

A new Town Development Council

On October 23rd, at the end of a three-day selection process, the community selected a new eight-member team for the Town Development Council (TDC) Interface Team. Unlike previous Town Development teams, six of them are women.

“Profound disgust”, said one of the participants, responding to the “How do you feel?” question on day one. The others on his table nodded in agreement and added their version of dislike. No-one was looking forward to spending three days selecting the new Town Development Council (TDC) Interface Team.

Yet the three days are mandatory. They are part of the Participatory Selection Process approved by the Residents’ Assembly in January 2014. [see *AVToday* # 299-300, June-July 2014]. It specifies that any Aurovilian can nominate him/herself as well as any other Aurovilian as a candidate or participant in the selection process for members of major working groups. The names of the candidates who accept the nomination are published so that the community can give feedback. The feedback is checked by a Feedback Review Committee who decide whether a person can or cannot join the selection process. Candidates and participants then meet for three days to select the new members.

The nomination for the TDC had opened in August. Approximately 140 Aurovilians were nominated. Over time, the list narrowed down to 58 persons who met on October 20th, 21st and 22nd.

At the request of the Auroville Council, the three-day process was facilitated by Aurovilians experienced in conducting trainings, workshops and Auroville introduction programmes. Rakhal, Leena and Sheba worked for almost a month to prepare the process, which they based on the spiritual ideals of Auroville.

“The Terms of Reference for the TDC state that the Auroville Charter and the Vision for Auroville as given by The Mother form the foundation for the development of Auroville,” says Rakhal. “For us, this meant that the spiritual and the material should not be separated and that we should focus on both during the three day process.”

The first day set the tone: participants gave their views on the strengths and weaknesses of Auroville; there were table discussions on specific case studies and the outcomes were shared with all participants; there was an explanation of how the new Interface Team and its Technical Team are to function [see *AVToday* # 335-336, June-July 2017]; a first group of individual candidates briefly presented themselves; and participants were asked to ponder questions such as the relationship of the first line of the Auroville Charter - *Auroville belongs to nobody in particular but to humanity as a whole* - to the planning process and how the second line of the Charter - *But to live in Auroville one must be a willing servitor of the Divine Consciousness* - was to be personally understood.

Day two

During the second day the understanding of the interrelationship of the material and spiritual was sought to be deepened.



PHOTO: MANOHAR

From left (top) Anita, Sindhuja, Anu, Aurovici, Tejaswini, Divya, Inge and Pino

This time participants were invited to play the ‘game of powers’, where each was asked to pick a card mentioning one of the twelve Powers of The Mother (*Sincerity, Humility, Gratitude, Perseverance, Aspiration, Receptivity, Progress, Courage, Goodness, Generosity, Equanimity, and Peace*), reflect on its meaning and share the reflection with the other table participants. A second group of candidates then presented themselves; and the outgoing members of the iTDC (interim TDC) talked about their work, its complexities, difficulties and joys. A few more case studies in the form of ‘fish bowls’, where the candidates play-acted a development problem, and a review of the feedback received concluded the day.

The most touching part of the second day was the long resounding applause that was given to the outgoing members of the iTDC - “the first applause I received for my work in 10 years”, observed Sauro dryly. Together with Jacqueline and Cristo, he had served two terms in the TDC and seen its gradual demise when more and more people left office [see *AVToday* #297, April 2014]. They continued their work in a so-called ‘interim TDC’, together with a few newly appointed members, initially for 6 months, while they awaited the formation of a new TDC. These six months became 1½ years.

“In this job you have to pursue the 12 qualities of The Mother all the time,” said Divya, an outgoing member who was later re-selected. She highlighted four of them. “*Perseverance*: you have to come back every day. *Courage*: you need a lot of courage to come back every day. *Goodness*: don’t expect anything in return, no result, no reward. And *generosity*: you have to be generous in all domains, time, energy, goodwill, especially work.”

“I would add commitment, for without that you can’t do the job,” added Sauro. “For the job doesn’t stop when you go home in the evening.” And he warned about the difficult challenges and

the stress that the work brings. “There is no other job in Auroville which puts you into touch with so many aspects of Auroville life.” Jacqueline stressed the necessity that all new members be aware of what The Mother said on Auroville. “The new team must be aware of the vision of Roger Anger” with whom The Mother had many talks about the planning of Auroville.

Cristo reminded the participants to be not city-centric but include the surrounding villages in planning the development of Auroville. He added some practical tips concerning ‘how to survive the work of the TDC’. “Never tell lies, ever. And be aware that some people will never collaborate. Leave them in their space, but make sure that not one or two persons can block development. Find ways to enforce discipline. And, most importantly, never forget what Mother has said about building the city: it is only a pretext, a support for the sadhana that each of us is supposed to do. It isn’t the amount of concrete that we pour into Auroville that matters but the amount of consciousness that we pour into the concrete.” “And never forget that you are at the service of Auroville, not at the service of the residents,” added Tom.

There was a little time for questions. “Listening to all these concerns, are there any joys in this type of work?” asked one of the participants. “There is the joy of seeing a development towards a more collective living,” replied Sauro. “In 2007, the city area was just a spread of scattered developments. Today, we have a beginning of urban consolidation in the residential zone sectors 1 and 2, with a library, a health and a farewell centre, and a nearby Solar Kitchen. There has also been a development of the administrative area.” But he admitted that 90-95% of the visible job of the TDC has been conflict resolution. “It’s rare that a project doesn’t result in some kind of conflict, and I expect that the new team will have to do a lot of communication. But they will also have to concentrate on ensuring that detailed development plans are being made so that everyone becomes aware of what is planned in a certain area which, ideally, should give less conflict.”

At the end of day two, the candidates were asked to look at the feedback that he or she had received and discuss it with another person. The feedback was also pasted on the wall to be accessible to all. In this process, the facilitators took care to help people deal with feedback regarding them and how to make the best of it. “Feedback is breakfast for champions,” they stated. “Listen without defensiveness, receive it as a gift, don’t plan a rebuttal, use it as an opportunity to reflect deeply,” mentioning at the same time that being able to receive feedback and use it positively is a necessary skill for team members.

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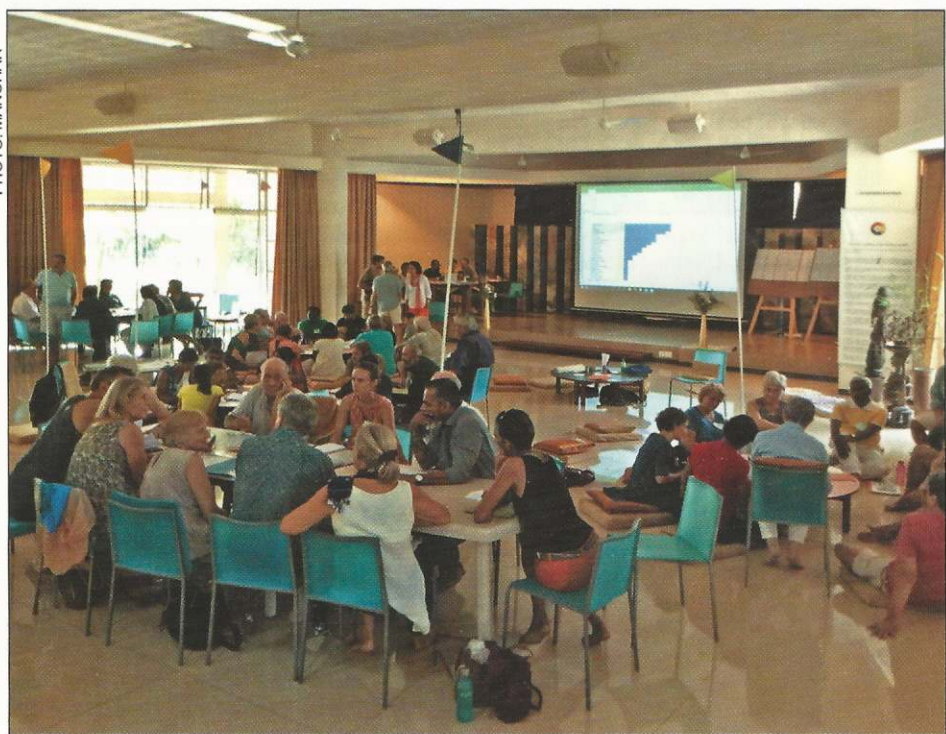


PHOTO: MANOHAR

Participants discussing the candidates’ qualifications

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The Galaxy Re-visited

Anu Majumdar, in her new book, *Auroville A City for the Future*, argues that the Galaxy concept is central to the manifestation of Auroville but it has been neglected or dismissed over the years.

Is the Galaxy still relevant? If so, what can we learn from looking at it afresh? Why has it taken so long for it to be materialised, and what can be done to change this?

Auroville Today brought together architects and town planners who have explored the concept to answer these questions. Helmut, David, Ganesh and Tejaswini are architects. Anupama, an architect, worked extensively with Roger Anger, whose team designed the Galaxy concept and whom Mother appointed Chief Architect of the town. Christian is a professional town planner. Anu, like Tejaswini, is a newly appointed member of the recently formed Town Development Council Interface group.

planners and interested Aurovilians who met to explore innovative ways to realise the city eds.], we tried to look at the Galaxy afresh. For example we asked, do we need roads? If you begin with a question like that, it doesn't mean that you don't make them, but it will lead you somewhere else than if you assume that roads are necessary.

Again, when you look at the Galaxy model from above you wonder what it would be like to stand between the high buildings. But if you look from ground level, you do not get that feeling. So we have to keep looking at the same thing from different angles. This will give us new clues.

