

Auroville Today

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Too much bureaucracy?

Auroville is seeing an increase in bureaucracy. The Funds and Assets Management Committee proposes to enlarge its 12-page Code of Conduct for trusts and units of the Auroville Foundation to a 40-page document: the Town Development Council has come up with an empanelment process for contractors in Auroville and has initiated a process for how to deal with people who build without building permissions; the Entry Board is facing official "Auroville Foundation (Admission and termination of Persons in the register of residents) Regulations 2020; and there is an increasing 'imposition' of regulations from outside Auroville. Abha, Christine and Tency, who all joined Auroville more than 40 years ago, express their concerns to *Auroville Today*.

Abha: We are seeing a movement which is centrifugal, widening and widening, getting increasingly externalised and further away from the central truth and goal. But this is the opposite of what Auroville should be doing. We seem to have lost focus on what has brought us here. We should be looking at what we are supposed to do, at the deepest level, at the level of The Mother's vision that Auroville could become the cradle of the superman. We should focus inward towards this deepest aspiration. That, I feel, is the only way to get out of this outwardness.

Christine: I share this completely. I was thinking of Satprem's *On the Way to Superhumanity*, "From within outward". Auroville is focusing on the external and to such an extent that I have become pessimistic and have started to wonder if the Auroville experiment is over, or if we still can try the Real Thing, which is to act from inside, with sincerity as the only benchmark. Mother said "No Rules." She said "Rules are stifling life", and this is what governments do and what Auroville now is following. Some people say "this is because of the Auroville Foundation," but I do not think this is fully correct. For sure, the Foundation has brought its own amount of bureaucracy, but we have gone much beyond that.

The only solution for us is to go within and act from there; otherwise, there is no hope and people may leave Auroville in consequence. Very often I feel like leaving, as I no longer recognize anything we came for. We, who came here more than 40 years ago, have known an Auroville which was not like that. For sure, it was not paradise, it was not ideal, but it was not so full of these stifling rules.

Tency: I am less pessimistic. We are at that tipping point where we have to try and find ourselves again and say "this is not possible any longer, let us all reflect a little bit." Aurovilians come from many different backgrounds and cultures – today there are people from 53 nationalities – and all come with a trunk full of qualities and of shortcomings, weaknesses and dishonesty – you name it, everything is there. That trunk is opened when coming to Auroville and everybody is confronted with their own shortcomings, and those of others. Often, we don't see a way out of all those messy and chaotic and dishonest things.

But coming to Auroville means that a cleaning needs to happen, for Auroville cannot become what it is intended to be when these things remain submerged.

But how to do this? We experience that when sitting together with three or four people, you can have an in-depth conversation, a rich one, with everybody intently listening to each other. If you are in a group of ten or twenty people, that quality of communication seems to get lost. The dedication, the inner flame, which is there in quite a number of individuals, seems unable to assert itself when we have large meetings. To compensate for that lost aspect is one of the reasons why people come up with rules and regulations, mostly a copy-and-paste job of rules existing outside. Should we not try to do things differently, trying out something else than what has been tried outside? This requires a sincere individual effort. We have to go within and act from there. For that is the real reason why this little place on earth was started.

Abha mentioned the ideal of Auroville to become the place for hastening the next evolutionary breakthrough. If we Aurovilians could carry the aspiration to follow what Sri Aurobindo and The Mother wanted to achieve, to be open to the supramental vibration which they made descend into the world, and which is becoming stronger by the day, I believe it will have a huge impact. It will become increasingly uncomfortable for all of us, participants in the Auroville adventure, to deny that vibration and forget why we have been invited to come and participate in this unique attempt. The FAMC's Code of Conduct is an outdated effort to deal with our internal shortcomings of not being able to agree collectively; doing that battle with traditional means is taking a wrong direction. It has been shown not to work – or only to a limited extent – in the outside world, so why would it work here? We have been given the challenge to try something else. We should do our best to look for that something else, and not let it evaporate and slip away again.

Christine: Over the years, Auroville has created an imposing structure with pages and pages and pages of mandates and regulations and guidelines which are weapons in the hands of legalistically minded people to accuse Auroville of 'not having followed this or that'.



The Town Hall strangled by red tape

Kireet Joshi [a former Chairman of the Auroville Foundation and the author of the *Auroville Foundation Act*, eds.] once said to me that there is a great virtue in vagueness and I have found this to be true. Rules should be as

general and as flexible as possible. Extensive mandates are a madness. What a group should be doing should be said in no more than two lines. And that would also be a safeguard against legalistic questions from outside.

The regulation overdose is also an issue for Newcomers, who are confronted with a volley of regulations about what they have to pay for a house with this percentage and that percentage added – it's killing, and it doesn't encourage generosity. Actually, it encourages the opposite and the same goes for commercial units who are told that they have to contribute 33% of their profits. The

strictness is a damper on the generosity. Many units now pay exactly 33% and not a paisa more.

Abha: We have to switch levels entirely. When we come to a place like Auroville, it is an inner choice; and you can't cheat the Divine. Who are people cheating when they cheat? Their deal is with the Divine, not with the FAMC. If you cheat at that highest or deepest level, it is your problem. I think we should only function at the level where we expect the highest from everyone; and if someone is not at that level, all the worse for that person. The last messages of The Mother for Auroville were all along those same lines: "Do not lie". She said it at least four times in the last years. What if Auroville groups could simply hold the mirror up of what is expected of each one of us, and have trust? Auroville brings out the worst at times, but we may trust that there will also be moments when it will bring out the best. And that's what we have to demand from each of us. It doesn't help to keep looking at the worst and making rules to deal with that.

Tency spoke of the inner flame. I think that flame is there and growing in many of us, and I believe that is the real reason why many people in India respect Auroville.

When the Prime Minister of India addressed the Auroville residents in February 2018, he said very beautiful things about Auroville. His was an inspirational speech which showed that at one level, India continues to follow Auroville with great hopes.

In *The Agenda*, The Mother gave a *raison d'être* for the creation of Auroville. She said that India has become the symbolic representation of all the difficulties of present-day humanity; that it is in India that there will be the cure; and it was for this reason She had created Auroville – a nucleus whose work would have a sort of influence on India, which in turn would have an influence on the world. To grow towards such a lofty goal, we have to nurture that inner flame in each and every one of us. We have to demand of each other the best that we know a person can be.

A problem is that we don't know everybody, like we did in the olden days. Then, we used to fight and argue, but in the evening we met for tea and cake. There was a brotherhood. That seems somehow missing today: we have become too individualistic, and doing things together like we used to is no longer there. This should change: we should find ways to meet and come to know each other at that higher or deeper level. It is not about having more of a social life; it's about deepening our collective life.

Tency: What we seem to forget is that Auroville has been given an unbelievable Charter with four sections which say it all. It starts at the individual level: if you want to be part of this experiment, you have to be a willing servitor of the Divine Consciousness; that is the first effort you have to do as an individual. The other lines give you all the possibilities that you can imagine, and the very last line mentions the collective effort towards a living embodiment of a human unity. It is all listed out, giving the greatest possible freedom within a spiritual framework. Wouldn't that be enough?

Abha: Yes. The Charter should be our only Code of Conduct. We could add "To be a True Aurovillian". For it is the same thing.

Tency: This may be a way out of our present impasse: those who have the inner flame burning could hold up the mirror that Abha was talking about. That requires the growth and blossoming of an intensive collective inner fire in many individuals before we can move further. That may not yet be strong enough, but I trust that this is being prepared at some higher level. Meanwhile, to paraphrase Sri Aurobindo in *Savitri*, we can act with the truth that saves, and not with the truth that slays and hurts.

In conversation with Caryl



Abha



Christine



Tency

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The need to specify minimum conditions

Over the last few months, the functioning of the Funds and Assets Management Committee has come under fire. The members are accused of following a top-down approach, wanting to accumulate power, lacking efficiency, not delegating issues, refusing collaboration, showing no respect for others, providing insufficient basic communication, and being arbitrary in their decisions. Those who object to its functioning now propose that the constitution of the FAMC is changed.

One of the most controversial issues is the Code of Conduct which was introduced in Auroville four years ago. Its opponents believe that it will, among other things, increase bureaucracy regarding the functioning of Auroville's units.

Auroville Today spoke to Lyle, one of the Funds and Assets Committee (FAMC) members, to get clarification on the responsibilities of the FAMC and to get his views on the need to have basic guidelines concerning how our trusts and business units function, as well as on the proposal to change the constitution of the FAMC.

Lyle: When the Government of India created the Auroville Foundation in 1990, it set up one legal entity which was responsible for everything in Auroville: safeguarding all immovable assets (all lands and buildings), acquiring more lands, ensuring the completion and operation of the Matrimandir, and running educational institutions, commercial units, service units and the scientific research units. The first Secretary, seeing the enormity and unmanageability of all this, started a system of office orders whereby individuals and groups of individuals were given the responsibility to run a unit or a service on behalf of the Auroville Foundation. In later years, this was replaced by a structure of management trusts which are part of the Auroville Foundation. With the growth of Auroville, this structure has expanded enormously. Today there are 37 trusts, under which 303 units, 372 activities and 120 City Service activities operate. The total number of units and activities is 792; more than 1,500 people have been appointed as trustees or executive.

The FAMC mandate

The FAMC's work and composition has been laid down in an extensive mandate, which was approved by the Residents' Assembly in 2016. Apart from its overall mission – to encourage the development of an economy based on the Mother's vision and instructions – it has as practical tasks to promote a vibrant and sustainable economy and protect and grow Auroville's funds and assets. While doing so, it has to ensure that all financial rules and regulations, both internal and external, are followed; that there is financial transparency, clarity, and accountability; and that all funds and assets of Auroville are being managed in a responsible manner and are used to achieve the vision set out in the Charter of Auroville.

