



*A LANGUAGE LABORATORY
AT THE
UNIVERSAL TOWNSHIP
OF
AUROVILLE, INDIA*





AUROVILLE : A RICH LINGUISTIC FIELD

33 years after its founding in 1968, Auroville has grown into a vibrant township of about 1500 persons from 32 nationalities¹, with new persons joining at the rate of about 100 per year. The enormously diverse population, whose members have dedicated their entire selves to building this “city of dawn” together, manifests powerfully the principle of “unity in diversity”. Situated in the middle of villages of Tamil Nadu, Auroville is in deep and daily interaction with a mainly rural population of about 40,000 villagers, whose life has been influenced deeply by its growth as well as that of the nearby city of Pondicherry.

The meeting of cultures and the remarkable linguistic diversity provide an extraordinary opportunity for mutual enrichment. The interaction of languages here in Auroville, (from the local language, Tamil - repository of a rich and ancient cultural heritage - to languages from India, all over Europe, and other parts of the world) provides an exceptional field for a joyous exploration of cultural difference, a means of enhancing mutual respect and inter-cultural understanding, and of discovering our essential Human Unity.

¹ The population includes 1206 adults and 366 children. The single largest nationality is Indian (558) followed by French (266) and German (225). The majority of Indian Aurovilians are from the local area. *Others include* : Dutch (72), Italian (71), American (56), Swiss (45), British (37), Spanish (35), Russian (27), Belgian (26), Australian (20), Canadian (20), Ukrainian (18), Swedish (14), Argentinian (10), and Korean (10). *Single Digit nationalities include* : Austrian, Brazilian, Hungarian, Tibetan, Sri Lankan, Colombian, Estonian, New Zealander, Slovene, Algerian, Byelorussian, Ethiopian, Indonesian, Japanese, Latvian, and Nepali. *Mixed Nationalities include* : American/Irish, Argentinian/Italian, Australian/French, Australian/German, Austrian/Italian, French/British, French/German, French/Indian, French/Irish, French/Italian, French/Spanish, French/Swiss, French/Ukrainian, German/Indian, Italian/Spanish, and Swiss/French.

NEED FOR A LANGUAGE LABORATORY

It is time to take advantage of the extraordinary opportunity afforded by the multi-cultural, multi-national, multi-lingual nature of Auroville by making available a full-fledged comprehensive language learning facility that will tap into this rich resource, concentrate its benefits, and use them more directly in the service of language education, thereby magnifying its benefits for the enrichment of all.

The *Auroville Language Laboratory, ALL*, will continue the research work presently conducted to impart high quality second and third language knowledge to the Aurovillian population and to local students, and will increase the scale of the research by making available and experimenting with a diverse range of teaching methods, both traditional and modern. Audio-visual, computer, e-mail and internet-based second-language teaching resources will supplement the traditional classroom. Cultural interchange amongst the languages will be very much part of the Laboratory, and cultural programs will also be used as aids to language learning. Film showings in different languages, documentaries, TV programs, theatre programs, creation of newsletters, visits, multi-lingual international pot-lucks etc., will fuse together to make the language learning experience comprehensive, challenging and enjoyable.

The multi-cultural, multi-national teaching faculty at the Laboratory will explore how teaching languages can cut across national, racial, regional and other divisions and foster Human Unity. The specificity and unique spirit of each language will be respected, explored and given space to flower at the Laboratory. *ALL* will thus make practical contributions towards reducing the dominance of any one language, and the development of a true unity based on diversity and mutual respect between cultures.



