

Auroville's 50th anniversary

On February 28th 2018, Auroville will celebrate the anniversary of its 50th year. The occasion presents an unprecedented opportunity to honour the birth and vision of Auroville, to increase the recognition of its relevance for India and the world, to attract people of all ages from India and abroad to visit Auroville and participate in the events, and to document and share its journey of 50 years.

The Chairman of the Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation, Dr. Karan Singh, who once described Auroville in Parliament as an 'arrow shot into the future', writes: "Auroville is poised for significant growth while moving towards its Golden Jubilee for which a broad array of projects has been planned."

In 2015, Auroville's 50th preparatory team was beginning to be deeply involved in envisioning what Auroville's 50th birthday could look and feel like. As the team collected and sorted through dozens and dozens of ideas and proposals from the Auroville community and from friends around the world, a visualization of how the celebration could take place came to them and this was entrusted to a newly constituted Envisioning Committee to take forward. This new committee, which consisted of two members of the Governing Board, one member of the International Advisory Council and two Working Committee members, took the recommendations of the 50th preparatory group, and evolved a comprehensive programme for the occasion. In December 2016, the Governing Board submitted this finalized proposed programme to the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), requesting funding through a special grant.

The total budget requested was 28.5 crore rupees (approximately US\$ 4.3 million) and covered 17 different areas. These included symbolic ceremonies, Auroville presentations in India, conferences, cultural offerings, afforestation projects, a youth hostel and events, an Auroville fair, art installations, celebrations with the neighbouring villages, collaboration with UNESCO, as well as the release of a postal stamp and a commemorative coin. Following the initial budget proposal, many months of juggling with different scenarios took place as we were unsure how much the Government of India would be willing to provide. Budgets for 20 crores, 10 crores, and 2 crores (US \$ 3 million, US \$ 1.5 million and US \$ 300,000) were carefully prepared.

In order to organize and plan this enormous and invaluable task, the Working Committee asked Chali, Fabienne, and Frederick (as well as Marianna who initially took part) to become the Core Organization Team. Their job is no easy one, for it includes preparing detailed plans, planning event coordination, administration, dealing with media and communications, liaisons and public relations, as well as documentation and information dissemination, and finally monitoring and evaluation. Additionally, as India's Prime Minister Mr Narendra Modi has in principle accepted an invitation to join in the celebration, the anticipated level of activity has increased even further.

In August, the MHRD forwarded some questions regarding the proposed special grant.



In a General Meeting on September 25th, Auroville residents were informed about the ongoing preparations for Auroville's 50th anniversary

A response to these questions has been sent but Auroville still awaits news regarding the total amount that may be sanctioned. In the meantime, the 50th core team continues to work on a basic celebration packet, called the 'bare bones' budget, which currently totals 75 lakhs (approximately US \$ 115,000). Soon, the team will commence additional internal and external fundraising.

Not all Aurovilians rejoice at the prospect of this massive celebration, but when the 50th team organized a meeting at the Unity Pavilion on the 25th of September to provide updates and seek additional support and involvement from the community, people stepped forward with offers to carry and manifest our aspiration for a beautiful celebration. The calendar of tentative events is rapidly growing. When February's menu unrolls, there will be food for all palates; elaborate and grandiose, as well as quiet and refined.

Frederick, a pioneer, active ambassador of Auroville, and member of 50th core team reflects: "Half a century in the becoming. My first vision of Auroville was in the Nataraj Temple in Chitambaram. Floating on the dark waves of a heaving sea I looked back and saw the black contours of the coast with a golden glow of a rising city on the hill. I knew I was permitted to make landfall after years of wandering. The first work The Mother gave me was to build a permanent house with cement and bricks to show to the world that we are here for good. That was the rooting. Now comes the spreading, reaching up and out wide to become partners to the world. India is home and nourishment; the nations of the world our family. I sense the same mounting wave to carry us to our next manifestation - let us surf it together."

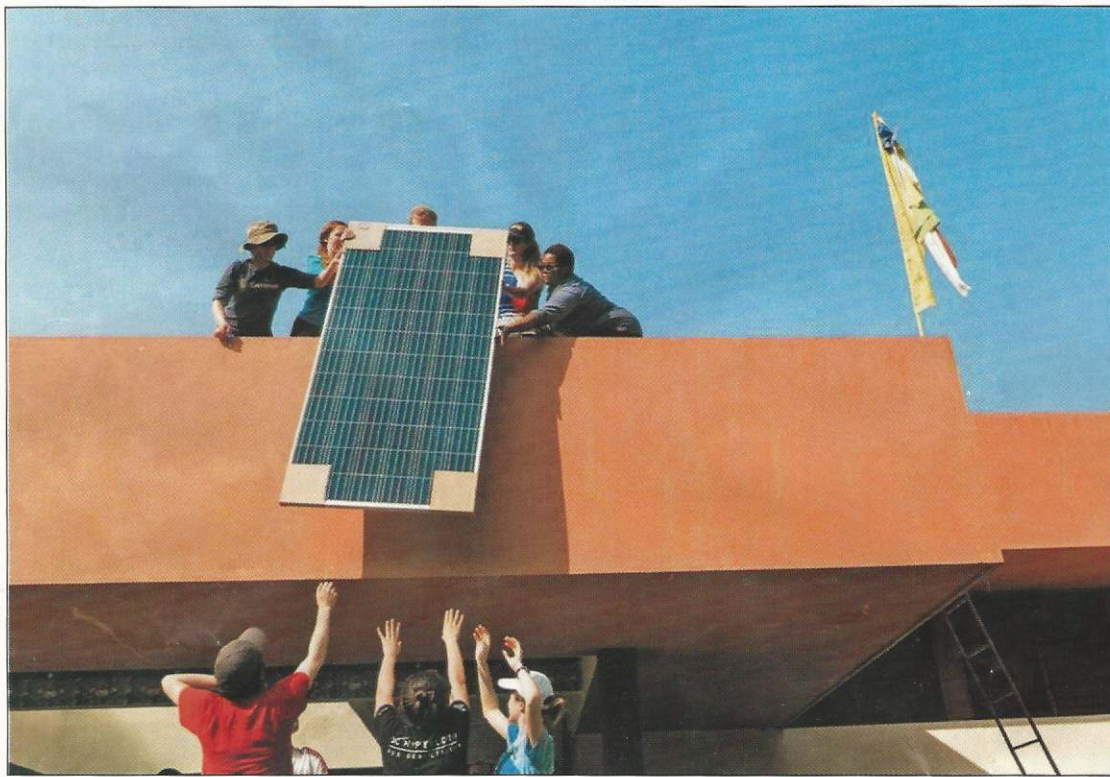
Inge van Alphen

List of confirmed projects - prior booking may be required

Events	Category	Venue	From	To
November 2017				
Auroville Expo	Conference	Unesco building - Delhi	21-Nov.	24-Nov.
Auroville Expo	Conference	Indira Gandhi Centre for Arts - Delhi	22-Nov.	25-Nov.
Auroville Expo	Conference	Sri Aurobindo Ashram - Delhi	26-Nov.	
Cité de l'architecture et du patrimoine	Exhibition	1 place du Trocadéro - Paris	11-Nov.	
December 2017				
Auroville Film Festival	Film Festival	Various locations	16-Dec.	23-Dec.
Auroville Kino Kabaret	Kino Festival	Centre d'Arts	17-Dec.	20-Dec.
Visible / Invisible	Exhibition	Centre d'Arts	7-Dec.	23-Dec.
MagzAV Special 50th Edition	Publication			
Youth Fair	Fair	Youth Center		
Art Installation	Exhibition	Matrimandir Garden	24-Dec.	1-Jan.
January 2018				
Art for Land	Exhibition	Unity Pavilion	1-Jan.	15-Feb.
Auroville Potters Market	Exhibition	Visitors Center	26-Jan.	28-Jan.
Walk of Hope	Conference	Belgium	28-Jan.	29-Jan.
Trashion Show	Awareness			
Clean up Campaign	Awareness			
Classical & Bulgarian spiritual songs	Musical			
Kolama Sacred Mandala Workshop & Festival	Cultural	Mohanam Campus		
Pongal Festival	Cultural	Ilaigarkal		
February 2018				
3rd AV & Bio Regional Youth Camp	Cultural	Various locations		
Bamboo Installation - Mother's Symbol	Cultural			
4th AV & Puducherry Village Festival	Cultural	Mohanam Campus		
Auroville Sisters	Musical		10-Feb.	10-Feb.
Auroville Marathon	Sports	Visitors Center	11-Feb.	11-Feb.
Exhibition at Janaka House (Ravana)	Exhibition	Janaka House	14-Feb.	14-Feb.
Panorama of Indian Cinema	Film Festival	Bharat Nivas	15-Feb.	17-Feb.
SEAS	Performance	Matrimandir Amphitheatre	17-Feb.	17-Feb.
Piano recital of western classical music	Musical	CRIPA		
Birthday Week Events - February 21-28				
Mother's Birthday	Cultural	Matrimandir Amphitheatre	21-Feb.	
The Bridge	Conference	Various locations	22-Feb.	27-Feb.
Savitri around the world	Literary	Savitri Bhavan	25-Feb.	26-Feb.
Youth Choir	Musical		23 or 26 Feb	23 or 26
Auroville's Birthday	Cultural	Matrimandir Amphitheatre	28-Feb.	
Water Ceremony	Cultural	Matrimandir Amphitheatre	28-Feb.	28-Feb.
The Auroville Choir	Musical	Matrimandir Amphitheatre	28-Feb.	28-Feb.
Commemorative coins and stamps	Commemorative			
Human Chain	Cultural	Crown Road	28-Feb.	28-Feb.
Olivier's Exhibition	Exhibition	Visitors Center		
50 Poems from Auroville	Literary			
Celebration of the European House	Cultural	International Zone	28-Feb.	
Art Installation	Exhibition	Matrimandir Garden	21-Feb.	28-Feb.
Auroville London Exhibition	Exhibition	SOAS London		
March 2018				
The Auroville Choir	Musical	Bharat Nivas	3-Mar.	3-Mar.
The Auroville Choir	Musical	Bharat Nivas	4-Mar.	
Auroville Tango	Performance			
Auroville Bamboo Festival & Seminar	Ecological	Bamboo Center		

Auroville Consulting

Auroville Consulting is acquiring a considerable reputation in India for its work with State, Central government and international agencies, as well as academic institutions but it is also contributing its expertise to Auroville. What is its work, and how is Auroville Consulting organised?



Installing solar panels on the roof of the Pavilion of Tibetan Culture, Auroville

Auroville Consulting was founded in 2010. Chandresh, Toine and Raghu Kolli had been talking for some time about creating a unit that would not only generate wealth for Auroville, but also offer opportunities for young people to work professionally on projects outside Auroville that resonate with Auroville values. Today, many of the team are non-Aurovilians – often engineers, management or I.T. professionals, who have recently graduated or are taking a break from a ‘conventional’ career – but the emphasis upon youth remains.

