

Vanakkam friend,

As usual, this time of the year since October 2011, Aikiyam teachers and volunteers are very busy with classroom micro projects. Children come up with project presentations week after week and other class children, teachers and parents are the main audience. We are happy and a little proud to share the parents' appreciation about our work. I hope and know you will enjoy reading that Aikiyam children made their version of 'The Tempest' and enacted, wrote poems, made puppets, posters, clay models, role play, and other ways to express what they learned through their project hours. Of course we were disturbed by the strong wind but it was the chance to prove how Aikiyam School is functioning like a family. All teachers, volunteers and our older children were on campus for a week every day, chopping, dragging and stocking the wood. Yes, the wind brought us together and I am amazed about the collective energy we have at Aikiyam. Aikiyam activities prove that it has evolving progress. Please enjoy the newsletter. Aum... Shankar



"The need of the day: working in the banyan trees."

The campus on the morning of 30 December 2011



Checking in with four Aikiyam Students about Cyclone Thane

On Monday 2 January 2012 school was scheduled to resume, after a one week term break. The students were ready to return to their classes, but due to the overwhelming damage to the campus, the school remained closed for another week. That did not deter many of them from arriving, some in their school uniforms, to participate in the major cleaning work that went on for the entire first week of January. We talked to Priyadarshini, and Devalakshmi from the 8th standard, and Priyanka and Parasuraman from the 7th standard. This is what they had to say:

What did you see at school when you arrived after the cyclone?

The kitchen roof was broken. Near the library a big tree was broken, and one fell on the building. I saw students and teachers helping. My father came to help cut tree branches. There were many banyan branches in the playground area and one of the little pools was broken. There were many trees in the road, and near my classroom there were tree branches covering the ground. We saw garbage (debris) everywhere. Some of our water taps were broken from the tree branches falling on them.

What were you thinking, and how did you feel?

I felt bad because we had to miss one more week of school; now we have to do our work faster. I thought I would go back home but I stayed. I wanted my teachers to know I had done my assignment (during the school break). I was sad that the cyclone ruined so

much. It was bad to look and see. And I was sad there was no school for another week.

What were your friends saying?

My friend told me to come home but I stayed. We were seeing our teachers and principal working. This was good. We helped our teacher to pull broken branches that were stuck in the tree. We were talking about 30,000 trees that fell all around Auroville, and we heard about 15 people who died in Pondicherry. We were sad and happy, working and cleaning. At my friend's house, the water tank blew off their roof, and three houses in Kulapalayam fell down.

How did you help? Why did you help?

I took the big logs and moved them out; and worked with a hand saw to cut branches. We moved all the broken tree branches to one area, and we helped to clean up. It would have been boring at home. We had one week break already. I wanted to come back to class. I helped so the school could open sooner. I was having fun with my friends and liked working together to clean up. It was done faster together.

How are things at the school now?

Before the cyclone the trees had so many branches, and some were close together. Now there is more light, and it's hotter. Also, before the cyclone we had our own garden, but the cyclone ruined it. We had many lemons from our tree but now we don't. The school is perfectly clean now.



From left to right: Priyanka, Devalakshmi, Priyadarshini, Parasuraman

Cyclone Thane hits Southeast India, and changes Auroville in its path.

On Tuesday 27 December 2011 many people were already talking animatedly about it. We knew 'something' was coming; it was called a cyclone; we'd had cyclones before. Little did we know! Auroville was not in the eye of the storm; that was between Cuddalore and Pondicherry a mere 30 km (19 miles) South of Auroville where the storm made landfall.



The rain started around 21:00, the wind slowly picked up over the hours and by 2:00 am many Aurovilians were awake and already battling buckets of water coming in sideways through glassless, mesh windows. Some lay in bed, listening for hours on-end to the various tones of cracks and smashes that were quite obviously, and frighteningly, branches and trees being rent from their natural places; the sound of glass breaking; tiles flying off roofs; and huge trunks hitting the ground. Some Aurovilians eagerly awaited the sunrise like never before: "How bad is it?" they wondered. The daylight revealed a new look for Auroville.

The common scene was this: no electricity, no water, no phone (for some not only their landlines but also no mobile service), an inability to move by anything other than foot, crawling over trees and several forms of debris (huge branches, broken glass and bricks, tiles, large pieces of plastic and aluminum which were once the roof of a shed or a storeroom). The rain continued on Friday but that did not deter the work that had to begin. Chainsaws could be heard as early as 10:00 am the morning-after and for the next couple of days the primary goal was mobility (while restoration of water and electricity was pursued with vigour in parallel).

The residents uncovered all manner of saws and cutteys and began the arduous task of hacking their way out: first the main roads and then to the over 180 residential communities. For some people living in the greenbelt, it took 2 days to get through the trees. Long-term residents got lost and became disoriented when moving between once-familiar places. While sharing, standing in the now unfamiliar terrain, many expressed and could feel between each other, a deep sadness for losing so many of our friends, the trees. To see so many laying and twisted every way imaginable was for some, honestly, heart-wrenching.

After a few days, when the shock was wearing off, the comments one heard were, "Ah ... there is so

much more light!" and "A lot of what went down in the forests were 'work trees' which had started to become a nuisance anyway." and "Now that the outside looks different, I wonder what will be transformed on the inside?". The most obvious Grace was that not one person was even injured!



Aurovilians are resilient and strong. It is amazing to experience how quickly we're moving forward .. into the new year, 2012, and more importantly, towards the future.

When The Cyclone Came

*When the cyclone came
Trees came down
Tamarind ,papaya ,coconut ,guavas ,
even some palm trees down or damaged .
Everything was crashing down .
The walls broke ,the roof sheets went flying .
We were very frightened
When the cyclone came .*

*When the cyclone came
The wind blew and the rain came in .
Everything was wet ;
The clothes were floating
And the dishes .
When a tree fell on the roof
We had to run to another house .
We were cold and wet ,hungry and frightened .
When the cyclone came .*

*After the cyclone came
We didn't have electricity or water .
Stones and trees blocked the road
Many houses were damaged ,
But the wind stopped blowing ,
And the rain stopped too .
After the cyclone
We cleaned our houses ,
We collected palm fronds and ate the sweet part .
We picked up the coconuts and scooped out the soft insides
And we played ball with the papayas .
We were not frightened anymore
After the cyclone came .*

A poem by the 7th standard students

Seven weeks later, moving toward restoration: we have been very fortunate to receive several donations toward cyclone repairs from the Government of India, Weltwaerts, and other well-wishers of Aikiyam. We send out a heartfelt 'thanks' to everyone!



As always, we depend on your support for the daily running of the school to pay teachers, provide a morning snack and mid-day meal to the children, and maintain the campus. Any contribution, no matter how small, will be immediately put to work. We are very grateful for our many helpful friends at home and abroad. We could not survive as a school without you!

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