

# AIAT Newsletter 2021

## Winter 2021

### About Auroville Institute of Applied Technology/AIAT

- AIAT was founded in 2004 with the financial aid of the German Govt. and many private donors in Germany to empower rural youth with skills for earning a livelihood with dignity. It is a non-profit unit of Auroville Foundation (see more under auroville.org. and aiat.in).
- AIAT is situated in one of the most backward areas of Tamil Nadu and is serving youth from the bottom of the social and economic pyramid. 95% of our trainees depend on availability of a stipend (BPL and 40% schedule caste).
- AIAT is holistic in its pedagogic approach and addresses issues of the stakeholders (trainees and companies).
- AIAT offers Central Govt. recognized 1-2 years industrial training under the dual system of training in collaboration with 10 companies of the region.
- AIAT also conducts short term courses funded by Tamil Nadu Skill Development Corporation (TNSDC) of 3 months duration in Computer applications, and Welding, Electrician related learning tasks.
- Till date, approx. 2800 trainees have been trained in Electronic Mechanics, Draughtsman Civil, Information Technology, Mechanical Engineering, Secretarial ship and Accounting.

*Dear Friends and Well-wishers of AIAT -  
Auroville Institute of Applied Technology*

**Welcome to our Winter-Newsletter 2021!**

In this edition we bring you news and pictures from our AIAT-world. We suggest, "Make yourself a cup of tea, relax, and enjoy reading!"

*Here in our hemisphere, about 1330 km north of the equator, we have the winter monsoon right now. It lives up to its name this year, it is raining like cats and dogs with temperatures dropping to as low as 24° C at night.*

*The first frog croaks from the resulting lake like landscape come up to us.*

*On the way to the school, a lake has burst its banks and is spilling over on the road.*

*The villagers have thrown out nets and are catching fish.*

*But the art of adaptation is always alive with us.*

*Chennai, the capital of Tamil Nadu, 3 hours north from here, is under water as it was in 2015. The dams are full. In Cuddalore, 30 km south of Pondicherry, 11,000 people had to be evacuated due to flooding. In Auroville and surrounding areas, all tanks are full or overflowing and groundwater has been replenished.*

Now a stream flows around AIAT, and it doesn't just drip into the electrical lab. One of our teachers could only return to his house in Pondicherry wading up to his waist in water. Let's see what happens next.

Unfortunately, the monsoon brings mosquitoes in its wake. For some of us a kind of 'Russian roulette' because you never know what they transmit! The continuous rain also brings the snakes out of their burrows. The other day, a small snake had to be scared away many times at the garage door. Today again. That's not funny.

Corona is hardly visible here in Auroville. Few wear masks, although we are still encouraged to avoid large gatherings. But of course, in the 'street scene' you see those who were infected with Covid 19 in the spring-summer (Indian Corona peak) and are still suffering from the after-effects. It is also gradually becoming clear that a higher number of Aurovilians were affected than initially thought.

Two weeks ago, on 15.11.21, Tamil Nadu reported 802 newly infected per day. Compared to the situation in Germany e.g. (with approximately the same population), this is not so alarming.

It was 'Diwali' just last month. It is the biggest festival in India which celebrates the victory of light over darkness. We put lights in front of the door so that the goddess Lakshmi, who stands for happiness, love, fertility, prosperity, health, beauty, harmony, i.e., for abundance, could find her way to us and AIAT.

As usual, our principal, is working farsightedly, persistently, and single-mindedly for the welfare of the school; on the one hand to maintain our good standards (old and new school year) and on the other hand, on an already highly visible vision that goes far beyond the current level of education at AIAT. The aim is to offer courses leading to a bachelor's degree in applied sciences and technology in collaboration with the University of Pondicherry. Wow!

Read *the facts* for yourself!