PRINCIPLES

- ◆ *ALL* will serve Aurovilians as well as students from the local population.
For the local student population, the acquisition of a second language, and now, increasingly, a third language, opens up extraordinary opportunities : higher education, work within and outside Auroville, travel within India and abroad, in short : a new life and a new future. ALL will be a channel for this growth.
- ◆ Interaction between the language teachers will be based on mutual respect emphasising interchange, exploration and exchange.
- ◆ The diversity of teaching styles and learning needs will be fully honoured and integrated together in a harmonious way. A wide variety of teacher-student relationships (one-to-one, small groups, larger groups, guided independent study) will be fostered in order to facilitate an ideal learning and teaching environment, suitable to all.
- ◆ Technology will be used to aid learning, as a tool of self-study, and to enrich the contact between the teacher and student, so that it is not de-humanising or alienating.
- ◆ The spirit of “language-sharing” will be encouraged in addition to “language-teaching”.
- ◆ Research in the different native languages will be stimulated. Even single-digit nationalities in Auroville and those from different states of India will find facilities to keep in touch with their native tongue. Resident parents will find support material and resources to help them teach their children their mother tongue.
- ◆ Teaching materials will be developed through interactive and participative methods, for a culturally diverse international audience.
- ◆ Disabilities should not prevent access to language learning; therefore the building and the materials will be accessible.



A FRENCH CLASS



A TAMIL CLASS



PROGRAMMES

- ◆ Regular teaching of Tamil, simplified Sanskrit, French, and English as second languages at the rate of 400 students a year at the beginning.
- ◆ Facilities for the study of other languages including Indian Languages (such as Hindi, Urdu, Malayalam, Gujarati, etc.) as well as Languages from Asian, African and European countries (Arabic, Farsi, Dutch, German, Greek, Hebrew, Italian, Japanese, Latin, Spanish, Swahili, Tibetan, etc.)
- ◆ Provision of all facilities, materials, equipment and encouragement to existing teachers and widening the circle of language teachers within Auroville and in the local area (in traditional language this is known as “teacher-training”). Encouraging people to share their mother tongue and providing resource material to enable them to do so.
- ◆ Provision of varied materials for different levels of students: beginners, intermediate and advanced.
- ◆ Provision of support material and resources for language teachers for children in different Auroville and village schools.
- ◆ Providing the language skills necessary to equip Aurovilian teenagers, young adults and local youth adequately when they travel within India and to various countries abroad for education, recreation and work experience.
- ◆ Continuous research in new audio-visual, textual, computer, e-mail and internet-based second language teaching methods. Encouragement of Internet facilities in different alphabets.
- ◆ Fusion of a variety of programs such as film shows, documentaries, cartoons, TV programs, theatre programs, visits, multi-lingual international pot-lucks, to make the language learning experience comprehensive, challenging and enjoyable.
- ◆ Creation of a multi-lingual newsletter through participative methods involving students.
- ◆ Postal/e-mail exchange with national and international schools followed by cultural visits.
- ◆ Specialised courses organised in collaboration with rural village institutions for local youth to facilitate employment and job qualification.
- ◆ Collaboration with other Auroville Faculties and Departments such as Tamil Heritage Pavilion, Centre for Indian Culture, other National Pavilions in the International Zone of Auroville.
- ◆ Collaboration with language research institutions and organisations from within India (such as Sanskrita Karyalaya, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry - Sanskrita Bharati, India - Dept. of French, Pondicherry University - Centre for Study of Indian Languages, Mysore - International Institute of Tamil Studies, Chennai - Max Mueller Bhawan, Chennai - British Council - Centre for the Study of Foreign Languages- Hyderabad) and abroad (such as the International Association of Language Learning Technologies, International Federation of Teachers of French, ESL International Network, etc)
- ◆ Creating, maintaining and updating Web Pages related to language learning in an international context.
- ◆ Production of our own language learning methods on CD-ROM and Video (to help future self-sufficiency of the Laboratory).



