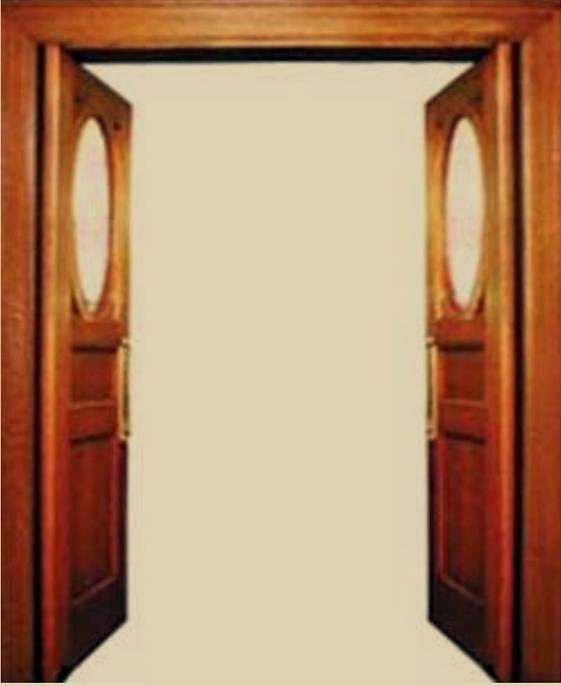


WELCOME TO VAASAL

We would like this magazine to be an entrance into the world of Tamil ideas, art and culture for anyone in Auroville who is from another native ur (village, town, country, habitat, that place which belong to you and you to it - see below).

The word vaasal வாசல் (entrance) comes from the word vaai வாழ் (mouth). The entrance is the most important part of any Tamil village, a place which needs protecting from alien forces which might cause chaos if not properly watched over. Notice the location of prominent temples and shrines at the outer perimeter of villages around Auroville - placed at strategic points like crossroads and waterways where they can make sure no harm comes to the residents.



The entrance of the home is equally important. It is where the protective kolam is placed each morning. When you go to someone's house to give them something, they will always step outside to receive your gift, or invite you in: nothing must be passed across the threshold of the vaasal that separates one world from another.

Our Vaasal intends to do the following things:

1. Enjoy: Showcase Tamil literature, music and art in a way that is accessible to everyone.
2. Meet: Introduce senior Tamil Aurovilians, workers to the community at large.
3. Think: Introduce important ideas and rituals along with an open offer to participate.
4. Speak: Act as a friendly first step into the Tamil language for those who are frustrated by their language inability and wish to learn to enjoy themselves in this beautiful language.
5. Integrate: In light of Mother's words that Tamil culture is an essential part of the integral yoga of Auroville, to bring the Tamil and non-Tamil parts of Auroville closer together.

We welcome contributors to Vaasal, and we have many existing materials that we would like to share with the community. We welcome thoughts, ideas and feedback at tamil@auroville.org.in

Vaasal thanks to:

**Jonathan | Mahalingam | Lourdes | Joss | Ayyanar | Arunan
Meenakshi and the team at Ilaingnarkal School, Auroville.**

TALES FROM AUROVILLE, PART 1:

I once knew a driver, a very sweet, gentle man, who got married. A couple of weeks after the marriage, he was booked to go on a long tour, far from home. That night, deep inside Tamil Nadu, he can't sleep. Suddenly, for a few moments, he feels his chest tighten and he can't breathe. They say here that ghosts can come to you in the night and sit, nenji-le, right on your chest. Eventually he falls asleep and the next morning he calls home. His family tell him that the previous night his wife was electrocuted and died.

He is devastated. Many years later he gets married again and he has three children with his new wife, but he never forgets his old wife. Every time a festival comes around, he buys two saris, one for his living wife and one for his dead wife. The first sari, he offers to his dead wife and only then to his living wife. Whenever there is a function or ceremony, like a wedding or other family event, his first wife is there too in the room. She takes possession one of the people in the room - the driver never knows who it will be - and suddenly someone will come up to him and speak to him in the voice

of his dead wife. The person will hold him by the collar, just like his wife used to, whether he knows this person well or whether this person is a complete stranger to him. At every function, the same thing happens.

