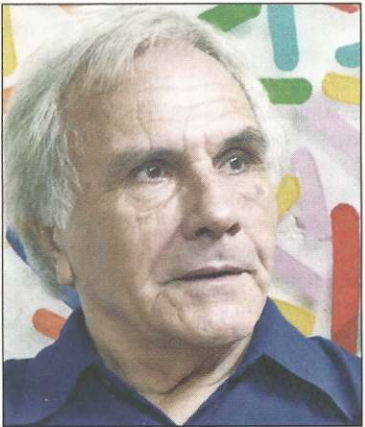


# Auroville Today

SEPTEMBER 2010, No.255

Auroville's monthly news magazine since 1988

## Decoding the Galaxy



Pierre Legrand

On 9th August more than 120 residents of Auroville met with the new team of L'Avenir d'Auroville, Auroville's Town Planning service. After each new team member had introduced him or herself, Pierre Legrand, one of the new members, presented his discovery, 'decoding the galaxy'. His presentation was well-received.

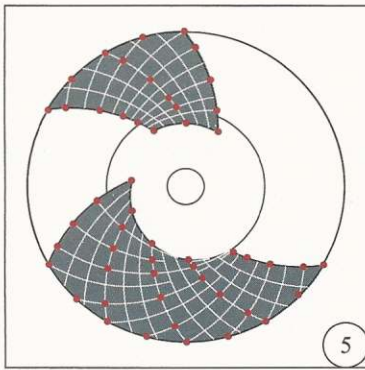
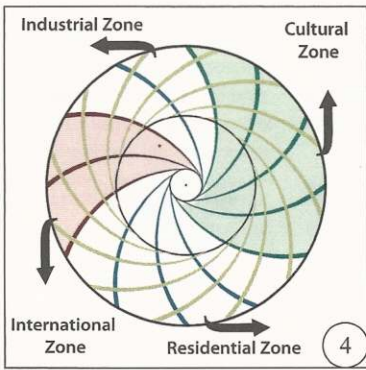
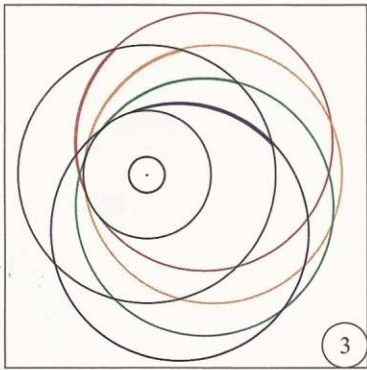
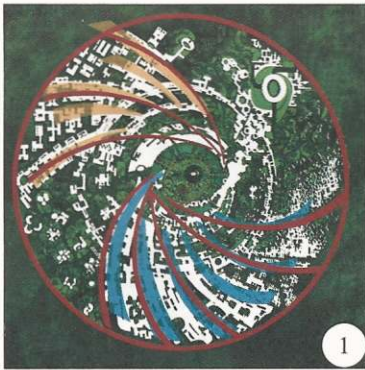
Pierre explained that when he was studying the galaxy, he was struck by its incredible dynamism. Galaxies are known to be fields of force, vortices in movement. This one also finds in the galaxy model of Auroville. It expresses not only a major clockwise flow (picture 1), but also a minor anti-clockwise movement (picture 2).

This dynamism is caused by two zones: the Industrial Zone (north) and the Residential Zone (south). The Cultural and International Zones are rather static. Pierre wondered if the galaxy contains a grid pattern which could be of use for future town planning activities.

Working with geometry he realised that the galaxy movement can be decoded by juxtaposing circles with the same radius as the outer city circle tangentially onto the city crown road (the middle circle in picture 3). Repeating this at various points, a dynamic clockwise movement comes into existence. (Lines in bold, picture 3) Doing the same on the ring road around the Matrimandir (the centre circle, picture 3) an anti-clockwise movement manifests. Pierre then overlapped these clockwise and anti-clockwise patterns, and arrived at the grid which he considers to be the key to Auroville's galaxy model. (picture 4).

Pierre mentioned that many city lay-outs are based on a particular grid pattern. The town plan of cities such as Amsterdam, San Francisco, Florence, Pondicherry, to name just a few, have each their own unique grid which marks their particular configuration. The grid determines the city; this feature is more fundamental to the city than most of its buildings.

Observing that for years building permissions have been given without an actual frame of reference, Pierre now proposes to use the grid as reference. He also advocates using the grid to identify the so-called 'negative spaces', the areas without buildings (the white lines in picture 5), while taking existing ground realities into account. Negative spaces are for example public parks, plazas, roads and service areas. Even though there may not be funds to materialize buildings, we can now identify those negative spaces and use them, for example, to lay underground electricity cables and water lines, argued Pierre. And with the grid as key, Auroville can now also plan dynamism into all its future buildings in such a way that, wherever you are in Auroville, you will feel the 'movement' of the galaxy.



## Views on the Galaxy

Recently there have been some interesting postings and much discussion on Auronet concerning the relevance of the Galaxy Plan today. Here are edited versions of three major articles. One argues against the plan; the second favours the Galaxy, while the third proposes a new perspective.

### Hasta la Victoria siempre\*

The society our earth needs will be the territorial expression of a sustaining harmony between individuals and their direct environments, climatic, geological, human and ecological. This balance will rise upwards, from within, from the earth, and exteriorize itself gradually, until it is complete and integral. No two societies the earth needs will be alike; each will integrate every particularity, every local reality, and will be applicable to its dynamic territory alone. It is the awareness of a potential symbiosis with one's environment and the effort of enhancing to the fullest every local potentiality, which will be common to all societies of the future. The partiality of some will not impose, in brutal gnashes of ignorance, the forms of its realization. [...] No descending shower of Beatitude will fill the matter erected by the ignorant man, who believes, still today, that consciousness can be manufactured.

What is wanted of us here, in Auroville, as I see it, is to participate, collectively and actively, in the realization of a new humanity, a humanity that, like Nature, is a direct exteriorization of the Divine, a delighted tool of evolution and the growingly integral consciousness of the world, a humanity fundamentally free from the smallness, the pettiness and the tribulations of the incomplete mind. [...] The collective thirst for more truth and simplicity would not be distorted, weakened or destroyed by the immaturity of its vindicators, and end up like pillaged, abandoned temples or the hollow carcass of a mentalised ideal.

The Galaxy Plan is a mental vision, a finite one, based on the state of consciousness at the time of its inception, not the Mother's, but the world's. Mised are those who claim otherwise. Today, in 2010, the Galaxy Plan is a sterile, sad-looking example of the 1950's mindset, in which the world was infinite and resources were endless, in which man had the right to arrogantly carve and manipulate his mother earth according to his will. Its geo-

graphical spread does not take into account the geology, the human settlements, the hydrology and the original vegetation. It is insensitive to ancient pathways and millenary old burial grounds, the fabric of social history, its myths and culture. It has nothing in common with the plateau, yet its crusaders claim it is the very form social harmony will take. [...]

Since this experiment's cradle, even the ideal has been diluted, transformed and formatted by frighteningly limited minds. The ideal of realizing unity through diversity has been politically pushed into the background, and the obsession of building a city has become the ultimate goal of our political actors and wedged disciples. This fundamental distortion is stronger than ever, backed by heavy, well-lubricated political machinery. Its visitors are fed this urban fantasy and Aurovilians are injected with this urban propaganda every day of their lives. Absurdities like ring roads, radials and, God pardon me, lines of force, despite their utter unreality, have become real to most of us, who end up believ-

ing that Roger's urban sketch is actually the idea behind Auroville. [...]

Our decisions are more often than not manipulated by Asuric forces that perpetuate the misconception that Auroville will be realized only when streets are paved and endless rows of architectural sterility are filled with fifty thousand people.

We are not here to build a city.

We are here to evolve as a human species, to create and sustain an environment in which this thirst for growth is nurtured, where man is encouraged to develop to his full potential, free of the rigidity of government, of politics, of religion and economic dictatorship. [...]

Auroville is not the Galaxy Plan. Auroville is not the Master Plan.

[...] Had the Mother been presented with an urban plan which would have been the result of lengthy and serious study, a proposed territorial organization formed by the local climate, geology, history and society, environmentally-durable and

continued on page 2

- The work of the Integrated Sustainability Platform
- Nature's gifts: the jams of Siegfried

pages 3 – 4

- The yoga of flowers
- Shradhanjali turns thirty
- A new life – a profile of Lakshman

pages 4 – 5

- The work of the Entry Service
- Seniors helping seniors
- Passing: Rika Martens
- News in brief

pages 6 – 7

- Better relations with the villages
- Aquaponics – the future of farming?

pages 7 – 8



continued from page 1

agriculturally self-sufficient, she very well could have sighed with relief and given Roger the task of contemplating a cement mixer.

One should never overestimate the sanctity of disciples, who, invariably throughout history, were the instigators of religion and their gurus' biggest traitors. [...]

Enough cities have been built in the last millennia; we have sufficiently demonstrated our ability to chisel our landscapes, transform and consume all that should come our way. Aurovilians, whether in Vanur Block or Amsterdam's suburbia, will be the first earth species to consciously act in favour of evolution and transformation. They will have become facilitators of the Divine's manifestation, acting freely and in symbiosis with the earth in which they live, with the untiring drive for the creation of life in the most subtle and intricate spontaneity. [...]

The vegetation and the soil are the climate's offspring. Our climate is characterized by the irregularity of precipitation, concentrated in monsoon showers, and the abundance of sunlight throughout the season-less year. Vegetation that is undisturbed, in its state of climax, is the perfect regulator of these extremes of dryness and humidity. It is the most minute, intricate, intelligent, subtle and efficient manner of sustaining and diversifying life. [...]

## Why the galaxy plan?

We are all familiar with the galaxy plan for Auroville. Most of us are also aware that it received Mother's blessings. Yet some Aurovilians continue to challenge it, and would like to see it substantially modified, or even abandoned.

Why? Do they no longer have faith in Mother? Do they think that Mother was wrong? Do they think that 40+ years later we know better, or that what she endorsed at that time can no longer be relevant? Or do they still think that the galaxy plan is impractical, and won't work according to all the established rules of town planning? Whatever their reasons, I feel there are a number of important points to be taken into consideration regarding the galaxy plan, as follows.

