



Auroville Outreach

A newsletter from Auroville international township

October 2001

Auroville help for Gujarat

Although the dust has long ago settled in Gujarat following the massive earthquake in January which left more than 20,000 dead, and the State is slowly returning to normality, the rebuilding programme still has a long way to go.

Immediately after the earthquake Auroville launched an internal appeal for financial contributions, and whatever other help could be given. This resulted in collection of nearly 4 lakhs rupees in Auroville, on top of which another 8 lakhs of donations from Auroville friends in Germany raised the total to just under 12 lakhs (approx US\$26,500). Other donations in the form of clothing from Auroville commercial units and

individuals were added to 2 lorry loads of material aid assembled and transported by the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry.

One of the problems commonly faced by organisations wanting to help in chaotic circumstances, such as after an earthquake, is knowing how and where best to utilise the money, materials or skills being offered. Fortunately Auroville had already been in contact since 7 years with NGOs in Kutch, Gujarat, and this led to a close cooperative effort with the Kutch Nav Nirman Abhiyan, a well organised Kutch-based NGO formed after the 1997 cyclone in the area, which works in 450 villages representing a network of 26 organisations.

The Abhiyan leaders had already been several times to Auroville, and were not only familiar with the

Auroville is an international township in Tamil Nadu, South India, founded in 1968.

Inspired by the vision of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, over 1,500 people from India and some 30 other nations are building a township dedicated to an experiment in human unity, with the eventual hope of contributing to international understanding and the evolution of human consciousness. Nearly 5,000 of the 40,000-plus local people living in the dozen-or-more villages that comprise the Auroville bio-region are also involved in the project, providing their skills and labour.

The township, projected for 50,000 people, will radiate out from the central Matrimandir and its surrounding gardens in 4 zones, the International, Cultural, Residential and Industrial. A large forested area, the Green Belt, will eventually surround the entire township area.

Present activities in Auroville include wasteland reclamation and reforestation, organic farming, village development, education, health care, renewable energy, appropriate building technology, arts and culture, handicrafts and small-scale industries, architecture and town planning.

As described by its founder, Auroville aspires to be "a universal town where men and women of all countries are able to live in peace and progressive harmony, above all creeds, all politics and all nationalities."

For more general information visit the website: www.auroville.org



Fabricating Auroville-designed roof channels in Gujarat



Auram presses

In previous issues of the Newsletter we have made mention of Compressed Earth Block (CEB) technology developed in Auroville, and again here in relation to Gujarat, but haven't to date focussed on the highly acclaimed hand operated Auram presses for the blocks.

The Auram press is another of Auroville's little known success stories. Designed, constructed and developed entirely in Auroville in the late 1980s by Auroville Building Centre's 'Earth Unit' executive Satprem Maini in collaboration with Robi Trunz of Auroville's Aureka workshop, with funding from HUDCO, these presses have now been sold as far afield as Sri Lanka, Africa, Europe and America.

Altogether some 225 have been produced to date, of which 11 went recently to Gujarat for use in the rebuilding programme following the earthquake.

Although CEB presses are not new, the Auram design stands out from other makes thanks to its precision (blocks consistent to within 1 mm), double compression, reliability, adjustable compression ratio, adaptability to different block shapes, heights and sizes, ease of maintenance (up to 500,000 blocks between servicing), and high output (up to 125 blocks per hour). It is now rated as one of the world's best presses for CEBs.

For more information e-mail: aureka@auroville.org.in

materials and technologies available here, but had used Auroville-developed ferrocement roof channels for a community centre close to the Pakistan border in 1997-98. This building, located near the epicentre of the earthquake, was one of the few to come through the 'quake undamaged; as also did the many Auroville-designed ferrocement latrines provided for the use of village

women in the area. This helped to reinforce local confidence in ferrocement technology.

Another positive news story of sorts which emerged from the disaster area, was the relative lack of damage to the traditional mud-brick-constructed circular 'bhungas' (huts). This led to Abhiyan seeking help from the Auroville Building Centre 'Earth

Unit' (AVBC), which specialises in compressed earth block (CEB) technology. Specifically, they - plus another relief organisation - asked AVBC to arrange for supply of 11 of their Auroville-designed Auram presses; train local masons in the fabrication and use of CEBs; and come to Kutch to demonstrate use of CEBs by erecting an AVBC-designed 23m² earthquake-resistant house. AVBC completed the whole building - from foundation to roof, inclusive of electricity supply and painting - in just 62 hours, at a material-plus-labour cost of Rs.65,000 (US\$1,445), using materials and a 20-man team driven all the way from Auroville (3 days each way)!

