

# Auroville Today

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## OLIVER! – Community theatre at its best

Aurovilians from the ages of seven to seventy five gave a rollicking, heart-warming performance of the musical 'Oliver!', the story of the hungry little boy who dared to ask for more.

On October 5th and 6th the Sri Aurobindo auditorium thrummed with singing wenches, a thunderous villain, a groveling old thief and a flock of starving children. Vaguely familiar tunes like "Food, glorious food" cut through the humid night air. From the opening scene of the workhouse children treading a huge wheel to the climactic but upbeat ending, it was a glorious success. Charles Dickens, who wrote 'Oliver Twist' in the mid 19th century, was all too familiar with the story's background. When his father became bankrupt, he himself was put in a children's home. Dickens wanted to show the hypocrisy of the upper classes and the Church through his writings. The lively music by Lionel Bart for the musical version of the story is also a product of his working-class Jewish boyhood in East London.

As usual with Auroville theatre there was the problem of language, or languages. When the villain, Bill Sykes, spoke in Cockney – a working-class London accent – it must have been unintelligible for probably 95% of the audience. The other perennial problem is the huge stage. The soft tones of women and children were easily lost in that vastness; the acting coach Norman spent hours shouting "projects, projects!!" and "face front!"

The music, played by Holger on violin and Matthew on piano, swept the show along and the young children were bursting with enthusiasm.

Paul, the initiator, wisely decided to keep the project to a seven week limit. This was partly because it had to fit in with the school holidays and also some of the team had to leave Auroville immediately afterwards.

When one witnessed the finished



The workhouse children

performance it was difficult to believe that most of the cast had never set foot on a stage before. The professionalism and inspiration of Holger, Matthew, Nuria, Norman and Paul carried them gloriously through and they became a well-integrated team.

The main characters were sharp and vivid. Jana played the wife of the pompous Beadle, played by Marco, who was dressed in full Victorian regalia but strangely barefoot – an Aurovilian stamp perhaps? Clare played

Nancy, the 'tart with a heart,' who is torn between her sympathy for young Oliver and her love for the villain, Bill Sykes. It seemed as if the brazen hip swinging 'gangster-girl' role was a tad difficult for her to portray but Clare's bright energy and sauciness in her scarlet dress made her character convincing.

From the moment farmer-musician Krishna as Bill Sykes entered to the thud of his sack of booty on the ground, the audience was caught up in the atmosphere of his violence. He provid-

ed the solid feel of dread to counteract the sweetness of the girls' choir and the exuberance of the children.

Otto, head of Auroville Financial Service, was obviously born to play the wily character of Fagin the thief, and brought a touching pathos of humour and wit to his obsessed character. He mesmerized the audience with his writhing, elastic body, bouncing movements and expressive voice. Who will ever forget his wild eye-rolling or his fingers clawing at the air as Bill Sykes

threatens to strangle him.

Oliver was played by Surya, a young Tamil boy who handled the English musical songs with remarkable confidence for one so young. His speaking voice was strong and clear and his obvious sense of enjoyment was tangible. Anandi as Bet was exceptional in her grace and polished performance, although some of her songs were a little too difficult for her range.

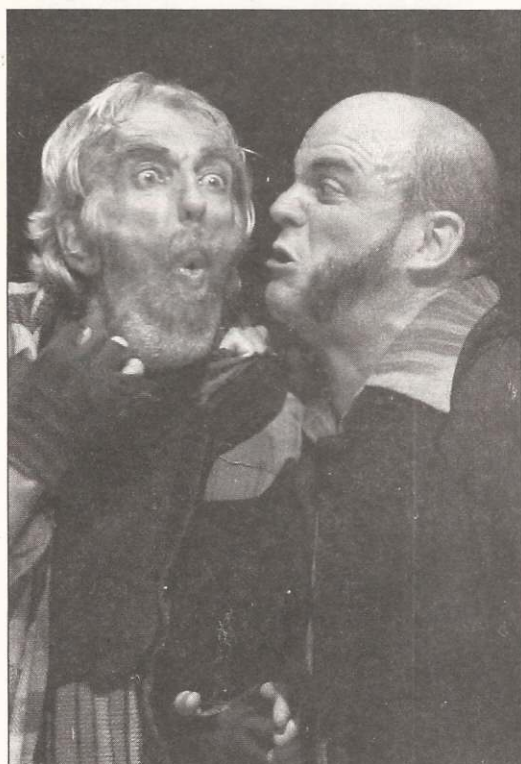
The real joy of the play was provided by the children. They danced and shouted and sang their hearts out. Stav as Charlie and Isa as the Artful Dodger with a jaunty top hat perfectly caught the tough nonchalance of city kids. The choir of twelve girls sang beautifully and looked poised and confident in their long skirts and shawls.

For all the children it was a remarkable experience. The sense of camaraderie and working together with adults was inspirational for them, and they came to rehearsals with great enthusiasm and were never late. Everyone agreed that the presence of the children created a high standard of behaviour with the minimum of ego clashes, "as if everything was oiled by some grace" as one veteran of many Auroville plays put it.

The performance played to a full house on both nights. "This is real community theatre and I feel so proud of what we've produced," said one of the adult participants. Another mentioned how encouraging it was for the teachers to see such progress. "It is so good to see how our children have developed. They could not have performed at this level even seven or eight years ago."

Maybe the ultimate praise for Paul's creation came from a seven year old girl in the children's chorus; "I don't want it to end; I want it to go on and on for ever."

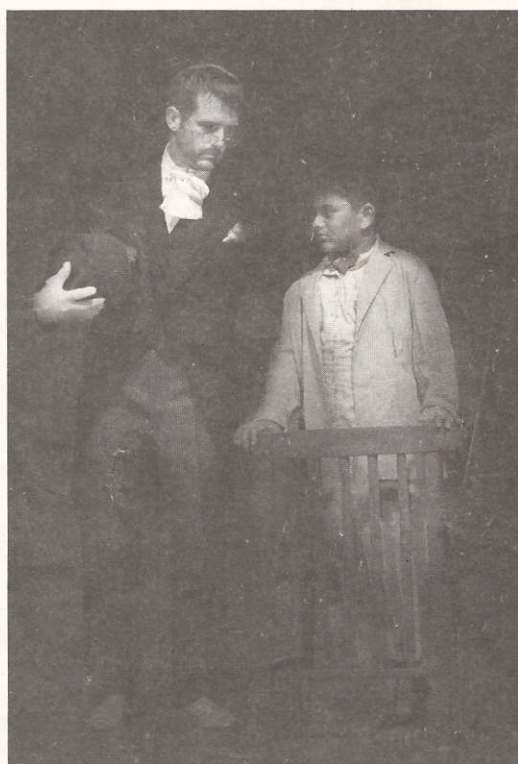
Dianna



Not the best of friends: Fagin (Otto) and Bill Sykes (Krishna)



Singing the joys of thieving: The Artful Dodger (Isa), Fagin (Otto) and Charlie (Stav)



The good Mr. Brownlow (Jesse) and Oliver (Surya)

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# Reflecting on Auroville's economy

On August 31st, the Auroville Economy group completed its tenure of three years. A new group, now termed the Budget Coordination Committee, needs to be created. But before doing so, a reflection on the policies and successes of the work of the Economy Group is required. Have the ideals, as envisioned by The Mother, been in the forefront of their vision or have these ideals been put on the back-burner in favour of so-called practicality? Critics say that the Economy Group has only paid lip service to The Mother's ideals, and that their objectives were too narrow, both in terms of philosophy and in their vision of the economy.

A major criticism concerns the Economy Group's maintenance policy. "The effect upon Aurovilians who have been subjected to these policies has been brutal, creating a distressing atmosphere in Auroville, which, regardless of the intention behind the decisions taken by the Economy Group, is not acceptable," writes a group of critical Aurovilians. They acknowledge, however, that "there are also quite a few residents who are trying to abuse Auroville's economic system and profit by it, which makes the work of any Economy Group difficult and may induce an exaggerated urge to control and over-structure."

Here Lyle, a former member of the Economy Group, responds to the criticism by submitting his personal reflections on the work of the Group.

## The work of the Economy Group

The work of the Economy Group was to supervise the collection and disbursement of income and expenses for the Central Fund. The Central Fund, essentially Auroville's municipal budget, includes over 60 activities, including school budgets, village education, road repair, security, forests and so on. The income consists largely of contributions from commercial units and guest houses.

## AUROVILLE INTERNATIONAL

# Thoughts about the land

The participants at the Auroville International meeting in Montreal, Canada reflected long on the land situation in Auroville. By the end of the meeting, strong impressions had emerged. Excerpts from an open letter.

During a presentation from a member of the Canadian Association, a strong message was delivered on behalf of an Algonquin indigenous elder that "the earth is our mother and as you couldn't own a part of your mother you also cannot own the land". This statement had a strong impact and had us rethinking the prevailing attitude in Auroville that all the land must be purchased and owned. We found ourselves looking with fresh eyes at this assumption in light of the seemingly impossible scenario where land prices are beyond anything reasonable or affordable, coupled with the fact that even if we did have the money, landowners choose not to sell.

The sense we had was that this impasse was calling us to seriously look again at a co-operative model of co-development with the villages (who are also landowners) that goes beyond what has so far been achieved. Auroville still maintains to a large extent a relationship to the villagers which is capitalistic in nature (employer/employee and accompanying power differential) and consequently perpetuates a model which we know is unsustainable and is rapidly revealing itself to be as inadequate as the socialist system proved to be – a process which Sri Aurobindo has foreseen and described in *The Ideal of Human Unity*.

We believe that if Auroville shifts its focus from buying/owning all the land towards fostering co-operative relationships with the villagers where they can keep the land but are encouraged and given practical support to use or develop it in ways that are ecologically sustainable and consistent with Auroville's consolidation priorities, we will not only deflate the situation which is currently inflated out of all proportion but, more importantly, we will have moved significantly in the direction of an economic and social model that is new and progressive and in the long run much healthier. We may also go as far to suggest that it is Auroville's obligation as a laboratory for the future society to make this shift, as this issue is no longer particular to Auroville but a global phenomenon, which ultimately con-

When the former Economy Group started three years ago, we felt that a lack of transparency clouded our collective judgment; a lack of accountability prevented us from understanding our real needs; and a lack of interest in the efficient use of funds resulted in spending beyond our means. We felt that these concerns required immediate attention because they threatened the very integrity of our economic life. Our primary aims were, therefore, to increase our accountability, our transparency, and our efficient allocation of resources.

As of today, many of these critical areas have been addressed, particularly on the expenditure side. All activities now submit proper budget requests that include the previous year's income and expenditure and present financial reports. An accounting system for all Central Fund activities has been developed which shows a full picture of the cost of our various activities.

We have also developed an accurate maintenance database, which shows where Aurovilians work who receive community maintenance. Together with this database, we have developed transparent policies to promote an egalitarian allocation of maintenances. What is still lacking is a database of those who do not work or work only minimally for Auroville and of those who cannot participate in Auroville's economy.