However, the original intention was not only to work outside Auroville. One of the first initiatives of the founding group was an online project called Auroville Collaborative. This brought together everything relating to certain areas of work in Auroville – education, arts and culture, green practices etc. – so that people working in a particular area could see what other people in that area were working on and to present this work to the outside world.

However, Auroville Collaborative unit was not designed to be income-generating: Auroville Consulting was created for this. “But when we do projects outside Auroville, it doesn’t mean that Auroville does not benefit,” clarifies Martin Scherfler, another of the co-founders. “Apart from the financial benefit to the community, the vision was always to be a platform between the inside and outside so that expertise would flow both ways. I think that is still there in most of our work.”

The projects

The work they have been engaged in so far is impressive. They have completed 23 major projects, there are 10 ongoing and they have conducted over 100 capacity-building trainings (see box). Their clients are mainly State, Central Government, academic institutions or international agencies. Most of the projects and trainings are in the area of renewable energy and green practices, as well as individual wellbeing – the focus of their Retreats programmes – but recently they helped Tirupathi, Bhubaneswar and Mangalore Municipal Corporations prepare Smart City Proposals.

Completed projects also include renewable energy action plans for Pondicherry and Tamil Nadu, and a detailed case study for the development of green industrial parks in India. Ongoing projects include a regional energy plan for the Hubli-Dharwad municipality and a solar village project for the neighbouring village of Irumbai.

Within Auroville at present, their projects include one in Buddha Garden which aims to automate irrigation, using solar powered smart technology; smart street lighting; and a first-in-India experiment which has involved installing a new type of high-efficiency solar panel that can produce both thermal and electrical power for the Pour Tous Distribution Centre kitchen.

“The common factor in all these projects,” explains Abhi, one of the team members, “is the optimisation of energy use.”

The programmes

They also run programmes that have successfully established themselves over the years. These include the Auroville Green Practices workshops which have been running for five years and have catered to more than 400 students; the Auroville Retreats, which focus on individual wellbeing but also include custom retreats for organisations that want to strengthen group identity; and the annual Summer Schools.

The Summer Schools focus on different aspects of sustainability. So far, the themes have included responsible energy management, organic farming and green architecture. It is a very intense three week programme – “designed to exhaust them, to break old neural patterns,” says Martin – that includes a hands-on project and an introduction to systems thinking, as well as personal transformational development.

“We want a programme that provides something of value to the students but also contributes to an Auroville project. In the past, this has included installing solar panels at the Tibetan Pavilion, building structures at the African Pavilion and urban farming in Citadines.”

Martin notes that the summer school programme has been designed with help from Monica Sharma [see *Auroville Today* issue 330, January 2017]. “We have used what she calls the ‘conscious spectrum’ approach which we have renamed ‘hands, heart, head’, basically the three pillars of sustainability. Every day during the programme we make sure we work with all three.”

Auroville Consulting has already acquired a considerable reputation in India. But why should their clients choose Auroville Consulting rather than another consulting firm? Is there something that makes them unique?

Martin laughs. “Sustainability, in terms of sustainable resource management and sustainable management practices, is our guiding principle but we are not the only consulting organisation in India resonating on this level. I have met many individuals in consulting firms who think exactly the way we think; they are just in a slightly different vehicle. What we can say is we work with sincerity, integrity and passion, we have always delivered and we do not take bribes. I think this is why some of the government departments keep coming back to us.”

Collaborating hubs

So how does Auroville Consulting function? How is it organised?

Auroville Consulting is the consulting wing for outside work but also the administrative umbrella for a number of sub-units. These include ‘Auroville Green Practices’, which runs workshops and the annual summer school, and ‘Auroville Retreats’, which organizes retreats for individuals and groups on the theme of wellbeing. ‘Auroville Collaborative’, another sub-unit, is primarily for Auroville-related projects.

This sounds complicated. What holds it all together?

“There are two ways to organise,” says Martin. “One is to put everything under one unit or department, the other one is to have interdependent and collaborating hubs. We tend towards the second in the way we organise things here.”

But how to ensure that the different ‘hubs’ share a common understanding?

He explains there’s a lot of permeability: an individual may work on more than one project for more than one team. There is also a lot of emphasis placed upon inter-group communication.

Every Friday, every project team member submits a few bullet points on the work they have completed that week, and this report goes out to everybody. On Thursday afternoons, one member from each team presents to everybody else what they are working on.

The work environment is also special here. There is a room called the tearoom where everybody meets informally daily at 10 o’clock and 3 o’clock and where everybody eats lunch together.

continued on page 3

Completed projects include:

1. Solar Photovoltaic Grid Penetration Study for the World Resource Institute.
2. Conceptualization and Strategy for Amma Green Grama (Green Village) project for Tamil Nadu State Government.
3. Renewable Energy Action Plan Tamil Nadu.
4. Renewable Energy Action Plan Pondicherry.
5. Pilot project for solar PV-Thermal hybrid project.
6. Research on passive and low energy buildings in tropical climates for ADEME, France.
7. Consulting Services for Tirupathi Municipal Corporation for preparing Smart City Proposal.
8. Consulting Services for Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation for preparing Smart City Proposal (Round 1).
9. Consulting Services for Mangalore Municipal Corporation for preparing Smart City Proposal.
10. Market research for a Government Agency from Netherland on new solar photovoltaic business opportunities in India.
11. Training programme on Energy Efficiency and Solar PV for Ministry of New and Renewable Energy.
12. Curriculum design for “Consulting for Sustainable Development”, IIM Indore.
13. Pilot grid-connected solar PV installation in a university campus in Rajasthan.
14. Grid-connected solar PV pilot projects in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry.
15. Guidelines and detailed case study for the development of green industrial parks in India for the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ).
16. Sustainable Environment Prosperity Auroville (SEPA): energy and water audits for conservation and efficiency.
17. Programme for Responsible Energy Management (PREM) for Government of Tamil Nadu to solarise all government buildings.
18. Consulting services for a university campus in Tamil Nadu for greening the campus in areas of energy, mobility, waste and landscaping.
19. Water and Energy Efficiency Master Plan for a Town Development Council under Green Campus Scheme by Ministry of New and Renewable Energy.
20. Consulting services for a Town Development Council on the Solar City project under the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy.
21. Study on energy sourcing and storage in Auroville.
22. Project management services for a company in solar thermal energy in setting up a 1 MW pilot solar thermal power plant using Advanced Linear Fresnel Technology.
23. Strategic planning for the Auroville Farm Group in developing a Sustainable Agriculture Plan.

On-going projects

1. Renewable energy policy and technical advice to various State Governments.
2. Consulting services for international wind generator manufacturing company.
3. Advisor to Niti Ayog (Planning Commission Government of India) on Smart City Vision Paper.
4. Regional Energy Plan for Hubli-Dharwad (twin-city region).
5. Review of the Tamil Nadu Solar Energy Policy for the World Resource Institute.
6. Solar Village Irumbai, a project to solarize the village, in collaboration with TEDA.
7. Micro-grid development with demand response and advance forecasting in collaboration with Heriot Watt University.
8. IT-tool for Auroville farmers that enables demand and supply side management and monitoring of resource consumption.
9. Sustainable Urban Energy Plan for Chennai Smart City Limited.
10. Consulting services for sustainability and social inclusiveness for Tirupathi Smart City.

Capacity Building programmes

Over 100 trainings provided since 2010 in green practices, energy efficiency and sustainable design, as well as wellbeing retreats.

Publications

1. *Sustainable Urban Energy, a Sourcebook* addressing sustainable urban energy solutions from a system’s perspective, as a three-step process - energy conservation, energy efficiency and renewable energy for UN Habitat in association with Dr. Brahmanand Mohanty of Asian Institute of Technology, Bangkok.
2. *Lifestyle Choices and Behavioral Changes as Local Climate Strategy* in association with Dr. Brahmanand Mohanty of Asian Institute of Technology, Bangkok. ADB Working Paper No. 398.
3. *Program for Responsible Energy Management. A Guidebook for Municipal Energy Managers*
4. *My Pumpkin Roof: How to Grow Your Own Urban Garden*. Earth Care Books.
5. *Creative Expressions of Auroville*. Bharat Nivas Publications
6. *Planning & Design Guidelines for Green Industrial Parks: A White Paper for India*. Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ)
7. *Planning & Design Guidelines Green Industrial Park for ALEAP, Nandigama, Andhra Pradesh, India*. Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ)
8. *Under the Banyan. Principles of Sustainable Architecture in the Tropics*. Harper Collins.

Revised Entry Policy ratified

On September 23, 2017, a revised Entry Policy was ratified by the Residents Assembly. Of the 222 Residents who participated in the decision-making process, 85% agreed with the new policy.

The Entry Task Group (ETG), which was formed to draft the policy, had engaged with the community through an intensive participatory process. The draft policy was published for feedback between July 2 and July 21. Feedback was incorporated and a General Meeting called on August 26. In this meeting, the ETG presented the new policy that would be the basis for decision making in the community. There were changes suggested in that meeting, and the ETG was flexible enough to accommodate those changes at that late stage in the process. Many of the comments in the General Meeting were related to the terminology used in the policy document, such as Admission Committee and Termination Committee. Several participants felt that such terms did not resonate with the spirit of Auroville.

The new Entry Policy, written in a 27-page document, does a good job of clarifying the eligibility criteria for Mentors, the Entry Process to be followed by different groups of aspirants, such as Newcomers, Children of Aurovilians, and Students, and how the Entry Policy works for different relationship levels, such as Friend of Auroville and Associate of Auroville. Perhaps an executive summary could

have helped readers who do not want to wade through the details.

Main differences

The two main differences between the new policy and the earlier one are related to the structure of the Entry Service and regulations related to Mentors. The Entry Service is now made up of three layers: The Entry Board, which is the decision-making body, the Entry Secretariat, which coordinates all activities, and the Mentors, who help Newcomers navigate through their first year in Auroville.

The Entry Board is to be made up of nine Aurovilians, of whom six must have lived in Auroville for at least five years. Considering how critical this group is, the policy requires that the Entry Board be selected through the Participatory Working Groups process, which involves the entire community.

The other significant change from the earlier policy is the set of regulations related to the Mentors. In the new policy, each Newcomer is to be assigned two Mentors, as opposed to the earlier guideline of three Mentors for each Newcomer. This is a practical step keeping in mind the shortage of active and motivated Mentors. Also, in the earlier policy, an Aurovillian could mentor an unlimited number of Newcomers. Clearly, this was ineffec-

tive, and the new policy limits the number of Newcomers to five for each Mentor.

Mentors now have eligibility criteria. Only those Aurovilians who have been residents for at least three years are eligible to be Mentors. Employers and relatives of a Newcomer are not permitted to mentor him or her.

