Barin survived, partly because he was a semi-invalid and so was given lighter tasks, but also because the extreme suffering is punctuated by moments of delight and the genuine heroism of some of his companions. In this sense, like many other prison accounts, this book is a tribute to the resilience of the

human spirit. More than this, though, Barin, who had already been practicing sadhana for many years before being sent to the Andamans, concludes that this terrible experience is an opportunity for spiritual growth. "A tree requires for its growth not only the touch of the gentle spring, but the rude shock of storm and rain and the scalding of the summer heat. Man remains frail and weak and ill developed if he has an easy and even life. The hammer of God that builds up a soul in divine strength and might is one of the supreme realities."

Sachinanda Mohanty's excellent introduction provides a brief overview of Barin's life before and after the Andamans. More importantly, it clarifies the relationship between the two brothers and shows how, even if their later life trajectories differed, both shared an intensity of spiritual search and an undying opposition to any form of human oppression.

Alan

*The Tale of my Exile. Twelve years in the Andamans. Published by Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 1911. Price in India Rs 95.*





## Our daily bread

Every morning, hundreds of Aurovilians, guests and visitors from elsewhere enjoy the produce of the Auroville Bakery, whether it be croissants in the Town Hall's Le Morgan restaurant or at the Visitors Centre, or some variety of bread purchased from Pour Tous, PTDC, or the Bakery itself. People drive from Bangalore and beyond to buy baguettes or breads. Yet while we all savour these tasty treats, few realize the time, energy and passion required to make it all possible.

Elumalai joined the Bakery team in December 1995. He was brought in to help with accounting, but quickly started taking up sales as well. Time passed. People left, others joined. After several years, Elumalai decided to take his commitment one step further.

"I was selling everything, but I didn't know how anything was made. I thought I should learn." Learn he did. Now Elumalai leads the bread-making process every morning, arriving at work at around 4.00 a.m. – even in the worst weather. He is striving to expand the operation. "I'm most happy when I can bring in new recipes, like multigrain bread, for example."

Hurricane Thane peaked at exactly the time Elumalai needed to leave his house to go to work. "I was with my wife putting out buckets to prevent flooding because the water was coming in through the roof. And I told her, I have to go." She understood and was supportive as Elumalai put on

a raincoat and rain pants. "I never wear rain pants!"

What waited outside was 140kmph winds and trees falling like dominos. "I was not prepared that the wind would be that bad. If I had known, I would have left my house earlier."

Elumalai's first attempt failed. There were too many bushes and trees blocking the way, the wind was too strong, and he couldn't run in his rain pants. "I went back home, took off the rain pants, and tried again." He crawled under trees and climbed over barbed wire fences, rain whipping

his face, trees falling around him, pieces of roof flying about threatening real harm. He was armed only with a tiny torch and a cell phone. More than 40 minutes later (the distance would normally take him 5 minutes by cycle) he finally arrived, soaking wet with his clothes torn. "I don't know how to explain it clearly. There was no way. When I looked later, I was really shocked. I don't know how I made it. It took them two days to

clear that way."

When he arrived, there were just two people making croissants and the night watchman, but no other workers. He started mixing the dough by himself, determined to provide food for Auroville. Eventually three others arrived. "I was very happy," he says, describing that morning when a handful of people did the work that usually requires more than a dozen workers. "We made about 320 loaves of bread. People came and



Elumalai



The new entrance of the Auroville bakery opened on 26th February

couldn't believe it, couldn't believe we were open."

People told him he was crazy. "I wanted to deliver to the Centre, to the rest of Auroville, but it just wasn't possible. There was no way, no roads were clear. Otherwise, even if a bike could have gone, I would have delivered." When asked how he found the motivation to go out that morning, he answers: "I was thinking of the people. I kept thinking, there's no power, there's no food. What will people eat?"

Two months after Thane, the Bakery unveiled its new space. "It all started because of parking problems," Elumalai explains. "Parking on the street can cause problems as there is a lot of traffic. We were asked to move the parking space for the Bakery." The Bakery team proposed parking on the far side, closest to the volleyball ground, but that would require customers to walk all the way around the building just to buy a single loaf

of bread. They discussed various options, and finally decided on another option which would include an upgrade of the entire facility.

"Now it's going to be a really nice space," Elumalai adds. The new tables are crafted by Ben, the windows and doorways were carefully chosen and the new layout was planned to maximize convenience.

It was a lot of pressure for Elumalai. "It's one thing to oversee construction on your own home, but when you are doing a public project, providing a space for Auroville, it's really scary. It has to be done quickly and done well." The delays were the most frustrating factor. "We wanted to open in December, but there were delays because of power cuts and other problems. Then we wanted to open for Pongal, but then the cyclone came. So now we've decided to open on February 26th, two days before Auroville's Birthday."

Catherine

## Reach for the Stars

The new Reach for the Stars college scholarship initiative for village students is having much success, but now faces the challenge of meeting the needs in its second year.

Sixteen students from underprivileged families in the villages surrounding Auroville have had a chance to follow their dreams of higher education, thanks to the new *Reach for the Stars* scholarship fund. The students are at the end of their first year of college, and their positive experiences of the scheme have raised the hopes of many other young villagers – hopes that may be difficult for the scheme to fulfil.

*Reach for the Stars* founder Stephanie is pleased with the overall progress of the initiative – a project which links donors to aspiring college students. "Nine of the students have specific sponsors, and they communicate with them by email," she says. "I think the sponsors are very happy about the exchange."

The initiative was started last year by a group of Aurovilians and villagers to provide funds for talented but underprivileged village students to go to college. 16 students commenced degrees in 2011 in medicine, civil engineering, nursing, hotel management, commerce and business management. The healthy number of donations from European supporters last year will fund them for the entirety of their degrees.

However, donations for the project's second year are much smaller, and this will hinder the scope for growth. The project only has three confirmed sponsors lined up for the new students who want to join the project this year, and this means there will probably be only enough money to sponsor four or five students. "It's a bit disappointing," says Stephanie, "because we have a good structure now and we know what we're doing. But in Europe, many people are being cautious about money right now. It's sad, because so much help is needed. Even small donations would help."

One of the village students benefiting from the *Reach for the Stars* scholarship is 18-year-old Suchithra from Edaiyanchavadi village. She is undertaking a software engineering degree at Dr Paul's Engineering College near Vanur (next to Aurofood). "After I finished school, my mother said I should go and work in Auroville," she says. "I was very sad, because my friends were going to college but my family couldn't afford it. Then we heard about *Reach for the Stars*. I came and spoke to Balu [her village recruiter for the initiative], and asked for help."

Suchithra passed the selection process, and *Reach for the Stars* covers her college fees of Rs 42,000 per year. She has also recently commenced a part-time evening job at Thamarai, the community centre established by Auroville in Edaiyanchavadi, which gives her valuable work experience and pocket money for exam fees and bus fares. "When I finish, I hope to do a Master degree in engineering, and get a software job in Pondicherry," she says. "If this project was not here, we could not do our higher studies. It is a wonderful project, and very helpful for our life."

Vimal is from Kuilapalayam village, and is doing a four-year computer science degree at Mailam Engineering College, a 30 kilometres daily bus ride away from Auroville. His father works as a labourer and his mother as a housekeeper, therefore his further

educational options were limited to the Auroville Industrial School, which costs about Rs 6,000 per year. Vimal met with Shankar, the headmaster of Aikiyam School, who is the project's recruiter for Kuilapalayam. "He encouraged me to apply for the scholarship, so that I could do the studies that interested me," he says. "I did the interview with the committee, and I was very happy when they accepted me. My parents are proud of me."

Large companies will conduct interviews on campus in the final year of Vimal's degree, so he is optimistic that he will gain employment at the conclusion of his studies. "At college, they teach you how to manage yourself in the interview, and the ex-students brief us on what to expect. I hope that I can get a job with one of those companies in Chennai or Bangalore, such as Tata Consulting Services."

Balu, an Auroville newcomer with an MBA from Chennai, is the recruiter for *Reach for the Stars* in his village of Edaiyanchavadi. He identifies talented and eligible students in his village, and encourages them to apply for the fund. The students are required to write two essays for the application – one about their career aspirations, and one about their life. "This sort of application is a very new concept for the students," he says. "It takes a lot of explaining to help them understand that they need to talk about their personal goals and dreams."