I had a serious talk with him: I said to him, you must let go. He said, I can't. But you must, I said, you are not allowing her to go out from this realm and into the next one. Then he admitted that he never sent her off. In Tamil Nadu we have a ritual, especially when there is an accident, that we go to the scene of the accident and lift up the spirit from the place, take them home, and then we do a pooja to send the spirit off to their own realm. We follow a procedure of freeing the spirit from the physical place and allowing them to leave. And the driver had never done it, so the poor wife was trapped here, and she couldn't leave, she couldn't move on, she couldn't become a goddess.

Last year I saw him, and he told me proudly that he had done it, he had let her go, and she had never come back to him again in any ceremony since.

I DREAMED A DREAM AUTHOR: ANDAL TRANSLATION: SRI AUROBINDO

From Tamil

I dreamed a dream, O friend.
The wedding was fixed for the morrow.
And He, the Lion, Madhava, the young Bull
whom they call the master of radiances, He
came into the hall of wedding decorated with
luxuriant palms.

I dreamed a dream, O friend.
And the throng of the Gods was there with In-
dra, the Mind Divine, at their head. And in the
shrine they declared me bride and clad me in
a new robe of affirmation. And Inner Force is
the name of the goddess who adorned me with
the garland of the wedding.

I dreamed a dream, O friend.
There were beatings of the drum and blow-
ings of the conch; and under the canopy hung
heavily with strings of pearls He came, my lov-
er and my lord, the vanquisher of the demon
Madhu and grasped me by the hand.



I dreamed a dream, O friend.
Those whose voices are blest, they sang the
Vedic songs. The holy grass was laid. The sun
was established. And He who was puissant like
a war-elephant in its rage, He seized my hand
and we paced round the Flame.

Reprinted from volume 5, the complete works
of Sri Aurobindo © Sri Aurobindo Ashram
Trust 1999.

Published by Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publica-
tion Department

IDEAS # 1: RESPECT AND BLACK MAGIC

The single most important concept for the newcomer to Tamil Nadu is respect or honour - mariyatai. Tamil has a vous or sie form - niinge - just like French or German, a polite word you that takes a plural verb.

A quick example:

Ni po-ra

You go (one person)

Niinge po-rainge

You go (respectfully to one person, or to more than one person)

Clever folks will notice that both the words change in the same way:

ni + inge

po-ra + inge

You overhear people talking in Solar Kitchen, it seems as though they can even use the respectful niinge when talking to children. You resolve to use that form always, so as not to upset anyone ever.

So now to try them out with a simple, everyday type question - "Where are you going?"

The beginner learns the words - niinge (you), yenge (where), porainge(go) - and carefully you select someone who you know can't answer back in English. You've even learnt the proper way to pronounce it niin-ge yen-ge po-rin-GE, with the stress mostly at the end of the words.

Excitedly, you try out your newfound phrase: "Niinge yenge porainge?"

Far from getting a smile and a clear answer, the person's face falls. They stop. Then they either sit down, or turn around and start walking in the opposite direction, back to wherever they came from.

You don't know what has happened - did they understand you at all ? Did you say something wrong?

Disillusioned, you feel ashamed, and it takes a long time before you try out that phrase again, if ever.

Without knowing it, you have spoken with exactly the opposite of the respect you were trying to give: you have cast bad luck on the person's journey. They may have to delay their journey to do something to remove the evil eye before continuing on their way. It turns out that direct questions like this are never asked in Tamil.

Here's Tamil anthropologist E.Valentine Daniel:

"The directly phrased question Where are you going? is not only rude but casts a pall of inauspiciousness over the proposed journey. It would be especially rude if asked to an elder, one full of mariyatai... it is the negative counterpart of a good mantra: it is efficacious black magic."

E. Valentine Daniel, Fluid Signs: Being a Person the Tamil Way (University of California Press)

Now that's quite a shock - you only wanted to make small talk to try out your Tamil and you've ended up putting a dark spell on someone you might actually like. Somewhere in the back of your mind, you remember that how to say "bye-bye" or "I'm going now" doesn't have much to do with going at all.