Duration of Newcomer period

Another notable change is the duration of the Newcomer period. In the earlier policy, a Newcomer could, with the support of her Mentors, take as little or as much time as she needed to become an Aurovillian. It was really up to the Newcomer to "feel ready". There was, in fact, a case of an aspirant becoming an Aurovillian after a three-month Newcomer period, which led to a spirited debate on Auronet.

The new policy specifies a minimum period of 12 months for Newcomers. Interestingly, it also specifies a maximum period of 18 months. So, unless a Newcomer leaves Auroville for several months during the Newcomer process, his case will be resolved within a defined timeframe. This should come as a relief for Newcomers - in the past, some aspirants have been stuck in the process for months on end for a variety of reasons, ranging from team

dynamics in the Entry Service to the office being closed during summer.

Criticism

The new Entry Policy is not without its critics. Many of the Residents who have said 'No' to the policy have sent their feedback. Some are categorical about "no Mentors necessary", while others think the new policy is based on "more bureaucracy, reflecting more fear, distrust, and need to control". A common thread that runs through this feedback is that this is a "reversal to the old policy". Some Residents are sceptical about the Entry Board, saying that the Board "seems to be the real decision centre, but whose intentions have not been clearly defined. It is more a council of elders, of which little is known about the criteria of decision."

Any policy change will have its critics, and only time will tell if the new Entry Policy proves to be an effective basis for welcoming Newcomers and helping Auroville move toward future realisations. It's also important to note that the new policy makes several welcome changes to the entry process, such as a formal three-day programme for people who want to become Newcomers, and education, training and support for Mentors. The Mentoring piece of the puzzle has been refined and is like-

ly to have better outcomes than the previous attempt at Newcomer mentoring.

In terms of actual implementation, the interim Entry Service team will continue to operate till the Entry Board is selected by the community. The Auroville Council and Working Committee, in consultation with the Entry Board, will then appoint the members of the Entry Secretariat. Only after the Secretariat is appointed will the implementation of the new policy come into full force.

Newcomers no doubt are heaving a sigh of relief, now that the prolonged period of uncertainty about the entry process has finally come to an end. Some of us are tempted to say, "all's well that end well," but the larger issue of community participation in decision making continues to be a challenge. 12% "turnout" in decision making is very low by any standard. In his new book *Sense and Solidarity*, the economist Jean Dreze talks about the need for "public-spiritedness" to achieve meaningful change. What will it take to increase the "public-spiritedness" in Auroville?

Manas

Auroville Today earlier reported on the Entry Policy in issue # 322 of May 2016 and in issue 335-336 of June-July 2017

AUROVILLE UNITS

Auroville Consulting

continued from page 2

On Fridays, everybody goes down and works in the community garden, and once a week there is a session where anybody can come and talk about their interests and passion.

Every Thursday morning there is also a session for capacity building and personal transformation. In addition, there is a peer-to-peer learning programme where one team member can teach another a specific skill.

All this is much appreciated by those individuals who have worked in other organisations in India. "Here it is not hierarchy-based or role-based or task-based," says Prabhaka. "It is person-based. The best part is that everybody is more or less equal. We eat the same food, we share ideas. This is one aspect you do not get outside and that is the beauty of this place."

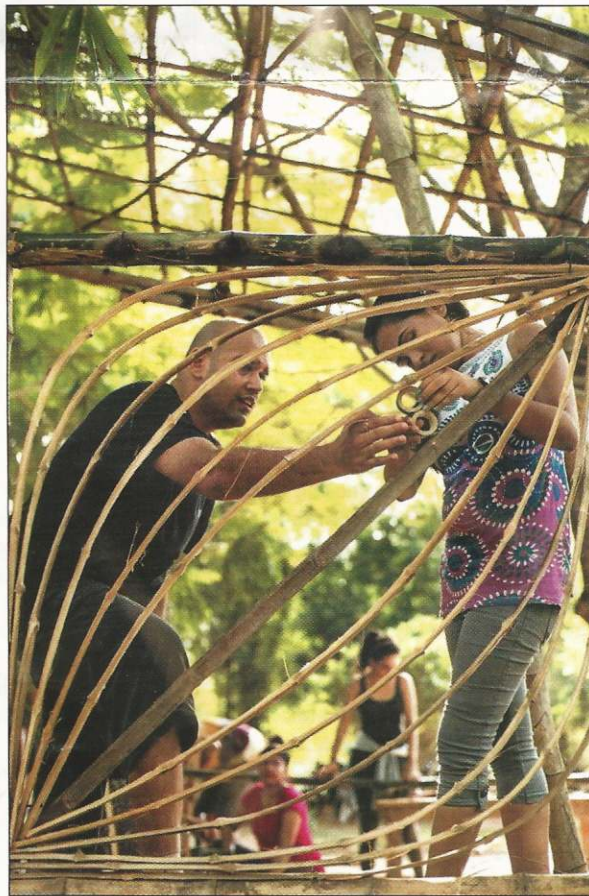
"I'm really fortunate that I'm working in Auroville Consulting," says Ahmed, "because I have a little experience of working in a company outside and how they treat their people. Here they have created a culture of responsibility rather than accountability." "I love the working culture in Auroville Consulting," says Anuraag. "The way people mingle in different projects and the responsibility we are given."

Being given responsibility is clearly significant because most of the people working here are young: they could not hope to be given such freedom if they were working in a traditional Indian company.

How does Consulting take decisions about which projects or programmes to take up?

"It's generally very straightforward," says Martin. "For example, Balu looks after Auroville Green practices and if he wants to do a programme he will quickly run it by one of the core team members who will almost always say 'yes' at once. That's all that's needed for him to go ahead. If a more critical discussion is necessary and a decision to be made, then it comes to the full core team. And if this team feels it needs advice from the mentors, we bring it to them."

"The core team," explains Vimal, another founding member of Auroville Consulting, "are people who have been here a long time. Then we have team members who are long-term and receive a stipend, and volunteers who are on probation for the first three months. The mentors are people like Mr. Bala Baskar, Toine, Chandresh



A hands-on bamboo workshop

and Raghu Kolli who have vast experience of the Indian corporate and governmental set-up."

Challenges

What is it like to work with outside agencies? Do they share the same concept of sustainability?

Not always, it seems. Vimal remembers Consulting being asked by a German organisation based in Delhi to prepare an exhibition of all the projects they had done with the Indian government. "From beginning to end, they couldn't resonate with what we were doing. But we finished the project successfully." And the learning from this experience? "Not to work with them again!"

"My experience is that many high-level IAS government officers resonate with what we are talking about," says Martin. "It's dealing with the other levels which is difficult because in a highly hierarchical structure, the other levels are unwilling to take decisions. So if the person at the top is not behind your project, it becomes impossible."

Recently, they were fortunate that the Bhubaneswar Commissioner really cared about the citizen participation aspect of Smart Cities. "He supported us when we said we wanted to start with hearing from the marginalised - the children, slum dwellers, disabled people, transgenders etc. We mobilised a hundred thousand people in the slums to find out what their priorities for development were," says Martin. "That was very satisfying. For me, that is sustainability."

On the other hand, it was a shock to encounter the work culture of the municipal corporation. "We were based there some of the time and we would see the employees coming in only at 10.30. By 4 pm they were disappearing again, while we were sometimes working until midnight. We wondered what we were doing wrong!"

Martin also mentions that many potential government projects don't materialise or take years to come to fruition. "One thing I have learned from Toine is persistence, not to give up. For example, the solar village project in Irumbai was announced five years ago but it is still far from completion, although we have completed an energy efficiency survey and the installation of energy efficient fans. One problem is that the people at the top of the commissioning agency change regularly. So far, this project has had four different managers, and each time you have to explain everything again to the new man."

So if it is so difficult working with the government, why do they do it?

"The main reason is that if we can get one project accepted in that system it will have much more impact."

The accommodation challenge

Balu, who coordinates Auroville Green Practices, often has to deal with government officials with particular expectations and needs. "We had booked a government official into Atihi Griha guest house, which is simple but comfortable, and the first thing he wanted was A/C and a television. These people want an urban standard when they come to Auroville which we often can't provide, and they want immediate entry to Matrimandir."

"Once I had to tell the owner of the liquor shop in a local village not to serve participants in a workshop because we knew if he did, we wouldn't see them the next day!"

Providing accommodation for visiting participants is a huge challenge. They often have 40 students or more coming for a course, but there is no one place in Auroville that can accommodate so many. Instead, they have to put them up in cheap accommodation in the area around Auroville and bus them backwards and forwards.

"This is one of the main factors behind one of our biggest projects at present, the Centre for Sustainability project," says Martin. This project, planned to be located at the Pony Farm, would provide accommodation for 60 students, as well as work and venue spaces and perhaps a cafeteria in the first phase.

"Some time ago, we got a project to document the best practices of climate responsive architecture in tropical countries," explains Martin. "The Centre for Sustainability project will apply and be a shop window for these practices." A design studio has already taken place with architects from both Auroville and abroad.

In the end, what gives them the most satisfaction?

For Balu, it is seeing students who have attended architects' workshops getting inspired by Auroville and coming back later on their own. Vimal identifies a very personal project, the 'Creative Expressions' book, an artistic presentation of the products of some of the Auroville units which he conceptualised and photographed.

For Martin it is those projects in which he has been most invested. "The Summer School is one of these because it is more than just a professional investment: you also work very intensely with the students at a personal level."

The next five years

Recently, the team considered what they would like Consulting to achieve in the next five years. Vimal would like the Centre for Sustainability to be completed and to have more people on the core team.

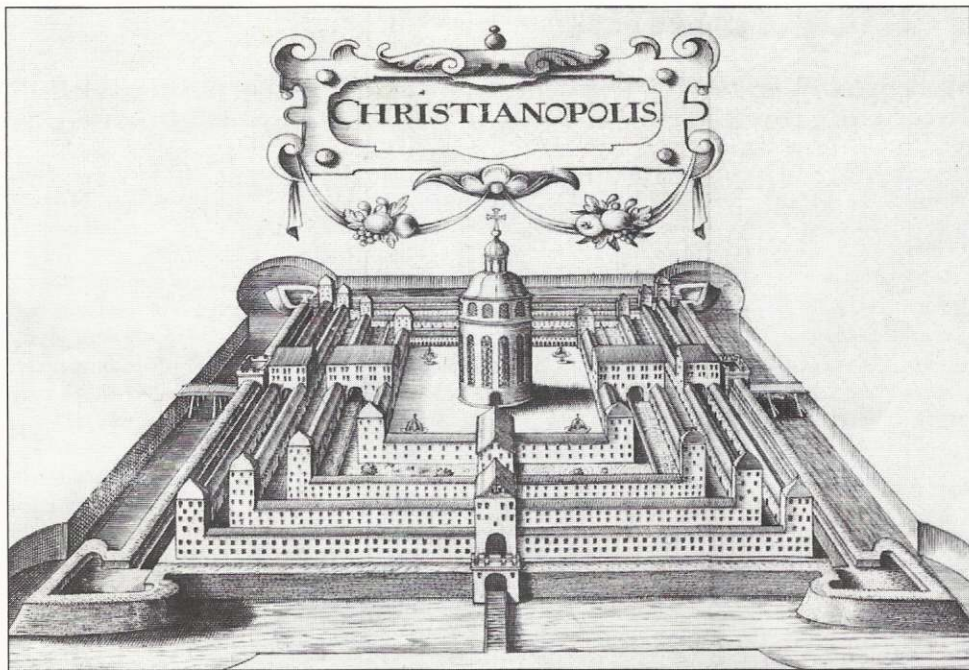
Martin agrees that he would like Consulting to grow, both in terms of revenue and team members. The solar village concept is also very close to his heart. "In five years, I would love to have a hundred solar villages on the ground. Hopefully, these would provide 24/7 energy to the villagers because this could really impact the quality of life. But there are also other elements of this concept I find fascinating, like the potential for co-ownership of the facilities and revenue-sharing by the villagers."