The applications are assessed by the selection committee, and all students are invited for an interview. If the student is then accepted into the *Reach for the Stars* initiative, a profile of them may be posted on the project's website, and their essays are sent to potential donors. "The donors get inspired by the aims the students outline in their essays, and then they choose one student to sponsor," says Balu. "One donor, an Indian man in Europe, took on two students – an engineer and medical student – for their entire degrees. I always check that the students are emailing their donors and studying well."

The establishment of the scholarship fund has given hope to poor students from the villages, but the shortfall this year is glaring – at a time when the educational and job aspirations of village youths have dramatically increased. Bharathi from Edaiyanchavadi village is finishing her final year of high school. She wants to study medicine, but her parents are casual labourers and are too poor to pay her college fees. "There is no doctor in my village," she says. "I would like to become the first doctor here and to help my people. I would like to study,

## OUTREACH EDUCATION



High school student Bharathi from Edaiyanchavadi village, who wants to be a doctor but cannot afford to go to college

but we don't have the money."

Balu points out that he has 15 students in his village this year who want to go to college. "Altogether, there are at least 35 students this year from the surrounding villages looking for funds, but we only have enough for four or five students," he says. "They keep asking me for help. So, it's a critical situation. We need about 8-10 lakhs (US \$ 16,000 - 20,000) this year to meet the need."

Many of the applications for this year are from promising students, and there is a rise in the number of female applicants. While the project ideally aims to match students one-to-one with a donor who covers the expense of their entire degree, small donations also allow the project to accumulate funds to sponsor other students.

The long-term goal for the project is to have an alumni network where the graduates can mentor and possibly sponsor young students. This would aid the project's plan to stand on its own feet in five or ten years. "By then, the students will have graduated and be working," she says. "They will not only be able to pay back the 20% of their fees that we request, but will ideally also be able to fund other students by themselves, so that no outside donations are needed. That is my biggest dream."

Stephanie points out that some of the current students already 'give back' by voluntarily teaching English classes in the villages. "They understand that people are volunteering for them, and want to do that themselves. This mindset is nice."

Lesley

For more information on *Reach for the Stars* visit <http://www.reach-for-the-stars.org/>



College students Vimal (Kuilapalayam village) and Suchithra (Edaiyanchavadi), who have almost completed their first year at university, thanks to the *Reach for the Stars* initiative



# Emailing in India and Auroville

Whilst the mobile phone has been enthusiastically embraced in India, email has not been taken up as readily as a communication tool – except, of course in Auroville. However, here the internet service for guests leaves much to be desired.

India hit international headlines in 2009, when it was claimed that the country had more mobile phone connections (670 million) than toilets. The stories highlighted Mumbai slums with one toilet per 10,000 people, but where every family has at least one cell phone. Whilst India has the reputation of being at the cutting edge of communications technology uptake, enthusiasm for email communication lags way behind, and email practices differ radically from those in the West.

For my work in India over the last two years, I have had to contact professionals across many fields. I've discovered that many people do not respond to my emails. When subsequently contacted via phone, they will claim they did not receive the email and will request you to re-send. Sometimes the process of calling/re-sending can go on for weeks. Academics will generally only respond if you drop names or flatter them about their publications. NGOs and media practitioners may respond, mostly to fob you off temporarily. Most officials never respond. I have received phone calls three months after sending an email, when an organisational director responded with a 'I'm just catching up on emails today', and I had travelled to his state in that time period and had hoped to meet him. Excuses for non-response include monsoon rains that have destroyed cables, being 'out of station', poor electrical power, and inefficient assistants. Emails sent through an organisation's website 'Contact Us' facility are certainly sucked up into a distant cyber vortex.

A Delhi journalist colleague visiting Auroville recently told me that she and her colleagues have good intentions when they read someone's first email request, but it's never quite enough to drive them to action. Only when the fourth or fifth email arrives in the inbox will the compulsion or guilt accumulate adequately for them to be spurred into action. She conceded the explanation's inadequacy, sighing in commiseration.

The fact is that email generally holds very little weight in India. In many Western countries, business emails are regarded as a legitimate form of query that employees feel obliged to respond to within a given timeframe – perhaps one or two working days. Employees feel that their timely response reflects on the organisation or on themselves, and they want to appear efficient and helpful.

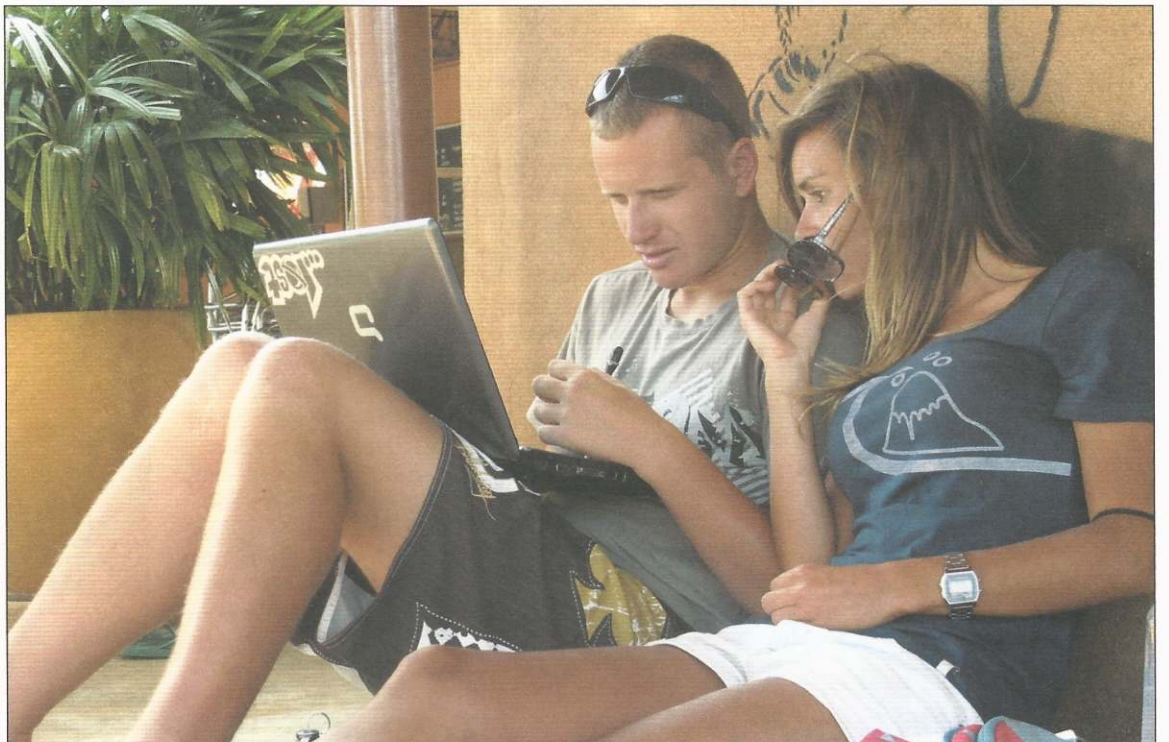
But in India, email recipients often do not feel any duty to respond once they have read the

email. To 'get things done' in India, a face-to-face meeting is necessary. Once the meeting has taken place and a relationship established, only then is progress likely to be made. In a culture where everything is about relationships, interconnectivity and community, why should anyone help a stranger who contacts them via the impersonal medium of a computer? Personal connection is necessary for a sense of obligation to grow. I've learnt from experience – in India, it's best to pick up the phone and request a meeting in person. Whilst a meeting is not always the most efficient use of time, you'll establish a new relationship and get to drink plenty of sweet chai.

Yet, emails linked to innovative social media campaigns have proven popular in India. For its 2009 campaign to ban genetically modified brinjal (eggplant) in India, Greenpeace India emailed thousands of supporters, urging them to sign an online petition. The campaign made world news and managed to get 20,000 signatures within two days, resulting in a government moratorium on GM brinjal. Greenpeace and other organisations continue to execute successful campaigns kick-started via email – which demonstrates that email can be a functional medium in India when emotive content captures the reader's imagination.