1. Covid-19 situation in India and Tamil Nadu
2. The impact of Covid-19 on the economy and the families in rural pockets
3. The impact of Coronavirus on AIAT
4. Despite all this – keeping the good standard!  
(Examination, repair work in Palmyra, visit from Pondicherry, Clemens – our new volunteer, a new Pbl project)
5. Status of negotiations with the University of Pondicherry on collaboration
6. A report on three alumni - or 'reaping a bit'
7. Call for donations

Good wishes to all friends and well-wishers

## 1. Covid-19 situation in India and Tamil Nadu

Yes, Covid-19 situation was out of hand in India until June this year. You don't forget pictures like that! We have reported on this. Now the situation has changed positively. On 6.11.21, India reported 10,929 newly infected and 392 dead (out of a population of 1.4 billion). More than 75% of the adult population has received at least one vaccination; about 30% have been vaccinated 2 times. A total of 1.07 billion vaccine doses have been given. It is estimated that about 90% of the population has developed antibodies against Covid-19. Only the southwestern state of Kerala continues to report a high number of newly infected people (6,500).

Given the continuing downward trend in infections for weeks, Covid-19 is almost no longer an issue. The predicted third wave for October/November has so far failed to materialize.

The shops, schools and colleges, restaurants and factories are open. Most people don't wear masks. Only in public offices masks must be worn. Large gatherings of people are still prohibited.

## 2. The impact of Covid-19 on the economy and the families in rural pockets

The Indian economy is growing again at 9% compared to the low figure of the previous year and the stock market is booming. However, this only applies to the big cities and metropolises. The recovery has not reached the countryside. All schools are open again from 1<sup>st</sup> of November. One might get the impression that the country has returned to pre-pandemic life, but the 2<sup>nd</sup> Covid-19 wave in spring/summer this year, has changed a lot and left deep marks. The middle class has become poorer. Many have lost their jobs and returned to their villages. Many have over-indebted themselves in the hope of being able to pay back the money after the pandemic. The lower middle class has been hit the hardest.

During the Covid-19 crisis, the Indian central government provided basic food aid to 800 million people (about 200 million families living below the poverty line and socially disadvantaged families). Unfortunately, our teacher families were not among them, although they were on short time work until October this year. As a result, they were right on the poverty line and had a very hard time getting through this period, especially since the inflation rate in this country is 6,26% and petrol has gone up by 20%.

### 3. The impact of Covid-19 on AIAT

According to the lock down phases, our school was open from January to March; closed from April to mid-July (during this period only 30-40% of the students could be reached with online classes). Classes have been held again since mid-July. The Covid-19 policy of the central and state governments and the deterioration of the economic situation of the rural population has had a drastic impact on our work.

- Because of the loss of income, many families no longer send their children to private schools but to government schools, which are free.
- Vocational education is held in very low esteem in this country. Students and parents aspire to get a college degree. This attitude in society is encouraged by the current policies of the state governments of Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry:
  - All Grade 10 students were automatically promoted to Grade 11 without examination. All Grade 12 students were declared 'Passed' without examination. They are thus eligible to continue their studies in a college.
  - Moreover, the T.N. government gives substantial financial incentives to students into government schools. Especially girls from the poorest families receive financial incentives if they complete grade 12 or a bachelor's degree. On their wedding day, they receive a government subsidy worth €1000.
  - Also, in Pondicherry all 10<sup>th</sup> grade students were automatically transferred to the 11<sup>th</sup> grade. This year the government in Pondicherry started implementing the new education policy of the central government to join the vocational stream of secondary/senior secondary education.
- The result of these measures is that hardly anyone now wants to attend a private vocational school. This year only 35 students have enrolled in AIAT.
- Overall (old and new cohort), the number of students in AIAT has dropped to 77 students this year. In some classes, e.g., for welders only 3 instead of 20 or for fitters 8 instead of 40 students are enrolled. For comparison, in 2019-2020, about 180 students attended our school. AIAT has a total capacity of 360 students/year.
- Because of the lockdown between April and July the students of 2019-2021 and 2020-2022 batches could not do an in-company internship as part of the dual training. Thus, they couldn't earn a stipend from the company to pay the institute's fee. Approx. 10% of the students who were enrolled dropped out because of not being able to pay the institute's fee.
- As a result of this low number of enrollments, we will have a financial shortfall of about \$16,000 this year as well – despite cost-cutting measures such as reducing our teaching staff from 12 to 8.

## 4. Despite all this – we keep the good standard!

### Examination

On 22 September, the Indian Ministry of Skill Training and Entrepreneurship announced the examination results of the NCVT graduation class in dual education. All our trainees in the professions of Fitter (22) and Electronics Mechanics (11) and Welding passed this examination, which was conducted online for the first time. All of them achieved 80% or more marks. We congratulate all students and the teachers concerned for this good result.