We were less successful in organizing the income side. We have not yet succeeded in clarifying the contribution guidelines for commercial units, guest houses, and individuals who do not contribute toward Auroville through work. Neither have we developed an adequate contribution tracking system. All this means that there is still significant work to be done before we can claim to have a Central Fund Budget that has real transparency.

In the course of our work, there have been three primary criticisms of the Economy Group. The first has been that we did not change the economy in any fundamental way by moving it toward a more in-kind system. The second has been the

tributes significantly towards a widening gulf between those who have and those who don't.

There must be many tools and strategies that can be applied in order to support this shift. Developing worker cooperatives along the lines of the Mondragón Corporación Cooperativa in Spain is one idea. The proposal of Olivier for Auroville's Conscious Community Exchange System for Sustainability (ACCESS) is another. We would like to invite all individuals and bodies concerned, and in particular the International Advisory Council and the Governing Board, to think with us and suggest possible modalities for making this transition. Whatever the best solution will be, we believe that research and experimentation in this direction is the need of this moment.

We trust that if Auroville can agree to embrace this challenge, it will also generate more goodwill and interest from the global community towards Auroville than ever before, as a genuinely new economic model of co-development would really be something radical, interesting and progressive. It may release more funds and generate more confidence for Auroville's future development. It may give greater strength and credibility to Auroville's application to become a UNESCO World Heritage site of the future. It may also be an added incentive for Government of India and Tamil Nadu to find new ways to safeguard and protect the development of land not owned by Auroville but within the Master Plan area because it will be evident that Auroville is genuinely committed to safeguarding the villagers' interests and not inadvertently exploiting them or denying them their most precious asset.

Finally, we would like to propose that this idea could be adopted in a more official way during Auroville's 40th birthday celebration and that the next 5 – 10 years could be seen as a time frame in which this new economic model of co-development becomes a priority for our applied experimentation into the creation of a society aimed at becoming the city the earth truly needs.

Auroville International Board  
08.10.2007

maintenance policy. The third, most recent, criticism is that we have requested Central Fund activities to submit regular expense reports.

We have promoted less 'in-kind' payment of maintenance than was desired. We received much criticism when we increased maintenances but at the same time eliminated the Solar Kitchen lunch subsidy – something we did to allow people greater choice and to push the Solar Kitchen to be more efficient. Another decision that evoked outspoken criticism was our questioning of the budget for the Pour Tous Distribution Centre, the community experiment that aims at evolving a system that will take care of the essential needs of all Aurovilians without money circulation in one with the ideals of The Mother. [see *AVToday* #218, April 2007] Our main concerns, that the project is divisive and inefficient, still need to be addressed.

The Economy Group's maintenance policy has resulted in some of the most significant criticism. The Economy Group took the position that people should work and that work was required to get a maintenance. We agree that, as per Mother's directions, work should not be linked to a maintenance. However, there are differences of opinion concerning how this should affect our maintenance policy. Most people who receive a Central Fund maintenance do not work 35 hours a week.

According to the policy implemented by the former Economy Group they were not eligible for a full time maintenance, but were allocated a part-time maintenance. This was not appreciated by some of those who do not work full-time.

The most recent criticism has been more limited but no less vocal. The Economy Group was accused of 'brutality' for requiring managers of activities to submit monthly financial statements. It has been our position that simply reporting on Central Fund disbursements and not on actual expenditures is inconsistent with the Economy Group mandate. Central Fund money is not the private domain of any individual. The community has the right to know how its money is spent, and not simply that it was given.

I hope that the work done by the former Economy Group to clarify the community's financial situation will be continued by the next group responsible for the Central Fund budget, and that whatever new directions are taken do not sacrifice transparency, accountability, or efficiency. It is dangerous for us to believe that an in-kind economy does not have to fulfil these criteria. An economy that embraces spiritual ideals must also be honest, transparent, efficient, and accountable. It must have in place mechanisms to reduce our egoistic tendencies to abuse the power that comes with money.

Lyle

## AUROVILLE AND THE WORLD

# Auroville in Ethnomir



The honeycomb plan of Ethnomir

In August a small team of Aurovilians visited Russia to participate in the festival of Auroville in Ethnomir. Founded in 2006, Ethnomir is an 84-hectare cultural complex 90 kms west of Moscow in the Borovsky district of Kaluga Region. Designed in the form of a honeycomb, Ethnomir will ultimately house 52 cultural centres of different countries – an idea that is very close to the concept of the International Zone of Auroville.

Currently it has traditional ethnic dwellings – about 40 yurts from Tibet, Mongolia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tuva, and tipis of the native Americans. The construction of a Russian House began in 2007, and there are plans to build Japanese, Chinese and Australian centres.

The idea of a festival of Auroville in Ethnomir began when Ruslan Bairamov, the president of the Dialogue of Cultures - United World Fund, the organization which founded Ethnomir, visited Auroville in 2005. The idea grew and eventually Ruslan combined the festival with the beginning of the construction of 'India House', which is to be the cultural centre of India.

Before the Auroville team moved to Ethnomir, the Indian Embassy in Moscow hosted a presentation of Auroville and Ethnomir. A film on Auroville was shown, followed by short presentations on various topics pertaining to life in Auroville, and on Ethnomir. Nearly 200 people attended.

A few days later the Auroville delegation arrived in Ethnomir, in time for the August 16th foundation stone-laying ceremony of the India House. Dr. Ananda Reddy guided the proceedings while Uma and Manoj chanted Vedic hymns. The event was attended by several government officials. Blessing packets were placed in the foundation and nine granite blocks were placed around it by various people. One of the stones was placed by Masha, an Auroville child.



Ruslan Bairamov

Everyone was then invited to shower flower petals over the stones. A sculpted lotus was presented on behalf of Auroville by Frederick.

The India House is scheduled to be completed in 2009, the 'year of India' in Russia. It will have an exhibition hall, a yoga studio, an Ayurvedic medicine centre, an Indian restaurant and a guest house. The architect's design is of eight rooms, each representing one of India's different ethnic and cultural regions. The materials for the interior decor will be brought all the way from India. In this way, it is hoped that the Indian House will be a miniature India inside Russia, and Russians will have a chance of getting a taste of Indian culture without leaving the country.

Over the next two days, Ethnomir celebrated the festival of Auroville. Nearly 150 participants, mostly young people, attended the event. Various programmes were held. The Auroville team offered sessions in hatha yoga, concentration, guided meditations, Kho-kho, Kabadi, Vedic chanting, singing, meditative painting, theatre sports, craft workshops, medicinal plant excursions, as well as talks on many aspects of Auroville, integral yoga and human unity. One of the highlights of the festival was a hands-on workshop of building a capsule. Here Johnny had the opportunity to initiate Russians into the mysteries of this structure's sacred geometry.

This may just be the beginning of a more lasting connection between Russia and Auroville. The Auroville delegation expressed the hope that the Pavilion of Russia finally materializes in Auroville and that an Auroville International Centre is soon established in Moscow.

Adapted from a report by Manoj



# Auroville needs more fraternity

Long-time Aurovilians Claude and Abha share some of their perspectives on the Auroville of Today.

**Auroville Today:** *You have both lived here for a long time. How do you perceive the Auroville of today?*

**Abha:** I am most concerned about the discontent and disillusionment which is prevalent in Auroville, notwithstanding the very many positive things that are going on. At the level of our organization in particular we don't do well. A big problem is that decision-making is still too much in the hands of a select few. There are people who could contribute substantially, but for all kinds of reasons they no longer express their views. Because of that, Auroville is walking lame. More people should be involved in the making of policies, in all fields of Auroville.

**Claude:** There is an old pattern persisting: that things can be arranged in back-room discussions and then pushed through meetings for approval. It's happening all over the world like that. But Auroville should be different. If proposals were first made public, and the general public's considerations taken into account before anything is finalized, agreement would be much easier.

**Does it mean you are in favour of a more democratic process?**

**Abha:** The issue is rather one of transparency and brotherhood. Since I have recently become a member of the Funds and Assets Management Committee, I am confronted with the lacunae in our system of decision-making. Many people ask where Auroville is going, more in particular if it is going off-course. They wonder why well-qualified people are not part of a decision-making process, why people are by-passing community processes. The answer is always a lack of trust. That's perhaps where we need to focus: on building trust among us Aurovilians. If you cut out the politics, it is there. But as soon as politics or ideologies come in, everything gets spoiled. People should realize that the fraternity of Auroville is far more important than plans or ideologies.

**Claude:** We are also getting much too bureaucratic. Formerly, Aurovilians used to freely take the initiative to meet with important people or to start projects and raise money. Now this is causing problems. For example, that I had invited the Lieutenant-Governor of Pondicherry to the Jean Monnet exhibition. It was felt that it was the Foundation's prerogative. I do not agree. Auroville is not a corporation with a Chief Executive Officer! Another example is the recent decision of the FAMC that people who want to start a project, now need prior permission from various groups before they are allowed to start fund-raising. I understand the logic. But the Tibetan Pavilion would never have existed if I had had to follow this procedure.

Auroville has grown because of the initiative of the Aurovilians: their interests, their energy, their creativity to start projects have made Auroville what it is today. That spontaneous initiative should not be killed by imposing a plethora of rules or by an official hierarchy.

**You have often said that the Matrimandir imbroglio of a few years ago has put Auroville off-track. Could you explain this?**

**Abha:** The main issue, for me, was the way in which people were removed from the management of the Matrimandir. It was believed that by removing some people the problems would be solved. To achieve that, every method in the book was used, including involving the Governing Board. That was a huge mistake. Forget the personalities – those who were removed might have needed a breather from the Matrimandir. But the way it was done created a tremendous disunity right at the heart of Auroville, at the very place which is supposed to symbolize our aspiration and unity. By asking the Governing Board to directly intervene in the removal of individuals, a terrible precedent was set. I think Office Order 105 regarding the Unity Fund and increasing intervention by the Foundation in many areas are a direct consequence of that action.

