

Trees vs. roads, city vs. forests

When everyone finally arrived and found a chair in the cramped meeting room, the chatter suddenly stopped. More than a dozen Aurovilians representing six groups sat completely still, took a collective deep breath, and remained quiet. A minute passed, maybe two. "You know it's going to be a tough meeting when it begins with an impromptu moment of silence," one participant commented, allowing the debate to begin.

The subject of the discussion: Four trees.

And a Crown Road, an age-old philosophical battle, the meaning of perfection, the future of the City, and so much more.

"It's not really just about the trees," Glenn, the steward of the said trees, commented afterwards. "It's about being flexible, working together, and look at reality. We can be creative and realistic and find a solution that works for everyone."

Recently, the Crown Road in Auroville has progressed rapidly under the careful watch of Alain Grandcolas and his team. At the end of February, the paved stretch reached the edge of Gaia – one of Auroville's planned parks – where the road splits, one route heading straight towards the schools (curving around a patch of non-Auroville-owned land) and the other leading to the Town Hall. The planned route for the Crown Road meant cutting three khayas and one neem tree, all over 20-30 years old. These trees are located on the left edge of the current road, which Glenn planted with Service Trees at the request of a previous l'Avenir d'Auroville years ago.

"We all agree that the Crown Road has to be paved to the schools and as quickly as possible," said one member of the Town Development Council (TDC), also known as l'Avenir d'Auroville, early on in the meeting. "We also know trees will have to be cut. The question is when and how." To examine those questions, TDC gathered members of the Working Committee, Council, Green Group, and Road Service, along with other concerned Aurovilians, to take the Gaia split as a test case. From these meetings, members of TDC hoped to establish a process that could be applied in similar situations in the future. "We don't want to have a situation where we have four different discussions about the same four trees."

Deep-seated beliefs: trees vs. infrastructure? city vs. forest?

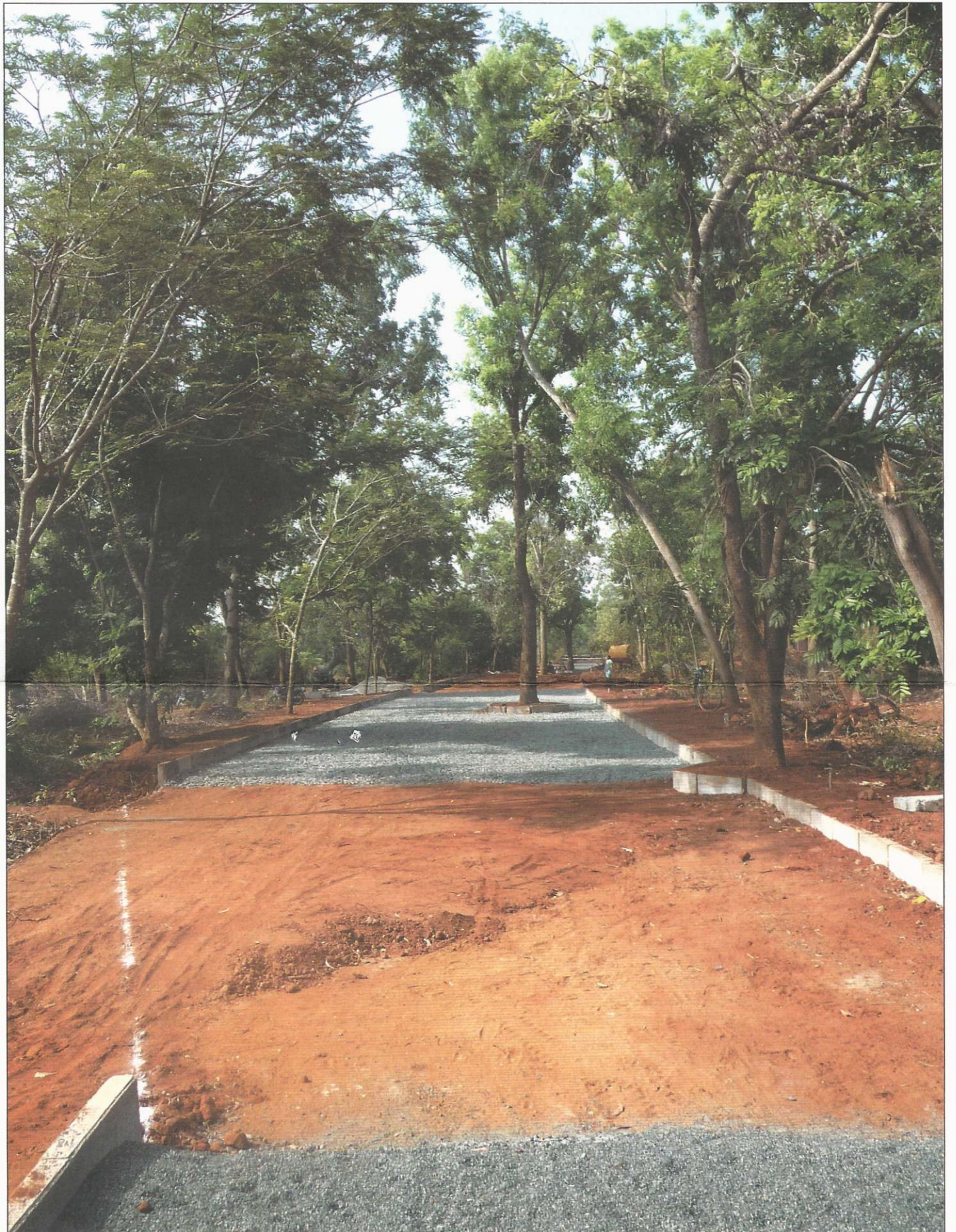
Unfortunately, the discussion almost immediately began with labels. People were quickly categorized as Green or City; for the road and the City or for the trees only; and even, 'here for Auroville, the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, or not'. The boxes members put each other in were unfair, inappropriate and detrimental to the progress all had gathered to make. At one point an early Aurovillian even commented to the adult child of a pioneer: "Your generation wants to change the Master Plan, and your kids will change the Charter!"

In fact, every member attending the meeting had planted trees in Auroville, and had at some point supported the cutting of a tree or two. Everyone, in their hearts, felt that they were representing Auroville's best interest. And no one disputed the future City, or even the road.

"It's a long-standing, deep-seated battle over vision. Somehow we keep coming back to this fight, even when it's not quite what we're fighting about," Cristo, former Green Group Coordinator and current member of TDC, reflected afterwards. "If the trees were truly amazing or rare, I would be the first to protect them. But they're not. In fact, three of the trees are a species that's known to have falling branches that should never be planted near a road. What happens if a branch falls on a passing driver?"

Infrastructure Issues

The full paved width of the Crown Road will someday be 18 meters and include lanes for a tram, cars, motorcycles and cycles. There will also be walking paths, trees lining at least one side, and infrastructure following the road, which will require an additional 1 to 1.5 meters. The present road at the Gaia split is approximately 4.5 meters wide with a cycle path meandering through the



The agreement reached: the road will be paved respecting the trees – and can be adjusted to the "perfect circle" in the future once the rest of the width is paved. The white line indicates the adjusted edge of the road.

woods on either side. To realize the full width of the proposed road for the city of 50,000 people, trees will inevitably have to be cut. But do they have to be cut now, when we're only 1 500 people? Should they be? Does it matter one way or another?

Some members of the group adamantly argued for the cutting of the trees, mostly because there needs to be room on either side for the infrastructure. "Cities are built around the infrastructure," Cristo said. "We need to lay the infrastructure first." With years of experience in exactly this field, Cristo explained that while the road could zigzag to accommodate the trees, the infrastructure cannot. "In my professional opinion, we should cut these trees." If not, he warned, we'll have to cut many more trees

to accommodate the underground current, wastewater, gas and other pipes.

But according to Glenn, who as the land steward arguably knows the ground reality best, there is room for a slight diversion of the road and the adjustment won't dramatically impact the route of the infrastructure. After almost two hours of conversation, Alain added, "If there's goodwill, we can find a way for the infrastructure no matter how the road goes." The group clung to these words, hoping his optimism could turn into reality. If the infrastructure can follow the slight diversion of the road, everyone would be satisfied. Right?

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Cyclone Thane recovery work continues

Cyclone Thane was the worst cyclone to hit the region since 1972, and in Auroville, the recovery work continues. Coordinating the ongoing activities is the Auroville Cyclone Relief Team (AVCRT), which includes members of each of the working groups and other Aurovilians who have experience in crisis management and emergency response (including former Working Committee members and Aurovilians who assisted with Tsunami relief).

One of the primary focuses of AVCRT after the initial emergency relief phase has been financial coordination. The Resource Mobilisation Team quickly created a column on the Auroville website to inform people around the world of the cyclone and solicit help from well-wishers. All of the Auroville International (AVI) Centers responded quickly and with great sympathy, and many individuals and organisations all over the world contributed generously. AVCRT kept account of all donations and sent hand-written thank-you cards to all. The total of all donations so received amounts to Rs 20,334,000 (approx US \$ 390,000).

However, the most significant financial help came through the reallocation of Rs 2 crores (approx US \$ 383,000) from Auroville's Government of India Plan Grants, which was permitted after the January visits of Dr. Karan Singh and the Finance Committee of the Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation.

In addition to this visit, AVCRT coordinated a number of other important visits after the cyclone, including from Union Home Minister Mr. P. Chidambaram, who came with a high-level team to conduct a damage assessment in Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry. The Central Committee, headed by Mr. Lokesh Jha, also came to the area to assess the disaster, and a small team of Aurovilians gave a presentation at Ananda Inn in Pondicherry, where Mr. Jha was based. Additionally, Ms. Manimergalai, the Collector, visited the Office of the Secretary and expressed support to Auroville from the local administration. At a later date, the new Collector visited Auroville and was updated on issues relating to security and cyclone damage. Within the coming weeks, AVCRT will also present Auroville's requirements to officials of the Prime Minister's relief fund. For the money received is not sufficient to repair all the damage Thane caused.

Clearing, equipment and communities recovery

Cleaning up after the storm, including the purchase of the equipment required to clear, is clearly the largest expense faced by Auroville, and the work is ongoing. The initial emergency work focused on clearing Auroville's main roads and ensuring everyone had access in and out of their homes. Since then, several Aurovillian volunteers and paid teams continued the hard job of clearing roads, pathways and cycle paths, but with fewer individuals the work takes longer. Months after the cyclone, clearing teams are still active cutting trees in various communities. Already the clearing costs have exceeded Rs. 50 lakhs (approximately US \$ 96,000), and the end is not yet in sight.

The work also required purchasing equipment, including 20 chainsaws, a backhoe loader (more commonly called a JCB), and three tractors with trailers. Additional heavy machinery Auroville is considering or is in the process of purchasing include a weighing bridge, shredders, additional tractors and trailers, forklift, construction excavator (with a grabber attachment), among others.

These various pieces of equipment will continue to serve the Auroville community once the clearing work is over. AVCRT is helping to organize it so that the equipment is under the custody of the primary user. For example, the Road Service is the caretaker of the JCB.

