



Auroville International

UNITED KINGDOM



Banyan Tree in front of Matrimandir shaken but standing



Windmill down



forest destruction

## Cyclone Update: Two First Hand Accounts and Links

(anything underlined in blue is a "clickable link")

Vani, a long-time Aurovilian from France, is the Secretary to Auroville International living in the Vikas Community. Michelle just arrived with [Living Routes](#), a US based study-abroad program, at [Sadhana Forest](#). Their essays convey the hope amidst the destruction which has characterized this intense challenge.

Hi Everybody,

Survived.. Just reconnected my old solar system to have little current, not for long however! Vikas is a real disaster as all communities with big trees, only small trees survived.. Years of reforestation work gone... Our windmill just fully repaired is completely broken... roads and pathways blocked, no water, no electricity.

But a fantastic collective good will and energy to make every one feeling OK... Feels little bit like the old survival times when we had nothing, no electricity very little water or food... but a lot of collective life!

Our services are doing a fantastic job, running all day and some Water Service even at night, so that roads are opening slowly, slowly, water pumped in every community with 2 generators late in the night... Long patient work...

Basic food is available in Pour Tous , Solar Kitchen, Visitor's Centre since Saturday, today also the Bakery brought us bread.

Mother Nature really got hurt and it is a miracle that no human got hurt even in the surrounding villages...early morning you hear cutting, sawing, generators till late..  
Every neighbour cleaning, sweeping, cutting, caring...

The summer will be hot without trees, you already feel it now; sun comes straight in the house early morning! It has also become much warmer, when it was just starting to be nicely cool! We can see houses and structures again, I even discovered new ones!! So give me time to recover, clean around before I work again on our meeting in February!

Your support in any ways will be most welcomed, even just emotional support!

Happy New Year  
Vani



Keet and Bamboo Buildings at Sadhana Forest

## **Earth, Wind, and Fire: Say Hello to Cyclone Thane**

[Posted on January 3, 2012 by Michelle](#)

A lot has happened since I first arrived in India, but despite the hardships encountered, I continue to be astounded each and every day by the perseverance of the Sadhana Forest Community.

Our first few days in Sadhana were wonderful. The beauty of the forest radiates through natural vegetation, fruit trees and gorgeous flowers, as well as through the people here. I can hardly explain in words the sense of community that engulfs one as they enter the village. Almost immediately, I felt at home. It was a slight adjustment to become used to the composting toilets where you must separate your business into liquids and solids, and where toilet paper is uncommon. However, I was impressed by the natural feel and structure of all of the buildings, and by the lengths the members of the community go to in order to practice sustainability.

All living space consists of naturally made huts, constructed of wood beams and rope with thatched roofs. There are many windows for cross-ventilation and there are no chairs to sit on, only padded cushions. To my surprise, we were able to access electricity to charge our appliances for many hours during the day, and there was 24-hour wi-fi available in our learning dorm/hut (all powered through solar energy!). It was very bizarre for me to feel so connected with nature, yet still have all of the conveniences of modern technology. There was even a projector and amplifiers in our classroom space!

We all swiftly began to settle in, quickly becoming accustomed to life here in the forest – completely unaware of the approaching challenges we would soon face. On the evening of December 29th, we received word of a cyclone (a synonym for a hurricane) approaching the South-Eastern part of India. The cyclone was headed straight towards Chennai, Pondicherry, Auroville and our peaceful village, Sadhana.

We were told to pack up all of our valuables and enough clothes for two days, leaving the rest of our belongings behind. Our Living Routes group was evacuated to Mitra, a hostel in Auroville, for our

safety. The rest of the 94 short-term and long-term volunteers (including families and children) remained in Sadhana to tough out the 83 mph winds and cold rain.

Once in Mitra, the severity of the storm soon became apparent. We were fortunate to find a place to stay during peak visitor season on such short notice, and were provided with two rooms with mattresses on the floor. We were all very grateful for the dry place to sleep, and were content with a change of pace, oblivious to the threat the storm posed and soon falling asleep. The rain began to come down harder as the night continued, and we were all jolted awake around 4 am by a loud crash and powerful, turbulent winds. A tree branch had flown off of a tree roughly 100 feet away and landed on our third floor balcony. My thoughts immediately went to the brave volunteers at Sadhana, waiting it out in huts. At this point, we noticed water was being swept in underneath the doors, coating the floor with a nice shallow layer and soaking through many mattresses, mine included. We did our best to keep our packs up off the ground and prevent the water from coming in, and cuddled up with our neighbours in an attempt to get a little more sleep.