Anupama: Roger's Paris office thought the only way mobility can work in such a sunny, humid and rainy climate is if there are many covered walkways. So many of the structures which look massive from above are covered walkways, and everything is joined up to enable people to walk everywhere in the shade. Roger also created one-storey walkways so that when you walked there, you are not overawed by the height of surrounding buildings.

they still resisted changing their plans.

David: We are still building according to a density plan that someone in Aurofuture made more than 20 years ago.

Tejaswini: Today, what I feel is missing is the human scale, particularly if I look at the Crown and the first radial. The Crown design encourages speeds of up to 50 km speed in the city, even though we are talking about a pedestrian city with a maximum speed of about 10 kilometres an hour.

Christian: We are creating a city for the car, exactly what we wanted to avoid. This is the first obvious fact I saw when I came here.

Helmut: The outer ring road is there to take the pressure from the city. It is for faster traffic which wants to go from one zone to another. There should be no motorised traffic on the Crown, except for public transport and emergencies.

So there is agreement that the Galaxy plan has much to offer us?

David: It's a no-brainer, it's obvious.

Roger was working with these people. I asked him and he said, The Mother told me to do my work and the rest will be done, and I deal with these people because they are the ones there now. He felt when Auroville is ready, the situation will change.

The planning office has never encouraged different studies of the Galaxy to be made. We have had problems hiring outside consultants because the Galaxy plan has been so hotly contested in Auroville. If we wanted to make further studies ourselves, we were called 'fanatics' or people thought we were trying to take over the project.

Planning is a series of negotiations and explorations but in Auroville there were these two 'religions', the pro-Galaxy and the anti-Galaxy religion, and wherever you went you were bombarded by one side or the other.

But I continue to work on it and keep putting life into it because it is worth it: I learned so much more by talking to Roger and going through his archive and works in France.

Anu: For so long, negativity against the city and Roger has been so strong that nobody could deal with the Galaxy, except through building



An unusual view of the Galaxy

Auroville Today: Does the Galaxy have much to teach us? For example, regarding density, how successfully does the Galaxy deal with fitting 50,000 people into such a small area?

Helmut: I don't think there is a density problem here, unless you compress too much in certain areas. Moreover, the confined size of this city encourages pedestrians because the distances are very walkable.

Anupama: I think mobility is the key thing. Originally, Roger wanted to spread the city because he didn't want a dense city where there would be no room for nature. However, The Mother insisted that it should be more compact. So Roger introduced the Lines of Force because he didn't want to compromise the green of the rest of the city, and he wanted the mobility to be predominately pedestrian. You do not see roads on the Galaxy plan, and this is deliberate. Even the Crown is not a road but a cluster of buildings within which you can circulate the city's facilities on foot.

However, the Auroville planning office took this plan and converted it into very conventional road sections. This is a type of city that will attract motorised traffic.

Helmut: Roads and streets are usually the forerunners of development. But they do not have to be designated for motorised traffic. We have no proper mobility concept for the city. This is a serious set-back; we might get overrun by motorised traffic with all the fatal consequences for city life.

When we have a very complicated plan like the Galaxy, we need a new kind of development logic to build the town. If we don't have this, we will fall back on old models, which is what is happening at present – uncontrolled random development. The Galaxy will not get realised this way.

Ganesh: It is important that we change our perspective. In the Dreamcatchers [architects,

If you look at the Galaxy as an urban form without roads, it is a very fluid space which, frankly, nobody has explored. I should clarify that, according to Roger, the radials are not roads but infrastructure paths.

Anu: For me, the Crown is one of the key elements in mobility. Unless we achieve here a quiet pedestrian circulation, we are not allowing everything else to emerge. It's not about being strict regarding geometry but getting a clean flow of energies to circulate.



The Galaxy plan

David: Actually, Roger was shocked when I described to him how native English speakers understand the word 'road'.

Anupama: He was very concerned at plans to make the width of the Crown road, including pedestrians and cyclists, add up to 24 metres. He wanted the maximum width to be six metres, and within buildings much less, because otherwise the intimacy would be lost. He actually took one of the planning team out one morning with a measuring tape to make his point. Unfortunately,

Then why has it taken so long to manifest?

David: This is why I am getting so angry. I have sat for over 20 years in meetings like this with very intelligent people having similar conversations. I can tick almost everything that everybody here has said. But why are we still sitting here? It is because certain far-reaching planning decisions have been made by imbeciles, and anyone stepping in later to try and help has started with a ball-and-chain around their ankles.

In *Dreamcatchers*, we spent years discussing fundamental issues of planning. But every time we presented something to these people, we hit a blank wall. So, unless we deal with the politics of planning in Auroville, with the fear and the power driving decisions here, we will be sitting here in ten years having the same conversation and nothing will have changed.

Christian: I fully agree. I chose to step out of the Master Plan process because I realised nothing can be done at present to change things.

Anupama: The Galaxy plan is a solution to the problems the rapidly-urbanising world is facing if it was only recognised. But those who until recently managed planning in Auroville have no understanding of this, and they keep taking decisions without reference to the larger plan.

David: Decisions with profound implications have been made by people with an extreme dearth of imagination. Clearly, if people like that demand the right to determine the parameters of the Galaxy, they can't manage it. I couldn't do it, either. The only chance of this manifesting is if all of us brainstorm and work together. If you put this in the hands of people who haven't got any idea, the only thing they can do is lay down infrastructure, like roads and pipes, which is what is happening at present. Basically, Auroville is being designed by engineers.

Anupama: We have always empowered people who knew less to be at the top of the planning pyramid. Many people wondered why

infrastructure. There are still many closed minds. We need a mind shift to be able to see the realization of the Galaxy not as ordinary 'development' but as steps enabling a unified and far-reaching experiment.

Key aspects of the Galaxy are contained in the recently published Terms of Reference for planning in Auroville. Doesn't this suggest that the Galaxy concept is far from dead?

Anupama: The Terms of Reference have included elements of the Galaxy plan as a compromise, but the fact the Galaxy represents an entirely different form of city, and therefore a different form of mobility, is not penetrating.

Tejaswini: Fortunately, I have not come across anybody who is actually anti-Galaxy. So I think we should talk less about these divisions and more about how we can take it forward. The Galaxy is a given; there's no debate about that. All that is debatable is different interpretations.

Anupama: I don't think we can wish away an actual situation of duality. Why do we have this situation? I think what happened was that Mother used to meet Roger daily about the city but in those days there were no reports of these conversations. So people working on the land in Auroville were seeing Roger as wanting to impose something alien upon them, and they resisted.

Helmut: These kinds of controversies happen everywhere in the world with development projects. We are not an exception. Information and participation in the planning process are the best way to deal with it: imposition will always fail.

But certain strong reservations about the Galaxy have persisted. One is that it does not consider ground realities like topography and the prevailing social situation. Another is that it represents the consciousness of another era when there was abundant fossil energy, and architects felt free to manipulate the landscape to fulfill their dreams, as in Brasilia and Chandigarh. These people say we need to be building a different kind of city from the Galaxy today if we are to be the 'city the world needs'.

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Helmut: I agree that the Galaxy concept is not adapted to ground realities. This has to happen, we only have to start doing it. I don't see this as a problem.

Anupama: The problem with Modernism in town planning, which Roger very well understood, is that Modernism got somehow linked with 'motorism'. Brasilia and Chandigarh are all about motorisation. Roger's approach was actually a counterpoint to the Le Corbusier's. Although he admired his artistic genius, he was very sad when he saw Chandigarh because of this aspect.

What Roger planned here was very different, although the Aurovilians still don't see it. Roger was compacting the city to enable alternative forms of mobility.

Christian: The architecture of the Galaxy was popular in the 1970s and 1980s but it has been proven to have many drawbacks, including the creation of spaces difficult to supervise, leading to all kinds of anti-social behaviour. You have to listen to the experience of other cities because these kinds of forms are clearly dated. But this doesn't mean we should reject the Galaxy concept as it has some very interesting elements. We just have to find different ways of materialising it.

Anupama: Roger said that cities keep changing over time. Auroville's plan is no exception. But he wanted there to be some organising principle.

Christian: To build a city you have to provide the bones, then the flesh can be organised around them. Unfortunately, the way the Auroville planners have translated the bones is as roads. This is clearly nonsense.

I love the structure of the Galaxy but for me, as a town planner, there are other important considerations. At present, each human needs half an acre to feed and accommodate them. If you make this calculation, you will see that for today's 2,500 residents plus guests, the surface of the Master Plan area is exactly sufficient. But if you put 50,000 people here, you will need a much bigger area to sustain it. We are focusing on the city as an artistic object but it doesn't exist on its own. We need to see how it relates to the larger bioregion in terms of circulation and economy.

Anu: We have to see the totality. The complete Galaxy plan for me includes the greenbelt. Until now, most of our greenbelt is forestry, there is very little farmland. We need additional farms to bring more self-sufficiency in food.

Tejaswini: We should not forget, when we talk about 'ground realities', that there is still much land that we do not own. Consequently, what is happening now is we are constructing bits and pieces of the Crown, and little bits of a radial here and there. I think we are forcing ourselves to do a few elements of the Galaxy, but this doesn't make sense. Galaxy elements should not be implemented without looking at the present situation of the land and the present needs of the population.

David: I think the fact that we don't own all the land is a huge blessing. It allows us the time to finally get our act together, and start manifesting what I



From left: Anu, Tejaswini, David, Ganesh, Helmut, Anupama and Christian

believe Mother really saw when she looked at this Galaxy plan.