Firstly, there can be no doubt that the original model of the galaxy, as still sometimes shown in information leaflets, brochures, etc, excites the human imagination. It is beautiful, inspiring, futuristic, and different in concept to any town layout on earth. We have only to put down beside the galaxy plan the layout of any existing town or city – take Pondicherry for example – and there simply isn't the same beauty, the same feeling of something

## Her evolving galaxy

There are images that are potent with creative, symbolic and dynamic power; Auroville as a galaxy is one such image. It is an image that carries with it the power of its own realisation, like a seed unfolding in time carried by the power that is inherent in the source from which it has come, the Dream of the Mother who has seen the birth and growth of the Eternal in time bound forms. It is a Force in motion gathering momentum as it unfolds and it has come not from the window of a little mind that cannot see the totality of Time, but from the gaze of someone who has seen the Eternal and the great civilisations rising and falling on earth in search of the divine for thousands of years.

Civilisations ancient have fallen, not because they poisoned their rivers and skies and ate up all their resources or cleared all their forests. What is common for both ancient and modern failure is the sheer presence of the beast in man, its lust and greed, its hatred and fear, and its wrath and territorial warfare still alive in the modern man, only made more sophisticated by modern weaponry and diplomatic language.

To imagine that Auroville will be complete if we build a city in a galactic form, or to imagine that Auroville will be sustainable if we use eco-friendly technologies or life styles or live entirely in forests in perfect harmony with Nature is far too naïve a faith and misses entirely the beast in man that needs only a chance to bring forth its deadly claws and territorial claims. Whether it lurks behind the rash impulses of the vital being or the mental concrete reinforced with faith or intellectual dogma makes no difference, the beast is the same behind the fort; fighting to defend or enlarge its territory, its little belief system in this or that little concept, easily threatened by anything that looks different and ready to rip apart its enemy or defend its meat of truth. It may fight for the galaxy or against the galaxy, for Nature or against the Nature, but the bottom line is – I will not tolerate you. It is this

When left alone, this land, through stages of species succession, evolves from barren ground to dense forest with emergents 60m high, where not a single ray of sunlight reaches the forest floor. In the depths of this ecological vibrancy, close to the damp, breathing ground, there would be a state of constant calm, peace, stability, regardless the climate beating against the canopy. The humanity of the future will be the conscious facilitators of this natural progression, vectors of this ecological urge for perfection and peace. [...]

On this coastal plateau, a minimum of two of every three surface units should constitute protected forest entirely deprived of human intervention (apart from the initial planting and acceleration of species succession during perhaps two decades), where the surface undergoing photosynthesis is maximal, where the capacity of the vegetation to intercept rainfall and percolate centenary rains is assured. These two thirds of protected forest would be the minimum necessary to compensate for imbalances caused by human concentrations, as they would recharge the water aquifers (depending on water management in Auroville and the wider bioregion), diminish the impact of climatic extremes and provide future generations with a natural heritage with which to heal their land. It is predicted that India's population will stop increasing in another forty years or so. This means that until



Tim Wrey

new and exciting.

Is this important? Yes, I think it is, because I suspect that the spiral shape is an embodiment of power – like a *mandala* or *chakra*. In fact I believe

savage in us that has to be transformed and without such change there is no Auroville.

Our inner Nature is still a jungle where the wild beasts roam and it is there we have to bring in the light of gnosis, a light that is embodied in the Matrimandir. There is nothing much eco-friendly or natural about Matrimandir, but its inner chamber is immensely soul-friendly. This is where the power of transformation is physically anchored on earth in Auroville and it is from such a centre that the galaxy radiates, the force field churning everyone who is coming in touch with it, compelling inner transformation, exposing their inner beasts and the forts of resistance. The galaxy is already there, the churning power is acting upon everyone, and it depends very little on the building blocks and the roads for its action upon this world and its people. The built forms are only the veils of matter in flux, meant to evolve constantly to express the spirit of Auroville with increasing perfection; the building of Auroville is an exercise to perfect the people and the rest are consequences; an Auroville where "all the fighting instincts of man would be used exclusively to conquer the causes of his suffering and misery, to surmount his weakness and ignorance, to triumph over his limitations and incapacities."

The spirit of the galaxy is not the form of the galaxy; the graphic concept that emerged through Roger is a great symbol, an inspiring vision that captures the essence of what is to come. There is no question of changing it; just like the Charter of Auroville it is not negotiable because without it the project loses its formal anchor point. The power that holds us together, that which sustains Auroville, is not something that comes from human conceptions, it comes from greater heights of the Spirit and that is why Auroville has a spiritual foundation and survives all the obstacles.

The Charter and Galaxy are the basic rules of the game and the difficulty of the game is not resolved by changing the rules given by the One who called us all here. It is a puzzle that is given to



Rishi Walker

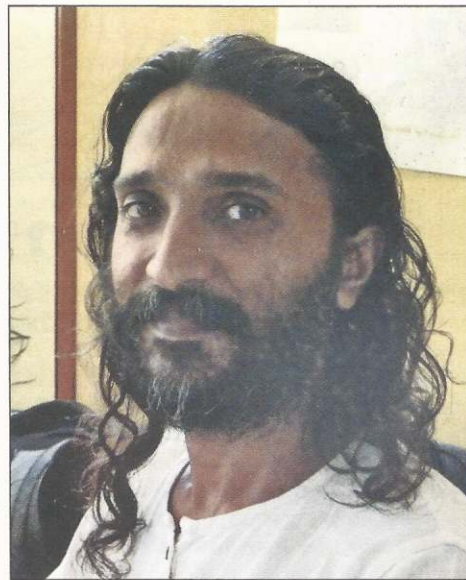
then, until the demographic transition is complete, consumption of resources will only increase and their availability decrease; the cancer that is this present humanity will spread destructively for decades to come. This is a reality that would shape the territorial organization of a future society, a

the galaxy plan is much, much more than a mere town layout, and has the power (like the Inner Chamber of the Matrimandir, which Mother similarly endorsed) to attract certain forces of a highly beneficial nature to Auroville, as well as to radiate out similar positive forces to the surrounding world.

My second point is that the galaxy plan will greatly facilitate Auroville's interaction with nature. With the spiral layout it is much easier to create wildlife corridors crossing the heart of the township from almost any point on the perimeter than it would be, for example, with a layout like Pondicherry's. With the spiral shape, the gently curving radials naturally lead wildlife into the heart of the township, and facilitate complete crossings of the township with minimal deviation.

My third is that just as the galaxy plan allows a free movement of wildlife across and within the township, so also it will permit good airflow.

My fourth point is perhaps the most important of all. I referred above to the "impracticality" of the galaxy, as claimed by some critics: it simply won't work according to them. To this I can only say GOOD! because what they are really saying is that with such a layout we will be unable to create a



Manoj

us to solve and to deny it is to avoid facing the problem. The day we can all agree upon something, no matter what, we have taken a step into Auroville. If the galaxy is not eco-friendly or user-friendly or soil-friendly or soul-friendly in its practical applications on the ground it is our challenge to make it friendly and harmonious, not to throw it out of the window due to the difficulty or lack of creative imagination. But this requires a continuous evolution of the details, not of the essential concept.

A galaxy that cannot evolve is dead; a galaxy that is not flexible is a tomb, a tomb where the great Mother of delight is laid to rest for eternity in precise granite geometries ornamented with plants that are not allowed to breathe. To evolve is to be open for change and change comes upon us through constant feedback. Consciousness evolves through its self-referential feedback loops of energy and information flowing into individuals or groups. The more evolved an individual or group

conscious society. [...]

Clearly, it would have been a great deal more convenient for the site of this city to be situated in a historical, demographic and socio-cultural vacuum, a treeless, flat expanse of nothingness from which one's mental masturbation could effortlessly arise. Only, the peninsula has been populated by the human species for tens of thousands of years, has borne ancient civilizations of traders, warriors, thieves, farmers and priests and is traversed by antique pilgrimage routes linking architectural wonders, erected throughout a rich land filled with the zeitgeist of millennia of human experience and spiritual curiosity and revelation. We may claim to be here to hasten the arrival of the Super Man and even believe that the latter will fall abruptly from above, but it is the soul of this land, its history, which are the fabric out of which the new humanity will be woven. [...]

Auroville has yet to be born. Today, the force that is driving its urban manifestation is one of the past. [...]

Auroville and the Galaxy Plan are two very different things. One is a corpse and the other is a spirit waiting to manifest. [...]

Rishi Walker

\* "forever, until victory". From Che Guevara's last letter to Fidel Castro. eds.

township like other townships on earth. Well, that's wonderful news, because we are not here to make just another township. To make the galaxy plan work we will have to set aside all existing rules, concepts and formations built up over centuries, and open ourselves to something new seeking to manifest. In other words, we can only make the galaxy plan work by going beyond all established criteria for existing townships. And in that new way we will be able to break our established moulds, move into a new state of being, and live a collective life in a totally new way. One could even surmise that a major step towards human unity will become a necessity to live harmoniously in such a township. In other words, the galaxy is a safeguard that we won't be able to repeat what humanity has always done before.

But above all I feel we should not abandon anything which Mother has given her blessings to. We can't claim to have faith in Mother and then not have faith in what she has endorsed. When the divine sanction has been given to something one should not disregard it, because one can be sure that the divine's guidance and protection will be with it at every step.

Tim Wrey

is, the more capacity they have to digest and creatively transform the incoming flow from all around. The more we resist, the harder the feedback becomes till it turns into hammer blows and break the hard shell of resistance; it is an evolutionary mechanism and process.

The anti-galaxy voices are a counterforce to the tomb makers, they grow up together, they are inseparable twins, both fighting to exclude and expunge each other with their incompatible territorial claims on the same soil, different fragments of truth frightened by each other's claws. They give birth to each other and are woven into each other, representing each other's shadow self to be transformed in a greater light where the galaxy can happily evolve in tune with Nature, immersed in Nature, both inner and outer, guided by the dawn of the higher Nature that is upon us.

Auroville, or the living dynamic power of her galactic form, is not sustained by the buildings or the roads that are yet to come or their precise geometries or the green practices that are already in place or yet to be invented. It is sustained by the flame of aspiration in the heart of its people, an aspiration lit by someone who is luminous and inspiring.

The galaxy evolved as long as the Mother was visibly present in a human body; initially there was not even the Matrimandir in the galaxy, it emerged over a period time. She turned the whole galaxy to allow the building of Bharat Nivas. Her ways are not easy to grasp; that She grants permission to something does not mean that the outer thing to which she has given permission is the final truth. She is not someone who ceased to exist in 1973, She is within us, She is all around us, we move and breathe in her Being. It is time to surrender all our dogmas and territorial instincts and look at each other's eyes to see Her smile.

Evolution continues and She is our ever present guide.

To know Her mystery we have come here.

Manoj



# The next step in Auroville's development?

The Integrated Sustainability Platform (ISP) is an attempt to help Auroville better utilise its existing resources through collaborative planning. Alon and Batel have designed and facilitated the process which, so far, has involved over 120 Aurovilians.