- ◆ National and international dissemination of the methodologies developed at the Laboratory (through collaborative institutes, universities and other organisations).
- ◆ International Seminars
Sanskrit: refining the “Speak Sanskrit” method for international audience, and inviting international groups for the study of Sanskrit. (Sanskrit is not only a classical language but a modern language which can be used in daily life.) (This particular activity is also envisaged as one source of funds for the running of the Laboratory in the future.)
- ◆ In the first 3 years, special emphasis will be given to development of materials as follows:
 - Book on Spoken Tamil with Introduction to Tamil Alphabet.
 - Training of animators to use theatre as a mode of language teaching, motivation for improvement of skills in Tamil, and

for second language learning in surrounding villages.

- Literacy Material on the theme “Environmental Regeneration” in Tamil, Hindi, English, (and possibly French and Spanish) in collaboration with Auroville Children and Trees Program.
- Booklet on “Aurovilian Conversations”: to enable immediate easy cross-cultural communication in daily life.
- Deva Naagari Script Package (made of a primer, workbook, audio-cassette and index cards).
- Speak Sanskrit Video and Workshops.
- Video/CD-ROM film on a French method in the context of Auroville and French Tamilians of neighbouring Pondicherry.
- Specific course materials in French, Tamil, Sanskrit and English.

(Work has already commenced on all of these projects)



BEGINNERS SANSKRIT



ADVANCED SANSKRIT GRAMMAR



PHASES OF IMPLEMENTATION

Three phases, each about a year, with a certain overlapping, are envisaged as follows : -

FIRST YEAR : PREPARATION

1. **Site location** through Auroville Town Planning Agency

2. **Communication and Establishing Linkages**

- Internal (within Auroville)
 - Communication with Various Individuals (Building up involvement in and support for the project).
 - Reaching Out to Possible Teachers.
 - Developing Nationality-based Language Ambassadors/Liaisons for Different Countries.
 - Needs Survey.
 - Nurturing the Team.
- External (outside Auroville)
 - Development of a Website.
 - Follow Up of Contacts Already Established.
 - Search for New Contacts.
 - Participation in Key Language Learning Listserves.
 - Establishing Contacts with Auroville International Centres.

3. **Fundraising :**

- Identification of Possible Funders (both general and language-specific) and funder-specific Project Creation.
- Development of Fundraising Brochure: text, photos, scanning, artwork, printing.
- Translation of Brochure, Proposal and Cover Letters into different languages.
- Brochure and Proposal: hard copies by post and soft copies through the Internet.
- Production of 15 minute Digital Video film of language classes in the multi-cultural context; inclusion of material

about Auroville, the local area and the Language Laboratory project, and production of a CD-ROM. (For distribution to various embassies, national libraries, agencies).

- Trips to Madras, Bombay, Bangalore, New Delhi, Hyderabad, Mysore, Dehradun (Note : trips will combine fundraising with architectural and building research, identification of didactic material in Indian and other languages, identifying equipment suppliers and establishing contacts for the future).

4. **Building and Architectural Research**

- Collaboration with the Architect for research, sketches and detailed drawings.
- Preparation of Architectural Models for Public Display.
- Research on Humidity Proofing.
- Research on Sound Proofing.
- Research on Disability Access (current situation in India).
- Research on Ecological Building Design.
- Energy Requirements and Designing Hybrid System.

5. **Didactic Materials Research**

- Internet Research.
- Correspondence with Teachers through Listserves.
- Subscriptions to International Language Learning Organisations and Key Second-Language Learning Magazines and Journals.
- Collection of materials through Auroville International Centres, liaisons, etc.

Note : Preparatory activities such as those related to creating a support base for the project, creating and maintaining collaborative relationships with organisations within and outside Auroville, identification and training of future staff, etc., research, will continue in the second year as well.