This mandate gives an overwhelmingly large role to the FAMC. It has to approve land issues such as proposed land purchases, sales, and exchange; it appoints and removes stewards of land assets; it oversees the functioning of all trusts, units and activities of the Auroville Foundation and takes action as required; it appoints and removes trustees and executives; and it reviews applications for new building construction and infrastructure projects for financial integrity and sustainability. It constitutes and oversees the functioning of the Housing Board and that of the Budget Coordination Committee, and supervises the functioning of the Unity Fund. Last but not least, it is responsible for maintaining a register of all trustees and executives; a register of all land and building assets; and, jointly with the Secretary, Auroville Foundation, ensuring proper accounting procedures and overseeing the drafting of the Consolidated Balance Sheet of the Auroville Foundation, which has to be submitted to the Indian Parliament.

ACARAT, the unified accounting system, and the Code of Conduct

To do this work, over the years various systems have been developed. One is ACARAT, a computerized register which has the personal data of all trustees, executives and activity managers, when they were appointed, and when their term of office ends. It also has the data of all lands and buildings owned by the Auroville Foundation.

Another work is to develop a unified and standardized accounting system where each trust and unit follows the same accounting model, booking incomes and expenses under the same headers. This would immensely facilitate the making of profit and loss accounts and balance sheets – one click of a button would be sufficient. It would also help at consolidating the accounts of all the units into their trust accounts, and the consolidation of all trusts accounts in the consolidated account of the Auroville Foundation. This work is still in process, as it has met roadblocks because some units refuse to follow the prescribed systems.

Another work was to develop a Code of Conduct for all units of the Auroville Foundation. More than half of the Code consist of 'normal traffic rules': how do we create a trust, a unit or an activity; how does one become a trustee or an executive; what does it mean to be a trustee or executive; how do you close a unit; and when does one's trusteeship ends.

Running a unit implies taking risks; but it is not sufficiently known in Auroville that those risks accrue to the Auroville Foundation – or rather, to the community itself. So it is necessary to explain what a unit can and cannot do. You have to specify minimal conditions, a kind of floor level, because we saw people going below this. People were booking personal expenses as expenses of the unit and one unit did not maintain accounts at all. This makes it necessary to put some minimal guidelines in place. If a unit executive acts below that level, then the FAMC, on behalf of the community, should be able to take action.

The Code also specifies how much a unit should contribute to the community – commercial units 33% of their profits; guesthouses 20% and eateries 5% of their turnover – and the unit can self-determine what it does with the remaining surplus, as long as it is used to benefit Auroville as a whole. There have been discussions proposing changes to the contributions schedule, making it more equitable, introducing a progressive contribution system where smaller units pay a smaller percentage and large units a large one. This is normal in the rest of the world and is fairer as it helps smaller units to get off the ground. But we have never been able to get that considered by the commercial unit executives, despite numerous attempts to discuss it. There is another discussion going on concerning if a service unit and a research unit that make a profit should contribute to City Services. The FAMC believe they should; the Board of Services object.

Another topic which we are trying to address is the topic of large bank holdings which some units have. We are proposing that those units that are holding large reserves inform the FAMC what their plans are; and that those reserves are parked in the collective Auroville Maintenance account, with the stipulation that the unit would continue to get the interest which the bank otherwise would pay. This too has been refused to date.

The FAMC is also required to resolve the problems with defaulting units. This too makes a minimum of regulations necessary. Otherwise, what right does the FAMC have to dissolve the unit and find the money to pay off the creditors?

Government rules and regulations

If there is an increase in bureaucracy, this is also due to the fact that Auroville has to follow the rules of the Government of India. There are quite a few, and these rules are increasingly becoming stringent: the government is moving towards a tighter oversight system using all computerised information systems available. This makes full compliance mandatory. No longer is it possible to go and meet an official and convince him of your point of view: the system now returns a notice based on a number of criteria, independent of the judgement by a particular official. Those in Auroville who feel that "Auroville is different" and that for that reason the rules should not apply, are out of touch with reality.

We encountered this problem with the newly introduced Goods and Services Tax (GST). At the time the GST started, the rules were very unclear and many rules were still being formulated. The problem was that if you do not fully adhere to GST, you would be liable to pay a penalty per day, and those penalties accumulate. And of course, the GST was extremely difficult to apply to Auroville with its unique structure. Nobody knew exactly how to resolve the issues. A delegation from Auroville visited the Ministry of Finance in New Delhi to see if Auroville could enjoy a special exemption from GST. The response was largely negative: the government agreed to exempt Auroville maintenances from GST, but did not give any other exemptions. Meanwhile, a large number of trusts and units

proceeded to get their own GST numbers. But our Chartered Accountants finally advised us to minimize the number of registrations, and so minimize the risks, which would have the additional advantage that Auroville would pay less GST. The FAMC organised a community meeting in the presence of three of Auroville's Chartered Accountants and the Secretary of the Auroville Foundation, where we explained the necessity for bringing down the number of GST registrations. But ABC members objected that they had not been sufficiently consulted and blamed the FAMC for the unclarity. Today, many GST registrations have been cancelled, but the mistrust continues.

Mistrust and the change of FAMC mandate

This became evident once again when we tried to constitute a feedback committee on the changes we would like to make in the present Code of Conduct. We want to introduce details for eligibility of being trustee and executive, specify their duties and responsibilities, introduce succession planning, and make tighter conditions for what to do in cases where mismanagement is suspected. The proposed amendments also include stipulations on the use of external bank accounts for fixed deposits; and conditions to ensure that units are maintaining adequate reserves for employees upon termination of their contracts in accordance with government rules, such as the Employees Provident Fund.

We asked the trustees of the 37 trusts to nominate the feedback committee, but they refused. The Auroville Board of Commerce proposed that they would nominate such a committee, which was not what the FAMC had asked for. The Auroville Board of Services refused to participate altogether. So we decided to postpone the review process.

Now attempts are made at changing the FAMC mandate and going back to a system which existed in the past when the FAMC was controlled by various interest groups. I do not think this would be good for Auroville. The present mandate specifies that the FAMC's nine members are appointed by the community. This came into being in 2016, when there was dissatisfaction with the system of working group representation. It was found that the representatives of working groups were inclined to defend the interest of their working group rather than those of the community. Also, it was noted that the representative would have little time to actually do the work of the FAMC, next to his or her other work obligations. Is this what the community wants to go back to? Moreover, this will disempower the Residents Assembly to select people it feels are suitable because under the new proposal the RA would be able to select only three members, whereas they can select all nine at present. There is also an agitation against the present Code of Conduct and a move to come up with an alternative document. I am not arguing that the Code is perfect. But it is a first honest attempt to ensure a collective sharing of resources that are generated within Auroville and to protect Auroville from units assuming liabilities that could endanger Auroville's financial viability.

In conversation with Carel

REFLECTION

Who hasn't been cornered by this impossible question and forced to stutter some superficial reply? For there are so many dimensions to this complex experiment that it is impossible to grasp all of them. But it raises the question, how do we evaluate success or failure in Auroville?

My impression is that we tend to use very conventional indicators. For example, we pronounce a productive unit successful if it generates plenty of income for the common pot, whereas an ambitious initiative that folds after a short period is deemed a failure, along, sometimes, with the 'dreamer' who launched it.

But do such crude indicators tell the full story? Isn't it conceivable that a profitable unit may not be expressing some of Auroville's key values? Or that a 'failed' initiative may generate valuable learning that can be put to good use in the future? And isn't it sometimes necessary that an attempt at a highly idealistic project is made, even though it fails, so that that vision is kept alive (something Mother implied was the case in earlier attempts at creating Auroville)?

And how do you evaluate, quantify, the development of individual skills, consciousness, and ability to work well in a group, which may be the consequence of an individual participating in a 'failed' experiment?

Business managers and psychologists the world over now realise that crude indicators are insufficient to assess either an individual's ability

How is Auroville doing?

or a company's performance. Consequently, the intellectual intelligence (IQ) test is now frequently supplemented by other forms of assessment, like emotional intelligence (EQ), adaptability quotient (AQ), curiosity quotient (CQ), personality quotient (PQ), and even spiritual intelligence (SQ). At the same time, many commercial projects now take into account not only the generation of profits but also their impact upon society and the environment (the 'triple bottom line') in assessing their overall performance. But in Auroville there's yet another dimension to consider.

Two of Mother's early messages give the clue: *You know, people get restless because 'things are not moving fast'; then I had that vision of the divine formation taking place underneath, all-powerful, irresistible, regardless of that whole external hubbub.*

Auroville is going very well and is becoming more and more real, but its realization does not proceed in the usual human way and it is more visible to the inner consciousness than to the outer eye.

In other words, to understand what is really going on here, we have to ignore the surface manifestations and turbulence, and try to connect with the deeper unfolding which does "not proceed in the usual human way".

But how to do this? Clearly, something that is "more visible to the inner consciousness" cannot be accessed using our usual mental toolbox. For what Mother may be referring to is not a scale

model of an alternative township, with all its buildings and activities already in place, simply waiting to drop down, but a particular mode of being or consciousness, the spirit of the 'true Auroville'. And, perhaps, it is only when we can identify ourselves with that, that the true outer manifestation will follow.

Mother described this process as follows:

In modern civilization, men work on the surface. The mind is the surface of existence; they work on the surface and then try to find the Truth that is behind by studying more and more deeply. Whereas the true method is to enter into direct contact with the inner Truth, and impelled by that, guided by that, to make an outer construction which is not a seeking for the Truth, but a creation of the Truth...

Sri Aurobindo described a similar process regarding how the Ashram developed.

There has never been, at any time, a mental plan, a fixed programme or an organisation decided beforehand. The whole thing has taken birth, grown and developed as a living being by a movement of consciousness...