**Auroville Today:** What is the philosophy that underlies ISP?

**Batel:** It comes from ecological philosophy, systems thinking and complexity sciences. These deal with how a system can organize itself from the bottom upwards, which is the way that most living systems actually function. Another important aspect is inherent flexibility, which means that a system can constantly change and adapt itself to changing circumstances. So we are applying ecological methods to human organizations to see how a place like Auroville can organize itself in such a way that no central organization sets the rules. Instead, the system builds itself up organically.

**Alon:** Compared to a natural system, human societies are much more complex. For one thing, human beings can make conscious choices. The ISP approach is never to change the core belief but to rethink how to make it happen using the existing resources available: this is analogous to ecological systems which always seem to be efficient and adaptable. And to do this one needs to take into consideration many more layers and perspectives than one thinks about now and then see how you can work with them.

**Has this been done before?**

**Batel:** This is the first time that we are fully implementing this approach. We wanted to do it in Auroville because we see many similarities between our own interests and the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother. We think this approach can be implemented anywhere, but as every system is different it requires research to discover the nature of the system one is dealing with.



Alon and Batel

**Phase one of ISP has been completed. What happened in this phase?**

**Batel:** The process started for us with three months of research. We met over 200 people and read a lot of back issues of *Auroville Today* and anything else we could find about the actual day-to-day life in Auroville. This helped us divide Auroville into eighteen sectors under the three main divisions of social, natural and physical infrastructures. This research phase eventually led to the formation of planning teams for each sector. We tried to find people who represent different viewpoints in each sector so we could get deep and interesting discussions on the basis of questions we asked them.

**What was the purpose of the questions?**

**Batel:** We were asking them how their sector functions: what the main projects and units in their sector are, the relationship between them, what is working, what is not working and what can be improved. Also it was important for us to identify the main values and purpose of each sector. The questions were designed in such a way as to lead naturally to the emergence of a five year development strategy for each sector.

**How many people were involved?**

**Alon:** About one hundred in the sector teams but some sectors, like village outreach, food and farms and forests, decided to work with everybody in their sector. So, overall, more than 120 people answered the questions. Almost half the sectors were new. In other words, many of the

groups we formed had not sat together before even though they had been working in the same field. The groups met once a week for four months.

**Were you happy with the outcome?**

**Alon:** All of them came up with what needed to happen next in their sector, so for me this is 100% success.

**Batel:** ISP brought a lot of new energy to different sectors. For example, many people in the education sector had thought they couldn't do things because they didn't have the money. But then they realized the problem is not the money, the problem is they are not collaborating and they could do a lot if they collaborated more.

Finally there was a one day workshop when one person from each group met with four other people from four other groups, which meant that altogether each group met all the other seventeen groups. As a result of these interactions, most of the groups' strategies were modified. This was the last step of phase one, where each part begins to see itself as a part of the bigger whole and adjusts accordingly.

**Alon:** Actually, this was one of the biggest learnings. All the groups realized there needed to be much greater connectivity, integration, between them if Auroville is to progress.

**What will happen in the second phase of the ISP?**

**Batel:** There are two main tasks. One is to establish the feedback process between the sectors and the main planning body, the second is for each sector to take responsibility for the implementation of the strategy they came up with (see box). This requires some people in each sector to dedicate themselves full-time to this work.

*Each sector requires additional human resources to do this. Specifically, forty additional maintenances are being requested. If the funding for these is not available, will the project stop?*

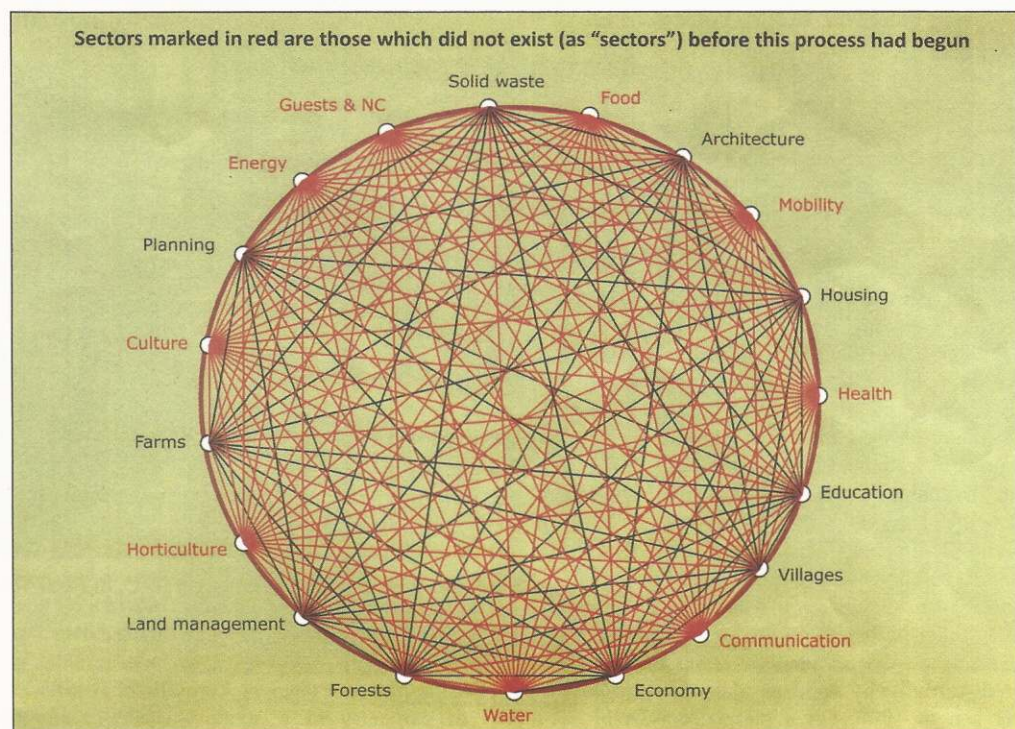
**Alon:** No. If we can't find the money initially – and we will look outside Auroville if the community is not ready to provide it – we will use volunteers to do the work. However, it won't be the same and progress will be slower. That's why I think that if the community is really serious about taking Auroville to the next stage of its development, these forty maintenances are the absolute minimum. We really need a new organization to support further development.

**What will this new organization look like?**

**Alon:** The idea is not to create a top-down management structure but the opposite: the decision-makers will be the people from the sectors. There will still be a role for a body like L'Avenir d'Auroville but it will be a facilitating role. In fact, we are in discussions with L'Avenir at present concerning recognizing each of the 18 sectors as decision-making bodies.

**Auroville at present has many examples of 'top-down' management. How can you be sure that the ISP will not go the same way?**

**Alon:** Top-down management tends to depress peoples' motivation and the energy for growth, so it is crucial that the ISP does not go this way. The more the sectors work with each other, the less need there is for some kind of top-down or outside management. It also depends a lot on how the sectors will manage themselves internally. If the sectors' coordinators understand that their role is to represent all the viewpoints from within their sector, then it will work. But if the sector's coordinators become managers and people from within the sector feel excluded from the process, then the sector will



Map of possible interactions between existing (black) and new (red) sectors.

not serve its purpose and this will require other sectors' involvement.

**So connectivity, communication, between the sectors is the key?**

**Alon:** Yes, it is a crucial part of the process. The overall communication function will be taken up by the communications sector, which has to be a transparent communication tool. At the same time, as people get information about what is happening in other sectors, they have to stop thinking that something happened 'over there' and start feeling that something happened 'here'; that we're all part of the same thing.

**Isn't there still a danger of abuse? That, for example, one sector will try to go its own way without considering the needs of the whole?**

**Alon:** Let's take an example. If the energy sector, for example, gets a lot of money for a particular project and decided to go ahead without consulting other sectors involved, it is up to the communication sector to inform all the other sectors about what is happening so that some remedial action can be taken. For if one sector goes its own way like this, if it tries to become too strong at the expense of others, it will make for a sick society and everybody will suffer.

At the end of each financial year, the turnover of all sectors can be presented, and if one sector is way over the others, there should be a collective decision on how this sector can support other sectors. If, on the other hand, one sector is developing very slowly, the other sectors can assist.

**Batel:** We see this process as a tool that fosters collective responsibility. The aim is always to strive towards balance among the sectors. The

more balanced the system, the more sustainable it is in the long run. Adjustments can be made along the way to ensure maximum transparency and accountability.

**The main criticism of the ISP approach is that it is impractical. For example, there have been attempts in the past to get different groups to work together but most of them have failed because some people want to keep control over their own area or project. Why should it be different this time?**

**Alon:** I believe that people, like anything else in nature, first need to take care of themselves. But then they reach a point where they understand that they need to hold hands with others because then they will develop faster and better. I think Auroville has reached this stage. But it is not only about speed, it is also about the quality of development. You can learn a lot from collaborations in ways which cannot be anticipated in advance.

**Batel:** Through our process, we understood that development in Auroville will occur by investment in its sectors. The more the sectors develop, the more Auroville will be able to manifest.

At the beginning of this process there were people who told us it would not work and that we shouldn't waste our time. Now, as a result of the ISP, one of the biggest sceptics has created a huge project involving collaboration between different sectors, and there are many other stories like this. So I think the reality is that many Aurovilians have been waiting for something like this for many years. Of course there are fears and concerns about the next step, but the wish to try something different is even stronger.

*From an interview by Alan*

## Excerpts from the sectors' five years development plans

- ◆ **Mobility:** establish a mobility steering group to, among other things, fund-raise and allocate funds for a Green Grid; create service nodes for parking, cycles and storage
- ◆ **Water:** establish an Auroville Water Board with authority to implement water policies
- ◆ **Energy:** establish an Energy Board to set up an energy fund and a sustainable energy educational programme
- ◆ **Waste:** develop educational programmes for schools and the general public; implement new waste management guidelines for new housing projects
- ◆ **Architecture and planning:** formulate a green building and infrastructure policy; create user-friendly Master Plan and planning guidelines; create Board of Architects
- ◆ **Education:** develop teacher-training programme based on integral education, ecological expertise and progressive Indian educational programmes
- ◆ **Economy:** establish Friends of Auroville commercial status; explore how to partner with external companies; develop transparent criteria for investments and funds
- ◆ **Culture:** develop a financial support

- strategy for arts in Auroville
- ◆ **Communication:** improve collaboration between the various media, develop communication infrastructure project
- ◆ **Villages:** expand cultural exchanges between Auroville and the villages; develop a model village with alternative energy products; coordination body to mediate between working groups and the villages
- ◆ **Forestry:** create larger managed forest areas; accept gaps and additions to Master Plan as carbon sinks; appoint forest coordinator to communicate and fund-raise
- ◆ **Farms:** offer certification for organic food, promote training of village farmers, promote urban farming in city area
- ◆ **Housing:** Expand fundraising; create housing assets management policy
- ◆ **Food:** open more distribution centres; expand relationships with the bioregion
- ◆ **Health:** set up a Health Board to coordinate the health sector and develop health education programmes
- ◆ **Guests to Newcomers:** transparent financial overview of all guest-related activities through centrally coordinated handling of all income and expenditures; establish different categories (Friends, residents etc) for joining Auroville



## Nature's 'sweet' gift

"Everything that has been done is always nothing compared to what remains to be done" (The Mother – The Secret of Eternal Youth, CWM, 12:122)

There is no better example of activity, creativity and the will to stay young than Siegfried, or "Sigi" as he's fondly known. At the young age of 63, Sigi is an entrepreneur and visionary. His business 'Nature's Gift', which produces jam, is one of the smaller Auroville units. However, during the interview it became clear that jam is merely a sideline!

