

Heeding the Call: Sustainability for South India and Beyond

Tamil Nadu today is ranked among India's most 'developed' states. Increasingly urbanised, it has a growing service sector in the cities, and is a proud leader in healthcare and information technology. And yet, the same state is plagued by one of the country's highest levels of malnutrition, rising unemployment and severe social stress that results, among other consequences, in the highest rate of suicide among young adults. Less and less of the once fertile land is available for agriculture, and farming, particularly of food crops, is in decline. Rapidly shrinking natural resources, environmental degradation, climate change, increasing dependence on global markets, and rising living costs, all contribute to this challenging situation.

Sustainability, the need of the hour

2015 marks the 20th anniversary of the Rio Conference, and in December – just a year away – the global leaders will congregate in Paris, France, to try to agree on 'Sustainable Development Goals' to replace their earlier commitments to 'Millennium Development Goals'. In principle, this is a significant step forward.

In these two decades things have changed a lot. Sustainability has been recognised as a mainstream priority, not only in commerce and economics, in an effort to contain human greed and consumption. It has also impacted the sphere of development, through the setting of different goals, aspirations and values by which human development is measured around the world.

While the global leaders decide on the 16 parameters by which sustainable development goals will be measured, the very nature of sustainability demands that there be a million local applications. Sustainability and local economic revival are synonymous. And while globalisation pursues its galloping course, there are trends all over the world that promote slowing down, localisation, and 'growing green', all indicating a new consciousness descending on us. For some it is a necessity and a matter of survival, for others it is a matter of choice, but the shift to the 'sustainable' paradigm is an irreversible fact.

Auroville's bioregional outreach: IRD and SEDAB

Intentional communities like Auroville that have over decades adopted and developed practices of conscious and sustainable living have a responsibility towards the world to come forward and share their knowledge, insights and practices in this moment of need for humanity and the Earth.

From the very beginning Auroville endeavoured to share itself with the people of its region – including the 'first Aurovilians' as Mother once called the villagers within the area – through bridging the vast cultural and economic gaps. Today, it has many outreach projects with a diversity of approaches.

The IRD project

Auroville's IRD, short for Integral Rural Development, was created ten years ago by Bhavana, Rod and Joss, to help facilitate the Auroville-based outreach work in the bioregion. The Kaluveli bioregion, as it is called, is a mini-watershed area that originates near Gingee at its highest point and ends in Kadapakkam where the water drains into the sea; it encompasses a large area of 750 square kilometres. Several outreach units have been operating in this region in the past decades, in spheres like women's empowerment, micro-finance, literacy, education, adult education, culture, health, art, music, sports, agriculture, irrigation, livelihoods and crafts. While some of the early outreach work used to be funded through philanthropic contributions facilitated by Aurovilians, more recent ventures are increasingly having to put in place a plan to sustain their project. This includes building the capacities within the community to own, manage and grow with these ventures.

As early as 2005/6, the IRD had articulated a vision for a sustainable region with a very bold and forward-looking plan. In a series of engagements with the (then active) national Knowledge Commission headed by Dr.



From top: Advanced tailoring enterprise in Irumbai; women receiving training at an Auroville hammock making unit in Kottakarai; women from Amirtha and Meera enterprise from Vandipalayam selling herbal medicines and herbal food products at Auroville Village Action Group; women's nursery enterprise in Nadukuppam

Sam Pitroda, the Planning Commission, and later the Rural Development department, this vision was much appreciated as a regional development plan. However, IRD was asked to accommodate parts of their vision into one of the schemes, the 'Special SGSY scheme' which, unlike more conventional programmes, allowed for several process innovations.

The birth of SEDAB

Out of this process evolved SEDAB (Sustainable Enterprise Development in the Auroville Bioregion), launched as a collaboration of several Auroville units under IRD's banner, with the aim of creating sustainable enterprises at village level in Auroville's wider neighbourhood. SEDAB identified potential entrepreneurs amid more than 1100 village women in the bioregion. These were provided with skill enhancement, knowledge of markets, raw materials, and capacities to create and manage enterprises in several areas. The project has been implemented in the Vanur and Marakkanam blocks of the Villupuram district since June 2012, and will be completed in 2015.