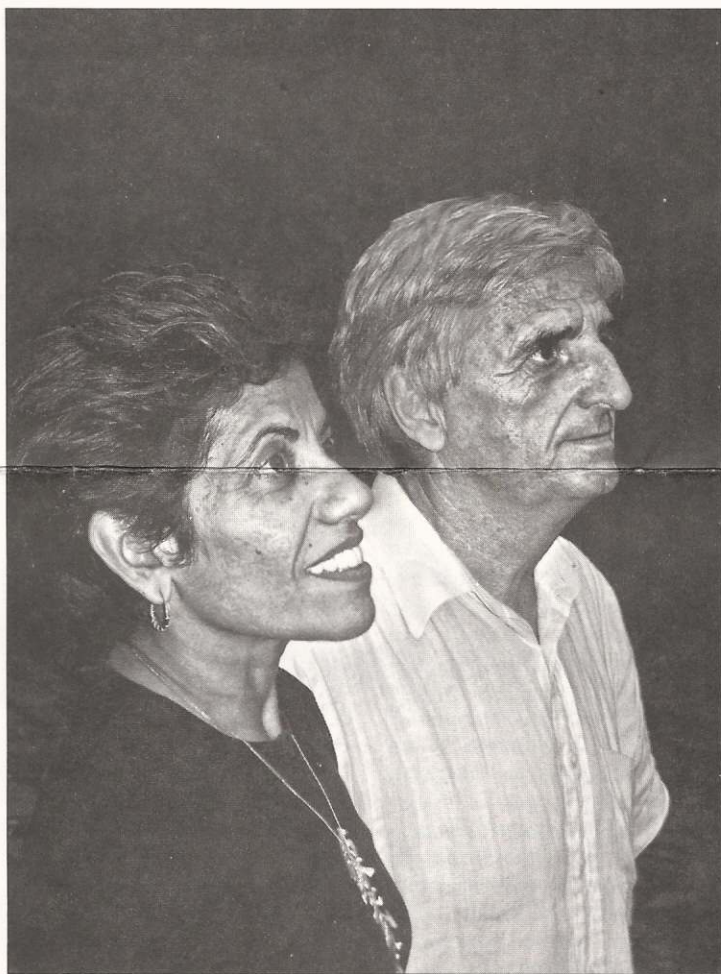
**Claude:** It is, in fact, an authority problem. Who in Auroville has the authority to ask difficult ques-

tions of anybody or of any group? Where can you go if you feel an injustice has been done to you? Auroville has no court of law; it is not possible to start public interest litigations, so people are dissatisfied. At the same time, many people are not ready to accept that any group in Auroville assert authority. In other words, we need to build a ground-level consensus. That means that decisions are not taken by seven people in the Working Committee or eight people in the FAMC or in L'Avenir d'Auroville, but by at least 60 to 70 people actively participate in decision-making.

**Having lived here all these years, do you feel that Aurovilians' dedication to the deeper purpose of Auroville is increasing?**

**Abha:** I can't answer the question. Sometimes I am shocked to hear that people have joined who are clueless about the deeper reasons of Auroville. Auroville is about self-discovery, about an inner search in whatever way, and all the clues have in fact been given by Sri Aurobindo and The Mother. So to be clueless about that dimension is really unfortunate.

On the other hand, many people pursue that inner quest privately or go to the Matrimandir or Savitri Bhavan. This dimension needs to grow more and more.



Abha and Claude

**Claude:** Sometimes I think that our aspiration in the early days of Auroville, when we had nothing, was more intense. Now we have become more bourgeois, so it's perhaps more difficult to keep that same intensity of aspiration.

But you can't judge spirituality by looking at the outside. One can do a lot of tapasya and still be full of human defects. (laughing) One lama once told me that some Tibetan lamas only reincarnate because of their attachment to their possessions! Outwardly they show a dedication to spirituality, but inwardly...

**You are the moving force behind the Pavilion of Tibetan Culture. Do you think that Buddhism should be taught there?**

**Claude:** It is a tricky question. As Tibetan culture is 99% Buddhist, teaching it would be logical. But Mother has said 'no' to religions in Auroville. We can of course teach Buddhism as part of a course on the history of religions.

On the other hand, Buddhism has a lot to offer. A hundred years ago, it was a secret teaching. Today the initiates could share many things and techniques which can be very beneficial to people all over the world, but which are still considered as secret. I believe it should be demystified and made it accessible, just as has been done for Vipassana. The Tibetans should do the same, and it would be good if that knowledge would be available from the Tibetan Pavilion.

**Can you share your vision of education in Auroville?**

**Abha:** Our daughter Smiti chose to go to Last School, where education is not aimed at passing exams and getting a certificate. Her going there was also a logical extension of our own beliefs in Auroville including an integral education. When one reads all that Mother said about education, it is so marvellous! Why on earth would one want to limit his child to a syllabus system which is necessarily constricting in time and scope, and which is only logical when the child has a specific goal and wants to pass an exam in order to achieve it! Now she is 17 and has chosen to continue studying at Last School.

**Claude:** We told her that she could go to Future school or the Lycée Français if she wanted, but she chose not to. This means that she won't have the required certification if she wants to pursue higher education in France or India. So she may have to go through a crash course of one or two years to obtain the necessary grade if she decides to go to a university. In this way, she would lose a few years – but she has gained a lot of other things instead.

**Abha:** I feel that the Auroville education should create true individuals, people who are self-aware, who will not follow others just because everybody else is following them. His Holiness the Dalai Lama, when he came in 1993, was intrigued by Mother's concept of integral education. He felt Auroville should study the Auroville children 10 years, 20 years after they have left school to see what their education has produced. Personally, he felt that there are useful aspects in the examination system, for example, it gives a target to the student.

**You are both long-term executives of a commercial unit, Shradhanjali. What is your relationship with your employees?**

**Abha:** In a small unit like Shradhanjali, there is a personal contact with each employee. We know something about their lives and their problems and about the situation in the villages they come from. We do try to increasingly interweave their life with Auroville. We show them socially relevant films or street theatres – the Auroville Health Centre has produced a number of excellent efforts – on issues such as garbage, AIDS, nutrition, family planning/pregnancy, alcoholism, pesticides etc. Lucas recently spoke to them about solid waste management and EM.

**Claude:** Our employees, like most employees in this community, hardly know anything about Auroville. In August, we did an Auroville tour. We visited various Auroville units; our employees got the grand tour of the Matrimandir. They sat in the petals, in the Chamber; they ate lunch at the Visitors Centre – many of them couldn't stomach the 'healthy plate'! – and visited Pitchandikulam. During the tour they asked hundreds of questions. They were thirsty for knowledge and so happy! They all asked afterwards if they could go again and meditate at the Matrimandir.

**Abha:** We Aurovilians make a division between 'Aurovilians' and 'villagers.' That's harming us. For example, when Sydo was murdered, there was a meditation at the Banyan tree which was announced as 'open only to Aurovilians'. The workers were very upset. They asked why they couldn't express their solidarity. They wanted to sit with the Aurovilians as one, not separated.

**Claude:** But they are, as Mother said, the first Aurovilians and should be part of our projected population of 50,000. Our land and town planning is distorted because we do not consider the villages. This leads to a hundred other problems. The sooner we include them, the better for us.

**Abha:** I feel that's the key. They may not have an intellectual comprehension of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, but in their hearts they can understand very well and that is much more important. If we could share with them, there would be a 100-fold return in terms of a harmonious development of Auroville.

*In conversation with Carel.*

## In brief

### Sydo murder case

On October 3rd all the accused in the Sydo murder case, the Dutch Aurovillian who was found murdered in his house in January 2004, were acquitted for lack of evidence. The Secretary of the Auroville Foundation has proposed to the Government of Tamil Nadu that it initiates appeal proceedings.

### No! to recruiting children

The Auroville School Board has warned against film crews that come to Auroville to recruit children for commercials. Increasingly, film companies, insistently ask children to pose for shots either at schools or at playgrounds. The School Board has asked parents and older children to protect the younger ones.

### More bureaucracy?

The Funds and Assets Management Committee (FAMC) has issued elaborate 'Funding Proposals Endorsement and Assessment Criteria,' imposing an approval process for funding proposals. The intention is to ensure that proposed projects are in line with Auroville's overall aims and support our common development, that they are not in conflict with existing projects, and will not create future unsustainable financial burdens on the community. All those who wish to fundraise for an activity will now first have to present their proposal to the Project Coordination Group which has the authority to approve or reject it. Proposals over Rs 10 lakhs will moreover require permission of the Planning Group and the FAMC.

### Land management

After a long process, a Land and Resources Management team (LRM) has been constituted to take charge of all Auroville Lands with effect from October, 2007. The team takes up this work from the Land Consolidation Committee, which was disbanded by the Governing Board in September, 2007.

### Quiet beach disappearing

Residents of Quiet are concerned about their disappearing beach. In April 2006, the width of the beach was 70 metres. In October it was 32 metres. A small-scale experiment to prevent beach erosion using cemented tyres and Palmyra-trees was blocked by the neighbouring fishermen. How long the beach will last is anybody's guess...

### Residents' Assembly Service

In August 2007 the Residents Assembly (RA) decided to constitute a Residents' Assembly Service consisting of three members who would serve for two years to manage the meetings of the RA. The task of selecting the three members was entrusted to the Selection Committee. The Committee has now proposed three Aurovilians for the job who will start functioning from November 1st, 2007.

### Passing

Malvi, the 4-year young daughter of Mani and Saroja, left her body on October 13th. She had been suffering from a brain tumour for more than a year.



## "An inner conviction is required"

Italian couple Liliana and Marco say that they always felt like tourists in Italy, "as if we didn't really belong there. But here in Auroville, we've always felt at home."

"I immediately fell in love with Auroville and have always felt good here," begins Liliana. "If I hadn't, I am the sort of person who would either do something about it, or leave. Many people here complain about things, but there are also so many people quietly working away at what they believe. Without an inner conviction that what we are doing is very worthwhile, we might as well be anywhere in the world," she continues. "It is only I who can decide what is best for me at this present time. No committee or organization can or should do this for me."

Marco cuts in, observing that Liliana's Italian blood is warming up but says he agrees with her. "I too strongly feel we don't have to depend on our elected people to guide us. We need good administrators who can do their job efficiently and therefore help me to do my job more efficiently. I feel many people talk too much about the latest crisis which they imagine we are in, and this produces a lot of negativity. The only thing we should do is try to have a clear mind about what needs to be done, create the right atmosphere and the nec-

essary skills, and then do it with a full commitment and sense of purpose."

Now it's Liliana turn to interrupt. "When we came 12 years ago there was hardly anything here, and look at Auroville now. It has blossomed under our eyes. It's a miracle that so few people have managed to produce so much in such unfavourable conditions. When we live here all the time it is easy to forget our amazing achievements. We should be proud of this and let it inspire us and others and keep working with highest ideals."

"I personally keep out of Auroville politics but I do attend General Meetings. But Marco has at different times been involved with the Council, the Working Committee and other groups – whenever he feels it is necessary, or feels he has something useful to offer. We both work hard and are careful to utilize our spare time to the best possible advantage."

"I have established the unit Miniature which produces clothing and bags and I work there six days a week, from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. I started with two employees and now we've sixteen. And although it is hard work and a lot of responsibility, I love doing it. I feel some

units do not do well because the executives who run it do not spend enough time there. I feel you have to be there all the time to create new products, and to support your workers who will then give their best."

Marco speaks of his extremely full life. "I am also very busy. I have built a Tai-Chi hall on the terrace of our home where I give three hour lessons five days a week. Two years ago a group of us created the Cinema Paradiso in the multimedia complex which I feel is a great success. In the mornings we offer it free for the schools to use and the rest of the time for conferences, presentations and so on. And of course in the evenings there is a regular programme of films."

Marco also volunteers as a contact person for newcomers. "I feel very strongly that this programme should be encouraged as Auroville can be a large and confusing place for new people, especially if they are alone or do not speak good English. From time to time, I call them over the phone offering help or advice, often just pointing them in the right direction. I also help them in their contact with the entry group."