This trip was also the occasion to conduct two 2-day training courses on the production of CEBs using Auram presses. A total of 33 engineers and masons for Abhiyan, and 19 engineers and masons for the Catholic Relief Service (CRS), another NGO, were trained by two members of the AVBC team.

The whole intervention has been the starting point of a rehabilitation programme using ferrocement and earth construction for the zones affected by the earthquake. In August Abhiyan and CRS sent to Auroville 23 more engineers and masons for a 2-week intensive course on production of interlocking blocks, stabilised rammed earth, and design guidelines on masonry for earthquake resistance. Several thousand houses are now to be built in the next 2 years by them, with technical assistance provided by Auroville in the form of on-site supervision 3 days per month over a period of 6 months. Meanwhile blacksmiths, carpenters and more masons will undergo skill upgrading courses in Auroville in support of the programme.

For more information e-mail: csr@auroville.org.in

Consecration of the German Pavilion

August 15th this year was a big day for the Germans residing in and connected with Auroville. After nine years of internal discussions regarding the construction of a German Pavilion in Auroville's International Zone, it was finally decided by the group to put something "concrete" into the ground, to symbolically start the

headed by Wolfgang Schmidt-Reinecke, chairperson of the Auroville International Association. The group brought with them earth from different parts of Germany, which was mixed during a small 'sealing ceremony' with earth from the Samadhi of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and from Auroville. One of the two metal containers which were to be placed in the ground at the site of the pavilion also held a large rose-quartz from the recently initiated Sri



Chairman of AVI-Germany passes a consecrated container to Nirodbaran process of building the Pavilion, and - more importantly - to take an action which could help heal old wounds left by Germany's past history.

Interestingly, it was two Indians who were in the forefront of bringing this consecration of the German pavilion about. One of them is the Director of the Sri Aurobindo Centre for Advanced Research (SACAR), Dr. Ananda Reddy; the other is Sri Nirodbaran, lifetime physician and scribe of Sri Aurobindo. Both are associated with the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, and both were present during the ceremony.

A German group arrived in Auroville in the beginning of August

Aurobindo Centre in Berlin - a symbol of love and heart energy - together with silver symbols of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, and many flowers from Auroville and the Ashram. The two containers remained for some time in Sri Aurobindo's room before being put in the ground on the 15th.

More than 100 people - mostly Germans from Auroville and Pondicherry or abroad - met in Auroville's International Zone, just north of the Tibetan Pavilion, for a ceremony at the site where, one day, the European Plaza will be. It was quiet and concentrated, with people meditating while Mother's organ music was played. After this,

Friederike Werner, board member of AV International Germany, read the passage in 'The Human Cycle' where Sri Aurobindo talks about Germany, a very appropriate text for the occasion, deep and touching. Then Nirodbaran was helped down into the freshly dug pit, and Wolfgang handed him the two containers to place them inside. Nirod, who had made it a condition for participating that he would not talk, became so inspired that suddenly he gave a moving speech about the 'great German nation putting their foundation into Auroville'.

Everybody then dropped earth and flowers onto the containers, the hole was closed, and a big stone with an Auroville symbol was placed on top, so that the spot could be found again. The service tree, a seedling from the Samadhi tree, will remain in a pot and be cared for in an Auroville community for one year, until the 'real' foundation stone for the German pavilion is laid on 15th August 2002. At least this is the set goal - to come back with money and plans and start the pavilion construction next year.