Housing & public buildings

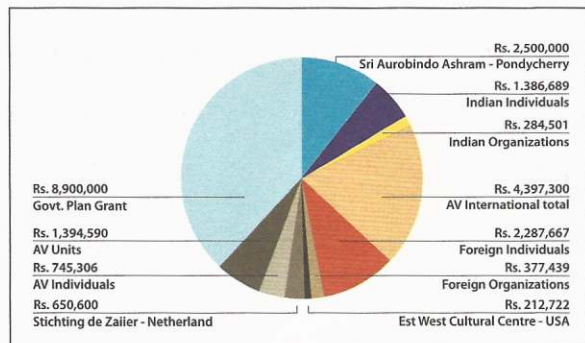
Damage to houses and buildings were the largest expense. In the first weeks after the cyclone, there was an estimated cost of Rs. 1.5 crores (approximately US \$ 288,000) in damage to more than 200 Aurovillian buildings, including houses, community spaces, public buildings, schools, common farm infrastructure and various structures that serve Auroville's units. Towards the end of March, the Housing Services estimated the cost of damage to buildings at more than Rs. 2 crores (approx US \$ 383,000).

AVCRT dispersed more than Rs. 35 lakhs (US \$ 67,000) to reconstruct individual houses, and at least Rs. 15 additional lakhs (US \$ 29,000) is needed to repair Thane-related damages. There are a handful of Aurovilians that are either unable to or are

afraid of staying in their original locations and need or want to be relocated. This is especially true of the beach communities, where what the wind didn't destroy, the sea swallowed. Work is ongoing to find them suitable alternatives for their now untenable living situations. The cost of these relocations will also be covered by relief funds.

Damage to essential common structures within the various communities cost almost Rs. 70 lakhs (US \$ 135,000), all of which has been dispersed.

It is estimated that there is over Rs. 20 lakhs (US \$ 38,000) of damage to schools, and approximately Rs. 14 lakhs (US \$ 27,000) has already been spent on repairs. Nearly Rs. 7.5 lakhs (US \$ 14,000) remains pending. The other public buildings suffered over Rs. 7 lakhs (US \$ 13,500) of damage, of which approximately Rs. 4 lakhs (US \$ 7,500) has been paid and Rs. 3 lakhs (US \$ 5,700) is outstanding.



The Housing Service along with AVCRT allocated almost Rs. 2 lakhs (US \$ 2,800) for agricultural structures serving the farms (including structures essential to the farm animals), an additional Rs. 2 lakhs (US \$ 2,800) for Auroville guest houses, and roughly Rs. 30,000 (US \$ 575) for commercial units. Whenever possible, especially in the case of the commercial units, the funds required for repairs were given as a loan.

These figures reflect only the funds that passed through AVCRT and/or Housing Service; they do not reflect contributions made directly by Aurovilians. While the full cost of repairs of Auroville's structures may never be known, the reports are currently being collected and compiled. The direct contributions already add more than Rs. 5 lakhs (US \$ 9,500) to the Rs. 200 lakhs (US \$ 383,000) identified by Housing.

Electrical

Restoring electricity to Auroville and the surrounding area was a dramatic affair that involved several teams, near-constant liaising with public officials, and almost three weeks of non-stop work. The work cost almost Rs. 40 lakhs (US \$ 77,000) and is not complete. Many of the temporary works, which were done in haste, must now be revisited and redone for safety and stability. The extreme damage to the electrical infrastructure emphasized the already identified need to install underground cables to avoid similar situations in the future. Already AVES has done a lot of work in finalising the purchase of materials for the electrical restoration and infrastructure improvement. It is anticipated the next phase will cost more than Rs. 48 lakhs (US \$ 92,000).

In the days immediately following the cyclone, many individuals and communities throughout Auroville sought relief by purchasing solar panels, which cost them approximately Rs. 60 lakhs (US \$ 14,000).

Additional expenses

Providing emergency water relief to Aurovilians and villagers required more than 30 people and over Rs. 6 lakhs (US \$ 115,000). The windmills, most of which collapsed under Thane, cost more than Rs. 12 lakhs (US \$ 23,000) to repair, and several are not yet fixed. To minimize crop loss and save chickens and cows, AVCRT also helped farmers fund emergency water for their fields and animals. The minimum emergency support given was Rs. 26,500. (US\$ 500)

Security was another important element that required ongoing funding after Thane. The storm rendered many Auroville communities, houses, farms and forests completely vulnerable to intruders, thieves, animals, and encroachment. In Repos, for example, the fishermen began looting houses and threatening Aurovilians. Meanwhile, the forest and farms lost acres to wandering cows and goats which suddenly discovered open pastures due to broken fences. As such, AVCRT helped fund increased security presence and the immediate reconstruction of fences in high-risk areas. The initial work amounted to approximately Rs. 20 lakhs (US \$ 38,000), although it is estimated that it will

cost well over Rs. 55 lakhs (US \$ 105,000) to fully restore the fences that were lost.

Fire was another Security Risk AVCRT dealt with, first by publishing tips for Aurovilians to follow to minimize the risk of fire. The Security Service approached the District Fire Officer and he has offered his services to train volunteers to face fire situations, as the closest Fire Station is in Vanur (9 km away). A tanker with a compressor and a pipe pulled by a tractor is in the process of being purchased and will cost approximately Rs. 5 lakhs (US \$ 9,500).

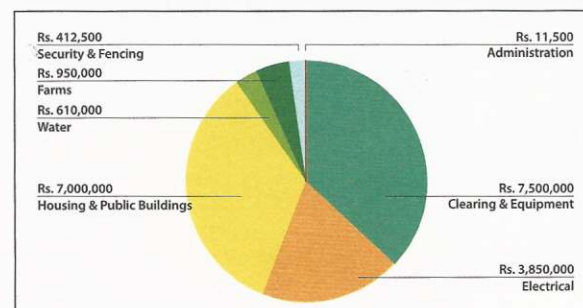
Farm and crop damage

In the wake of cyclone Thane, the Farm Group estimated almost Rs. 47 lakhs (US \$ 90,000) in immediate damage and losses, and an additional Rs. 27 lakhs (US \$ 52,000) in mid- to long-term loss and damage. These figures included estimates for clean up, crop and orchard losses, and reparations to buildings and fences; the costs for emergency water supply were figured separately. AVCRT granted more than Rs. 12 lakhs (US \$ 23,000) directly to the Farm Group for clean up and immediate relief.

Almost 355 hectares (approximately 875 acres) of Auroville cashew, seasonal vegetables, paddy, millets, pulses, rosella, casuarina, banana, papaya, alma, avocado, chick, coconut, apple, guava, citrus, jackfruit, mango, and other fruits or cash crops were lost or damaged. The crops grew on land stewarded by farmers, foresters or LRM. LRM pursued the state government (at Collector level) for reimbursement for this crop loss, but the results were limited. For example, Auroville's farms were promised compensation for only 67 hectares, but the funds have not yet reached the Farm Group; the forests will receive nothing at all.

Forest recovery

While the immediate need for windmill repair was obvious, the forest stewards struggled – and continue to struggle – to put a value on the damage done in the forests and the amount required for long-term rehabilitation. The delay is in large part due to the extensive and slow clean up process, which may take up to two years in some forest com-



munities. In some forests Thane felled valuable timber; in others, the storm produced only firewood and crop loss due to damaged cashew or orchard trees. The initial damage assessment estimated an average clean up cost of almost Rs. 23,000 per acre of forest, with more than 2000 acres total forested acres in Auroville. It is impossible to determine yet if that estimate was accurate. However, the Forest Group has set up a common fund into which all wood sales go. In this manner, the forests that have timber offset the losses in the forests that have little to sell and a damaged cash crop. The Forest Group has also established a fraternal fund into which a portion of all sales go; this fund will be used towards fencing and immediate replanting. In terms of long-term rehabilitation, the Forest Group predicts an estimated Rs. 6.7 crores will be required.

Wood sales

From the beginning, Auroville intended to maximize the value of the wood that fell during Thane. While there is an overwhelming amount of timber, much of it is immature, cracked, twisted, or too small, rendering the majority of it "second-rate timber," which cannot be processed by Auroville units but can be sold to the local market; and there is a lot of firewood and biomass. To examine how to best sell the various forms of wood, AVCRT helped create and support a Wood Tendering Team, which includes members of various working groups and which was formally endorsed by the FAMC.

The team has already managed one auction of firewood, and a larger, national online auction is underway. The work on firewood sales continues with excellent transparency and reporting, so that when the Tendering Team is no longer needed, it will be clear how much money came from Thane's wood.

It was anticipated that Auroville would establish a wood-processing unit, which would include a

sawmill, in the wake of Thane. Many Aurovilians spent time and energy in pursuit of this dream, where all the wood would stay within Auroville, to be processed and used in Auroville, for Auroville. Several options were explored, ranging from portable sawmills to massive mills including wood yards and a processing unit. Unfortunately, the dream continues to face difficulties in manifestation. Sawmill permits are extremely difficult to secure and may face challenges from surrounding villages, while appropriately skilled human resources are in short supply, and it remains unclear if Auroville has a market (and adequate supply) to sustain a sawmill beyond five years. The costs and reality of this project are still being explored.

Non-recorded donations / activities

While this report reflects primarily the activities of AVCRT, a lot of effort and funding went unrecorded. This came through direct contributions from Aurovilians for the repair of houses, units and communities; through envelopes of personal cash to employees; and through great efforts from Aurovilians to chainsaw (or hire teams to chainsaw) themselves and their neighbours free, among other unofficial channels. We're still collecting information to fully understand the unofficial contributions, but our initial reports already show more than Rs. 14 lakhs (US \$ 27,000) given outside AVCRT channels. This includes more than Rs. 5 lakhs on structural repairs, approximately Rs. 3 lakhs (US \$ 5700) for clearing and cutting, over Rs. 50,000 (US \$ 950) for equipment and a substantial amount given towards employees for their homes or other needs in the villages.

Lessons learned

Every day in Auroville, one learns something new. This has only been emphasized in the wake of Thane. The disaster forced us to realize our inadequacies in certain areas, especially emergency preparedness. We lack certain crucial community-level emergency response elements, such as a major gathering place where people can live temporarily (e.g. a stadium or large school). We need ambulances and water trucks. On the communications level, we have no formal or informal procedure for communicating with residents if phone lines are cut. In disasters, Aurovilians don't know where to go or how to get information. AVCRT is committed to creating recommendations to better our emergency response for the next time.

Because, unfortunately, there will surely be a next time, Auroville is situated in a cyclone-prone area, and the intensity of the storms is increasing due to global climate change. Beyond emergency response measures, we should design our city conscious of the climatic risks. For example, some of our structures were literally torn apart during the storm, with wind rushing directly through. Our architecture – especially housing – should have certain codes to ensure the structures are cyclone-resistant. The infrastructure, like electrical lines and water pipes, should be underground, where they're safe from wind.

The security needs of Auroville also became clear in our most vulnerable state immediately after the storm. We need more training and tools to fight fires and protect our assets.

At the ecological level, the forest and farm stewards learned a lot from Thane. The Forest Group as a whole has spent many hours analyzing which species fell and which survived, and replanting will be planned accordingly. The canopy layer was most severely impacted, and it was primarily Work Tree and non-TDEF species that fell. While the Work Tree served a valuable purpose in the beginning of Auroville by regenerating the soil and providing shade for TDEF saplings, now that Thane took them away the younger TDEF plants underneath have new opportunities to grow. For the farmers, they learned innovative ways to sustain their crops, realized which crops could best survive extreme weather, and especially learned lessons on infrastructure.

And we all learned something about patience. Recovery has been a painstaking process. There is still wood everywhere. Many individuals and families are still living in damaged homes held together by makeshift repairs. The infrastructure – especially the current lines – still need a lot of work. In the first weeks after the cyclone, without water and power, we could have made each other's lives extremely difficult. But we didn't. We had patience and trust, we all did what we could, and together as a community we're pulling through.