Sigi was born, raised and lived in Berlin, Germany, until the 1st of January 1998, when he arrived in Auroville to begin a new journey. "I remember it clearly", he says "I left Germany on 31st of December and landed in Mumbai early morning on the first day of the New Year, of my new life. The smells, the atmosphere, it was just amazing."

He had first come to India in 1994 and, like many others, had immediately fallen in love with the country. He knew India was where he wanted to live. He discovered Auroville by accident on another trip with his son in 1996. On a plane from Delhi to Mumbai he asked a fellow traveller "an old, Indian man with long white hair" where he was going – the answer was "Auroville." They came and spent two weeks in College Guest House. This really wasn't long enough so the following year the whole family came for 3 months. Sigi already had an interest in eco-farming and it was while spending time in the Discipline kitchen on the first visit that he suddenly realised his direction. Discipline was to become 'home'.

Sigi had spent most of his life in the food industry. His father had a bakery while he was growing up. Around 1986, Sigi started to look for 'something else'. He and a partner started a restaurant and then a little later he opened a biological food shop offering alternatives to chemically-enhanced, meat-laden produce.



Siegfried with his jams, 'Nature's Gift', in Pour Tous

But, he just knew, 'It cannot be like this, there's something more.'

For the first four years in Auroville he dabbled in carpentry in a small workshop in Kottakari. Later he spent time at Siddhartha Farm, Pour Tous and finally Deepanam School. He left the school, he says, "Because it wasn't developing in the correct way for me." During this period Sigi met his Tamil partner, Patchiammal. They have two young boys. Since he was no longer receiving maintenance and had a young family to support, Sigi decided he had to do something. Food was the obvious choice but he didn't want a shop or to bake. So he began to make jam. What started out as a few batches of fruit jams for friends and neighbours expanded six years later into a successful business. His product range varies from season to season, depending on availability of ingredients and suggestions from customers. He also makes nut butters from almonds, cashews, sesame and

peanuts.

This is a truly family business which employs only one local helper. All the making, packaging and labelling is done 'in house' and Sigi single-handedly takes care of the marketing and delivery. Asked if he thought the kids might one day take over, he says that he would love that. But, he adds, he wants them to pursue their own desires. "Ajit may go that way; he likes farming and shows interest from time to time. Arjuna likes to copy whatever Dad does," says Sigi.

The name 'Nature's Gift' reflects how he feels about the things that go into making his jams. He doesn't

use any artificial preservatives

or chemicals. Does this have any effect on the shelf life? No, the jams are good for up to 12 months from production as long as they are stored in a cool place after opening as sugar and fresh lemon are natural preservatives.

Sigi procures as much of the produce as possible from Auroville and local farms. This not only cuts costs but allows him to select organic produce wherever possible. After realising the potential of his products, Sigi began to sell his wares in Pour Tous and Farm Fresh. "It was the 15th of August 2007" he adds fondly. I asked him how many jars he sold back then. "About 30 a month", he says. And how many now that the number of outlets he sells to has increased? He looks a little bashful as he answers, "Mmm...It's quite a few more now, depending on the season".

Sigi has been exploring options to relocate the growing business's premises for two to three years. "It all comes down to money at the end

of the day", he says. "My plan is to create an organic orchard or farm. This requires the right kinds of people and attitudes. I want to develop an economic system where all the workers are equally paid, no matter what work they do. I envisage providing excess produce within Auroville and the profit to be used for a good cause. All this is on the lines of Mother's original plan. I'm not worried though. It will happen when it happens."

How has a business with only one employee, no email and no website managed to grow to the level we see today, with a client base spanning Auroville, Pondicherry, Mamallapuram, Tiruvanamalai and more? "Profit is never number one," he says, "I like to meet the people, to make sure the products are displayed nicely and to see the expressions when people taste the jam. That's my reward. When you like what you do you will earn what you need and be happy." Asked why he wasn't listed on the Auroville.com shopping site he replies "No-one asked me."

Does Sigi have any plans to take it easy any time soon? Definitely not! "I'll never retire", he says, "to retire would mean the tomb is half open. There is still so much that I wish to learn and do. I'm interested in teas and coffee, oils and perfumes. Maybe I'll make those later. I'd also love to work in the kindergarten. I love children, especially the smaller ones. I see, I think, I'm sure they are the future. They are so natural and so real. You can trust them completely and see exactly what they are feeling. I read Sraddhalu's book on education and I think that anyone who wants to be involved in education should read this. The principle is that first we have to help ourselves, only then can we help the children. We need to raise our own consciousness first. Mother's ideals were correct, but it shouldn't be 'school'. We still need to work on this; it all needs a new way of thinking. I'd like the excess profit from the farm to be used to be used for a new kind of education."

Louise

## INNOVATIONS

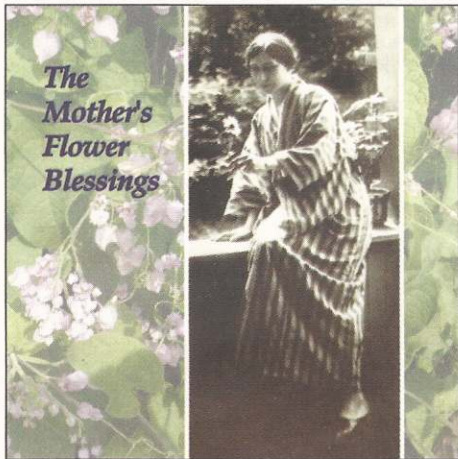
### The yoga of flowers

In his Prisma office Franz shows me an elegant and beautifully coloured box. "It does look rather like a chocolate box", he laughs. The cover shows a photo of the Mother in Japan and this is surrounded by a delicate pink "Harmony" flower – "I took the photograph of the Harmony creeper which is growing up the south wall of the Town Hall," he says. And, as an aside, "We need this Harmony, that is something we have to achieve here in Auroville and then in the world, but it is not easy."

He opens the box. Inside is a booklet and two small boxes, one with a picture of a white and the other of a mauve "Protection" flower. "There are two boxes of cards, each with sixty-four cards. You can play the Memory Game or use only one set of cards. Every morning I shuffle or spread the sixty-four cards, trying to let my mind go quiet, and then choose a card. This will be the flower which I offer to the Mother." He demonstrates by turning over a card and we see a picture of a brilliant white zinnia. Mother's name, *Integral Endurance*, is written underneath, and its message: "It will go on unfailingly till the end of its task." He then chooses a second card and explains that this Mother's response, the flower she gives to him for that day.

"If one does this daily you will find it a very interesting and helpful way to start a flower dialogue with Mother. This is also the way she used to communicate with many of her disciples in the Ashram, through flowers. It is a very sweet way, this yoga of flowers, a very simple way, but a way to discover your soul qualities."

"When I first explained to Richard and Kailas of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram my wish to create these cards they were very enthusias-



tic and supportive. They helped me to select the sixty-four blessing cards and gave me their advice. The Ashram gave permission to use the writings of the Mother, and we selected the text from the book *The Spiritual Significance of Flowers*. The Ashram Archives also very kindly gave us the flower photos to use.

"I have been working on these for one year, and now on August 15th – at Darshan time – they will be available. The proceeds will go to the Matrimandir Gardens."

"Mother gave names to everything – people, buildings, places, communities. She also named flowers and trees, using them as symbols to help us on our way, as aims that we should try to achieve. It is interesting to look at the names Mother gave to some of our early communities – Aspiration, Hope, Promise, Fraternity. They have all been chosen very specifically for us, yet often we go in a completely different direction. If we can be aware of this and be conscious of what it triggers in us and what perspective it gives us, we can have a very different approach to life here."

"When I first came here from Germany, where flowers only came from the flower shop, I was very puz-

zled when I found that all the different flowers had names here. I recognized basic emotions such as love and hate, anger and tenderness, but I learned about so many different soul qualities and movements only here. The first time was in Medhananda's *Eternity Game*, where my eyes were opened to the psychic qualities that lie behind everything in nature.

"Now I am working on another card game with the Matrimandir flowers, with one hundred and eight flowers. It is not a game as such; it is a way of discovering the many aspects of Mother's flowers. The gardens are Auroville's next big unique creation and it may help people to learn and appreciate the subtlety, power and purpose of its flowers. I hope it will help to lead them to the meaning of the gardens and how the gardens will lead us to the inner core of the Matrimandir, which means the inner being in all of us."

"What I find very remarkable about this flower yoga is that it is absolutely unique to the Ashram and Auroville. Mother first became aware of the subtle power of flowers at the age of twenty five, when she went to study occultism with the Theons in Algeria. From Alma she learned of their power of receptivity, and years later she gave the spiritual meaning of nearly nine hundred flowers. These are now all beautifully photographed and described in the book *The Spiritual Significance of Flowers*, published by the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. It is as if the world is still completely unaware of this dimension of flowers."

Savitri Bhavan's large garden is also part of Franz's attempt to convey what he calls 'Flower Power.' There are more than sixty different flowers and trees there, and each of them will

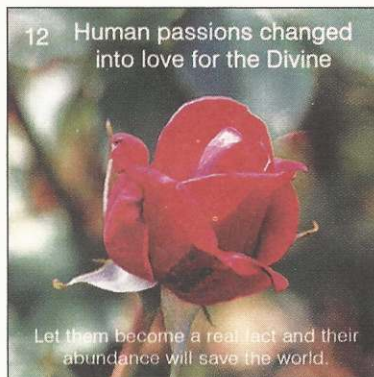
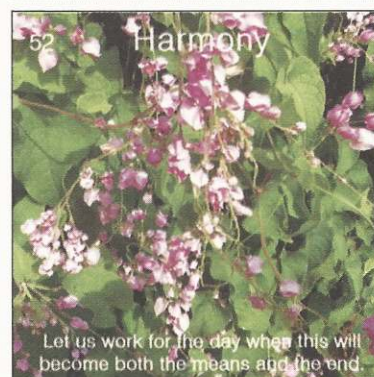
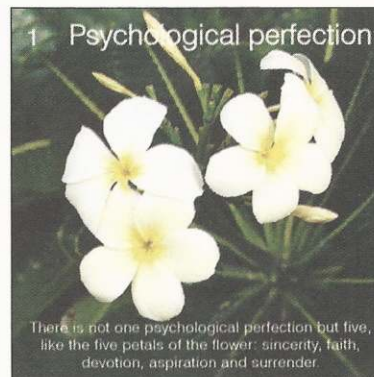
"When the sun sets and all becomes silent, sit down for a moment and put yourself into communion with Nature: you will feel rising from the earth, from below the roots of the trees and mounting upward and coursing through their fibres up to the highest outstretching branches, the aspiration of an intense love and longing, – a longing for something that brings light and gives happiness, for the light that is gone and they wish to have back again. There is a yearning so pure and intense that if you can feel the movement in the trees, your own being too will go up in an ardent prayer for the peace and light and love that are unmanifested here."

