

Auroville Today

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The young Auroville emerges

On 23rd February, a one day event, The New Creation Emerges, was held in Bhumika Hall.

The morning was a very special one as ten young Aurovilians shared about their lives and aspirations.

“A new half-century for Auroville is starting,” said Michael in his introduction. “This place has been shaped by people with a certain aspiration and now a new generation is here who have been shaped by a different political, ecological and social environment. We want to show our aspiration in our own words.”

How they came or why they returned

Seven of the ten young presenters, whose ages ranged from the mid twenties to early thirties, had either been born or brought up in Auroville. The other three had joined Auroville in the last few years. One of these was Juan Andres from Chile. Juan Andrés' parents were both psychologists, and this made him particularly curious about himself and the world. “I was questioning many things and having deep conversations with my parents from a very young age.”

He loved using the mind but also sensed there were other dimensions to be explored. He went to medical school to explore the physical dimension, but was disappointed by the narrow approach. However, while there he began working with an international federation of medical students who were working to empower young people. Later he dropped out of medical school to take a degree in psychology, but continued to work with the federation.

His drive to comprehend more dimensions, to live and work more holistically, continued and he explored integral psychotherapy, which was beginning to consider spirituality as an important realm of experience. “But still something was missing. I was dealing with people confronted with issues which had larger boundaries than the discipline I was bounded by.”

“That was the crisis that drove me to look for another place to explore another way to embody the search to complement the way I could be of service to humanity. I took a trip around the world to experience a more holistic way of being and Auroville picked me.”

Aparajita was trained in graphic design and communication. However, she became disenchanted when she realised that the industry only used these tools to sell things. “I constantly looked for a wider space which would give me the freedom to use the tool in a broader way.” Her search led her to explore the symbolism of Indian mythology which she realized could be a powerful way to reconnect people with spirituality, the source, which she felt had dried up and been replaced by the ‘dry pond’ of religion.

This became her mission: through art to reconnect people with that ‘flow’. Recently she gave an exhibition in Auroville. “I felt I was able to give so much to the community because people here appreciated what I was doing. So then I took the decision to come and live here.”

Michael also came relatively recently. Born on the border between France and Italy, with a German mother and Spanish father, he felt different from other children. But for a long time he tried hard to fit in. “So I ended up being a business lawyer, tax lawyer, financial analyst and a chartered accountant and even an HR manager, but it was not me at all. I was always feeling alone.”

One night he had a dream where he saw himself ten years in the future. He was immensely successful, with a family and big house, “but my eyes were empty”. He decided he had to escape and in the dream discovered he could fly.

“I started flying round the world and finally came to India. I didn't know anything Auroville, I was allowing myself to be guided, but I ended up in Auroville or Auroville ended up in me. But then the real magic happened because the little robot that I'd been before became human, became a real boy, and I started to feel a deeper sense of myself.”

For those born and/or brought up in Auroville the journey was rather different. A common factor, however, was that at a certain point they all experienced the world outside the community. “Growing up here,” says Manjula, “you keep hearing that Auroville is special. But in what way? And what was my role in this? I had to go out to discover these things.”

After gaining her first degree in Chennai, she moved to Brussels to pursue a Masters in Human Ecology. “My experience of studying taught me what Auroville meant to me. Auroville was home. Within one month of stepping out, I knew I was going to go back but I realised it would take a few years to discover what I could take back. Every minute I spent there I was thinking, what can I take back to my community?”

Luca came to Auroville when he was nine. He went to all the schools but decided, after Future School, that he didn't want to

who interned there were encountering new experiences, like living in community and connecting with nature, but were not having a space in which they could reflect upon the processes they were going through. So he began having counselling sessions and deep conversations with them to help them understand the changes they were experiencing. “I told them that though they would return to their cities, they were never really going back. From now on they would always be moving forward.”

He also observed that some Auroville youth were having issues with sexuality, substance abuse, etc., and these and their own existential crises were not approached or dealt with in an open way. Using peer-based learning methodology, he is working with them to “explore deeply with a non-moralistic approach and connect with the deeper side of young people, with their visions and lives. I am very happy to be of service here.”

Michael is also working with youth. As part of the Youth Link team he is trying to incubate new communities in Auroville. “I am trying to help people find all the resources to create their own space and their own project in a real spirit of service. To not think about money, money, money, but to look beyond and see how to do things differently.”

Krishna was born in Auroville and left when she was sixteen. While she was out, she studied midwifery and became a professional birth attendant. Two years ago she returned and is now working with Paula Murphy and her team on creating the Morning Star birthing centre in Auroville.

It is something she is very passionate about. “Paula did a study on women's health here and found there is a great need for a place in Auroville

where they could give birth and feel safe, secure and respected. The present state of maternity services is pretty dire. Peaceful, quiet births don't happen very often. Caesarean sections are common and these have impacts on the future health of the child and the larger community.

“So we work with women and families to educate around pregnancy and conception and around the continuing development of the child. Everybody has to understand this concept in order to create a space where women can conceive and give birth in peace in order to promote the best development of ourselves and the species.”

Personal passion in the service of the larger community rather than making money is a common theme of these young Aurovilians' stories. Sandra wants to find ways to build community through art and cultural events. Bhakti is initiating an art residency for visiting artists so that they can experience Auroville, respond creatively and offer a work as a contribution to an Auroville art collection.

Kim is building tree houses and passing on his skills to the younger generation, while Aurrima is using her skills as a graphic designer to work on community projects like the Auroville festivals in Chennai and Baroda.

Luca's passion has always been motorcycles. He started tinkering with them while still young. A few years ago he heard there was a racetrack in Chennai.

He and a friend built a couple of race bikes and within a few years they actually became Indian national motorcycle champions in their class.

Today, he is working on building a better electric bike because “many of us in Auroville ride around on old motorbikes and I feel we should do better than this. My plan is to make them more affordable, then everybody in Auroville can drive them.”

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From left Luca, Aurrima, Kim, Sandra, Bhakti, Manjula, Michael, Krishna, Aparajita, Juan Andrés

spend more years studying. “I am more a doer so I built myself a house here. Over the years I went to Europe quite a few times. It was always nice but I was always really happy to come back because there was something missing there for me. So now I know this is my home.”

Kim was born in Auroville. “I had a great time growing up here but when I became a teenager I didn't know what to do. All I knew was that I didn't want to study for five years and end up behind a desk.” He decided to do a five-year carpentry apprenticeship in France with the Compagnons. “It was a good thing because if you were a bit of a rowdy like me you need structure. After that I travelled the world a bit, went to Australia for a year, to Asia and then came back to Auroville. And once I was back here, I realized what it was all about. I finally realized Auroville is in place where you can do things differently and you have the freedom to express yourself.”

Aurrima, who was born in Auroville but only came back much later, feels the same way. After studying at the Lycée Français she left for Paris with the idea to pursue a career as a designer working on cultural events. However, during her first internship in a corporate agency “I discovered the money aspect of graphic design which made me uncomfortable because it wasn't what I wanted with my life. That year I came back to Auroville and I knew this is the place where I wanted to be.” She went back to France to graduate and returned to Auroville six years ago.

What they are doing now

Juan Andrés is continuing to use the tools of social empowerment and individual discovery he learned about in the federation of medical students, but now in an Auroville context and adapted to Auroville needs. While working in Sacred Groves, he noticed that the young Indian architectural students

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When Manjula returned to Auroville she was clear that she wanted to work on environmental projects and be a bridge: between the past and future, between Aurovilians working on similar projects and between Auroville and the rest of the world, where many exciting things are also happening. "Taking all the advanced things we are doing here out into the wider world and incorporating the best that the world can offer here is the next step."

At present, she is working with Pitchandikulam Forest Consultants – "which is the best place to share what we have achieved with the rest of the world". She is helping manage ecological restoration projects outside Auroville, including a project with Tata Consultancy Services on the outskirts of Chennai. "They own 300 acres of land, so if we manage to clean up two of their polluted lakes we can work on 50 more lakes. While this may be a drop in the ocean regarding cleaning up cities and returning nature to them, we are hoping it will cause ripples."

The challenges they met and how they dealt with them

It hasn't necessarily been an easy ride. Many of these young Aurovilians have had to overcome challenges and resistances in pursuit of their passion. Krishna says that while the educational side of the birthing project is going very well – they are already giving well-attend-

ed classes for people from Pondicherry – "we are running into some walls" regarding the physical manifestation of the building they need. "We are coming up against a lot of obstacles and this is incredibly frustrating because everybody has the same positive reaction to the project. However, we are doing so much other work that I see this as just part of the process. Eventually those barriers won't be there any more."

Michael knows about experiencing frustration. "If there is a really strong aspiration in yourself, many times you will encounter a wall and want to go through that wall. You will bang your head against the wall thinking you're going to break it before finally you realise you have to open yourself to finding another way. In other words, the only limitation, the biggest limitation, is oneself."

I think things happen if we are really in tune with our environment, the divine, and you just roll with this. I've seen this happen so many times."

Aparajita learned that artists are not necessarily appreciated in Auroville. "Some people come to my exhibition and say, 'this is fine but what are you doing for Auroville?' They assume I am doing this work only for myself. They don't appreciate that this is my way of keeping the flow of spirituality going, and only if I keep my flow going can I share it with and inspire others."

However, a young Aurovillian in the audience put all these challenges in perspective.

"I went out and came back and my experience is that, compared to the outside, Auroville is a place where it is way easier to manifest anything that you want to do. Outside you have to work within the system, you have to get certificates, etc., but here it is more up to you. If you have the energy, motivation and drive you can manifest whatever you want to manifest here."

What would they change in the present Auroville?

Juan Andrés observes that it is difficult for young people who were born here to get their basic needs covered and to explore the world because the community is not yet self-sustainable. The community should focus upon achieving this. Aparajita agrees. "First of all we should try to have the basic needs met before we try to create architectural extravaganzas like the eighth wonder of the world."

On the same note, Michael regrets that accommodation is so expensive in Auroville. "You have to spend at least 25 lakhs for an apartment, but you don't have this money when you are twenty five-years old. If you want more young people here, you should let them build their own simple, inexpensive accommodation."