This, of course, is the very opposite of the process which is usually followed in the world, which is to draw up plans or strategies for shaping behaviour, towns, the economy, etc. Actually, Auroville is no different from anywhere else in this respect – after all, this is the approach we are most familiar with. And it's easier, much easier,

when confronted with a problem to come up with an instant material 'fix', like a new guideline, or group or selection process.

And, of course, we can't just sit on our hands, doing nothing, until we have managed to identify ourselves with that 'Truth' consciousness. We have a town to build, so we must do the best we can with our present capabilities. But the building can also be a learning process if we approach it as a form of karma yoga, and a means to contact and develop that other consciousness. Otherwise, even inspiring projects like the Galaxy may become no more than a mechanical placing of brick upon brick.

In fact, Mother has left us many indications of how we can contact the 'spirit of Auroville'. It's all there in *The Charter, To be a true Aurovillian, A Dream*, and in so many other messages. The problem is that we tend to translate these simply into material guidelines ('no cash in the city', etc.) rather than receiving them as expressions of a particular consciousness, and allowing that consciousness to infuse our being as a preliminary to any important discussion or material creation in Auroville.

Above all, we have the Matrimandir, the 'soul' of Auroville. This unique fusion of matter and spirit, concrete and consciousness, is the first expression in matter of the true Auroville and a prime gateway to that deeper dimension. Born of vision, materialised through many hands and hearts, it is the supreme accomplishment of a process that develops from within to without.

Alan

Fostering goodwill towards the city

Auroville City Conversations is the online discussion forum of the exhibition *The City The Earth Needs*, which has been in the Unity Pavilion since February. The conversations (all on YouTube) and exhibition focus on the development of Auroville as a city, with the goal of reconnecting people to Auroville's original aims and vision while discussing ways in which the Galaxy model and Master Plan can be nurtured and developed.

Exhibition curator and conversation programmer Anu hopes that the discussions will open up the exhibition topics for wider in-depth exploration. "At present the city plan has a very negative response in the community, it is very misunderstood and still faces violent reactions," says Anu. Knowledge is not available or confused, and the city does not have a natural space in our culture, education or life research. This makes us and Auroville the losers. The pandemic shows just how much more we ought to be doing to offer a live, integrated model to a world in crisis."

Anu explains that the concept of an online discussion was sparked by an exhibition three years ago of the Galaxy drawings, which sparked interest from many people who wanted more information and understanding. She was then invited by Unity Pavilion to develop a more detailed exhibition, which she did with the support of the exhibition team that includes Anandi, Aryamani, Devasmita, Jacqueline and Uma. Research help came from Sri Aurobindo Ashram Archives, Auroville Archives and the Roger Anger Archives.

Following the healthy interest in the initial conversations that took place at Unity Pavilion on February 28th (Auroville's birthday!), the team was encouraged to make videos as a way to continue the discussion during lockdown. Four new videos now up are a mix of zoom conversations, slides, excerpts from past presentations, and video interviews.

The first two videos feature zoom discussions with renowned Indian architect B.V. Doshi, who has been a member of the Auroville Governing Board and Chair of Auroville's Town Development Council. In conversation with



The City exhibition at the Unity Pavilion

Auroville's Toine van Megen and Sreevatsa Ramesh, Mr. Doshi emphasised the need to approach planning as not being just about buildings, but rather as a "celebration of life". "That's what I think Mother was talking about. How do you charge the souls to manifest their subtle existence, or the purpose of existence? How do you celebrate life, live life, generate life, and enrich life?" He expressed concerns that Auroville's planners have "narrowed our attitudes, ideas and concerns" while attempting to translate Roger Anger's Galaxy model. Mr. Doshi emphasised the need for a city plan to address the region: "It should address connectivity, integration, relationship and diverse scales and opportunities."

In the second video, Mr. Doshi, Toine and Sreevatsa are joined by Auroville-based architect Omar Rabie and urban planner Andrea Cammarata, to consider the complex issue of how the Master Plan can be translated into a physical town. Omar suggested mixing systems and models, while Andrea emphasised the need to establish a planning relationship with the

villages, and Mr. Doshi suggested the clustering of communities that can accept change and different living styles.

The third video includes four Aurovilians who address different aspects of mobility, including mobility as envisioned in the Galaxy Plan. Architects Helmut and David address the need for good town planning to draw people away from motorised transport and towards more sustainable modes of mobility. Gillian – who has been part of the team that has developed Auroville's green cycle path network over the last 40 years – points to the big increase in cycling during the lockdown ("a miracle") as more people discovered that cycle paths offer faster and more shady alternatives to the dusty roads. Torkil, an entrepreneur in the Industrial Zone, suggests solutions to reduce the amount of heavy traffic passing the Matrimandir each day to service the Industrial Zone.

The fourth video features architect Anupama Kundoo, who has designed buildings in Auroville and is now a 'Friend of Auroville', based abroad. Her current exhibition at the

prestigious Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Denmark showcases research which will benefit Auroville greatly, says Anu, through its "new understanding of land use and by integrating diversity, sustainability and social equity as part of a conscious urban design."

Anu takes up Mr. Doshi's suggestion that Roger's Galaxy concept is "notional", asserting that it is not possible to contain all the layers of a complex design concept in a 2.5 sqm model. "For that, successive master plans are required to flesh out details progressively," she says. "The first master plan, based on the Galaxy plan, was prepared in 1969 by Roger, in consultation with The Mother. Since then, there has been the master plan we refer to, which will also be updated in due course. But one does not supplant another. The concept and master plan work together by respecting a vision laid down, not by Roger, but by The Mother."

"There will always be different ways to express the same thing but we need a conducive space to foster these expressions and nurture them. Through them, hopefully, a goodwill towards the city will be found, which will show us the way forward. Right now, the way forward is all about incremental growth, projects and buildings, stakeholders etc, and that is where our stagnation lies. We need to shift all this to the growth of Auroville as an experiment for humanity, which the city plan represents. Auroville began with a difficult ground reality. We must work with this in order to create solutions, but it should not become a deterrent for the city. The ability and willingness to work with the vision, and not just the wishes of some, will go a long way for the world."

Pointing out that environmental solutions and sustainable goals can be harmonised with the realisation of a city aimed at human unity, Anu hopes to explore more sub-topics in conversation with small groups of people from inside and outside Auroville, both online and at the Unity Pavilion.

Lesley

See the Auroville City Conversation videos: <https://www.facebook.com/aurovillecityconversation>

ENVIRONMENT

Let's Talk Trash

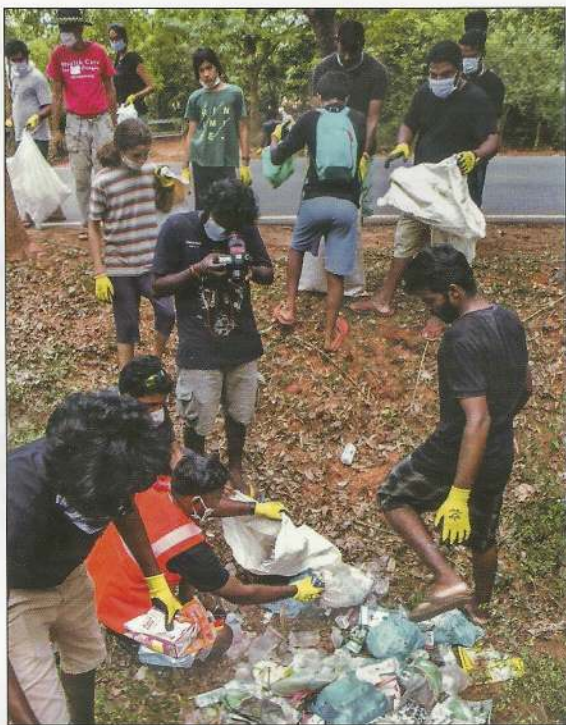
One Saturday morning in November 2017, a bunch of Auroville youth hanging out in the Solar Kitchen parking lot had the 'wild idea' to clean-up some of the ever-increasing amounts of rubbish in Auroville. By the very next day, Bharathy Somasundaram and friends had gathered people and started cleaning up the Certitude to Pitchandikulam stretch of the tar road.

"We finished the event and went for breakfast," says Dinesh Arumugan, "and we didn't expect the garbage to build up again." "The team did not plan to do regular clean-ups", says team member Induja Gandhiprasad, but to just do it once "and see how it goes". However, as the group saw waste begin to reappear on the road, they started fortnightly outings.

Now dubbed 'Let's Talk Trash', the initiative's team members have cleaned the Crown, around Town Hall, and Industrial zone, but they have concentrated mostly on the Certitude to Pitchandikulam stretch for the simple fact that it is the most polluted and, as Dinesh puts it, "If we have 30 people coming, you want to pick up the most rubbish possible". In one year they picked up an impressive 595 kilos of mixed waste (plastic, paper, waste clothes, metal cans, etc) and 700 kilos of glass bottles.

Amongst the expected mix of alcohol, packets and other plastic bags, Rishi mentions finding "a car bonnet, mattresses, masks, condoms, sanitary waste as well as pharmaceutical items including a blood sample tubes. It's awkward to handle and dangerous". The litterers are mostly tourists but, depressingly, they have noticed some Aurovilians dropping garbage off rather than going to the Eco Service.

The organising team is predominantly Auroville youth, Transition and Future school alumni, who are working for the environment and finding ways to give back to Auroville.



photos), but they continue the clean-up activities due to the need. The group also organises clean-ups just for women.

They have noticed that the government only provides for one rubbish bin in villages, with Rishi noting that "we have this big government but no proper help". However, they wish to create positive messaging instead of top-down commands, so they put up three signboards on the tar road. The one near Acceptance depicts a tree saying 'This is my house, not your trash bin.'

Let's Talk Trash celebrated World Clean-up day this September and took part in recent collective waste events in Auroville. Surprisingly, the city of Madurai was the only other place in the South Zone of India that signed up for the global world clean-up day event in 2019. "The awareness is still missing or networking has not been built," says Induja, who is trying to work with the zonal group to further promote the message of cleaning up.