Until today, around 700 beneficiaries have been reached, and about ten enterprises have come into existence through the process. Many of the women are first-generation entrepreneurs, and their products are on display and sale through various channels, including a special outlet made available for them by Auroville at the Visitors Centre, called Kamalam. One of SEDAB's unique features is the emphasis on building a healthy eco-system within the village, which is essential for these enterprises.

The SEDAB Enterprises

SEDAB's work with enterprises has mainly focused on the Natural Resource Based Enterprises and Cottage Based Enterprises. The former are as diverse as working with the Irula tribal community with their expert skills in snake catching for snake venom extraction (VSVPT), establishing indigenous plant nurseries as enterprises, and projects involving Auroville units such as the Earth Institute producing compressed earth blocks for construction. Examples of cottage enterprises include the tailoring of cloth bags (SmallSteps) and reusable sanitary napkins (EcoFemme). Employment Based Capacity Building takes place through vocational training schools, such as the Auroville Institute for Applied Technology (AIAT), the Swami Vivekananda Rural Community College, and Auroville units such as the Bamboo Centre and Rio. Some Auroville units provide training and then employment, and others take it a step further by helping the beneficiaries take ownership of their own production and enterprise.

Environmental Education

SEDAB's environmental education activities have the aim of creating awareness and protection for the Kaluveli watershed. The programme works with the Education and Forest Departments, Panchayat presidents and Parent-Teacher's Associations, to create awareness in schools and in self-help groups. All groups are encouraged to come up with their own solutions to protect the watershed. This is done through nurturing strong Eco-clubs, whose events are activity-based and include many field trips and hands-on discovery sessions. Today, 22 schools offer courses as co-curricular activities, on themes such as Young Healers, Young Botanist, Bird Watching, Physical Health and Hygiene (encouraging the use of EcoFemme pads and spirulina), and Stress Reduction (using mindfulness and laughter therapy techniques from Auroville). Seminars are also conducted on topics such as biodiversity, pollution, water conservation, alternative energy, and local traditions.

The Nadukuppam Environmental Education Centre was created by Pitchandikulam as an outreach centre 30 km away into the bioregion, and has evolved into a model site visited by over 150 groups annually. The local government school was 'adopted' ten years ago, and today has an ecology class, natural wastewater treatment, and a nursery and vegetable garden cared for by the children. Near the school, there is a site for SEDAB enterprise projects, and land with a young forest and an experiment in sustainable farming.

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The Sustainable Livelihood Institute

The work of IRD and SEDAB ensured a continuous dialogue with the government agencies that were facilitating and funding the project. In the process, the department of Rural Development of Tamil Nadu recognised that there are several ways in which Auroville can offer valuable contributions: not only by improving the effectiveness of the existing government programmes, but also by bringing new and enhanced perspectives to their overall efforts.

In September 2012, the programme managers of the government's Rural Livelihood projects from Tamil Nadu's 30 districts, along with various top functionaries, attended a three-day design and marketing workshop in Auroville. It was the first time that all the heads of district had come together to Auroville for such a training. In July 2013, the Principal Secretary of Tamil Nadu's Rural Development department visited some of the SEDAB enterprises. During

create this institute, and infuse it with its ideas, spirit and expertise. The SLI has no precedent in India – the only faculty with a somewhat similar scope being a department of the Institute for Rural Management (IRMA) in Gujarat. The invitation to Auroville to host and shape the SLI for Tamil Nadu is based on the realisation that a profoundly new approach is needed that has eluded earlier efforts, and the faith that Auroville can gather and share that crucial missing ingredient.

The broad outlines of the Sustainable Livelihood Institute were agreed upon through a concept note at the end of 2013, between Auroville's IRD and Tamil Nadu's State Rural Livelihood Mission (TNSRLM). The Institute will be autonomously managed jointly by Auroville and representatives from government and civil society. As its immediate – but by no means exclusive – scope, the SLI would create programmes for officials and field workers of the department, aiming at a paradigm shift in thinking and action. The global requirement of sustainability would be



Harvesting spirulina at Green Spiruls, a women's enterprise. There are three such enterprises in the villages of Nadukuppam, K.N. Palayam and Kodur, all producing spirulina under the trade name Surya Spirulina

Avaniyammal, 30 years old, runs the Amirtha Herbal Medicine Enterprise in Vandipalayam. This is a women's enterprise promoting herbal kitchen gardens and sustainable harvesting of herbs for medicines, food products and cosmetics.