SECOND YEAR

BUILDING CONSTRUCTION

The Building specifications (which will be further refined in the coming months) are as follows:

	<u>Sq. m</u>
6 Classrooms (7x5=35 sq.m. each)	210
Common Library/ Infothèque	70
Lounge /Meeting area	35
Video, CD, Slide Projection Room	35
Audio Lab & Computer Room	40
Sound Recording, Video Mixing Studio	40
Amphitheatre (Inside/Outside)	85
Toilets (1 men's, 1 women's; accessible)	10
Kitchenette	10
Reception, Corridors, Bulletin Boards	20
Equipment/UPS Room	20
Office	20
Parking Area	20
Watchman's Kiosk	5
Children's Play Corner & Toilets	35
Caretakers Apartment	40
Patios (for outside teaching 35x3)	105

**Total : 800 sq. m
(with patios)**

Note : Special attention will be given to humidity-proofing and sound-proofing throughout the entire building, which need to be taken care of in the building stage itself. Lighting, fire and theft security, and access for persons with physical/learning disabilities will also receive special consideration. Research work has already commenced towards this end. As far as possible, ecological design considerations will be given priority. It is hoped that the building will be solar-powered; provisions will be made for a hybrid system in the interim. These specialised needs shall push up the construction costs.

THIRD YEAR

ACQUISITION OF DIDACTIC MATERIALS & EQUIPMENT, RUNNING

While the process of identification of didactic materials and equipment will start already in the first year, they will be ordered in the second year so that they may be installed as soon as the building is ready. The preparatory work of the second year will ensure that the Laboratory is up and running and can open to the public soon after the building is constructed and equipment installed. For example, support staff identified and employed in the second year will work together with the team to create databases (such as resource mapping) and software adequate for the Lab. These shall be transferred to the equipped Lab to enable it to function immediately.





MANAGEMENT

HUMAN RESOURCES

A multi-national team of 10 persons (3 Indian, 2 French, 1 American, 1 Dutch, 1 Ukrainian, 1 Canadian and 1 German) is committed to the realisation of this project. The team is made of four qualified teachers who have built up years of experience in teaching second-languages both within and outside Auroville, and welcomes as well four teachers who have recently started teaching. Two persons function as co-ordinators and there is close collaboration with the architect.

The project is a project of the Auroville Foundation and funds will be received through the Auroville Fund, which is recognised under the Indian Foreign Contributions Regulation Act (FCRA). Indian donations made out in the name of “[Auroville Fund](#)”, specifying the “[Auroville Language Lab](#)”, are exempt under Section 80(G) of the Indian Income Tax Act. The Auroville Language Laboratory is a registered member of the International Association of Language Learning Technologies, USA.

SUSTAINABILITY

After an initial grant to cover the running costs for the first 5 years, the Laboratory would aim to be self-sufficient in the future. Various possibilities are being explored:

- Running costs will be partially covered by sale of materials produced by the Laboratory. Liaisons with key publishing houses in India and possibly abroad, and with certain state and central government agencies will be made to this end.
- The Snack Bar will be self-supporting. A charge for photocopies, video, audio and CD copying facilities may be considered.
- Building maintenance needs may be partially met by the Sri Aurobindo Institute of Educational Research at Auroville.
- It should be noted that in Auroville, the teachers are all volunteers who do not receive salaries but are, for the most part, maintained by the community.
- Tax-exempt donations from Auroville International Centres from around the world will be sought.



A TEACHERS' MEETING



- Grants will be sought from various national and international agencies to cover specific project costs.
- A network of Auroville-supportive individuals and agencies from around the world will be built who will function as “language ambassadors” for the Laboratory. They will be the conduits for international public relations, sale of material produced by the Centre as well as donations of teaching materials, subscriptions, etc.
- Special language programs for groups of Guests to Auroville may be developed. For example, a request for collaboration with a Yoga Institute being set up in London has already been received, in order to arrange for Sanskrit classes for a group of western Hatha Yoga practitioners.
- Non-local visitors and guests who have the financial means may be asked to contribute towards their classes.
- Special language courses for Private Companies (Indian and multi-national) may be developed. These may include : English and Tamil classes for multi-national companies setting up base in Tamil Nadu (which is developing as one of the preferred sites for foreign direct investment in India, especially from East and South East Asia), French classes for Indian companies engaged in joint ventures, Hindi classes for first time visitors to India, etc.
- As the Laboratory evolves and the number of languages taught increases, further possibilities will certainly develop.