Catherine

The Auroville Health Fund

From the early years of Auroville till 2002, Aurovilians looked after their own medical expenses. Most of them paid the bills themselves, some had a medical insurance. Those who had no money and were not insured brought their bills to Auroville Fund and later to the Economy Group, which somehow managed to pay for them. But by the turn of the century it became increasingly obvious that this situation was untenable. Health costs, in particular the costs of hospitalisation, increased dramatically and were beyond the means of many.

In 2001, a group of Aurovilians studied whether Auroville should obtain collective health coverage from a commercial insurance company or start its own in-house health insurance system. The decision was taken to start a one-year experiment with an in-house system. This was considered closer to the aims and ideals of Auroville. Another reason was that such a system might be able to cover a wider range of health costs than would be covered by an outside company, and also benefit elderly Aurovilians whose insurance would either come to an end upon reaching a certain age or who would have to pay increasingly higher premiums as they grow older.

The Auroville Health Fund

On February 1, 2002, the Auroville Health Fund started functioning as a co-operative insurance system. This means that the income from the monthly contributions is used to cover the medical expenses of the participants. Any unspent money at the end of the year is carried over to the next year. In case the Health Fund has more expenses than income, the deficit will be shared proportionally among all the participants. In this way the participants carry the medical costs of together.

The Auroville Health Fund has now been in existence for 10 years and the experience has been positive. Over 1,600 Aurovilians and Newcomers are now participating. Over the years some adjustments needed to be made, such as that the amount to be paid for an operation would be that which would be charged by a hospital in Pondicherry. Individual Aurovilians are still free to go to a costlier hospital outside Pondicherry, but would need to pay the extra costs by themselves. Similarly, costs of medical aids, such as lenses for cataract operations, are reimbursed at the price of lenses made in India, not at the price of foreign lenses. Here too, the Aurovilians are free to opt for the foreign lenses but have to pay the difference themselves.

With these adjustments, the Health Fund has been able to meet all expenses from its income. There has never been a Health Fund deficit and, consequently, there was no need to request for additional contributions from the participants. The monthly contribution, which was Rs 200 in 2002, has been slowly increased to Rs 300 in 2012 – in fact, below the rate of inflation.

In line with the ideals of Auroville, participation in the Health Fund was not made obligatory. Over the years, however, incidents occurred of people who had chosen not to participate in the Health Fund meeting with accidents and having to call on their fellow Aurovilians for financial assistance to cover their medical costs, as Auroville has no budget to help them. To stop this, in January this year the Budget Coordination Committee (BCC) called on all those who are not participating in the Auroville Health Fund – about 600 people – to do so, or to have a health insurance elsewhere. But this

call had hardly any effect. Only 24 people responded; four people informed that they have an outside insurance.

Covering nursing costs

The coverage of the Auroville Health Fund for hospitalization expenses is extensive. It includes fees of specialists, costs of medicines and drugs, costs of diagnostic materials, costs of x-rays and of various scans, costs of dialysis, chemotherapy, radiotherapy and the costs of a pacemaker, lenses and artificial limbs.

The Auroville Health Fund, however, hardly covers nursing expenses. Only if a patient convalesces in Auroville at Quiet or at Arka will the Health Fund pay, but then only for the costs of the room, not for the costs of the attendants – which these institutions, moreover, do not provide. The Auroville Health Centre in Aspiration used to have facilities for nursing, but no longer. To sum it up, Auroville has no nursing home and no facilities are available for those who require temporary nursing, let alone for those who need permanent nursing or elderly care. This is becoming a problem.

One example is that of a senior resident who now requires 24/7 care. The costs of hiring a trained personal attendant amount to Rs 30,000 a month, which this Aurovillian can afford from his foreign pension. But for Aurovilians who live on an Auroville maintenance of Rs 8,000 a month, this is impossible.

A proposal has been made to experiment with an Auroville Nursing Fund which would pay for the costs of nursing. To cover these expenses, the BCC would need to increase the Auroville Health Fund

contribution by a proposed 10%. The experiment would be for a one year period after which it would be evaluated. Another proposal is to build an Auroville nursing home or to adapt a part of the Arka complex for this purpose. These proposals too are still under consideration.

Newcomers of 55+

Another issue is that of people older than 55 who joined Auroville after March 1, 2009. Although Auroville has no maximum age limit for joining Auroville, the Health Fund does not accept such persons as they pose a higher financial risk to the other participants.

As those people usually have personal means (e.g. an income from interest, immovable assets, life insurance or a pension), a proposal has been made that they take a private health insurance from an outside insurance company. In addition, they would be required to make a fixed recurring deposit with the State Bank of India for an amount proposed to be Rs 10 lakhs, which can only be accessed with a countersignature of Auroville and be used for paying uncovered medical and nursing expenses. The deposit would remain owned by the person, who would enjoy the interest accruing on the deposit. The BCC is also studying this proposal.

Much needs to be done

While the community has taken firm steps in the field of health insurance, much remains to be done. The nursing costs of individuals should be carried collectively. And Auroville needs a nursing home for those who are convalescing as well as for the elderly who need permanent care. With a greying population, this issue is gaining in importance.

Carel

We urgently need a nursing home

In April 2008, returning from a work-trip to Sudan, 41-year old Aurovillian D. Perumal collapsed from a massive brain stroke. For one and a half years he was taken care of by his wife and friends, before his body gave up the fight in October, 2009.

"This was one of the most difficult periods of our lives," remembers Luk, one of Perumal's friends. "Like most people, we had no knowledge of medicine or nursing. After Perumal's release from hospital, when he was in a vegetative state without speech or mind control, we brought him back to Auroville. But here, neither guidance nor help for a patient like Perumal were available. A glaring deficiency of our community became obvious when we started looking for a space to nurse him. The Auroville Health Centre had no specialized nursing facilities. There was – and there still is – no facility in Auroville for taking care of patients who need 24/7 supervision and professional assistance. Finally, Perumal's friend, Sukrit, made a part of his workshop available where we quickly built a kitchen and a bedroom with bathroom annexed. But this was a make-shift solution.

"Auroville could not provide specialized help. We were on our own and had to rely solely on a professional nurse Kundhavi, Perumal's wife, managed to hire at Rs 30,000 a month. Perumal needed constant care, in feeding and washing as well as in the administration of medicines. As he had an artificial windpipe installed, round the clock observation was required. The nurse was good and knew when Perumal needed to be brought back to Chennai for urgent treatment. It was very difficult to find another nurse when she had to take leave.

"There was another problem. Perumal was no longer insured under the Auroville Health Fund, which led to another big stress. He had been on the Health Fund until just before he left. Who was going to pay for all the bills? Kundhavi's parents were most generous and paid most of the expenses. But it was a struggle. Auroville did its best to help and quite a few individuals and places made exceptional efforts to help, but overall, we were quite frustrated that so little could be done.

"The strain on us, his friends and wife, almost led to a breaking point. It simply was too intense. Even Kundhavi, who was amazing with her unwavering dedication, at some point had to take off for a few days; our little group also had moments where we felt we needed a distance and a breather from the intense strain.

"It is normal in Tamil culture that the family takes care of family members who are ill. Perumal, however, was estranged from his biological family; consequently his wife and close friends from Auroville were all he had, and it was too little. I have heard other stories of people getting ill, becoming enthusiastic from friends for the first few days, but after that it receives very difficult to find attendants for such a long duration. It is only natural – everyone needs to get on with their own lives. But this shows that as a community we need a nursing home. Urgently. We are fooling ourselves to presume that there won't be other Perumals in future. Moreover, there is a large number of Aurovilians growing older, some of whom will need to be taken care of as well.

"The experience has taught me a lot and I have two observations to make. The first is that it is not acceptable that there are Aurovilians and Newcomers who are not part of Auroville Health Fund. Participation should be made mandatory. Everybody's health costs should be covered. My second observation is that a nursing home with qualified nurses needed to be created as soon as possible; in the meantime, spaces should be made available for this purpose in a suitable location.

"The ball is in the court of our official working groups. I hope they understand the urgent need, and can come up with the funds and resources to create a nursing home."

In conversation with Carel

The needs of Auroville's seniors

During the period March – November 2011 a survey of the senior population of Auroville was undertaken by Auroville Health Services, Aurelec, to understand their current situation and get their thoughts on their future. Out of the age 65+ population of 206 Aurovilians, 124 residents were approached of which 54 people responded, 21 in the age group 65 – 69, 16 in the age group 70 – 80 and 12 in the age group 81+ (5 people declined to reveal their age).

The survey showed that the majority of Auroville seniors live by themselves. A further study is required to clarify the full extent of their living situation and how many seniors live alone through choice, bearing in mind that no other options such as assisted living or an old-age home are available to date.

The survey also showed that 83% of the 49 respondents to this question are actively involved in some kind of community activity. 100% in the age group 65 – 69, 89% in the age group 70 – 80 and 50% in the 80+ age group provide community service. Of these, 76.9% are doing full time service. To the question 'Would you like to volunteer to help the community or other seniors?' 30 people answered 'yes', 25 'no', while 45 observed that the community did not offer any suitable opportunities to them for volunteering (or that they were not in a position to undertake any kind of service).

Health

The survey asked a number of health related questions to ascertain the overall fitness of the seniors. Only 55% of those who participated in the survey answered this question of which 5% replied that they consider their health to be in bad condition. The most prevalent health problems are osteoarthritic (bones/joints), eye diseases, hypertension and hearing problems. Most of the participants admitted to enjoying regular sleep patterns and taking some rest during the day. Only 2 people admitted to smoking, while 15 said they drink alcohol at least once a month. A hearty 91.3% practice regular physical activities; 50% of the 75 – 80 year olds responded that they walk regularly at least 7% of the respondents undergo a health check-up at every 2 years.

Asked about their requirement for physical aids, 3 seniors replied that they require special medical beds (in 80-85 age group), 85% require glasses, 33% dentures and 12% require handrails in the bathroom. 19% said they needed to use a cane, 9.5% a hearing aid. Only 14% had no special requirements.

Travel

Transport is a major concern for most seniors. Many cannot move around as and when they would like. The main activities which are affected are visits to spiritual places (including the Matrimandir), attendance of social events and gatherings, and visits to other localities such as Kulapalayam village, Quiet and Pondicherry. Approximately 30% of the respondents said they were limited in mobility because of their health.

In the 80+ age group, 50% use taxis as their main mode of transport, none use bicycles, and only 2 continue to travel by motorized two-wheeler. 68% of the 65-69 age group and 74% of the 70 – 80 age group travel by motorbike. In these age groups, only 26% use taxis.

Suggestions were made for more collective transportation through the use of regular electric vehicle shuttles between popular vantage points, especially for lunch and dinner.

Current status

The questions in this section of the survey centered on personal support, finances and general limitations. While quite a few of those questioned have some kind of personal support network in the form of friends and family, 53% rely on the services of a paid caregiver (such as a cleaner/cook) and 13% have no support at all. Generally, support requirements centre around day-to-day housekeeping and occasional repairs. 5 out of 41, responding to the question "What support do you need at this time?" answered that they would simply like some companionship and conversation.

Financially, 80% of the seniors are self-supporting; of these 65% receive some form of pension, while 37.5% use their savings. None of those responding are reliant on Auroville social support and only 4 people intimated that they were in need of some financial assistance.