The work brings change to those cleaning up. "Three years ago I stopped buying chip packets," says Induja, a newcomer in Auroville. She grew up in a village where there was "hardly any plastic packaging. If I shop in Pour Tous or HERS there is packaging; I don't want to go back to that. The whole system has to change." Rishi now studies in Pondicherry University and mentions how cleaning up "impacted me because I try not to litter as I

used to. I spread the word in college and when friends buy a pack of chips I urge them not to throw it on the floor." Madhan recalls his pride after a day of picking up twenty sacks of waste, and Dinesh also notices that "after every clean-up I feel motivated and proud of cleaning a particular area because nature becomes much more beautiful. We are trying to set an example".

Peter

Facebook: Lets Talk Trash

Anitya: from vision to reality

Joy of Impermanence (JOI) is an umbrella project that aims to create new communities in Auroville based on impermanence and sustainability. Anitya (Sanskrit for 'impermanence'), is the first community in the project and is now more than three years old. Three of the six core members spoke with *Auroville Today*.

Auroville Today: Impermanence, the decision to move on after five years, is an interesting concept for a community. How did the idea emerge?

Serena: At the time it was very difficult to get a new settlement in Auroville, so we felt an experiment centred on temporary rather than permanent housing would hold more resonance for the planning groups. Impermanence is also very much linked with our ideals. We want to leave a soft footprint on the ground and also to serve Auroville, to be in a place that doesn't belong to anybody in particular. We want to go back to the simplicity of the Dream.

Nikki: A few people are also very inspired by Vipassana and the spiritual aspect of impermanence. So everybody is connected in their own way to this concept of impermanence.

You have been on the land for two years now. What were the challenges you faced and how did you deal with them?

Mathilde: We had so many challenges that I don't know where to start. One which I experienced strongly is that when it comes to the initial vision, everybody said they wanted to live in harmony with nature and have a simple life, but when you are on the ground, you soon learn that your basic needs might be very different from somebody else's. So there is a need to find a balance.

We did this through communication, talking. I've learned there is nothing we cannot solve if we are willing to talk about it. For example, initially we all agreed we would only have a common bathroom and toilets. But as I am pregnant now, I realised we will need to have separate facilities for the baby, so my partner and I brought this issue to the collective table and we talked it through. It helped me realise that now there's nothing that we cannot bring to the table because we have such trust in each other and the process we use is so efficient.

Nikki: When we came from vision to reality, we realized that the more time we spend together, the more important it is to also have our own personal time, otherwise community can drain you. And the only way to find a balance is to adapt and be flexible, otherwise we would be stuck to the idea rather than the needs of the current reality.

Serena: For example, we have a community kitchen but we also have a small kitchen in our house. We have community meetings four times a week and we often have dinner together, but it's nice to have a choice: to have openness for both and not to be forced into anything.

Nikki: But it's taken us a long time to get to this point. It's been 3 ½ years of communicating and working together, and this has helped us a lot in understanding our own needs and getting to know and accept each others' needs.

Regarding adaptation to the ground reality, have your self-sufficiency ideals been modified? You have piped in electricity and water from a neighbouring community...

Serena: This is because the grant we received for infrastructure specified that it had to be permanent, not able to be moved elsewhere. I think we might have done it differently if we had had a choice. However, we haven't given up on

self-sufficiency. Our house is on solar and we try for closed loop systems in the community. The grey water from our kitchens goes to our vegetable garden, we plan to collect all the rainwater from our rooftops, and we have dry compost toilets. Hopefully in a year we will be growing enough vegetables to sustain ourselves with the help of the larger Auroville food ecosystem.

Nikki: Also we are not allowed to dig new wells any more in Auroville. This is why our neighbours, Sacred Groves, are providing us with water.

You spent the first years very much engaged in building the physical community. What did you learn in this process?

Mathilde: When you're doing the physical work, you begin to understand that everybody works differently. There were frustrations, resentments, because people have different values. It was a huge learning about each other and how to accept each other. I can be angry with you because I came on three days to dig a trench and you only came one day, but then the question is how I deal with this. How can I connect more deeply with you and how can we grow together out of this? In this way, the physical work actually accelerated the inner, spiritual process.

We have also developed some meeting tools that work best when each person is willing to look within. For example, we have deep sharings when we share something about ourselves to deepen connection, and we have the sharing circle inspired by restorative circles if there is a problem or an issue we need to resolve. Since the beginning, we agreed that everybody has an equal vote in decision-making and that we are honest and transparent with each other.

Serena: These are some of our core values. Actually, the buildings are not a priority for us. I think the inner work and the sharing are number one. This is why we wanted to be in community. It is all about discovering ourselves through working and being together.

Nikki: Some people have left this project, but it's the ones who have resonated with this aspect of heartfelt receptivity who have stayed.

Mathilde: We don't have to be best friends because we are connected in another way – by the larger idea which we are trying to implement. As long as the person is open to practicing the tools, to grow, it goes a long way. But this kind of commitment requires a lot of time and energy. My partner says you have to be a little crazy to join this project!

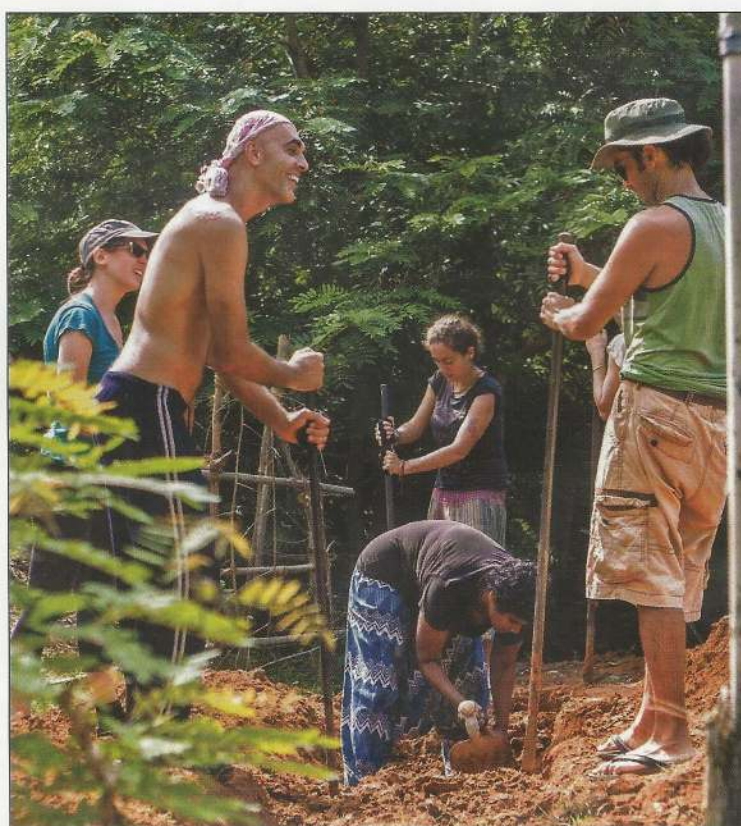
How supportive has Auroville been?

Nikki: Part of challenge with the working groups has been explaining the project to them without knowing ourselves fully how it will evolve. We've faced resistance from them, partly because everything has to be put in boxes now and we don't fit into any of the existing boxes, and partly, I think, because of a suspicion of experiments. Of course, some in the past have not gone to plan, but it's clear to us that Auroville is a place for experiments, and any experiment has to have room to grow or to fail, otherwise no real learning is happening.

In fact, I think it's important to think of a project like this not in terms of success or failure but in terms of what there is to be learnt. This is where our documentation of the process will be incredibly useful.

Serena: Newcomers in particular are inspired by this project and would like to form communities, but they get stuck with the Auroville process. Sometimes it feels like block after block after block. The pioneering spirit in the beginning of Auroville was beautiful, so let us have a chance to experience it, too.

And this project is something that Auroville needs – there's still a lot of land that needs to be protected, and building a sense of community is important. In Auroville right now there is a sense of increasing disconnection, but if we can come together and



Digging an infrastructure trench

solve problems within small groups, solving problems in the larger community would be so much easier.

How is this project financed?

Mathilde: Our first idea was to do fundraising, but we were lucky to get a substantial grant of 30 lakh rupees which paid for all the infrastructure. We also got a small donation from Belgium to start an educational project with the local village. Also all of us also put in at least one lakh rupees each at the beginning.

Nikki: We have all invested something in the project, so we are asking new members to also invest something. Part of that investment will be used to put a little bit aside for when we move on in five years. Individually, you are asked to make a calculation of how much would be required to rebuild your house and to put that money aside before the five years are up.

Do you all share the expenses?

Mathilde: Two years ago during a retreat, the facilitator asked if we would have a common pot where all the expenses would be shared, but we all felt we were not ready for that. Maybe in the future we will be.

Nikki: At present we each look after the construction and maintenance of our individual living spaces, and we put in a certain amount of money every month to cover the maintenance of the collective spaces and salary of our workers. If a big expense comes up, we'll discuss together how to cover it.

Mathilde: In future, we want to make the community financially sustainable because we know grants may not happen again. We feel that running workshops and sharing what we have been able to learn could be a means to sustain ourselves.

We have already run some courses and the participants have been inspired by our process. The videos we are making and the networks we are building now are the next step and will be crucial to fundraise on a larger level.

What about the village aspect? You're in a fairly tough place here because you are close to Edaiyanchavady village and there are often drinking parties in your vicinity...

Nikki: It's true that a lot of drinking has been happening around here, and it has increased over the last few months, and when we first moved here as two women living alone we didn't feel very safe. We've had a few incidents with boys coming to the fence that haven't been very nice. But in reality we haven't had much trouble, just a couple of incidents and a few barrels stolen. I think the fact that the villagers have seen us as physically involved in the work has influenced their perception of us. But what was also very important was the relationships we built with the villagers. Babu and his sister Selvi, who live in the village and were associated with the Thamarai project there, have been particularly helpful in forging links.