PRESENT ACTIVITIES

The Languages most widely studied in Auroville are Tamil, Sanskrit, French and English. Teaching is conducted regularly by professional teachers in these four languages for beginners, intermediate and advanced levels, for individuals and groups.

The exact number of students, unlike in the case of schools, is difficult to estimate in the case of adults. The nature of life and work in Auroville causes the number of students in any particular class to change quite often. Adults fit in language classes into already busy schedules; they sometimes cannot continue regular study due to other pressing reasons, and often stop only to continue later when they can.

Classes take place all over Auroville - at ad-hoc spaces offered or at teacher's and students' houses. (This is one of the reasons that a Language Laboratory is needed - to provide a suitable atmosphere of study, discipline and concentration.)

Courses oriented towards special needs are also undertaken. Beneficiaries include Aurovilians of all ages, Newcomers, long-term guests, local youth, employees of Auroville units and services.

A preliminary calculation has revealed 250 students of languages per year. This includes around 50 who learn other languages such as Hindi, Italian, German, Spanish, Russian, Tibetan, Latin, etc. from about 20 other teachers. (A proper survey will identify the real situation.)

An informal survey conducted over one week through the e-mail system of Auroville revealed 120 responses of those expressing a wish to learn another language.

Tamil :

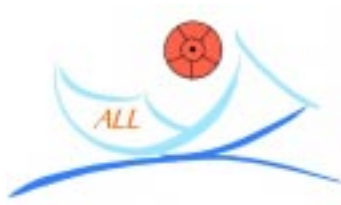
There are several classes and different groups of adults. Beginners' classes of Spoken Tamil are based on using the English phonetic to communicate basic grammar with the aim of getting the students to utilize the language in their daily life. There is a lot of emphasis on practice and speaking in class, along with exercises in grammar. Classes are conducted in small groups as well as larger ones; mostly 3 times a week for a period of 2 months. Often the students come back after a period of practice to continue their studies; many do so individually.

Classes are also held on reading and writing Tamil, with varied materials for different levels. Young Tamil students taking public examinations in Tamil have also gone through year-long preparatory courses.

Taking into account the needs expressed by students, of introductions to the cultural heritage of the Tamil language, this past year, trips to specific places in Tamil Nadu were organised. These turned out to be really successful in raising awareness and appreciation of Tamil culture. It is hoped that this can be developed into an ongoing program.

In order to meet the needs of a largely international population intimidated by the perceived "complicated" nature of the Tamil language, the experience of years of teaching has been encapsulated in the form of a book to help students pick up the language without difficulty and to use it with ease in their daily life. Work on this book is being finalised. Audio-cassettes have also been created.

Efforts are also being made to identify different Tamil methods and contacts have been established with the Centre for the Study of Indian Languages, Mysore. Audio-cassettes of a Tamil method developed in France have also been identified and will be widely distributed shortly.



Sanskrit:

Sanskrit classes have been going on in Auroville for 15 years. These were initially limited to a small number of students.

The Declaration of the year 2000-2001 as “Year of Sanskrit” by the Indian Ministry of Human Resources Development led to a great expansion of the Sanskrit Program in Auroville. Specifically, a collaboration with an organisation dedicated to the revival of Sanskrit, Samskrita Bharati, Chennai, has been developed.

The program is based on a unique “Learn Sanskrit through Sanskrit” approach with absolutely no translation. These “Speak Sanskrit” camps have reached 150 people in the four times they have been conducted, leading to a dramatic increase in the number of students. Nine of these students have also participated in a teacher training course in the Speak Sanskrit method.