The overall picture that came out is that 95% of the respondents are happy with their present material conditions and social life (house/community).

Prospects for the future

When asked about the services which seniors think should be provided by Auroville, the overall consensus which emerged was the need for a holistic centre which should provide comfort, security, companionship, activities, medical care and supplementary treatments, a garden, special care assistance where required, balanced and healthy nutrition...and a sustained involvement with the Auroville community as a whole.

In response to the question 'If you could no longer take care of yourself, how would you manage?' most of the seniors answered that they would first rely on themselves for support, reaching out later to friends and family; followed by paying for home care and as a last resort moving to a care home. 75% said that Auroville needs a senior's home, of which 87% said they would stay there if necessary in future. The responses made clear that none of Auroville's seniors would like to go back to their native country at the end of their life.

In the section 'Farewell Wishes' questions were asked about dying and last wishes. Most respondents answered that they often think about death. 78% expressed a desire for hospice support if required (e.g. for spiritual support, no allopathic treatment and for pain management). 64% of the respondents were not aware that Auroville has a Farewell Group and that there are 'Farewell forms' which help a person to document their last wishes.

In conclusion

The current scenario of 206 seniors is bound to rapidly change in the coming years as the older population matures. Auroville needs to seriously consider the requirements and provision of both senior care and general home care. This area requires our attention and action now in order to ensure that we don't end up in a crisis situation a few years down the line.

Auroville Health Services Team

Is an Auroville Information Service feasible?

Lalit has been working as an urban planner for Auroville's Future, which later became L'Avenir d'Auroville. He believes that Auroville badly needs an Information Service.

Auroville Today: Why are you proposing an Information Service in Auroville?

Lalit: We want to be a society that handles information in a mature way. However, at present our working groups are generally not able to make even the most basic information accessible.

For example, who can produce a list of all decisions made by the Residents' Assembly (RA)? Is there any documentation on recently completed housing projects, any kind of evaluation, lessons learnt which can feed in for further improvement? As another example, we have today seven to eight groups dealing with land. No updated information is easily available in the public domain on their mandate, policies, scope, membership, task reports or tenure. AuroNET has already organised some information (on groups and their mandates), but key relevant information which could assist in better informed discussions is missing and that is one of the main factors that leads to poor utilisation of AuroNET's all round capabilities.

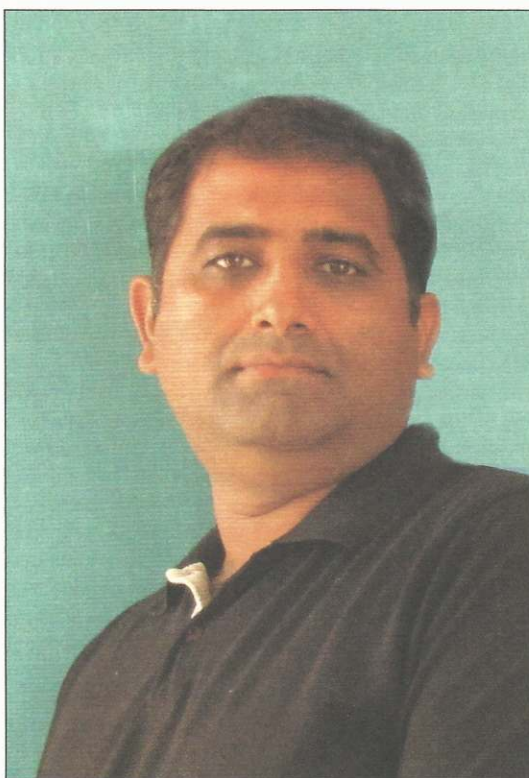
It seems to me that 95% of the discussion on AuroNET springs from the lack of clear and easily available information that matters. The Auroville database needs to be improved; it is in a super mess in every field. Information is either non-existent or misses the full picture.

Many of the good minds of Auroville, those who have the ability to contribute on a collective overview level, are not able to participate because such a base is not there.

I would like to have an Information Service with several members who would work full-time on developing an information platform for the community. The following information on each group should be presented: mandate, task forces (their mandate, purpose, etc.), policies, issues and challenges, and ongoing work. What are their proposals and how do they integrate issues and concerns of other connected areas? There is not even a clarity about what type of proposals the RA should approve and how a new group is created.

Why do you think a new information service will be able to improve the information flow?

This Information Service would be empowered to do this job. It would be dedicated to the collection, design, processing and visual presentation of information and it could assist in facilitating discussions also. There aren't many people in Auroville who can process information in an integrated, relatable way. The working



Lalit

groups should upload information on their own, but when they don't, the proposed Information Service should obtain the information and make it available. Also, it needs to be clearly organized and presented in a visually appealing and accessible form. It should work closely with the Residents Assembly Service to provide information on upcoming decisions that need to be made by the Residents Assembly.

In addition to providing a clear database of information about the

activities of the various committees and working groups on the web, there are other ways of disseminating information. There could be regular postings on AuroNET – daily or perhaps twice a week – that share useful information, and the Auroville Wiki should be used more. One could put a group's policies directly on the Wiki, open for modification for one month, then treat it as compiled feedback to the group. Then let the group modify the proposal and resubmit it in a concise form. There also could be two-week 'Annual Integration Fairs' where all groups present their work. There are 50 working groups and task forces but they never share information on the same platform.

Will the working groups cooperate? How will you get them to start documenting their work in a fuller and more efficient manner?

There will be problems. For example, by asking a group to define their policy you are making a point: "You cannot operate without a policy." If a group does not have a policy, the Information Service will report "policy does not exist," and tell them, "whenever your policy is there, you can upload it to this particular link." On the other hand, it could be a beautiful experience: "This is their policy,

this is their proposal, this is their financial report." This is transparency. The biggest issue with trust is transparency.

How will you respond to the reluctance of groups to share sensitive information? For example, some kinds of information about land may fuel land speculation.

Much of the sensitive information on land is out there anyway. I would not fear that. People should not use "this is sensitive" as an excuse for not doing their homework and finding creative ways to share information.

Some people may argue that there is a trade-off between communication transparency and efficiency – that opening up an issue to the community can slow down the decision-making process.

Perception of slowness is relative. The responsibility of residents to be informed should not be neglected. There is a need for a symbiotic relationship, for two-way communication between the groups and the community. It is fine if some people are not interested in the various groups and meetings, but it should be made easier for people to get involved if they become interested.

Auroville needs to evolve its own version of the 'Right To Information' Act which already is in use in India. This proposed information group is best seen as a transitional step. We are planting a seed.

In conversation with Larry and Daniel

ENVIRONMENT

Trees vs. roads, city vs. forests

continued from page 1

Wrong. Cristo explains, "Adjusting the road like this means we cannot do the infrastructure in the way we wanted to, which means there will be much more damage than cutting just four trees."

A Perfect Circle

At this point the meeting embarked once again on the ongoing discussion about whether the Crown Road should be a perfect circle or not. While the perfect circle could be debated for hours (It was the Mother, after all, who said: "Perfection is not a maximum or an extreme. It is an equilibrium and a harmonization."), it soon became clear it's not a huge issue in this case. "We can always restore the original alignment of the road later," Alain explained, because the full width won't be paved yet anyway. Future Aurovilian road developers would simply have to add paver blocks on the inside and the outside. "It's quite possible."

But according to Cristo, the slight diversion changes everything. "It won't be a perfect circle, and we need a perfect circle if for no other reason than to keep our options open," he says. "If we want an electric tram, for example, the curves cannot be too sharp. It has to be a circle."

Of course, others in the group questioned the feasibility of a circle when Auroville doesn't own all the land required to build the road. Between Solar Kitchen and Kalabhum, there are a handful of plots owned by villagers, so the paved road is already happening in pieces. It is paved for about 500 meters, then there's a gap of dirt road through non-Aurovilian land, then pavement again, then another gap, and paved road again, and a gap, and so on. Members of TDC insisted that Auroville will soon control or own the plots in question, so "it's not necessary for discussion. The road will go there."

Long-term Implications

Then there was the concern of what precedent the group is setting with the Gaia decision. "What if we adjust the road to protect every tree? Do we really expect the road to snake around?" someone asked. For others, it was the process that was the precedent and not

the end result. Will the planning authority of Auroville take into consideration the concerns of some Aurovilians? Can diverse Aurovilians work together to find a solution for all?

An additional pressure was the need to spend the Government of India money authorized for this project by March 31, the deadline for such projects.

A Conclusion Reached

The morning after the first meeting, the group gathered on-site. Alain had already marked the options.

"I knew once people saw the land and the markers it would be clear," Glenn said, and he was right.

But for Cristo, a very different future became clear. "Saving these trees means we're going to have to cut many other ones. The infrastructure will take a totally different route, and we'll have to clear it."

Finally the decision was taken to pave the road in a way that avoids the trees, accommodates the infrastructure, and which can be adjusted to the "perfect circle" in the future once the rest of the width is ready to be paved. The roadwork further along, near Kalabhum, can progress as planned; the adjustment at Gaia would not impact the trajectory. Or so the group believed.

"We'll see in the future the impact this decision will have. Personally, I am not optimistic. This decision was taken without carefully considering the facts," Cristo said.

Other members of the TDC groaned, "We're just postponing the inevitable." But they conceded the adjustment.

Glenn sees it otherwise. "We're taking into account what's happening now. Who knows when we will have the money and population to complete this? Maybe there won't be any petrol left in the world and we'll want to convert it into a rail. Either way," he adds, "I'm glad we did this. Because maybe it's four trees here, but further along the Crown it's going to be a whole forest, or a canyon, or a house. Then what? We've shown Auroville that there can be some flexibility and humanity in planning this city. We've shown we can come together and talk something through and find a solution that works for all."

Catherine

LETTERS

Dear AV Today:

Rip van Winkle reporting in from across the pond...

As a proper "Old Timer", I've been tuning in recently after a long absence of mind and body. Of course, the rest of the being never leaves the "Home Town"; I discovered this when I returned in '84 after an excruciating 7 years in the wilderness of USA (which felt more like 40). Upon arriving on the red soil of North Arcot, I eased down into my previous and familiar state of consciousness as if I never left. And ever since it has been obvious to me as this very strong connection. The problem with a connection that strong is that it doesn't diminish in time and space. Well, what I mean is, the daily minutia is over looked and you start taking a lot for granted and the ability to accurately speak to others about what goes on in AV gets stuck in some bygone keet covered past.

Here's where you the editors of *Auroville Today* come in. The February issue took me to a hill being designed to help generate electricity and enable a controversial water feature in the Matrimandir Gardens. I also learned of the plan to desalinate beach water from the Coramandel Coast and pump it uphill to drink. Similarly amazing was the fact that the dream to have windmills planted down south to spin in the constant off shore breezes and charge the Tamil Nadu grid and off set our carbon footprint was actually now a reality... imagine.

On the social front I learned that an illusive animal called "Consensus" had been sighted slithering through general meetings. OMG! (Tim Wrey must have missed that creature in his fabulous and scholarly new book, *Footsteps through the Salad* I got for my birthday.) A courageous and visionary Elvira has the guts and tools to keep this creature nourished and coming back for more... fabulous!

In the March issue of *Auroville Today*, I got a visit from Alan, raised in the West, himself a proper Old Timer with grey hair, and was struck with a bold move editorially speaking. There in black and white for all the public to see, was a challenge: perhaps the "City the Earth Needs" was being run and populated by a bunch of naked emperors.