### Repair work in Palmyra



Since the completion of our welding workshop, we have had the problem of water entering the workshop during the monsoon seasons. A projecting roof on the weather side (12 x 2 m) would solve the problem but would also cost approx. 500 €. In order to save costs, the roofing

work was planned as a project for the students of the Fitter and Welding classes. The teachers, Mr. Albert/Welding Department and Mr. Krishnadevan/Fitter Department planned the work up to the installation and carried it out with 10 students within two weeks in August at the material cost of only €250 and everyone learned a lot. For the first time since 2016 our Welding workshop was not flooded during the current Monsoon.

### A Delegation of the Govt. of India and CII Pondicherry visited AIAT

On 27 October, a delegation led by Shri Dinesh Rai, IAS, former Secretary to the Government of India, MSME, visited AIAT with the SINADE project officer, Mr. Jens Kayser from Bildungswerk der Bayrischen Wirtschaft gGmbH Deutschland (BBW) and Mr. Amit Nain, DGB MEMSE Technology Centre Puducherry.

The aim of the SINADE project is to meet the need for qualified trainers to improve vocational training at the ITI level (i.e., vocational school level) in India by training the trainers. In a first step, selected trainers will be trained for 6 weeks in India and in

Germany. They will learn modern teaching methods and action-oriented teaching. The cooperation was initiated by the Indian government and is supported by iMove. The Indian government is funding this three-year project. The CII (Confederation of Indian Industry) chapter of Pondicherry and the delegation of the Govt. of India visited AIAT as the model Industrial Training Institute of the region, implementing modern teaching methods such as project-based learning, interactive learning etc. For your information, AIAT teachers have been trained in modern, action-oriented methods for years by the German SES trainers.



### Clemens Huber, our new volunteer from Austria

“My name is Clemens, in Auroville also called Taco.



(Clemens Huber: With the white shirt)

I am an Austrian citizen who graduated this year in electrical engineering from HTL Mödling Department of Electronic Austria. For the upcoming 9 months I will be assisting the Electronic Mechanic teachers at AIAT. I hope to transfer as much of my knowledge and skills onto the students as possible and help to improve the school in any way I can.”

### “Automatic Plant Watering System” – A new Pbl project (Project-based learning) from the Electronics-Mechanics Department

This project is about building and implementing an automatic irrigation system that can detect the water content in the soil and automatically water a plant. It is a micro controller-based project that uses a moisture sensor to control the water inflow. This system can be adapted to the different requirements of the plants, the dryness of the soil and seasonal variations.

Our project is intended for the irrigation of a single plant. If implemented on a larger scale, it has the potential to reduce overall agricultural water use and runoff while reducing the labour work.

Such gadgets are important for countries like India, where it rains only 2-3 months a year and the fields are artificially irrigated the rest of the time, thus placing stress on depleting groundwater levels. This system would make it possible to significantly reduce water consumption in agriculture.

This project is a prototype to test its functionality, is easy to use and it is effective.

This project will be implemented under the guidance of Clemens, Manikandan, Mohammed – by the students of Electronic Mechanics of 2<sup>nd</sup> year.

## 5. Status of negotiations with the University of Pondicherry on collaboration between the Auroville Foundation and the Pondicherry University



From front left to front right: Dr. S. Ranganathan, Dr. Jayanti Ravi, Lavkamad Chandra, Sanjay, Prof. Dr. Gurmeet Singh

Auroville Foundation is currently negotiating with the University of Pondicherry to offer courses at Auroville Institute of Applied Technology (AIAT) in applied arts, science and technologies with a bachelor's degree in the future. In this context, we, i.e., Dr. Jayanti Ravi, Secretary of Auroville Foundation (State Secretary rank), Dr. Sanjeev Ranganathan, Executive of SAIER (Shri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research), Sanjay, Electronics Teacher for Bachelor and Lavkamad Chandra, Principal of AIAT, visited the Vice Chancellor of Pondicherry University, Prof. Dr. Gurmeet Singh. We are confident that an MOU could be signed between Auroville Foundation and PU by the end of this year.