## Are email and internet practices better in Auroville?

Auroville is also affected by the communication practices and connectivity issues of wider India. In terms of email practices, some Aurovilians lament that it has not improved governance in Auroville, as they had originally hoped. Aurovilians involved in committees and working groups complain that certain group members never read or respond to emails. Will this always be a challenge in Auroville, given that groups are made up of people from different cultures which have very different approaches to email? And can/should anything be done about this? If so, to whose standard should email practices adhere? Or should it be acknowledged



Guests emailing outside the Auronet office above the Solar Kitchen

that sometimes people do not respond to emails as a strategic measure, or because the issue is an uncomfortable one for them?

Of course, email practices anywhere are shaped by people's capacity to respond, and in India, this capacity is often affected by power cuts, poor connectivity provided by service providers, and weather conditions such as lightning strikes. To a certain extent, Auroville reflects this. Until recently, a number of Auroville communities in the green belt complained of erratic wireless connections. However, since the cyclone destroyed so many trees these communities now enjoy better connections. And when patchy connections make emailing too difficult, face-to-face meetings are always a fallback option – the benefit of being in a small community.

Sadly, for guests internet connectivity is much worse than for Aurovilians. Many guests feel that Auroville – which has a reputation of being at the forefront of technological developments in fields such as solar energy, building and computers – lets them down by having worse internet connectivity than the wider India with its broad communications infrastructure. As a repeat long-term guest, I have battled along with other guests to find decent connections. My wireless USB connection – highly effective in other parts of India, including Pondicherry – barely gets reception in Auroville and manages to creak out one short email per day, if luck is on

my side. The internet cafés in and around Auroville are no better. The Kulapalayam internet shop suffers power cuts for a few hours each day, and cyber seekers are often turned away with a sad shake of the head by the proprietor. Auronet above Solar Kitchen usually has queues, is expensive, has temperamental computers, unreliable connections that crash unpredictably, and its wireless service constantly logs out without warning or is 'down' for long periods. The internet connections in guest accommodations are improving, but are very inconsistent. Connections often go 'down', and one guesthouse manager conceded, after much fiddling with mine, that some guests' laptops 'just don't get' the connection on his site. Other guest communities have excellent connections in a very specific location, which means not being able to work in one's own room. Whilst internet connections are better this year in Auroville than previously, long-stay guests who rely on the internet to continue making their living (for example, building websites) whilst they volunteer in Auroville have expressed their great frustration to me that they cannot get good connections, and that this cuts short their time in Auroville.

Given the challenges for Aurovilians and guests alike, should not an international community dedicated to human unity be able to do better than this with communications?

Lesley

# Experiencing Indian and Auroville health services

Just before Christmas my husband, Norman, aged 80, became very ill and I, aged 72, took him to a local hospital in a taxi. I did not take any cash with me as I had my ATM card and I could pay the taxi with my Auroville account number.

However, the hospital ATM machine was broken and I as I did not have the rupees to pay the registration fee, treatment was not started and Norman had to lie in the emergency room for one hour. Meanwhile, I found another taxi to take me to the University where the nearest cash machine was situated.

**LESSON ONE:** Take lots of cash, including small change, when you go to any hospital. You, or rather your helper, pays for everything as you go along. And keep all the receipts.

Indian hospitals are obviously made for Indians with large supportive families who practically move in and care for the patient. They sleep on a low bed beside the patient and help them with all the necessities that in the West a nurse would perform. This "attendant" is compulsory for all patients but as I have no family here I did not know what to do. I could not stay with Norman all the time as I myself was not well.

A helpful Aurovillian friend explained that it would take four shifts

of people of six hours each to be his attendants. That would mean up to sixteen people for four days! Where was I supposed to get these people from? The friend put out a massmail on Auronet requesting help and about eight people very kindly responded. The friend also undertook the complicated job of coordinating them and the taxis to take them to and from the hospital. We did not have enough people for the last day, so hired a Tamil boy who had been trained in basic health care by Frederike, an experienced geriatric nurse. He was very helpful.

**LESSON TWO:** Do not be afraid to ask people to be attendants. It should be our Aurovillian sense of duty to each other. As we have no families here, our neighbours have to become family.

Nursing in India is not yet considered a "noble profession." Nurses are poorly paid and only check blood pressure and take blood samples. Many do not speak good English which can be unnerving when you are ill and cannot think clearly. Several times I got angry with them as I had different expectations about a nurse's duties.

**LESSON THREE:** Try to remember many things are done differently here.

To be back home in New Creation

was wonderful but then we faced real problems. Both of us needed help and care, especially since the cyclone had just struck and we had no electricity and therefore no fridge in which to keep food. Neighbours were very helpful with offers of "If there is anything we can do just let us know," but we found it difficult to coordinate our needs – mainly food – with their offers. We did not know what demands to make on our neighbours, and in turn they did not know how to help us. Everyone was busy with the effects of the cyclone and our rather haphazard system soon fell apart.

In retrospect I could have been more proactive and asked each of the five neighbours to bring us an evening meal in rotation, which I am sure they would have been only too happy to do. People like to help if the needs are clearly defined.

Eventually, someone came around from the Health Service and suggested we get tiffins delivered and they organized them for us. Somehow we did not think about getting them as we did not know anyone who used this excellent service. They were a great help.

**LESSON FOUR:** When you are sick you cannot think clearly and easily get emotional. You also think you will be better in a few days and are hesitant to worry people with your demands. Do

ask people. Do tell them of your needs. They will only be too glad to be of service to you.

**LESSON FIVE:** Tell people what you need, and when. If you want to be visited – and you will if your illness drags on – ring people or drop them an e-mail. They do not know your state of mind unless you tell them. Make sure you are not forgotten.

**LESSON SIX:** "Train your amma to learn to cook what you like," suggested someone. "And ask her to stay longer if she is helpful. She will probably feel pleased that you have asked her. Be clear and specific with her and you will be pleasantly surprised at how much she can do and how caring she can be." That seems a very good idea. After all, she knows you and the house so it is not like a stranger coming in.

We somehow muddled through feeling confused, helpless and even, at times, frightened at our situation here. When Norman got better after spending three weeks in his room, I got worse and he cared for me beautifully. I do not know how I would have managed if I had been alone. It was pretty scary. "Was this a preview to an old age in Auroville?" we wondered.

The frightening reality is that there is nowhere in Auroville to go to be

cared for. I thought we may be able to stay at a guest house where we would be fed, but no room was vacant. There are about 250 beds for guests but not one for Aurovilians in need. What a crazy situation!

"Oh, in Auroville it always works out O.K. in the end," said one person with a laugh. And of course it did, we are both still alive, but we will never make casually foolish statements like that.

I was told that years ago very sick people used to be shipped back "home." The harsh reality is that they can only go "home" if they have relatives who are willing to care for them. For most older people here now, Auroville is their home. There is nowhere else to go. This is where they will spend their last days.

**LESSON SEVEN:** Read what Mother has to say about sickness and good health.

Rest and quiet, that is indispensable.

As soon as you feel a wave of physical disequilibrium, of ill health coming on, it is necessary to concentrate in the right spirit, in an inner calm, a trust in the Divine Grace, and a will to remain in physical equilibrium and good health.

Dianna



# Aurovilians and extreme sports

**M**other saw physical activity as an essential aspect of daily life. In Auroville, which somehow naturally draws people to extremes, sports have been taken to a whole new level. We host fanatical mountaineers, rock climbers and long distance cyclists. In February alone, Auroville hosted two extreme sporting events: the only Ultimate Frisbee Hat Tournament in India and the 5th annual Auroville Marathon and those are only the official gatherings. Aurovilians are participating in testing events both locally, around India, and even internationally.

## Ultimate Frisbee Hat Tournament

The month kicked off with the 'hat' tournament, for which more than two hundred players from all over India and abroad came to Auroville. This unique type of Ultimate Frisbee tournament invites players, regardless of their original teams, state or country, to get mixed up to form new teams. After the shuffling, the twelve newly-formed teams played six games of Ultimate

cash register during the event, couldn't take her eyes off the players. "That it, I'm starting Frisbee too!" she said.

## An International Trail Marathon

On February 12, 2012, Auroville hosted its fifth edition of the increasingly popular Auroville Marathon. What started as a one-off event to celebrate the 40th year of the advent of Auroville has become a regular fixture in the calendar of Auroville as well as of long-distance running events in India.