OMG times 2. Eeeeee! That won't do! Bad form Alan! (Sounds familiar though, now that you mention it.)

Next was a topic close to my heart – some English dude named Krishna finds himself head over affinity with the locals, the culture, his Indian wife (from the city who's name I never tire of saying... Tiruvanamalai) and decides to teach Tamil! Follow your bliss English dude! He goes on to quote another local, Shankar, who is a silver tongued teacher of this "Dravidian-melodious-ribbon-of-sound" as saying regarding the difficulties of how to impart Tamil to the AVians, "...It would do more towards creating human unity than anything else". Another OMG moment for old Rip.

But wait, maybe the area I've been spending my time in recently (private enterprise) has something in common with the "Home Town" I left so many years ago. We say in business that there is a principle expressing itself as a ratio that makes everything turn out right. We say (and prove) that a whopping 80 percent of our proceeds come from 20 percent of our customers. (I know, huh? Amazing!) I didn't believe it the first time I heard it. But then I thought back to my life on the red barren plateau in the 70's and that was exactly what I felt was the ratio back then of who worked and who didn't. (I know, I wasn't very gracious back in my youth.)

Alan had an interesting inclusion and powerful personal note that really touched me and I feel he speaks for all the Elviras, the Shankars, the Krishnas who bust their butts to build Auroville in ways that matter... they do Yoga! Alan states "... the more I get into contact with my inner being, the less I will need to armour myself against others and the more flexible I will become in my responses." Sounds a bit like tools for consensus building, eay Elvira? and human unity if you ask me, eay Shankar?

I found myself saying "adda-boy and adda-girl" a lot in reading these recent AV Today's and wanted to congratulate the 20 percenters of Auroville along with the editors for the "AV Business Journal" of creating the 80 percent proceeds.

Borrowing from my Aussie greenbelter buddy Johnny – Good on ya, Mates!

Jack Alexander

The General Meeting of April 5th



Jesse from the RAS addresses the general meeting at Kalabhumi on April 5th, 2012

On April 5th, the Residents' Assembly Service (RAS) invited representatives from several major working groups to present the current issues and challenges of their work to the community. In an attempt to make the community show up too, the RAS had promised them not only information but bread and games as well: Auroville children gave a song and dance performance in the beginning, while dinner was provided at the end. Colourful posters allowed notes to be presented in a visually appealing way. The discussions were introduced and moderated by expert entertainer, Jesse.

In order to raise the collective consciousness before the discussion, Jesse read out some of Sri Aurobindo's guidelines on effective communication (with the most important message being: don't say anything unless it's constructive) as well as the Auroville Charter ("to make sure we are all on the same page"), followed by a moment of silence.

But the elevated mood immediately descended to the normal level when the first speaker, Joseba, gave a bleak report on Auroville's chronic housing crisis.

The number of people in need of housing is steadily growing, while too few new housing projects are approved. Even newcomers with sufficient funds are unable to get their own place to stay. Joseba stressed that Auroville urgently needs to change its approach and make housing a collective priority. He recommended selling unused assets if necessary. In the question and answer session, one concern expressed was that Auroville seems to be providing more and more beds for guests and fewer and fewer for Newcomers and Aurovilians. Another issue was the Transit Lounge [see AVT no. 263-64, May-July 2011, page 10]. Joseba explained that the project had been cancelled due to substantial negative feedback. Regarding the suggestion to use alternative approaches to construction, he pointed to the need for solid buildings that can withstand a cyclone. Several people suggested that people be allowed to settle in the International Zone to serve as caretakers of the land.

The six o'clock power cut came right on time, and, after discovering that the back-up generator was too noisy, it was decided to let Sauro give his presentation about planning without a microphone.

Speaking for the Town Development Council (TDC), Sauro stressed the need for a more socially-oriented development: Aurovilians need to move closer together, both socially and physically. This would allow construction to be better coordinated and more cost-efficient. Auroville is much slower in its development than the surrounding area, which reinforces the need for a more regional perspective. Private development within the Master Plan area remains an acute problem, and discussions with the local government on how to tackle it are ongoing.

The next speaker, Gilles, described the Land Consolidation Committee's efforts to sell unused land as frustrating and time-consuming. Also current land prices are so high it doesn't make sense to focus on fundraising alone: it is also necessary to exchange land, which is a much more complicated process. He confirmed Sauro's evaluation that Auroville is lagging behind the development of the surrounding area and stressed that outsiders need to understand that they cannot build inside the Master Plan area.

Finally, the need for a single coordinated land group was stressed.

Sandeep of the Land Resources Management group (LRM) shared some of their experiences fighting encroachment and stressed that the LRM alone has very little power to settle disputes. He called for greater individual and community participation. Also, the fact that Auroville has so much unused land seems to exacerbate the problems of encroachment and legal disputes. At the end, the LRM received a round of applause for their efforts in obtaining funds for cyclone relief.

Minh gave a presentation for the Economy Group, and his main theme was the apparent conflict between abundance and simplicity. Auroville needs an economic system in line with its Charter and ideals, respecting the various social and spiritual concerns of Aurovilians while still being productive enough to sustain them. Earlier during the meeting, many participants had voiced their dissatisfaction with the Auroville economy: Aurovilians are not able to sustain themselves only by working in Auroville, nor are they able to finance their housing without outside assistance. While there were several calls from participants for a return to a more simple lifestyle, Minh pointed out that what constitutes 'simple' has changed dramatically over the past few years. Additionally, without a functioning healthcare and welfare system, wealthier Aurovilians will remain reluctant to donate their savings to Auroville, leaving the wealth and income gap largely unchanged.

When most participants were already standing in line for dinner, Sumeet presented an update on the Integral Health Centre. The goal of his team is to provide Auroville with a comprehensive, centrally-located and well-equipped facility that meets the actual needs of the community. While the land has been allocated and the first phase of the construction has started, additional funds are required to finish and to purchase an urgently-needed Auroville ambulance. Ambulances from the outside are unable to respond effectively, often getting lost on Auroville's roads, while transporting injured persons in taxis puts them at further risk. It was pointed out that even a good ambulance needs good roads to drive on.

In the end, the question of how to best make use of Auroville's resources in trying to tackle its many challenges was the one that was raised the most during the meeting – and the one for which there seemed to be no conclusive answers.

Daniel

Can the Residents' Assembly become a functioning body?

Auroville's general meeting on April 5 drew quite a number of people. There was entertainment; food and drinks were provided; and representatives of five working groups gave presentations. But there were too many presentations and there was too little time for questions and answers. So I left with a feeling of dissatisfaction for it showed, once again, that in this way the community will never become empowered.

The functions of the Residents' Assembly

The Residents' Assembly (RA) could be described as the legislative body of Auroville, in charge of approving policies and mandates. At the same time, it is the body which should appoint and control the 'executive' which, in the case of Auroville, are the various working groups. To help the RA fulfil its function, there is a community appointed Residents' Assembly Service (RAS). It organizes meetings of the Residents' Assembly and is in charge of the decision making process, independently of the executive. The members of the present and former RAS are pro-active in also organizing and chairing general information meetings. (The third component of the old Montesquieu triad of 'powers', the independent judiciary, doesn't yet exist in Auroville.)

The legislative function

A good example of using the RA in its legislative function happened last year, when the then Working Committee sought approval of a proposed Entry and Exit policy. A number of meetings took place on this rather dry and technical matter. After a lot of discussion, the policy was approved. A formal vote of the RA was considered unnecessary, as there were no strong objections.

But it happens more often that changes in policies (e.g. the Housing Policy) or new policies (e.g. the Maintenance Policy) are proposed by a working group and then declared 'passed' by the same working group after having received community feedback, which that working group may or may not have taken into account when formulating the final version. As a matter of principle, this is wrong. The Executive can propose a policy; but it is the RA which should approve it – even if approval by the RA is time-consuming.

The appointing function

The RA should also be the body to appoint the members of the various working groups and determine their mandate and term of office. This, history has shown, is a difficult task. General meetings are not so suitable to 'approve' or 'disapprove' of a particular person for a function, as this tends to become a popularity contest. For this reason, the process followed so far has been that in most cases a senior working group, such as the Working Committee, proposes names, which it subsequently approves (or not) after community feedback has been taken into account. The process is not fool-proof and has been abused, as was shown in the selection of the members of the present Working Committee and Auroville Council [see Auroville Today # 271 February 2012 page 5 *Selecting a new Auroville Council* and *Working Committee* and AVToday # 272 March 2012 page 7 *Towards self-governance*]. This mishap could have been prevented if the RAS had taken the initiative to organize a general information meeting in which the members of the Selection Committee could have explained their decisions and answer questions, before the new groups were allowed to take charge.

A step in the right direction was made in the General Meeting of Thursday April 26, where the Selection Process Study Group presented its study into better ways of choosing members of working groups. It made a detailed proposal how this could be applied in choosing the members of the next L'Avenir d'Auroville – Town Development Council. This proposal is now under consideration.

The supervisory function

The supervisory function is to ensure that a working group or individual members of a working group fulfil their duty. The RA should hear reports of working groups and has the right to demand answers to questions and hold the working groups – or individual members – accountable for work done. The supervisory function gains importance when a working group is accused of not functioning properly or in a biased way or does not respond to people's observations or proposals. As of today, there is no sanction, and a working group can do what it likes.

Proposal for effective general meetings

To make general meetings more effective, the RAS should first ask a working group to prepare a report for publication in the *News and Notes* and on the Intranet. Then it should invite the residents to send their questions and observations on the content of the report, and on any other issue which is part of the mandate of the working group to the RAS. The RAS should then list the questions in the *News and Notes* and on the Intranet and ask the working group to publicly answer the questions in a general meeting. The RAS, chairing the general meeting, would make sure that each question is answered and that discussion has taken place on that answer if requested. Then the chair should formulate its conclusion: the question has been satisfactorily answered or disagreement on the response persists and the answer has left the questioner dissatisfied. Subsequently, the RAS would publish the questions, answers and the RAS conclusions in the *News and Notes* and on the Intranet.

In this way, general meetings would become meaningful instruments for decision making by the residents; they would allow the residents to decide if any issue should be brought for a vote to the Residents' Assembly or not. For example, there could be a 'no-confidence motion' against an individual member of a working group or against the entire working group, or a resolution could be adopted to be executed by the concerned working group. Each month a general meeting could address the work of one of Auroville's working groups: the Working Committee, the Auroville Council, the Funds and Assets Management Committee, the Town Development Council, the Entry Service, the Budget Coordination Committee, Land and Estate Management, etc. Special general meetings to discuss particular issues could be called in between whenever required.

This process would have three major benefits. (1) The residents would be better informed and feel that they have a role to play; (2) the members of the working groups will become accountable; (3) and the RA would get 'teeth' by becoming the one and only body to approve new policies and mandates; approve changes in existing policies and mandates; to do a regular assessment of the work of the executive group; and appoint and dismiss its members. This would lead to a governance system with institutionalised transparency and accountability.

Carel

International House Take Two

The former American Pavilion in the International Zone of Auroville became International House more than two years ago. The change of plans for the International Zone had changed. To make what had been the first phase of the former American Pavilion operationally and financially feasible, another building was needed. Donors in the United States agreed to fund this extension through Auroville International USA.