Aparajita feels that the community is presently focussed upon the wrong things. "We are making too much fuss about building the city and we are not getting the time to build ourselves. If we go on like this, I'm not sure something different is going to come out than has already happened elsewhere. If, on the other

hand, I have the space and the time to work on myself and become a beautiful person, all I create will be beautiful."

Michael agrees. "When I heard Roger Anger saying in an interview that what we are really building here is a new man, it really spoke to me." He would like to see an attitudinal change. "Sometimes things are a little bit stuck here because there is this pressure to be perfect, so we can't allow ourselves to do anything because it has to be perfect. But I've seen a lot of beautiful things that happened by accident. We should have the space to make mistakes because we are meant to be a laboratory for experiments and we don't know what will come out of them."

He also warns against creating 'mental boxes'. "Why do we have to put kids of the same age in the same class? It's not helping them prepare for the diverse environment they will experience when they leave school. And why do we want to put all the old people together in homes when research shows that this is the quickest way to shorten their lives? We have to learn to embrace diversity rather than uniformity."

Juan Andrés concluded by emphasising the need for greater unity. "I would like us to grow in unity by stopping these judgements we easily make about others upon the basis of 'truths' we think we understand. We really don't know, so let's live humbly in this unknowingness and open ourselves up for a deeper dialogue to co-create a truth that is bigger than ourselves."

Alan

OUTREACH

Bringing Auroville to Kolkata: the latest edition of the Journey of Auroville Festival

The Journey of Auroville festival, a project under the special grants from the Government of India for Auroville's 50th anniversary, was most recently held in Kolkata (earlier called Calcutta) from 28 to 31 January 2019. Previous editions of this festival were held in Baroda (AV Today, issue 351) and New Delhi (AV Today, issue 341).

Even from our initial scouting trips, it was clear that our approach for the Journey of Auroville festival in Kolkata, widely considered to be the cultural capital of India, would need to be tailored to the unique context of the city, where not only much of the population is already well-acquainted with Sri Aurobindo and his legacy, but also ready to deeply engage on the subject of Auroville. After all, Kolkata was the site of Sri Aurobindo's birth, of his rise to prominence in the nationalist movement, of his imprisonment for a year, and of intense spiritual experiences that heralded his transformation from freedom fighter to yogi.

During our encounters with the residents, the Bengali concept of *adda* – informal intellectual exchanges between people – was palpable to us as a casual remark would result in long conversations about Auroville's development challenges or debates over Sri Aurobindo's departure from revolutionary activity (all over several cups of tea). Facts and texts would be invoked to support statements made, not just hearsay or opinions.

The importance of literature and the written word could be seen all across Kolkata, whether in the street-side book sellers, the continued presence of the National Library of India in Kolkata despite the shift of the capital to Delhi over a century ago, or the verbose slogans graffitied on the walls of Jadavpur University.

In our previous festival in Baroda, our overall theme was 'reconnecting with Sri Aurobindo' and we particularly explored



"Turning Points" session with storytellers Roger, Ankita, Frederick, Uma, and Amy

expert-level connections between Aurovilians and the students and faculty from the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, where Sri Aurobindo was a professor. In contrast, the schedule for the Kolkata Festival evolved into a series of four evening events open to the general public and united by the theme of 'turning points', referring to Sri Aurobindo's own turning point from Aurobindo Ghose to Sri Aurobindo in Kolkata, the turning points in the lives of individual Aurovilians, and the turning point that this golden jubilee represents for Auroville as a whole.

The press conference took place a week before the opening of the festival. After the introductory videos and our overview of the festival, the thought-provoking questions from the assembled journalists set the tone for the rest of the festival. As it was the eve of the birthday of Subhas Chandra Bose, Bengal's revolutionary and much-celebrated hero who challenged the British during the Second World War with his controversial attempts to ally with Germany and Japan, there were a number of political questions about Sri Aurobindo as journalists fiercely asked if he was an escapist. This was swiftly rebutted by Ranjan Mitter of The Future Foundation School.

When the festival commenced on 28 January, we were able to incorporate these important themes into the series of events. Exploration of *Savitri* was a recurrent motif throughout the festival, as a way of connecting with the literary culture of Bengal through Auroville's own foundational literature. At the opening itself, a screening of excerpts from 'Savitri Around the World' started the events. Following Dr. Karan Singh's opening address, Grace Gitadelila and Savitri Maya performed selections from the original SEAS performance (Soul Encounters for the Auroville Soul). Vibrant video images from last year's performance at the Matrimandir set the backdrop for their dance, tracing the soul's evolutionary journey as portrayed in *Savitri*. And later in the festival, a preview of *Vast*, directed by Phillip Pelen Baldini and performed by Thierry

Moucazambo and Gopal Dalami, explored the quest to find one's inner 'vastness', a recurring theme in *Savitri* and Sri Aurobindo's other writings.

The literary theme continued with a donation of almost forty books written by Aurovillian authors to the National Library, as a first step toward establishing a regular contribution of Auroville's literary output to this national depository.

To create a forum for much-wanted discussion, two events were held: a storytelling session around the theme of 'turning points' at the Goethe Institut / Max Mueller Bhavan Kolkata, to give insight into the personal stories of Aurovilians, and a panel discussion at the Indian Council for Cultural Relations on the themes of cultural integration, unending education, social enterprise, and a no-money circulation economy.

Exchange also took the form of learning experiences for the Aurovilians

who were in Kolkata as festival contributors, particularly with the profound experience of visiting the Alipore Jail and Courthouse. Absorbing the meditative environment of Sri Aurobindo's jail cell or walking through the courtroom-turned-museum where Sri Aurobindo, his brother Barin, and 37 others were tried in the Alipore Bomb Case made us all recipients of Sri Aurobindo's greater legacy.

And exchange took an internal form in the diverse mix that comprised the festival participants. Old-time Aurovillian, volunteer, Auroville Foundation official, Governing Board member, and Auroville well-wisher worked together. People from the Kolkata community also came forward to contribute their skills and speak on behalf of Auroville: Ranjan Mitter chaired the panel discussion; renowned dancer Alokanda Roy performed at the Sri Aurobindo Bhavan in honour of Auroville; Darshan Shah of Weavers Studio organized an informal gathering; noted architect and business magnate Shanta Ghosh hosted a lavish lunch; Maina Bhagat of the famed Oxford Bookstore connected us with the pulse of Kolkata's cultural scene; and the author who served as our PR consultant, Arindam Basu, gave his own 'lay' perspective on Auroville during the storytelling event. On the institutional level, we were able to partner with the Sri Aurobindo Bhavan, the Alliance Française du Bengale, and the Goethe-Institut/Max Mueller Bhavan Kolkata.

We returned to Auroville with a new appreciation of Auroville's historical and philosophical origins and exciting prospects for future connections with the individuals and organizations that we had met. As we look ahead toward Sri Aurobindo's sesquicentenary in 2022, we hope that our two communities will be able to continue to celebrate our connection and mutual respect for Sri Aurobindo.

Hilary on behalf of the Journey of Auroville Organizing Team (Amy, Ankita, Hilary, Jürgen, and Ravi)



Dr. Karan Singh arriving at the Sri Aurobindo Bhavan to lecture on the 'Five Dreams of Sri Aurobindo'

Things are moving in the International Zone

The International Zone Coordination Team shared the International Zone's latest developments and future plans in an open community meeting in January. One day earlier, a separate presentation had been made on the European 'Cluster Concept'.

Without doubt, the main mover behind the International Zone development is Professor Andrea Cammarata from Italy. Andrea is a "Friend of Auroville" and a volunteer. Six months a year he works as a Professor at the Polytechnic University of Milan, the largest technical university in Italy; the other six months he works in Auroville, helping to develop the International Zone.

"It started about five years ago," says Andrea. "I had read a few books on Sri Aurobindo, The Mother and Satprem and then decided to visit Auroville. I was drawn to the town planning work and, in particular, to conceptualizing the International Zone". In collaboration with the International Zone Coordination Team (IZCT), the Pavilion Groups, L'avenir d'Auroville and Auroville

plans to treat and re-use part of the black water from these sources. In this way a blue environment in the form of ponds and streams can come into existence. The water will also allow for a green environment. "50% of this zone will be blue and green," says Andrea.

The presence of the villages is both a challenge and an opportunity. The International Zone will provide work opportunities and so benefit those living in the villages. Some specific shared services will be provided to allow the village to become more sustainable, which would be an advantage for all of us.

The challenge will be to stop the further development of the village into Auroville, and grow harmoniously together, although some areas in the village may need to be bought as and when the need for the Zone's development calls for it.

There are also two farms inside

others facilities. Around it were the pavilions of the states of India."

The cluster idea has been followed in subsequent designs of the Zone: by Roger, by Piero, by Helmut in his 'agora' concept for the European pavilions, and by Pino. The nation concept of which The Mother spoke is still fully alive, but it is now part of a continental-based clusters system.