"My mother died in a bus accident when I was 15 years old, and my father is deaf. I have two younger brothers." Avaniyammal shares that she did not want to get married because she felt



responsible for taking care of her brothers and father, but that she did eventually marry, after long negotiations to persuade the groom's family to take in her youngest brother as well. "My husband is a farmer, also now I have two kids, my son is 14 and my daughter is 11." Avaniyammal's training took place in 2013. "We took surveys of medicinal plants and types of common illnesses in our area. Then we were



taught the traditional herbal remedies preparation techniques. The work we are doing is good and useful and the feedback we are getting from people we sell to, even our families, is encouraging." Avaniyammal works with the sales team of Amirtha. "We have to take the initiative ourselves; it is our own decision which results in our income." There are many challenges as well: "It is not so convenient as we don't have a cycle and have to walk far for marketing, we cannot visit many places in one day, and we often come back home late." Avaniyammal hopes to earn more in order to help with her children's studies. "We need to further develop the work to further develop our life."

an interaction with Auroville's secretary, Mr. Bala Baskar, he suggested that Auroville and Tamil Nadu's State Rural Livelihood Mission jointly create an institution that will look at livelihood training from the sustainable paradigm. He felt such an institute would benefit not just the community, but also the staff and functionaries of his department. Mr. Bala Baskar concurred, and offered to make available land on lease for such an endeavour if the government was willing to invest in creating the facility, and sustain the institute for a reasonable period of time. The Sustainable Livelihood Institute (SLI) is the outcome.

It is significant that while previously Auroville used to take its projects to the government, here the government approached Auroville to collaborate and

met with the local need for consistent, risk-addressed livelihood options with dignity, through programmes designed, carried out, monitored and continuously evolved by these officials. The Institute would have sections dedicated to research, innovation, outreach, documentation and communication, in addition to its core activity of training.

In February 2014, the agreement was signed for a preparatory phase of the SLI, during which a curriculum, a master plan and all the documents required for the setting up of the SLI would be worked upon. The overall commitment from the government is to create an infrastructure facility with a budget of 10 crore Rupees [approximately US \$ 6 million], and provide sustained financial support for the administration and training activities by

the Institute for seven years from the beginning of the operation.

Several teams within Auroville have been working since then on the various aspects of the project. Presentations and workshops on SLI have taken place in the community; similarly the Farm and Dairy groups, Auroville Campus Initiative, Higher Education, L'Avenir, FAMC, and the Governing Board have all received presentations and expressed support.

An extraordinary opportunity

Apart from creating courses for public servants and community resource persons, Auroville is encouraged to use all its creativity and vision to make the Institute into a dynamic centre that reflects its ideals and furthers its goals. The possibilities are almost unlimited and the need is great. Auroville is not expected to provide all the solutions; it is envisaged that SLI can be an inspiring platform inviting the most advanced and promising initiatives from India and beyond for exchange, cross-fertilisation, networking and collaboration.

Aside from the deeper picture, the benefits for Auroville are many. Needless to say, helping to create a healthy bioregion – ecologically, socially and economically – is paramount for a sustainable Auroville. A growing hub of learning and excellence brings a vitalising influx of fresh and creative energies. Young Aurovilians, especially Tamil-speaking ones, will have meaningful work opportunities without being forced to leave the community. And finding sustainable local solutions rooted in age-old knowledge and traditions is essential not only for the people and communities of Tamil Nadu. It will promote a deeper understanding and appreciation of the local culture, and a growing oneness among Aurovilians from different cultures.

Architects weaving dreams

An inspiring experiment by architects Mona, Manu, Fabian and David has led to a draft masterplan for an institution campus that will not only embody proactive ideas of sustainability, but offer a concrete experience of a more integrated way of living, capable of nurturing individuals and collectives alike.