Asked about the future, they both speak simultaneously.



Liliana and Marco

"We are both now in our early sixties and hope to continue what we are doing for many more years. Where else in the world can older people work as they want to, without compulsory retirement or redundancy? We don't want to travel any more; we feel we have seen everything and are now 100% in our right place."

"India is full of beautiful places to visit, so why go all that way to Europe? We used to visit Italy for years to see parents, children and grand children, but now we feel they should come here if they want to see us."

"It is strange, but we feel we've been here so long that we have lost contact with Europe. Last time we were in Italy, we felt as if we didn't know what people were talking about; so much

seemed to revolve around TV and the media, and people's opinions come from those. It all felt a little unreal compared with the vitality here in Auroville."

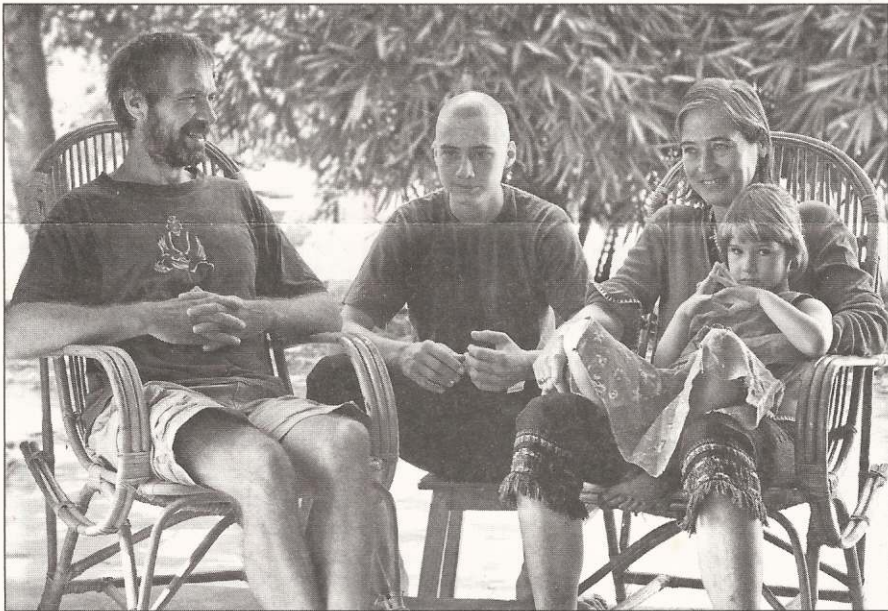
"One thing we started in Auroville a few years ago is the 'Grandparent's scheme', something that has given us a lot of pleasure and satisfaction. Young children here do not usually have grandparents and so we put a notice in the News and Notes offering to be surrogate grandparents. This we've done with a few families and some very nice bonds have been created."

"Here in Auroville, we have no fear of old age or death. We live our lives in the present and take the future as it comes."

Dianna

## Views from two new Aurovilians

Nelly and Rene from Holland have been in Auroville now for three years with their 4 year old daughter and 17 year old son. Life in Auroville they say, has not been easy.



Rene, Manolo, Nelly and Verle

### Nelly reflects:

"A part from the nightmare housing scenario, things have been good," says Nelly. "It is tough being here with a young baby without family support and I have been through many changes. Which is, of course, why I came – to try and realize things that were difficult to practise in Holland. But in fact I had to change a great deal."

"Back in Holland one could always blame the system for the situation, but here there is only yourself to fall back on. There seems to be this constant pressure here to raise oneself to a higher level, and that is good, but it can be a great effort. The strong positive and negative energy fields here can cause one a lot of confusion. When you are new here you can feel you are sucked into the historical accumulations that have accrued over the last 40 years, both the good and the bad, and it can be difficult to keep one's own individuality and freshness."

"I guess I am typically Dutch with their stubbornness and resistance to change. You can easily see here in Auroville how people bring their national characteristics with them, something that generally causes difficulties!"

"We lived in a keet hut in Aspiration for two years and I became seriously ill from the damp and fungus. At one stage my condition became so serious I thought I might die, so the only resort was to go back to Holland and recover. It was a dreadful period. I hear the Aspiration keet huts are going to be pulled down – thank goodness for that! Now we have a house in Gaia's Garden and are very happy."

"My son Manolo who is 17, loves the freedom Auroville has given him. He spent a lot of time with Johnny in the Greenbelt and developed a love of nature and now has a palm tree nursery. He cycles around the villages and collects different palm tree seeds and now has quite an extensive collection of seeds and plants. He goes to the Bangalore Botanical Gardens and is making connections with various seed banks. He also loves his school and appreciates the scope for expression it gives him after the pressure of exam-oriented schooling of Holland. However he misses the Dutch friends he grew up with, but keeps in touch by e-mails."

"Veerie was only one year old when we came here. We had a terrible shock when on Veerie's birthday, our third day here, Sydo, a Dutch Aurovilian was murdered. Although we did not know him personally, we were staying with people who knew

him well. This was a shocking confrontation for us. It abruptly brought us into the reality of Auroville and India. We realized it would be very different from our rose-tinted expectations."

"I am still learning to accept situations rather than fight them. I have left my home country and everything I was familiar with and I have to try and 'find my way' in this new land. Maybe my sickness was part of this; I don't know. Auroville has not been easy. I think I faced death through frustration, exhaustion and illness. But I am still here and love being here."

### Rene's take:

"At first we were happy with our hut in Aspiration as we wanted to experience community life, but after a while the reality began to show through. We expected more commitment to Auroville's goals from people we knew. We were disappointed when most people from the communal kitchen we were part of were not interested in trying to organize organic vegetables. We were surprised when we saw the difference in living conditions between the Westerners and the Tamils."

"But after a year or so we realized it was no good pointing the finger at other people, it was only by looking at oneself that things could be improved. We saw that the people who stay in Auroville are the ones who accept this attitude; the ones who can't, will leave feeling bitter and frustrated. This was personally a very important lesson for me in the newcomer period."

"Often the thought comes, 'What the hell am I doing here?' Only when I went back to Holland last year did I realize how much I had changed. I felt uncomfortable there. It is difficult to explain mentally. I realized Auroville has 'an indefinable attraction' and that I am on a path of no return."

Dianna

## LETTER

Dear Auroville Today Friends,

I found the impression given in the article *We can't afford to eat at AV restaurants* in your October 07 edition, to be quite distorted. Someone who didn't know Auroville would conclude that Tamil Aurovilians are the only ones having difficulties making ends meet on a maintenance, which is certainly not the case. The article fails to state that one of the persons interviewed is the co-founder and co-manager, along with her husband, of an AV restaurant, where presumably the other women interviewed have never been invited. The interviewees may not know that Western women have a long tradition of meeting friends for conversation and coffee in a restaurant, and even very poor women will include this in their bud-

get, whereas Tamil women, who don't have this habit, would rather spend their money in other ways, such as buying gold. They seem unaware of the fact that many Aurovilians from all cultural backgrounds can't afford Auroville products, and have had trouble finding the means to give their children the kind of education they want, which they either didn't or don't find in Auroville."

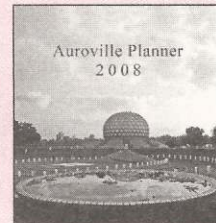
I would much rather read discussions with people of various cultural backgrounds on a common theme, like Auroville maintenance, so we can get a more global picture of what is happening in Auroville today, and the interviewees can learn something about the situations of each other. Thank you,

Janet

## 2008 Auroville Planner and Calendars

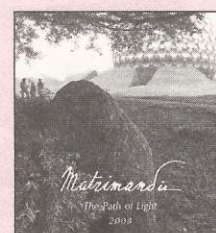
### Auroville Planner 2008

A 172-page Auroville Planner 2008 in square format with 24 pages of colour photographs featuring life in Auroville, a map of South India, and pages for notes, addresses and telephone entries is now available. It is priced at Rs. 150 plus postage. Profits from the sale will be donated to an Auroville project yet to be determined. Contact [tine@auroville.org.in](mailto:tine@auroville.org.in) for information.



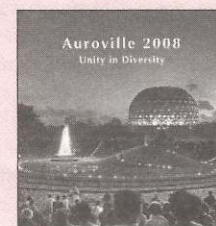
### Matrimandir Calendar

The theme of the 2008 Matrimandir desk calendar is *The Path of Light*. It features 12 large photographs and a small photo combined with quotations from Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*. Price is Rs. 150 exclusive of taxes, packing and postage. All proceeds from the sale of the calendar will go to the finishing of the Matrimandir. The calendar can be ordered through the AVI Centre in your country or by e-mailing [tine@auroville.org.in](mailto:tine@auroville.org.in) or [matrimandir@auroville.org.in](mailto:matrimandir@auroville.org.in)



### Unity in Diversity Calendar

A desk-top calendar with the theme *Unity in Diversity* features 12 large photographs accompanied by a montage of smaller photos and a brief textual explanation. Price is Euro 10 including packing and postage. Bulk discount is available. All proceeds from the sale of this calendar will go to fund cultural events in Auroville. To order contact the AVI Centre in your country or by e-mail to [cosmic@auroville.org.in](mailto:cosmic@auroville.org.in)





## "I've faith that we will manifest as a collective"

**D**harmesh came to Auroville in 1992 – he was 24, fresh out of college with a civil engineering degree, looking for inspiration and direction to his life. "I was drawn by the ideals of Auroville and it seemed like a very progressive society," he says, "and that attracted me the most." Dharmesh stayed and says he has never regretted the decision. "Though there are many challenges, I am still very happy that I am here."

The biggest challenge according to Dharmesh is the lack of progressiveness. "In some areas, Auroville is still stuck in the seventies. Take town planning for example," he says going straight to the point. "If you look around the world, you find plenty of town planners, developers and architects who are thinking much ahead of us – we're not evolving."

"Even our concept of beauty I feel, has stagnated. We have to try to redefine what our aesthetics are; what our concept of development is; and the context we're building in."

"What is presented today in exhibitions all over the world is Auroville in the form of the galaxy. As a concept it is great – but it needs to be adapted. We can't build today what was conceived in 1971 as 'futuristic'. The times have changed. Now we have to build what is ecologically and energy-wise the best."

Dharmesh has been a key player in the development of Bharat Nivas, the Pavilion of India. "I see Bharat Nivas as the first point of contact for anyone who wants the feel of Auroville and the International Zone character of Auroville – with Bharat Nivas, the Tibetan Pavilion and the American Pavilion."

He was the architect responsible for the design of the Athithi Griha guest house at Bharat Nivas. His more recent achievement was the dramatic transformation of the unfinished structure of the restaurant building into Kala Kendra with its Gallery



Dharmesh

Square Circle, a beautiful and much used space for workshops and exhibitions. Attached to it is the Indus Valley Café, a small restaurant serving primarily North-Indian cuisine. What is unique about it is that it is based on a 'gift-economy' – instead of paying a fixed price, one gives what one wants.