"When you're about to leave and want to say goodbye, you say varenga (polite form of I will come)," says Kali, "or poi varenga (I'll go and then come), because if you just say poi (I'm going) that means you're not coming back. Varenga - I'm coming - means I'm going. Because otherwise it means you are going forever... to die."

The black magic EV Daniels talks about suddenly seems less strange, and rather more chilling.

“If any of us children would ever see my father leaving and ask him ‘Enge poringe?’” remembers R. Meenakshi from Ilaingargal School, “he would come back into the house, sit down and drink a glass of water before getting up and leaving again. The only way to get information out of him was to be tricky - my mother would say something like ‘Oh, we’re having moore kozhambu today’, at which point he might say something like ‘Ninge sappudungo, kaalaile dan varuvan.’ (You eat it, I’ll be back in the morning.) That’s the only way we’d find out where he was going and when he’d be back.”

Luckily, EV Daniel gives us an acceptable way to ask the question, keeping the respect intended:

Niinge urku poringe? “Are you going to the usual place?”

Bright sparks will look up ur in a dictionary and see: village. Yes, ur can mean village, but in fact it means something much wider, and much more useful.

Ur covers all the places that you regularly go to at particular times: if asked in the morning, ur means workplace.

In the evening, it means back home. Likewise if you regularly go to the Sunday market in Pondy, it would mean to the Sunday market in Pondy - whichever places are part of our ritual wanderings around this earth.

For foreign Aurovillians going away, ur is simply country.

Naan urku poren. I’m going to my country.

For Indians from elsewhere, Naan urku poren could mean state - Maharashtra, Kerala or Andhra Pradesh.

For Tamils from elsewhere, Naan urku poren could mean district - Madurai or Kancheepuram.

But what if you don’t know the person - say you have stopped to give someone a lift by the side of the road?

EV Daniel again:

“There are times when the questioner, X, will not have a clue where the other, Y, is going... In instances like these, the ur contained in the question remains unknown and hence the query ‘Are you going to the ur?’ calls for more than a yes response. It becomes only polite for Y to specify his destination, thereby answering the underlying question “Where are you going?”

In other words, the other person will tell you exactly where they are going anyway, so the answer that you will get will tell you what you need to know.

No matter what the situation, “ninge urku poringela?” will keep you out of trouble.

Being direct, which can even imply respect in other cultures, can achieve quite the opposite in Tamil Nadu.

Just one more note on this topic:

That sweet old lady you’ve picked up by the side of the road on your scooty, after you’ve asked her about her ur and she’s duly replied, what will she say to you to signify that she’s sitting safely on the back and you can go now?

One word: po. Directness is not always inappropriate, after all.

That’s all for now, see you next time in Tamil corner!

With thanks to Joss at Pitchandikulam Forest for lending us EV Daniel’s book.

MAHALINGAM

In our series talking to the Tamil statesmen and women of Auroville, we begin with Mahalingam from Fraternity - best known as one of the very few living Aurovilian to have seen and taken darshan with Sri Aurobindo in person.

"I was born in 1920 in a small village in Tuticorin district Tamilnadu. I had my elementary education there and went to high school in the next village, which was a little bigger than mine. I went to college in 1936 to St Xaviers College, Palayamkottai, in a college run by Jesuit priests. Today they have schools in Madurai, Trichy, Madras. In those days, many districts in TamilNadu had no colleges at all, but ours had four! Education was very important.

My father was not educated. He was a business man, a kalkandu (sugar candy) merchant. I was the first to go to college in that area from the surrounding villages. Maths and physics were my subjects, but before I could finish my studies, I joined the army. It was the time of World War Two, the newspapers were full of stories about the British Expeditionary Force landing in France where they were welcomed. I thought if I join the Army, then I could also go to France. So i joined up in 1940.

Because I could speak English, I was given work to bring ammunition from the factories in Punjab. My battalion was in Alipore, Kolkata. I was on railway security duty - there were people working against the government, putting bombs on the track and breaking the tracks to stop the ammunition being brought in. I was in charge of twenty soldiers, going to all the stations see if there is was trouble in that area, and trying to help them if there was. I travelled to most places in North India, from Bombay to Punjab to Delhi and beyond.