Tejaswini: I don't agree that not owning all the land is a blessing. Ownership of the land is very important for the success of the Auroville experiment. We cannot ignore that today private developers want to make developments in the city area without any reference to the Auroville spirit.

Ganesh: As designers and planners we always try to simplify the project to its true essence. But the trick is to simplify it without losing its spirit and perhaps we have over-simplified the Galaxy concept too much.

Also, we should realise that while we are discussing the rich potential of the Galaxy, what we are actually building today might be very different, and the more this happens, the more the Galaxy gets diminished. So what can we do? Maybe something like this. If somebody asks me to design a building, as an architect I have the usual list of priorities in my head, and they are all valid. But if we are constructing something in the Galaxy area, I think we should add into this mix an understanding of the 'matrix' that unifies all this. Then, when we design something today, it can fit with what another architect designs 100 years later. For me, this is the most pressing need, because I think that by not considering the overall concept we might be going against it, even without realising it.

Helmut: We have all done this. As architects, we do not want to just drop our buildings on to the land without an awareness of the larger whole, but so far that is often what we have been forced to do.

How flexible is this Galaxy matrix? For example, could trees be substituted in some places for buildings?

Ganesh: It's very possible. I see the Galaxy not as a town but as one singular building, a large house. If you are given a part to do, you try your best to satisfy what the project demands of you there. At the same time, you try and decode the Galaxy with your own interpretation of it, with your own choice of materials. So, yes, perhaps you could put a row of trees to represent something of the

design. It's a question of creativity, trying to understand what it can be and doing your best to contribute to the matrix.

David: The Chief Architect was effectively holding the matrix we are talking about.

Christian: A city is like a body, it has to keep renewing itself while growing.

Anupama: Roger was always trying to keep it flexible. People were asking for byelaws to help design the town, but he said if I give byelaws, will it help? Look at all the cities with byelaws, do they always ensure good cities? He was aiming for something higher than that. But that flexibility can be misused by others and become the lowest level. To a certain extent, this is what is happening today.

David: The most interesting thing I found in presenting Crownways was there was a lot of positive feedback from across-the-board in Auroville. Greenbelters came up to me and said, "I've spent my whole life resisting the Galaxy but if it would be anything like that, I'd be in favour". I believe that what I was really presenting was a set of values which people could connect to, weaving together environmental aspects, mobility, everything. We have to present the Galaxy with all these levels, with all these layers of meaning, so that people can connect to it. Without this, the Galaxy concept is too abstract even for many architects to get their heads around.

In 1972, Roger said the city should be at the service of people who live there. It should not be constructed first and then occupied but, "The inhabitants will define the needs of the city by experiencing them". What do you understand by this?

Christian: With very few exceptions, cities are not built before being inhabited, and all those have failed. Cities evolve at the crossing point of two kinds of energies. One is vision, planification – the vertical axis – and the other, – the horizontal axis – is the energy of life, of those who come there to gather and create opportunities. If a city is just planned, it is dead: if it grows just through the energy of the inhabitants, it spreads haphazardly, like a cancer.

Beautiful cities emerge from a negotiation between the two axes; this is where we are failing at present. If you have a vision and construct it like a beautiful piece of art, it can take centuries to make it into a living place. You can never make a city without incorporating the energy of the citizens.

Two things I conclude from today's discussion. One is there is so much more to discover about the Galaxy that most people do not know about, so there's a huge need to communicate this.

David: I think Anupama has made a very important point, which is that many have not seen what she has seen in the Galaxy. This is a consequence of her conversations with Roger. But why didn't Roger put everything on the table so we could all understand the Galaxy better?

Anupama: He did what he could, but many of his papers and drawings regularly disappeared from Aurofuture.

The other thing is the political dimension. It seems that many of the proposals put forward in the past, as well as requests for further studies, have been blocked by people who do not understand the Galaxy. I would like to ask Anu and Tejaswini, as members of the new TDC/Interface group, if they see this group offering a way forward, both in terms of increasing communication and knowledge and in dealing with the political dimension?

Tejaswini: Definitely, yes. Past planning groups ended up doing a lot of fire fighting but now there is a shift in the whole structure. We are supposed to initiate a lot of technical planning work so, hopefully, there is a space where all the work we have talked about around this table is going to be plugged in.

Anu: I think one of the good things is that now there is a focus upon a general detailed development plan for the whole town. This is an opportunity not to be missed.

Anupama: You shouldn't be sucked into fire fighting, you should focus on the big unifying things. But it has to go together with communication with the community. You have to help it get over its fears, hang-ups and misconceptions about the envisioned plan and to look at it afresh. In any city, planning is a series of negotiations, so Auroville needs a body that facilitates this process and heals past divisions.

Christian: Communication and education is the most important thing you can do. Don't leave planning to the technocrats; they will just make one more city like anywhere else.

David: If Auroville can truly be open in the sense that the poetry of life has a place at the planning table, we will have done it; we will have succeeded.

Anu: I'm really surprised by the feedback I'm getting concerning what I was expressing about the Galaxy, among other things, in my book. People are very open to it; it's almost as if I have voiced something that was inside them. So I feel we may be entering a new phase, a new beginning.

Edited by Alan

AUROVILLE ORGANISATION

A new Town Development Council

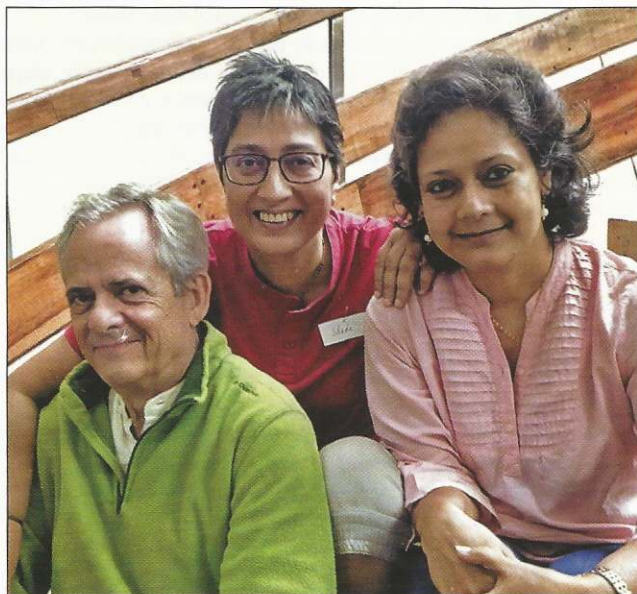
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The third day

The third day was dedicated to finding the new team. In various groups, the qualifications of the candidates were discussed, after which results were collated and shown on the board. There was unanimity on three people who were declared selected. More group work followed to select the remaining members and then groups joined to compare notes.

The selection showed remarkable maturity. Individual observations were quietly endorsed or countered with other observations: Did a person have the necessary skills? Was a person known for abusing a power position, and if so, to what extent was this of importance? Did the person have sufficient social skills to function in a group? Some groups took long to come to a conclusion and kept the facilitators waiting till far into lunch time.

The groups' findings were again collated. A team of eight members was finally selected and accepted by all present. It was also agreed that



The facilitators: from left Rakhal, Sheba and Leena

the eight selected members would suffice to function as a team, in response to the original request to form a team of between six and thirteen people.

There followed another touching moment,

when the outgoing team, standing in a tight circle and surrounded by a wider circle of participants, thanked each other for 'the good run' together. Once again, there was warm and long applause. The process ended with more thanks: to the many quiet supporters and, in particular, to the three facilitators.

Too much spirituality?

Yet, they hadn't been able to satisfy all participants. Some protested about how sections of the day were being handled, showing little respect for the efforts that were made. "There were many different types of energies in the room, and often it felt like the process would get impacted. As we had 65 people to look after, we had to push back firmly at times," says Sheba.

Others objected to 'overdoing' the spiritual side, which was why one participant left on the first morning and another accused one of the facilitators of conducting a Sunday sermon on day three. "I was shocked," said Rakhal. "His accusation showed me that he did not understand what we were trying to do –

to bring a concentration on the spiritual as a help to come to harmonious decisions on practical matters, with people holding very different views. If we can come to a state of deep listening, not only to what is happening but also to the intention behind, then there is an opening, and an agreement is more easily possible."

"We were very alert to the responses that came in at different moments from the participants, and often we sat together to agree on a course correction," adds Leena. "For this was the first time we were facilitating a process involving so many old-timers. It was a challenge. But we don't believe that the 'spiritual side' was overdone: for we witnessed some rather powerful happenings, for example, after people had drawn their 'power' card and reflected on it."

Taking everything into account, the selection of the new team turned out to be a success, said the facilitators. It is a view shared by many. "We've got the best possible team in the given circumstances," was the common response when the conclusions were announced. And what about the process? Some tweaking seems to be useful – perhaps including shortening the three-day process.

Carel

Sunship



Sunship is a new housing complex of thirty-nine apartments, and was conceived as the next step after the Citadines experiment in pioneering a different kind of collective housing in Auroville. On September 30th, it held an open house. *Auroville Today* spoke to Louis, the project holder, and Ananda, the architect from the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, to find out more.

Auroville Today: Why is it called Sunship?

Ananda: We tend to associate it with the supramental ship Mother referred to in *The Agenda*. But I believe Pierre named it after a jazz composition.

Sunship is in close proximity to a number of other buildings in this area. How will it relate to them?

Ananda: When we first presented the concept to the architect B.V. Doshi, I mentioned to him that later the building could be linked to surrounding buildings, like Mitra Hostel and Citadines, to create a larger cluster and he responded positively to the idea.

But unlike the Media Centre and the Town Hall, the buildings in this area are not unified architecturally.