Ther Mother, *Questions and Answers*, 1929-31

have a metal name-stand, with Mother's given name, its message for us, and its botanical name. If the Tamil names can be found they will also be included. "I would like to see these flower names with their profound messages on many of the prominent trees and plants around Auroville," says Franz. "Each time

you see the tree and read the sign it will help you to become aware of its true aspiration and purpose. For example, the entrance tree at Savitri Bhavan is a *Cassia javanica* which Mother called Psychic Work. What a beauty this tree was during summertime!"

In conversation with Dianna



Four of the flower game cards.



# Shradhanjali turns 30

In March, Shradhanjali – meaning 'Offering of Faith' – celebrated its thirtieth birthday with an Open House for all.

“It was towards the end of 1979 that Radhika and I had the idea to start a unit,” recalls Abha. “At the time hardly anyone in Auroville had a personal income: we all ate at community kitchens where sometimes there was only dry bread for breakfast. It was a difficult time and commercial units were needed to improve Auroville’s finances. For us another reason was that we wanted to work with our hands and make crafts. We had already been talking about this when we were still studying in Delhi University, long before joining Auroville. So we decided to work with dry flowers for both of us enjoyed doing this.”

We are sitting in the comfortable office of Shradhanjali in the Industrial Zone of Auroville. Next door, a dozen ladies are painstakingly glueing dried flowers and leaves and grasses to paper sheets; elsewhere, other ladies are laminating the sheets for future use in stationery products, serving trays, lampshades and even curtain blinds. The building is surrounded by a beautiful

the space was insufficient. At the time there were six or seven girls working for Shradhanjali and there was no place to store our raw materials and finished products. Moreover, the flowers we tried to grow in the garden would vanish overnight into the bellies of roaming village goats and cows. We needed to shift.”

Her ideal was a place in the Industrial Zone, large enough for a production unit, storerooms, offices and a garden to grow the flowers. But the proposed move wasn’t welcomed by all. “There was a tussle with Aurofuture who didn’t want to give us land and the Aurovilians living in the area also strongly objected to having a new unit there. They were unfriendly and unhelpful,” remembers Abha. “Finally it was grudgingly agreed that we could buy a piece of land near CSR. Using our reserves and a loan from Auroville, this building and the surrounding gardens were then manifested.”

Shradhanjali is known for its policy of employing mainly women. “This is a very deliberate choice,” says Abha. “One reason is that

lages. Thirty years ago village society would barely permit girls to ride a bicycle, and would not allow them to rejoin work after marriage. Now, women drive their own mopeds and return to work after marriage and even after childbirth as a matter of course.”

Shradhanjali focuses a lot on social development. “We want our employees to connect with Auroville on other levels than just work, including on a deeper level,” says Abha. “We take them on annual tours to different places in Auroville, we show them films about health and hygiene, and we organize periodic talks by specialists on subjects like nutrition, clean water, garbage and waste management. This is very much appreciated. They particularly loved visiting the Matrimandir and the Botanical Garden.” This initiative, she says, will be developed in future. “I want to expose them to other ways of living and thinking, so that they gain larger horizons, both in terms of social thought as well as in their outlook on matters of education or environment.”

Celebrating a birthday brings up the question of how Abha sees the place of Shradhanjali in Auroville’s changing scenario. She laughs. “I do not foresee much difference in our work or employment policy or our decision to give the maximum of profits to Auroville. But we do need young people with fire and enthusiasm, willing to work hard. Presently we employ thirty employees and five Aurovilians, but would be happy to have committed Auroville youngsters join us. We want to expand organically, in a manner we can handle, without losing the conscious and caring way in which we work. I am hopeful it will happen.”

She reflects that today’s mindset is very different from the time when Shradhanjali took birth. “People who now come to join Auroville have no clue to what we had to go through. I went to a recent meeting about quality control for Auroville products. Many of those attending were relatively new to Auroville. They complained that there is no infrastructure for new people to start a business, that there is no help



Employees pressing flowers at Shradhanjali

being offered to new entrepreneurs. There is an expectation that a full-fledged Chamber of Commerce will help with everything, with buildings, infrastructure and organization. Business in Auroville has become a totally different ballgame.”

But ultimately the objective of Shradhanjali remains working as an offering to the Divine. “Shradhanjali’s inspiration are the words from The

Mother that ‘Life must blossom like a flower offering itself to the Divine,’ says Abha. “There is such beauty and spontaneous offering in a flower or a tree, in nature in general. It is a life lesson for us who want to do the yoga of Mother and Sri Aurobindo.”

*In conversation with Dianna*

For more information visit [www.shradhanjaliaouroville.com](http://www.shradhanjaliaouroville.com)



Thenmoori, a senior employee, glues flowers to paper folders.

garden, where shrubs and trees are labelled with hand-drawn pictures. The atmosphere is quiet and concentrated.

Shradhanjali started 30 years ago with some borrowed money in a building near Pour Tous in Aspiration. “It used to be the office of Aurofuture. After they moved out, we were told that we could use a small corner,” says Abha. “It was great for a start but soon

women are more suited to do delicate work. But another, and equally important reason, is that women are the key to bringing social change in the villages. Most of them lead very difficult lives. But we have observed that over the years the women working with us have gained an increased sense of self-worth and confidence. There have been great changes in the vil-



The stationery products of Shradhanjali

## PROFILE

### A new life

Lakshman is a 33-year old Tamil Aurovilian who takes care of the Town Hall. His wife Poorani also works there with L’Avenir d’Auroville. They are happy to be Aurovilians.

Lakshman was born in Rayapettai, a small village close to Auroville, into a family of five children. His father worked hard selling rice around the villages on his bicycle to support his family. “He is now 85 and everyone knows him,” says Lakshman proudly. When Lakshman was two years old, his mother died in childbirth. “My father had to work even harder as his children grew older, but somehow he managed to educate all of us.

“I went as far as 10th grade – then as there was no more money I had to leave school. In 1995 I began to train as an electrician in Matrimandir. I worked there for six years. I felt a great connection with Auroville and very much wanted to become an Aurovilian. I loved the Aurovilian way of life which was so different from my traditional village, and I liked the people. I did not speak a word of English – even the ABC was not taught in our poor village school. I got to know Amar who also worked at the Matrimandir, in the marble section, and he was giving English classes at Savitri Bhavan. There I also learned about the Mother and Sri Aurobindo.



Poorani, Jeevan and Lakshman

Then I gradually felt I was starting a new life in Auroville. However, my family wasn’t happy about it as Auroville was an unknown to them.

“I left Matrimandir as they did not support my application to become an Aurovilian. I started working in Abri as an electrician helper, for a small wage. I stayed at the Big Boys’ Boarding in Fraternity for a few months and in Arc-en-Ciel for some years, and took my food in New Creation community kitchen. It was a very difficult period. It often felt as if I was climbing a mountain. I did not have enough money for three meals a day. I began to develop stomach

problems with the inadequate food. In the village the food was regular and plentiful, but here I often had to do without. I still suffer from those days as I have a stomach ulcer. I was dependent on the help from generous friends. It took me five years to get my application accepted to become a newcomer. I felt as if I was waiting for ever. But I knew that Mother had mentioned that Auroville life is not easy.

“In 2003 as a Newcomer my life changed completely when I was asked to work as an electrician in the newly-built Town Hall. I loved being

part of the Town Hall family. The people there helped me change my life.

“During that time at New Creation I met Poorani who had been brought up in the Boarding School. She had lost her parents when she was four years old, and Dr. Beena had taken care of her over the years. We got to know each other and fell in love and wanted to marry, but faced many problems. She was from a different caste. It took half a year to sort out all kinds of problems and also for my family to accept her. Finally we got married in the temple. The Town Hall team helped me with our wedding and with

building a simple house in Sincerity. We now have a one and a half year old boy whom we called Jeevan which means “life” in Tamil, Sanskrit and Hindi. We also named him Jeevan because Auroville gave me a new life.

“I am always very busy here in the Town Hall. I started as a conference room technician and gradually took up more responsibilities. Now I am the caretaker, or manager – I do both together. Among other things I organize the work. We have three watchmen, one handyman, one gardener and 5 cleaning ammas. As I am from the village myself, I know how to deal with them.

“Maintaining the building can be a nightmare as often the electricity fluctuates. It affects all the computers and our big UPS machines can get damaged. I have to run around and start the generator. It can get crazy. Also keeping the water tank filled is a daily challenge as the water supply is not guaranteed. I also help at Cinema Paradiso as a technician.

“How do I see my future?” Lakshman pauses from his extremely busy life to think for a minute. “I am already thinking of starting an electric motorbike service and dealership for Aurovilians where they can rent and buy their bike and get it repaired without going to Pondicherry.” He shows me a pile of bike catalogues that he has been looking through. “I am trying to get funds to start the service.”

Anything to add? “I want to say thanks to all those who helped me get a new life in Auroville.”

*Dianna*



# "We need people who want to help Auroville grow"

A new Entry Service was formed in November 2009. For the first few months the new team was busy examining how they wished to function and processing a large backlog of applicants and Newcomers. Alan met with three Entry Service members who shared their experience and plans for the future.

Historically, Entry Groups have tended to either be a welcoming group or a group which tried to tightly control admission into Auroville. Where does this group stand? "I would say we are both," says one of the members. "When we recognize somebody is meant to be here we really go all out to help them join. But we are also protective of Auroville because the community has suffered in the past when some people had not been screened sufficiently."