This year Sourya was responsible for planning the marathon's route, a particularly daunting challenge after Thane. "The cyclone damage complicated things," she explains. "Plus, I was really committed to avoiding the tar roads." Runners also shouldn't cross each other, the route has to be the correct length, and it cannot be so confusing that runners get lost. After weeks of struggling to find a path that met these requirements, the solution finally revealed itself. "What a relief it was when I finally found something that worked. And I was especially pleased that we

## Highs & Lows

But Frisbee tournaments and marathon runs were only the best-marketed "extreme sports" in Auroville this February. Myriad Aurovilians found a variety of ways to push their bodies, from the depths of the ocean to the wonders of the clouds, to international Ironman competitions. Is this how Auroville will create the Superman?!

Jonah, who's recently taken up scuba diving with a couple of other Aurovilians, says the sport has increased his concentration, awareness – and his lung capacity. "Diving is a meditation of sorts. It's so peaceful and calming, and it requires an extreme concentration where you're aware of every breath you take. It's also about doing the minimum movement to achieve the most." And while scuba diving may not increase muscle mass, "it drastically enhances the awareness of which muscles you're using".

Jonah started taking scuba diving classes last May and quickly achieved his certification. He's presently taking a rescue course and, if the funding comes, will do an instructor course enabling him to teach aspiring divers. "We already have a small diving club, but it'd be wonderful to have a diving programme in Auroville. Many Aurovilians dive when on vacation but don't think to dive here, and there's actually magnificent diving off the Pondy coast." While others were training for Frisbee tournaments and marathons, Jonah was swimming amongst diverse and exotic fish.

At the other end of the spectrum, Auroville's paragliders say the high-flying sport "gives an amazing mix of peace-of-mind and adrenaline-rush. It pushes you," explains Martanda. "As a human, suddenly you have to fly!"

Martanda took up paragliding with Gopal, Agnes, and Aurovici, who pioneered the sport in the bioregion and remain deeply committed to flying.

## An Extreme Triathlon

Those that prefer to remain more "grounded" have also managed to find impressive but lesser-known activities to push their physical limits. Aurovici and Sourya, for example, entered their first Half Ironman competition this month. The event took place one week after the Auroville Marathon, just across Adam's bridge in the streets of Colombo, Sri Lanka.

The Half Ironman is a long-distance triathlon featuring a 2 km swim, a 90 km bike ride, and a 21 km run. Athletes must race the events in that order, without a break, and within 8 hours. To prepare, Vici and Sourya practiced each sport three times a week. It took a commitment of five to ten hours each week for 20 weeks.

"I surrendered it to Mother," Sourya says when asked how she felt before starting the race. "I said 'I've done the best I can to prepare for this, now the rest is up to you. It doesn't matter if it happens or not, it's up to you. I trusted Her to take care.'"

She did take care. Aurovici and Sourya crossed the finish line, their 6 year old son joining for the last stretch – about 7.5 hours after the start, well within the required time for Half Ironman races.

Just five years ago, the idea of Sourya participating in an Ironman was preposterous. "I always did sports when I was young, especially tennis," Sourya says. "But after I had my son Yael, I didn't really do anything." Then, one Sunday morning, Sourya found herself and Yael hanging out at the finishing line of the first Auroville marathon, "just for something to do. I saw all these people crossing the finish line with such smiles and I thought, 'Man,

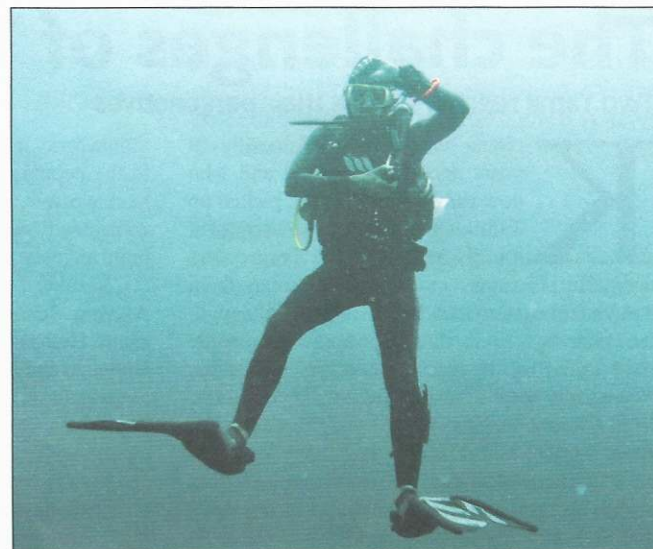


PHOTO COURTESY: JONAH

## Jonah scuba diving

these people are so happy. I want to try it'."

So she started running. "In the beginning I couldn't run one kilometre. I couldn't even run five minutes straight. I ran my first round of Auromodele, and I huffed and puffed my way back home, and I thought running was so hard I'd never do it again. But I felt so good afterwards that, a few days later, I decided to do it again."

The transition from running to triathlons came through cross-training for the marathon, which included cycling and swimming. Sourya started watching documentaries on triathlons and her interest grew. "Triathletes are well-built, and haven't overdeveloped any one part of their body."

It was the Ironman documentary that also inspired Aurovici to join his wife's quest towards ultimate triathlons. "There was an 85-year-old man completing the Ironman, and even an elderly nun, so I realised I could do it too," he explains. "But it's truly thanks to my wife I'm getting into this. I wouldn't have been interested without her."

"What inspires us are not the professional athletes, they are just machines," Sourya adds. "What inspires us are the ordinary, and often elderly, people doing it. If these 80-something year olds can do it, we at 30-something should too."

For Vici and Sourya, their commitment to sports has many benefits. They cite increased energy, better focus and more stable moods throughout the day. Combined with changes in their diet that eliminated sugar, milk and wheat, Sourya lost more than 10 kilograms. They gave up other 'vices' as well by doing sports; they haven't touched a drop of alcohol in three years. "As a result of doing sports, I realised that so much of the work is done on a physical, cellular level. We need to develop a physical consciousness," Vici says. "I was surprised to see that bringing a consciousness into the cells was possible by doing sports."

This is just the beginning. Hours after finishing the Half Ironman, they walked gracefully around their Colombo hotel as if nothing had happened, checking out the Ironman website for upcoming events. What's next? They're already talking about completing a Full Ironman, which is double all the distances, followed by an Ultraman, which is three days of extreme endurance sports. Given their achievement in Colombo, these goals are not far-fetched.

But at the end of the day, their dreams are closer to home. "I want the three of us to complete a triathlon together. Already my dream was to complete one with Aurovici, but my ultimate dream is to finish one with my husband and my son," says Sourya.

"Maybe we'll bring it to Auroville," says Aurovici. "Chandresh wanted to do a marathon in Auroville, so he made it happen. Mark wanted to have frisbee in Auroville, so he started it. Sourya wanted to do an Olympic-length triathlon in Auroville, so she organised it. That's the way these things come to Auroville."

Catherine



Adults and children participated in the Auroville Marathon

Frisbee spread across three different playing fields: one near Udavi, one on the Certitude Sports Ground, and one on the soon-to-be community farm behind Certitude. "Ultimate Frisbee is a more self-sponsored sport with a clear spirit of sportsmanship," Mark, the lead organizer, explained to AV Radio. "One has to keep it cool, know the rules, play fair and work in a team."

The tournament also inspired new participation from Aurovilians. Sourya, as she manned the

could finally officially call it a trail marathon, because the routes didn't include any paved roads."

This year, over two thousand individuals ran the marathon, half-marathon, 10.5k, 5k or 2k routes. It was the largest marathon yet. And for those who believe in quality over quantity, this year the Auroville Marathon attracted a number of running celebrities, including "Barefoot Ted" (see box).

## Barefoot Ted

Barefoot Ted is an independent athlete committed to re-discovering primal natural human capacities and encouraging others to do the same. Many have come to know about him through the pages of Christopher's McDougall's best-selling book *Born To Run*, a book Barefoot Ted likes to call the quirky PhD thesis that he didn't have to write.

*Born To Run* is based on the idea that everything we're taught about running is wrong. Sneakers themselves are designed in a manner that actually changes the way we run. Naturally, we humans run tend to run lightly and land on the balls of our feet; with sneakers, we're more likely to take long strides and land heel-first. Humans are designed to run, and the only equipment we need is our feet.

Barefoot Ted lives in Seattle in America and is an extremely affable person. Having spent the last 7 years focused on mastering barefoot long-distance running, he now shares his insights through coaching clinics and running engagements.