The 'dreamcatchers' developed the 'dreamweaving' process as part of an exploration into collective planning. Their main focus was to go beyond a personalised egoic approach to development, and dreamweaving was one idea to see if planning processes involving several participants could create results which were more than the sum of their parts, as opposed to the lowest common denominator which is often the tenden-

cy in such situations.

The first result of this experiment was the 'Crownways' concept for the Crown area of Auroville, and the SLI project has now been a good opportunity to reawaken the dreamweaving process and see if it could help to manifest its master plan in a collaborative spirit befitting Auroville's ideals.

The process itself is very simple, if not counter-intuitive to the usual design processes in operation around the world today. Each architect is given a basic set of parameters – including the site plan, project brief and any particular approaches that the clients feel are important (environmental, programmatic, aesthetic etc), and spends some time sketching out a concept design as they would for any other project. The architects then come together and take turns explaining their proposals to the group. However, instead of each proposal being critiqued by the others (as is common practice right from the architecture

towards implementation, the division of work should hopefully become much more easy and harmonious.

One could hardly imagine a process more in tune with the values the campus aims at embodying. Part of the dream is to create "a place where people come to have a transformative experience. A place where people come with questions and leave with the ability to find answers, come with answers and leave with new questions, come with habits and leave with different habits, come with goals and leave with improved capacity to evaluate and achieve those goals. The time spent at SLI would be experienced as a balance and interplay between peace and energy, introspection and collaboration, contemplation and activity. A place of wholeness and oneness, synergy and fraternity, rejuvenation and health, beauty and hope..."

So far, the collective experience of the architects justifies these high aspirations!

Angeli Devi, 24 years old runs one of the five units of *Aval*, an advanced tailoring enterprise. Each unit produces a wide range of stitched products. Some products, such as EcoFemme and SmallSteps bags, are produced for Auroville units.



The Aval units are located in Irumbai at the Village Action campus. Angeli explains, "I feel this work is good because before I used to sit at home, here I can do more without feeling useless." Angeli's income fluctuates, but she says she is earning about Rs. 3000 per month. She used to tailor a little at home before, but now she is happy to have more constant and regular orders and a promise of salary. "It is easier to work in a group. Also, my husband has no regular painting work in the rainy season so my income is important." She shares that she is happy with her work and her enterprise group, saying that many women are beginning to change their minds and gain confidence. "Traditionally women were expected to stay at home, but here there is lots of training, and we need more training! I want to become more famous in tailoring and I want to train others."



Kamalam is a retail outlet of SEDAB situated at Auroville's Visitors Centre through which products from all SEDAB enterprises are marketed. It promotes ethical and eco-friendly products. Auroville has provided this space to support sustainable livelihood options for women from the villages around



Auroville. Kamalam helps spread awareness about sustainability efforts to the many visitors to Auroville who pass by the shop on their walk from the Visitors Centre to Matrimandir.

A curriculum for sustainability

Formulating a comprehensive curriculum and programme for the new institution is both a challenge and a powerful opportunity. Even in designing courses for government servants, the SLI has been given an exceptional freedom to adopt innovative approaches. The SLI's offerings will therefore range from perspective building in sustainability to hands-on training in eco-friendly technologies, from professional capacity enhancement to 'soft skills' that are gaining ever more recognition for their importance, and so much more. Organic



From top: Students performing a sketch on ecology; girls watch birds at Vedanthangal bird sanctuary; initial training of a women's self-help group

farming will be taught alongside the capacity to study, organise and systemise local livelihood activity, conservation-linked enterprises, ecological building techniques and design, traditional crafts that will find newer relevance, leadership and communication in sustainable thought and practice, the ancient science of self-development, alias yoga – the scope is endless and will keep evolving and adapting. Courses will take place with Tamil as the main but not exclusive medium. A strong emphasis is placed throughout on staying rooted in and relevant to the local culture and traditions of the participants, which only need to be tapped to yield their rich treasures of sustainable knowledge.

The outer mirrors the inner

The curriculum-building team has come together following a call to the Auroville community, including open workshops, to involve all those with experience or a strong interest and commitment to the sustainable paradigm. With the wider Auroville seen as the field of learning, or 'extended campus' of the SLI, input and collaboration is invited from the many units and individuals who are engaged in one or the other form of sustainability.