One of the reasons for this was inadequate communication between the different groups involved in processing Newcomers. The new Entry Service works much more closely with all the relevant groups. "The entry decision today," clarifies one member, "is a reflection of a whole process involving the Housing Service, the Human Resource team, Connections, the Health Fund, the School Board, the Budget Coordination group, the Funds and Assets Management Committee and even, at times, the Council or the Working Committee. And then there are the contact persons that the people choose for themselves. All in all, we're talking about 40 or 50 people who participate in someone's entry process: it is no longer just a decision of the core Entry Group. Most importantly, we value feedback from the community at large, particularly when someone is announced as a Newcomer or prospective Aurovilian in the News and Notes. The impact of such feedback should not be underestimated. It may shed new light on someone's process."

## Bureaucratic?

Partly as a consequence of this, today much more information is required from prospective Newcomers. The six page application form contains questions concerning their knowledge of the ideals and how they want to serve Auroville, as well as their skills and education, their housing situation and how they intend to take care of their basic needs over the next 2-3 years. To be officially registered as a Newcomer, they must bring letters of support from at least three Aurovilians as well as letters from the Financial Service, Housing Service and the Health Fund. "It may sound awfully unfriendly and bureaucratic," says one member, "but it brings clarity to the entire process."

"We want prospective applicants to be fully aware that there is a housing problem and maintenance problem", adds another. "If someone becomes an Aurovilian, they can no longer assume that they will be given a house or be looked after financially." But won't this automatically exclude some applicants who are full of energy and idealism yet lack personal resources? "It's a real concern", admit the members. However, they point out that the housing and maintenance groups have agreed that they will allocate 10% of their budget to deserving people who really have nothing. Moreover, Newcomers can now receive a maintenance and get their Central Fund and Health Fund contributions taken care of if they are doing essential work for the community.

Does the Entry Service have an ideal applicant in mind? "Someone committed to the ideals and who can adapt to multi-cultural living. Ideally, it is a young community-oriented person or couple, full of aspiration and energy, ready to contribute where needed, preferably with a background in one of the following fields: education, medicine, communication, administration, farming or entrepreneurship."

"In other words," adds another member, "We need active members, people who want to help Auroville grow; we need better representation of youth and less of the older age group." So are they refusing people who are too old or have physical dis-



Three members of the Entry Service: Jocelyn, Cecilia and Rakhee

abilities, as rumours suggest? "No, not at all!" exclaims one. "We look at each case individually because we cannot put people in a box," clarifies another member. "If you've been visiting Auroville for many years you will not have difficulties with the climate or everything else, even if you are 75 years old. While we would prefer that potential Newcomers do not come to Auroville for the first time at this age, we wouldn't refuse anyone on this basis."

But how can they be sure that somebody will take up useful work for the community after their Newcomer process has been completed? It's a problem, they admit, pointing to instances when people disappear off the radar once they become Aurovilians. "That's why we are uncomfortable with giving some people the status of Aurovilian after just one year. Consequently we are exploring along with the Council and Working Committee the possibility of granting just the 'Resident of Auroville' status at the end of the probation year. Then we will wait for a period of time - yet to be defined - before granting the permanent status of Aurovilian."

## The housing challenge

Apart from this, what are the main challenges the Entry Service is facing at present? Lack of housing, they all agree, is the biggest obstacle. At present, they have about 300 people in the Newcomer pipeline, but no new housing development is planned to house them in the near future. "People are our greatest asset. We want to welcome a new generation that will smoothly integrate into Auroville. But how can the community reasonably expect us to do this if Auroville doesn't have places for them to live and financial help? Past Entry Groups did not ensure that Newcomers had secured housing and work prior to them becoming Aurovilians. Consequently many individuals without resources became Aurovilians with the expectation they would automatically be allocated free housing and a maintenance. Some of them are still on the housing waiting list, sitting idle with few resources."

"For these reasons, we will again slow down the entry process over the coming weeks and prioritize according to Auroville's needs until our working groups take very concrete steps to resolve the present blockages that hinder the Entry process."

The Entry Service makes it clear they do not hold the Housing Service responsible for the present state of affairs. "The community has not given enough attention to this issue for too long. Funds

should be released immediately to make more housing available. New housing doesn't have to be just expensive apartments which few people can afford. We must also build relatively low-cost, yet aesthetic accommodation and address the different needs of youth, couples, families and older people. We must explore different possibilities like renting and leasing. We hope the new L'Avenir team will catch the momentum."

## People from the local area

In the past, many people from the surrounding villages have been accepted as Aurovilians. Today over a third of the population is from the local area. Is this another matter for concern? "There is an imbalance that has become unsustainable. Auroville is meant to be an international city. To achieve this we need to keep a reasonable proportion of all nationalities and cultural representations. So we need to encourage people to come here from other states of India and from abroad, particularly countries which are not represented or are under-represented in Auroville. But this is a very sensitive issue that must be handled carefully."

Another member adds, "In order to discover new ways of living and growing together, it is important to let go of old behaviour, old customs and beliefs. This is true for all of us, but more specifically for people from the local area. This is why we make it clear to them that the Newcomer status is not granted automatically, even if you are the brother or wife of an Aurovilian. It must be a conscious choice, an inner individual process."

"Many of the local people who became Aurovilians were former employees hoping mainly to improve their economic status. This has occasionally led to conflicts in services or units. We have instituted an orientation programme specifically designed for people from the local villages who want to become Aurovilians. In this programme they are introduced to various aspects of Auroville, they learn about the ideal and what is expected of them. This has an impact. For example, when employees learn that they will no longer have their salary or gratuity and will have to give up some traditional habits, it is often too much for them. On the other hand, if the orientation programme team leaders recommend somebody to us, we will try to facilitate their entry."

"For those employees who do not satisfy the requirements to become an Aurovilian, we are currently exploring the guidelines of a new status - *sevak* - that we will present to the community for approval over the coming months. *Sevaks* will be integrated employees who will have some rights - to be defined - in our community without them having to give up their employee rights, traditional life style and beliefs. It will help the Entry service to solve some complex cases."

The Entry Service stress, however, that it is not simply some local people who are attracted to Auroville for the wrong reasons. "Auroville is for *karma yoga*, not for personal gain. But Auroville has become very attractive to foreigners in need of long-term Entry visas, to parents looking for a supportive environment and alternative education for their children, and to people who wish to retire, particularly given the present recession in the West. If we threw our doors wide open without further scrutiny, we might have 500 applications tomorrow."

On the other hand, there are people fully committed to Auroville's ideals who assist in its development but, for various reasons, are unable to live here on a permanent basis. For these people the Entry Service has revived the 'Friends of Auroville'

status. Friends of Auroville have the same rights as any other Aurovilian except they are not members of the Residents Assembly, their housing is stewarded by the Housing service when they are out of station and they don't get a visa guarantee from the Auroville Foundation (see box). "It's like a recognition of the work these people have done for us over the years. It is also an option for new people who are not yet ready to join but who would like to contribute on a permanent basis."

## Orientation programmes

Other innovations taken up by the Entry Service include a five day orientation programme open to all Newcomers and prospective Newcomers. "We would like all of them to attend these programmes because they help create more awareness of the realities of life here."

The Entry Service is also planning to introduce self-assessment for Newcomers after six months and to publish the photos of Newcomers on AuroNet. They are also about to launch an information e-booklet. "We have lots of ideas but we don't have time at present to do all these things: we have only two full-time and four part-time members and it is not enough to cope with the workload. We are searching for two more members with correspondence and communication skills to complete our team. The reception desk, in particular, needs to be strengthened. Some individuals need more individual attention but we do not have enough people to attend to their needs."

## Not an easy job

The workload is considerable. The present Entry Service inherited a huge backlog of cases from previous groups. Some had been dragging on for many years, "mainly because nobody knew how to deal with certain individuals who should never have been made Newcomers in the first place. Lately we've recommended some as Aurovilians, even though we did not feel comfortable about it, because they had been in the process many years, they had made such major adjustments in their lives and their children had been integrated into Auroville schools. Sometimes we have to make a stand and rescind a Newcomer process, even though it may result in us being shouted at and even receiving threats of violence." They emphasise, however, that they are very pleased with the quality of the new Newcomers.

Entry teams have never had an easy job. They are easy targets for those who feel they are either too soft or too hard on prospective Newcomers, and at times they have been used by the community to further a particular political orientation. The new Entry Service team, however, does not feel embattled. "Though we admit that it is rather draining and stressful at times, we enjoy this work. We have received, and continue to receive, a lot of support from individuals and working groups. We wish, however, that those who continuously criticize us had a better understanding of the ground realities Auroville is facing. Instead of using us as easy targets it would be better to give us and the rest of the community constructive feedback."

Alan

## Friend of Auroville

After having been dormant for the past years, the Entry Service has revived the category Friend of Auroville.

A Friend of Auroville has the same rights and duties as an Aurovilian as stated by The Mother in 1970 in *To be a True Aurovilian* and recognizes and accepts the Ideals of Auroville as stated in the Auroville Charter.

A friend of Auroville is someone who has visited Auroville several times over the last five years and who wishes not to become a permanent Resident but intends to regularly visit Auroville for several months a year. A friend has been and will continue to be active for the development of Auroville, both in Auroville and in his/her home country. A Friend may start a joint venture with Auroville in which they bring additional means, knowledge and / or expertise and is allowed to build or contribute towards accommodation for his/her use while visiting Auroville.

The Auroville Foundation does not guarantee visas for India to a Friend of Auroville.

A Friend of Auroville is self-supporting and will make a monthly contribution to the Central Fund on a par with Aurovilians.

A Friend of Auroville is responsible for maintaining close communication with both the Entry Service and the Housing Service. Failure to do so for two consecutive years from the last date of departure from Auroville may entail cancellation of status.

For the full Friend of Auroville guidelines contact [entry@auroville.org.in](mailto:entry@auroville.org.in)

## The process to become a resident

### 1. Guest

- ◆ Explore Auroville and participate as a volunteer
- ◆ Attend an orientation programme
- ◆ Volunteer in a work activity

### 2. Meet Entry Service

- ◆ Pick up a Request Form
- ◆ Submit Request form along with documents
- ◆ Make an appointment with the Entry Service
- ◆ Attend introductory meeting
- ◆ When necessary, apply for letter of recommendation (non-Indians only)

### 3. Newcomer

- ◆ Take up full-time responsibilities as a Newcomer
- ◆ Participate in development of Auroville through work
- ◆ Attend Newcomer Programme
- ◆ Field Meeting

### 4. Obtain Recommendation

- ◆ Provide references from place of living and place of work
- ◆ Submit self-assessment form and references
- ◆ Obtain extension of Visa, if applicable
- ◆ Attend Final meeting



## Seniors helping seniors

"Auroville wants to be a place of unending education, of constant progress and a youth that never ages." (Auroville Charter)

**H**ow does the statement in Auroville's Charter apply in reality? Auroville is a flurry of activity, of development, of growth and there is much to do on a daily basis. How do the less sprightly cope?