Barefoot Ted showing his foot to an enthralled audience

The day before the Auroville Marathon, Barefoot Ted shared his philosophies of running and life at Auroville's Visitors' Centre. More than 300 people from Auroville, elsewhere in India, and around the world gathered to hear him speak. He answered questions on the benefits of running barefoot and how to start running barefoot, emphasizing the grace, lightness and consciousness that comes with running barefoot.

Barefoot Ted came to Auroville through Anand, a mover and shaker in Indian running. "Auroville's so cool. I have to come back," Barefoot Ted said after the race. "And this trail is totally doable barefoot!"



Aurovici and Sourya crossing the finish line of the Half Ironman with their son Yael who joined for the last stretch



# The challenges of Tamil

Two Tamil teachers share their perspectives

Krishna, who came to Auroville 19 years ago from England and who now runs Solitude Farm, picked up Tamil while working with the local Tamils at Annapurna Farm years ago. He is now married to Deepa from Tiruvanamalai and they have a 3-year-old daughter, Chandni. "Over the years numerous people have asked me to teach Tamil," says Krishna. "Two years ago I felt there was a real need and so I put a notice in *News and Notes*. I gave it quite some thought before I took the plunge as here I was, an Englishman teaching Tamil – was I setting myself up as ridiculous when there were thousands of Tamil-speaking people around me? However, it seemed to me that Aurovilians could benefit from a Westerner's perspective of the Tamil language and so I decided to give it a shot.

"I have come to the conclusion that Tamil is difficult to teach and to learn for Westerners as it is not a 'mental' language," he explains. "It is a very lively and vocal language and is highly complex when reduced to grammar and rules. We need to get away from the paradigm of 'school'. There are many ways of learning something. In my classes I use theatre techniques and do role-playing to get people out of their heads. Westerners have a big block about learning this language – even Bhavana who worked with the villagers for 25 years, admitted to knowing only 'baby Tamil'. My Tamil is of a reasonable level simply because I have always worked and lived with local people and have a love for this culture and people.

"I was very touched by the people who came to my classes. Many of them were older Aurovilians who wanted to try a different approach to learning Tamil. For most of the students it was difficult as they did not spend very much time with Tamils and, of course, they all said the same thing; that Tamils want to speak English and if you ask them something in Tamil they will reply in English.

"I think it would be good if Newcomers could teach English at night schools in the villages where there is a great need to learn English. They would be much appreciated while they would have an 'immersion' period when they got the feel of the people, culture and, of course, the language.

"We do not present enough opportunities for Newcomers and Aurovilians to have contact with the villagers and to learn good Tamil. Most people have no idea about how to get involved with village life and thus Tamil is reduced to a functional language for shopping and getting

things done. It is a deeper symptom of our attitude to the people who live around us and on whose land we live. It is paramount we have a good contact with our village neighbours so that we can build an integrated Auroville."

Shankar, the indefatigable principal of Aikyam School, has started his Tamil classes again. He has a passion and knowledge of Tamil language and is seemingly undaunted by the lack of enthusiasm of the community.

"I have been giving classes for 6 years now," he said with a laugh. "I would say about 200 people have passed through the classes. The biggest obstacle I have found is the Aurovilians' busy and often erratic work schedule that prevents people from attending regularly twice a week. If they have to miss a few classes they get left behind and lose heart. Maybe 'drop-in' classes for the beginners would be a solution, but then we would need more teachers. It is also extremely difficult to teach the spoken language. I have asked many promising people in the Tamil community if I could show them how to teach, but none has taken up the challenge. For some reason they are not inspired by it. One reason is that they would not get a good salary and it has little prestige.

"Tamil is notoriously difficult to learn as there are two Tamil languages, the one in the books and the one spoken on the streets. If you want to learn the book Tamil, I think you could quite easily do it in three months. But the spoken language is completely different. Most people, especially in this area, do not speak it clearly as they are in the habit of swallowing the last syllable of each word. Without hearing each phonetic sound it is extremely difficult for Westerners to understand the word. This is why I am now teaching the Tamil script. The students should make an effort from the beginning to learn the letters as it is really the only way to master the correct pronunciation."

Shankar is obviously concerned by the difficulties of how to teach and how to learn Tamil. "It would do more towards creating human unity than anything else," he says passionately.

Tia, an American Newcomer who has been attending Shankar's Tamil classes, wholeheartedly agrees with him. "I live in the teacher's quarters in Kuilypalayam village and feel it is my responsibility to learn a little of the local language. It's the obvious way to build bridges between people. When I walk around the streets and can say simple sentences to people they love it. It's changed my life here."

Dianna

# AVI meeting 2012

I always look forward to Auroville International (AVI) gatherings, wherever they are held, as they are an opportunity to meet up with old friends who are all part of the Auroville family, from distant countries around the world. It is much like a big family gathering, full of joyful reunions and opportunities to re-connect. However, meetings held in Auroville are special, as they are an opportunity to bring together those of us who serve the Auroville ideal from the far flung corners of the world with those friends who have made Auroville their permanent home, and for us to connect more fully to the work being done on the ground.

AVI meetings are held in Auroville every two years, and this year it was Auroville's turn to be our host. The meetings were therefore organised to enable AVI members to have as much contact as possible with Auroville groups and projects with which they may have a natural affinity. Meetings with the International Zone group are especially important, as this is an area where AVI groups have a close interest and involvement. Meetings were also organised with the Entry Group, Housing Group, L'Avenir, SAVI (a group supporting volunteers) and project holders from a variety of interesting projects.

The AVI Board also met with the newly appointed Working Committee. This was an opportunity for the two groups to get to know each other. It was clear that both groups were a little apprehensive at first, especially as many individuals in the two groups were unknown to each other. However, after a round of introductions, it became clear that we had much of common interest. We discussed the role of AVI in the response to the recent cyclone appeal, and talked about the progress of fundraising and clean-up operations.

One of the issues which has been of concern to members of AVI over many years has been the recognition of its role as a part of Auroville's work, both by Aurovilians and by the official bodies, the Governing Board and Working Committee. Auroville International, officially in existence since 1982 (although in other forms, since the beginning of Auroville), is now represented in 30 different countries worldwide, with three new countries being added in recent months, but it is not officially recognised as a body representing Auroville. This often results in these groups being unappreciated for their work, and their members treated as strangers during their visits to Auroville. The Working Committee promised their support in bringing this issue to the attention of the Governing Board, and seeking official recognition for the organisation.

It became apparent from the beginning of the conference that there was a significant level of engagement of AVI members in the issues raised, and that many issues, particularly concerning the International Zone, are of great concern to individuals and groups across the world, who are willing to engage fully in finding and implementing solutions. One particular issue, the protection of the International Zone and the urgent need to occupy and utilise the land, was discussed with a joint group of Aurovilians and members of AVI groups, and proposals will be put forward to Auroville planning bodies.

From such exchanges, one important role of AVI members becomes increasingly clear. Their goodwill, commitment and passion for the experiment of Auroville is obvious, but their level of detachment from daily preoccupations seems to bring another perspective to the work, and sometimes helps to unblock situations which have for many years been unmovable. Individuals can also bring knowledge and expertise into situations where Aurovilians have struggled to find solutions. I hope that such a role can be more fully exploited in the coming years, and a real collaboration emerge.

Martin Littlewood  
(Chairman, Auroville International)



Group discussion during the AVI meeting, 2012

## NEW BOOKS

## What is this Auroville?

The children's book *Tell me, my friend, what is this Auroville?* was released on February 7th at the Unity Pavilion. Beautifully illustrated by Jyoti Khare and with texts by Christine Devin, the book opens with the story of a lonely Banyan tree which was to become the centre of a city. For so it had been decided by a Lady who was living in a room a few kilometres away in Pondicherry. Why?

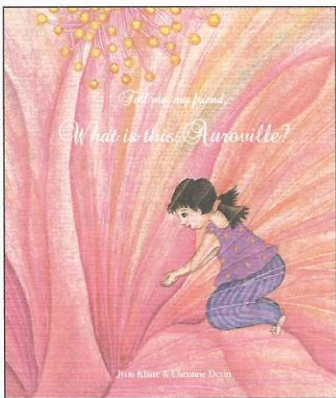
"She saw that a great war was approaching... This had to be prevented ...

"She knew of a very special diamond.