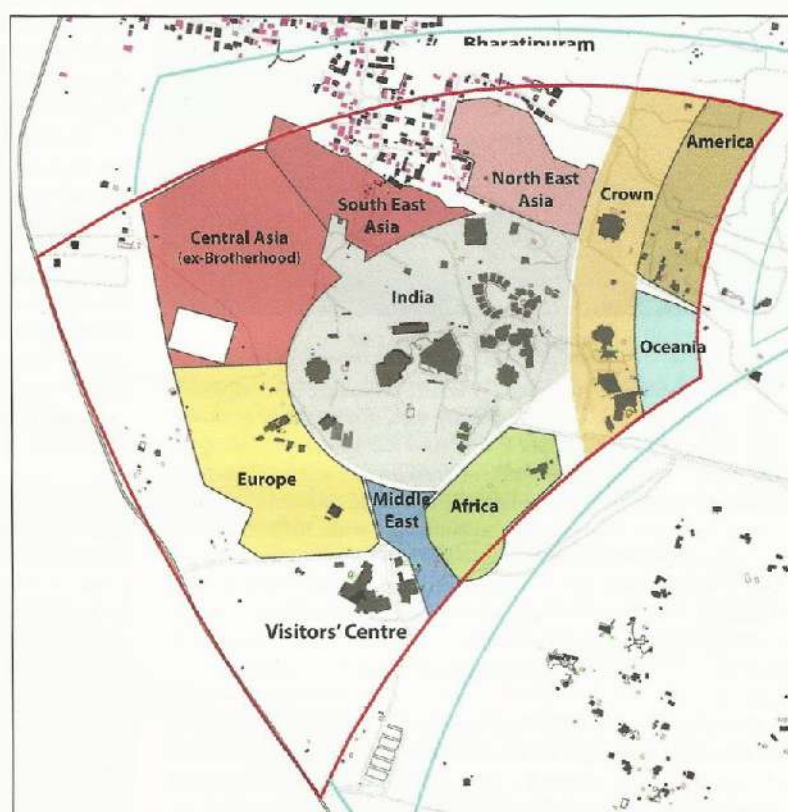
Andrea points at the changing world. "If you compare the present world situation with 30 years ago, you see immense changes. Since 1990, 34 new countries have come into existence. International integration is happening more than ever before. Entire populations have moved from one area to another. Europe consists today of 50 countries, Asia 48, Africa 54, Oceania 14 and the Americas 35. To imagine that all of them would have their own individual pavilion is very difficult. To bring together common functions in a central building, with smaller nation buildings around it, makes much more sense – also from the point of view of human unity." He mentions that each satellite can be different in size and adds that the nation soul does not necessarily have to be expressed through a building. "It can also be expressed through an artistic installation, or a particular garden, or by a monument. The Canadian Inuksuk is an example."

The cluster idea has now been enthusiastically accepted. Today, there is a European pavilion group, a North East Asia pavilion group (for China, Taiwan, Mongolia, Japan, and the Koreans); an African pavilion group (for the entire African continent); the Bratsvo or Brotherhood pavilion group (primarily for Russia, Ukraine, Belorussia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and the Caucasus countries); and an American pavilion group (for all the countries in the Americas). The pavilion groups for South East Asia, Oceania and the Middle East still need to be formed. At the centre of the International Zone is Bharat Nivas, the Pavilion of India, which, says Andrea, could also serve as the focal point for the pavilions of Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bhutan, Nepal, Myanmar and Sri Lanka.

But the composition of each cluster has not yet been finalized and is bound to remain flexible in the years to come. The Bratsvo cluster, for example, could also have satellites from the former Eastern Block countries, but some of these might prefer to find a place in the European cluster.

The economics of the Zone

While the construction of the central buildings and the satellites will have to be funded from donations, each cluster will need to be self-sustaining for its maintenance. How this is to be done is under discussion and needs further study. One possible source of income is tourism. The International Zone is envisaged as a place of interaction and continuous exchange between Auroville and the outside world and many day-tourists visiting the clusters and their eateries can be expected. But the Zone will also need cheap student and volunteer accommodation. "We learned that



Provisional map of the International Zone area

from the Africans, who insisted on having a place for exchange students. They started with safari camping, now they are going further. This is in accordance with The Mother's views on the Zone. Both in The Mother's vision, and in the 1968 and 2001 Master Plans, the International Zone is expected to host exchange and research between Auroville and the rest of the world. To fulfill this mission one needs a supporting infrastructure."

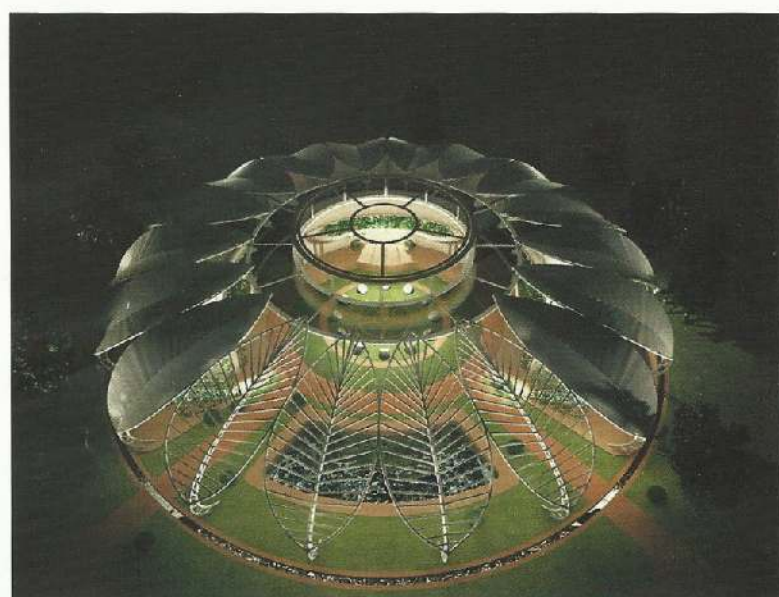
Towards a Detailed Development Plan

Asked if Auroville is ready for making the Detailed Development Plan (DDP) of the International Zone, Andrea briefly hesitates before answering, "Yes, absolutely". His hesitation, he says, is because some parameters are still to be fixed, such as the exact location of the focal points of each cluster. "There are some deviations from the earlier designs of Roger as the area has changed and the landscape is different. But there is nothing dramatic. So we can start the DDP. In the last three months I did an intensive

strategies, the ideas, the perspective, the possibilities of the area, all have to be worked out together and shared with the people who are interested. Only a joint effort has any chance of success."

But even before the DDP is finalized, work on the ground can start. Some of the Zone's infrastructure, such as the loop road, can be built now. Bratsvo can be given permission to start building the core of their cluster, and the African Pavilion group to build their dormitory and caretaker spaces.

Andrea warns that the DDP will have to be flexible. "Theoretically, the DDP will outline the order of the needs, such as fencing the area and making the loop road, but in practical terms it never works out like that. If suddenly someone comes with enough money to start this or that project, then things will happen in parallel. So perhaps a few cluster cores or pavilions will start to be constructed while the general infrastructure of the Zone is still in process. Of course, all that on the basis of a DDP which has been accepted by the community."



Conceptual plan of the future pavilion of Central Asia

team-building work. The IZ Tech team already includes eight or nine Aurovillian architects, seven international professionals, three planners, two landscapers and a green/blue planning unit. This is promising, though we may need to hire some outside experts. We also hope that the cluster teams will provide other professionals who can be included in the team".

But he stresses that the DDP cannot be made by experts alone. "We have to work with the people. The

Is getting community approval a concern? Andrea doesn't believe so. "The DDP of the International Zone might be more readily accepted by the community as they are participating in the process of its making. Participation is open to all those who want to be involved. In fact, we are asking more people to participate. They could be part of the Pavilion Group or of the IZCT and if they have also a technical skill, they can join the IZ Tech Team."

In conversation with Carel



Concept plan of the Bratsvo (brotherhood) pavilion

International, he gave form to what so far had just been a vague concept.

The work started studying the "huge collection of materials" on the Zone, in particular what The Mother had said about it. Then the area was analyzed in detail, and possible strategies for the future were defined. These included the water management; the Zone's overall landscape and a definition of how much green and blue space it should contain; the relationship with the village of Bharatipuram that has developed within the Zone; a full infrastructure plan; and the buffer needed to protect the Zone from the outside.

Water recycling has been given a primary place. Today, an estimated 7,000 people are visiting the Visitors' Centre, located on the outer border of the International Zone. This number is expected to increase dramatically. In the middle of the Zone is the village of Bharatipuram, which has an estimated 1,000 residents; nearby there is the village of Kottakarai where an estimated 5,000 people are living. The IZCT

the Zone: Ayyapaddi and Solitude. The IZCT considers their presence a blessing, as they are crucial in terms of water use and water recycling. Moreover, their location near the Edaiyanchavadi – Kottakarai tar road is a buffer for the buildings inside the Zone.

Clusters and nations

When The Mother spoke about the International Zone, she talked about national pavilions, each expressing what a nation had contributed to the evolution of mankind. This concept has partially evolved. Instead of large pavilions, the focus is now on clusters, each with one or more large buildings at its core with facilities that can be used by all, and the pavilions of individual nations as satellites around it.

"You find the seed of the 'cluster' idea in The Mother's approval of the winning model of the competition for Bharat Nivas, the Pavilion of India," says Andrea. "The central buildings (we can also call it a cluster) housed the auditorium, a restaurant, and



Sergei Kornlenko (with hat), the architect of the Bratsvo pavilion, and Andrea Cammarata (centre) on site



The cashew fruit and nut

It's that time of year again. Aurovillian eyes are burning, heads are aching, throats and noses are sore, and so many of us feel exhausted and nauseous. Yes, it's cashew spraying season again. And it is not a minor problem in Auroville, according to fresh data from the newly-formed Auroville initiative Healthy Cashew Network. The Network's community-wide 2018 health survey indicates that 42 per cent of respondents suffered headaches in last year's cashew season, 25 per cent experienced sore throats, and about 20 per cent suffered from itchy eyes, nausea and vomiting. Coughs, breathing problems and fever were all experienced. In summary, only seven per cent of 350 people surveyed said that they felt no symptoms at all.

Network member Marc was inspired to join the group when he was forced to move from his home in New Creation due to the pesticide spraying. "One morning I smelled something really strange, and it was really hurting my throat. We all had headaches. After talking to people, we realised what was going on." Marc shifted his family first to Quiet, and then to a house-sit in Grace, but it did not turn out to be the reprieve he'd hoped. "I thought, 'Now I'm going to be in Auroville and will be saved from that pestilence', but it was almost worse. The community is surrounded by cashew fields, some of them Auroville-owned, that are still being sprayed with pesticide."

Marc's house shifting experience is not unique. 11 per cent of surveyed community members said they left their homes in order to get away from cashew pesticide spraying last year. And even more significantly, more than 30 per cent of respondents said they wished to leave their homes, but could not because of various factors.