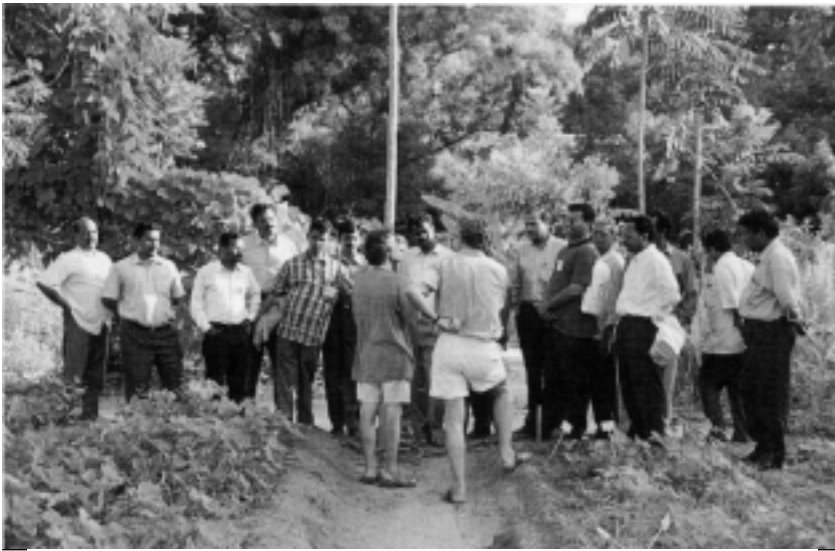
For more information e-mail tine@auroville.org.in

(Adapted from a report to an international cyberforum submitted by the Auroville International coordinator residing in Auroville.)

17 Additional Collectors' 2 days in Auroville

It's not often that one sees a collection of Collectors, but for 2 days at the end of August Auroville had the pleasure of hosting 17 Additional Collectors and DRDA Project Officers from Tamil Nadu, who had come at the invitation of the Secretary of the Auroville Foundation for a 2-day 'retreat' on the subject of a "Sustainable Future for Rural Areas".

The aim of the event was to introduce the Additional Collectors to



The Additional Collectors' field visit to Annadana research unit

the work which has been done - and continues to be done - in Auroville towards sustainable development, and to offer Auroville expertise to help establish a similar approach to development strategies relating to rural areas.

The first day of the event began with an introductory slide show reviewing the appropriate technologies in use in Auroville, followed by a presentation from Auroville's 'Harvest' Water Service unit on irrigation management in the bio-region, a visit to the Matrimandir, and an Auroville slide show on "The Genius of India". The next day the Additional Collectors had an introduction to the work of Auroville's Village Action Group (AVAG) by way of talks on their development workers' training and community organisation, the local empowerment of women, savings and credit schemes for the local villagers, and a project for primary education. In the afternoon they heard a presentation by Auroville's Palmyra unit on their tank rehabilitation and rural development programme using the Geographical

Information System (GIS) as a tool, followed by an introductory field visit to the seed production and genetic resource protection work being coordinated by Annadana, an Auroville research unit.

Overall, the feeling expressed by the Additional Collectors was that the two days had been a positive learning experience for them, and they thanked Auroville for hosting the event. For Auroville the hope was expressed that this could become an annual event, which could also be extended to include Collectors, not only from Tamil Nadu but also from other States in South India.

"That such a place still exists?"

When the time comes for our departure from this life, we all hope that it will be in peaceful and loving circumstances. It seems that Anne Arogyasamy, a 74-year old nun from Salem, had her prayers answered in this regard, when she died in the Auroville Health Centre in June this year.

Anne was diagnosed in January as having a large tumour in her bladder. The surgery that followed could not remove the whole tumour, and she had a lot of pain. In the circumstances she decided against further treatment, and looked only for a place where she could receive good care and attention "until the end".

A friend of Anne heard about her situation and arranged for her to be admitted to the Auroville Health Centre nursing care unit. She arrived with what the doctors assumed to be just one month left to live, and immediately endeared herself to all around her. Her wonderful spirit, and her list of all the things she still wished to do, inspired the staff, who did everything possible to make her last days pain-free and peaceful.



Anne Arogyasamy

Asked about her impressions of the Health Centre's nursing unit, Anne said: "What can I say? I feel 1,000 times better, thanks to the atmosphere and care I receive. That such a place still exists? I must have done some good things in life to be able to stay here in my last days. The spirit of Auroville has always been in my mind.

Anne left peacefully on June 26th, but will be remembered with affection by all who came to know her during her time in Auroville.

Enquiries or feedback relating to this newsletter and its contents are always welcome, and can be communicated to:
Auroville Outreach, Bharat Nivas, Auroville 605101, India
E-mail: outreach@auroville.org.in

Auroville Outreach newsletter, which is for private circulation only, is published and edited by Auroville Outreach Team and printed at Auroville Press, Auroville