"Hidden deep in the hearts of men, it was smaller than a seed of a millet and bigger than the universe. Inside of its invisible space, all separate elements merged, like different rivers became one in the ocean; inside of it, all men were one. If enough people, she said to herself, could descend in themselves far enough and activate the power of that diamond, it would release in the atmosphere such a tremendous power that the terrible war could not happen.

"She needed to gather a group of people, and she needed a place for them to undertake this exploration undisturbed: a special kind of city, where the main goal of the inhabitants would be to go in search of the secret diamond. The land around the Banyan would be ideal for that city."

The book then recounts how the Lady,



with her magical invisible wand, touched people all over the earth, who came to work for the realisation of the city.

Animals also came, amongst them a small blue rabbit with huge astonished eyes. One day, having fallen asleep at the foot of the Banyan, he asked the Banyan in the dream "What is this Auroville?" A number of beautiful answers are offered, each with its

own truth, yet none of them is The Truth. So what is this Auroville?

"The real Auroville is not its buildings or its windmills or its trees: the real Auroville is the silent search for the invisible diamond. Ask the Banyan, he will tell you ..."

Highly recommended.

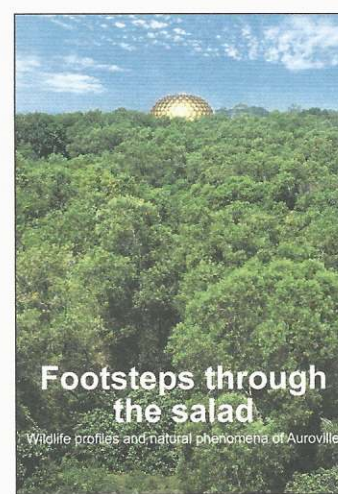
Carel

*Tell me, my friend, what is this Auroville?* was printed by Auroville Press and published by the Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research, Auroville. Available from the White Seagull bookshop in Auroville, price in India Rs 490. For more information email [aurovillepress@auroville.org.in](mailto:aurovillepress@auroville.org.in). Another children's book illustrated by Jyoti Khare, *The Crow who wanted to sing*, based on the story 'The acquisition of friends' from the Panchatantra is also available from White Seagull bookshop. Price in India Rs 450.

## Footsteps through the salad

Tim Wrey of Prisma, who has always been an admirer and lover of nature, has written a book about this topic with the unlikely title of *Footsteps through the salad*. He chose such a winsome title because of its eye-catching appeal. But footsteps? Whose footsteps? And what's salad got to do with it? Tim explains that the 'salad' refers to the plant world which abounds in Auroville; the 'footsteps' were inspired by an actual incident he experienced, when a semi-wild owl walked through a plate of salad he was eating. However, in the wider context of Auroville he uses 'footsteps' as an image to portray the diverse life-forms which can be found walking, crawling, flying, hopping and slithering their way through our Auroville 'salad'. But there the playfulness ends; the book is, in fact, seriously informative about the lives of amphibians, mammals, birds, reptiles, insects and other creatures of all sorts, shapes and sizes – both friendly and not so friendly – which reside in Auroville alongside the human population.

What was the genesis of this book? Initially, Tim wrote a series of 30 articles designed to stimulate interest in the world of nature for *Connexions*, Aurelec's in-house monthly journal. Some 20 years later he decided to compile those articles into a book in order to make the information accessible to a wider audience. He also added new articles on topics such as butterflies and moths, bees and porcupines. Finally, the book comprises 72 articles, 65 of which are on wildlife and 7 on natural phenomena such as cyclones, the monsoon



and nature's agents of destruction.

Of course, one can visit any well-stocked bookshop and find plenty of books on birds, insects, various animals, and the like. *Footsteps* differs in that it covers virtually all the common life-forms to be found in one geographical location... and how delightful to find that it's written for the layman. For Tim's aim in writing *Footsteps* was to increase interest in and awareness of nature among the Aurovilians, specially the younger generation.

I found some of the chapters to be of great interest, replacing

my abhorrence and fear of certain species with at least a modicum of respect. Admittedly the section on micro-organisms was not, for me, as interesting as those covering topics like wind, thunder and lightning, snakes and cockroaches, but *Footsteps* is presented in a manner which is definitely user-friendly; one can choose the topic of interest easily, learning and enjoying simultaneously.

As to accuracy of content, Tim avers that all the articles incorporate the most up-to-date information that he could obtain at the time of writing.

I shall keep my copy handy for the moment when a particular form of wildlife has whet my appetite, then I shall sit down with a cup of some genial beverage and peruse *Footsteps*, awfully glad that Tim spent his time and energy on writing it.

Marlenka

*Footsteps through the salad* is available from White Seagull bookshop. Price in India Rs 720. For more information email [prisma@auroville.org.in](mailto:prisma@auroville.org.in)



## February entertainment

The month of February attracted hundreds of visitors. Auroville educated, entertained and amused them on an increasingly grand scale. The News and Notes of February 11th listed 16 different types of yoga classes including classes in French, Russian and Italian, yoga for the elderly and acro, sivananda and laughter yoga. Six different types of dance classes were offered ranging from Salsa New York style, swing, to Odissi in Bollywood style. Also many massage courses were available, including Watsu, Ayurvedic, Hawaiian Lomi Lomi and an assortment of others. Amongst the one-off courses, at least ten covered oddities such as body percussion, circus skills, horse and soul, and Didgereedoo.

Hidden amidst the offerings was an introductory course on Integral Yoga, while more about Sri Aurobindo and The Mother could be found at Savitri Bhavan.

## Towards self-governance

The Study Group on Selection Processes and Self Governance set up by the Residents Assembly Service to refine the selection process of various groups like the Working Committee, the Auroville Council and L'avenir d'Auroville, has concluded that it needs to look at the overall situation, including all working groups and their mandates.

The Study Group therefore started work on alternative governance methods. The result of its preliminary work has convinced them that the Residents Assembly is the one and only instrument to arrive at a substantial change in Auroville's governance. Without a bigger and more responsible participation of the Residents' Assembly, no change at all can take place in the present governance system which, they said, is actually based on lobbying, nepotism, lack of trust and power abuse.

The study group will make a presentation highlighting the great possibilities of Auroville as suggested by the Mother. The group proposes that the Residents Assembly 1) takes back its key role; 2) approves the general implementation of all governing groups' activities through the process of absolute transparency and 3) gives a mandate to the Study Group to propose the practical renovation of the actual governing structure.

## Ponies' retirement

The Dehashakti Horse Friends Club organized a bazaar to fundraise for the maintenance of three old ponies that had served many children in Auroville for the past 15 years or more and now are over 25 years old. As only two ponies can continue to offer rides and there are eleven seriously committed students, two or three young ponies will need to be bought as well.



The opening concert at CRIPA

## CRIPA opens

On February 5, the Center for Research in the Performing Arts (CRIPA) at Kalabhumi opened its doors with a concert by the Auroville Choir, conducted by Nuria. The CRIPA hall will be used for the exploration and development of theatre, music and dance. It will also be used for regular classes, workshops and performances by Auroville residents.

## The teaching of flowers

Savitri Bhavan hosted an exhibition telling the story of the Mother's life and work in the framework of her flower teachings. The exhibition included photographs and paintings of the early Ashram, along with flower photographs and portraits of the Mother. It also screened a new two hour video *The Teachings of Flowers: the Life and Work of the Mother of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram*, made by Loretta and Coren. This tells Mother's story using beautiful flowers and rare photographs and paintings of the early

days of the Ashram. For more information on the video email [loretta@auroville.org.in](mailto:loretta@auroville.org.in).

## Polskie Filmy Auroville

A Polish Film programme was conducted at Bharat Nivas on February 16 and 17, showing films from the 1960s and 1970s by directors Andrzej Kondratiuk, Wojciech Jerzy Has, Krzysztof Zanussi and Andrzej Wajda.

## Marc Vella

Pianist, composer, writer, poet and UNESCO 'Peace Artist' Marc Vella visited Auroville for three weeks and gave a number of well-appreciated concerts. Also the documentary *In praise of the false note* featuring him was shown. Following the film, Marc Vella talked about his work. He subsequently organized a *Caravan of Love* for February 2013 to tour India and invited some Aurovilians to join him.

## Study facilities at Savitri Bhavan

Aurovilians, visitors and volunteers can now increase their knowledge and understanding of the vision of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and the aims and ideals underlying the experiment of Auroville by using Savitri Bhavan's open computer access to a large range of audio-visual materials. These include recordings of courses, guest lectures and special events held at Savitri Bhavan.