Louis: True, the buildings are completely different but we had to change certain things in the original design of Sunship to conform more to the shape of the Galaxy. Originally, the design was much more linear.

Ananda: Just before the work was to begin, we were told that the shape of our earlier concept was wrong in terms of the Galaxy, so in three days we came up with a different design. It wasn't so difficult, it was waiting to be manifested.

It is also true that in the original concept there were more common spaces. This would have made the project more costly and made it difficult to give away apartments free.

Louis: But even with the changes, Sunship is very much what Roger wanted. He wanted the

How much has Sunship cost?

Louis: It comes to 14 crore rupees for 6500 square metres of constructed space. This is around Rs 20,000 rupees per built up square metre. The contribution we asked for is about Rs 50,000 per square metre, but this includes a lot of common spaces: a dining hall, office, laundry etc.



Ananda and Louis

Is the Sunship experiment similar to that of Citadines?

Louis: It is exactly the same spirit. Firstly, we have been able to give around 50% of the apartments free to those who are working for Auroville. Secondly, the intention is that residents do not have to waste their time on daily maintenance issues. The apartments come furnished, and there is a collective kitchen, laundry etc., so they can really concentrate on their inner work as well as their outer work for Auroville. We also have the same guidelines as for Citadines: no pets, no personal servants, no air conditioning etc.

Ananda: However, I see a difference. With Sunship we wanted to create different kinds of spaces. We saw the rooms as intimate, sacred spaces to which individuals could retire to unite with what is most precious in themselves. We wanted to keep the spaces outside the rooms quiet yet allow the possibility for exchanges with other seekers, while the spaces on the ground floor are for more general social interactions. Sunship is not suited to everyone. It is really meant for those who want to live a more introverted life.

How will the residents be chosen?

Louis: For the people who are giving a financial contribution, there is no selection. We only select the residents of the pro bono apartments. A small core group did this, as is the case in Citadines.

How do you avoid the danger of simply choosing people who think the same way?

Louis: We select because we want a certain quality of person. But it is also important to have diversity, to have a mix of young and older people, for example. In Citadines, the people chosen did not have to conform to a specific outlook or be part of 'Roger's group'. They were people who appreciated, among other things, being close to Matrimandir and who were interested in participating in an experiment in fraternal spirituality.

In Sunship it will be the same. The only difference is that a higher proportion of the Sunship residents are making financial contributions and have not been selected, but all of them have signed an agreement to abide by the guidelines.

Are you worried that this could dilute the social experiment in some way?

Ananda: Of course, but this is part of the compromises we have had to make. The original idea was not to ask anybody to contribute because the apartments belong to Auroville and we did not want to encourage a sense of ownership. Unfortunately, we could not manage that fully as we could not raise enough money for the entire project, but we still retain the vision and hope that in the future this will be possible.

Louis: There is a group that will look after the management of the place and who will try to preserve a certain atmosphere. This is very important.

In this context, Sunship is very close to Mitra, a students hostel, and Inspiration, a housing complex funded by the Government of India. The residents of these buildings have not signed up to similar guidelines. Does this represent a challenge to preserving a certain atmosphere in Sunship?

Louis: In Citadines sometimes we have experienced some noise from the students hostel, but, personally, I haven't been bothered by this. In any case, the students are due to move out and then the building will be for Newcomers and Aurovilians.

Ananda: In the city it should be possible to have a variety of habitats, places where people can make more noise and quieter zones. I don't think the variety of social situations in the Habitat area will be a problem.

The architecture of Citadines is fairly conventional, while Sunship is a much more striking building and there is a touch of beauty everywhere you look. Is the outer form intended to encourage inner transformation?

Ananda: There is no doubt that the surroundings have a tremendous influence on the atmosphere of a place. Certain buildings clearly have an influence upon the inner being. In fact, all buildings have some kind of influence because a building is like an instrument, a living entity, and the force that creates it lives in it and can be felt by those who use it.

Golconde in Pondicherry was definitely an influence upon Sunship because there a certain atmosphere has been created, a serene space of beauty where every screw is perfection. We cannot compare the perfection of Golconde, which was built by devoted *sadhakas*, with Sunship because here we had to make some compromises, but it was certainly an inspiration.

Louis: Nevertheless, we have tried in many ways to create beauty in this building because I believe that beauty brings transformation: a place like this will help you to transform yourself.

For me, building the city goes along with the building of the inner being: when Mother asked us to build the city, she gave us a tool for transformation.

Do you believe that architecture in Auroville has become too functional, that it has rather lost the emphasis upon beauty?

Ananda: I think beauty has come to be perceived as an unwelcome luxury. But to be satisfied with the cheap and mediocre is a betrayal because beauty is matter's birthright. Mother told us, "Let nothing come out of your hands which is

not an expression of beauty and the Divine help will always be with you."

As to the design of the city as a whole, I think we need to respect the original concept. The Galaxy is the only reality of Auroville. Mother has chosen one person to design the city and Mother has said 'yes' to his design, so I would say it is normal to respect Her vision. All our concerns about functionality, practicality etc are 20 levels below this. Of course, certain aspects can evolve, but the main lines of the Galaxy have to be there.

What is your next project?

Louis: For me the next stage in building the city is to start the Line of Force, which will house 2000 people in the first phase. If you see what we have done in Citadines and Sunship, you can begin to visualise what the Line of Force could look like. The common thread is encouraging collective living while keeping in mind the needs of the individual.

But the Line of Force is a big project for which we will need big money.

Ananda: But why should the cost matter? Look at Golconde. Mother did not consider the cost; she wanted something of perfection, of beauty. In our constructions in Auroville we should be striving only for beauty and harmony, for excellence. Of course, we should eliminate unnecessary things that increase the cost, but we should not cut corners because we should worship beauty: it is the body of the Divine.

At present money is a factor, we cannot ignore this, but I think the more we seek it, the less it will come. There is no lack of money, there is plenty of it, it is just for the moment in the wrong place. Lack of money is never the cause; it is a consequence of our not being ready to use it properly. We should have confidence that if we are working for the Dream, the money will come.

What have you learned over the 2 ½ years you have been engaged in this project?

Ananda: I've met so many beautiful people who I never talked to before and who have widened my scope and understanding. And, of course, it is an immense joy to work on a project like this.

Louis: It has been a very rich experience. Fifty Aurovilians are working here and all these relationships, the intense daily interactions, have helped me transform myself. Work wise, it was a little bit stressful for me at times as I had to look after so many different aspects, but I always felt I was an instrument.

Ananda: He has been the locomotive of this project.



A view of an apartment

Louis: I may have been the locomotive but the engine was Mother. It was all done by Her.

From an interview by Alan



The central courtyard

ground floor to have 'transparency', so that you could walk freely through the building as well common terraces – which could be linked to the one of Citadines.

Humanscapes

The Humanscapes project is designed to accommodate Aurovilians and interns between the ages of 20 - 40 years. The first phase, which is approaching completion, will provide 36 beds in apartments varying from studio size to shared groupings and larger family apartments. *Auroville Today* spoke to the architect, Suhasini, and to Sonja of the Housing Service, which is the project holder, to find out more.

Auroville Today: What need is Humanscapes fulfilling?

Suhasini: We were looking to pursue several goals. In 2014, when the Government of India undertook the task of amending the national building codes, a national group of architects, planners, energy experts and policymakers working towards sustainable settlements voluntarily offered their expertise to the governmental body. I invited some of the members of this group to participate with the Auroville experts to frame the Terms of Reference for building materials, energy, water use etc. which we are trying to implement in Humanscapes. We will be monitoring these over the next three years. The idea is to use this project as a demonstration of the innovative building materials and technology developed in Auroville as a region specific contribution to the national building code.

Secondly, we wanted to help meet Auroville's needs regarding housing. We saw the Humanscapes project as a means of bringing significant government funding for housing into Auroville. The Government originally agreed to fund the project for 75 crore rupees over three years. If everything worked well, a further 75 crores would have been made available to us.

Initially, we were planning to provide housing for about 1000 people over five years. However, the full funding could not be realised due to a change of government but we are trying to re-establish the channel and hope to get the funds.

Sonja: The specific need that the first phase of this project is meeting is providing housing for young Aurovilians. At present, we have about 80 people between the ages of 20 - 35 who do not have financial means and are looking for accommodation. A whole generation of young Aurovilians cannot live independently, so this project gives them this opportunity.

Suhasini: Basically, there are only three ways you can live in Auroville at present. You have either independent means, or the capacity to earn money outside by marketing a product or skills, or you have to live in housing that is inappropriate to your needs as you cannot finance a house on an Auroville maintenance.

Auroville doesn't have the means to support young people with an incubation time to find out their vocation and interest and to develop it before they are asked to contribute to the community. Humanscapes is a kind of incubator that allows them time to focus on how they can positively participate in Auroville rather than on how they can survive here.

Sonja: Actually, the criteria now for these units is that they are for young people who have been actively working for at least nine months in an Auroville service or activity and are on a basic maintenance. Many second generation Aurovilians are already in this position and are ready to move away from home. It is important for the future of Auroville that they remain in Auroville, or return if they have already left, as the original pioneers are now aging.

Suhasini: We also want to experiment with a value system that does not divorce work from the rest of life. So how do you bring life and work together? It's by allowing people to function in a more fluid manner, to work at different times of the day, and to work from home or a place near home. In this way, you don't have a heavy investment in mobility, in travelling backwards and forwards from work.