"I don't know if it will ever happen, but we are actively looking for funds."

Alan

Ideal cities

Auroville can be seen as the latest in a chain of ideal



Christianopolis sketch (early 17th century)

An idealistic or utopian strand of thought can be found in all cultures. In ancient Indian literature, for example, there is reference to the mythical land of Uttarakuru. "The Peach Blossom Spring" from ancient China describes another utopia. However, these utopias focus upon an ideal society and, in the case of *The Peach Blossom Spring*, a very rural society, rather than taking the city as the ideal construct. It is only in the Western utopian tradition that the ideal city has received so much attention.

This is because unlike in ancient China, where the Taoist tradition valued nature and natural living above all else, from the time cities arose in the West they were seen as representing the highpoint of the cultures in which they were embedded. It was natural, then, that when people wanted to imagine a more ideal state of affairs, or to critique the society in which they lived, it should take the form of an ideal city.

In around 380 BC Plato described his ideal city in his *Republic*. Rather than being an architectural treatise, it deals with the ideal relationships between the citizens and defines the nature of the just city-state. Its influence was profound, particularly in the Renaissance when classical learning and culture were being rediscovered in Europe.

In fact, the Renaissance was one of the golden ages of the ideal city concept. This was assisted by the rise of Humanism, which shifted the focus from a divine to a human-centred universe where reason was seen to be the key ordering principle of life.

Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516), which literally means 'nowhere', does not provide site plans for an ideal city but describes a society in which, among other things, there is no private property, meals are taken in community dining halls and houses are identical and rotated between the citizens every ten years.

Leonardo Da Vinci on the other hand, was responding to a particular event – a terrible plague in Milan – when he drew up his plans for an ideal city. It included a network of canals (divided between lower canals for tradesmen and upper canals for 'gentlemen') and elegant buildings: "Only let that which is good looking be seen on the surface of the city", he wrote.

In fact, it was believed that, ideally, good government and social order in the state should be mirrored in the appearance and external order of a city. In this context, a series of three 15th century paintings (by unknown artists) called the "Ideal City" are important because they provide a visual addition to the mainly philosophical works of Plato and More. These paintings depict wonderfully harmonious cityscapes of broad squares, colonnades and restrained architectural classicism designed to maximise interactions between the inhabitants and to elevate their thoughts.

The City of the Sun

It is the latter impulse which predominates in the two most famous ideal cities of the Renaissance: *The City of the Sun* and *Christianopolis*. *The City of the Sun* was a treatise written in 1602 by the philosopher Tommaso Campanella while he was in prison. Frances Yates, the English historian describes the city as follows:

The City of the Sun was to be on a hill in the midst of a vast plain. In the centre, and on the summit of the hill, there was a vast temple, of marvellous construction. It was perfectly round, and its great dome was supported on huge columns. The fourfold theme was again dominant. Four main roads led to the centre where there was a circular domed temple.

Inside the vault of the dome was a representation of the stars of heaven and on the altar, which was in the form of a sun, were two globes, one of the earth the other of the celestial skies.

In this ideal city, the citizens possessed nothing; everything was held in common.

Johann Andreae's concept for *Christianopolis* was published in 1619. Like *The City of the Sun*, *Christianopolis* has a temple in the centre, all property is held in common and the layout is symmetrical (*The City of the Sun* was circular, *Christianopolis* square).

Both Campanella and Andreae saw their cities as archetypes of an ideal heavenly

and earthly society: both believed the design of their cities would assist in the practical realization of a heaven on earth. In fact, as Gareth Knight points out, Campanella "hoped to establish his city on Earth as herald of a new age."

The presiding concept behind both these ideal cities was the Heavenly City, *New Jerusalem*, which, according to the Bible, will descend on earth at the end of the world to usher in the reign of God. (There are interesting analogies here with the Buddhist *Shambhala* that will descend to conquer dark forces and usher in a Golden Age.) *New Jerusalem* also has its sacred geometry. According to the *Book of Revelation*, it is a perfect cube, with twelve foundations and twelve gates.

The Biblical *City of God* acted as a powerful inspiration for the Puritans colonizing New England in the 17th century. In fact, the Puritans saw themselves as builders of the New Jerusalem on earth.

Later ideal cities

The Industrial Revolution also gave rise to some concepts of an ideal city but this time, largely in response to the terrible conditions of the early industrial townships, it was the social rather than the religious aspect that predominated.

For example, in 1902, social reformer Ebenezer Howard published his treatise *Garden Cities of Tomorrow*, where he outlined his idea of a planned *Social City* where people would live in harmony with nature. Welsh reformer, Robert Owen, put his utopian socialist ideals into practice in the design and construction of the village of New Lanark in Scotland for the workers in his cotton mills.

In the early 20th century, French-Swiss architect Le Corbusier had big plans for the ideal city. Architecture, he believed, should be as efficient and simple as the industrial machines that had ushered in the modern age. Inspired by this notion, he planned two modern utopias modelled on this idea of the city as machine: the *Ville Radieuse* and the *Ville Contemporaine*. Both would have massive skyscrapers housing millions of people – rich and poor. Parks and green areas would divide these massive cities into zones of productivity and leisure.

Neither, of course, got built. Nor did Buckminster Fuller's radical idea to solve overcrowding in cities. His *Spherical Tensegrity Atmospheric Research Station*, called *STARS* or *Cloud 9s*, would be composed of giant geodesic spheres that could float. His floating cities would be anchored to mountains, or left to drift around the world.

Antecedents of Auroville

Is Auroville an 'ideal city'? Interestingly, when the Sri Aurobindo Society first announced it as a project of the Society in 1964, Mother took only a 'secondary interest'. However, on 30th March, 1965, she wrote to Roger Anger to thank him for accepting to build her project of an "ideal city". On 20th June 1965, Huta sent a letter to Mother in which she recounts a vision and some dreams, and then an "old memory" is awakened in Mother and she takes up the project with full enthusiasm. Within three days she has elaborated plans and drawn up the first sketch of the four zones, shown as the petals of a flower. In September, 1965, she issues her first message on Auroville:

Auroville wants to be a universal town where men and women of all countries are able to live in peace and progressive harmony, above all creeds, all politics and all nationalities. The purpose of Auroville is to realise human unity.

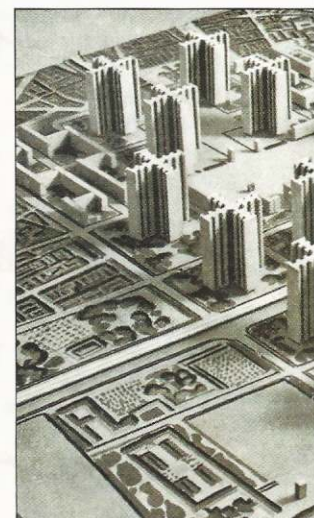


Sketch of layout of

But what was the "old memory" that was revived in Mother by Huta? Mother said it was "something that had tried to manifest – a creation – when I was very small... and that had again tried to manifest at the very beginning of the century when I was with Théon. Then I had forgotten all about it. And it came back (with that letter): suddenly I had my plan of Auroville."

Mother also recounts in *The Agenda* that she had had a plan for an 'ideal town' for a long time, but this was in Sri Aurobindo's lifetime. In this case, she was referring to the possibility of building an ideal township in the State of Hyderabad. This was in 1938. In Mother's conception, Sri Aurobindo would have been living in the centre, in a house on top of a hill. The town would have been laid out according to Mother's symbol, delineated with four large petals near the centre and twelve smaller petals around. The town would have been walled, with entrance gates and guards, so that nobody could enter without permission. And within the town there would be no circulation of money.

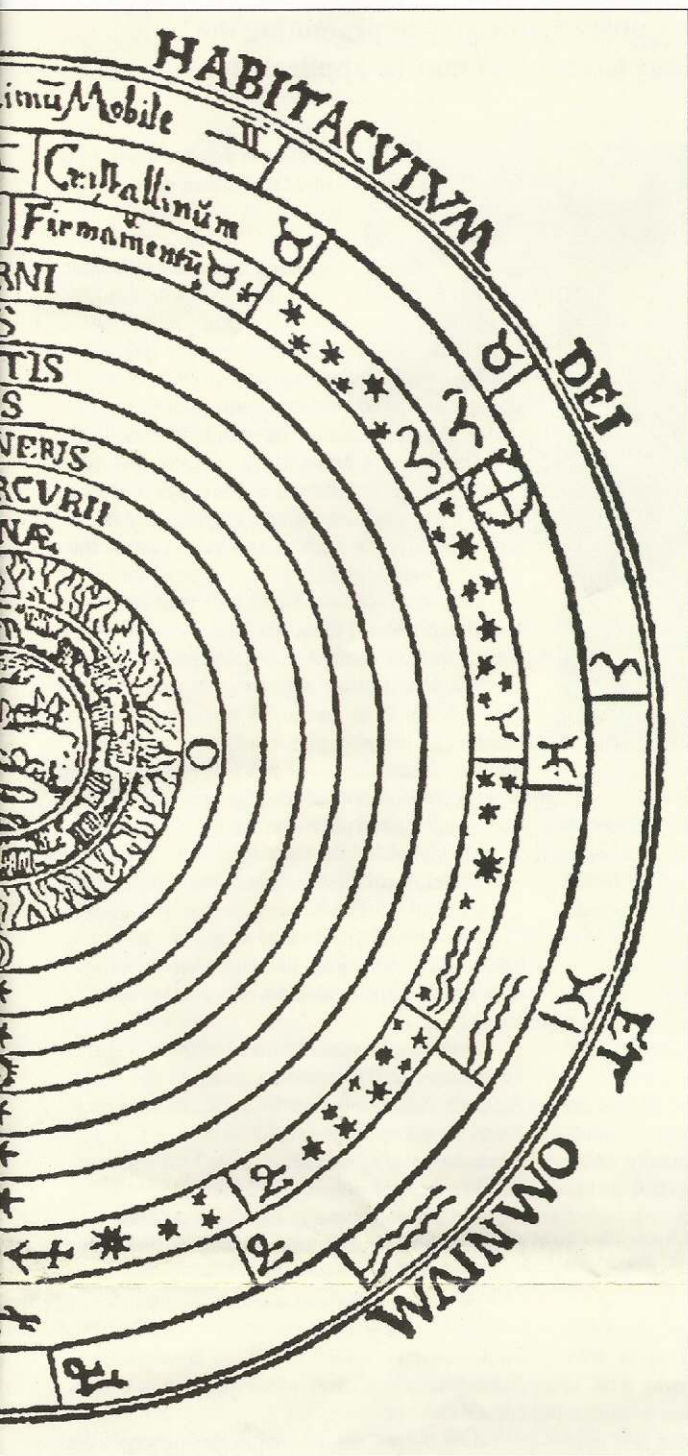
However, the Hyderabad authorities stipulated one condition that was considered unacceptable: that nothing could leave the State of Hyderabad. Moreover, it seemed highly unlikely that Sri Aurobindo would want to leave Pondicherry. So the plan fell through. (In any case, Mother subsequently told Satprem that she had planned to start materialising the project only 24 years later, which would have been in 1962.)