## Crown road quiet road?

Residents of Arka and Surrender have appealed to Aurovilians and especially the Auroville youth to drive slowly and not to make noise, particularly at night, on the newly paved Crown road from the Solar Kitchen to Arka. Residents complain about not being able to sleep due to noise caused by Auroville youngsters and their friends.

## Free email

The Budget Coordination Committee has decided to allocate free email accounts to all Aurovilians and units. Auroville has been classified by Google as an educational institution and charging Aurovilians and Auroville services and commercial units is not felt appropriate to reducing the exchange of money in Auroville.

## Requests for farm land

In response to a number of requests for small areas of land for farming, and concerned that those small plots of land might turn into large gardens if the individual eventually decided not to continue farming, the Farm Group has set up a sub-group to explore the possibility of creating an experimental project which would provide small plots of land to those wanting to farm. The Farm Group wants to promote farming and it considers that starting on a small piece of land will provide an excellent experience.

## New film policy at Cinema Paradiso

Since 2005, Cinema Paradiso, an Auroville service, has screened a fixed pattern of films at the Town Hall's Multi Media Centre. Now Cinema Paradiso has decided to start film series which will present documentaries and features

from different genres and will focus on various topics, regions, issues and themes.

## IMO certificate for dairy

Annapurna farm has obtained IMO certification for its dairy products and is introducing a range of certified organic products for which they will charge more. It is planned that all Auroville dairies will become organically-certified.

## Auroville Accessibility Code

Accessible Auroville, in collaboration with L'avenir d'Auroville, has drawn-up an Auroville Accessibility Code for all public buildings, areas and facilities. The Code includes, amongst other things, prescriptions for ramps, handrails, signage supplemented with pictograms, door widths, non-slip flooring, adapted drinking-water facilities and accessible unisex toilets. Guesthouses are to have at least two rooms at ground level with integrated toilet and bathing facilities. In new communities, at least two fully

# News in brief

accessible ground-level flats should be constructed.

Public transport vehicles are to be adapted to have devices to assist people getting on and off. Safe, fully accessible pathways should be constructed for pedestrians, including wheelchair users, people with babies and small children, elderly people, people with physical difficulties and others.

## Dog sterilization camp

AV STRAW (Auroville Stray Relief and Animal Welfare) conducted free of costs a series of sterilization camps for stray dogs in the surrounding villages.

## No increases in 2012

The Budget Coordination Committee informed the community that it will not be possible to offer a general increase in allocations. This is due to a shortfall of funds because of rising costs due to Indian inflation, insufficient contributions and the global recessionary effects on Auroville. The BCC will only be able to increase budgets in very exceptional cases.

## Concerns about the lack of housing projects

In an open letter to all the working groups of Auroville and to all Aurovilians in general, the Housing Service has once again expressed its serious concern about the lack of new approved housing projects. Stating that the previous team of L'avenir d'Auroville approved 11 housing projects with around 120 flats during its 2-year tenure, the present team, in office since June 2010, and notwithstanding "hundreds of communications, reports, sharings, surveys presentations and other information efforts" has not approved one single housing project. Warning that this is hampering the growth of Auroville – which is already stagnating as the Entry Service keeps narrowing or closing their doors because of this situation – the Housing Service expressed its desperation as it has nothing to offer those who constantly approach them asking for places to stay in new projects.

The present L'avenir d'Auroville team objected to the open letter as it says it has given site permission for collective housing of 139 units for 280 people with another 154 units for 309 people currently being processed. Those projects that have site permission are under study by the concerned project holders and architects who have to follow up with a request for building permission. However, there is currently no building application for collective projects pending with L'avenir d'Auroville.

L'avenir also stated that residential development needs to be combined with services, amenities and social spaces if Auroville is not creating dormitories without social life, and that the growth of the population of Auroville needs to be combined with the overall growth of its employment capacity, job and income generation. "Resources therefore should be properly invested and balanced between housing, services, amenities, infrastructure and income-generating activities. In this direction, L'avenir d'Auroville has prepared a strategic plan that was presented to the Governing Board and which has been published in the Auronet that projects a growth in the Auroville population to 3,000 people in 5 years. This is in accordance with the existing trend and the absorbing capacity of our community."

## Walking into Exile

The Pavilion of Tibetan Culture organized the exhibition *Walking into Exile* showing rare historic photos of HH the Dalai Lama arriving in India on March 31, 1959, when he and his entourage crossed over at Khenzimane in today's Tawang district of Arunachal Pradesh. He was received by a senior officer of the Ministry of External Affairs and the local Assistant Political Officer who handed him a message from Jawaharlal Nehru, the Prime Minister of India: "My colleagues and I welcome you and send greetings on your safe arrival in India. We shall be happy to afford the necessary facilities to you, your family and entourage to reside in India. The people of India, who hold you in great veneration, will no doubt accord their traditional respect to your personage. Kind regards to you."

The exhibition was inaugurated by Professor Samdhong Rinpoche, former Kalon Tripa (Tibetan Prime Minister) and was followed by a talk by Samdhong Rinpoche on My Vision of Future Tibet.

## Electronic tokens

Thanks to Future School students Chandran, Dyuman and Kanikannan, the Financial Service office at the Town Hall has now moved with the times and installed an electronic token system. This should end the confusion of who is next in line.

## Aspiration Talks

The recordings of the 'Aspiration Talks' (in French), which are the responses of The Mother to questions raised by three early Aurovilians (Christophe P., Bhagwandas and Alain Monier) between March and August 1970, are now available from GangaLakshmi, House of Mother's Agenda, Savitri Bhavan (email: [savitribhavan@auroville.org.in](mailto:savitribhavan@auroville.org.in)). The English transcription of these talks has been published in *Collected Works of The Mother*, volume 13.

## Matter precipitates

From February 10-12, the Sri Aurobindo Centre for Studies India and the World, organized a seminar titled *Matter Precipitates – it is in a hurry to transform itself*. Individuals from Auroville and outside gave presentations on topics such as the spiritual nature of matter; genes and life; and stem cells and the body's evolution.

## Police surveillance

Following a number of security problems and petty crimes, Auroville has been brought under police surveillance. Two mobile police teams, each consisting of a sub-inspector and four constables, have been made available for patrolling the areas.

## 40th anniversary of the start of the Matrimandir concreting



PHOTO COURTESY: MATRIMANDIR

A stone bearing the writing (Om) and Mother's signature was put in the base of the East pillar on that day by two Auroville children, Ramalingam (left) and Marta

February 21st 2012 marked the fortieth anniversary of the beginning of the concreting of the structure of the Matrimandir. The ceremony on The Mother's birthday was recorded in the diary of Ruud Lohman, one of the pioneer builders of Matrimandir:

"This morning [February 21, 1972] we had another grand solemnity, at sunrise. Again hundreds of people had gathered in the splendid light of the rising sun. On the hill formed by the excavated earth, twelve fires had been lit and later another great fire was lit in the centre of the crater. This time we had gathered to officially commence the next phase of the work: casting the four huge pillars which emerge from the depths up to zero level to carry the large sphere. There were twelve people, all in some way close to Mother. The group descended towards the first level at three meters depth, where they all received a stone. They walked in procession all around the excavation and then put their stone in the cement mixer. Behind them then followed the hundreds, even thousands, each contributing a pebble.

Nolini-da, elder disciple from the Ashram, read out the following message from the Mother, which she had given for this occasion:

"Let Auroville be the symbol of a progressive Unity.

And the best way to realize this is a unity of aspiration towards the Divine Perfection in work and in feeling, in a consecration of the entire life."



# Pondicherry can conserve and be modern

Sebastian Cortés has been living in Auroville for seven years. Before coming here, he was a noted lifestyle and fashion photographer living in Milan. Today he continues to produce work for many international magazines but also he has more time to pursue personal projects. One of these is the photo book *Pondicherry* which has taken him five years and which has just been published by Roli Books. To accompany the book launch, Aurodhan Gallery in Pondicherry put on an exhibition featuring some of the photos.

**Why does a fashion and lifestyle photographer take up a project like this?**

I rarely got a chance to do photography for the simple joy of just doing it. So the Pondicherry project is like experiencing the joy of simply having a general idea, and then searching it out through visuals while enjoying the process of discovery. Also, I have done fine art book projects in the past and now I'd like to do more.