The other thing we wanted to do with Humanscapes was to experiment with co-living in Auroville. Co-living is a huge trend in the US and in Europe where people up to the age of 35 work long hours for little money and lack the means to buy into the conventional property mar-



Buildings of the Humanscapes project

ket. So people buy up old houses and convert them into reasonably priced co-living apartments where facilities like bathrooms and kitchens are shared.

In Humanscapes we have various combinations. There are individual rooms which share a bathroom, kitchen and dining area, one bedroom units for couples, and two bedroom units for families. The shared kitchens are designed in such a way that six people can be cooked for.

There is also a multipurpose space that includes a kitchen that can provide meals for forty-five people, a self-help laundry and a small amphitheatre with a screening wall where people can watch films. The multipurpose space will not be just for residents of Humanscapes but will be shared with everybody, young interns, volunteers, Aurovilians etc.



Suhasini and Sonja

What happens when residents get to the age of 40?

Sonja: They will have to vacate. But there is another phase planned in Humanscapes that will have family units for those who are older than 40. There are also two other housing projects in the pipeline which will also be for older people. Hopefully, they will be ready in the next two years.

The Terms of Reference for Humanscapes put a huge emphasis upon sustainability (see box). Among other things, it means that residents' consumption of energy and water must be fairly frugal. The per capita water target, for example, is only 45 litres per day. How will you achieve these savings in water and energy consumption?

Suhasini: In a number of ways. We will conserve water by extensive use of low-flow faucets and hand-held spray faucets, and by recycling grey water.

There are also a very few changes that people can do in their lifestyle that can bring down their water consumption by half. For example, you do not need to flush the toilet after every pee. If two rooms are sharing a toilet, they can agree upon this. In the summer, when people take more frequent showers, you can fill up a bucket and leave it overnight. The next day, the water is cold so you only need a few mugfuls to bring your skin temperature down. Then you only need to take one good shower a day using soap.

Regarding decreasing energy consumption, we hope to install high-efficiency, low-energy lights, fans, cookers, fridges etc. We also hope to cut down on the number of appliances that are purchased. If we have two or three blenders/mixies in the multi-purpose hall, that should be enough for everybody. The point is, people don't have to own these things to use them: this is the kind of consciousness we need to develop.

Sonja: If four people are sharing a kitchen, they need only one mixie, ironing table, iron etc. But if everybody has their own independent studio, they will all want to have their own appliances.

Clearly, the residents of Humanscapes will need to be prepared to make some lifestyle changes. To what extent are these changes facilitated by design? And to what extent will people have to make a conscious shift in themselves?

Suhasini: There are certain changes you can encourage by design. For example, we have put in water points where they are needed but not outside the building; in this way, we discourage wasteful irrigation. Also, we do not have any outlets for individual washing machines. If you have a washing machine within each dwelling unit, you're going to use it much more often, even running half loads, than if you have to walk some distance to the community laundry. We use the same approach with garbage. We make the garbage collection point a little far from the apartments, obliging people to walk a certain distance to encourage them to use products that generate less waste.

Sonja: But residents of Humanscapes will need to make an effort to live differently. We have a selection committee who will meet everybody and explain this. The residents will also get a one-day workshop where we will tell them that Humanscapes is not like a simple youth hostel. They will have to agree to living in a certain way and there will be a monitoring group to ensure that certain ground rules and guidelines are observed.

Suhasini: But you have to realise that second-generation Aurovilians do not necessarily look upon relative frugality as a sacrifice. Many of them live like this already and the others are very adaptable.

Sonja: There are different groups. The young people from the local area tend to be more aspirational, to want more luxury, so we will definitely have to motivate these people and explain to them why and how they will be living like this.

Will there be certain agreements that people will have to conform to regarding, for example, controlling noise?

Sonja: We have not yet made guidelines regarding noise as we want to do this with the people themselves.

To what extent is noise pollution minimised in the design?

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Humanscapes Terms of Reference (extracts)

Humanscapes aspires to:

1. Demonstrate a living and evolving neighbourhood that mainstreams sustainable development and an integral lifestyle.
2. Demonstrate the outputs of integrated planning, be relevant and forward looking for the next 20 years, acting as a bridge to the future.
3. Serve the future citizens of Auroville and meet their needs.
4. Become a prototype showing incremental models of population density with improved sustainability and affordability of public infrastructure in Auroville.
5. Apply local wisdom, culture and traditions while integrating new ideas, developments, and demonstrations, whether in the area of buildings, horticulture, or resource management.
6. Be involved in generating local employment and upgrading of local skills, especially in the building trades used in the project.
7. Transparently document the processes of design and implementation so as to act as a resource for future work.
8. Elegantly integrate closed loop systems for managing resource flows to achieve a small resource footprint, raise the bar for conservation, efficiency and sustainability.
9. Produce positive value (for society, the nation and the world) in its fields of endeavour without externalities, without unfair or unsustainable exploitation, whether of natural resources, other human beings, or of future generations. In keeping with this attitude it shall not only be a place with sustainable hardware but promote sustainable, integral lifestyle choices.
10. Institute systems of evaluation.
11. Be benchmarked to the best worldwide.

General ambient sonic performance

Protection from noise by a combination of social-cultural curfews as well as physical barriers, without losing transparency and openness.

Environmental performance

1. Near-zero net CO2 emissions.
2. Significantly lower embodied energy than conventional.
3. Highly reduced net water demand (from hypothetical two-way grid).
4. Near-zero runoff and erosion compared to virgin site.

Health

1. No materials and systems used will be detrimental to physical health.
2. The buildings shall be fully accessible (for the physically challenged) on ground floors and for all public spaces.

Energy

1. 24/7 supply of electricity and water for essential functions.
2. Electrical energy consumption for the operation of the project shall be 0.8 kWh per resident per day (exclusive of electricity used to pump water in the water supply system and energy consumed in cooking, transportation to and from the building).
3. Conservation of electricity by use of super-efficient lights, fans, refrigerators, washing machines and info-entertainment devices shall be demonstrated.
4. The project shall be net zero for electricity by use of grid-interactive as well as stand-alone renewable energy systems.
5. Solar water heaters and rooftop PV systems will be incorporated into the design.

Thermal Response

1. Walls will have high heat insulation.
2. Roof thermal efficiency will be enhanced with roof gardens and shading.
3. Building morphology will enable good cross ventilation.
4. Mechanically-assisted ventilation will be strategically deployed.
5. Planting of trees across the site will enable a thermally-stable environment.

Water and waste

1. The water consumption shall be 45 litres per resident per day without compromising on service quality. This benchmark represents nearly half of the current National Building Code benchmark level of 86 litres per head per day.
2. Conservation of water shall be by extensive use of low flow faucets, hand held spray faucets for ablution and yard washing, spring loaded flush cocks, all with adequate supply pressures.
3. The project will separate grey water (wash), black water (WC), and yellow water (urine and kitchen) streams.
4. All rain water shall be harvested.

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Made in Auroville

A profile of Kareem

When I came across Kareem at the workshop, he was engrossed in painting huge, flat pieces of steel a fiery red. "What are you making?"

"Building a crane," came the answer. "I need a crane to be able to lift logs of wood," he replied.

I was flabbergasted. "You are making a crane from scratch? I mean, what the heck, how do you even know where to start?" Kareem, who is not given much to talking, shrugged nonchalantly. I persisted: "Honestly, I would not even dare to cut steel into size. I fear I would just waste the material by making mistakes."

"Well," he explained. "I first cut all the parts out of cardboard, and then used those as a template to cut the steel." I still shook my head in disbelief, knowing that no matter how hard I tried, making a complex machine like a crane would be beyond my capability. But for Kareem that instinctive feel for machinery and moulding matter to one's will seems to come naturally. He smiled wisely, "I guess, we all are good at different things. I can't write the way you do."

While Kareem had some formal schooling in Auroville, even passing his A-levels in certain subjects, his teachers at Future School realized that Kareem was not really into the 3-Rs. Recognizing his natural aptitude for working with metal, they suggested that he joined the apprentice programme at Aureka, Auroville's metal workshop. So, in the last year of High School, Kareem spent half-a-day at Aureka, learning first-hand from the workers there how to cut and weld metal.

I remember that he once came around and asked me for the shock absorbers that I had replaced on my motorcycle. The next thing I knew these shock absorbers from my TVS motorcycle were added to a four-wheel go-cart that Kareem built. With a steering wheel, brakes, and proper seats, the go-cart was a fun vehicle to drive around. Kareem was just 16 and still an apprentice at Aureka when he made this go-cart.

After the go-cart, his next big project was making a trailer that could tip loads for his tractor. Again, taking us all by surprise, Kareem on his own had done his research and found the small-sized tractor he needed for his forest work in Tiruppur, a small town 80 km from Auroville. He bought it and drove it back home on his own. He then built the tipping-trailer that could be attached to the tractor. And now, before our eyes, a full-fledged crane emerged, complete with a swivelling arm and a hydraulic pump to lift loads. "I first used a hydraulic pump in the trailer," he said, as though that was all the explanation one needed to understand the dynamics of a complex machine like a crane.

I remember Kareem as a toddler. He was born in 1994, the same year that I joined Auroville. And I, remember, when attending a Forest Group



meeting at Forecomers, a cute smiling baby with golden curls and blue eyes, nestled in his mother Clementine's arms. With a sunny disposition, Kareem, as his father, Karlheinz says, charms everybody.

Even though I did not play a parenting role in his upbringing, I was secretly pleased when Kareem, then a young boy of about 10, introduced me to his friends as his stepmother. His friends, I remember, all giggled unbelievably, perhaps because I was not "white" like them. But Kareem stood his ground, and taking my arm, glared at his peers for laughing at me.