Two paintings of The Ideal City. Painter unknown. (Italian, late 15th century)

and Auroville

city experiments stretching back thousands of years



The City of the Sun

But it's possible that Mother was drawing upon an even "older memory" in her new attempt at manifesting an ideal city. And that takes us back to ancient Egypt.

Akhetaton

In 1956, Mother revealed in a conversation that she had been present in ancient Egypt as Queen Tiy (or Tiye). Her son became Amenhotep IV and, seemingly under her influence, initiated a stupendous religious revolution by making the sun god, Aton, the only god to be worshipped.

Georges van Vrekhem in his book, *The Mother – The Story of Her Life*, takes up the story.

"The sun god Aton, never represented in human form but as the sun disk, was central to the theology of Heliopolis, perhaps the most ancient in Egypt, although he played only a minor role in the official religion... Most historians agree that Tiy had an equally strong influence on her son Amenhotep IV. As Berbers and Beumer write: 'Through his mother Tiy, in this supported by his father Amenhotep III, he must have been initiated in the philosophies around Aton and indoctrinated with the idea that for the religious salvation of Egypt a god like Aton was the only outcome.' This influence must have been very strong indeed, for after his father had died Amenhotep IV changed his name to Akhenaton, translated variously as 'he who is

faithful to Aton,' 'One useful to Aton,' 'he who serves Aton' and 'reflection of Aton.' And not only did he change his name, he founded a totally new city, Akhetaton, 'Horizon of Aton,' on the right bank of the Nile, halfway between Thebes and Memphis. The name of the city may be understood as the projection of the Sun World into the material world of the earth.

"This splendid city, entirely dedicated to the new creed, was built in an incredibly short time and must have been a costly enterprise. Akhenaton lived there with his wife, the famous Nefertiti ('the Beautiful has come') and their six daughters. There he worshipped the sun disk.

"The faceless Aton was declared the only God and the worship of all other gods, of the whole Egyptian pantheon, was abolished. The significance of this act can only be understood if one realizes that the priestly caste was second in power to the Pharaoh – who was a living god, the incarnated Horus on earth – and often vied with him for supremacy."

In fact, on Akhenaton's death the priesthood had their revenge when one of Akhenaton's successors, Horemhab, had the city razed to the ground and all references to Aton were obliterated in Thebes, the centre of the old orthodox religion.

But a formation had been created stronger than bricks and mortar. Van Vrekhem quotes Tanmaya, a teacher in the Ashram school.

"In reply to a question (concerning Akhenaton) I had put her, Mother let it clearly be understood that she had been Queen Tiy, the mother of Akhenaton... She specified that Akhenaton's revolution was intended to reveal to the people of that time the unity of the Divine and his manifestation. This attempt, the Mother added, was premature, for the human mind was not yet ready for it. It had, however, to be undertaken in order to assure the continuity of its existence in the mental plane."

This is fascinating because it suggests the possibility that others could subsequently access aspects of this formation from this plane. This could explain the undoubted resemblances between Akhetaton – "the horizon of the sun" – Campanella's *City of the Sun*, and Auroville – "the city of dawn" (Sri Aurobindo, of course, identified the sun as the symbol of the supramental).

In fact, some Aurovilians have long seen a resemblance between Akhetaton and Auroville. Writing in one of the first issues of *Auroville Today*, Gilbert Lachaux described Akhenaton's charter for his city as:

*Here is the place that belongs to no prince, to no god.
Nobody owns it.
Here is everybody's place.
Hearts will be happy in it.*

But the possible links between historic ideal city concepts go further still. Plato sometimes refers to Solon, the elder Greek lawmaker, who visited Egypt and spent many years learning from the Egyptian priesthood. So it is quite possible that Plato's influential ideas of an ideal city in the *Republic* derive partly from Solon and, through him, from the profound occult knowledge of ancient Egypt.

Closer to home

But Mother's plans for an ideal town may also be discerned in experiments she made much closer to the founding of Auroville.

In the early 1900s, Mother was already writing (in the *Revue Cosmique*) about the need to found an ideal society in a propitious place on earth. Then, in the 1930s, there was the still-born Hyderabad experiment. She may have been referring to this or to an earlier conception when she said, in 1961, "What I myself have seen was a plan that came complete in all details, but that doesn't at all conform in spirit and consciousness with what is possible on Earth now, although in its most material manifestation the plan was based on existing terrestrial circumstances. It was the idea of an ideal city, the nucleus of a small ideal country, having only superficial and extremely limited contacts with the old world. One would already have to conceive (it's possible) of a Power sufficient to be at once a protection against aggression or ill will (this would not be the most difficult protection to provide) and a protection (which can just barely be imagined) against infiltration and admixture."

Van Vrekhem also mentions a later experiment. He notes that soon after The Mother founded, in December, 1943, the Ashram



The Auroville Galaxy concept

School she had a very different conception of it from how it subsequently developed. He quotes M.P. Pandit, who remembers: "She said in sum: students from different countries, with their different civilizations and traditions, should be given opportunities to stay in independent blocks; students from France, students from Japan, students from America – each in a separate block not demarcated by walls but by the free development of their own pattern of life, so that if any student wanted to know of the Japanese way of life, he could straightaway walk into the Japanese sector, a distinct part of the hostel, mix with the students there, see what kind of food they ate, how they cooked, how they lived. And at that time she said also that each country must have its own pavilion – a pavilion where its own culture at its highest point should be represented in its special characteristic way... She saw the whole area round the Ashram, with all buildings contained in it, split in twelve different segments together forming the Mother's symbol."

Whatever the accuracy of Pandit's memory, this clearly is the seed of the idea for the cultural pavilions in the International Zone of Auroville.

In 1956, elements of her ideal city concept can be discerned again in a proposal for a film school to be located on a 105 acre site by Usteri Lake. Later the Mother found some notes from that time reminding her to call on one of the two architects of Golconde, Antonin Raymond, to plan the 'tremendous programme.'

At that time, Mother was developing the Sri Aurobindo International University Centre (as it was then called) and the film school was supposed to be part of it. In fact, the "tremendous programme" included not only a film school but also the construction of residences for an international community of at least 400 people, a model township for local semi-skilled and unskilled employees, and a "wide buffer belt" of farms, orchards and gardens. The international township would include, among other things, a non-sectarian temple for worship; recreation areas for swimming and other sports; playgrounds for children; indoor recreation and dining halls; community administration offices; health facilities; schools; a cinema; a shopping centre; water works; and an electric power plant.

In the end, the project did not happen because the money to buy the land did not come and the American film-maker, Dr. Alexander Markey, who was a key person in the project left and, subsequently, died.

Later, Mother commented to Satprem about the project, "That's what happens – things change. It's not that the project stops, but it's forced to take other paths." Those "other paths" surely included, eight years later, the founding of Auroville.

The echoes are unmistakable. Mother called the failed Lake project, 'New Horizon' (surely a reference to Akhetaton) and gave a message:

*New Horizon will open the way for mankind
to a new and truer life.*

A decade later, in her welcoming message at Auroville's Inauguration Ceremony, Mother said:

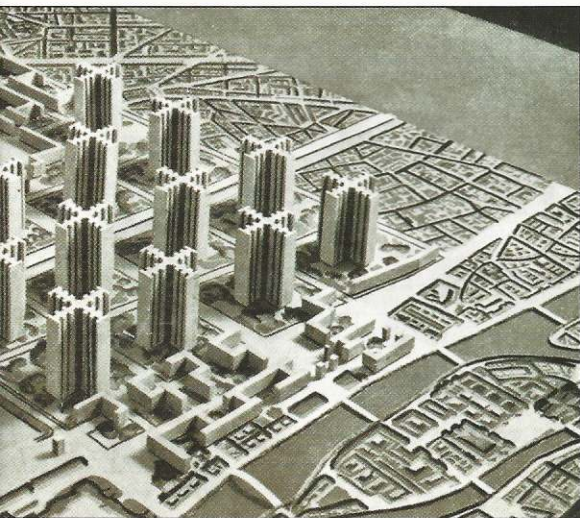
*Are invited to Auroville all those who ...
aspire for a truer and higher life.*

Auroville, then, can be seen as the latest link in a chain of ideal cities stretching back thousands of years. Like many of the ideal 'social' cities, the plan of Auroville was intended to maximise harmonious relationships between residents (interestingly, Roger Anger, the architect, kept a print of one of the Renaissance "Ideal City" paintings in his house). Like the ideal 'sacred' cities, Auroville has a yantric dimension which unites earth and heaven through sacred geometry, numerology (the four zones, the twelve gardens of Matrimandir etc.) and symbolism.

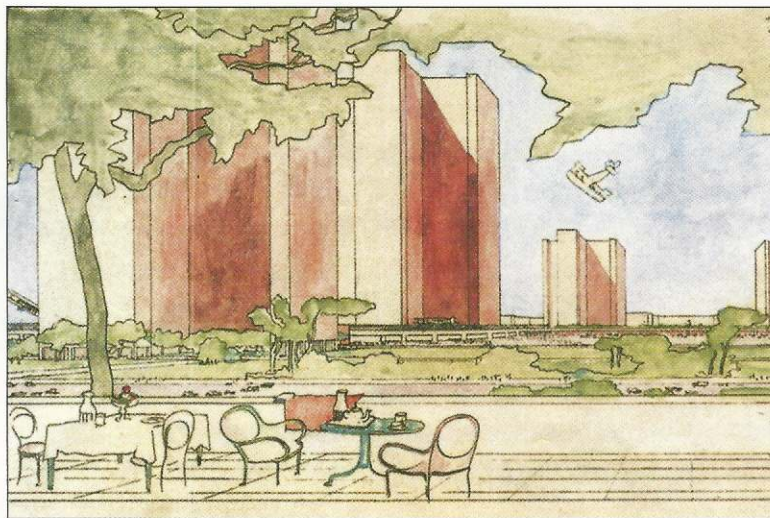
At the same time, it is very different. Unlike those earlier experiments, Mother emphasised that Auroville would succeed; it would be manifested in its true form. "Even if you don't believe it, even if all the circumstances seem quite ... It may take a hundred years, it may take a thousand years, but Auroville will be because it is DECREED." And at another time she explained, "You say that Auroville is a dream. Yes, it is a 'dream' of the Lord and generally these 'dreams' turn out to be true – much more true than the human so-called realities!"