I was a member of the Congress Party - the original Congress Party that fought for

independence against the British. Nehru was arrested and imprisoned for nine years for an anti-war speech, so the Congress were against joining the war effort. They didn't want to help the British to strengthen the Empire, so by some trick I got out of the army - I was there for only twenty months.

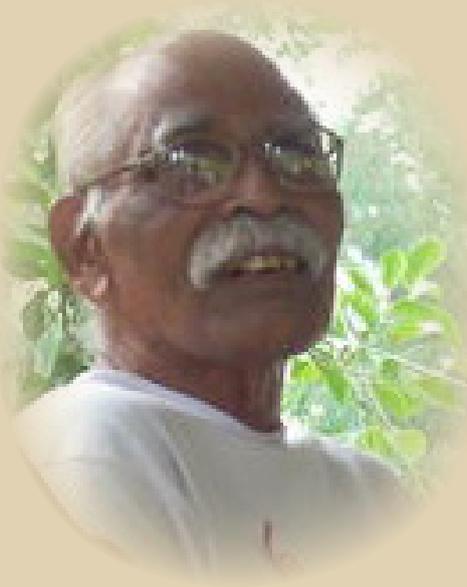
In 1942 I received training to become a teacher - mostly in English and Mathematics - and over the years I have taught in twenty-five schools. I remember in one of my first jobs, the school manager lived a few kilometres away in the next village. On my first payday, he insisted I come to his house to get paid. I told him, when I work in your cowshed, you can pay me there, but since

am not working in your cowshed, you should pay me in the school. I did not stay there long.

It was during my teacher training that I first read the complete works of Swami Sivananda. I was looking for a guru, a living guru, so I became his disciple. I went to Rishikesh in the Himalayas, taking a bath every day in the river, but even with the kindness of all the brother disciples, I couldn't stay there for long. I heard a voice - go away from here. Two weeks later I left, and when i got down from the train, I saw a friend of mine was holding a book of Conversations with Mother in Tamil. He was not interested but he knew that I was, so he gave it straight to me. As soon as I read it, I knew that this is my way. So in 1944 I wrote to the Ashram for Sri Aurobindo's darshan.

I went to the house of one of Mother's devotees, Siva Subramaniam, and stayed with him in Madras, and then from 1945-1950 I came to the Ashram each year for darshan.

It took place in his meditation room, on the first floor. The first time I went, there was a queue some of three or four people in front of me, and I peeked around the queue. He looked up at me and smiled. I was struck by his colour,



like the colour of the setting sun, shining. I went every year until he left his body.

Mother gave me permission to join the Ashram, so I stayed there until 1978 when I came to Auroville.

In the ashram I worked in the bakery and in the laundry. Very few people from Tamil Nadu joined the Ashram back then, even today our number is very few.

By the time I came to the Ashram, my parents had died, even my brothers were not there, only their children, and they were interested in religion rather than spirituality.

The whole of India are more interested in religion than spirituality: they just follow the traditional ways with their kriyas and poojas. When you find spirituality, naturally religion will get left behind.

In Auroville, I came to work in the school as as a Tamil teacher, but only for six years. Then Mary was in charge of the school, and she considered my translation work to be so important that she asked me to do it full time. So I spent my time in the school mostly working on translating from English into Tamil, and each time, before starting, I would pray to Mother that I could be open to her words.

Much work had been done translating spiritual teachers like Ramamkrishna and Vivekananda into Tamil, so the spiritual vocabulary in Tamil was there. I did have to coin some words, like adimanam.

I have translated the Collected Works of the Mother, all of her works. And all of Sri Aurobindo's letters and his research on Yoga. The Life Divine and the Sythnesis of Yoga are more difficult, there I have only translated some of the concluding chapters, and the parts dealing with Bhakti Yoga and Karma Yoga.

My work was mostly publishing in Vaigarai, a Tamil magazine published by the Ashram, with about three thousand subscribers. The whole magazine was written by me, along with one lady from Madras. Afterwards my work was issued in books.

I lived in Pitchandikulam Forest, I was very happy there. I used to walk twelve kilometres every day - I had fifteen routes across Auroville, even down to Bommayapalayam. There were three of us in Auroville who wore dhotis - me, Shankar and Subbash - but they only wore it sometimes, whereas I never wore anything else. So everyone in Auroville knew me as the man in the dhoti."