The new building, adjacent to the first one and dramatically baptized by the cyclone, received its first residents in January 2012. In contrast to the large aluminium vault roof of the original single level building, which acts as a rain catchment and a second roof for the rooms underneath, the new structure is a steep A-frame rising four floors and covered with recycled tetrapaks which have been moulded into corrugated roofing sheets. The wide covered verandas in the front of the rooms give the feeling of a rustic mountain lodge emphasized through wooden pillars, floors and railings. The EarthHauz architectural planning team headed by Manu wanted to utilize local materials as well as recycled waste materials as much as possible in keeping with a zero waste ethic. Waste styrofoam (thermocool) from the Eco-Service was used in the

cement needed for the first level to protect the wood in the upper levels from termites and stabilize the structure in the low-lying clay soil.

For ventilation, each room is screened from both sides by perforated sheets of aluminum which are better value than conventional screens because of a lower price and their non-rusting quality. A low-watt wall fan is mounted in each room. The rooms above ground level have interior mud walls made with a mixture of the local soil and coconut fibre reinforced by a lattice of palmyra leaf stems which have a saw-tooth edge for grip. The door and window frames too are made of the local palmyra wood.

The pillars for the building are full size palmyra trees and the structural beams are of the same palmyra wood while the floors are coconut planks. The interior staircase is also the local eucalyptus and mango wood and the railings are made of bamboo. The stairway from the ground floor is a tree trunk fitted with a spiral of steps recycled from another Auroville house (thanks to Grace, Aurora's sister). The railing above this staircase is made from recycled petrol hoses (thanks to Mana, president of a petrol hose company). The electrical system is solar-powered and sufficient for all the laptops, fans, and the lighting, which is low-watt LED strips and bulbs. At either end of the building is a compost toilet room with two showers. Coming soon are a hand-operated chain-pulley lift made of wood and a suspension bridge ramp from the old building, designed to make the meeting hall at the fourth floor completely accessible.

Among the startling features of the place is the 'rocket' shower between the two dorms. It also looks like a Native American teepee because of the shape and the bamboo poles coming out of the top. There are two rings of burned out incandescent light bulbs toward the top embedded in the teepee for day lighting and inside are rings of LED lights for nighttime showers. You enter through a hydraulic door to an interior clad with about a thousand pieces of broken mirror. The interior plumbing is encased



The International House in the International Zone.

Insert: close-up of the corrugated sheets made from discarded tetrapaks

in bamboo and the shower has two modes: rain and waterfall.

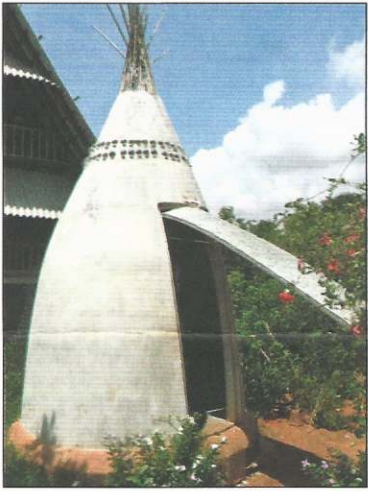
The non-conventional style of the new building has naturally drawn an enormous range of reactions: this is Auroville where there are more trained architects per square foot than anywhere in the world, while the rest of the residents are self-anointed architects. Some visitors and residents are enthusiastic about the relaxed and playful character of this dormitory (it has built-in musical instruments), while others have referred to it as a monastery. Some are even waiting for the passion fruit vines, now growing on either side of the building, to completely cover it up. This will certainly make it a green building and provide a cooling layer above the roof and more protection from ultraviolet deterioration of the roofing panels.

The amazing fact is that this building was completed in just seven months at 450 rupees (\$10) per square foot, which is about one fourth the current rate for similar-sized buildings in Auroville.

Finished at the same time as the new dorm, and parked on the premises next to the water tank tower, is the mobile office of EarthHauz. This is a two storey building made of ladders and tetrapak sheets tied together with coconut ropes and sitting on a recycled sugar cane trailer. Not only is it a fully equipped office, but it has a kitchenette and

compost toilet, plus it can sleep eight upstairs. But this is another story...

B



The bathroom teepee



The mobile office of EarthHauz

PHOTO: ANIKAL SOMVANSHI

ARCHITECTURE

Architecture should go together with lifestyle

Tejaswini is a young architect with considerable experience of working on community and individual projects in Auroville.

"I went to an architectural college in Nagpur, which is my home town. Auroville was not well-known in my college but my parents are devotees of Mother and Sri Aurobindo and have been visiting Pondicherry for more than 30 years.

I was already at college when I first visited Auroville. We only saw the Matrimandir and the Visitors Center but I immediately felt this place is a marvel. I wanted to do the practical part of my architectural course here, and this is what happened: I did a six months internship with Anupama at Kolam. We worked on projects like the Town Hall and Creativity and it was a very good introduction, not only to practical architecture but to Auroville in general.

In fact, after returning to my college I found myself very much a misfit. In Auroville I had experienced, absorbed, a different way of life, a different way of looking at things. I knew I wanted to be here but I also understood it would be a serious step to take and that it was not the right time to leave my studies.

From an architectural point of view, Auroville was very stimulating in those days. I was very attracted by Roger's designs and the way he treats each of his buildings as a sculpture. Last School, for example, has many unusable spaces - but I think if you are creating something of beauty this is acceptable because beauty matters a lot. In terms of building technology I was also fascinated by the Visitors Centre and the Solar Kitchen. This is why I had an urge to work with Suhasini, the architect who designed them.

However, when I finished my course and finally decided to move here she didn't have any vacancies in her office. So I worked for some time with

INTACH in Pondicherry. Conservation was a new field for me but I soon realized that you need a very good grounding in architecture before you can enjoy conservation work and I didn't yet have that.

Then a vacancy occurred and I came to work with Suhasini. This is where I learned the joy of making drawings and of seeing a project through from conception to birth. I worked with Suhasini for over seven years. It was a very enriching experience because I was involved in all kinds of projects, including the new Pour Tous, a new building at the Visitors Centre and the Center Guest House extension, as well as smaller projects like individual houses. During that time I also got involved in the town planning process and it was then that I met and got to work in Ahmedabad with the man who had been one of my heroes when I was at college, the architect B.V. Doshi.

That really was an eye-opening experience. What I like about him is that he is very young at heart, he's so enthusiastic about everything, and each day for him is a new day. For example, if you begin a work one day, the next day you expect to continue from where you left off. But often he will make you start from scratch all over again. That takes a lot of energy, but what he says is that you shouldn't be attached to what you have already done. Be prepared to look at it fresh tomorrow.

The other very important thing he taught me is 'Be yourself... always'.

I realized I had to develop my own individuality and this led to a shift in my career and personal life. That made me start my own architecture office. At present, all my clients are in Pondicherry and, at times, this can be frustrating. For example, I am interested in sustainability and simplicity, but these principles are not much valued outside Auroville. However, I don't like to force my ideas

upon anybody: I always like to create a good rapport with my clients; sometimes I even take their ideas and develop them further.

As to Auroville, architecturally I'm less inspired by what is happening here now. Many of our new buildings have no relationship to their environment, and we're also using reinforced concrete as if it had just been invented. At one point I thought that Auroville represented an alternative to what is happening elsewhere in India, but I'm not so sure any longer. I may sound harsh, but I think we are lost.

How to change this? It's not that Auroville architects are ignorant of things like environmental appropriateness or the qualities of different building materials. But what happens is that to gain one thing we may compromise on something else. So aesthetics, for example, may be favoured over climatic responsiveness. But for me the key is that architecture and planning should go together with lifestyle, they have to merge, to support each other. And Auroville, being a special township, will have a high quality lifestyle.

Also, I really think that if we architects can put our egos a little to one side it could make a very big



Tejaswini in her house in Prarthna

difference. For example, if we could meet together and share ideas and offer constructive views of each other's work, this could really change things.

At work, I'm looking for something interesting to do in Auroville. I want to take a leap forward. I'm just building up my experience and once I'm ready I will take that leap."

From an interview with Alan

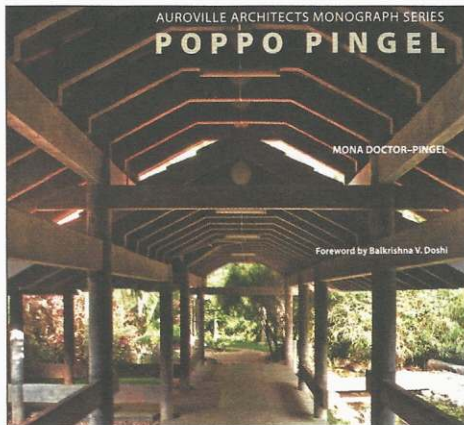
Poppo Pingel: a monograph

Every year several hundred architects visit Auroville searching for inspiration. They look for professional literature on Auroville architecture. But apart from the book *Auroville Architecture* published by Prisma last year, which gives a general overview, and the book *Roger Anger – research on beauty* published in 2009 by former Aurovilian architect Anupama Kundoo on the work of late Roger Anger, nothing is available. Auroville architect Mono Doctor-Pingel has decided to fill this lacuna by publishing a series of monographs on some Auroville architects. The book *Poppo Pingel*, which was released by Dr. Karan Singh on April 7, is the first to appear. A book on Piero and Gloria Ciconesi is in preparation.

Mona expresses in her introductory note her deep sense of gratitude towards those early architect pioneers, who came to the barren red Auroville plateau to follow a Dream. The buildings they created in those early years, she writes, still inspire many, “be it Roger’s buildings with their curvilinear, earth-hugging innovative shapes, Piero and Gloria’s ‘Aspiration’ huts, or Poppo’s low-cost ‘Fraternity’ workshops.” These architects not only set standards, but also initiated “the spirit of innovation, experimentation and perfection that has become synonymous with Auroville’s architecture scene today”.

Her book on Poppo Pingel opens with a brief description of the Auroville context: the foundation of Auroville in 1968, in which Poppo participated as one of the two representatives of Germany, and a description of the Galaxy Master Plan. Mona proceeds by giving a first insight into Poppo’s architecture – ‘lying between the plastic and the elemental, the sensory and the rational’ – while describing his designs as ‘simple and straightforward with a rustic quality’ in accordance

with Poppo’s personality who prefers ‘to do things in the old forgotten ways’ without cell phone or computers. “Poppo likes to remain master of his own time, limiting his commissions to invest his energies in activities besides architecture that enrich and empower him to grow. Archery, archaeology, painting, calligraphy, health and



healing are all pursued with a Teutonic zeal and depth.”

It is one of the attractions of this book that it does not limit itself to describing Poppo’s development (his formative years, his work as a carpenter apprentice, his studies, and his work in famine-struck Bihar in India) and his architectural achievements, but also touches upon these other aspects of his personality. The book carries a number of reproductions of Poppo’s aquarelles and calligraphies, and contains a separate chapter on his archaeological work in the Auroville area where he has excavated several megalithic burial sites dating 500 BCE – 500 CE and a settlement from the Chola period, going back to 1000 CE.

But the main part of the book, as may be

expected, deals with Poppo’s architecture. It starts with his work from 1971 to 1980 (he finally joined Auroville in 1970, but the book is silent about his contacts with The Mother), when, after his experience in Bihar, the social aspects of architecture were predominant. With funds from various organisations he built approximately 400 rammed earth houses in the villages around Auroville, aiming to achieve the magic mark of building a Rs 1,000 house. This ultimately resulted in his 1979 handbook *Rural India: Village Houses in Rammed Earth* which was published in five languages. But the book also marked the end of his involvement with village projects as this type of housing was not what the villagers wanted: they aspired for pucca brick houses with concrete roofs and considered houses made of earth with thatched roofs as fit only for the poor and beneath their status.