Kareem never ceases to surprise me. After the crane was built, I again chanced upon him at his workshop, and this time he was putting the finishing touches to a beautifully crafted wooden table. "I fell in love with this red wood that I saw in Pondy, an import from South Africa, and I wanted to do something with it," said Kareem as I ran my hand admiringly over the long dining table made of work-tree and inlaid with a centrepiece of a red wood. The joints, the pegs, were all handcrafted flawlessly in wood. Without being told, I could see that this perfectly finished table had required hours of patient, manual work. "Yeah," he smiled, "Not all my friends have the patience for this work, but I really enjoy working with wood." And he showed me yet another piece that he had recently completed – a coffee-table made out of a huge tree

stump, again inlaid with bits of that red South-African wood.

When once again I expressed my amazement at his carpentry skills, knowing that he had not done a formal apprenticeship, Kareem said that woodwork came naturally to him, for when he was young his father had a full-fledged carpentry workshop, and the carpenters taught him how to chisel, saw and plane wood. "I started acquiring carpentry tools as a boy." And added, "I really like to have good tools." "Ah, that's the German in you," I grinned, knowing that whenever he could, Kareem invested in the best tools he needed for his work, often buying them from abroad.

In fact, along with his peer-group of friends, Kareem has worked in India and abroad – helping Philippe and the tree-house team build wooden tree houses in India, working at renovating buildings in Europe, and pruning trees and sawing logs in Australia.

"My friends, like Sathya, Kimmy, Pao, Raefello, Sanjay etc. are all like me. We all like to work hard. We get inspired by each other's projects, and whenever needed, we lend each other a hand. I helped Kimmy with the woodwork in Suryamayi's house, while Sathya helped me to retrofit this container at Foodlink," says Kareem.

"I guess, growing up in Auroville, working with our hands came naturally to us. As boys, we were always at Johnny's crafting something or the

other, and I learnt a lot from Johnny. He also gave us the confidence to do anything we wanted to do. All my teachers at school have always been encouraging. And Dominic from Minati is another mentor. Dominic is a trained metalworker, and he helped me with all my metalwork projects, offering advice, suggesting tips and sharing books from his apprenticeship days. All these people have guided me."

"That's the best part of growing up in a community," I agree, "one has so many mentors."

"But this sense of community is disappearing," Kareem exclaims in undisguised frustration, "everything now seems 'controlled' and costs money. And one cannot even really afford all the goods available in Auroville if one is on a maintenance."

"Not that I get a maintenance. I tried briefly to get a Forest Group maintenance. Since the cyclone of 2011, I have been helping my mother, the Forecomers steward, to take care of the forest. But I could not be bothered to go through all our bureaucracy."

"I was offered a job by a construction company in Auroville, but again, I don't see the point of slaving eight hours a day for just a maintenance. I would rather work at my own projects. There are so many creative ideas I have. Anyway, people know of my skills through word of mouth, so I get by. And I could also try to get jobs abroad. I guess that's also OK, just to earn the money that one needs to live here."

"I understand that as we have so many people now in Auroville, we have to have rules. And yes, I agree, the bureaucracy is not as bad as it is in Western societies. But, it is sad. We wanted to do something different in Auroville, but we end up copying the same structures that are in the outside world. I guess, we don't know any better."

"To be honest, I and many of friends are not sure about the future. Auroville and India is changing rapidly, and I am not sure if I should settle here. Let's see how it all turns out. For the moment, what I would like most is to have a full-fledged workshop."

Kareem is an avid surfer, and when the surf is up, he is out catching the early morning waves. And in the evenings, he and his friends are often huddled at a console hooked to video games. But lately, he seems to have been working far too hard. "What to do, I have just got all these projects on hand," he said. And before I could pester him with more questions, he left with his chainsaw to help Ambre at Nilatnam to cut some dead trees in that forest.

I showed some pictures that I had taken of the crane to Bill, a visiting American friend. "That's well done," Bill exclaimed, "it could easily been made by the John Deere company."

"Perhaps," I answered, adding with pride, "but, it is made in Auroville, just like its maker, Kareem."

Bindu

NEW COMMUNITIES



An interior view of an apartment

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Suhasini: Between the floors we used styrofoam, collected from Eco-Service, which we have shredded and mixed with cement. This reduces noise between the floors. We have also put the television outlets on walls that face internal walls rather than big windows. There's not much we can do regarding controlling noise through open windows but on the ground floor, where all the apartments face the central courtyard, we have constructed walls about 5 feet high between the apartments and the central space, so there is some visual privacy and acoustic control. We are also minimising high humidity vegetation in the courtyard because in the evening sound tends to travel at ground level where the humidity is higher.

How do you deal with heat and humidity?

Suhasini: All the rooms are oriented north-south for the prevailing winds, all have cross ventilation, and the bedrooms have big opening doors on to balconies. The walls have high heat insulation and the roof has a thick layer of Styrofoam as

well as heat-reflecting tiles. There is no provision for air conditioning, but with fans all this should be sufficient to keep people comfortable.

Another benchmark that you are trying to achieve in this project is very low environmental impact. How do you achieve this?

Suhasini: First of all, we designed Humanscapes in such a way that we minimised the amount of cement and steel used. We also used a lot of recycled materials, like stone from the stone-cutting factories and Styrofoam waste from Eco-Service, and we tried to cut down on sand consumption. We employ energy-efficient appliances, we recycle water, hardly any toxic chemicals have been used on site, and there is near-zero water run-off and erosion.

One of your Terms of Reference for Humanscapes is to have lower capital costs than mainstream construction for civil and shell work. So what is your overall building cost?

Suhasini: Even though we are cutting down on material costs, our overall building cost is only about 10-15% cheaper than places like Citadines. This is because 60% of the cost of construction today is labour and we are more labour-intensive than those projects. The only real resource this country has is its people, most of whom work in the unorganised sector. We wanted Humanscapes to be labour-intensive rather than material-intensive so that we could generate local employment rather than supporting industrialised processes. So I focused on trying to design it in such a way that with low-skilled workers and using

low-embodied energy and recycled materials we could produce high-quality living spaces.

How confident are you that Humanscapes can become a model for sustainable construction and living in India?

Suhasini: It would be too much to claim it as a model because this is the first attempt. I'm not completely happy with everything we have done here because, for example, we had to use a certain amount of mechanisation in making the walls. But I think it is a good beginning.

I realise, however, that over the first few years, there will be a lot of reaction from the residents and Housing will come under a lot of pressure to change things.

Sonja: This is already happening. We have people who want to set up a commercial laundry business in Humanscapes. We had to say no, this is the wrong place for this as it would raise the energy and water consumption: we have to hold a certain line. This is why Housing will remain the steward for the project. If these units are stewarded by the residents, the units becomes 'theirs' and it is much more difficult to ask the residents to conform to certain standards. So these will be like Auroville staff quarters.

Suhasini: When people move into new housing projects, they need time to adapt. A lot of the initial issues are actually interpersonal, but people blame the hardware and start asking, 'Can't we add a door here, change a room there?'

We have to move forward, step by step, but change always takes time. And it's not necessarily painless in the early stages.

From an interview by Alan

Extracts from Humanscapes' Terms of Reference

continued from page 5

5. Other than treated black water disposal, the water cycle shall be such that not a drop of liquid waste goes out of site.

6. All water entering or incident on the site shall be managed, retained or utilized within the site as needed and overflow should be connected to the open water channel system designed for the filling of Matrimandir lake.

Solid wastes

1. Complete at-source segregation of solid wastes into Organic wastes and Inorganic wastes, further segregated as: Saleable (Glass, Metals, Paper, Plastics), and Special Disposal (Toxic, Electronic, Mixed).

2. All compostables shall be composted in a scientific, safe and hygienic way.

3. The project shall be a net exporter of compost especially in the later phases, to be used in local farms.

Materials

1. The project shall not use PVC, CPVC, or UPVC pipes for the potable water distribution. For potable water distribution composite, multilayer (PE-AL-PE) pipes shall be used.

2. Use low energy materials such as rammed earth.

3. Re-use Construction and demolition waste.

Applicability

Though the above list has been developed for the Humanscapes Project Phase 1, the list may further develop into sustainable benchmarks for future low-resource consuming and affordable buildings, both inside and outside Auroville.