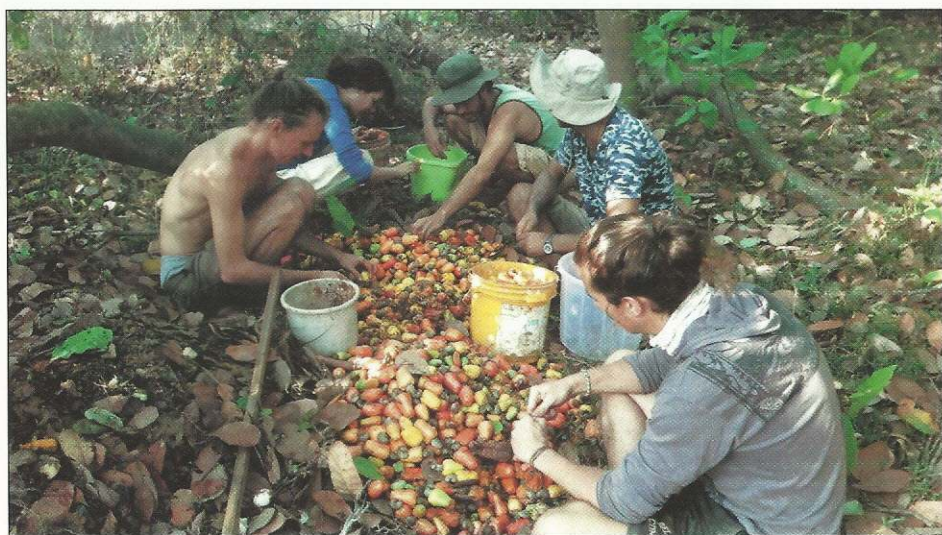
But Aurovillians' desire to drive down pesticide use comes up against a complicated nexus of local practices, stakeholders and larger forces. And if this story has a ring of déjà vu about it, your instincts are right. *Auroville Today* has covered the issue of toxic pesticide spraying in various articles over the last 25 years. Is cashew spraying a case of *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*? No, say some. The situation is worse now.

Rita, whose late husband Njal worked tirelessly to promote organic neem pesticide to local farmers between 2000-2012, points out that she and Njal also did a health survey about a decade ago. "The health effects are so much worse now," she says. "The symptoms are worse. The number of people saying they're affected has definitely gone up. And the chemicals used are much worse. In Njal's time, it was mostly Endosulfan being used on cashews. Endosulfan has a yellow label, which is bad enough. The pesticides they use now have red labels [the most poisonous]. The farmers now make a concoction by mixing up different pesticides."

Endosulfan continues to be one of the pesticides of choice for cashew cultivators in the Auroville area, even though it has been banned in more than 81 countries around the world. The toxic pesticide has also been banned in the neighbouring Indian states of Kerala and Karnataka, after it was linked to high rates of mental disorders, physical deformities and cancer in certain rural areas. Yet, farmers in Kerala continue to cross the state border to buy Endosulfan in Tamil Nadu, where it is still legal, and take it back to Kerala in bottles with fake labels. A ban on Endosulfan in Tamil Nadu is rumoured to be in the wind, yet the legal-regulatory process is slow and usually allows for a five-to-ten year phasing-out process. "Last year was extreme, far more than usual," says Network member Jasmin, about the use of Endosulfan in 2018's cashew season. "We heard an unconfirmed rumour that because it's going to be banned, the dealers dumped a lot of pesticide on the market."

Cashew plots and spraying

Why have cashews become such a popular local cash crop? Until 30 years ago, local farmers generally grew groundnuts and pulses on



The Kriya community harvesting cashews

The tangled web of cashew gi

their family plots. The local landowners embraced cashew trees when they found they were much less labour-intensive than traditional crops, and were well suited to the red laterite soil of Auroville's region. The crop also did not attract animals to destroy it, and it commanded cash value. Over time, more and more local landowners converted their land to the comparatively low-maintenance cashew crops, and something of a local monoculture has resulted.

As Auroville has bought up land over the decades, much of this has been land containing established cashew trees. The Auroville-owned cashew plots in the Greenbelt are generally stewarded by Aurovillian foresters. Stewards may choose to plant forest and give less priority to cashews, which has taken place in areas such as Pitchandikulam.

The 30 Auroville-owned cashew plots in the city area and outlying lands are managed by the Land Board. They consist of 1100 trees across 150 acres. For a number of years, the Board has leased out these cashew plots to local cashew cultivators in a tender process. The system was updated last year, whereby the first tendering round is announced on Auronet and is open to Aurovillians only. Bidders offer a certain amount for the lease on the plot, depending on the number of trees and the Land Board's estimate of the worth of the lease. Any remaining plot leases that are not taken up by Aurovillians are then offered to non-Aurovillians in a second tendering round. Last year, 17 people took up the 30 cashew contracts, and 87 per cent of these were Aurovillians. Each year, the number of leases available decreases, due to the development of Auroville's city on former cashew land.

Murugan, who has been working at the Land Board for 30 years, clarifies that people leasing Auroville cashew plots are told they cannot spray pesticides, and the lease clearly states that chemicals cannot be used. The Land Board, however, does not have the resources to monitor spraying on Auroville land. He refers to a "problem" on an Auroville cashew plot some years earlier. "We got some complaints [about pesticide spraying]. That's why we changed the system. That's why we give priority to Aurovillians now. If we tell them [not to spray], they mostly don't do it." Murugan explains the villagers' preference for spraying pesticide as being shaped by a belief that they will get more cashews when harvesting. "They say they will get 100 kg without spraying, but with pesticide, they get 150-200 kg."

While the Auroville-owned cashew plots can be subjected to measures to protect them from pesticide spraying, about 10 per cent of the land within Auroville's city area is not owned by Auroville. Most of this non-Auroville-owned land contains cashew trees that are harvested each year. There are also many cashew plots in the Greenbelt that are not owned by Auroville. Many Aurovillians believe that the use of pesticides is rampant on these non-Auroville owned plots, and some believe that pesticides are also sometimes sprayed on the Auroville Land Board-leased plots too. As Rita points out, it can be difficult to tell where pesticide clouds are coming from, and to know which plot is being sprayed. "It's one person's word against another's. No one really knows."

The Healthy Cashew Network has set up a What'sApp group to notify concerned people of spraying on plots in and around Auroville. It relies on group members to report any sightings of cashew spraying. "If someone notifies that spraying is going on, people who are sensitive can know to choose another route or wear a mask," says Patricia from the Network. These alerts are transferred onto a map which can be accessed online. Aurovillians are also encouraged to share photos of evidence of spraying.

The Network last year managed to collect pesticide samples and information from various sources in Auroville and neighbouring villages. With the help of the Environmental Monitoring Service in Auroville, the Network has compiled a 'rough guide' to the 14 most commonly used agricultural pesticides in the Auroville area. The majority of the pesticides used locally are classified as 'very toxic' or 'extremely hazardous', and many of them are used in suicides. The acute symptoms of toxicity of these pesticides are well documented globally, and include nausea, breathing difficulties, cramps, diarrhoea, blurred vision, burning and seizures. The chronic effects of long-term exposure include endocrine disruption and birth defects, and most of the pesticides have been linked to cancer. These effects are a major motivating factor behind the Healthy Cashew Network's goals of creating awareness and reducing spraying on Auroville land.

Pesticide spraying

While many Aurovillians believe the main perpetrators of spraying are people on the village-owned plots within the Auroville master plan area, not all village-owned cashew plots use pesticides. Some village-owned cashew plots within the Master Plan have converted to organic methods, due to their exposure to Auroville and the educational efforts of Dr Lucas and Njal over the last two or three decades. Ayyanar, Murugan's colleague at the Land Board, is one of the many Tamil Aurovillians whose family has long owned a plot of land inside Auroville's Master Plan area. Like many villagers at the time, his father farmed ground nut and lentils on the plot when Ayyanar was a child. About 25 years ago, when Ayyanar was a teenager, the family planted

cashews. "When I was staying in the village, I didn't realise these things [the dangers of pesticide spraying]. I think in about 2000, I sprayed twice with pesticide. After I got knowledge from Auroville that this is not good, I stopped it. I got information from *News and Notes*, and also from the man near Solar Kitchen [Njal]. After that I didn't put pesticide, not even neem oil. Now I feel my nose hurting in harvest time [from other people spraying]."

There are other Tamil Aurovillians like Ayyanar who no longer use pesticides on their family-owned cashew plots. Rita points to a number of local farmers who converted to neem oil thanks to her late husband Njal's educational campaign and his trial plot near Solar Kitchen that demonstrated that farmers did not make a loss by using neem oil. "Quite a few farmers bought the neem oil," says Rita. "We sold 200-300 litres, maybe even more. So it's that much less chemical pesticide in the atmosphere." Rita was unable to continue Njal's work after his death in 2012, and no one else has taken up the task. "I did ask FoodLink to take it over, but everyone was too busy to actively promote it. But if the neem oil is not available for farmers, what will they do?"



Njal proving information at his cashew trial plot

Ayyanar explains villagers' rationale for spraying. "Villagers do not understand the health advantages if they do not spray, and how it affects the air. Mostly they feel they get more money from spraying." However, Ayyanar claims that whether plots are sprayed with pesticide or not, they yield roughly the same amount of cashews and income – this is borne out by his own plot. "People don't really calculate whether they get less or more. It's just become a habit now. If you consider the costs of spraying, picking labour, water, bullock cart... it's about the same in the end." Harvesters like Ayyanar who do not use pesticides can sell their pesticide-free cashews for an extra Rs 20 per kg (Rs 150 per kg, compared to the rate of Rs 110-130 for pesticide-sprayed cashews). Yet the extra income for pesticide-free cashews does not appear to be a sufficient incentive for village cultivators to give up pesticides.

Ayyanar highlights the various ways in which pesticides are pushed towards farmers. When villagers visit the regional government Agricultural Society, they are sold pesticides at a 20-30 per cent discount, and the government may even give farmers loans to buy pesticide. Private agents also visit villages to sell pesticides, and radio advertisements extol their benefits. Banks often will refuse loans to farmers unless they agree to use pesticide on their crops. Jasmin from the Healthy Cashew Network labels this multi-pronged lobbying of farmers as "a big collective brainwash".