In the early 1970s, Poppo also designed and built workshops and a kindergarten in Fraternity. Aiming at low-cost and simple structures, the choice was made to use asbestos sheets, as had been done for the louvers of the Golconde building of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry. At the time, the long-term effects of asbestos production and handling were not known. The buildings excelled, writes Mona, because Poppo achieved the synthesis he was seeking: “a clear and sincere expression of the material, yet transcending the usual aesthetic associated with asbestos, with a fine sensitivity to details and a rich indoor-outdoor dialogue.” Today, Fraternity is hardly recognisable as it has passed through many changes and asbestos is slowly being replaced.

Mona continues with an extensive description, richly illustrated with photos and architectural drawings, of a selection of Poppo’s later achievements: his house in Certitude, built in the early 1980s; and the residences and studios in Kottakarai, the Udavi school extension, and the

Quiet Healing Centre and apartments, all realised in the 1990s. A separate chapter deals with Afsanah Guest House, which was built over more than 2 decades (1984 – 2008). Poppo’s design for *Suryamandalam*, the Tamil Heritage Centre and Museum, which is under construction, ends this section of the book.

The book concludes with five personal reminiscences and perspectives. But the brief one written in the foreword by noted Indian architect and town planner Shri Balakrishna Doshi stands out:

When a Zen archer confronts a blank paper with an ink-filled brush in his hand, suddenly, as if by magic, there appears a series of strokes expressing his innate skills, incongruous at first glance, but creating varied images in the mind of the viewer and eventually satisfying the senses. This is how I have known Poppo Pingel, the German architect and Aurovilian, since 1984.

His meticulously documented architectural buildings and complexes express a connection between earth, water and sky, between craft and technology and between within and without... Through interconnected passages, varied scales, volumes and spaces, his hovering buildings give a unique identity to his landscapes of water bodies, rocks and greens as if in a silent dialogue.

The book is well-written and gives a keen insight in Poppo’s work. What’s missing is a paragraph on his spiritual development, an essential for people living in Auroville, which would have provided a deeper insight into his multifaceted personality. But if the book aims at a general architectural readership, this omission is acceptable.

Carel

Poppo Pingel
Auroville Architects Monograph series
Published by Mapin Publishing Pvt. Ltd. India
Costs in India Rs 2,000. For further info contact:
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The New Being and the New Society

Subtitled ‘A compilation of the Mother’s words and archival material during the formative years of Auroville’, Paulette’s latest compilation brings together documents and interviews relating to the early years. Some of them are familiar – she quotes generously from Mother’s Agenda, for example – but others are being published for the first time. She has conveniently grouped the material under headings like ‘The Yoga of Work’, ‘Industries, Agriculture and Economic Activities’, ‘Organization: the Inner Hierarchy’ and ‘Relationship with the Villagers and Integration as Aurovilians’.

The latter section is particularly interesting because it contains a little known report of a meeting in 1970 between the Comité Administratif d’Auroville (CAA) and Aurovilians who were already residing on the plateau. The focus of the meeting was the proposed compulsory purchase of land from local villagers for the construction of the Matrimandir and Bharat Nivas and the report clearly exposes the rift which existed between members of the CAA, who lived in Pondicherry, and the residents of Auroville who bore the brunt of the CAA’s somewhat clumsy dealings concerning land purchase. It’s also fascinating to read Navajata’s description of the origins of the explosion in local land prices and Mother’s response (“Mother’s instructions were to buy... Mother said, you don’t know the force of greed. If you think by bargaining you bring down the price, you are wrong.”)

The compilation also includes previously unpublished material from Roger Anger’s archive, including important material about the ideal organization of Auroville and the precondition for being a good organizer. Mother explains that it is about “knowing how to learn what to do at each instant, what decision to take, to understand and see in the world of intuition the thing to do. For the time being we must do our best with what we know, but later we will live in the world of intuition.”

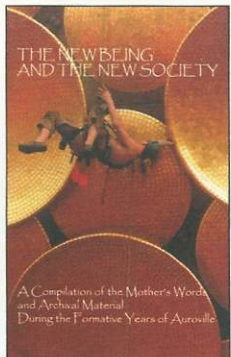
“This book,” Paulette notes in her introduction, “wishes to address a new generation of youth with high ideals, along with the eternally young, people for whom the Ideal manifests in life itself and not in some distant utopia, people aware that human evolution goes hand in hand with the metamorphosis and self-perfection of individuals. The purpose of this book... is to draw inspiration from the practical set-up of Auroville as it began to emerge during the Mother’s years under her guidance, as an attempt to achieve on earth a slightly more ideal life.”

In terms of addressing the general reader who may be unfamiliar with Auroville and the yoga, the compilation does a good job in identifying the main lines of Mother’s intentions for Auroville. On the other hand, the minutiae of some of the reports are probably only of interest to researchers. And then, of course, there remains the vexed question of how one interprets Mother’s ‘approval’ or ‘blessings’ of proposals made by others. For Mother made clear, in a different context, that her ‘blessings’ should not necessarily be taken as a seal of approval for a particular course of action. In this sense, this compilation at times gives a fascinating insight into how Mother’s force was mediated and interpreted by the human instruments around her.

Overall, though, this is a very useful introduction to the ideals and creative ferment of the early years of a project which Mother said would play a key role in humanity’s evolution.

Alan

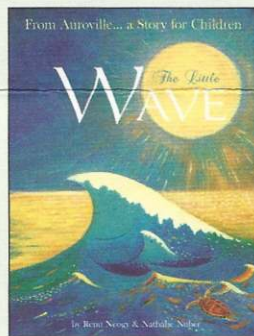
The New Being and the New Society: a compilation of the Mother’s words and archival material during the formative years of Auroville. Published by SAIER, 2012. Price in India Rs. 200. Available from Auroville Visitors Centre and VAK and Focus bookshops in Pondicherry.



The little wave

An increasing number of children’s books are being published in Auroville [see for example AV Today # 272 page 6, *What is this Auroville?*]. A new children’s book, *The Little Wave*, released at the Auroville Unity Pavilion on April 21st, has now been added. It tells the story of a young wave’s adventures. Its Big Mother, the great ocean, assures it that the little wave is always part of her and that it will always return to her. With that assurance at heart, the little wave experiences becoming a cloud, raining down on the land, and becoming in a river, before ultimately re-connecting with its mother. The story is both ecological and spiritual.

The book, with poetic texts by Renu and beautiful illustrations by Nathalie, two Aurovilians who grew up together in Auroville, has been published in hardcover. It is available at Auroville.com and at the Auroville Boutique and the Auroville Press outlets. Price in India Rs. 690, with additional charges for shipping and packing.



Source book for Asia on sustainable energy

In collaboration with Auroville Consulting, UN Habitat has published *Sustainable Urban Energy – A Source Book for Asia*. The book addresses sustainable urban energy solutions from a system’s perspective, as a three-step process – energy conservation, energy efficiency and renewable energy.

To confront the challenges of fossil fuel depletion, increasing energy costs and rapid climate change, cities have to develop and implement energy management solutions. This publication is a training companion developed originally for training courses at the International Urban Training Centre in the Republic of Korea.

The book can be freely downloaded from <http://www.unhabitat.org/content.asp?catid=533&typeid=24&cid=11115>.

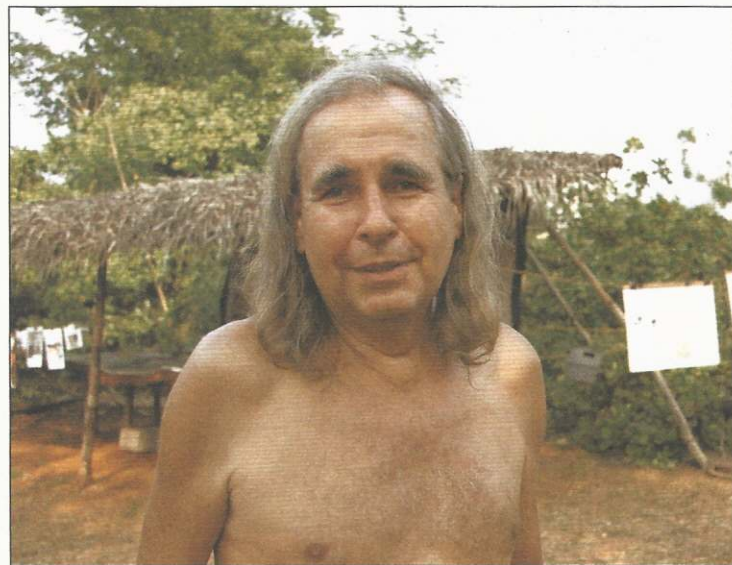
PASSING

Njal

On April 17, Aurovilian Njal Ehlert left his body in his house in Centre Field after feeling unwell during the day. He had turned 70 a few weeks ago.

Njal, who hailed from Berlin, Germany, joined Auroville in 1992 and has been, with his partner Rita, a strong and relentless activist against the use of plastics and of chemical pesticides and fertilizers within and around Auroville. In 2001, in response to the dangers of Endosulfan pesticide spraying, he started a small organic cashew plantation on a plot near the Solar Kitchen. The results were impressive. After he started making his own compost and applying bio-pesticides made from the neem tree, the harvests increased year after year.

Even an attack of the root and stem borer beetle, which is not affected by neem, and which caused a loss of a third of his trees, didn’t affect the yield: it still went up. This created more agricultural awareness. The plot became an exhibition site with information about the dangers of pesticides, natural alternatives and organic growing in general. He distributed 50,000 pamphlets on the dangers of chemical pesticides and the benefits of organic farming. As an aside, he exhibited panels on the lives and thoughts of people who espoused values of simplicity such as Diogenes, Thoreau, Gandhi and Schumacher.



Njal in front of his road stall

Njal’s philosophy of life was close to theirs: he favoured living a simple life and objected to people blindly going along with the mainstream of society, applying pesticides and artificial fertilizers. For Njal, everybody should listen to their own inner voice and not be influenced by the thinking of others. In an interview with Stella Shaller from Auroville Radio on March 11, 2012, he spoke about his work and said that, after he is gone, he would like it if someone continued his work.

Njal’s body was cremated at the Adventure cremation grounds on Earth Day, April 22nd.

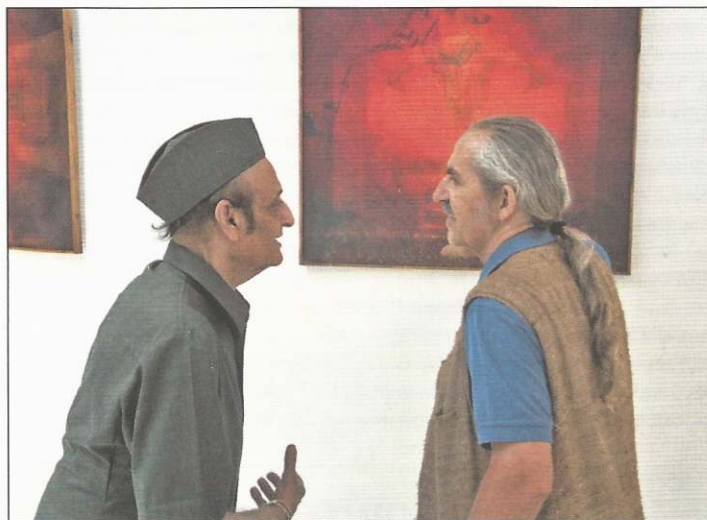
Images of devotion

The exhibition 'Parables of Dawn' with digital paintings by Jürgen Pütz was held at Savitri Bhavan.