Serena: Anitya is located on land that used to be a public toilet for the village ladies, and a busy footpath ran through it to the centre of Auroville, so

we had to be particularly sensitive about fencing it off. We asked advice from friends in the village and others and, based on this, we began by simply erecting granite pillars to mark the boundary and allow people to get used to it. Then there was no big reaction when slowly we started to fence the land.

At the beginning our ideology was do-it-yourself, but we discovered we couldn't do it all ourselves and now we have a gardener from Edaiyanchavady. Actually, he is much more than a gardener; he teaches us about plants, he's security, he talks to everybody who passes by. He's a godsend because he has really strengthened our bond with the village.

Nikki: We also have a lady from Edaiyanchavady who comes three or four times a week to cook community lunch for us. The two of them teach us so much. Even though I was brought up in a Tamil home, I lived in a city so there are many things I don't know about culture. And the villagers appreciate that we are employing local people.

Mathilde: We also have an educational bridge with the village, a project that came naturally together. The Thamarai project began in Edaiyanchavady, but when the centre had to shift to another village, this left the local children without evening schooling. Babu had been helping them to do their homework in front of his house, but it wasn't an ideal space as there were dogs, drunks. So when we learned about this, we offered to hold the classes in Anitya. Normally the children do homework and have an English class, but on weekends they have games and artistic activities, and we have a project to develop a sports ground for them.

What are the main learnings that you take from this experience which could be applied elsewhere?

Mathilde: One of them would be the need for humility, for not arriving in a place thinking you know what to do, especially if you are close to a village. It is best to be humble, to observe, to connect with your neighbours, before building your fence and houses.

Regarding the community itself, I think the most effective tools are creating a space where everybody has an equal voice and finding ways to resolve conflict. The reason why most collective projects collapse is the 'human factor'. Most of us do not learn how to use breakdown to breakthrough, we don't learn to transform because we see conflict only as a problem. But here we use conflict as an opportunity to grow, to learn; this, for me, is one of the biggest learnings.

Nikki: I also feel that we have somehow been able to channel something that is beyond one person or the group as a whole. I've observed that in Auroville many communities are led or managed by a single individual, but this wouldn't have worked here because we feel that this project is bigger than any one of us.

Are you all prepared to move on after five years? Many people would feel attached to a place after putting so much energy into building it up from scratch.

Nikki: We always said that the five years would start when the last person moves into the community, but it will probably start from January next year when the entire core group will be living here.

After that, we will review where we are after every two years. I think it will be easier for some to surrender and leave than for others – for me it's a constant process – but the essence of this project is its impermanent aspect and it's a condition of joining that you embrace the willingness to move on. After all, change is inevitable.

But impermanence could happen in so many different ways and we are open to all possibilities. We have built our houses to be demountable, so all our houses could move, but maybe we will be the ones who move on to build something completely new elsewhere.

Serena: Being willing to change is a sign of progress. We have to move on so we can learn from our mistakes and do something different next time. Above all, we want to serve Auroville through trying to live by the core values of *The Dream* and the *Charter*.

From an interview by Alan



From left: Ion, Mira, Nikethana, Serena, Mathilde, Andres

Red feet: Growing up in Auroville

*A road, full of holes.
Up in trees, like monkeys.
Run after a horse, race it.
Oh! The heat, it stings.
Veils of vines, hiding something.
In and out a dam!
Luxury of nature,
Lift me up and away,
End all sadness and pain.*

Author: myself, 13 years, in Transition School.

Home birth is rather common and very accessible here in Auroville, and I was one of those lucky children to evacuate my warm private cocoon straight into what would be my home for my first 19 years. My parents and a good friend celebrated this with a glass of red wine, comfortable at home in Ami. My midwife Hilde has helped countless into this world, and she is still in town (albeit retired)!

In Auroville, most mothers started working again quite early after birth. Back then, children were often left in the care of the household helps. Parents had also set up a “pre-crèche” for children between 2 and 3. My mother started working as a teacher in Transition School when I was one and a half, so I went to the pre-crèche, and I loved it! I was so happy to spend time with my new friends.

My mother – like many other parents – became a teacher out of necessity, as “real” teachers became exasperated and left because the kids here were too rowdy. Fret not, there are more anecdotes regarding these wildlings in the following paragraphs.

Between the age of five and ten, I started sneaking out of my house at night to go over to a neighbour’s house. Social gatherings often happened there, and the music drew me in like light does phototactic bugs. I’d go over and sit in a corner, watching people dance and talk. My parents never panicked, they knew where I was and that I was all right. I remember that they’d come over at some point to put me back in bed.

It is evident that these people were not my peers, but age difference never discouraged me. I can easily make conversation with people 15 years younger and older than me. This has been the case from early on, which I believe is thanks to being listened to and respected here, even as a child. Everyone is given the chance and opportunity to share their thoughts, no matter the age group.

The love of socialising has always stayed with me, I enjoy inviting people over and being invited too! As a proselytiser of non-violent communication, there’s only one thing that puts me off: people using excuses such as the lateness of hour, their unchecked emotions or their uncontrollable penchant for drama to create an awkward change in the atmosphere. Live and let live!

Short anecdote: When I was in Transition School, my mom asked me to welcome my new classmate Aurore C. from France. When I saw her for the first time, I walked straight up to her and boldly told her with my thick French accent: “Hi, my name is Divya, we’re friends now.” She told me later that it was a true lifeline; we’ve been best friends since. Many kids from Auroville are out-going and friendly, with a natural capacity to bond with people.

Auroville is an international city in the making; we have over 50 different nationalities here. Between my classmates, my neighbours and my teachers, I can count up to 15 nationalities! This place also attracts countless volunteers, youth doing their civil service, guests and “newcomers” from around the world. The constant movement of people allowed me to meet new people, but many would up and leave very fast too. This affected many of us long term, and with time I caught myself being rather detached in new friendships, as I was never sure when their “expiry date” was.

Auroville has always had a special bond with Tibet. The Dalai Lama came for the foundation stone laying ceremony of the Tibetan Pavilion here. I was seven, did not grasp the solemnity of the situation, and was running around madly when I bumped into him, in full swing. All I remember was that he caught me by the shoulder to stop me from falling flat on the ground and – putting his hand on my head – said something about my budding passion for mathematics. Well, I’ve always loved maths, so I guess he was right! We also had a Rinpoche spend several months with us and he was in my class since we were around the same age. I think he was shocked at how wild we were as kids. Fun times.

My classmates basically constituted my friend group: we’d see each other all day at school, do sports together in the afternoon, often had sleepovers and birthdays to celebrate. They were also my partners in crime: three of us hid in an abandoned house for a few hours while our parents organised search parties; once the entire class exited the bus that was driving us to our Art class in Last School and chilled at our favourite hang-out spot instead; my best friend and I regularly played truant when it came to sports – until my mom found out and gave us a solid dressing-down.

Aurovilian music composer Anandi Sala Casanova once described Auroville in an upbeat and fun song that was performed by the Auroville Choir. One sentence in this song truly resonates deep within me: “Soily toes, red earth, dusty soft paths.” A characteristic of this region is its fine red earth that daily colours our feet and insidiously turns all our white clothes orange. When I was a child, we used to cycle and walk a lot, so our feet would get dirty; it only got worse after doing sports: red from head to toe! Sliding around in the slick red mud and puddles in monsoon was also a highlight of my childhood. Having red feet and legs is for me a tell-tale sign of adventures had and things accomplished.

There was a tough unapproachable Dutch lady who had a nervous and fearful horse. Having watched The Horse Whisperer, I was delighted that she agreed to let me accompany her in the quest to tame it. Through this, she and I became friends and spent a lot of time brainstorming new things we could do with the horse to win its trust. I was 14, she was twice that, but that didn’t prevent me from sharing my thoughts, or her from taking them into account.

Horse riding was by far my favourite sports, I started when I was seven. The best thing that happened to me back then was my grandmother offering to pay for a pony that then became ‘mine’. His name was Magic and we used to gallop around the forests. Having my own horse made me learn to be more responsible and conscientious.



Magic loved to buck me off, after which he’d come to a screeching halt and look at me with a bewildered look like “What are you doing on the floor?” After falling off and scratching or bruising myself time and time again, I learned to stay on. This obviously really helped me improve my riding skills.

My parents clearly explained to me that the chance I learn from their mistakes was very slim, and therefore I needed to make my own – to learn from them, of course. The only rule was: Take care. This freedom really allowed me to learn to fly with my own wings, thus allowing me to become independent and responsible quite early on. This was the attitude of most parents, so many of us were little dare-devils that regularly put our limits to the test.

My favourite playground was nature: my friends and I would climb trees, race around, swim in the sea and catchment areas, eat berries, fruits and flowers found in our forests, steal peanuts from our neighbouring farmers’ fields, play very active games, etc. As a child here, material things did not provide distraction: I never had a TV at home, computers and cell phones only came into my life in my late teens, I didn’t have a single toy that wasn’t a hand-me-down. I anyway preferred fully dismantling them to understand how they worked rather than actually playing with them! Capitalism, consumerism, fashion had not yet crept into our lives, we were wild and free.

This calling for adventure obviously allowed to me to also quickly understand the consequences of some of my choices, and better grasp what my limitations were. Along the way, I got five stitches under my chin, broke my arm, fell off a horse straight onto a tree, and got bitten by a monkey, several dogs and numerous horses... but what doesn’t kill you makes you stronger, right?

When I was in Transition School, we had a class called *Awareness Through the Body* (ATB). On the Auroville website, this is how they describe ATB: “What was intended as a program to improve the posture of the children, quickly evolved into a program to help children develop their capacity for attention, concentration and relaxation, while enhancing their ability for self-awareness and their sense of responsibility.”