Auroville, she wrote in its Charter, "will be the place of an unending education, of constant progress". Is this why Auroville is the 'city of dawn', of beginnings? And is this why, unlike the rigid geometric forms that enclose ideal cities like The City of the Sun and Christianopolis, the spiral arms of the Galaxy seem to be endlessly reaching out for new experiences, new forms of consciousness?

Alan, with input from Gilles Guigan



Sketches of Le Corbusier's Ville Contemporaine (left) and Ville Radieuse



Coastal protection and restoration: can we learn from Pondicherry?

Aurofilio is a member of PondyCAN, a citizen's action network located in Pondicherry. He has been very much involved with promoting the Pondicherry Beach Restoration scheme, which is now underway to restore the town's beach. Are there any lessons that may be applicable to the Auroville coastal communities that are experiencing severe erosion?

Auroville Today: In the past year, and particularly in the last few months, there has been serious erosion of some of the southern Auroville beaches, particularly Quiet and Samuthira (formerly Mira Youth Camp) leading once again to loss of buildings. Some people believe that the work going on in Pondicherry to restore the beach there is contributing to this. Is this a possibility?

Filio: In theory, yes, but it is highly unlikely. Firstly, what looks like a groyne near the Ashram tennis ground has only been there since June this year. It was constructed to build a submerged onshore reef and while it is there it will block the transport of some sand to the north. However, it is only temporary and once the reef is built, the blockage will be removed.

Moreover, this 'groyne' is too far away from the Auroville beaches for the impacts to show there in a matter of a few months. If we take the case of Repos, it took 4-5 years for serious erosion to set in after a groyne was constructed at Thandirayankuppam village only one kilometre away. Our construction is much further away from the southernmost Auroville beaches.

So if there is any negative impact from the temporary 'groyne', it will be short and felt only locally (a few hundred metres north of the reef), and most certainly not as far as Quiet and Repos, particularly in such a short time.

Once the reef is in place, initially it will hold back some sand. This is because it is designed to ensure that the Pondicherry beach is restored. But once the beach is restored, the reef will be submerged and even buried underground and thereafter sand will flow freely above it.

How long will this take?

If everything goes well, we are talking about one to two years for the beaches in Pondy to be restored and four or five years for a trickle-down effect to the Auroville beaches which will be benefitted from sand flowing north.

There will also be a second reef, but this will be an offshore reef opposite the Hotel Ajantha on the Pondicherry seafront. The purpose of that reef is to slow down the sand going back into the Pondicherry harbour: it will not impact the Auroville beaches at all.

If the new Pondicherry reef construction is not to blame for the accelerating erosion of some Auroville beaches, what is the explanation?

There is always natural variation in the width of beaches: any normal beach will vary by ten or fifteen metres in a year. Actually, I think that Repos and other Auroville beach communities to the south were lucky during the previous two years because the erosion was much less severe than one would expect with a groyne and a seawall nearby. I'm not sure about this, it has to be confirmed with



The situation at Repos beach: more houses disappear into the sea

some data, but in 2013 we got the Pondicherry government to nourish one and a half lakh cubic metres of sand in the sea which had been stacked up on the land at the port.

The most plausible explanation is that this sand travelled north to the Auroville beaches and delayed or mitigated the erosion there. But now that the supply is exhausted, the normal speed of erosion has resumed.

There has also been a vigorous south-west monsoon this year, resulting in a constant wave action since April. So if you put together a reduced supply of sand and increased wave action this would result in increased erosion.

What would you advise? What can the affected Auroville communities do? They are losing land fast.

I completely empathise with them, it is easy for us whose houses are not being washed away to advocate the ideal solution and there is clearly an urgent need to do something. But at the same time, it is equally hard to agree to suggest some unscientific, piecemeal, short-term, ad hoc measure that will finally result in an increase of erosion, especially to the neighbouring beaches. The Indian coastline is densely populated and there are no uninhabited beaches that can be sacrificed at the cost of inhabited ones. Transferring and increasing erosion to the neighbouring beach also impacts the lives of others.

Last year you advised intermediate solutions that do not cause any more damage to the shoreline. These would include beach nourishment and the employment of the least intrusive protection structures.

I'm aware that many Aurovilians who are

losing their homes due to the eroding coast favour seawalls to protect the seafront properties. It's true that seawalls offer some protection and they are the least intrusive of the 'hard' options right now but I don't want to recommend them because then there would be a seawall building spree.

Also, they don't bring the beach back and, while they may protect a particular property, they accelerate the rate of erosion of the next unprotected beach.

If you built a seawall or a groyne all you are going to do is transferring the erosion problem further up the coast. So you are not really fixing anything this way. The only solution that makes sense is to address the root cause.

Which is?

The Pondicherry harbour breakwater that interrupts the natural flow of sand. This is why Pondicherry lost its beaches; it is why you in Auroville are also losing your beaches.

But you have not succeeded in removing the breakwater.

True. But we in PondyCAN realised there is no point holding on to a position which ignores the existence of the harbour. For the time being, we have to acknowledge it is there and do the best we can. In the present situation, we cannot do without dredging, which also has an environmental impact, or the reefs. It is the best compromise because we insisted that any reefs being built for the Pondicherry beach restoration project should be able to be dismantled.

However, our long-term goal is to get the government to remove the harbour or, at the very least, redesign it to allow sand to flow freely again. In

fact, we have managed to have inserted in NIOT's final report the fact that the harbour needs to be redesigned.

So what are you suggesting that Auroville does now?

I think you need a multi-pronged approach. For the places under immediate threat, I would suggest using the least environmentally-destructive means of protection. Interestingly, I've heard that the villages outside Pondicherry are now started asking for what we are doing in the town. They are not asking for the groynes any more: they are asking for reefs and beaches. For me this is a very positive sign.

I also think you need to change your approach to the authorities. I think one of the biggest problems is that people in Auroville are not asking for beaches. Instead, they are asking for protection of the land that is in danger of erosion. But if the beaches are restored, you would have that protection too. So ask the authorities for your beaches to be restored and nourished. The how can be discussed and figured out subsequently.

Also, I don't think there has been a concerted effort from Auroville as an institution to request the Government of Pondicherry or Tamil Nadu or Central Governments to take action. So far, it has been mainly individuals like Guy from Quiet who have been willing to do the work of contacting the authorities.

Some years ago, the National Institute of Ocean Technology (NIOT) made a study of the whole Auroville coastline but, as far as I know, nobody in Auroville asked them to take the next step, which was to come up with an action plan. That's what we did. We stepped in and asked them to extend the study to Pondicherry and then help us draw up a plan. And that's one reason why we have the Pondicherry beach restoration scheme.

The irony is that our association with NIOT actually started with the erosion of Quiet. In 2007, Rauf Ali had called NIOT to a meeting in Auroville, and that is when they started their coastal surveys.

How did we get a beach in Pondicherry? We used a multipronged approach. One approach was going to court with the help of other organizations. We tied the government's hands over the construction of more groynes and seawalls because the Court recognized the harmful effects of these solutions, so the only option they had left was to start bypassing the sand at the harbour and restore the beaches. And we were fortunate that NIOT was not only able to come up with a solution, an action plan, but also that they were completely open to a 'soft' solution. So everything fell into place.

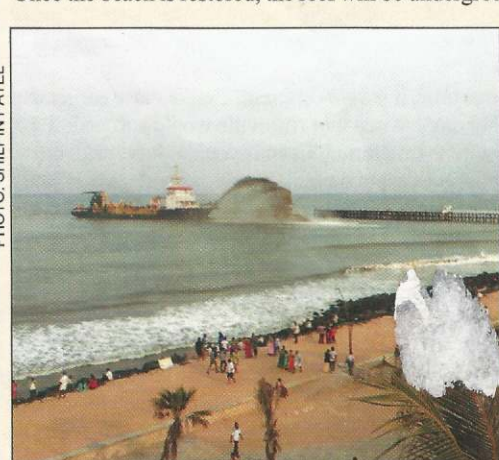
With the progress that we have made and the path that we have paved in Pondicherry, we think that today Auroville is in an even stronger position for the same to be done there.

From an interview by Alan

The Pondicherry solution

Two reefs are being constructed, one a nearshore reef, the other offshore. The nearshore reef is a triangular steel wedge about 60 metres long and wide, and two and a half metres high. It will sit on a foundation of rocks. The top of the onshore reef will be at the level of the lowest low tide. The purpose of this reef is to restore the alignment of the shoreline to its "equilibrium profile" i.e. the shoreline profile of a stable, undisturbed sandy beach.

The intention of the offshore reef is to prevent siltation of the harbour while the nearshore reef will initially stabilize the sand so that the original beach can be restored. Once the beach is restored, the reef will be underground and sand will flow above it.



Artificial beach nourishment

As long as the harbour continues to block the natural flow of sand, it is also necessary that artificial beach nourishment takes place. As part of the beach restoration scheme, the Pondicherry government is legally obliged to dredge a specified amount of sand annually and deposit it near the shoreline to replenish the beach. This year the requirement was four lakhs cubic metres of sand but, for various reasons, there was a shortfall. NIOT has now submitted a proposal to nourish seven lakhs cubic metres next year to compensate for this. The annual cost of dredging is estimated at 15 crore rupees. Filio points out that this is cheaper than the cost of coastal erosion – the loss of livelihoods, land, tourism, ecological resources and saltwater intrusion into the aquifers – or the cost of constructing and maintaining seawalls and groynes, which, in turn, cause more erosion.



Auroville - A City for the Future

This is really two books in one. The first book is an introduction to Auroville, the vision, the history and its inhabitants. The second book is a passionate advocacy of the need to build the city as soon as possible according to the original Galaxy plan.

The first 'book' works very well. It is a fine introduction to the history and the main activities of Auroville as well as present challenges. Above all, the spirit of Auroville breathes through the inspiring personal experiences Anu has collected over the many years she has been researching this book. I particularly enjoyed Anu's own 'discovery' story as well as the crucial role played by revelatory dreams in bringing so many people to Auroville.