"India is all about hospitality and generosity," he explains. "It is this feeling we're trying to bring out at Bharat Nivas – a place where people can come to work (there is free wifi), or hang-out and just feel good. One visitor recently commented how wonderful it was to see a place that fuses materiality with ecology and spirituality."

Asked if the Indus Valley experiment has been a success, he warms up. "Over the past 20 months, we ran up a deficit of about Rs 40,000 – Rs 50,000. This is peanuts considering the number of meals we've served – it amounts to just 2 to 3 rupees per meal. But the positive feelings this has generated is tremendous."

Dharmesh is not only certain that the project will continue – he has guarantees from some friendly Auroville units to meet the deficit if required – but feels that it should be extended to all of Auroville. "Imagine the goodwill it will generate in people's hearts! Imagine you go to the Solar Kitchen or any other Auroville restaurant, and no one asks you for money; you pay what you like from your heart. There is no need to be part of any 'intelligent' schemes that are being devised in Auroville..."

Dharmesh makes another observation – the feeling of deprivation that seems to be quite widespread in the community. "Why are we feeling deprived?" he asks. "Auroville was, of course, never much of a material attraction for most of its residents. Any young professional who wants a lucrative job will look outside. But just look at the kind of peace that we get here, the kind of life we can live here, and the aspiration that is the basis of this place – it's something you can't find elsewhere. The other day I was telling someone how here in Auroville we are living very simple lives but enriched with so much aspiration, creativity, and beauty."

"Auroville whether we realize it or not, is still a magical. I meet a lot of people who in their first year here are totally inspired and into it. So we should be having a feeling of abundance."

The talk shifts to the limited population growth of Auroville. "That's another major concern – that we don't have enough new people coming in and not enough young people. That has to change. We have to become more welcoming."

"When I came in 1992, I felt very welcome in Auroville. Within 20 days, I had a house in Aspiration. Two months later I was declared a Newcomer. The doors were wide open. But in today's Auroville, practically all our doors are closed. Today it is very hard to become a Newcomer; and if you do manage that, it's very difficult to find a house." That is why he welcomes the recent decision by some administrative groups to rapidly create 200 houses.

"But everything in Auroville takes so long to decide; we either begin to quarrel or get bogged down in senseless bureaucracy. In any other town, building 200 houses would be considered a minor issue. Here we make it a big deal. It isn't a question of money, it's a question of vision, of entrepreneurship. Some people say 'Mother will decide what's best'. But we have to provide at least the basics – Mother is not going to act if we're not really together!"

Life in Auroville, concludes Dharmesh, is about contrasts and contradictions. "Some tend to get depressed because of all these challenges and material difficulties. I still remember what Dr. Karan Singh said in a recent interaction at Bharat Nivas: that Auroville is a collective experiment and that the strength of the collective can make good things happen; but that by the same token, the collective can be undermined by a little negativity."

"I have total faith that Auroville will manifest its power as a collective. I believe our problems will be solved the day we learn to use our true power as a collective."

Priya Sundaravalli

## "As a community, we need more openness"

**R**akhee moved to Auroville in the year 2000. She had come from Gujarat to attend a short course on pottery at Golden Bridge in Pondicherry. There she met Dharmesh, an Aurovilian architect who was involved with Ray Meeker in the 'fired house' project. The alchemy of the kiln brought the two together. And Rakhee stayed.

"It was not an easy decision. I had just built a little studio in my parent's house in Baroda. To close that, leave it behind was almost unthinkable. But perhaps the streak of the artist in me won over and I decided to start a completely new life here."

Rakhee confesses that she had no idea about Sri Aurobindo or The Mother or what Auroville was about. "I only knew there was an ashram in the town." Auroville was indeed a big culture shock. "It was nothing like what I was used to. The attitude and approach to life was totally different from the outside world. People seemed cooperative rather than competitive; aspiring to high ideals and the 'no-money economy'; and so much freedom. Overall, life seemed more deliberate and slower."

Her first experience of community was in Aspiration, a time that 'blew her away'. "I am an extrovert by nature and like having people around, but here was this community kitchen where 45 people were eating everyday, three times a day, and sharing every thing. I wondered how in the world it worked!"

But she took to community life. "Of course, Dharmesh's presence by

my side helped a lot. He was always telling me who's who so it was as if I already knew many Aurovilians!"

A year later, motherhood immersed Rakhee even deeper into the community. "For me, having Uttara has opened a whole new side of Auroville – the world of Auroville parents. Now she is about 7 years old and goes to Transition school. Every day she comes back with so much to tell and share. For me it is a whole new way of seeing and understanding Auroville."

However, it was only a few months ago that Rakhee became Aurovilian. "I didn't mean to delay it this long. I felt like I was an Aurovilian the first day I came here. But I wanted to take my time; I didn't want to become Aurovilian just because my partner was."

What have Rakhee's challenges been along the way? "Loneliness. Initially with few friends I felt very alone. But when my daughter arrived it became better as I was so busy. However this feeling of being alone still hits sometimes – even though I now have plenty of friends and work in the studio."

"What I have noticed in Auroville is that if you are not occupied in doing some kind of work you can quickly get very frustrated. And here one can have the highest 'highs' and lowest 'lows' in very quick succession. It is a kind of emotional roller-coaster I have never experienced before."

"That we may not have 'material generosity' is fine, but do we as a community have openness?" asks Rakhee, a potter who has been living in Auroville for the past seven years.

"Openness to let people experience Auroville in the way they want to?"

It is a topic she says came up in the discussion group that she is part of. "An Aurovilian was saying how upset she gets when visitors who are long-term guests put their children in Auroville schools and then they go away and never get involved in any kind of activities. But I see this as one way of getting into Auroville. There can be different ways for different people to get to know Auroville."

Rakhee in her seven years in Auroville has kept herself busy, first as a designer of handmade paper, then as a craft teacher at the middle school. Now she runs her own small production pottery with two helpers. She also organizes workshops, bringing artists or crafts people from other parts of India and facilitating interaction with their Aurovilian counterparts. Recently she has started to offer an informal programme for Auroville's architecture interns – hands-on pottery sessions at her studio. "For these interns, it is another glimpse into Auroville life. This kind of relating with the outside world is very energizing and everyone comes out feeling good."

Recently she has started to collaborate professionally with her husband's architectural unit, Buildaur. "I do the ceramic interiors and detailing for their architectural projects." She says her favourite collab-



Rakhee

orative project is Club Mahindra's Zest, a holiday resort in Kodaikanal. "I did not know that working together like this could be fun. We are very supportive of each other and I enjoy the interaction and challenge. The way architects think is completely different from artists. So when these two things combine, functionality and aesthetics, it seems like a winning combination."

Priya Sundaravalli

## In brief

### Battling the housing crises

With 60 Aurovilians in urgent need of housing and 100-120 newcomers joining Auroville each year, the Funds and Assets Management Committee (FAMC), the Housing Group and the planning group L'Avenir d'Auroville have jointly resolved to start the construction of a minimum of 200-250 housing units as soon as possible. L'Avenir d'Auroville will propose the appropriate areas for development. Architects and builders will be invited to submit proposals to L'Avenir for the architecture and urban design and to FAMC for the financial feasibility. The FAMC will study the necessary financial mechanisms, including the creation of a new revolving fund for housing with the aim of taking care of the development collectively.

### Kottakarai water situation

Auroville's unit Water Harvest, reporting on its work in the village of Kottakarai in the fields of sanitation, solid waste and integrated water management related issues, stated that in the last year 80% of the population has been affected by water borne diseases and that 15% of people's annual income went towards medical expenses. Various committees have been set-up: a drinking water distribution committee to reform the water distribution network; a solid waste management committee to install garbage bins, help in community level composting and construct a sorting shed for proper segregation of waste; a Water Resource committee to de-silt the village's main pond and feeding channels; and a sanitation committee to do repair of public toilets and install proper sanitation treatment facilities.

### Auroville's new stone sentinels

An assortment of menhirs have started popping up at various road junctions and corners in Auroville. In due time they will show the direction to hard-to-find Auroville communities and landmarks. It's like hitting two birds with one stone – no more lost guests, and no more stolen road signs!

### Take prior permission!

Shri M. Ramaswamy, Secretary, Auroville Foundation, has called the trustees of all the Trusts of the Auroville Foundation to a meeting to review their working and plans for future development. The invitation for the meeting was appreciated as 'long overdue'. But his instruction 'to take prior permission from the Secretary' if a trustee could not attend the meeting did raise some hackles. Nonetheless, the meeting proceeded harmoniously.

### www.auroville.ru

Russians interested in Auroville may now consult the website [www.auroville.ru](http://www.auroville.ru) to learn about Auroville in their mother tongue. Anyone typing the word Auroville in a Russian search engine will now first be directed to this website. This is an offshoot of the [www.auroville.org](http://www.auroville.org) website, where an icon with the words 'translation into Russian' can be clicked to get the Russian texts.



# New designs for an aging community

Recently members of one of Auroville's oldest communities sat around a table with blank paper in front of them. Then they drew sketches of their dream homes to replace the well known hexagon-shaped keet huts. A variety of forms appeared on the paper, from square to round, from ground level only to three storeys high. A few of the sketches resembled Mother's symbol. The sketches will be reviewed by a professional architect who will advise on their realisation.

"The present buildings in Aspiration are on their last legs," says Surya Jaasma, one of the Dutch residents. "Auroville manifests itself more and more, and is becoming more and more beautiful. For almost 40 years Aspiration has been a gateway for many new residents. But the place has become very run down. A big upgrade is needed."

The problems the residents face are many. The Aspiration huts were built as temporary housing and the location chosen was outside the proposed township. When the city was finished everybody was meant to shift to the city centre, therefore no foundations were laid in Aspiration.

Now there are cracks all over the walls and the infrastructure is old.

Electricity, water connections and drainage often break down. Also the thatched roofs must be renewed every two years, which is expensive, and the keet is home to diverse bugs and other wildlife. They drop on people and constant sweeping is needed to keep the huts clean. Inside the huts are dark, for they lack windows. In summer they are hot, and during the monsoon the dampness and fungus cause health problems for many. "But the major problem is the termites which eat your roof away," says long-time resident Jothi. Others worry more about the scorpions, snakes and rats.

So it's no surprise that all residents strongly support the initiative to demolish the old huts and replace them. In various meetings many ideas have sprung up. Eco-friendliness, alternative energy, bio-gas and compost toilets are on the wish-list. But everyone feels that the unique character of Aspiration should remain. The inhabitants still want to be a role-model for community living. So the community kitchen is to stay, as well as the regular group-meetings. The houses will belong to the community, just as now.

The plan, which is agreed upon by all residents, consists of three models of



Aspiration huts today

houses, for singles, couples and families. The community wants to build the new houses unit by unit, so that within five to seven years the work is completed. A few huts will be preserved in their original state as an Auroville Heritage Monument. The estimated costs are about 7.5 lakhs for a family house, and a little less for a smaller house. In total a minimum of 2 crores of rupees is needed (US \$ 470,000).