Through various modules and activities, we became more conscious of our bodies (how much space do I occupy, how do I move, do I feel pain or discomfort somewhere in my body, what are my strengths and weaknesses) and our minds (what mood am I in and why, what aura am I diffusing, can I use my breathing and body posture to change my energy). We were encouraged to explore and hone our physical skills thanks to fun exercises using balance, teamwork, cooperation, synchronisation and different materials and textures. My classmates and I were a bunch of superactive kids, so this really helped us explore and focus, while having fun! I still use *yoga nidra* on a very regular basis to reconnect to myself.

Having grown up learning to regularly and consciously check up on myself on the physical plane (ATB), the next step that came very naturally was to do the same with the psyche. With guidance from teachers and adults, I became more conscious about my behaviour and actions: the aim becomes to take a stand with assertiveness; to treat everyone with equality and genuine respect; to not give up too easily and improve further; to not attribute a lot of worth to fame, money and material goods; and to strive for more significant aspects of life such as communication, joy and sharing.

Having studied, travelled and worked elsewhere than in Auroville for nine years, I can safely say that the only place where my all-out honesty is fully accepted is here. As long as thoughts and ideas are expressed with respect and compassion, I truly believe that it should be the base of any communication and interaction if one wants it to remain pure and true. We can, of course, agree to disagree, but without honesty, all discussion loses its essence.

This excessive honesty also gave me the illusion that others were truthful when they spoke too, which has always resulted in me being a little gullible. Between that and my readiness to accept challenges, I often ended up doing silly things, like engraving a peace sign on the glass windows of our classroom. I also shaved off my eyebrows once and was mortified when people told me that they wouldn’t grow back. Thankfully, they did!

It was only when I “left” Auroville and went to the French high school in Pondicherry that I realised how different the mentality and approach to youth is in the occidental world. Patriarchy, manners, hypocrisy, racism, misogyny, performance, stress were notions I either hadn’t discovered or hadn’t fully understood until then.

Despite always presenting an open defiance towards authority, I have numerous fond memories linked with all Aurovilian adults and I always respected them: during our last year in Transition School, we had a potluck and sleepover at Mary’s house; we had also gone for a sleepover/stargazing night with Jana in a semi-desert location not far from Auroville; every summer many of us would go camping in Berigam for 12 days with camp leaders and other adults, we’d swim in the lake, go hiking in the forests, fetch water from the natural spring and learn how to take care of our own things.

Adults were there for us: just after the monkey bite, I was in shock and went to the closest neighbour’s house for help. Having assessed the situation, he saw that all I needed was to cool down, so he cooked me some sunny-side-up duck eggs. I remember this very clearly because the utter shock of seeing such huge eggs took the pain away. Isn’t life beautiful?

We were not rich but never went hungry. For example, my visits to Europe were always financed by family that lived there, mostly my grandmother. The simplicity of life in the villages around Auroville allowed me to keep things in perspective. The smallest things have always made me very happy, I’ve kept and nurtured this childish readiness for awe and joy brought about by the most “trifling” of situations: a beautiful sunset, a flower in bloom, the smell of horses, someone laughing, a stranger’s smile, morning dew. Ice cream was a definite highlight of my first visit to family in Europe: both in Germany and in France, at the advanced age of two, I regularly proclaimed loud and clear: “ICE CREAM!”

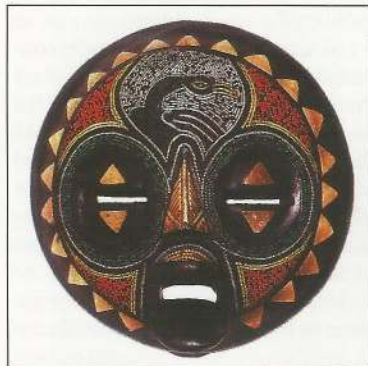
My expectations were thus quite low when I later went to study in France and had only enough money for bare necessities. My new friends there said that I reminded them of the protagonist in the film *Un indien dans la ville* (Little Indian, Big City): little “Indian” girl discovering the big city with a naïve and childish curiosity, barefoot whenever possible. I cherish this likeness and cultivate my barefoot inner child.

In conclusion, growing up in Auroville is retrospectively the best thing that ever happened to me as it gave me the freedom to be me.

Divya

Which mask do you wear?

In 2020, one subject attracted maybe as much attention as the pandemic itself: "masks". This simple but nowadays also potent word is able to trigger emotions, opinions, reflection and action.



African tribal mask

Different uses for different masks

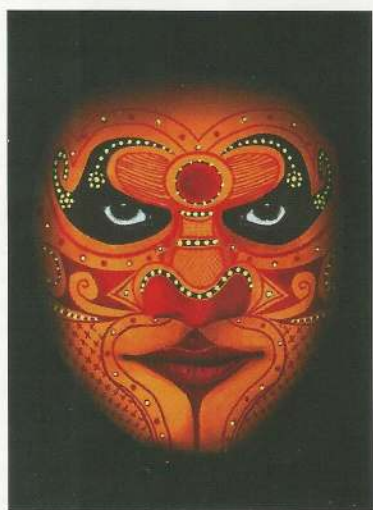
Masks have many uses, religious or shamanic rituals, entertainment, drama, aesthetics, war, disguise, protection, play, punishment.

In shamanism, which is also universal and pre-dates any form of organized religion, it is believed that the one wearing the mask not only represents the deity, animal or demon, but they actually embody them fully. There is "no one else" behind the mask. There is only the deity in question, which is being acted out by the person wearing the mask. When a shaman or a kid playing is wearing a mask of a lion, or a monster, they are not "pretending" to be that being, they are the lion, they are the monster. The mask brings a transformational aspect to the whole representation of the ritual and marks distinctively the rupture between the one wearing it, and the one the mask actually represents. It also opens new possibilities of behaviour. One cannot roar or howl at random, but if one transforms itself into a lion or a wolf, it is not only allowed, such behavior is in a sense even expected by "the audience". The mask protects the one behind it from

any judgement, because in a (archetypal) sense, there is no one "behind that face".

War masks have a similar intent, applied in a different context. The one who wears it transforms themselves into a warrior-like figure, like the classic samurai mask, which protected the identity of the warrior, concealed his emotions and also had the intent to bring terror into the enemy. War face-paintings, from medieval times to modern wars, allowed this transformation and exempted the individual subject from their acts. The soldier's identity is irrelevant, only their role exists. The uniform, mask and tools are there to make sure we all perceive that, on a consciously and unconsciously level.

In ancient Greece, the use of masks in the theater had a functional and drama role. Athena had audiences of up to 15 000 people and the use of masks made it easier for people from afar to be able to recognize the different charac-



Mask face

ters and their main emotions throughout the play. The masks also helped the actors play their roles, embodying their character wholly. It is worth



Corona virus masks

mentioning that women could not act in those plays, so men wearing feminine masks would play any female part.

Masks can also be punitive, as the known history of the mysterious French prisoner wearing the Iron Mask, or the medieval "mask of shame", resembling a donkey and usually forcefully put on a "bad pupil" or student.

The psychological aspect

The Swiss psychoanalyst, Carl Jung, coined the term "Persona", which is a Greek word borrowed from Latin and it means face, character, social role, mask. The Jungian term refers to the social masks we use in our lives. Whether you physically wear a mask or not, you're certainly making use of different personas in the different social roles you play.

We naturally present ourselves differently in a family, a social circle, a love relationship, a professional role. In all of them, different masks are being put on and off, presenting different outputs of our personalities. For Jung, the development of a social persona is vital for adaptation and integrations of one's psyche.

The mask we use can have deep effects on our psyche depending on the archetype we are evoking. A mother who naturally evoke The Great Mother; a ruler or a person in a position of high authority can melt into The King or The Queen; a rebel or a prankster can turn into The Joker or Loki and someone acting on seduction and love, Aphrodite, Eros or Kama. They can be

abstract and perceived through our actions, or very much literal and solidified into the mask device itself.

The concern is when that identification with the persona or mask one is wearing is too strong, and one can only express oneself through that role; a mother through her children and not as a woman, a doctor through his profession and tools, a son with his constant attachment to his parents, a teacher through his books. The person has no perspec-



Tibetan mask

tive of their own reality as whole individuals and can only "exist" in relation with what society or others expect of them. They become their masks, the masks become them.

Wearing a mask, a persona, makes it possible for us to simply function in the world. You cannot be the hunter, the father, the warrior, the dancer, the priest, the joker and the king, all at the same time. A set of priorities need to be attended and the different personas help us navigate through that, it gives us structure and stability. Jung believed that in the process of individuation, at some point you should be able to be in touch with "the one behind all masks", but to dispense with all of them can simply bring shock to one's psyche that cannot be sustainable for a very long time.

We can say then, that another vital use for a mask is to bring order from the chaos. To have one or many identities, so that at some point in life you can perceive you're not just these identities, you're the unmanifested, making its appearance through the persona, one at a time, across our limited perception of linear time and space.

But what do we feel when we are told we ought to wear a mask, which is the case with the present COVID guidelines? Whenever a new model of behaviour is created, there will be deviants from that model. Some people will see that adhering to it means conformity, a loss of individuality, of personal choice. Others will see a refusal to wear a mask as showing a lack of compassion and social responsibility towards others. Both attitudes can be discerned in Auroville at present.

It is worth reflecting how many compromises we make when we decide to live in a community. To be part of it comes with rights and responsibilities, but it is always difficult to find a balance between individual freedom and collective responsibility. Aurovilians now more than ever need to be fully aware of these forces calling upon them and to find that balance, or, rather, attain to a consciousness that transcends these polarities.



Comedy - Tragedy Greek masks

"The supramental being sees things not as one on the levels surrounded by a jungle of present facts and phenomena but from above, not from outside and judged by their surfaces, but from within and viewed from the truth of their centre".