As soon as the curriculum team started meeting, it became clear that its work wasn't going to be business as usual. By necessity, it embarked on an in-depth exploration of the meaning of sustainability, beyond the overused and misused buzzword, and in particular what it means in the local context. This turned out to be an engaging process which questioned many assumptions or stereotypes, and was in itself a transformative journey. Three fundamental insights emerged with striking clarity:

Firstly, that no amount of green technologies and system changes can lead to sustainability in livelihood, without a profound shift in human consciousness – away from the excesses of individualism, self-assertion and domination, to a new-found sense of oneness and the inter-connectedness of all beings.

Secondly, that there is no sphere of human activity that can be left out of the quest for sustainability. What better place then for the SLI than this grand experiment planted in the soil of South India, based on the premise that 'All Life is Yoga'? And if, just as in the integral yoga, the all-inclusive scope of the task seems overwhelming, it is also an immense advantage, since every step in the right direction helps the totality of the transformation.

Last but not least, it became clear that an institution committed to sustainability will be truly effective only in the measure that it is itself sustainable in all its aspects. Not surprisingly, when the team formulated its shared values and guiding principles, these had strong echoes with the Charter of Auroville – and we seem to hear once more the luminous, compelling call to the Great Adventure!

Jasmin and Kavitha

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Members of a women's self-help group visit Pitchandikulam; students getting information on renewable energy; students learning about the waste water treatment system at the Nadukuppam government school

COMMUNITY BUILDING

David: After all, it's meant to be a World Café not a western café!

The evolutionary cafe is very much designed for people who are comfortable with verbal/mental forms of communication in English. If you are talking about collective emergence, why not include other forms of expression and communication, like dance and painting?

David: There are many ways of exploring connectivity and collectivity, and there are other people doing that already in Auroville. I suspect that free dance is doing the same thing through dance that we are trying to do through dialogue, and the same is probably true of free art sessions. We are just bringing one piece of the puzzle. These are all tools, and the day may come when we find a way to weave those things together. At the moment, however, the evolutionary café has a fairly short timeframe of a few hours and we can only do so much in that time. But perhaps we could do a weekend where we could bring in some of these other things, a body awareness, dance, art, dialogue jam session!

Any other ideas for the future?

Ulli: One possible issue for a future evolutionary café is evolutionary leadership. Then there is Barbara Marx Hubbard's 'Wheel Of Co-Creation', which is a theory about the developmental process of the universe, and Otto Scharmer and his 'U-Theory' that shows how groups and organizations can develop leadership qualities in order to create a very different future.

What about the point of view that all we need to progress as Aurovilians is already provided by Mother and Sri Aurobindo?

David: If people are getting all their answers from reading Sri Aurobindo I am very happy for them. I am not there yet. I need these little stepping-stones to get to what Mother and Sri Aurobindo are talking about. So I feel there is space for both the Evolutionary Café and for people simply opening to Mother and Sri Aurobindo.

From an interview by Alan

The Evolutionary Café

Recently, Auroville residents were invited to participate in a new series of the Evolutionary Café which take place every two weeks in the Unity Pavilion. But what is the Evolutionary Café, and why is it being run in Auroville? Auroville Today spoke to the two organizers, David Nightingale and Ulli Roeper.

What is the Evolutionary Café?

David: The Evolutionary Café is the Auroville version of the World Café.

Ulli: The World Café started in the 1990s and it came out of the 'dialogue' movement inspired by physicist David Bohm. Juanita Brown and others tried to develop a model where society could be transformed through conversations that follow a basic model. It is important that participants understand the difference between a discussion and dialogue. Dialogue tries to create a free flow of meaning; it is an attempt to break out of our normal way of responding and reacting so that we can tap into something deeper. As somebody put it, the objective that the World Café and Bohmian Dialogue have in common is to "think together, to go places no member has ever been before by themselves or in the past."

What is its relevance to Auroville?

Ulli: The World Café is explicitly designed to harvest collective intelligence. As Juanita Brown expressed it, "World Café experiences hold the promise to access the unique relationship between the individual and the collective that enables a special type of mutual intelligence to emerge". In this sense it's like a tool designed for Auroville.