## 6. A report on three alumni – or ‘reaping a bit’

### Three former AIAT students started a successful small scale service business company in Pondicherry and Vanur Thesil

Rabakaran. R. (Vanur Village), Jayasakthi. R. (Lawspet, Pondicherry) and Silambarasan. P. (Vanur Village), former students of the Electronics Mechanics class of 2012-14 batch, jointly started an electrical and air conditioning repair and maintenance service company.

They proudly told us they came from poor families. At the time of their studies at AIAT in 2012-2014 their parents were not able to finance the tuition fees. For that they worked part-time (night work at a petrol station or at an electrician’s shop as a helper). Nevertheless, all three managed to do it at the first attempt: raise money, complete the course, pass the exam successfully. **Hats off!**

After course completion they worked as AC mechanic technician (air conditioning technician) and as electrician in a workshop in Pondicherry.

In 2018, in order to make a better living for themselves, they jointly set up their own business, SIVAKAMI A/C Service Center’, for domestic electrical work and air conditioning installation and maintenance.

Currently they have three helpers, and they are planning to expand their business in video surveillance systems (CCTV) installation and maintenance.

Expressing their gratitude, they said *“Thanks to AIAT. The training at AIAT has helped us to improve our life situation significantly.”*



## 7. Call for donations – any amount is welcome!

The annual report shows once again how far the pandemic has set us back and how tight the belt must be tightened to survive and grow.

Your donation would enable AIAT not only to survive but also to continue to impart skills to youths from the poorest sections of the rural society who suffered most due to Covid-19 for a better livelihood and to face the impact of pandemic.

### How to donate:

- a) Any amount to cover the running costs  
(Staff salary amounts to 70% of our recurring cost).
  - b) Any amount to improve our infrastructure,  
e.g., workshops, teaching aids, classrooms, library.
  - b) Support a student with a stipend  
(Indian rupees 3000/month or \$ 40/month).
- Pl. consider that 97% of it benefits young people directly.  
Only 3% is used for administration.

We ourselves in the management team work on an honorary basis.

Your donations are tax deductible as per your country's rules.

**Important** Pl. mention always in your remittance to AIAT:  
'AIAT Scholarship' or 'Donation for AIAT' so that your money reaches us.

**Important** to specify:

Your name and address on the transfer, so that we can send the donation receipt.

Pl. inform us via e-mail so that we can follow your remittance and make sure that you get a donation receipt; [principal.ariat@auroville.org.in](mailto:principal.ariat@auroville.org.in)

### How to remit your donation to AIAT?

- 1) **For foreign donors** the best way to remit your donation to AIAT is through your local Auroville International (AVI) organization ([http://auroville-international.org/avi\\_centres/](http://auroville-international.org/avi_centres/)) They can take your donation, issue a tax receipt, and channel the funds to Auroville. You can find a list of AVI Centres [here](#).

**Important:** Pl. mention that the donation is meant for AIAT in Auroville, India.

- 2) Donate through donation portal: [Auroville Donation Gateway](#)

**Important** is to mention that the donation is for AIAT in Auroville, India.

### 3) INDIAN INWARD REMITTANCE:

#### For Indian donors

IFSC Code: SBI0003160

MICR Code: 605002007

A/C with: State Bank of India, Auroville International Township  
Branch: Kulapayalam, Auroville 605101 T.N.

A/C Holder: Auroville Unity Fund Main

A/C Number: 31612623238

Purpose: Auroville Institute of Applied Technology (please specify)

Pl. inform us about your donation via e-mail: [principal.aiat@auroville.org.in](mailto:principal.aiat@auroville.org.in). AIAT would take care that you get a receipt from the unity fund enabling for 100% Tax deduction.

*Heartful wishes and a happy new year!*

*However, first and foremost, we wish you good health and hope  
you stay that way.*

*May you complete the turn of the year energetically and calmly,  
so that we can all courageously make our contribution  
to the great whole  
to which we belong together.*

*AIAT Management Team*

*Lavkamad Chandra, MTech, (Germany)  
Correspondent & Principal*

*Angelika Kolb M.A. (Germany), Head of Pedagogy*



# AIAT

Auroville Institute  
of Applied Technology

*be part of it!*