Amilton

ENVIRONMENT

Plastic Alchemy

On World Ocean Day in June, a dolphin washed up on to Sri Ma beach. "It was a young dolphin that had not died a natural death, possibly related to pollution, or to swallowed plastic," says Satya Agrawal, a teacher in NESS, who was catalysed by this event to start collecting waste on the beach. "There is trash everywhere, but it hurts most on the beach because it causes a lot of harm to sea life."

Zero Waste Beach is an initiative that collects trash from Auroville's beaches. The collected garbage is segregated, and the plastic waste is alchemically transformed into new items. The team hopes this could be a freely replicable model for the up-cycling and re-cycling of trash in rural India.

The project started in June at the height of the lockdown, with different groups coming together

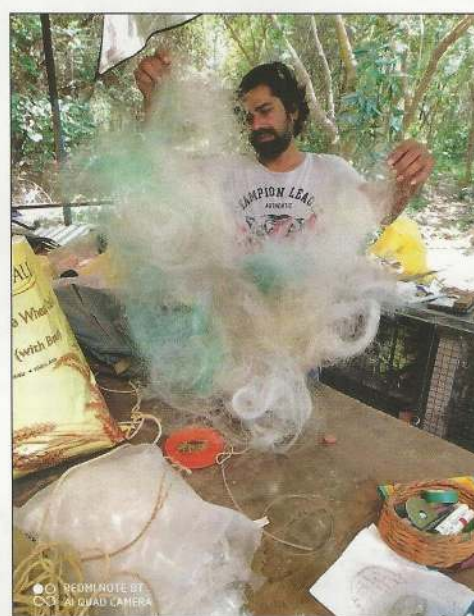
to clean beach trash, including numerous guests stranded in Auroville since March. They felt Covid time was an opportunity to look afresh at existing social issues, especially garbage.

Satya tried to find a solution to sea plastic. "I talked to some of the waste-free Auroville groups, asking what we can do with it. Everybody said 'You can't do anything. It's too degraded with too much salt and sun, it's useless plastic'." He then met Jorge of Minvayu, a part of CSR, who shared Satya's passion to generate positive solutions to the waste problem. "Since then, we've been relentless in bringing plastic here with new ideas, new moulds and 3D printing."

Using what is presumed to be India's largest 3D printer, Minvayu's outdoor farm lab in Terra Soul experiments with transforming material into new uses. Their vision is to find ways to up-cycle plastic waste using low-tech open source technology. Jorge notes: "We're doing things in Auroville with few resources, a lot of volunteer work and global collaborations."

The twice weekly clean-ups on Quiet and Sri Ma beaches started with up to 80 volunteers, though recently it has reduced to about a dozen people. Livia and Beatriz, two Brazilian volunteers, were motivated to make a difference. Livia set up the Instagram site to publicise their work and believes in "Zero Waste Beach as a future. We are trying to create this reality". "We want to create solutions for things we found" says Beatriz. "We see a huge amount of fishing materials, which are such a problem for sea life. We can recognise every type of garbage and send it to the right destination. However, for some multi-layered items like tetrapak or chips packets, there is no solution".

On each beach visit, the group fills around ten sacks of trash. Both beaches have become noticeably cleaner, though rubbish still piles up every day. All the collected plastic goes to Terra Soul, paper and cardboard goes to Well Paper, bottles to Light-Fish, an Auroville unit that manufactures



Satya working with a fishing net

innovative lighting, and all other recyclable and un-recyclable goods to Eco-service.

In Minvayu, the plastic is washed to remove sand and salt, then dried and separated into different types of plastic. For instance, the ubiquitous toothbrushes have nylon bristles with polypropylene handles, which means that pliers are needed to manually remove the bristles to reuse the polypropylene. The team initially made a gas oven from discarded bricks in which they melt plastic to form bowls and coasters, all uniquely marbled with swirling colours creating a new form. They are constantly experimenting and learning how to transform plastic into

newer forms. Jorge has now designed a bigger oven and "we will be able to melt and process at least ten times more beach plastic every day with this new oven" says Satya enthusiastically.

"We need local solutions to local problems," says Jorge. "In no country it is different. For instance, there is no electricity here, plus we don't have money. We do have gas and could use biogas, so we are developing very simple systems." The team plans to create a mini recycling unit, and is currently experimenting with the creation of products using a smaller 3D printer.

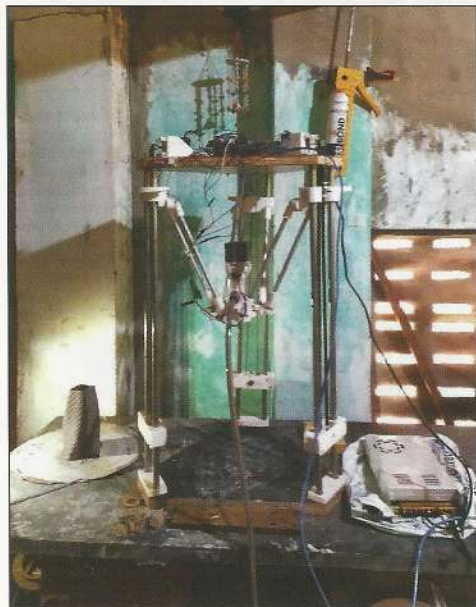
An important social aspect to their work is Satya's meetings with locals and the panchayat. Curious fishermen asked him what he was doing and when they found out he was a teacher, asked him to help their children. Jorge recalls that "Satya was doing something nobody has done: actually engaging with villagers on the beach and teaching fishermen's kids."

Beatriz points to one of the consequences of working in recycling. "I feel like once you start to clean rubbish, you can't be in denial anymore. I pick things up now when I go out, even if I am not on the beach, and I have become more aware of what I consume. Now that I am working with plastic, I avoid buying it as much as I can." Livia continues, "I studied pedagogy in Brazil, and here we are educating ourselves, we are learning all the time; about waste, about teaching people waste management, and trying to create something new for people and the environment."

Satya asserts that the project has given him hope for the future. "I was going crazy thinking about what to do with all this plastic. I talked to many people and was discouraged, but after starting this project, I have so much hope that we can find a solution."

Peter

Instagram: Zero Waste Beach



The 3D printer



3D printed trash tray

Resurrected in nature

It's deceptive... It looks like it could only have been constructed using a JCB or other heavyweight lifting mechanism. But I had a big surprise when Supriya Pava explained to me that her latest sculpture is as light as a feather. Well, not a feather, but it contains Thermocol, so lifting its parts into place was actually easy.

Supriya is a SAVI volunteer with Auroville Art Service and is proposing to join Auroville. She previously lived in New York, where she was a professional photographer, but some four years ago she abandoned photography and began to explore her other artistic interests, in particular sculpture, painting and writing. This sculpture at the Solar Kitchen is by no means her first – though her first completed one in Auroville – but is typical of her work, which consists of large shapes that lend themselves to becoming what the observer wants them to be.

"I am an artist," says Supriya, "whose main area of interest is Upcycling Art. When I look at pieces of trash on the streets or in junkyards I am not repelled; I don't ignore them like many people. I see possibilities! If I had enough space, it would be filled with junk that I collect. The fact is, I can't afford to work in the traditional way. Things that I find are free, and I don't like to show the raw materials; they are always at the core, not visible. Knowing that I have taken some trash from the environment makes this piece – this process – more meaningful to me."

Auroville International USA funded the sculpture. The construction of the sculpture began with a huge slab of thermocol, mixed with cement to bind the particles, which was fabricated in Auroville by a unit which uses the material in building construction. Out of the slab Supriya drew and cut the shapes needed, and then transported them to the Solar Kitchen, though in doing so some parts



PHOTO: SUPRIYA

were damaged as the resulting material is quite brittle.

Next came the work of a welder, who assembled the metal frame that held the blocks on top of each other, binding the total structure together to reach the final height of three metres, though bits of waste material, some green netting, fabrics and plastic were added to give it its final form.

On nearing completion, the question of colouring came up. Supriya's first idea was to use the orangey-pink of the Auroville hibiscus, but it didn't feel right in the context of the Solar Kitchen. What did feel right was to copy the original red-brown colour of the Solar Kitchen's walls, the powerful deep earth colour of Auroville, thus capturing the spirit of the environment. For this, earth was brought from the Matrimandir site. The resulting mix was applied by a mason guided by Supriya to give the blocks their final rounded form, integrating the sculpture and ensuring it didn't stand out like some foreign body.

The result? As Supriya puts it, "It towers over me, providing me with shade; it is like being in a place of calm, of serenity. At other times it ceases to exist, it blends in with its environment, camouflaged. Meanwhile, we see how it is being accepted as a habitat. The birds rest on it, many cobwebs are developing, and plants are shooting up around it. There is no resistance. A toxic material like thermocol has been given a new life, and resurrected in nature as part of nature."

There is a simple test for the success of any work of art, and that is whether one can live with it and continue to obtain pleasure from it. This sculpture undoubtedly passes the test. As the days and weeks go by, I am as fascinated by it as I ever was, and don't tire at all of its presence. It never ceases to attract my attention as I sit eating my lunch, and I hope it will give others the same pleasure.

Tim

NEW BOOKS

50 More Poems from Auroville

Some years ago, Vikas (Alan Vickers), one of the pioneer Aurovilians, brought out a slim anthology of Auroville poetry called *50 poems from Auroville*. He has now compiled a second collection, the proceeds of which, as before, will go towards land purchase in Auroville.

Auroville, as Vikas notes in his introduction, is "more than a place". It is "an inner search for truth and beauty and for its manifestation in the world in a truly new consciousness." Consequently, some of the poets featured here have never lived in Auroville, or even been associated with it.