With thanks to Lourdes Epinal.

AUROVILLE THE GANGA

Once before
You were born in the HIMALAYAS
Once again
You were born in the manas
Of Sri Aurobindo
And brought up at the lap
Of the Mother
Who stands high as Himalayas,
Fragrant with dew of white
Flowers.

Auroville the Ganga!
Bhagiratha
Desiring your presence on earth,
O Ganga,
Performed a mighty tapasya.

Yes
We are all Bhagirathas;
We are all a new Bhagiratha,
Do you understand
The severe tapasya
We perform to bring you
To earth, Auroville, Ganga?

Auroville the Triveni !
The fountain of this soil
Mingles three waters:
Ground stream of the land,
Salt-sweat of all humanity's
Hard laboring bodies,
And showers from above,
The gods who watch

ஆரோவில் கங்கை

mingle their waters
ever fresh in you,
ever-living and growing river.
Auroville the Ganga !
You are the first
Among rivers leading,
And among poems
A new poem, universal,
Beginning in a small corner
You will spread widening
Like the sound of OM.
Auroville the Ganga!
Everything is there
Existent in you,
What else is there?

Upon your banks
The fertile soil
Of many lands new-greening,
Air-roots of the Banyan.
On the surface of your waters
Floating flowers, honeyed.
Eagerly the birds
From everywhere come flying
To see your dear face.
Auroville the Ganga!
The great souls
Chanting and diving deep
In you
Dissolve their separate I's
O Mahamukhti,
From where did you learn
This art of elements
That cleanse our lives?
Satya Ganga!
Purifying,
Let me breathe
You always,
Let me put this burning
Self in you.
Let me
Be thee
Let me
Be thee

R. Meenakshi

முன்பு நீ இமாலயத்தில் பிறந்தவள்தான்
மீண்டும் அரவிந்த மனத்திலே பிறந்தாய்
இமாலயத்து வெண்பனி மலராய்
மணக்கும் அன்னைமடி தவழ்ந்தாய்

ஆரோவில் கங்கையே!
ஆம். நாங்கெல்லாம் பகீரதர்கள்தாம்.
புதிய மனித இனமெனும் ஒரே பகீரதர்.
மண்மீது உனைக்கொணர
இங்கியற்றும் தவம்புரிகிறதா?

திரிவேணியே!
இம்மண்ணின் ஓடைநீரும்
எங்கள் உழைப்புடம்பின் உவர் நீரும்
தேவ ஆசிகளாய்ப் பொழியும்
ஆகாச நீருமாய்க் கலந்து வருகின்றாய்
புத்தம் புது கங்கை நீ
ஜீவநதிப் பெருக்கம் நீ
ஆரோவில் கங்கையே
நீயே நதிகளின் தனித்தலைமை.
கவிதைகளில் சர்வதேசப் புதுக்கவிதை

சிறிதாய்த் தொடங்கி
விஸ்வமாய் ஓங்காறிக்கும்
நிலைத்த முதன்மை
ஆரோவில் கங்கையே
உன்னில் எது இல்லை?
கரையோரம் கலப்புநிலச் செழுமைகள்.
ஆலம் விழுதுகளின் புதிய பசுமைகள்
உன்மீது மிதக்கும்
வண்ணத் தேன்மலர்க் கூட்டங்கள்
இன்முகம் காணத் துடித்துவரும்
பறவையினங்கள்.
ஆரோவில் கங்கையே
உன்னையே உச்சரித்து
உன்னுளே ஆழ்ந்து
“நான்” களைக் கரைக்கும்
ஆத்மானு பூதிகள்
ஓ, மகாமுக்தியே!
அழுகலையும் அழுக்குகளையும்
செரிக்கும்
மூலிகை மூலத்தை எவரிடம் பெற்றாய்?
எப்போதும்
உன்னையே உயிர்க்கிறேன்;
எரியும் என்னை அமிழ்த்துகிறேன்.
“நான் நீயேயாகுக”
“நான் நீயேயாகுக”

கவிஞர் இரா. மீனாட்சி