Priya, the farmer-founder of Auroville's Buddha Garden and also a Network member, largely agrees. She links the problem to the short-term thinking of everyone involved in the cashew growing and picking process. "So often it seems to me that people want to extract the maximum amount of money with the minimum amount of fuss from the land," she says. "Cashew trees don't need a lot of looking after, don't need extra water, and you don't even need a fence because cows and goats won't eat them. Often the people who own the trees don't have the time or inclination to do the picking. It's easier to sell the contract to someone else who will be happy to do that. Both groups of people want to get as much money as they can from the next harvest rather than worry about the long-term. This is understandable when people have school fees to pay. And the people doing the picking are told by the government, someone powerful, through regular radio ads, 'Now is the time to be spraying your cashews!' It's not surprising they become too scared not to spray in case they get a bad harvest and lose money. Especially as the tree owner is unlikely to have much sympathy for them." Priya says that if the pickers get sick as a result of spraying, they may perceive their ill health as transient and as a reasonable trade-off for the money.

rowing and pesticide spraying



CARTOON: LAURA

Rita also points to the complexities of the pesticide-awareness work she and Njal undertook amongst local land owners and cultivators. "We saw how strong these lobbies are," she says. "One question that cashew cultivators often asked us was, 'If the pesticides are bad, why is the government giving a subsidy on them?' Some people who worked in pesticide companies told us they had been made sick by pesticides. But they said, 'What else can we do? We need to do this work in order to earn our living.' This mentality is linked to poverty and miseducation."

These practices and beliefs play into the drawbacks of monocultures –

cashews having become, to a great extent, a monoculture in and around Auroville. Due to the lack of biological diversity, monocropping can create the spread of pests and diseases, which farmers then feel compelled treat with pesticide. Pesticides kill off more than just unwanted insects, they can also kill off vital pollinators. Monocultures also deplete soil health, forcing farmers to use chemical fertilisers to encourage growth and production, which depletes the soil further. These pesticides and fertilisers make their way into groundwater sources and the air, creating further pollution and further affecting insects, animals and human life.

Yet Priya, who has cashew trees at her Buddha Garden farm, claims that the risk of pests destroying fields of cashew crops might be overstated in the local area. She does not use any kind of spray, and instead relies on planting other trees amongst the cashew trees; crop rotation; and creating a diversity of bacteria in the soil and in insect life. She points to a university student's study on her farm. "She did a very elegant study and found there were far fewer pests when there were more species of insects. The more diversity, the fewer pests." Priya also says that her experience when bugs do arrive in the cashew orchard, is that they confine themselves to one tree. "We find the following year, the harvest on that particular tree is often very good. In that process, the tree builds up immunity and is less likely to get bugs again."

Cashew cultivation – viable models?

Some Aurovilians have started to take matters into their hands in order to minimise spraying. A few who live next door to locally-owned cashew plots make private arrangements with the plot owners to buy the entire harvested crop, on condition that the owner does not use pesticide. These Aurovilians may sell the cashews at a loss, but they see this as a way to avoid the toxic health effects of pesticides.

The Healthy Cashew Network proposes another model for Auroville communities. They encourage communities to collectively take up a cashew lease from the Land Board for a neighbouring cashew plot, and for the community to harvest the cashews themselves. Rama Narayana and Anandi, who are members of the Network, highlight the experiences of their own communities. Rama Narayana's community of Courage collectively took the lease of the neighbouring cashew plot in 2005, after many community members suffered ill health that they connected to pesticide spraying. "People had to leave the house for one or two months, and look for another place," says Rama Narayana. "It's a concern, not to live in one's own house. Children suffer more, it's unbearable for them."

After Courage community demonstrated its capacity to care for the cashew plot over the first two years, it was then permitted to integrate it into their community park, and they no longer pay for the lease. The cashew field now has walkways for adults and children to enjoy, and the community's wastewater treatment flow goes into the field. In order to cultivate diversity, other fruit trees, flowers and vegetables are grown there. The Courage cashew plot is maintained by the community's gardener supervised by the community, and one extra person is employed for a couple of months during harvest time. Most of the cashews are sold to a processing unit, and the money goes towards the garden's maintenance. "It's not much profit, but we don't calculate in that way," says Rama Narayana. "If nature gives us fruits, we should take care of its tree. We consider it to be part of our community life. It should be a model! Auroville should be self-sustaining! Since taking the lease, we have no complaints about people suffering from pesticides."

While Courage is a large community with the resources and full-time staff to manage the cashew field with relative ease, what are the possibilities for smaller communities that live near cashew plots? Anandi lives in the small community of Kriya which has 20 cashew trees. When the Kriya community observed the apples reddening and falling in harvest time last year, they decided to take responsibility for harvesting themselves. In peak season of April and May, about ten community members harvested cashews early every morning, and then separated the apples from the cashew nuts and washed, dried and stored them. The community sold most of the harvested cashews to processing units in Auroville, and will use the small profits to buy gardening tools. Some cashews were set aside for community use, and resulted in Anandi's delicious cashew balls that have delighted Aurovillian taste buds at community events in the post-harvest months.

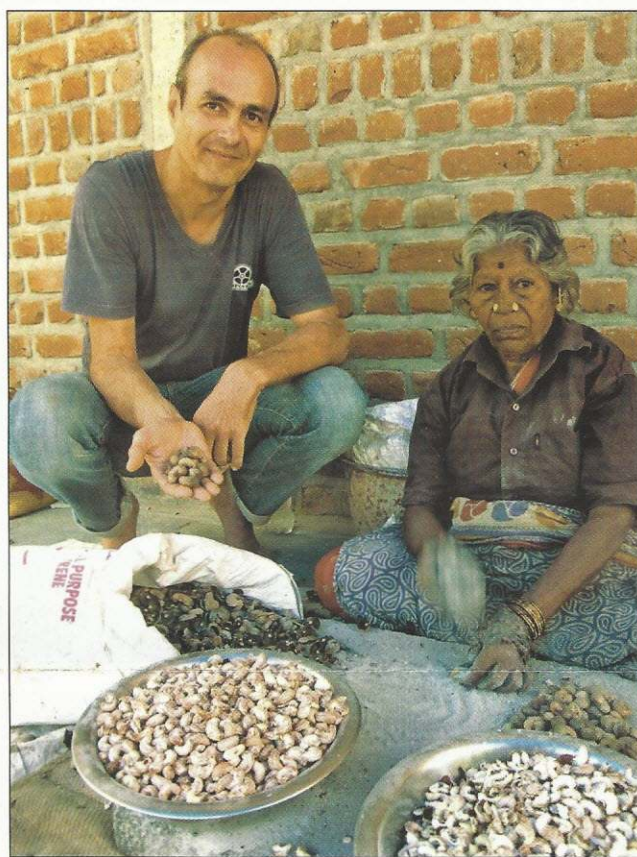
Anandi says the challenges of getting the community to join in with the harvest all boil down to attitude. "Some Aurovilians don't want to do hard work for a tiny financial reward, or do work they see as

being low status," she says. There is also the problem that many Aurovilians leave Auroville in the height of summer, when the cashew harvesting season is at its peak. "The harvest all comes down to a few individuals who are dedicated and can organise other people to help them with it," says Anandi. While Priya points to the difficulties of getting Aurovilians to commit to the "hot sticky work" of harvesting for the whole season, she emphasises that the community model can be strong when it is led by young people like Anandi who have the energy for coordination.

Jasmin summarises the model the Network proposes, saying, "The idea is that Auroville takes care of its own cashew fields and that they don't need to get leased out. In the meantime, one of the first goals of the Healthy Cashew Network is to avoid pesticides being sprayed on Auroville land. Some people tell us that, 'It's all about attitude – the more you think of pesticides, the more you get sick'. If I was a yogi, I could possibly protect myself energetically, but it doesn't change the fact that the earth is getting poisoned and species are disappearing. So it's an urgent call to action."

Cashew processing – viable models?

Some people refer to cashews as "gold" – a precious asset that always increases in value – and allude to the "commerce" that lies behind them, which is sometimes murky. But in conversation with



Steffen and Sellama processing cashews

cashew cultivators and processors in Auroville, it seems that the profits, at least for small-scale cultivators, are tiny in reality.

For Priya, cashews are a very small Buddha Garden sideline that doesn't translate into any sort of viable business model. She and her farm team do all the picking of the farm's cashew trees themselves. "We don't have enough cashews of our own to process," she says. "We don't want to process them ourselves, or to buy in stuff from outside. It's too much hassle, and knowing whether it's really organic or not is very difficult." The nuts are then taken to a processing place outside Auroville that does small batch production without machines, and where Priya's pesticide-free cashews are processed separately from other cashews. Priya then generally sells them through FoodLink, Auroville's own farm-grown food distribution system. "We don't make much money out of them but that's not what we aim to do. They are part of the mixed farming model that we have in Buddha Garden." For Priya, the cashew trees are an important educational tool, and she plans to make a video showing people how to care for and pick cashews.

Steffen was inspired to take up pesticide-free cashews from Auroville and sell them under his Joyoo Foods label, in order to drive down the amount of land in Auroville sprayed with pesticides. He oversees the processing of cashews from a few cultivators inside Auroville, but says he cannot manage to scale up beyond about 1500-2000 kg per year due to the expense. "I don't have much storage space. The workers are getting more expensive. We process manually, and I'm not interested in doing it in an industrial way. Cashews are now about Rs 200 [per 100 g] in the shop, and the price is rising. So it's a niche market." Steffen prefers manual processing, claiming it produces a higher quality than other cashews that are steamed and then shelled in cutting machines – the process used by the large industrial-scale players. But processing in a dry way, as he does, also means that more nuts break. Broken nuts have less value, which becomes another challenge to being profitable.