The Seniors Helping Seniors (SHS) group was formed to address the growing concerns and changing needs of the elders in the community. We spoke with Alice and Franca from the group to gain a better understanding of the challenges facing the elderly and the action being taken.

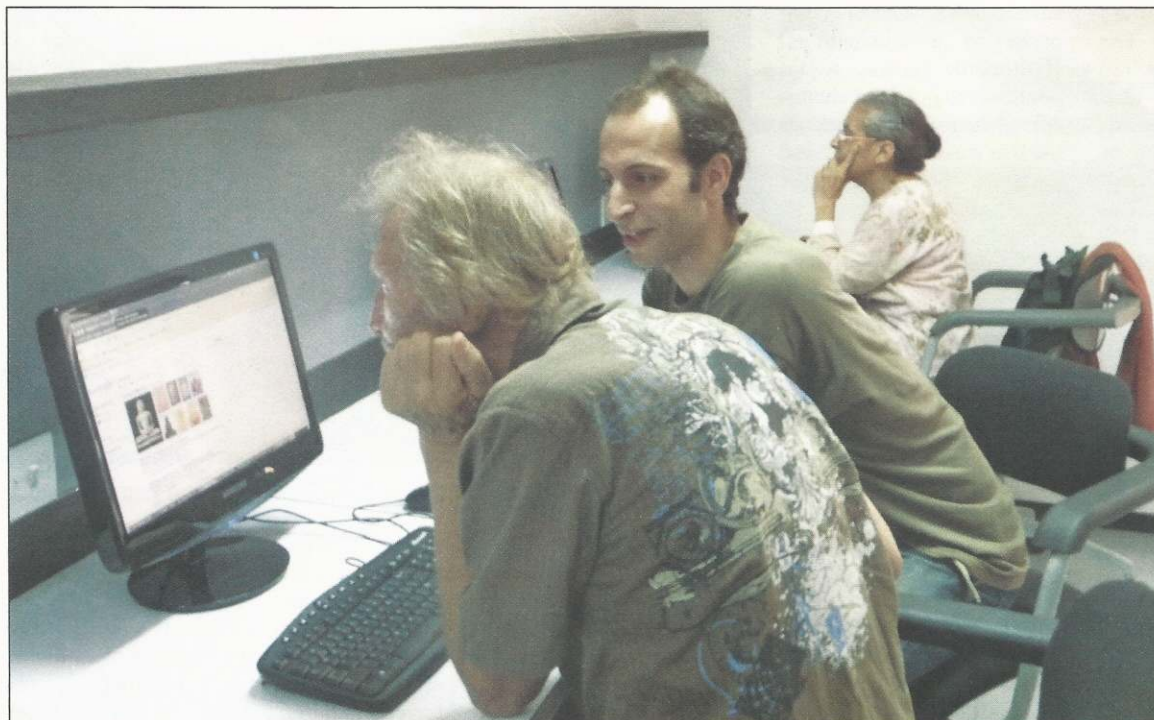
Across the globe, those over 65 are generally considered 'senior'. The group wants to promote the benefits of a healthy and active life, mentally and physically, before and after this stage. Franca recalls, "The Mother said something about seniors in Auroville like 'It's not a question of years, it's a question of mind!' Alice adds, "Old age is not a disease and prevention is always better than a cure. We should not see sixty plus as old."

Two years ago a survey of older people was carried out by the AV Health Service (AVHS). 44 people responded. 43 respondents said they were employed in work of some kind. Both extensive research and the survey helped to pinpoint exact areas of concern. SHS found that in almost all cases, seniors are concerned about losing their mobility and so becoming isolated from society. Worldwide studies conclude that the feeling of being part of the community is a critical key to healthy and prolonged living.

So, what progress has been made in addressing these concerns in Auroville?

SHS recently received a grant through the Project Coordination Group (PCG) of Rs. 50,000 to manifest a free door-to-door transport facility within the city limits for seniors. This is particularly useful for shopping, participation in workshops and seminars, and to enable them to make evening trips to attend the numerous cultural events.

The area of residential facilities is still a bit grey. Many seniors prefer to remain in their own homes, even those who live remotely. They would simply like to have a back-up facility whenever necessary. While many of the seniors are prepared to contribute to such a facility, not all



Uriel teaches Boris. At the back is Franca.

are able as they gave up everything to come to Auroville.

ARKA was intended to provide a solution. It was to become a self-sufficient residential centre for seniors. At present though it doesn't function like this. Many have utilised the facilities for convalescence, but returned home when they had recovered. ARKA does offer many recreational activities and Dr. Kamala, who is 83 years old and has lived in Auroville since the mid 70's, runs a twice weekly homeopathic clinic there.

Kailash Medical Centre provides medical/homecare assistance (medicare) in collaboration with the Health Centre and SHS. However, this is purely geared to immediate medical needs. The real issue revolves around support for convalescing or housebound individuals requiring assistance with daily needs such as bathing, dressing, feeding, shopping and even the moral support so essential to recovery/quality of life. Those with families to support them generally cope. It is the others who are alone who struggle, especially if they have to stay in hospital for any period of time.

The SHS group have submitted a request for funding to the PCG to set up a Home Care Support Service for seniors and those experiencing

emergency needs. In the meantime they have engaged the services of a fully-qualified Newcomer and hope to be in a position to provide training to eager candidates in the near future. Around 1.5 Lakh Rupees annually (approximately \$3,000)

#### Auroville needs:

- ◆ safe and secure transportation within the community
- ◆ a Residential Home for Seniors
- ◆ a Home Healthcare Service

would be required to develop and sustain the service. The Seniors Golden Fund has been set up to channel donations.

Both Alice and Franca themselves are approaching senior status, but they are full of energy and enthusiasm. "The human body improves with use apparently", says Franca. This is why a key element of the SHS is to keep people young. They aim to organise the kinds of activities which will help build confidence and energy amongst the four main aspects: Integration, Mind, Body and Communication.

The group actively encourages seniors to participate in the community through attendance at events, seminars and workshops. The transport service is one such step forward.

Additionally, they are developing workshops targeting the needs expressed by the seniors. A computer course began a few weeks ago. Newcomer Uriel facilitates classes every Monday and Friday at the New Creation Centre. Approximately 9 people attend regularly. One participant was so enthused he posted a note on AV Net saying that Uriel was 'full of enthusiasm, friendly, patient, smiling and knowledgeable'.

Somatics is at the forefront of SHS's vision for mobility. This is a low-impact bodywork system that reawakens the mind's control of movement, flexibility and health. SHS is keen to also incorporate the ideals of Non-Violent Communication (NVC) as a means of promoting peaceful interactions.

The group wishes that Auroville's youngsters would become more involved so that the seniors don't become a separate entity. The youth tend to veer towards more 'fashionable' causes like the environment for their community work. Alice mentions that they would like to introduce 'Adopt a Grandparent' as an integration initiative. Franca added that dance too could become one of the activities as it promotes both movement and fun, something which could be enjoyed by young and old alike.

Finally, we touched on the subject of seniors wanting to join Auroville as Newcomers. The Entry Service faces a number of challenges when it comes to seniors applying to join Auroville. For instance, the AV Health Fund will only accept new members up to the age of 55 for obvious reasons. SHS understands the many concerns but feel that this should not deter Auroville from accepting old residents, especially if they are financially self-sufficient and have valuable life skills to impart. "Just imagine," says Franca, "how much a senior's knowledge and experience could help Auroville! The contribution of skilled people is invaluable!"

If there is a genuine desire to lead an active and integrated life, to share valuable life and vocational skills and to develop in a more mindful way, age should not be a barrier.

Louise

## LETTERS

Dear AVToday team,

I was shocked to read in the article 'Cleaning the Matrimandir discs,' which appeared in the August issue of Auroville Today, the statement that the bottom rows and the backs of all the discs have never been cleaned since they were installed.

In fact, I was supervisor of the discs' maintenance department from 2005 till 2007. Victor, another person then working at the Matrimandir, taught me the maintenance work using materials for washing and cleaning the discs, repairing golden tiles, removing rust from the metal supporting the construction and painting it and providing a silicon sealing. I worked with my team and controlled the technical quality. Moreover, every Sunday a goodwill group from the Sri Aurobindo Ashram would come to wash the discs.

I do not agree with Prasad that the Matrimandir should be cleaned only twice a year. This work will always be ongoing, particularly in the tropical climate of Auroville.

Sergey Grabuzdov

## In brief

### Call for volunteers

To maintain a well-protected environment, Auroville security is calling for volunteers to do day and night patrolling in Auroville. Volunteers have to be physically fit, possess patience and 'always be cool', and be responsible and reliable. The volunteers will also provide an escort shuttle along certain sections of Auroville's roads.

### Kindergarten 25 years

Saturday 14th August marked the 25th anniversary of the Kindergarten with a photo exhibition of the past and present.

### "Research in Beauty"

Anupama's book on Roger Anger, "Research in Beauty" was released in Pune on 22nd August by the Indian Council of Architecture and FEED (Forum for excellence and exchanging in Design), Pune. Governing Board member Shri B.V. Doshi was the guest of honour.

### Matrimandir Calendar 2011

The Matrimandir desk calendar 2011 is available. The topic 'Light' has been manifested through slightly overexposed photos in an attempt to capture the continuous golden rain of light in the Matrimandir.

The calendar can be ordered through the AVI Centers or directly by emailing [tine@auroville.org.in](mailto:tine@auroville.org.in) or [matrimandir@auroville.org.in](mailto:matrimandir@auroville.org.in)

### Auroville Planner 2011

The Auroville Planner 2011, a lightweight bound weekly agenda, with 24 full-page colour photos taken in Auroville by different photographers as well as quotations from the Mother about Auroville, can be ordered from [tine@auroville.org.in](mailto:tine@auroville.org.in)

### Biomedical Waste

The Auroville Health Centre has improved the way biomedical waste is treated, handled and disposed of. Pathological waste, which includes any soiled cotton, band aids, gauze or cloth, will be disposed of through incineration. Expired or left-over medicines will either be returned to the manufacturer, burnt in the incinerator or stored and eventually placed in a secure deep pit.

### Second road phase

Construction of a new stretch of red paver-block road which will add 180 meters to the existing paver-block road passing the Kindergarten started on 16th August and is planned to be completed by mid-October.

### Udhayam's First Anniversary

Udhayam Educational and Cultural Centre celebrated its first anniversary on 15 August. Aurovilians from Ambedkarnagar village along with other villagers who work in Auroville and 10 Aurovilian youth and 30 village youth have resurrected the neglected night school and cleaned up the sports ground.