**Why Pondicherry?**

When I arrived in Pondicherry I felt it's an undescribed story. It's a legendary colonial place for children studying in France, and it has this presence, this indescribable force, which is Mother and Sri Aurobindo, and then there is the Catholic Church and all these different ethnic groups. All this melts together to make a very complex reality. This is why I also invited three very different writers to write about their idea of Pondicherry because I never felt that my images alone would give that gamut of tones necessary to explain something which is still unexplainable.

Pondicherry seems poised at a moment when it is neither this nor that. So the question arises, what is the future of this place? Is it going to become just another noisy Indian city? Or is it going to have the strength to choose something else?

**Did you have a particular angle that you wanted to explore?**

Being a lifestyle photographer, initially I was fascinated by the homes. The book that I had in mind was going to feature interiors from the simplest Tamil houses up to the most grandiose colonial mansions. But I couldn't get into the latter, so more and more it became a fine art project, which wasn't going to have any objective: it was going to be simply an aesthetic search. At that point it became pure perception, pure observation.

**But the focus in the Aurodhan exhibition is very much on old houses. Is this an exercise in nostalgia?**

No. I had seen a photographic book on Pondicherry but it was so nostalgic in its style and approach I decided I didn't want that. I adopted a different approach. For example, I chose a specific type of color which gives a certain contemporary 'oomph', and when I came in to photograph interiors I explained to the owners that I didn't want them tidied up. I was not interested in creating any mystery, I just wanted to record everything that was there. I told them it had to be as if, all of a sudden, time stopped.

**Did they understand what you were doing?**

No, but they were fascinated by being part of it. In one room, the man and the girl were lying on the ground. Graphically it didn't work so I asked them to sit on chairs. Then I told them they had to remain perfectly still for a very long pause, because there wasn't much light and I wanted everything to be saturated. So what I caught then was a kind of 'Oh my God what's going on?' kind of pose. This stylistic approach gives a contemporary feel, as opposed to the lifestyle kind of thing where everything has to be 'bubbly'.



Interior of a house in Ananda Rangapillai Street



Interior of a house in Ananda Rangapillai Street

At the same time, I wasn't afraid of the ordinary; I wanted to be brave enough to let some of the ordinary come out. I didn't want to be so contemporary that it only appealed to people with a certain aesthetic.

In another home, an old guy was lying on the bed. I came around siesta time but he called me in. He was not feeling very well so I said, 'Relax, sleep, ignore me.' I must have stayed behind the camera thirty minutes before he really relaxed, and then came one of those moments which all of a sudden takes over you, and you get this tingling feeling that it's 'happening'. This is the joy of my work, those free, exciting moments when all of a sudden you feel, 'aaah'.

**So you didn't want to impose any particular interpretation?**

Formally and stylistically yes, I was moving the project along with a particular interpretation. But as far as modifying or tweaking the moment... No, these were moments when I just allowed the actual situation to play out.

**What about the shot of the rather unkempt office? Isn't this a comment on Indian bureaucracy?**

No. It's one of my favorite shots because it gives you the sense of that improvisational quality of any Indian office and yet, if you look at it from an aesthetic point of view, it is very contemporary. There are so many layers; the plastic is mixing with the masonry, there are the blotches on the wall, etc.

**Was it also the aesthetics which attracted you in that shot of a tile with Mother's handwriting, a stainless steel pot and a row of switches?**

Yes. I wanted to get Mother in somehow, to have that evocative presence in the most simple way, because Mother was about a certain type of modernity. I wanted something that spoke to her aesthetics about modernity.

**At the launch of the book at the French Consulate you said you hoped one of the effects of the book would be that Pondicherry would become an artistic hub.**

That's my dream. What I see, and what I hope comes out of all of this, is that Pondicherry understands that if it can conserve what it has, it can also be modern. It's not about being stuck in the past, it's about looking at the past in a different way, a contemporary way.

The problem with Pondicherry is that while it has heritage, there isn't a contemporary culture here, and this doesn't happen overnight. Take Colaba in Mumbai. Here you have high priced restaurants and modern art galleries, but you still have the old Arab owners and the smell of the port and cheap food on the streets: it's a wonderful place of melting. So if you can keep what you have and keep it authentic

while bringing in something new, that can be a wonderful thing. We have to modernize without losing what is here.

**But how?**

We need to keep the little carts — people want to keep buying coconuts, that's not the problem: we don't want gentrification. And we don't need the arts and crafts kind of thing. For me, areas of the city should be set aside for development as cultural containers but with an eye towards new forms of expression and contemporary art. Pondicherry has the interesting possibility of having the best of both worlds: old-world charm and modern day cultural venues. For example, the distillery could become a place for contemporary art and some select commercial activities, which would make it unique. I'm sure the

biggest architects in the world would love to put something special here, something which could transform this place, put it on the international map, just as the Guggenheim did for Bilbao. And then people would come from all over and appreciate what else is here: the heritage and the non-tangible elements which are the most important.

**But would most Pondicherrians share this vision? Doesn't it represent a somewhat elitist perspective?**

Certainly, I don't make any excuses for it.

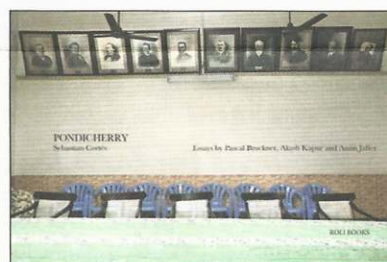
I come from a group of people who obsess about imagery, aesthetics. But that doesn't keep me from enjoying the simplest things. I'm perfectly happy in an old Tamil home. At the same time, I think there's a need to bring life to a place which I think is gasping for oxygen. That's why I think we could all come together and dream, not just about restoring old buildings but also about doing something 'wow', because I think the 'wow' factor is important. Auroville would also benefit from and possibly be involved in this transformation. A laboratory like Auroville gains by being connected to that which is best in contemporary expression. It might also attract a tourism which is more about substance ... I hope?

**How optimistic are you that it will happen?**

I think Pondicherry has a moment now when something new can happen. The French Consul is enthusiastic, there is political capital ready to be spent, and on 12th December there will be the worldwide release of the film, *The Life of Pi*, which features Pondicherry. People will be asking, what is this place? We have to take advantage of these moments because these windows are short-lived. Hopefully, Pondicherry can do it.

*From an interview with Alan*

*Pondicherry by Sebastian Cortés is on sale in all books stores in Pondicherry and Auroville. Price in India Rs 1,495. The book is available for Aurovilians at a special rate. For more info contact Sebastian at cortes@sebastiancortes.com*



The cover of the book *Pondicherry* shows an image of the Chamber of Commerce, Pondicherry

## SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION

### Subscription rates (including postage):

- One year subscription rates: India Rs. 450; other countries Rs 2,000 equivalent
  - Two year subscription rate: India Rs. 800; other countries Rs 3,700 equivalent.
- Those for whom the subscription rate is an obstacle are invited to contact *Auroville Today* for information on reduced rates. *Auroville Today* does not receive any funds from Auroville. Your subscription (or your supporting contribution of double the amount) helps us to continue this work.

### There are three ways to subscribe:

- Through our website.** Subscriptions can be ordered and paid on-line through [www.auroville.com/auroville-today](http://www.auroville.com/auroville-today)
- By sending your contribution directly to Auroville Today.** Surrender, Auroville 605101, Tamil Nadu, India. Cheques sent directly to *Auroville Today* should be made payable to Auroville Unity Fund, specifying: 'Contribution for Auroville Today'. Personal cheques are preferred to bank cheques. Please do not send postal money orders or cash.

### 3. By sending your contribution to:

- 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,
- 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, email: [AVINY@aviusa.org](mailto:AVINY@aviusa.org)

- The Netherlands:** Auroville International Nederland, email: [penningmeester@avinl.org](mailto:penningmeester@avinl.org), (Triodos) Bank account 19.84.20.927, account name Auroville Int Nederland, Account address

Hermelijnstraat 73, 6531 JW Nijmegen. (IBAN: NL26 TRIO 0198 4209 27, BIC: TRIONL2U).

**Editorial team:** Alan, Carel, Catherine, Dianna. Contributors: Lesley Branagan, Marlenka, Martin Littlewood. 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.**