In addition, regular classes also take place catering to different levels, including courses in Vedic Chanting, Sanskrit Grammar, Singing in Sanskrit, Vedic Literature, with Sanskrit experts invited as Guest Lecturers, etc. Lectures on the Sanskrit texts such as Kalidasa’s poetry have been recorded and cassettes disseminated.

A correspondence course leading to a diploma will soon be widely followed, backed up by a “Day of Sanskrit” once a month.

To meet the needs of beginners in Sanskrit as well as students of **Hindi**, special classes have been conducted on the Deva Naagari Script.

Research is also going on to create a full package (with a primer, audio-cassette, workbook and index cards) to enable students to learn the script easily. These will be tested widely with different nationalities in order to perfect the content.

French:

French has been taught at many different places in Auroville, in the last year, essentially to Tamil people. These include young high school students going abroad for a special cross-cultural educational program to complete their schooling; employees of various offices in one of the main administrative areas of Auroville and young high-level computer engineers at an Auroville-based international computer company. Initial contacts were made to follow up a request from the Youth Council of a village within Auroville for French classes, which will be developed this year. A special method, “Lecture des Sons” along with a cassette, has been developed to get beginning students used to the sounds of French words.

French has also been offered to classes of mixed nationalities at the French Laboratory. Classes use a video based on the “immersion method”, supplemented by audiocassettes, exercises, extensive reading out loud and grammar. The classes, each one and half-hour long, take place twice a week, during a period of 3 months. After six months of assimilation and practice, the students may return to the Lab or continue their studies with the aid of CD-ROMs. Intermediate level classes also use other audio-based methods on both audiocassettes and CD-ROMs, texts by different authors, and articles from French newspapers and magazines. They also view tapes of French TV programs and French films.

For specific needs, the Lab also offers individual courses : Reading, writing and grammar (for students who speak French, but who have never had access to reading and writing), Discussions (for advanced students who want to improve their French) and Films and Reflection: for students who are preparing for a course of study in France.

Research is also being conducted on audio-visual, computer, distance education, and internet-based French language teaching material and methods.



Internet research is leading to the development of an infothèque through contacts with organisations such as Framonde/AUPELF, Montreal, Canada - FIPF, Federation Internationale de Professeurs de Français - Bibliopolis/Lili (Paris) - and the French Department, University of Liège, (Belgium).

The language methods assembled at the infothèque have been disseminated to individual (adult) students and to schools through photocopies, lending of audiocassettes, videocassettes and CD-ROMs (such as the didacticiel - software program - received from the University of Liège).

English:

There is an enormous demand for English from both the international and Tamil population. Two teachers teach it full-time to adults, in a space that has been offered for the purpose. Classes are of 12 students each, twice a week, for a period of 3 months. The emphasis is on speaking, articulation and correct grammar. A lot of research has been done in identifying books and textual study materials which would be of use to students of English as a second-language (ESL). Research on textual study material for various levels has gone on for several years. Research has just started into audio-visual methods to supplement classroom teaching.

In addition to the regular teaching and concomitant research work in each of the languages, we are now preparing the future Language Lab in full swing by :-

- Building the base team of teachers, consultants, technicians, librarian, designer, accountant and management executives.
- Research to keep in touch with developments in the world of language teaching.
- Establishment of contact with other Language Laboratories around the World.
- Membership of International Association of Language Learning Technologies; research with IALL Language Lab Planning Kit and Management Manual; adaptation of these to context of Auroville & India.
- Resource mapping of existing resources.
- Identification of didactic material.
- Sitography creation
- Discussions and collaboration with architect for plans
- Informal needs assessment survey
- Development of laboratory management tools such as cards to keep track of students and teachers
- Creation of website
- Communication with a variety of individuals and organizations within Auroville such as Centre of Indian Culture (for Sanskrit and other Indian languages), etc.
- Creation of a group of "language ambassadors" / liaison persons for international languages.
- Project proposal creation.