Yet all of them in one way or another evoke something of the essence of the experience. It is in the poetry of matter as in Anandi's hymn to Matrimandir *Grey perfume stains our hands / A strong sweetness, / The future grows, / And in a dove-tailing of suns / A ray is caught*

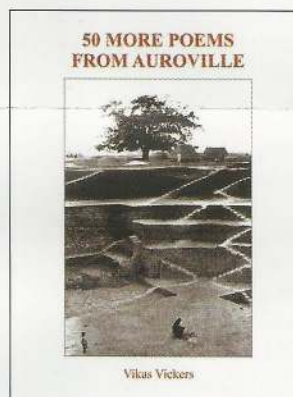
in shedding the old while seeking the new, as in Valentina Claeys's *I have been asked to write myself into a wordless leaf / expanding to the New; no more than that* in Meenakshi's dance of nature: *The morning sun / Picked the star flowers / And threw them / Into the moon-basket* in Alan's sadhanic sifting: *the tangled and the mangled/condense, / falling, ever softly falling, / to bedrock* and, above all, in images of self-discovery and transformation, as in Vikas's river meditation

Apart from the business of man / In this moment, everything just is and Shradhdhavan's epiphany in the Matrimandir: *Nowhere you can escape / The crash and clash / Of the universe wheeling onward / But to learn to hear – / Open your ears, / Open your heart – / Be aware / Everywhere / Always / Of My all-embracing silence / Forever inviolable...*

Vikas has done a fine, devoted work in stringing together this little necklace of poetic gems.

Alan

50 More Poems from Auroville. Published by Prisma, December, 2019. Available from auroville.com: Rs 350. The previous compilation, *50 Poems from Auroville*, is also available from the same website: Rs 320



Radicle Network

Radicle Network is a fast-paced thriller by an Auroville green-worker, Paul Blanchflower, that takes a look at the world we live in and the current environmental crisis that we have created. It explores the world of forests, their interconnectivity and our relationship to them. It is also about how things can change for the better. What changes to our perspective are needed, so that we might move forward with a world view and attitude that will allow our society to function more equitably?

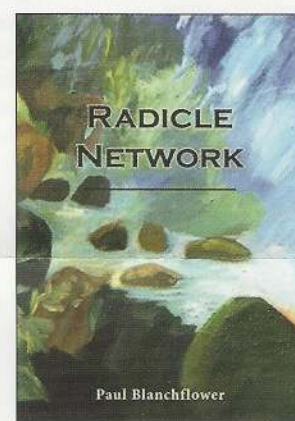
The novel ties together the fragments we have begun to discover about the intelligence of trees, the consciousness of the forest and the interconnectivity of the mycelia networks of fungi and mushrooms, and presents a view of how the world might actually be.

A thriller unlike any I have read before. The science was a discovery to me and the threat it implies wholly realistic.

Sir Mark Tully (former BBC correspondent in New Delhi)

What Paul Blanchflower proposes in *Radicle Network* is the prospect that technology will expand to include the decision-making processes of nature. A pioneering field that forest biology is increasingly discovering to be encoded in the symbiosis of fungi and tree roots.

Paul Blanchflower, who was educated in forest management at Edinburgh University, is drawing from his boyhood forest wanderings and 20 years experience creating a 50 acre botanical garden in the international community of Auroville in South India. In this book he has risen to the challenge of trying to fictionalise his intuitive suspicions regarding communication between trees.



Peter

human ingenuity, arguably a collective death wish of incomprehensible proportion. Here, Tolkien's Entmoot fantasy meets the scientific method in a compelling narrative of round-the-world complexity. Humanism at its best.

Ray Meeker

Radicle Network is available on Amazon websites worldwide, both in print and e-book, or directly from the Botanical Gardens. <http://www.radicle-network.com>

Auroville 80 - correction

In the previous edition of *Auroville Today*, we mentioned the publication of Nadia Loury's bilingual (French/English) photographic book, *Auroville 80*, which captures the poetry of daily life of the Aurovilians in the 1980s. Regrettably, the address where the book is available contained a mistake. Outside India, please contact Nadia at nadia.loury@orange.fr to get a copy of the book.

PASSINGS

Narayanaswamy Gopal

Aurovillian Gopal Narayanasamy from Douceur left his body in the afternoon of 21 October at JIPMER due to a heart attack. He was 57 years old.

Narayanasamy was one of those kids from the villages around us who, at a very early age, roamed Auroville in the seventies, came to the Matrimandir workers' tea times for a tea and a biscuit, and got to know and charmed many of the pioneers of that time. He came from Alankuppam and started living in Revelation in 1978, lived for some time in Hermitage, helping them plant trees, and was part of the team that created Horizon in 1980. In the beginning of the eighties he was taken up at Matrimandir as 'helper tractor driver', of course morphing into a much appreciated full time driver and working for Matrimandir for some ten years.



Douceur and buried the next day at Auroville's burial grounds where, due to Covid19 regulations, only his family and closest friends were present.

After this, he joined Aurelec, where he worked as driver and messenger till the end of the nineties. He was a cheerful, friendly person who had many friends. While living in Douceur, he married his wife Vishva and started a taxi company from home with his own Ambassador car. During all these years, he maintained animated relations with his friends, participated in cycle tours, would organise Kodaikanal camps for Auroville's school kids and at times came to community meetings as well. He remained a family man, and saw to it that his three daughters married well.

In recent years he worked at the Auroville Transport Service and at La Piscine.

Narayanasamy's body was taken to his home in Douceur and buried the next day at Auroville's burial grounds where, due to Covid19 regulations, only his family and closest friends were present.

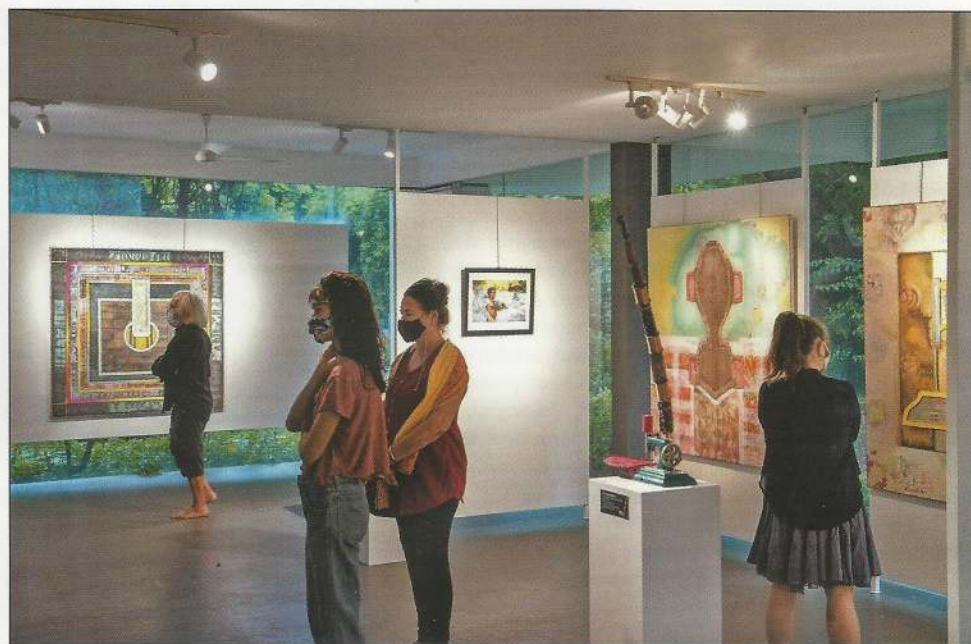
Akash Nandkumar

Akash Nandkumar, an Auroville volunteer, left his body on October 13th. Akash first came to attend Auroville's Swadharma programme in July-August 2018, and afterwards continued to live in Auroville, developing Hemprete which became his life's passion, working with the Auroville Earth Institute and others pioneering the difficult research and development work. During the lockdown his work came to a halt. Because of his mounting difficulties he chose to leave his body.

There was a gathering at the Tibetan Pavilion on October 15th in his memory.



U.F.O. Unidentified Found Objects



ALL PHOTOS: MARCO SAROLDI



It is 2030, and over the past months, ten strange objects that seem to have emerged straight from the past have been found in Auroville. Miraculously reclaimed from the depths of old, forgotten cupboards and reappearing in the most unlikely of places, they are submitted to deep scientific scrutiny with surprising results. A mysterious energy emanates from these objects. But why they have been hidden and by whom, remains incomprehensible.

Such is the concept behind 'U.F.O. Unidentified Found Objects', Dominique Jacques' new work, which inaugurates the coming season of exhibitions at the Citadines Centre d'Art in Auroville.

"When I began this work about a year ago, I imagined a small group of spiritual seekers in the early 80s secretly transforming certain everyday objects of the period, and after having modified their waveforms to intensify their positive vibration and having imbued them with a specific power, concealing them in strategic locations with the aim of protecting and helping humankind, and Auroville's inhabitants in particular, to face the growing challenges of the future." These objects had been chosen for their formal qualities and their symbolic significance.

The exhibition is therefore built around the discovery of these ten 'magical' objects. A fan, a pitcher, a transformer; each object is deconstructed by the artist in a playful and surreal manner. One can glimpse the ends of a lamp growing on the back of an old rotary phone, a typewriter generating coloured radiographs, or a microscope emerging from a fossilized form bearing esoteric markings. Ten obsolete objects come back to life, speaking to us of the past and the future, playing with our imagination and causing us to rethink our relationships with the 'things' which surround us and what they reveal about ourselves.

But the artist's search does not stop there. Ten paintings are placed in dialogue with these found objects and express their occult essence. The paintings are vast and powerful, explicitly connected with the objects they represent as in a kind of digital scan which completes the vision of these 'carcasses', revealing their hidden wonder. It is as if these paintings offer a vision of the objects from within, filtered through a new gaze able to assimilate and understand their power.

The exhibition is concluded by a collection of documents which illustrate this project as a playful fiction: an old map of Auroville, showing the places in which these objects were hidden, an installation staging archaeological equipment of the future, and photographic and audio-visual documents depicting the authors of these discoveries.

Dominique and Mariana



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