How will Aspiration get that money? The community members are

hopeful, since Aspiration is internationally well-known. The collective life of many Aurovilians started here. While they hope for major support from within Auroville and the Auroville International Centres, the residents also realise that a lot of fundraising has to be done. A book about Aspiration's history with the title *Aspiration, a gateway to Auroville* is planned, which should also bring in some money.

Italian architects Piero and Gloria designed the huts about 40 years ago.

They regret the demolition, for especially the larger houses were appreciated for their spaciousness and comfort and were a very successful design. At the same time they know that the structures cannot be improved as they are as a permanent roof is not possible.

In their September meeting, the Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation decided that lands that are not in the City Area or Greenbelt can be exchanged or sold. But the residents of Aspiration feel strongly that Auroville needs "strongholds" like their community, outside the actual town. "Auroville needs places where local Tamils can taste something of the Auroville spirit and community life," says long time Aurovilian Auroculture, who lives in Aspiration. "We should not make Auroville an island."

At present 55 residents live in Aspiration, including fifteen children. While in the beginning the majority were French, the population is now mainly Indian. According to the plan the new Aspiration will accommodate 70 residents. The community wants to recreate its international character, and for that reason non-Indians are welcome and encouraged to apply.

Robert

## Tracing the history of Aspiration



PHOTOCOURTESY AUROVILLE ARCHIVES

In the 1970s and early 80s Aspiration community was the centre of Auroville. There were schools, a cafeteria, Pour Tous, the Financial Service, workshops and commercial units. The pioneers called the place that bordered Kuilapalyam village 'Goldenrod'. But The Mother renamed it 'Aspiration'. Italian architects Piero and Gloria Ciconesi designed the huts, which were in the beginning very comfortable. They were airy, for there were no trees around. The view to the sea and Pondicherry was spectacular – but the absence of trees also allowed sandstorms to cover everything in red dust.

Contrary to what some people think, Aspiration was not the first community. Three other communities were in existence before Aspiration started. In May 1965, three years before Auroville's inauguration, Promesse was founded in and around an abandoned British customs station, on the Pondy-Madras Trunk road. In May 1968, Forecomers was started by an American couple, Bob and Deborah. And in 1969, Hope was established next to Auro Orchard. But none of those communities developed as a collective like Aspiration.

Aspiration started when Vincenzo, who had been living in Promesse, returned to Europe with plans to organise a caravan of workers who would be attracted to live in Auroville. The idea was that these people would help in building an 'advance colony' of Auromodèle. As a result of French radio and press interviews, a small group was formed and at midnight of August 14th, 1969, the caravan of fifteen left for India. All were French, except Steven, an Australian, and Krishna, who was Moroccan. They had no idea what was waiting for them. They travelled in a convoy of four vehicles – one was a motorhome, another carried tools and spare parts for gardening, construction work, and vehicle repair.

After six weeks of journeying over land, the group arrived in Auroville. It was October 2nd, 1969. Having been joined by others, they now numbered 25. As of today, only two from the original caravan still live in Auroville: Janaka and Jean Pougault – both of whom happen to live in Djaima.

Janaka was 28 then, but most of the others were 18 or 19 years old. "Out of the group, maybe four knew what Auroville was about," he recalls. "The rest came for the adventure. In the beginning it was a bit confusing. People had goodwill, but did not know where to begin. The direction Auroville was to take was not known, and would only be unfolded by The Mother, who we could see regularly." He remembers there were two clans in the early years in Aspiration and there was some rivalry. The 'supramental' clan, who did not speak very much and who were into meditation, and the 'vital' clan who smoked dope, played guitar, and often went to Pondy to buy a beer or eat steak. But after many months of seeing The Mother, the atmosphere calmed down.

"The big problem of Aspiration was that there was no organization. Nobody knew what to do and where to go. There was no leader or information desk. In the beginning, there was total freedom. People changed their names because they just felt like it. There was a man who wanted to be called by a number, '7'. Somebody objected, but said he could live with 'six-and-a-half'!"

Janaka remembers that once there was no food for three days, because nobody wanted to cook or do the dishes. Finally, after many meetings, the organization came from within. The cafeteria started in February 1970, cooking duties were arranged in shifts and responsibilities shared. Also a primitive health centre was established. Another problem was to decide what kind of collectivity the residents wanted. Was it to be the ashram system "Prosperity" with free goods and services provided for all, or was it to be a money-based system? And what to do with the village nearby?

Everybody felt that progress in Aspiration could not be made without taking the villagers along. In April 1969, Prem Malik, an executive of Auromodèle, wrote to The Mother "Should we not demonstrate to the villagers our real intentions by providing them with facilities such as a dispensary, a school, clean drinking water, etc? This would be money well spent if it is done with love and humili-

ty and not as charity." The Mother wrote in reply: "This is indispensable." The dispensary was started in August, 1969, and water was provided even earlier. A challenge was that The Mother did not want servants. The Aurovilians had to do everything themselves. The only exception was that the cook they hired!

Three months after arriving, Vincenzo started a workshop in the area, later known as *Toujours Mieux* (Always Better). It made metal-capping for the roofs of Aspiration, metal chairs for the cafeteria and roof clamps for the Last School.

The villagers were a bit suspicious about the intentions of the Aurovilians, and Tamil-speaking community members had to step in many times to solve problems. As things grew bigger (the incense factory that later became Maroma was founded, and the polyester unit had started working), outside labour was necessary, and some villagers were offered work. First they received payment in kind, but later the wages were in cash.

In December 1971, the first earth from the Matrimandir excavation was used to do some landscaping in Aspiration. Turf from a nearby lake made the soil fertile and trees and plants were planted. They enriched the appearance and left the topsoil less vulnerable to the monsoon.

The first major collective work the residents completed was building a road along the canyon at the back of Aspiration towards the coastal road to Pondicherry. Before, there was only a road leading from Edaiyanchavadi to the main road near Jipmer Hospital, which was a much further journey. Now Pondicherry could be reached a lot easier and faster.

Life was much slower in 1969. There were no mopeds. The only means of transport were bicycles and a collective van that went once daily to Pondicherry. Aspiration did have electricity, something most villagers could only dream of. For some residents the sweetest memory of the early years was the grace of being allowed to visit The Mother. Between March and July 1970 She opened Her room in the ashram on Tuesdays exclusively for Aurovilians.

### Aspiration in the early days

A sudden fire on March 7th 1972 destroyed the thatched construction of *Toujours Mieux*. Most of its contents were destroyed, including two vans from the caravan from France. It was a shock for the community. Vincenzo spoke to The Mother, who said that it was because of the lack of harmony and absence of real aspiration for the Divine that her protection did not work. To Vincenzo's question, "Do I have to start again?", She said, "Always we have to start again; everybody has to start again with the true aspiration to the Divine." Vincenzo left the room in tears.

On December 5th, 1972 Aspiration was almost devastated by a cyclone. For several days there was no electricity, no water. Bread and bananas became the staple. But Aspiration survived.

A confusing time began after The Mother left her body in 1973. A big dispute arose between the residents of Auroville and the Sri Aurobindo Society in Pondicherry. The Aurovilians decided not to accept any more help from the Society. They sent the teachers home that were hired by the Society and the three schools in Aspiration – Sanskrit School, (now called Last School), the Pyramids and a third school were closed. For many years the classrooms were abandoned. The dispute with the SAS escalated.

Long time Aurovilian Frederick remembers: "The chairman of the SAS, Navajata, had a house in Aspiration where he never lived but where he kept an umbrella. To justify the authority of the SAS over Auroville, his lawyer said in a 1975 court case that the chairman had a house in Aspiration. So we brought his umbrella back to his office in Pondicherry." The issue brought the police to Aspiration, for the residents had broken the lock to enter the hut. Auroville then had the support of Satprem, author of *Sri Aurobindo or the Adventure of Consciousness*. "He would come out to Aspiration to give us moral support. His visits were always a high-point," remembers Frederick.

Over the years, as other communities and activities developed around Auroville, Aspiration ceased to be the centre of Auroville activities and politics.

Robert



# Memories of Mireille Albrecht

Mireille Albrecht, daughter of a French resistance fighter and staunch promoter of the French Pavilion, passed away on 25th September 2007.

We first met Mireille Albrecht in December 1982, during the state visit of President François Mitterrand to India. Patrice Marot, my friend and colleague in the Auroville Cooperative (the ancestor of our Working Committee) and I decided that we should go to Delhi and try to meet the President. Our idea was to present the concept of a French Pavilion in Auroville to President Mitterrand.

Retrospectively, it was a bit presumptuous from our side, but I must admit that we did not think twice, we just decided to do it.

At that time, I was the liaison with the French Consul General and I begged him for two invitations for any function to be attended by the President. He gave one. Wearing borrowed blazers we went to represent the City of Dawn at the presidential reception given by the Ambassador to the French nationals living in India. At that time, India was not the privileged destination for business people that it has become today and hardly 150 people attended the function.

President Mitterrand arrived and as usual gave a very inspired speech. His address was followed by the national anthem and, the second it ended, he walked straight to us. We were quite embarrassed (and proud at the same time) to be the first ones to shake hands with the President of the Republic. We introduced our selves and told him "Mr President, we have come from Auroville." To our great surprise, he said: "Oh, Auroville, it is a great adventure!" We could not discuss any further as he had to meet with the rest of the party.

Later in the evening we met a distinguished French lady who introduced herself as Mireille Albrecht. She told us that she had heard about Auroville and was very keen to hear more. We spoke about the concept of the French Pavilion in the International Zone of Auroville. She was enthusiastic. She told us that she was the special invitee of the President and Madame Danielle Mitterrand. Later in the evening, she introduced us to the First Lady who showed great interest in our project. She introduced us to Monsieur Jacques Lang, the Culture Minister. He listened attentively to us and said that his government would be very interested to help.

At one point during the evening, I was alone in a corner when someone tapped my shoulder: it was the President. For about 10 or 15 minutes, he shot at me a number of pertinent questions about Auroville; I tried to answer, rather nervously at first and later with more assurance. He seemed to understand the deeper meaning of the experiment. At the end of the evening, we took Mireille's address (there was no email, not even a telephone connection in Auroville at that time) and decided to keep in touch. This was how the French Pavilion was born, at least at the government level.

Later, after years of hard work, Mireille managed to get appointed by the French Government to conduct an official mission to Auroville. It was during the summer of 1984. This was a tremendous achievement because in those days Auroville had a doubtful reputation with many people and very few wanted to be associated with this 'bunch of crazy people'. One of those who dared to pledge themselves for Auroville was the great Indian industrialist Mr. J.R.D. Tata. I remember him telling all the Chairmen and CEOs of Tatas in Jamshedpur: "I have to warn you, they are crazy [the Aurovilians], but I like them". It was



Mireille Albrecht

the greatest compliment from one of the greatest Indians of his time.

Before coming to Auroville for her mission in February 1984, Mireille went Delhi to meet Mrs. Indira Gandhi and brief her about the new interest of the French government in Auroville. The Prime Minister was very happy and encouraged her to continue her efforts. Mireille spent a few weeks with us in Auroville and returned to give her report to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The concept of a Pavilion was accepted. During her stay, Mireille had the occasion to meet a number of Aurovilians. Most of them remained close friends till the end.