In the morning, we crept out of our room to view the immeasurable devastation. I couldn't even count the number of trees that were blown over the night before. As early as 7 am, community members of Auroville were already out and about in the pouring rain attempting to clear the roads. According to one man, all of the roads everywhere were blocked. The storm had destroyed Mitra's water tower, obliterated power lines, and even knocked down cell towers, preventing almost all forms of communication with the outside world. Many claimed this had been the most damaging storm in over 30 years. We did our best to be useful, some of us attempting to clear trees, and others helping to cook lunch with the remaining water.

Throughout the next three days, we were confined to Mitra and the directly surrounding areas for our own safety. Soon, we were completely out of water and could no longer cook, flush the toilets, or even

wash our hands. Thank god for hand sanitizer, the Solar Kitchen, and our go-to guys Min and Segar!

We were also able to retrieve drinking water from a generator-powered filter in the Auroville town hall.



*Papaya and other fruit trees blown down.*

Despite adverse conditions, we did our very best to keep our spirits high, patiently awaiting the day we would be able to return to Sadhana. It was very interesting for me to experience the differences between disaster responses in India and the United States. I couldn't help but think everyone in New York would be cuddled up on the couch under blankets, playing board games and reading, just waiting for the road crews to clean up the mess in the streets and get the power up and running again. Conversely, it is estimated that Auroville will continue to be without power for at least another week.

On Sunday, the first day of the New Year, we were able to return to Sadhana for the afternoon. When we arrived, we were welcomed back with open arms and told tales of what had happened here in the forest during the night of the cyclone. I heard so many stories of people sharing their blankets and clothes with others, cuddling up three people to a bed, and making tea for the community in an attempt to provide warmth. During the heart of the storm, all of the volunteers were gathered in the learning hut we had been staying in before we left for Mitra, and similar to penguins of the Arctic, huddled together in a large circle to protect one another from hypothermia and the freezing rain. I cannot even imagine the physical and mental obstacles they must have endured. After facing such extreme hardship, the people of Sadhana were still optimistic. It is a powerful thing to witness – inspiring and enlightening.

Unfortunately, the surrounding landscape and structures within the community did not illustrate the same resilience – every single structure suffered some form of damage. Much of the roofing material on all of the huts was blown away. Of the 20 long-term volunteer huts, only 6 remain useable and 14 were completely destroyed. Many of the remaining huts have compromised foundations and will need to be rebuilt for safety. Many older trees and acacias, the vegetable garden, and the orchard have

been wiped out. Luckily, many of the young Tropical Dry Evergreen Forest (TDEF) trees have been spared. All in all, the damage has been calculated to be 2,800,000 Rupees, or £35,000.

At this point, the projects we were going to be taking on in Sadhana when we first arrived have changed dramatically, and we are now focused on helping rebuild the community. First and foremost, a vast amount of fundraising needs to be done. Sadhana runs completely on donations and now faces a great deal of financial trouble, difficulties which must be overcome to ensure the safety of volunteers and residents.

Throughout this entire experience, I have been moved by the perseverance and optimism I have witnessed. Much of the time, I have difficulty articulating it in words – it astounds me to the point of silence. Yorit and Aviram, the founders of Sadhana, have sustained huge losses to their home. Sadhana is their dream. Yet, they remain hopeful and express their gratitude for the kindness and generosity they have received from others. Aviram even feels the storm has provided a wonderful learning opportunity to rebuild from a clean slate – ensuring the next huts will be constructed to withstand even stronger cyclone winds. Even now as I write, I hear him laughing above in his office, restating what his three-year-old daughter always says, “Sharing is caring!”

Interviews with members from Sadhana Forest and others dealing with the cyclone can be heard on [Auroville Radio](#).

To all of you who have read this rather long report, we ask you to please do whatever you can to help. Every little bit helps.

Auroville asks its friends and well-wishers for financial help which is most urgent. Please make a donation for Auroville Cyclone Relief through AVI UK or [directly by cheque or bank transfer to Auroville](#). You may earmark for a specific community such as Sadhana Forest or project such as the Matrimandir Gardens if that inspires you to give.

Please pass on this message to anyone who may be interested to help.

You may send a cheque to:  
Auroville International UK, 7 Cubb Field, Aylesbury, Bucks, HP19 7SJ

Or donate online at [www.aviuk.org/donate.htm](http://www.aviuk.org/donate.htm)

**Thank-you for your generosity.**