### Fencing the Inuksuk

AVI Canada is planning to fence the area around the Inuksuk, the stone monument in the International Zone that marks the beginning of the Pavilion of Canada, to prevent people from outside Auroville using the grounds for night-time drinking and vandalism. Fencing will also allow the landscaping to proceed and explanatory plaques to be installed.

## PASSING



Rika Martens, aged 76, passed away on August 20 in her house at Certitude in the arms of her son Andy and his wife Gabi. Rika who had joined Auroville in 1989, was well-known for her highly cultured and refined personality. She had a deep love for music, in particular for the German classical and romantic composers, for German poetry and for classical ballet. She taught music and German language and with her gentle demeanour and her rich sense of humour was the mainstay for many Aurovilians who sought her help and advice to overcome life's problems. Her body was cremated at the Adventure burial ground in the early morning of August 23rd.



# Aquaponics: the future of farming?

**O**n August 15, the birthday of Sri Aurobindo, Akash, Monica and Aurovici hosted an Open House at the new Aquaponics site. The operation is located near the Community of Rêve behind the electric bike workshop, and was buzzing with a number of people enquiring about this new method of growing plants and raising fish. The young trio were meeting and greeting the curious and answering many questions.

The operation took seed when Akash, an Aurovilian by birth, went to Discipline farm to speak to Gino about the Hydroponic system they had set-up there. After the visit Akash began research on the soilless method of growing and came across a link to Aquaponics. He

felt this kind of system was much more interesting and sustainable because, compared to a conventional Hydroponic system, Aquaponics does not need chemical nutrients for the plants as the fish waste provides these nutrients. The bacteria in the grow beds convert the nitrites into nitrates, which the plants then consume as their main nutrient source.

He decided to set up an operation in the backyard of his home. It was a small pilot project using the water from the ant-channel surrounding his house. He purchased some pipes, valves and fittings, along with a pump to circulate the water from the ant-channel to the plants. The project wasn't very successful due to the lack of nutrients. This led to further experimentation. The second project involved buying some tanks for the fish instead of using the water from the ant-channel. This proved to be more successful as it provided better yields.

One evening while they were having dinner with Aurovici (another Aurovilian who was born and raised in Auroville) he was talking about the project and it was suggested they partner up and submit a proposal to the Farm Group for funding to expand the operation. This was the spark that Akash needed to move to another level. They designed the system, located the site, wrote and submitted the proposal to the project coordination team. They received the funds and in May started building the system.

The goal was to have the system in operation for the Open House on the birthday of Sri Aurobindo. They selected and purchased equipment, designed and constructed the system, installed fencing for security, and transported the fish. They want to the operational cost to remain low so they decided to make

their own fish food. This not only cuts costs, it also ensures the food is natural and organic.

It was a very intense two-and-a-half months. The design needed to suit the site so it had to be modified, leaks from the first row of grow beds led to experimenting with different sealants, and over a hundred fish died for reasons they are still trying to figure out. It could be related to the water or the stress in transporting them. The tank was emptied, cleaned and refilled with water and a new stock of fish arrived. So far everything is going well. The second rows of beds are larger, slightly higher and constructed from cement instead of granite slabs sealed together. This has proved to be more cost effective. It's part of the process of trial and error.

This new way of farming is being introduced and implemented around the world and the team are learning quickly about equipment, material and methods that are best to use in South India. They also have the challenge of learn-

ing about what grows well, monitoring the pH of the water, keeping the fish alive, coming up with organic recipes for the fish food, and, most importantly, keeping their sense of humour.

The motivation driving these young Aurovilians is "growing fish and food organically using sustainable methods." Aurovici's dream is to set up a few systems in the Residential Zone, "a community garden that is easy to maintain, organic and available to everyone"

Aquaponics is the way of the future. Are you ready to catch the wave?

Elaine

For more information contact  
avaquaponics.blogspot.com



Monica inspects the plants



Visitors to the Open House see the fledgling aquaponics operation

## VILLAGE OUTREACH

### Better relations with the villages

**T**he recommendation of the Integral Sustainability Platform that Auroville establish better relations with the villages has been welcomed by Auroville's Village Action. Those who work for Village Action are aware that improving the relationship is of paramount importance; but they always found a significant lack of response to the issue, both in official and popular circles in Auroville.

Yet, a rather large number of Auroville units (32!) relate to the villages. Their activities fall into five main categories: education, environment and ecology, health, livelihood, and social mobilization. Areas which are not yet developed are social enterprise and livelihood (creating production units that are economically self-sustaining while being socially useful); organic farming; water conservation; and the production of low-cost ecological technologies that are viable for rural communities, such as smokeless *chullas* and water filters.

The villagers appreciate Auroville's work opportunities and the peaceful environment. However, there is little understanding of the creative schools Auroville runs for village children – villagers appreciate most the conventional approach of Kuilapalyam School Trust. Villagers complain about the difficulty of communicating with Auroville; the way land is purchased; about the erosion of traditional culture; and the confusing differences in labour policies between Auroville workplaces.

Village Action has the clear perception that partnership in development, not charity, is the only viable approach for neighbourly relations and must become fundamental to all Auroville outreach work to the villages. Village Action proposes that Auroville focus on developing a positive synergy

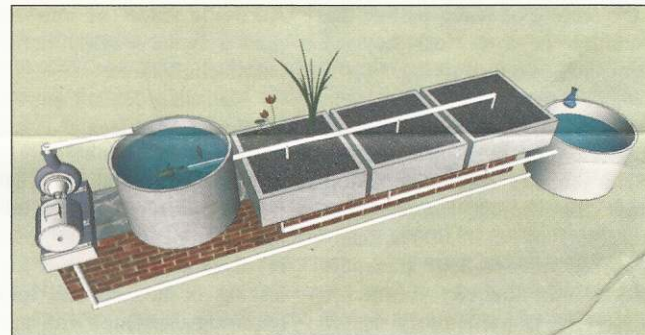
with the villages, making sure that the villages prosper and progress along with Auroville, while at the same time accepting the inevitable diversity in human unity. Aurovilians may see the village-Auroville relationship as part of the experiment in human unity; but for the villagers, the relationship is linked primarily to their livelihoods, their families, and to education.

To improve the relationship with the villages, Village Action proposes that joint village-Auroville development councils are revived or created and that an independent body is formed that can deal with village-Auroville conflicts. Other proposals are that Auroville studies the possibilities for leasing of Auroville land or for joint land management and helping the villagers develop organic and low irrigation farming. Proposals were also made to organize collective transport for villagers working in Auroville units; that Auroville units lend their expertise for creating village enterprises; and that Auroville sponsor community centres in the surrounding villages in order to increase cultural exchanges between Auroville and the villages. Lastly, proposals were put forward that Auroville's health and eco-services would help in common projects for waste management and pollution control, as well as health education, promoting traditional healing practices, and counselling support for women.

Village Action emphasised that Tamil Aurovilians should play a major role in improving Auroville-village relationships. It also called on Auroville's apex groups, like the Working Committee, the Budget Coordination Committee and L'Avenir d'Auroville and on all Aurovilians, to give top priority to village relations.

Bhavana

### What is aquaponics?



Aquaponics combines aquaculture and hydroponics. In aquaponics, you grow fish and plants together in an integrated soilless system. The fish waste provides food for the plants and the plants provide a natural filter for the water the fish live in.

Aquaponics produces safe, fresh, organic fish and vegetables. Aquaponics can be used to sustainably raise fresh fish and vegetables for a family, to feed a village or to generate a profit in a commercial farming venture. The benefits of aquaponics are:

- ◆ Reduces water use
- ◆ Low cost after the initial set-up
- ◆ No chemicals
- ◆ Reduces erosion by eliminating the need to plough the soil
- ◆ Lower operational costs compared to conventional farming
- ◆ Low maintenance
- ◆ Grow plants and fish all year round
- ◆ Sustainable way to farm and ease of use
- ◆ System can be set-up anywhere
- ◆ Organic and natural

There have been many studies into the types of plants that can be grown in an Aquaponics system, including leafy green vegetables, vine plants, fruit and fruit trees, flowers and fodder. The cost and turnover time of each crop varies dramatically, with leafy greens being able to be produced in a few months, while root-based plants and fruit trees take considerably longer.

Tilapia is the most common fish used in Aquaponics systems. The system in Auroville uses carp. However, most fish are suitable. The number of fish will depend on the size of the system.

#### SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION

#### There are three ways to subscribe:

##### Subscription rates (including postage):

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

1. **Through our website.** Subscriptions can be ordered and paid on-line through [www.auroville.com/auroville-today](http://www.auroville.com/auroville-today)

2. **By sending your contribution directly to Auroville Today.** Surrender, Auroville 605101, Tamil Nadu, India. Cheques sent directly to *Auroville Today* should be made payable to Auroville Fund, specifying: 'Contribution for Auroville Today'. Personal cheques are preferred to bank cheques. Please do not send postal money orders or cash.

#### 3. By sending your contribution to:

- ◆ **Germany:** Auroville International Deutsch-land e.V., Solmsstrasse 6, 10961 Berlin, tel. (49).(0)30-42803150, Fax (49).(0)30-92091376, email: [info@auroville.de](mailto:info@auroville.de). GLS Gemeinschaftsbank, BIC: GENODEM1GLS, IBAN: DE16430609678019389200,
- ◆ **U.K.:** Auroville International U.K., c/o Martin Littlewood, 30 The Green, Surlingham, Norwich NR14 7AG, tel. 01508-538300, fax 01508-537122; email: [info@aviuk.org](mailto:info@aviuk.org)

#### ◆ USA: Make checks payable to Auroville International USA, and send to either:

U.S.A (1): AVI USA, P.O. Box 1534, Lodi, CA 95241-1534, Tel: (831) 425-5620; email: [info@aviusa.org](mailto:info@aviusa.org); or to  
U.S.A (2): Auroville Information Office, PO Box 676, Woodstock NY 12498, tel: (1) 845-679-5358, email: [AVINY@aviusa.org](mailto:AVINY@aviusa.org)

◆ **The Netherlands:** Auroville International Nederland, email: [info@auroville-int-ned.nl](mailto:info@auroville-int-ned.nl), Postbank account: 805707, account name: Auroville Int. Ned. Account address: George

Washingtonlaan 16, 2285 CG Rijswijk (IBAN: NL11 PSTB 0000 805707, BIC: PSTBNL21)

**Editorial team:** Alan, Carel, Elaine, Louise, Dianna, Priya Sundaravalli. Proof-reading: Alan. DTP: Carel. Photo editing: Jean-Denis. Published by Carel Thieme on behalf of the Auroville Foundation. Printed by Brihat Consultants, Pondicherry, and published at Surrender, Auroville 605101, Tamil Nadu.

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