David: I think one of the things that Auroville is missing is tools with which to work collectively. We need new systems, new ways of interacting and dialoguing, and new paradigms of thought in order to move us forward. I see the Evolutionary Café as an amazing possibility to go deep and really question what it means to be here for evolution.

Actually, the concept is not new for Auroville. Dreamcatchers [a forum which aims to call down and synthesise different aspects of Mother's Dream for Auroville. See Auroville Today April, 2006 eds.] have already used this model with architects. We

called it a Design Café and had very interesting results in getting architects to sit around a table and come out with a collective design.

Now you are starting the second season of the Evolutionary Café. Looking back on the first season, what did you do and what were the highlights?

David: We always begin with a video to stimulate discussion. We began with Barbara Marx Hubbard talking about the ascent of humanity, then there were two sessions when Robert Gilman presented the big picture of humanity's past cultural evolution and how we can engage with the next step. Finally, there was an introduction to 'Spiral Dynamics', which is a dynamic model of human development.

Ulli: I think Robert Gilman was outstanding. In the first video he talked about the shift in our past history from kinship to empire, and in the second he speculated about what is happening now, which he identifies as another huge cultural shift into the 'Planetary Era'.

David: There is a very interesting overlap between Gilman and Spiral Dynamics. Gilman covers this very large timescale of cultural evolution. Spiral Dynamics explains in more detail how it happens.

Ulli: We always try to relate the content of the movie to Auroville through a question to the participants. For example, after Robert Gilman's first talk about the transition from kinship systems to empire we asked participants, "Where do I see these empire structures in Auroville?" The next time, when he focussed on the planetary era, we asked people what evidence of a planetary culture they could see in Auroville today.

Is there any indication that these kind of conversations have a practical effect in Auroville? Do they lead to practical change?

David: This is very much one of our intentions. However, my experience with

Dreamcatchers was that there was very little direct immediate result. People were very positive but you could not put your finger on something and say this changed because of Dreamcatchers. However, now I see little results, like small shoots emerging. For example, last week Aurelio asked me if I would do something like the Design Café with



Ulli and David

architects for the extension of Swaram workshop. What makes him open to this approach is that he had been part of the Dreamcatchers experiment. It is 'shoots' like this that give me the energy to do the evolutionary café with Ulli.