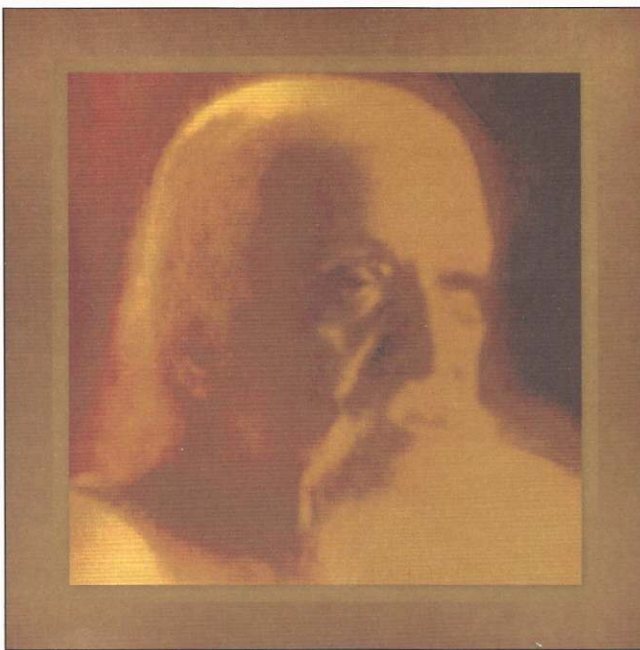
Many people are familiar with the photos of Sri Aurobindo and Sri Ramana Maharshi made by the French photographer Henri Cartier Bresson in April 1950. Yet, some people were unprepared for the impact they experienced when seeing these photos in dark blue or golden orange close-ups in a recent Auroville exhibition.

"There is more in these pictures than is initially perceived," explains artist Jürgen Pütz. "I have seen people being deeply touched. The Mother has said that each portrait of her – and by extension, I assume, also of Sri Aurobindo and Sri Ramana Maharshi – carries a unique aspect of the personality with which one can come into contact. I have been trying to bring that to the front. That explains the title of this exhibition, 'Parables of Dawn', where the pictures in their own unique way may help someone's spiritual journey by awakening something within. This would make all my work worthwhile."

In Auroville, Jürgen is known for his work as executive of Palmyra, a unit which does environmental and social work in the Auroville bioregion, and as a member of various working groups. But there are more sides to him.



Dr. Karan Singh and Jürgen during the exhibition

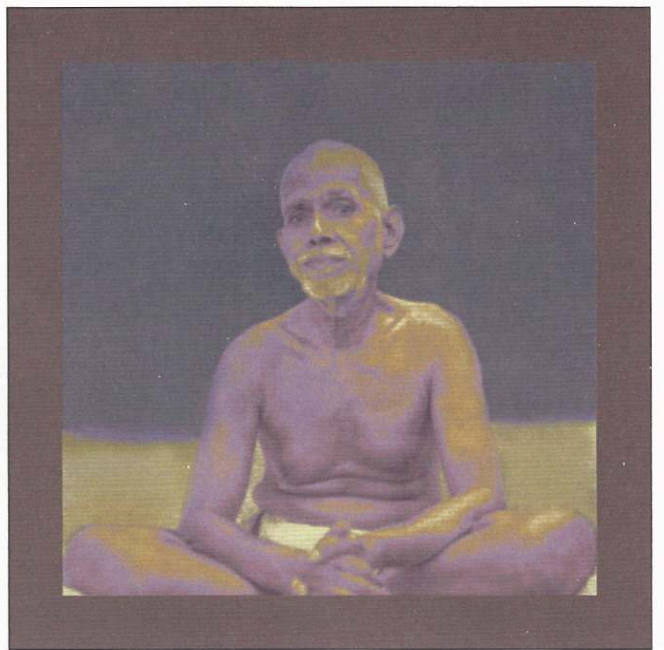


His artistic creations, he explains, are the result of years of experimenting with shapes and colours in the late sixties before he embarked for Auroville. He started off with a unique way of working pigments into paper, then went into superimposing photography, and more recently, embraced the endless possibilities of digital software. Along the way, he was influenced by many artists, of which Van Gogh, Andy Warhol and Miles Davis are the most important. "Davis, of course, is more known for his trumpet-artistry than for his paintings, but what's the difference?" he says.

Another major influence is all that surrounds us here. Jürgen cites his wife Sabine, who found that his paintings echo the natural surroundings of their home as well as certain events in Auroville and contacts with close friends.

"Over the years, the different influences gradually merged, from the art world as well as from my inner life and the relationship to Sri Aurobindo and The Mother," he says. "Slowly something more concrete developed. I concentrated on teachers who have always played a very dominant role in my life such as Sri Ramana Maharshi, Sri Aurobindo, The Mother, Buddha, and Nataraja."

But the process was difficult, particularly with the portraits of Sri Aurobindo. "I started to work with his portraits, adding colour, different backgrounds, adding The Mother into the picture – but it wasn't really coming together. Then I



addressed Sri Aurobindo directly, asking for his help. He responded to my prayers for guidance in a very material way and then the work became easier and something was allowed to manifest," he says, a bit hesitantly, as the closeness and guidance which he is seeking in his work is evidently a very personal issue.

Is there an emphasis on special effects? "Certainly not. I try to internalize the picture and see it from a different level of consciousness. The material expression sometimes follows that inner seeing, but never so often something manifests which I had not consciously planned. My work, in essence, is an outcome of creative devotion."

Has he ever heard objections that his colouring of these portraits amounts to sacrilege? "No. After all, many people, when looking at their portraits, have seen colours around them. So my use of colour is not so out of the ordinary. The only reservation I once heard was about using an image of the Matrimandir crystal, but we don't want to become religious, do we? Not here of all places!"

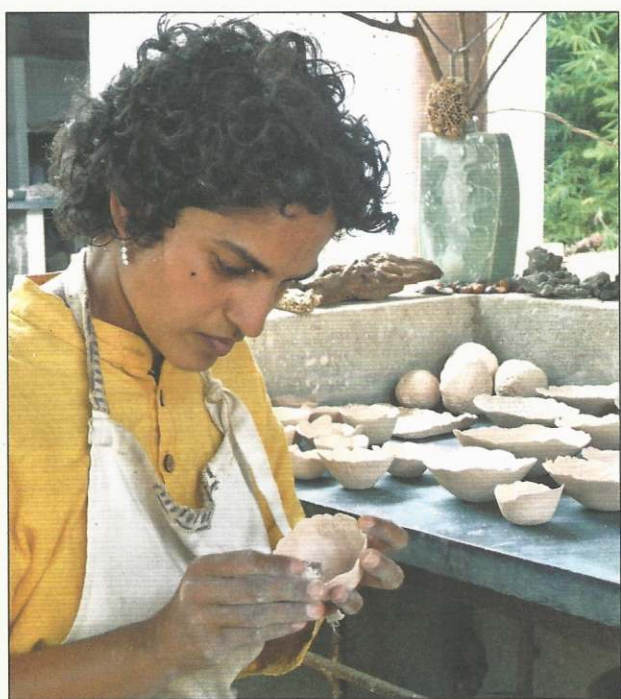
This is Jürgen's second exhibition, after his maiden show 'Between Magic and Expression' in Kala Kendra in August 2011. "I am happy that the venue of this exhibition was Savitri Bhavan," he says. "No other exhibition space in Auroville lends itself so well to the theme of 'Parables of Dawn'."

His next step will be to create a website, for there are hundreds of pictures he would like to show. We'll keep you informed.

Carel

"It's like needing to breathe"

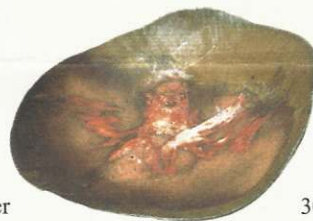
Priya Sundaravalli is still basking in the afterglow of her first successful solo show 'Ceramics' in Pitanga. When did she first discover clay? "In primary school, when I got a book on having fun with clay!" Not that she dove right into the medium; a circuitous route saw her first through medical college in India, and later industrial engineering at the University of Michigan, USA. There she signed up for a ceramics elective in the School of Arts and Design. "Here I met Felipe Ortega, the man I call my guru, a Jicarilla Apache medicine man and master potter who is famous for his hand-built and flame-proof 'Apache bean pots' made from micaceous clay."



In 2002, she moved to Auroville, started work for Auroville Today and at the same time taught science at various schools. But pottery was never far from her mind. Two years later, Michel of Flame Pottery in Dana gave her the space and resources which reignited her passion with clay. But unlike the products of Flame, Priya's works are very thin and light. "I like to explore clay as a fabric," she explains. "I'm trying to reach transparency, weightlessness and movement, while simultaneously working in minute detail." The process, she admits, is fraught with uncertainty. "The works are fragile, especially when the clay is drying. In the kiln, under the influence of fire, they take on a life of their own."

In 2010, Priya took a four-month sabbatical to further study hand-building techniques with Felipe, this time at his studio in New Mexico. The experience, she says, was exhilarating. "Felipe, of course, trained me in making the traditional Apache functional ware: beautifully symmetrically built pots. But this is not my way of expression, so in my spare time I made wafer-thin ware, which Felipe found amusing."

Back in Auroville she continued experimenting and increasingly spent more time with clay. Kratu had lent her a studio, which was soon overflowing with her pottery. "The idea of doing a solo show was thrown at me by Ange of Forest Pottery. In January this year I was piling too many pieces on my assigned space at the 'Jeff Shapiro & Friends' show. 'Priya! You are ready for a solo ... but not on this one pedestal please!' she exclaimed."



Dragon warrior

Priya got her way at a show in Pitanga, with over 300 pieces on display.

"It was the result of 16 months of work," she says. The many red dots showed that quite a number had found buyers. One oft-repeated comment I heard was that 'Priya's pottery' is very unlike 'Pondicherry pottery' –



Under the Persian sky

which, in translation, implies that most of us who have studied ceramics at the Golden Bridge Pottery in Pondicherry, with Deborah Smith and Ray Meeker, have 'imbibed' a certain look and feel. Priya, evidently, is not from this stable.

Next on the horizon? "Returning briefly to where I first started dabbling with clay, to Michigan, to the East Lansing Art Fair where I have been selected as an 'emerging artist' and have been given a stall to show my works. As my brother is paying for my airfare, what else could I ask for!"

Priya adds as a parting note that she would like to be a full-time potter but can't give up teaching. "I teach the science of everyday life, a jumble of things, at a few Auroville schools.

My classes are high-energy sessions – full of vitality." It makes up for the quiet corner at Dana where Priya works, bent over in deep concentration. What does she see herself doing in ten years? "If I am alive, then still working with clay. It's like needing to breathe, isn't it?"

Adil

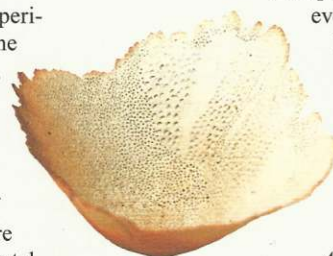
Adil Writer is an architect turned ceramic artist, a partner at Mandala Pottery in Dana, Auroville.



Savannah bowl



Tim Burton bean stalk bowl



Coral flare bowl

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