Steffen points out that the cheaper cashews currently flooding the Indian market come from Africa and other states in India, and these are harvested before the nut has fully matured. He also claims that impoverished people are exploited in outside processing units because they are willing to work for "any price." In contrast, he tries to pay his workers fair wages, sick pay, health insurance and pension fund, which he asserts is important for employment in Auroville. But he struggles to make the cashew part of his business profitable. "The profit margin is small on cashews," he says. "Cashews you either do for love, or you do on a big, big scale, where you can get some margin. Manual cashew processing is also very work-intensive. You need to take care of



The cashew harvest

workers, and you need a proper setup for storage and processing, with additional costs for the food license, health checkup for workers, etcetera. Cashews have a five per cent tax if they are unroasted, and 12 per cent if they are roasted. In addition, there's the shop margin, usually between 25-30%. And suddenly, a packet of cashews costs more than Rs 200, and then you feel ashamed to put this price on your label! But it's like this."

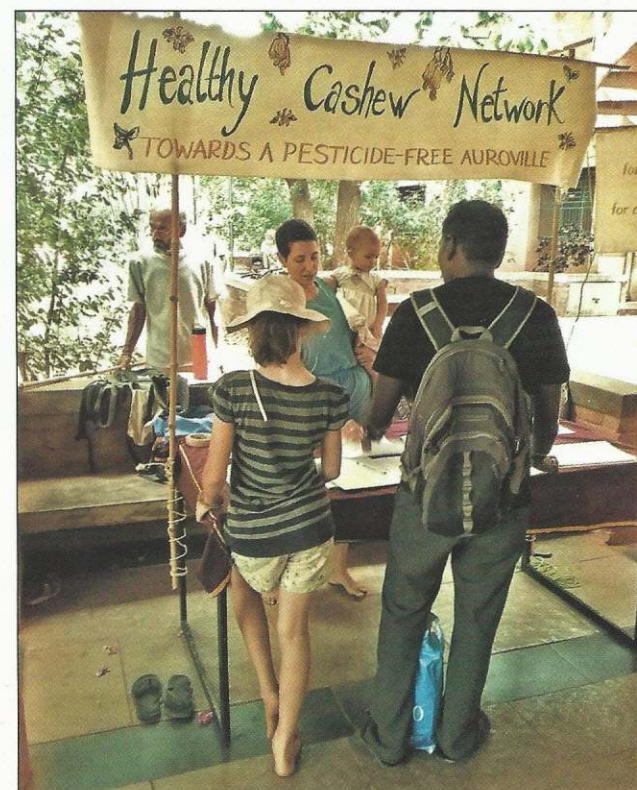
When Steffen and Priya describe the tight economics of being a small-scale cashew unit, it is hard to see how cashew processing and selling can be made viable as a business model, unless the business is very large scale. Within the small-scale operations in the Auroville area, the only person who clearly comes out ahead at the end of the season is the plot owner, who gains a flat fee each year for the privilege of having someone else harvest his cashew trees. He also largely avoids the toxic effects of spraying, while the people doing the harvesting suffer the most.

As for suggestions that Auroville could start its own cashew co-op, in which it could control more aspects of the production chain – such as plots, spraying, cultivation, processing and sales – Steffen's view is shaped by the need for a huge infrastructure. "It won't work unless someone donates a big sum of money to create a large building to store cashews, huge platforms for drying the cashews after harvest, and to pay watchmen and other staff. Instead, I think it should be done in a decentralised way. The Aurovilians who live next to outside-owned cashew fields can take the lease, arrange the workers for harvesting, and arrange security so that people don't steal the cashews. After harvest, the community can decide to either sell the cashews, or to get them processed through hired workers or through one of the Auroville cashew processors. The money or the processed cashews would then stay in the community. Auroville could start with a few fields, and show that it can be done, and each year add some more fields. And after some years, we might be able to show that we have avoided a good part of the spraying."

While the ban of Endosulfan in Tamil Nadu is in the wind, Jasmin from the Healthy Cashew Network cautions that this alone won't solve the problem. "Even if you ban one notorious pesticide, there are several others that are just as toxic," she says. "Endosulfan has a nasty smell, but now there are some pesticides in use that are odourless, so people will not be alerted by the smell, and can suddenly get sick. What is needed is a change of consciousness. Unfortunately this often only happens after facing serious health issues in one's family." Anandi points to the way in which China has shifted to solar power after top government officials' families were affected by smog and died. "But is that sustainable change?", she ponders. "We can't do it on big scale like in China, but we can do small things in the right spirit, and be a catalyst for a real change of consciousness."

In the meantime, the pesticide spraying season is gearing up in and around Auroville. Aurovilians are confining themselves indoors or donning masks. They're heading to the Integral Health Clinic to store up on the homeopathic remedy Okoubaka. They're signing up to the WhatsApp spray alert system, and taking circuitous routes to avoid spray clouds. Clearly, this is not a sustainable model. But the initiatives of those Aurovilians taking responsibility for looking after Auroville's cashews may hold hope for a way forward.

Lesley



The cashew network stall

Auroville in its 51st winter

Understanding Auroville with the mind is like grasping a handful of ash that wafts away in the breeze. You say something about it, then realize that the opposite also is true. Auroville is hard to grasp because, at its core, it exists somewhere that eludes the mind. It is the elephant which the blind men attempt to define by the part of the animal each touches. Skirmishes are common because our tools – our minds, our words – betray us and miss the target. They struggle to catch what Auroville means to those who have chosen this adventure. It is so hard to express outwardly what is in our thoughts, our inner vision.

I saw this challenge already in the 1970s when I lived in Auroville. Life is more polite, kinder and better dressed in today's Auroville. One's feet are less red, the body less tanned. But the issues remain the same though they change their colours, like chameleons. People defend positions that reflect their own work or their community, their friends, their past allegiances. We bring our egos to the table. We want our vision of Auroville, and we fight to defend it. Those impulses become personalized. Is there not a role for greater equanimity, a deeper surrender and less attachment to the outcome? At times, life feels impossible, but at other times we touch the heights of joy and love that will make Auroville the "City of Human Unity", whatever its population, whatever its speed of growth.

A personal note: Why, readers may ask, does he weigh in on Auroville issues, this ex-Aurovilian who has not lived here for decades? How can he understand how Auroville is evolving? I get it. Yet, an observer who has lived the highs and lows of Auroville – its crushing pressure, its magic synchronicities, the joy one feels at a quiet moment – can perhaps offer an insight that those who live it each day of the year might miss through their daily grind. When I come, I talk to many people and hear competing versions of Auroville. What I say is not negative, but a simple reflection back of what I hear. I keep returning because this bold, audacious experiment is my home too, if from afar, and the only real hope I see on this battered planet for the birth of a new mankind that may well save it.

In the bubbly high of last year's 50th anniversary, Auroville seemed to have finally emerged as an adult from its long years of puberty and preparation. There was a sense of miracle that, despite all the challenges along the path, Auroville IS! I had the feeling that renewed energy could go to the expansion of the town and ourselves in, as Sri Aurobindo wrote in *Savitri*, an "adventure of consciousness and joy".

However, this winter I have seen it with colder eyes, perhaps a reflection of the concerns of friends who say it is stuck, unable to move forward, with major issues to be solved in a social environment too complex for people to agree on solutions. Land.

Water. Infrastructure. Traffic. Dust. Housing. Manpower. Tourism. Village participation. Clashing visions. Financial haves and have nots. A missing management structure. In the outer Auroville, growth and dynamism are seriously stuck. Yet in the inner Auroville, people tell me, residents are moving forward just fine, plugging into the vibration of the future that Mother and Sri Aurobindo manifested in 1956.

For most of Auroville's life, I have sided with those who felt we must first build ourselves before we can build Auroville. I feared we might be making mistakes that would be there, in concrete, to stay. Why not wait until we are more enlightened, more intuitive, before we set out to build the city Mother described? Yet fifty years into the experiment, Aurovilians do not seem to have honed any great transformation in intuitive knowledge or decision-making as a collective, a community, other than a keener ability to listen to others and to express one's opinions with a kinder shine.

Mother joked that Auroville needs a government of divine anarchy. Auroville has got half way there; there is anarchy, but it is not divine. Sure, there is this working group and that working council and this selection committee. And there are any number of planning, moderating, arbitrating, and mediating panels, groups, councils. Auroville has been adjusting its systems for decades, tightening this screw, reevaluating that bolt, replacing this fixture for that one. Any idea more radical than these tinkering – from whichever sector – gets attacked by a tsunami of resistance and refusal before it even has a chance to be read, digested and discussed.

Auroville is a collective, a community, dedicated to "an actual human unity," as Mother said in the Charter. In such a community, the sharpened individual ideally submits to the collective good. But what is the collective good? Until some new birth yet unknown comes along, the best guide is the Mother, whose compass gives us the direction in which to move. As She often said, it is not this versus that. It is this *and* that. So, what is it we are building? In Auroville today, that often comes down to a simplistic Forest vs City, two poles with a lot of space in between, enough to find the way to solutions. So why not, Forest and City. Old timers and the young. Galaxy and Forests... and walkways through the forest and electric trams and open buildings and, frankly, who knows what will come along as the town evolves. It has to be that way. Aurovilians must give a little to have something greater. It takes compromise and collaboration, not bias and suspicion. Each one benefits, because the collective benefits. That's what Collective Consciousness is, in the material realm.

One morning last month, in the inner chamber, some words dropped into my head. "We make ourselves by making Auroville. We make Auroville by making ourselves." I thought perhaps my old friend, Ruud Lohman, sitting up there somewhere, was

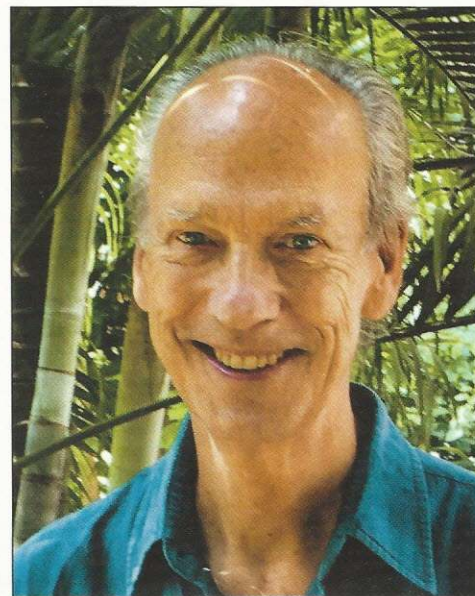
intruding into my meditation, for it is something he might easily have said. Mother probably said something like it, too. After all, both activities are crucial to the success of Auroville.