The second 'story' is, for me, more problematic. Not because I am against building the city or exploring the ways in which the Galaxy plan can help us to do this, but because of the approach Anu adopts.

Anu's stand is clear: the original Galaxy plan, along with the Charter, are the two strands of Auroville's 'DNA': both are essential for its success. By equating the two, Anu implies that the original plan, like the Charter, is unmodifiable and beyond dispute. "In no way can we grant ourselves permission to throw out the Galaxy plan because by doing so we throw Auroville off course and the real potential of the experiment," she writes.

Anu's defence of the Galaxy is passionate because she feels it has been unfairly neglected or criticised over the years. This is a fair point. But passions often result in over-simplification. For example, Anu writes that everybody who came to Auroville in the early days came to build the city. This was not the case. She describes the first resistance in the community to building the Galaxy as a reaction to the authoritarianism of the Sri Aurobindo Society. Later, she puts it down to those who wish to turn Auroville into some kind of eco-commune and to live a small, rural, comfortable life. There's some truth in this, but it is far from being the whole story.

As to what she terms the later neglect of the Galaxy plan, the new generation of architects coming to Auroville in the 1980s contributed to "a full Roger ban. The Mother was found to be clueless, a failed environmentalist and totally out of fashion." Really?

However, it is the environmentalists and Greenbelters who shoulder the main burden of the blame. Writing about the Greenbelt and those who live in it today, Anu muses, "It almost seems as if it has seceded and has no interest in the city or its overall intention..."

In fact, Anu even accuses "a self-appointed lobby of 'concerned citizens'" of thwarting Auroville's development in art and culture. "Art and culture get knocked

out by oil and power in some parts of the world, in Auroville by an active environmental lobby". Really?

None of the above accusations reflects the much more complex reality of Auroville where the views of greenbelters, for example, are as varied as those who live in the city area. (Interestingly, none of her interviewees is working the land, with the exception of Santo who does not talk about his work.) Nor does Anu address the more serious reservations expressed about the original Galaxy plan, including the argument that it takes little or no account of ground topological and social realities.

Anu reports Roger's 1996 statement that it is the "bad will" of people who made it impossible to build Mother's town, but she says nothing about the often inept manner in which some of his supporters have gone about trying to ensure that the original concept was realised.

Nor does she seem to appreciate the larger, complex process of Auroville, even though she quotes Satprem to this effect: "Their delays on the brakes they seem to apply to our motion is part of the fullness of perfection that we seek and which compels us to a greater meticulousness of truth".

Why does all this matter?

Firstly, because this book is likely to have a wide readership outside Auroville and it will be taken by many of those readers as a factual rather than, at times, rather one-sided version of events.

Secondly, her decision to attack those who question the Galaxy rather than explaining in greater detail why we should adopt it, obscures Anu's important point that it is time to examine the Galaxy plan with new eyes. Thirdly, it is written in a way that reinforces divisions through employing negative stereotypes of those who question the plan.

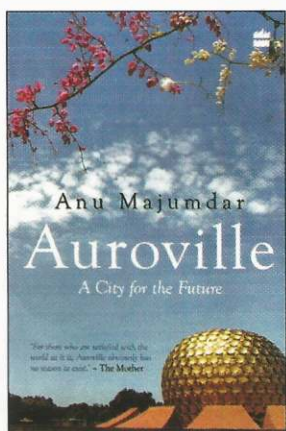
Interestingly, in the latter part of the book Anu quotes a number of Aurovilians who are very alive to the dangers of division. "It is time to move beyond this for-and-against trap and find that inclusive third position that helps us move forward," says Toine. Anu appears to assent. But does her approach really foster that 'inclusive third position'?

This somewhat mars an otherwise excellent and deeply-researched book that is well worth reading. Finally, let's remember Mother's words that put all our disagreements over the city in perspective.

"This city will be built by what is invisible to you. The men who act as instruments will do so despite themselves... That is why one can laugh."

Alan

Auroville A City for the Future. Anu Majumdar. Harper Collins, 2017. Available from Wild Seagull bookshop, SABDA and Amazon.in, price Rs 490.

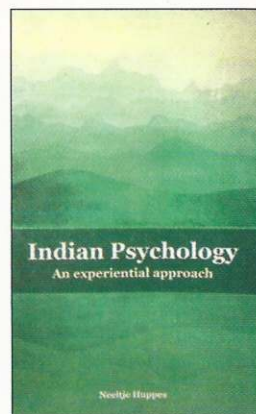


Indian Psychology - An experiential approach

At first glance, Neeltje Huppes' new book looks like a training manual. But spending just a few minutes with it uncovers a wonderful pedagogical design. Written for graduate and postgraduate students of psychology, the book is primarily meant to be used as course material. What differentiates *Indian Psychology* from typical textbooks is the careful planning of learning activities after the student has read the base material. Each chapter has a section that lists classroom discussions, additional reading, and self-reflection. The book is complemented by an online study guide called *The Internet Companion of Indian Psychology* (<http://ipi.org.in/second/ipaea-companion.php>), which provides links to additional reading, videos and other online resources.

When I started reading the book, one of the first questions I had was, "Will the author be able to do justice to the extremely diverse traditions that make up Indian philosophy and psychology?" The author has been associated with Sri Aurobindo Ashram for over 40 years, so the content could have been restricted purely to Sri Aurobindo's Integral Psychology. But it was a pleasure to discover that not only does Huppes write about the Vedic tradition and Integral Psychology, but she also refers to the *shamanic* tradition of Buddhism and Jainism. In fact, in some of the chapters, she even encourages students to study modern thinkers, such as Eckhard Tolle and the Buddhist nun Kelsang Nyema.

This openness with respect to content is matched by a writing style that is lucid and coherent. This will surely help beginning readers understand the complex ideas packed into the four sections of the



book: philosophical foundations, the structure of the human being, self-discovery and self-perfection. The annotated bibliography at the end of the book will be a valuable tool for interested readers.

The last part of the book, "An overview of Integral Living", sits a little uncomfortably with the rest of an otherwise splendid book. This part is a compilation of PowerPoint slides and notes on each slide. This content might work in a "talk" on Integral Living, but doesn't seem to fit into a book for serious, especially postgraduate students of psychology. The poor design of this section is a little puzzling, given the thoughtful design that has gone into the main sections of the book.

The only drawback of the book is the occasional over-simplification of ideas. For example, the vedantic tradition is classified into advaita (non-dualist), dvaita (dualist) and Integral, thereby avoiding the nuances of Abhinavagupta's *saibadvaita* (Saivik non-dualism), Ramanuja's *visistadvaita* (qualified non-dualism), Nimbarka's *dvaitadvaita* (doctrine of dual non-dual) and Vallabha's *suddhadvaita* (pure non-dualism). Perhaps this kind of simplification is necessary because the main content of the book, not including the study guide sections, is written in about 70 pages. Some of the finer nuances of the Indian psychological tradition could have been addressed if the book length had been expanded a little further.

Manas

Indian Psychology: An experiential approach, available from Indian Psychology Institute (ipi.org.in), and VAK bookshop, Pondicherry, Price in India Rs 290.

Inauguration of Auroville - Concept and Purpose

Why did Mother start the project of Auroville? And what did people experience on a dusty plateau on that morning of 28th February, 1968? These are the two questions Aurovilian Franz Fassbender set out to answer in this book.

Has he succeeded in doing this? Very largely, yes. He includes key extracts where Mother talks about her vision of Auroville and of its key purpose in humanity's "resurrection to a higher and truer life", and the book contains numerous recollections by participants of the inauguration day and the preparations for it.

The book includes fascinating new material or fleshes out what was already only vaguely understood. For example, Nata's account of the sheer logistical challenge of constructing, within a few weeks, not only an amphitheatre but also eight kilometres of road; or Mother telling a young Manas Das Gupta that the "real Auroville" will take another 200 years.

There are also more intimate accounts, like Paolo Tommasi refusing Mother's request to carry the Italian banner at the inauguration because he wanted to remain close to her; or the two young Ashram students who seemed almost more interested in discovering each other than in the event unfolding around them.

The book does a good job in evoking the atmosphere of a day on which everybody there felt something extraordinary had happened. Where it is less successful is in its organization and presentation of material. There is a lot of repetition concerning the ceremony itself (Poppo's story is even told twice), some of the photos are poor and lacking in interest, the chronological organization is sometimes unclear and there is occasional sloppiness in spellings and attributions.

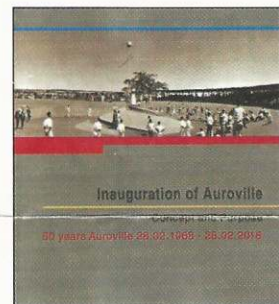
No doubt, for the hard-core devotee none of this is a distraction. However, if this book is aimed also at someone who wishes to learn about Auroville and the Inauguration for the first time, the book represents something of a challenge. This is because this is more an archive of unedited, or lightly edited, documents relating to a particular event – something of an immersion experience for devotees – than a doorway through which a reader without much prior knowledge can pass.

This kind of reader would require something different: good overview articles of the preparations and the event itself plus short, well-edited memories from participants.

Of course, Franz's intention may not be to seek a wider readership but, rather, through evoking a particular moment, to replant an aspiration deep in the hearts of those who live in Auroville now. "It (the Inauguration) is for all of us here a Zero point, a Zero time point from where we started. So we should take some time to study why some 5000 people came to this place in a deserted piece of land located in Tamil Nadu," he writes.

Alan

Inauguration of Auroville. Concept and Purpose. Published by PRISMA. Available from Wild Seagull bookshop, SABDA and auroville.com. Price Rs. 650.

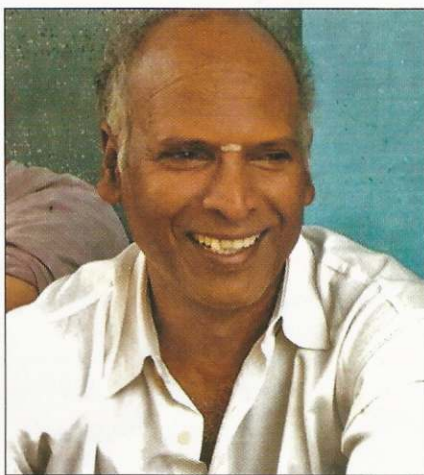


PASSING

Kaniappan

In the early evening of Sunday 10 September, Aurovilian Kaniappan suffered a road accident between Kottakarai village and the Visitors Centre, resulting in a severe head injury that left him unconscious. He was taken to JIPMER where, with his family nearby, he passed away in the afternoon of Monday, September 11th. He was 56 years old.

Hailing from Edaiyanchavadi, Kaniappan was one of those who joined us in the early seventies. Accompanying his father Dhanapal, one of Auroville's early forest workers, he did all kinds of jobs and, at the age of 13, was one of the first students in Meenakshi's Ilaigarkal school. Soon, his four brothers and sister joined him in Auroville. He worked for years at the Matrimandir and moved from there to Abri as a mechanic where he built up the Puncture Service, which he ran for the last 30 years.