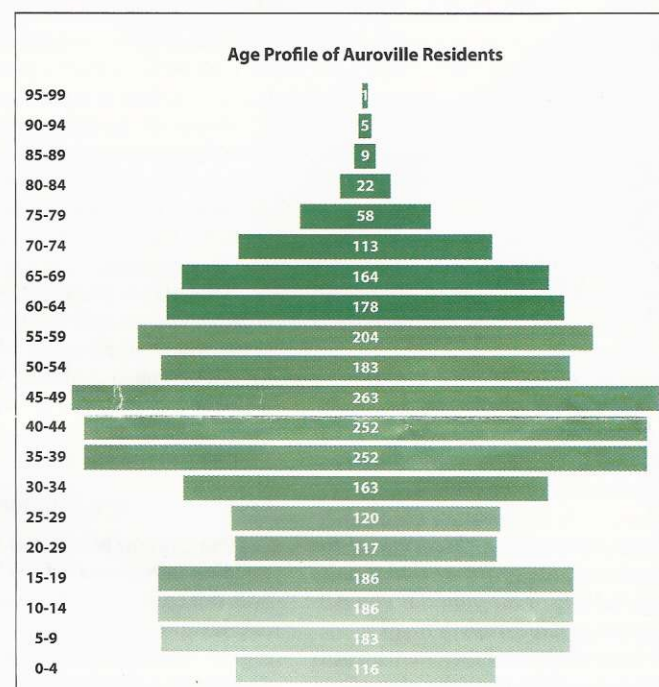
Auroville's population: a demographic challenge

Country	2016	2017
1 India	1080	1203
2 France	377	398
3 Germany	244	249
4 Italy	150	152
5 Netherlands	95	98
6 USA	87	91
7 Russia	65	72
8 UK	51	57
9 Spain	51	55
10 Israel	38	46
11 Switzerland	41	41
12 Belgium	35	38
13 South Korea	32	37
14 Sweden	25	27
15 Canada	23	23
16 Ukraine	20	20
17 Australia	17	16
18 China	12	14
19 Japan	13	14
20 Austria	13	13
21 South Africa	12	11
22 Argentina	9	9
23 Brazil	4	7
24 Hungary	7	7
25 Nepal	5	6
26 Slovenia	6	6
27 Taiwan	2	6
28 Mexico	5	5
29 Belarus	4	4
30 Iran	3	4
31 Latvia	4	4
32 Macedonia	0	4
33 Columbia	2	3
34 Denmark	2	3
35 Sri Lanka	3	3
36 Tibet	3	3
37 Bulgaria	2	2
38 Ethiopia	3	2
39 Iceland	2	2
40 Ireland	2	2
41 Lithuania	41	41
42 Moldova	42	42
43 Norway	43	43
44 Philippines	44	44
45 Portugal	45	45
46 Rwanda	46	46
47 Algeria	47	47
48 Czech Republic	48	48
49 Ecuador	49	49
50 Egypt	50	50
51 Finland	51	51
52 Kazakhstan	52	52
53 Poland	53	53
54 Romania	54	54
Total		

Looking at the age distribution of Auroville's residents, two things are immediately visible: there is an unusual contraction in the age group 20–29 and there is a sizable proportion of the population who are above 60 years of age.

If we consider Auroville to be a developing society, the contraction in the youthful age group is very unusual. Developing societies tend to have a "youth bulge," which fuels the growth of the society, especially in economic terms. The youth bring fresh energy, innovative ideas and a certain amount of irreverence that forces society to question its old habits. One explanation of the low proportion of youth in Auroville, particularly in the 20–29 age group, is that young people leave for further education and work. It is possible that many of them come back to Auroville at a later stage. But a recent survey of ex-students of Auroville showed that less than half of this population actually comes back. Many youths continue to live and work outside of Auroville, mainly in Europe and North America.

Another likely reason for fewer youth is our failure to attract young people to Auroville. Many youngsters find Auroville to be too expensive, especially during the Newcomer period. Housing has been a problem, but might be getting better with the new Humanscapes and X & Y projects. Solving the youth demographic challenge might be one of the most important things for the community to address if it wants to be "a city for the future."



Along with the challenge of youth is the challenge of an aging population. Almost 20% of Auroville's population is above the age of 60 years. Over the next few years, many of them might choose to slow down and reduce their work commitments. Some will need healthcare support and assisted living. Although Auroville is a place of "youth that never ages," the reality of an aging population must be addressed, and conscious support systems developed.

About 47% of the population is between the ages 30 and 59, which perhaps explains the large proportion of children in Auroville, who make up 17% of the population. How well is Auroville's education system serving these children? Are they growing up with a sense of commitment to Auroville's ideals? Will they participate in the unfolding experiment, or will they look for better opportunities elsewhere?

In terms of population growth, 2017 has been a good year. The number of residents grew by 211 people, which means an 8% growth over 2016. This is certainly because of a liberal Entry Policy, which was in effect for a few months towards the end of last year. That policy is no longer valid, and it is unlikely that we will see the same kind of growth in the coming years.

The number of nationalities have grown to 54, with new residents from Macedonia and Portugal. Six countries have clocked double-digit growth, with Israel leading the pack at 21%. Russia, UK, South Korea and China are the other countries that have added significant numbers of residents. In terms of absolute numbers, the French have always been the leaders from Europe – this year, 21 French nationals joined Auroville. The number of Indians grew by a whopping 123, taking their proportion in the population from 42.1% in 2016 to 43.3 % this year. Is it possible that this was one of the factors that prompted the rethinking of the Entry Policy?

Algeria, Czech Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, Finland, Kazakhstan, Poland and Romania continue to languish at the bottom of the table. Clearly, Auroville is not very attractive to these nationalities. What makes the Swedes come to Auroville, but not the Finns? Why the Spanish but not the Portuguese?

It might be more fruitful to look at the demographic challenge than to look at national representation. Does it matter if Africa and South America have poor representation in Auroville? Or should we look at policies and programmes that might change the shape of Auroville's age profile? Perhaps it's time for Auroville to get a youthful bulge rather than a middle-aged pot belly.

Manas

BRIEF NEWS

UNESCO draft resolution

The Government of India has submitted a draft resolution for the upcoming General Conference of UNESCO. Appreciating that the Government of India passed, in 1988, the Auroville Foundation Act for the purpose of protecting and encouraging the development of Auroville; that Auroville International Centres have been established in many countries of the world; recognizing that Auroville has developed into a centre of expertise in a wide range of fields, benefiting India and noting its success in sharing its experience and helping the development of its neighboring rural population; acknowledging that Auroville is inviting all nations of the world to participate in its development, especially of its International Zone, which is designated as an educational campus hosting cultural pavilions of all nations or groups of nations, expressing the genius of each culture; noting that 28 February 2018 will mark the 50th anniversary of the founding of Auroville; and recognizing that Auroville is a successful and unique model project, proving the capacity of an international community, after almost 50 years of existence, to continue to live up to its initial founding ideas of peace and international harmony and which are also UNESCO's own values and principles, as well as some of its major priorities, the resolution invites the Director-General of UNESCO to reinforce the association of UNESCO with Auroville and organize commemorative activities for its 50th anniversary and to re-invite the Member States on the special occasion of Auroville's 50th anniversary, to participate in Auroville's further development.

Road improvements

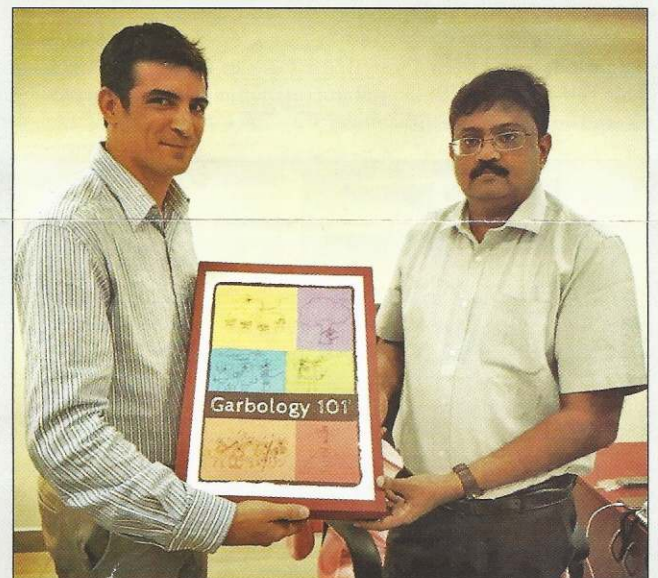
The Town Development Council has informed that in view of the visit of the Prime Minister in February 2018 new roadworks will be on the way soon. These include the paving of the present earth track in front of the Visitors Centre; the replacement of worn-out pavers and the removal of all speed breakers on the road from the Visitors Center to the Kindergarten; the paving of the earth track from the Kindergarten to Solar Kitchen roundabout; and the re-dimensioning of the Solar Kitchen roundabout to fit with Indian Standards. The TDC also plans to build an entire new road – a stretch of the radial near Courage to the Solar Kitchen roundabout – to be built with poured earth concrete.

Women's Solidarity Festival

Auroville Village Action and the Udhayam Women's Federation celebrated the 21st edition of the Annual Women's Solidarity Festival. The event was attended by over 5000 women from the bioregion, over 500 children, guests from Auroville and volunteers from the Paalam youth group in the bioregion and other village youths. The event was a great opportunity for Aurovilians to interact freely with women from the bioregion and get a glimpse of the richness of Tamil culture through celebrating the hidden talents of women from the villages.

Garbology integrated

The Education Secretary for Tamil Nadu has agreed to integrate a Garbology chapter into the Social Studies textbooks for two grades and the Garbology information boxes for grades 1-10. This means that millions of students in Tamil Nadu will learn about sustainable waste management in 2018 from the garbology programme created in Auroville.



Aurovillian Ribhu with the Education Secretary Tamil Nadu

Auroville Library of Things

The Auroville Library of Things, which has been operating for six months, is gradually developing into a useful community service. Located in a container nearby the Solar Kitchen, the ALoT intends to collect and lend out items that are unused by its owner.

Evolution Fast-Forward

The three Evolution Fast-Forward videos are now all freely available for streaming in their entirety online. You find them on www.sopanam.org, along with some other treasures. While the first two videos, produced by Manoj, Hemant, Arnab and their team, were made years ago, the third one, 'Parts of the Being & Planes of Consciousness', is new and very complete. The three Fast-Forward videos can also be ordered in a smart USB-card from Auroville.com

Correction Walk of Hope

The list of 50th anniversary projects mentioned in our previous issue contains a mistake. The Walk of Hope through Auroville and the surrounding villages will take place in Auroville and the bioregion on January 28, 2018. The walk will be led by Sri M, a social activist, educator and spiritual guide who grew up in Kerala, and then spent a few years wandering through the Himalayas, in search of a higher Truth. Sri M has walked kilometers in the name of peace, in India and abroad. He has been asked to walk in Auroville and the surrounding villages as an invocation for peace, within and without.