During her first stay, we discovered Mireille's past and the story of her mother, Berty, who was the companion of Henri Frenay, the leader of the French Resistance during World War II. As Berty's activities were too dangerous for her daughter, she was placed with a family to take care of her. These were the parents of Danielle Mitterrand, themselves closely linked with the Resistance movement. From that time, Mireille and Mrs. Mitterrand kept a close friendship. Mireille used to say that the bonds tied during the difficult years of a war were stronger than human beings can build. Berty was arrested by the Gestapo on the orders of Klaus Barbie; she managed to escape, but was caught again, tortured, killed and buried in Fresnes prison near Paris. Mireille spent the last decades of her life trying to find out who denounced Berty and the conditions of her death. She recounted her searches in three books, *Berty*, *Vivre au lieu d'exister*, and *Les Oubliés de l'ombre, 1940-1944*.

Mireille liked to go and visit colleges and schools to speak to children about the spirit of the resistance and the importance of memory. Her point was that one should not forget that people had given their lives to make it possible for us, their children and grand-children, to live in a free world. Mireille considered that the spirit of the resistance made human beings less selfish, more devoted to the highest values of mankind. The search for outer and inner freedom was shared by the resistance and Auroville, at least during the first years of the Auroville experiment. Mireille often compared the first years of Auroville with the days of the resistance.

A few years later, Mireille was advised by the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs that the best way to liaise between the French government and Auroville was to create an NGO in France to receive eventual grants. Accordingly Mireille founded the *Association pour le Pavillon de France à Auroville* (Association for the French Pavilion in Auroville).

She was to become its first President.

Mireille continued to visit Auroville regularly and tried hard to make the project progress. Unfortunately, as often happens, "Auroville was not ready!" This did not discourage her and eventually she got a French Ambassador (Monsieur Philippe Petit) to lay the foundation stone of the Pavilion in a rather impressive ceremony. Some naval officers happened to be passing through Pondicherry on that day, so the Pavilion's land was blessed by the

sound of a few buglers in full naval regalia. But once again "we were not ready" and the Pavilion was moved to another location in the International Zone. The Philippe Petit foundation stone is today buried somewhere under the Visitor's Centre car park. It is left to future archaeologists to find this illustrious French brick in a few centuries time.

Some years later, another attempt was made. Mireille asked Mr. J.R.D. Tata, who was French by his mother and Parsi by his father, to plant a tree to mark the new site of the Pavilion. It was done with due pomp in the presence of the first Secretary of the Auroville Foundation, Mr. L.K. Tripathy, who is today Chief Secretary of Tamil Nadu. Unfortunately, once again we were "not ready" and the tree is today shading some place between the Visitor's Centre parking area and the American Pavilion. Despite these hitches, Mireille remained faithful to Auroville and visited us almost every year.

Mireille told me one amusing incident. In the first years after the creation of the Association for the Pavillon de France and before each visit to Auroville, Mireille used to stop at Delhi and meet the French Ambassador and brief him about the latest developments on the Pavilion. One of the Ambassadors had a companion, a famous French author, who for some reason hated Auroville and particularly the Mother and even

wrote a book making fun of the "goddess," as she called Mother. One day, at a private dinner party at the French Embassy, the lady started a diatribe, pointing her finger at Mireille and asking her what was so great about the "goddess." As the discussion became more aggressive, one of the invitees who had kept quiet all that time, forcefully intervened and told the lady, not too politely, to calm down. He told her that she was entirely wrong, that Sri Aurobindo was the greatest human being that the planet had ever seen and that Auroville was his project. He told her he knew it because several years earlier, while he was studying acting, one of his friends, a certain Patrice, [Aurovillian "Big Patrice", today known as Shankar] had given him Satprem's book *The Adventure of Consciousness*. It was the greatest book he had ever read and she (the lady) should read it. The ambassador's companion finally fell silent. It was Gérard Depardieu who had come to Mireille's rescue. She was pleased to know that the great French actor was also connected with Auroville.

Mireille Albrecht was awarded France's highest honour by President Mitterrand: the *Chevalier de la Légion d'honneur*. She will remain for most of us who had the pleasure of knowing her and working with her, forever in the 'Légion d'honneur' of the City of Dawn.

Claude Arpi

## L. M. Singhvi

Former member of the Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation Dr. L.M. Singhvi passed away at the age of 76 on October 6, 2007. Eminent jurist, constitutional expert and writer, he served India as Advocate General of the State of Rajasthan, as High Commissioner in the U.K., and as member of the Rajya Sabha. He was conferred India's third highest civilian award, the *Padma Bhushan*, in 1998.

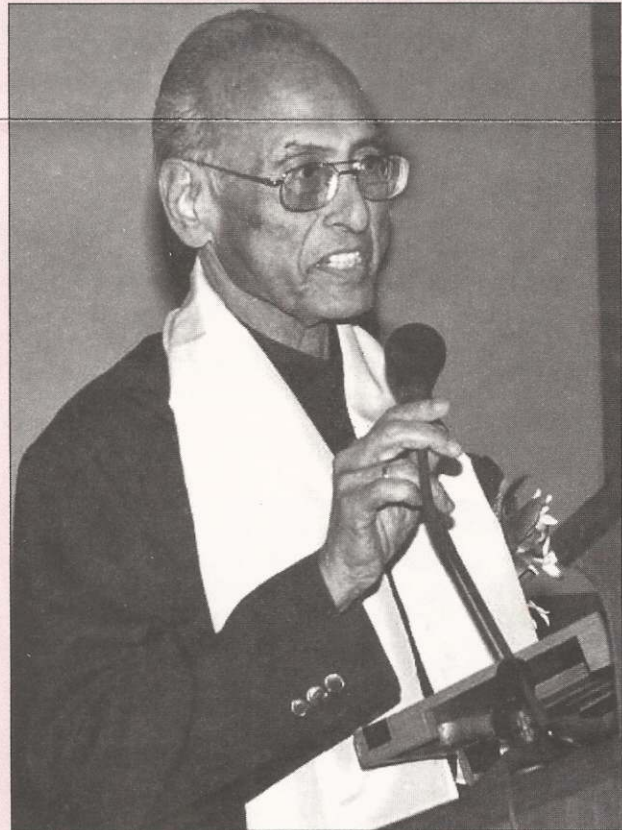
Dr. Singhvi was a great friend of Auroville. "I am a citizen of Auroville," he told the audience in February this year in New Delhi, when he delivered the keynote address at a seminar on Jean Monnet - Uniting People. The speech is remarkable, not only for his references to Auroville, but also for his allusions to Sri Aurobindo's thought on human unity.

"Long before Jean Monnet thought of European unity, Sri Aurobindo had declared human unity as being far more important than the unity of a nation or country or of different nations," said Dr. Singhvi. "Sri Aurobindo referred to the unity of the human race as a single race of beings with a common life and a common general interest. This is perhaps the most compelling idea in modern thought. Years later it took shape in the form of Auroville."

Dr. Singhvi then proceeded to detail the conditions for such a human unity, as outlined by Sri Aurobindo. "The gospel which Sri Aurobindo taught is a triple gospel of freedom, equality and brotherhood. None of them can be sacrificed for the other. Jean Monnet gave us the possibility of uniting the European people in self-interest. That unity is vulnerable and incomplete for it is a unity for the sake of the interests of the nations concerned. Europeans and the non-Europeans are divided by the idea of Europe. But Europe should not be organised against what is not Europe, it shouldn't be merely a countervailing force against, let us say, the superpower of the United States, but be a part of a greater, a larger, a more sustainable, more viable, less contentious human unity. European unity will surely be a strong force of human unity, a segment of human unity, but if it sets itself up against other units of unity, then it will be to that extent counterproductive in the larger context of human unity."

"Brotherhood is according to Sri Aurobindo the real key to the triple gospel. And brotherhood is ultimately based on the gospel of love, the gospel of compassion, a gospel of reciprocity. And it is from this point of view that the key to the triple gospel is provided by brotherhood or by even solidarity. Human solidarity then is the foundation stone of human unity and this I think is one of the most enlightened messages of Sri Aurobindo."

Then Dr. Singhvi spoke about his connection to



Dr. L.M. Singhvi

Auroville. "I said to my friend, the director-General of UNESCO, when I asked him to hold a festival of Auroville in the headquarters of UNESCO, 'I am not a resident of Auroville, I am only one of the trustees of the Foundation constituted for the purpose but I wish to tell you that I am emotionally a resident of Auroville, as indeed everyone who aspires to be a world citizen has to be emotionally a resident of Auroville, for Auroville is the first stage in the experiment in human unity.' Auroville is in that sense the manifestation of an immanent divine consciousness. It is in a sense an invitation to the life divine and it is in that sense an invocation for human unity as a concrete example of what we must strive to achieve in or upon this earth."

"But Auroville is quite different from Europe and its unity. Auroville is quite different from the United Nations and its efforts in unity. Auroville is quite different in the sense of striving for a spiritual unity and a spiritual eye to solidarity, a spiritualised world citizenship. That is why it is important that we recognise the essential unity of humankind as a goal for which we must all strive and which must become our passion, passion of one man, group of men, passion of nations, passion of people who would like to make the world a better place to live in."

Carel



# "Mother must have smiled on me"

Selvam is a young Tamil boy who has found his calling in farming.

"Ever since I was a little boy I have always loved animals; in fact I often think I love them more than human beings," says Selvam as we sit in the kitchen of Annapurna Farm surrounded by racks of strong-smelling cheeses. Looking across the stone table, it is hard to imagine that this bright-eyed young lad had a very difficult childhood. Selvam is originally from the nearby town of Tindivanam. He was just five years old when his mother died, and the family fell apart. "My uncle had somehow heard of Roy's Boarding House in New Creation for children who had nowhere to live, and in desperation brought me there and begged Roy to take me in."

"I never saw my uncle again; my grandparents visited a few times but they too soon stopped coming." For Selvam, Roy became a father-figure. "He gave me a happy and full life and I will always remember him wherever I am." Selvam attended New Creation School. "There was nothing there I didn't like. My favourite was sports and I secretly had the ambition to be a great cricket player. Later I changed my mind when I realized that I loved gardens and growing things."

When Selvam was finishing school, he learnt about the 2-year apprentice programme in organic farming that Priya Vincent from Buddha Garden had started. "It seemed like a wonderful opportunity so I immediately signed up. I learned a lot in those two years and I owe Priya very much, though often it was boring as I could not do what I wanted."

"At the same time I became obsessed with running and used to run for miles after work. It was a good way to release my emotions. Then one day a sponsor from the NGO Childline offered to pay for me to go and take part in the Bombay Marathon, so I trained even harder. I had never been out of Auroville before and was amazed by the long train journey and the crowds in Bombay."

In the race, Selvam came 84th out of 30,000 runners. "It was a proud moment for me. I saw lots of well-known runners whom I'd seen on TV and thought may be I could make a career out of sports."