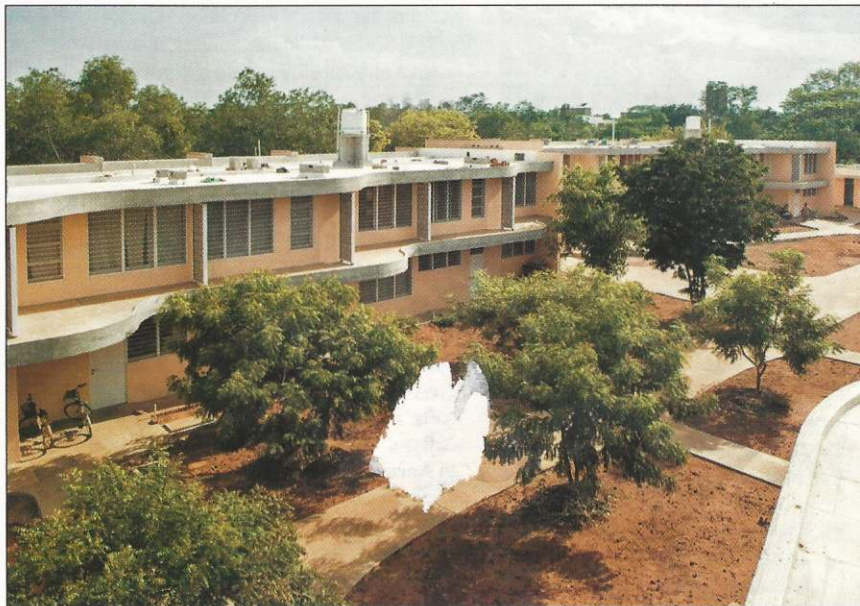
Kaniappan was a much appreciated Aurovilian, with an always-friendly demeanour and keen knowledge of the job at hand. He was also widely respected in Kottakarai and Edaiyanchavadi villages.

Kaniappan's remains were buried on Tuesday 12th at the Adventure funeral grounds with many people attending.

Our readers will have noted that in the print edition of the September issue, two mistakes have crept in.

The first is that the date of the issue on page 1 was printed as September 2018, which of course should have been September 2017. The second is that the photo of Courage community on page 4 was copied on page 5 in the Sanjana community article. The correct photo is published here. We apologize for the mistakes.

Editors



Some of the apartments in Sanjana community

PHOTO MARCO SAROLDI

CORRECTIONS

Bhu/Earth: A dance theatre show inspired by Kalaripayattu

Bhu was a testimony to Auroville's potential in bringing together diverse groups of people for synergetic collaborations. Conceived by Philippe Pelen and Moucazambo Thierry of the visiting French theatre company "Les Porteurs d'eau," Bhu drew its inspiration chiefly from conversations between the choreographers and Barbara of Ritam, Auroville and the work of Kalarigram, a Kalaripayattu institute in the vicinity of Auroville. Moucazambo Thierry and practitioners of Kalaripayattu were the performers, while the percussionists came from Kerala, Auroville, and the island of Reunion. Innovative musical instruments from the Auroville unit, Svaram were artfully used during the performance to create desired sound effects when depicting natural elements like wind and thunder. Auroville Art Service was responsible for bringing all this talent together.

A choreographer herself Anu described Bhu as "a powerful work that brings together Kalari, aboriginal, tai chi and Kathakali vocabularies with extraordinary grace, perfection and depth of experience." I watched Bhu under the stars at the open performance-space at Kalarigram. It seemed a perfect setting for this theatrical dance that



described itself as "the journey of a man looking for connection with himself and Nature."

I was enthralled by the dexterity, the strength, the suppleness and grace of the Kalari dancers.

PHOTO MARCO SAROLDI

Kalaripayattu from Kerala is regarded as the oldest martial art of the world, and as with all martial arts, it is the single-pointed focus of the performer - that delicate balance of motion and stillness, of strength and restraint - which holds one in thrall. Combined with this were some elements that could be attributed to Australian aboriginal performances and recorded Sanskrit chants. Holding all these diverse cultural threads together was a simple plot of a strong, angry young man who discovers an even greater strength by regaining his essential connection to the universe. Through successive encounters with an old Kalari master, the young man is reminded of his integral connection to earth, air, water, and spirit. The costume of the young man, a costume that he theatrically discards at the end, leads one to also interpret the play as an allegory of the modern man's disconnect with nature.

The only thing that jarred for me was the narration, which seemed to be an add-on rather than an integral element of the performance. For me, the narrative was a bit too simplistic. As the saying goes, "the script told more than it showed." A more subtle script would have integrated itself better with this elegant performance.

Bindu

AGRICULTURE

Why do millets matter?

Bindu, who is working on a movie on the topic, shares her understanding of the importance of millets, internationally, nationally and locally.

Devinder Sharma, nationally acclaimed in India for his work on food security writes: "If I were to ask you to list the natural foods you eat, it would go somewhat like this. Wheat, rice, tomato, cucumber, apple, banana... you begin to reel out the names. Not many can go beyond 20. Try a little harder, and you will probably end up with another 10. Push yourself a little more, that number could go up to 35. That's it." On the other hand, as Sharma points out, a forest tribal in India is still accustomed to a diet of 1500 different kinds of food. India's traditional varied food culture, which itself is linked to its inherent natural resources and richness in agro-biodiversity, has been increasingly eroded in favour of what is called "a globalized diet."

The globalized diet, the child of industrial agriculture and a market economy, relies on 3 major staples: rice, wheat and corn. These 3 grains together form over 50% of the world daily calorie intake. Rice and wheat in particular have been heavily promoted in India with research policies and subsidies. Internationally, however, in the era of climate change-induced crop failures, policy makers are recognizing the follies of narrowing down our diet to these few crops. Moreover, rice and wheat are not

climate change resilient crops. Wheat is an extremely thermally sensitive crop: as the temperature increases, the yield from wheat substantially decreases. And modern rice cultivation is water intensive. It also aggravates the problem of climate change: methane, a potent climate change gas, is produced due to the stagnant water in the paddy fields.



Tenai (Foxtail millet)

The millets, on the other hand, could be the key to providing food security in the climate change era as they can withstand higher heat regimes and grow in poor soils in non-irrigated fields. Best of all, millets are regarded as a complete food as they are highly nutritious. Thus, when I was contacted to help make a movie on climate justice, I decided to focus on the issue of millets and food security.

Practically every agricultural region in India was once home to different varieties of millets and a meal of millets was an inherent part of an Indian's diet, but as market forces started influencing traditional agricultural practices, millet cultivation has steadily declined. Unlike rice, wheat and sugar, millets do not receive any subsidies from the government. And while millets grow easily, processing millets for consumption is labour-intensive. Lastly, and perhaps

most importantly, millets do not command a good price on the market as opposed to other crops. Ram Subramanian who heads the Sustainable Livelihood Institute at Auroville, bluntly told me that it is only tribals in the forests who still grow millets and directed me to visit the Tribal Health Initiative in Sittlingi.

The Tribal Health Initiative is a hospital for remote tribal villages started by Dr. Regi and Lalitha George twenty years ago in the Sittlingi valley of Kalrayan hills in western Tamil Nadu. As doctors, Regi and Lalitha knew about the role nutrition plays in preventive health care, so about a decade ago, they undertook a *padayatra* (walking journey) through the villages talking about the importance of organic food



Ragi or Kelvaragu (finger millet)

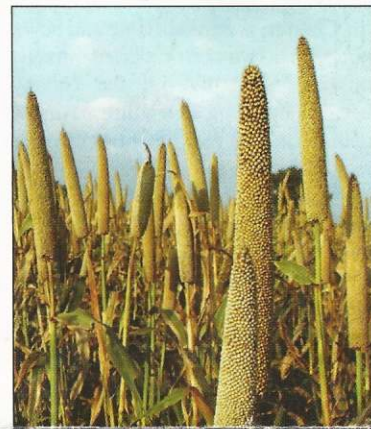
and millets. This resulted in an organic farmers' cooperative movement, currently 500 strong and growing, in the region. A *sine qua non* condition for being part of this organization was that the farmers would grow at least one acre of millets. Regi explained that millet cultivation was being abandoned in favour of more lucrative crops like tapioca. But he knew that if the farmers grew some millets, at least they would

consume a part of it. Regi's strategy worked out. Today, while the Sittlingi farmers' cooperative sell some millets and even processed millets items like cookies to outside stores, a portion of the millets is consumed locally. "By just having one millet-based meal, every day, the nutrition and health of the local people has vastly improved," says Regi for "in terms of nutrients such as proteins, fibre, iron, minerals or micronutrients, millets are much more superior to wheat and rice." Local production and consumption are the best ways to ensure food security in these uncertain times of declining product due to changes in the climate.

Millet cultivation in the Auroville area has steadily decreased due to a number of reasons, including lack of demand. Says Tomas, who manages Annapurna, Auroville's largest grain farm: "Last year we lost heavily in the area of cultivating millets. The kudravalli crop, which was poor to begin with, was fully destroyed by the peacocks; the varagu (kodo millet) crop yields were 50% less than normal and of poor quality because of too little rain and some wildlife damage. Also, processing the poor crop will give less return and take more labour to complete. Even in good years these crops are hardly breaking even because of low yields and increasing labor cost. Annapurna cannot afford to grow it on a larger scale any longer. We will try to purchase varagu in the bioregion after the monsoon, but even that might prove difficult.

"If Auroville is really serious about wanting millets grown on its farms we need to make a very comprehensive assessment, as well as commit ourselves as a community, financially, to develop systems which are in the long run doable. Required investments will never be financially viable in our current economical thinking, which is focussed on the short-term and have to be seen in a different light.

"Left to the farmers these crops will



Kambu (Pearl millet)

simply disappear. Residents, the consumers, need to give voice to their food requirements, and get more actively involved to help ensure these millets continue to be available."

As a community, Auroville seems to have a narrow focus regarding economic security, which does not include looking at how best to secure local, organic food. As Tomas implies, farmers are pretty much left to their own devices instead of following a vision of planning to ensure food security in the future. In India, however, climate change has forced planners to radically change their past direction and recognize the need for agro-biodiversity. For the first time in India, millets have been included in the Public Distribution System in the National Food Security Act of 2013. The Public Distribution System is a social policy where the government facilitates the supply of food grains at subsidized prices through "ration" or fair price shops to about 160 million poor families. To implement the directive in the National Food Security Act, Karnataka has already taken steps to grow ragi and varagu millets on a large scale by offering incentives to the farmers. Perhaps Auroville can take a cue from such initiatives and distribute millets in its "in-kind"/cashless internal economy.

Bindu



Varagu (kodo millet)

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