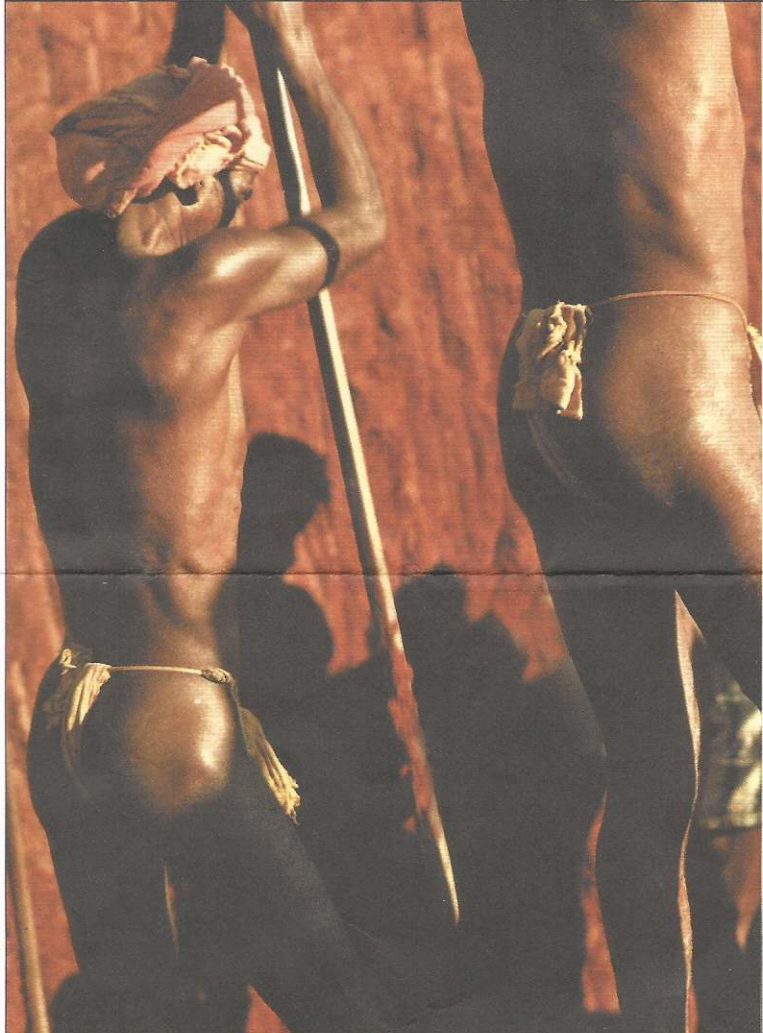
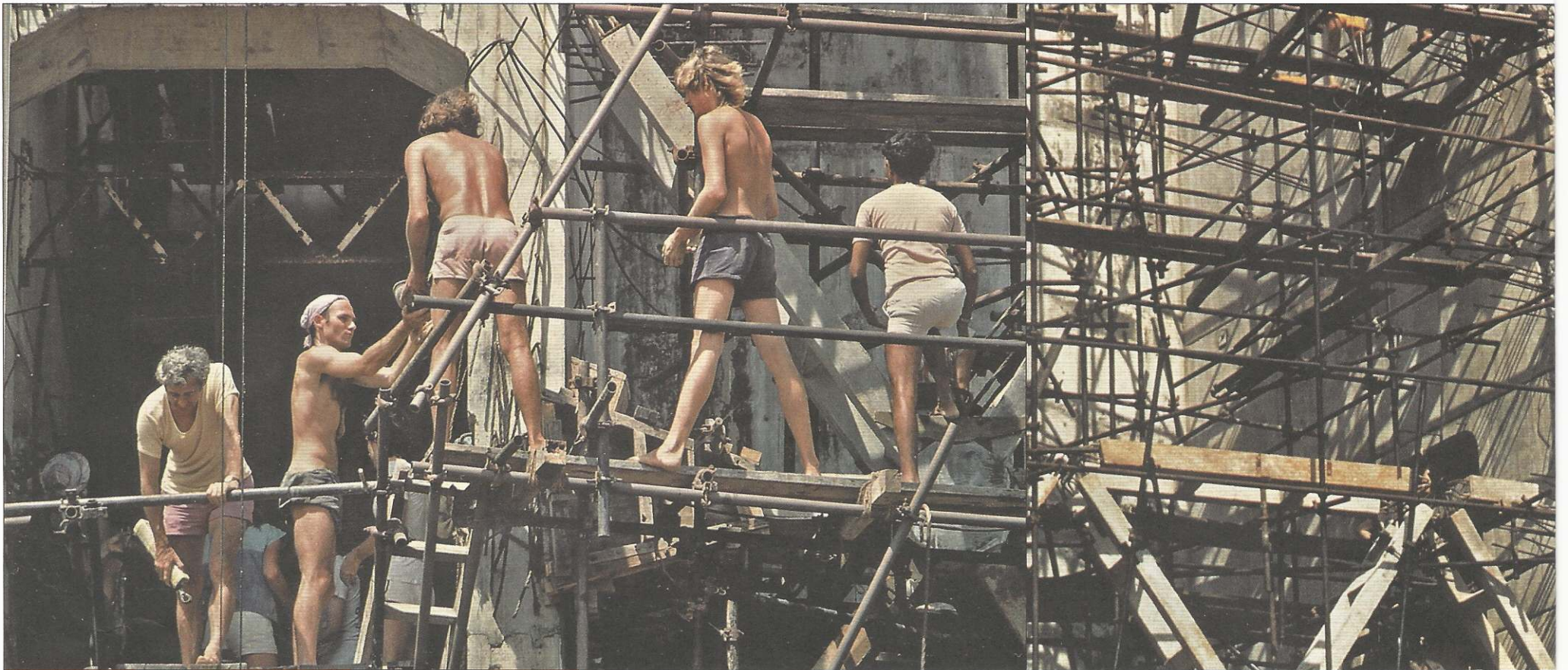
In the end, all we are doing is throwing out seeds and waiting to see what germinates.