When he returned to Auroville, Selvam had to decide which direction his life would take – would he put his energy into sports or into work on the land? "It was difficult. I badly missed Roy who would have been able to advise me." For Roy was in England, having an operation on his leg.

Selvam decided to do a 'small experiment' – "to convert the large garden at the boarding house into a little farm." He created dovescotes and a chicken house and even bought two cows. But the complications associated with this seemingly small enterprise quickly multiplied and Selvam was forced to wind it up after a few months. "Though I learnt one thing very clearly – that I did want to spend my life working with animals and the land."

"One day Mother must have smiled on me," says Selvam with a laugh. "I was in the bakery buying a basket of bread for my New Creation family of ten, when I saw Tomas from Annapurna Farm. It occurred to me that perhaps I could ask him for a job at his farm. I gathered my courage, went up and asked if he needed any help at Annapurna."

Tomas was positive and invited Selvam for a three-month trial. "This way," he said, "we could both see how we get along." That was a year ago.

So how has life on the farm been for Selvam? "Tomas is very straightforward and a great guy so I love working for him. I do whatever needs doing each day; it may be working with the cows, or emptying the tanks... there are always hundreds of things to do. There is nothing I don't like doing – not even smelly jobs!"

"I've also picked up how to use the farm machinery, and every day there's something new. Like now we're doing experiments with four types of rice seeds, and testing different types of green manure."

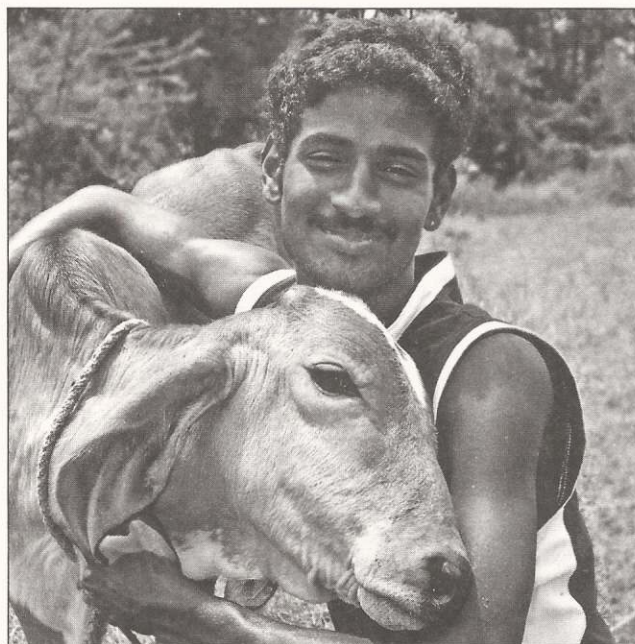
Though growing paddy is Annapurna's focus, it is also becoming famous for its cheeses. Selvam admits though, to have a personal preference for *paneer*, a type of Indian cheese. "European cheeses are too strong for a Tamil boy like me."

Any challenges? "Annapurna is a large farm – 120 acres. The main problem is our dependence on the weather. If it rains at the wrong time, we can't plant seeds or bring in the harvest."

At this point Tomas join us at the table. "Farming everywhere is going through a difficult period," says Tomas. "Farmer's sons no longer want to work the land as they know how demanding farm life is. Children these days prefer the click of a mouse to the thump of a *mumputi*. If we could get virtual farming going, the kids would love it!"

"It is especially difficult in Auroville as none of our kids want to go into farming, especially out here at Annapurna, which seems so far out (actually it only takes 25 minutes to get to from Auroville). The Indian kids are even less enthusiastic than Western kids as they still see farming as a low-caste occupation."

"That's why I am so happy to have Selvam involved. I feel the future of farming is with youngsters like him. But farming has



Selvam at Annapurna farm

PHOTO COURTESY TOMAS

got to change its image and somehow become a more attractive and less exhausting way of life."

Tomas explains how, since he got his computer, he has been using it for the farm work organization, preparing graphs and keeping in touch with what's going on in the farming world. "That's the reason why I am now insisting that Selvam improves his English and computer skills. I am trying to get him to do some reading in the evenings but he doesn't understand how important it is to widen his base. He wants to do courses in organic farming, hopefully abroad, but unless he is competent in these areas he won't be accepted into any course. If he doesn't gain extra skills like management and labour skills, he will spend his whole life just doing what he's doing now."

Selvam interrupts. "Trying to supervise Tamil workers who are twice my age is very difficult for me. I feel wiped out in the evenings after about 12 hours on the farm. There is no time even for my other favourite activity, which is cricket – not the time to watch it, never mind play. Now Tomas wants me to go into Auroville twice a week to attend evening classes. But I never liked the studies aspect of school and I feel it would be a waste of my time." The conflicts of the generations is palpable here.

"I can only think of the present," insists Selvam. "I know Tomas he has put a lot of trust in me; so I will do my best for him."

Dianna

## "Help has always come"

"I want to create an awareness of the precarious world situation," says Suresh of Auroville Video Library.

"I have inherited the beamer, the sophisticated film projector that used to belong to Wim," says Suresh. "Wim, who passed away last December, used it to show inspirational films in Auroville. I would like to do as he did – to show films such as Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth*. Before, I was not really aware of the potential environmental problems but things are changing very fast and Indians must be made aware of the problems. One of these days, I would like to dub it into Tamil and show it in schools and on local TV."

Suresh is a young man of thirty who has had a hard life and been through lots of emotional turmoil, but now he feels very clear about his future. "I have always been fascinated with the movie business, how movies are made and especially how they get those incredible special effects. I used to watch everything when I was younger but now I am more critical. If you come to the Video Library where I work, I bet I can tell you about every film, even if I haven't seen it!" Suresh also shows films at the Visitor's Centre on Friday and Saturday evenings, something he says he enjoys doing.

"Life was not always this organized. I grew up without parents and was taken care of by my loving grandfather who was very poor. When he could not manage any more he put me in Udavi Children's Home. Then, luckily, a dance teacher in Pondicherry adopted me, and in 1990 she took me to Germany for a three months holiday. I will never forget Germany! Everything seemed square and geometrical to me, even the people. The roads were huge and almost empty; everything was perfectly planned and you always had to be on time!"

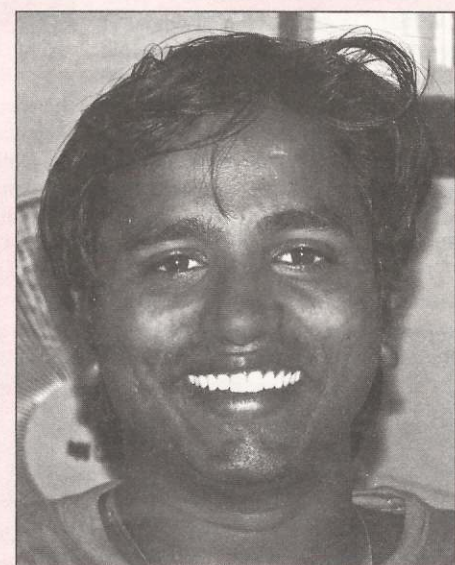
"Later I was put in New Creation Boarding but by this time I was not behaving well so I had to leave and went to live alone in Kuyilapalayam. A few hard and unhappy teenage years followed. I went to work in Pondicherry's industrial zone, living in a little room with ten other men who worked in tyre and bottling factories. I remember the walk of six kilometres every morning to get the bus to town and coming back at 7.30 at night. If the bus was late, the canteen would be closed and I had to go to bed hungry. But I was young and foolish, and spent whatever money I earned on clothes and movies. Finally the landlord asked me to leave. After a couple of years, this sort of life became exhausting and I came back to Auroville. I stayed in Samridhi with Diego for a while then Otto gave me a job in the Financial Service. Then I applied to be a Newcomer."

"I got a chance to go to the Delhi Ashram to do a teacher training course. I had never travelled further than Pondicherry before and the thought of being alone for two days and a night on a train scared me. I had been told of how you could be robbed while you slept, and even worse, how men would drug you, drag you off the train and take your kidneys out to sell them. On reaching Delhi, I panicked when I realized everyone was speaking Hindi; I didn't know how to even hire a rickshaw to take me to the Ashram which was a long way away. By some grace, a kind rickshaw driver took care of me and drove me directly there; I will never forget him."

"At the interview for the teacher's selection, I looked around the room and saw all these smart, well-spoken people with degrees; and here was I, a village boy from Auroville. I decided the only thing I could do was just be myself, so I started cracking jokes and making them laugh. I was terribly nervous. I could feel my future was in the balance and when the committee told me I had been accepted saying, 'We are very happy with you, you have such a good energy', I nearly burst into tears. They informed me that I would be in a 'free progress school and the kids were very wild and made the teachers pull their hair out'. They obviously had not heard about Auroville schools!"

"In the Ashram I had a room to myself and for the first time in my life I could close a door on the world. The students came from all over India and I was shy, but quickly decided I had to jump into this completely new way of living. The strict routine clashed with my personality as I had never experienced such Auroville a highly-organized life, especially after the freedom of Auroville and village life. I was warned several times about my behaviour and it took me a few months to adapt to Ashram life. But once I settled in, I was very happy and the three years passed like three months. The highlight of that experience for me was directing a performance of Ali Baba, and getting recognition from the Ashram for what I felt was a smash-hit."

"Then I came back to Auroville and became an Aurovillian. I worked as a teacher in Transition School for five years. Then I looked at my life, and saw that I had always been alone without the security of a family. So I decided it was time to get married. A friend arranged my marriage with a beautiful girl, Kaveri, who was a dancer and I am still very much in love with her. We eventually got a flat in Courage. We moved in on a Thursday,



Suresh

the next day our son was born. He is now four years old. Later we had our second child, a boy who is now eleven months old. Now we're a proper family; they are everything I have ever dreamed of."

"A friend asked me if I would like to join him in starting a school in Goa and my wife and I agreed as we wanted to experience living in another part of India and doing something totally different. We enjoyed Goa but ran up debts, so when we came back I had to get a teaching job in Cuddalore to pay it all off."

"I am now working with Claude at the Video Library, teaching at Nandanam Kindergarten, and showing weekend films at the Visitors Centre. My wife is still a newcomer and doesn't get a maintenance, and we find it a struggle to manage. Last year things came to a head. I was getting so tired with work that one evening I just burst into tears. My wife and I sat down and had a good talk. Now we have reorganized our lives so we have more time for our family. We have discovered that it is very important in Auroville to learn to manage your time well; many people we know become exhausted through the pressure of work and the family demands."

"Now I am thirty and I have never felt better. I have experienced hard manual labour, lived with ten men in a room, experienced life in the Delhi Ashram, and gone bankrupt in Goa. I feel I can now step outside Auroville with confidence, if necessary, and that is a good feeling. Whenever I've needed help in my life it has somehow always come, and everything turns out for the best."

"Now I feel like doing something else; through the inspiration I still carry from Wim, and from my love of film, I want to extend myself and be somehow of use to society. I am sure it will happen one day."

Dianna

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