What does it mean to be "a willing servitor of the Divine consciousness", Mother's foundational expectation for all Aurovilians? Key to the Charter's first proposition, it is the common denominator expected of everyone living here. No one can judge where any Aurovilian stands as though on some spiritual barometer, but are all doing the work She expected, as spelled out in Gilles Guigan's timely two volumes, *"Auroville in Mother's Words"*? It is all there. There is no excuse for our challenges but ourselves.

In fact, everything she said is already woven into the writings of Sri Aurobindo. It is hard to say one is practicing Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga, it seems to me, without having read Sri Aurobindo's main works. When, in February 1972, I was asked to take up work for Sri Aurobindo's centenary celebration, Mother wanted to meet me. After staring into my eyes for a while, then offering up a broad smile, she asked, point blank, "Have you read all of Sri Aurobindo?" All. That was her expectation for this new arrival in Pondicherry. I said that I had finished three of his books. Good, she intimated with a more serious regard. "You can do this work, but set aside two hours every day to read all of his writings."

What She said is clear. The central duty of Aurovilians is to do the Yoga, and not some flippant "all life is yoga" toss off. If everyone absorbed Mother's words on Auroville and lived by them, I doubt this budding town would be stuck in a stalemate. The apparent intractability of issues, the stubborn resistances, can evaporate, if there is a will to do it.

As for the city, I see only one solution. Each person needs to break down her or his inner and outer walls, move to the centre and find collaboration and compromises rather than refusal and stubborn persistence. In another era, I was among those who fought to conserve the exact dimensions of the Inner Chamber, another of Auroville's long history of skirmishes. I thought there was an occult imperative to it. Besides those dimensions, Mother saw four zones to the city, a silent park in the middle, and the refuge that has become the Matrimandir. When Roger presented the Galaxy model, with its lines of force, She approved it, and it has been evolving ever since. (It had enough yantric power to convince me to move from London to Auroville nearly 50 years ago.) But I cannot believe that other aspects of the plan have such occult resonances. Sixteen stories, or eight stories... does it really matter? I believe Mother pulled the number of eventual residents as 50,000 out of the air, not out of some Akashic Record or an inner vision. Isn't it possible to think of the "city"



Roger Toll

as something more intimate, given the realities on the ground today? Or Auroville could add in the population of the villages that enter our Green Belt. Let's keep the roads and general scheme of Roger's plan, but adjust where needed, with greater fluidity and flexibility. Mother was practical, and She was flexible where plasticity was needed. Can't we work out the near future without it becoming another Hundred Years War, with all the damage the internal battles leave in their wake?

Aurovilians need to believe that their neighbours, their brothers and sisters, are willing to collaborate and to work out details as comrades, not enemies. We are all learning what it is to become something that we weren't before. An old friend said, "I don't believe I have met a 'True Aurovilian', by Mother's definition. I have only to look at myself." When one regards the world today – more and more convulsive, with darkness menacing everywhere – one thinks of Mother's observation that the world's problems are all present in India, and that Auroville will be the place to solve them. Would Mother still say that were She to reappear?

Auroville was meant to remake the world... and we, to remake ourselves? If Aurovilians can agree to follow Mother's Dream, putting aside parochial positions, the project can move forward. But something has to change. That change, I'm convinced, has to be in ourselves. Without it, Auroville's soul is in danger, and Auroville's future.

Roger Toll

From 1972 to 1979, Roger Toll worked at Matrimandir, in publications, on governance issues and with Satprem. His outside career has been in journalism. Returning often, he remains a keen observer of Auroville's growth and development.

ENVIRONMENT

Minimizing our waste

We can learn quite a lot about a community by observing what its members consume; and even more telling is what they throw away! Whilst living in Europe, I was often quite astonished to find perfectly usable, sometimes even brand new, items discarded in rubbish bins and, on occasion, even felt compelled to rescue an object and find a good home for it!

The idea of non-recycled waste is simply not conducive to a balanced, holistic way of living. If we look to Nature as our teacher, we see that everything is reused and recycled as part of the wonderfully perfect cycle of life.

Living a relatively simple existence in a forest community, I feel a deep sense of satisfaction in composting all of our food waste, lighting a ceremonial fire to burn our paper, and then collecting the ash and returning it to the soil where our vegetables and fruit can then grow. We aim to use minimal plastic and wash it before placing it in the recycling bin. Glass jars are reused and metal cleaned and recycled. However, there is still much room for improvement.

One of the things I love about living in India is that there is still a 'make do and mend' culture here (although, sadly, this seems to be slowly diminishing). We are blessed to have so many skilled artisanal craftspeople, from shoe makers to carpenters, to tailors and metal workers who can, at affordable rates, repair our broken or torn items so that we can continue to use them and so avoid sending them to landfill. Sometimes, however, repairing and



A waste dump in Kullapalayam awaits cleaning out

reusing just isn't an option.

So how, then, can we become more effective at reducing and recycling our waste products? Well, education can help enormously, and in Auroville we are fortunate to have a dedicated team of eco-warriors who not only collect and recycle the waste from as many as 10-12 thousand people every day in the peak season, but also help to educate us on how to become more conscious consumers, and why it is so important to carefully segregate our waste. This team is the Auroville Eco Service, and is comprised of six ladies who sort the collected waste, one driver, and team

managers Kali and Palani who oversee the running of the unit.

The Auroville Eco Service is primarily a waste management unit which collects from 350 locations in Auroville, including schools, businesses, housing communities and farms, and processes approximately 9 tons of waste per month. It practises micro segregation of that waste into no less than 80 different categories. Some items are actually redirected rather than recycled, as the Eco Service actively supports anyone with innovative 'upcycling' ideas and will diligently collect any specifically requested items which can be put to

good use in this way. It caters not just to Aurovilians, but invites all who wish to manage their waste responsibly to use the service.

Talks on waste management and guided tours of the waste processing unit are given to all interested parties from local schools, universities, Auroville volunteers and government representatives. Palani visits local villages to educate on why responsible waste management is so crucial for the wellbeing of everyone living there. He explains how sickness inevitably ensues when toxic waste mountains are left to eventually contaminate ground water, which in turn will poison the drinking water of future generations. He gives the example of how fish are poisoned by this waste and how those who then eat that fish will become ill.

I was fortunate to have the chance to speak briefly with Palani and Kali about their work, and felt inspired by their enthusiasm and dedication. It was heartening to learn that they have witnessed marked improvements in recycling habits in the last couple of years, both of residents in Auroville and its neighbouring communities.

With knowledge and understanding we can all learn to make better choices as consumers. From my chat with Kali and Palani, I learned that simply avoiding tetrapaks and the multi-layered packaging such as silver foil-lined crisp packets which are prevalent today, can make a big difference.

A truly conscious society produces zero waste, and this is precisely the goal that Auroville has set for itself.

Fiona

The Process of the Integral Yoga

It took Paulette Hadnagy twelve years to compile the material for this book from The Mother's writings, she writes in her book announcement. Paulette, who has already published three books on Auroville during The Mother's years, seven compilations on selected aspects of Sri Aurobindo's and The Mother's teachings, and an eighth on Advaita vedanta and the Integral Supramental Yoga, felt the need 'to return to the centre' by publishing this book. It features the complete path of Integral Yoga, in all its details and complexities, presented as a comprehensive, all-embracing view of a journey that brings about the three major transformations: the psychic, the spiritual and the supramental which crowns the entire process.

All The Mother's texts have been taken from the Collected Works, Edition 2003. As an Appendix, and the crux of the book, Paulette has added a chapter on Integral Yoga and the Triple Transformation, a compendium to highlight the transition from spiritualization to supramentalisation as expounded by Sri Aurobindo.

The book, which has been published with a donation from the 50th Anniversary Grant of the Government of India, is dedicated to the sadhaks of Integral Yoga, to those who, in The Mother's words, "feel that their heart extends further than the limits of their own person and family, that their thought embraces more than small personal interests and local conventions, all those, in short, who realise that they belong not to themselves, or to their family, or even to their country, but to God who manifests Himself in all countries, through mankind, these, indeed, know that they must rise and set to work for the sake of humanity, for the advent of Dawn."

Carel

The Process of Integral Yoga, 500 pages, price in India Rs 450. Available from Auroville bookshops, Auroville.com, SABDA and Vak.

The English of Savitri Volume 5

Savitri Bhavan has published its fifth volume of *The English of Savitri*, which deals with the first four Cantos of Book Two, the *Book of the Traveller of the Worlds*, the longest chapter of *Savitri*. The book is based on transcripts of classes given by Shradhdhavan in 2011, and contains detailed explanations about the vocabulary, sentence structure and imagery, to help a deeper understanding and appreciation of the poem which the Mother has characterised as "the Supreme revelation of Sri Aurobindo's vision." As a supplement, the book contains brief summaries of Cantos Five to Fifteen of Book Two.

Interestingly, Shradhdhavan takes up in her introduction the challenge to discover the identity of the Traveller of the Worlds. He is named Aswapati, the Lord of the Horse, but is Sri Aurobindo here describing his own yogic development? The Mother, in a conversation with Huta, said "This is the description of one of those who are not purely human, but whose origin is far higher ... and who come upon earth to help the whole of humanity to rise towards the highest consciousness." Shradhdhavan, after a lengthy evaluation, finds that "when we read these magnificent lines, we cannot help applying them to Sri Aurobindo himself." She includes a personal experience. "When I once wrote 'Aswapati can be seen as Sri Aurobindo himself', my beloved teacher Amal Kiran corrected me by adding the words 'an aspect of' before Sri Aurobindo's name". And she concludes that the poem is an expression of Sri Aurobindo's and many of The Mother's own experiences.