Passing: Andrey Grigorachtchenko

On October 8th, Andrey Grigorachtchenko from Russia passed away in Djaima at the age of 58. Called by Auroville's ideals, Andrey first came to Auroville in 1985 where he was welcomed as the first Russian and lived for a short while in Ekta, Auromodèle. He went back to Russia to make some money and returned in 1997 with his wife Svetlana and their two young sons, Terentij and Ivan. Andrey's remains were buried at Adventure's burial grounds on October 12th.



Le visage de la paix - The face of peace

Travelling during the early seventies through the Indian subcontinent brought me to Agra. One afternoon, I found myself sitting on the borders of the Yamuna River while watching a sand barge being loaded right behind the Taj Mahal. The boat was connected to the sand loading place by a gangway. Labourers went up it with a head load of sand and down it with their empty cane woven baskets. The ongoing work was like a choreographed play, there was no talking, no sound, just a lone mother and her young child playing near the waterfront. The peaceful and graceful movements of the up and down rhythm of the workers, amplified by a surrounding silence with only the river water playing against the border, was like experiencing a visual mantra, slowly penetrating and transporting me to another reality. For a time, it felt like stepping into a timeless painting. It was an extraordinary soothing experience. I had no camera and could only retain the image within, keeping it embedded as a very special moment during a period when my journey was not yet clearly defined.

That event contributed to an ongoing quest of discovering beauty in its multiple forms. Somewhere, I became an art lover, a collector of art books, a keen museum visitor and, later on, a seeker of delight. It all began with the gift of an art book about abstract art in Flanders. Granted, not the easiest introduction at a young age, but it became a first stepping stone for exploring the art scene in a metropolitan city. Visiting different museums during school hours was great fun, especially when accompanied by classroom girls.

Books introduced me to art objects from around the world dating back to the early beginning of human civilization: the Venus of Willendorf created 25,000 years ago, the cave art from Lascaux and Altamira, the hand stencils in the caves, the painted walls in Egyptian tombs, the frescos and hieroglyphic scripts, the dancing girl of Mohenjodaro, the Chinese kneeling archers. One can only profoundly admire and appreciate the story of human creativity across time and space.

This evolving passion for art resulted inevitably in assembling reproductions of my preferred gallery of artists. Van Eyck and his self-portrait with the red turban; Titian for his compositions and masterly use of colour; Da Vinci's drawing of the



Le Visage de la Paix by Pablo Picasso

Vitruvian man within the circle and the square; Brueghel and his winter landscapes; Rubens with his voluptuous Flemish ladies; Rembrandt with his intimate self-portraits; Jakuchu for his Japanese forms and colours of the natural world; Hokusai for his landscapes and his Manga booklets; Monet for his water lilies; Gauguin for the striking colours and powerful forms of his unique Tahitian paintings; Van Gogh with his exuberant use of colours; Modigliani with his captivating portraits; Matisse for his forms and joyful colours; Picasso for his creative output spread over nearly seven decades; Hockney and his Grand Canyon paintings.

Viewing art from a spiritual angle we are reminded that inspiration does not originate from within ourselves. Ideas actually come to us from a surrounding vast ether space. Sri Aurobindo left us with a marvellous description in Savitri:

*Out of some far expanse they seemed to come
As if carried on vast wings like large white sails,
And with easy access reached the inner ear
As though they used a natural privileged right
To the high royal entries of the soul.*

Art, wrote Sri Aurobindo, is 'a discovery of the subject in one's deeper self, the giving of soul form to that vision and a remoulding of the material and natural shape to express the psychic truth of it ...'.

Art reflects the inner domain of the one who produces it. The higher the aspiration or the plane from which it is perceived and captured, the truer it mirrors the psychic qualities within the art work. The artist connects with an incoming vibration, translates this vibration into creative energy and produces an art piece in his chosen medium.

Among the celebrated artists of the 20th century there is one who stands out and who is impossible to bypass. He received the birth name of Pablo Diego José Francisco de Paula Juan Nepomuceno María de los Remedios Cipriano de la Santísima Trinidad Ruiz y Picasso. Later on he adopted a simpler version –

Pablo Picasso (25 October 1881 - 8 April 1973).

During the period that Mother frequented the Parisian art scene, she noted the huge egos of the artists with whom she was in contact. Picasso is the perfect example of that observation.

'When I don't have red paint, I use blue'

His unconventional lifestyle revealed that indeed the highest qualities also attract the biggest flaws. Countless mistresses, two official wives, four children by three different women. One mistress and one wife who committed suicide. His meanness was legendary but so was his generosity towards charitable causes. Despite his enormous wealth, he stayed a nomad during his entire life, moving countless times with his collected art works around France. He was a member of the Communist Party but became a keen supporter of the peace organisation. He was passionate about bull fights, but also a devoted lover of dogs and pigeons. Without doubt, Picasso represents, like no other, the creative art spirit of the modern world.

Picasso's drawing of a dove was chosen as the poster to represent the theme of the Paris World Peace congress in 1949.

The congress opening coincided with the birth of his daughter whom he named Paloma, the Spanish word for dove. The artist had a lifelong attraction for pigeons, which were kept at his homes in Paris and the south of France. He mentioned that he had an emotional connection with the birds and that they reminded him of his father's paintings of the doves at their family home. The dove is a universal symbol for peace.

It was in Auroville that I came across a stylistic drawing from the artist representing the face of a woman with a flying dove at the top of her head. Rather astonishingly, the date of execution is 5.12.50, the precise day when Sri Aurobindo decided to leave his body. The drawing was named 'Le visage de la paix, The face of peace'.

This drawing is another testimony that Picasso was indeed a creative genius, able to capture the incoming vibrations from the plane where all thoughts, ideas, concepts originate. On an intuitive level, he was able to feel that something momentous had happened that day, and transmitted that feeling into several drawings while choosing a title that reflected a lifelong effort of Mother and Sri Aurobindo to achieve lasting peace upon earth.

Creative building solutions

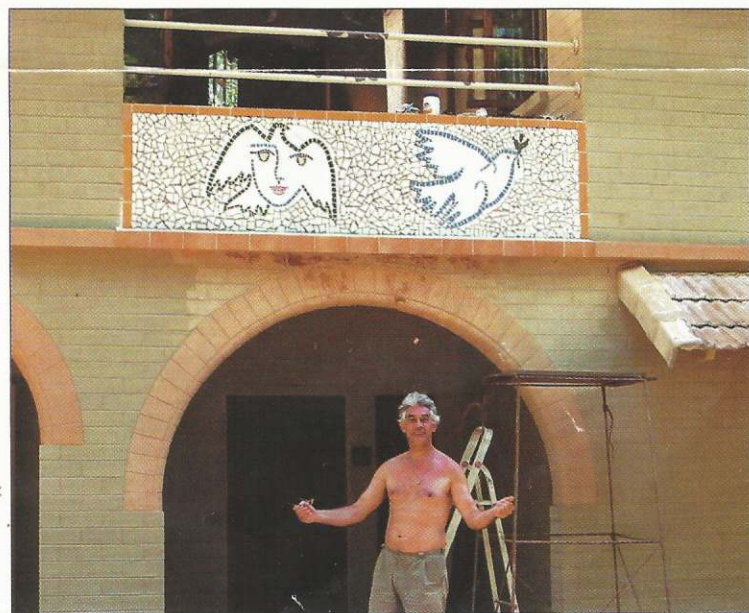
Our present house was built at the height of the sustainable building fashion period. As we found out much later, enthusiasm does not cover up building technology limitations. Areas with no overhang or protection against rain became black and required regular maintenance. To avoid frequent maintenance jobs, we decided on a more permanent solution.

Aiming to blend together several threads – a reference to the monumental date of 5th December 1950, paying tribute to an art giant, while also honouring the quest for achieving durable world peace – I reproduced two Picasso drawings in mosaic on the front of the house.

Besides all those symbolic meanings, I thoroughly enjoyed standing on a scaffolding during early mornings and late evenings, testing out my budding creativity.

Mind you, passing by visitors tend to give all the credit to the one who only copied the famous drawings.

Tency

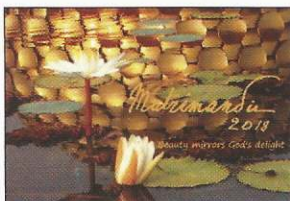


Tency with the mosaics

NEW PUBLICATIONS

Matrimandir Calendar 2018

The theme of this year's Matrimandir desk calendar is "Beauty mirrors God's Delight". The photos inside show the Matrimandir from the perspective of the Garden of Consciousness. Quotations from The Mother and Sri Aurobindo matching the flower theme of the photo are printed on the calendar page. Price: Rs 170.



Matrimandir greeting cards

A set of Art Greeting Cards, featuring beautiful photos with the Matrimandir, is now available. The cards come with a short quote of The Mother or Sri Aurobindo on the upper second page. The cards are packed with a white envelope and sealed in a plastic cover. Price per set of 16 cards: Rs 320.



Auroville Planner 2018

The Auroville Planner 2018 has as cover photo a wall painting at the Auroville Youth Center: 'Le Petit Prince' or 'The Little Prince', the well-known tale by Antoine de Saint Exupéry. Inside, 12 colorful photos depict daily life in Auroville. Each photo is accompanied by a short quote of The Mother or Sri Aurobindo. Format 11 x 16 cm, price Rs. 190.



All prices are excluding packing and postage. All profits will be donated to the Matrimandir. For orders contact tine@auroville.org.in or Matrimandir@auroville.org.in

Subscription information

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