With the publication of this volume, one more step has been made towards the publication of Shradhdhavan's complete talks on the English of Savitri. *Book One - The Book of Beginnings, Book Three - The Book of the Divine Mother, Book Seven - The Book of Yoga, and Book Ten - the Book of Double Twilight* have been published. We hope that in the near future we may announce the publication of her explanations of the subsequent cantos of Book Two, and of the remaining Books of *Savitri*.

Carel

The English of Savitri Volume 5, 300 pages. Price in India Rs 550. Available from Savitri Bhavan, SABDA and Auroville bookshops

Henk van Putten

Henk (Hendrik van Putten) of Petite Ferme left his body on February 16th at the Pondicherry Institute of Medical Sciences, due to an asthma induced lung complication that flared up after his recent return from Holland. He was 82.

Henk, and his late wife Agnus Gastmans, both accomplished artists, regularly visited to Auroville since 2001 and joined in 2004. They settled in Petite Ferme where they created their art. Henk was a well-known designer and sculptor, and worked with various materials such as steel, stone, bronze and wood, which formed the building blocks of his sculptures and multi-dimensional objects. A number of his large structures are found all over Auroville, in the Visitors' Centre, along the roads, in gardens and other places. Henk was totally dedicated to his work and was a respected artist participating in exhibitions and art fairs across Europe. In 2014 his work 'Stretching' won the Liu Kaiqu Excellence Award, Wuhu, China.

Henk's remains were buried at the Auroville burial grounds on the afternoon of 19 February. A short interview of Henk talking about his work can be found at goo.gl/FwqSvY

Auroville 1968 -2018 glimpses into 50 years of photographic archives

How can you encompass something as complex and as multi-layered as Auroville? You can't, of course. But it may be easier to capture something of this extraordinary adventure through images than through words. It is significant, then, that this large compilation of Auroville photographs taken over the last 50 years and compiled and worked upon – a huge task in itself – by Olivier Barot has a minimum of explanatory text.

Many of the photos are black and white and this, combined with the large format (34.5 x 25 cm), gives a unique sense of the texture of life here. We are taken from the very beginnings of the project in 1968 up to the water ceremony in the Amphitheatre that celebrated Auroville's 50th year.

On the one hand, there is something timeless about these photos, like the ancient landscapes or the luminosity of countless faces and bodies. On the other hand, there is a distinct sense of progression. In the early days, Aspiration appeared a precarious interloper in the larger landscape of rural Tamil Nadu, but within a few years the ambitious statements of Last School and Auromodèle have risen from the laterite.

But it is the images of the progress of the Matrimandir which best chart the toil, dedication and aspiration of all those who worked upon it. From the few pioneers awkwardly scraping the earth at the very beginning, via the collective concretings, to the glorious images of the completed interior many years later, one experiences the gradual manifestation in matter of a vision which drew people from all over the globe.

This is more than an interesting collection of photographs. To turn these pages is to experience something of the joy, sweat, intensity, beauty, determination, creativity and, above all, aspiration for something else, that has created what is best in the Auroville of today.

Olivier has done a fine job. This major offering is a fitting conclusion to Auroville's 50th year.

Alan

Auroville 1968 – 2018: glimpses into 50 years of photographic archives. 448 pages, published by Sri Aurobindo Institute of Educational Research, 2018. The book was made possible by a grant from the Auroville Foundation. It will be available in due course from Auroville bookshops and on Auroville.com

Auroville Smart City of Another Kind

"I want to insist on the fact that this will be an experiment, it is for making experiments – experiments, researches, studies."

The Mother on Auroville

Fifty years after the foundation of Auroville, it may be legitimate to ask whether the vision contained in these words has translated into reality, write the book's editors. This is the aim of this book, to look at the various experiments conducted in Auroville without trying to hide their shortcomings. And the editors reflect if Auroville is a Smart City – not as conceived by the Government of India, but 'a smart city of another kind'. As Minister of State for Housing and Urban Affairs, Shri Hardeep Singh Puri writes in his foreword to this book, "It encapsulates the essence of not only what Auroville is, but more importantly, what Auroville is about – the existential reality of human life – co-existence of all humans and life forms in homeostatis."

Auroville is a different type of a smart city – most importantly in the integral development of the individual, but also in specialized fields such as environment, energy, the varied manifestations of the community's ideals, and reaching out to those living around Auroville. On each of these topics different authors have written essays. The editors Christine Devin, Claude Arpi and Alain Bernard have in addition enriched the book with many interviews.

One of the things which sets this book apart is that all photos have been printed in black and white. Recommended reading.

Carel

Auroville, Smart city of another kind, 220 pages. Published by Auroville Press. Price in India Rs 640. Available from Auroville bookshops and at Auroville.com

The Dawn of Auroville 1964 -1973

A brief history in photographs

The Dawn of Auroville, which is published by the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, is a book of early photographs along with an outline history of Auroville's conception, inauguration and growth during the Mother's lifetime.

The project was conceived and initially researched by the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Archives photographer, Kiran Kakad, who chose photographs from the Ashram and Auroville Archives. He worked closely with Gilles Guigan of the Auroville Archives in preparation of the text.

This book is a valuable resource in a number of ways. The early photographs emphasise the challenge of the largely barren and eroded landscape that confronted the first pioneers. It also points up the important role that the Ashram and the Ashram school students played in surveying the newly acquired land, constructing the first roads and in organizing the inauguration ceremony, a role that is sometimes not fully acknowledged or understood in histories of Auroville. There are also photos of Ashram students and Aurovilians working together on the excavation of the Matrimandir.

It is also interesting to see how many senior Ashramites attended the dedication ceremony and foundation stone ceremonies for the Matrimandir, an indication of the importance that Mother attached to the project.

The book also contains participants' memories of the inauguration day, contrasting images of the early days and the present Matrimandir and gardens, and Mother's indications about the aims and ideals of Auroville.

This beautifully produced book helps deepen our understanding of the close cooperation between the Ashram and the early Aurovilians that helped overcome the challenges and strengthened the aspiration of those who worked tirelessly to materialise Mother's dream in those early years.

It also represents a wonderful example of how that cooperation has continued to the present day. As Kiran Kakad puts it, "The whole endeavour (of producing this book) was a very warm and memorable collaboration between the Ashram Archives and the Auroville Archives which ended in a beautiful book and a strong bond of friendship and love between our two communities".

Alan

The Dawn of Auroville 1964-1973. A Brief History in Photographs, 236 pages. Published by the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department, 2019. Printed at Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press. Price Rs 850.

TOURISM CORRECTION

The article on Managing Tourism that appeared in *Auroville Today* # 354 of January 2019 contains an erroneous income figure from the Visitors' Centre Parking. The correct figure for the month of November is Rs 4,41,860.

The article gives the impression that Auroville has no control over the traffic generated by day tourists. The reality is quite the opposite. Check-posts and a large visitors park at the periphery from where people can only access Auroville on foot, cycle or dedicated transport, go a very long way to protect the city area from the impact by cars and buses.

Nicole, manager of the Visitors Center

PASSINGS

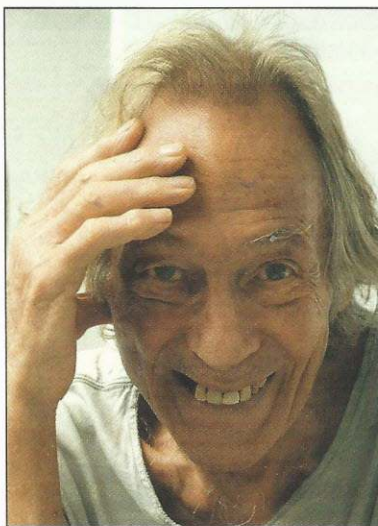
Devayani

On February 11, Devayani (Augusta) Martizi, Italian, left her body in Italy at the age of 72.

Devayani came to Auroville from Findhorn in 2010 and became an Aurovillian resident in August 2011. In recent years she lived in Swayam, and while being involved in quite a few activities, her main work was in PTDC's kitchen as well as at Matrimandir. She also spent much time at the Ashram.

She had been somewhat unwell the last half year and left Auroville in December to have a check-up in Italy, where her health deteriorated.

Friends describe her as joyful woman, a person full of light, who was extremely happy and grateful to know Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, whom she called her true parents.



Birthday week, February 21-28

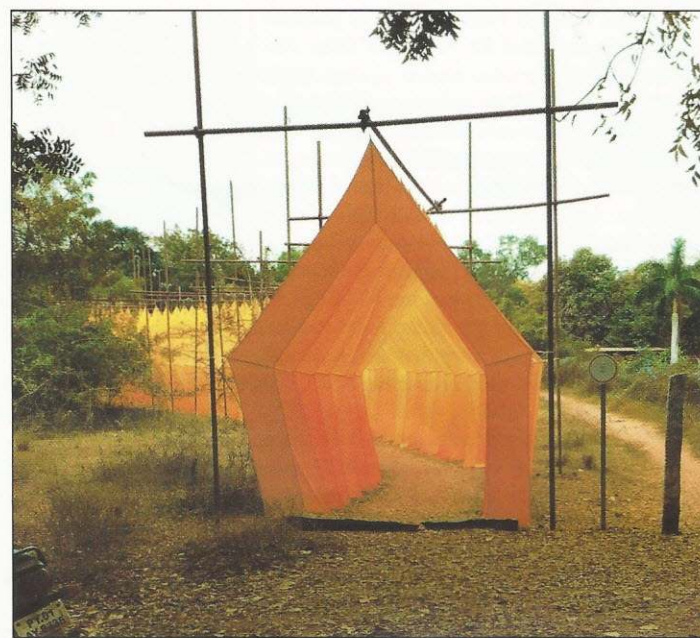
PHOTO: ANNEMARIE



Birthday bonfire design below the Urn



Tibetan monks creating a sacred sand sculpture at the Tibetan Pavilion



Art installation 'Cloth, Light, Wind' by Auroson at the Town Hall



Flower show at Savitri Bhavan



The first tree is planted in the Garden of the Unexpected



Devasmita dances at the inauguration of new Kalpana community



At the Crafts Mela in the Youth Centre

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Auroville Today does not necessarily reflect the views of the community as a whole.

PHOTO: MIMI