Ulli: We have no idea what the outcome will be. We trust in emergence.

I saw nobody from the local culture at the recent Evolutionary Café. Is the Evolutionary Café approach culture-specific?

David: Perhaps the Evolutionary Café approach may not immediately appeal to some local Aurovilians. But I suspect it is just a matter of time before they participate.

Ulli: I think our Tamil brothers and sisters are perfectly capable of participating; we just haven't reached out to them sufficiently. They are, of course, very much welcome.



Matrimandir - a hymn to the builders

The name of Dominique Darr is indissolubly connected to the early days of Auroville. Who in Auroville doesn't know her photo of a lone granite stone with the letters AV painted on it, marking Auroville land? or the photo of men, goats and cows ambling through a dry, eroded landscape? These are amongst her earliest photos of Auroville, taken during her first visits to Pondicherry and Auroville.

Dominique first came to Pondicherry in 1970, with her friend Klara Siritzky. "Klara was a hatha yoga instructor and was aware of the teaching of Sri Aurobindo," she says. "We were both interested in spirituality, and in 1968 we attended a conference on Auroville at the Trocadéro in Paris, where we met Roger Anger and many other architects, the physicist Gabriel Monod-Herzen, and various Ashramites. We came to know about the Sri Aurobindo Association, and a week later we joined Roger Anger. We became friends. We subscribed to the Bulletin of Physical Education of the Ashram and went on to follow the work of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

"When we arrived in the Ashram in December 1970, we were told that we were just in time to participate in the Ashram's Christmas celebrations. There, Mother's grand-daughter Purna Prema introduced us to The Mother. Afterwards, we were allowed to meet Her a few times more. The second time was the most interesting as Purna Prema insisted that I show Mother the book *Japon des Réalités*, a photo book about Japan that I had once published together with writer Marcel Giuglaris. I assumed that Mother would not be interested in books of devotees. But I was mistaken. She leafed through the book carefully, often smiled when she saw a scene that was familiar, and laughed when she saw a photo of *getas*, the Japanese wooden slippers. We also brought her some laminated photos of Sri Aurobindo and Herself.

In those days, photo lamination had just taken off in France. She was immensely pleased to see them, particularly the photos of Sri Aurobindo. What went on inwardly between Her and me is something I cannot explain.

"We have been coming back to Pondicherry and Auroville regularly.

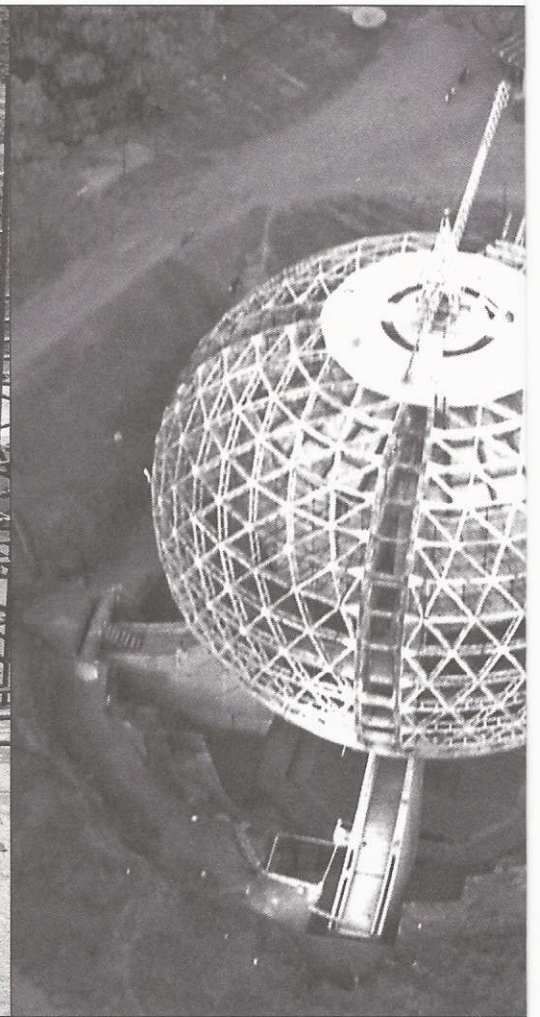
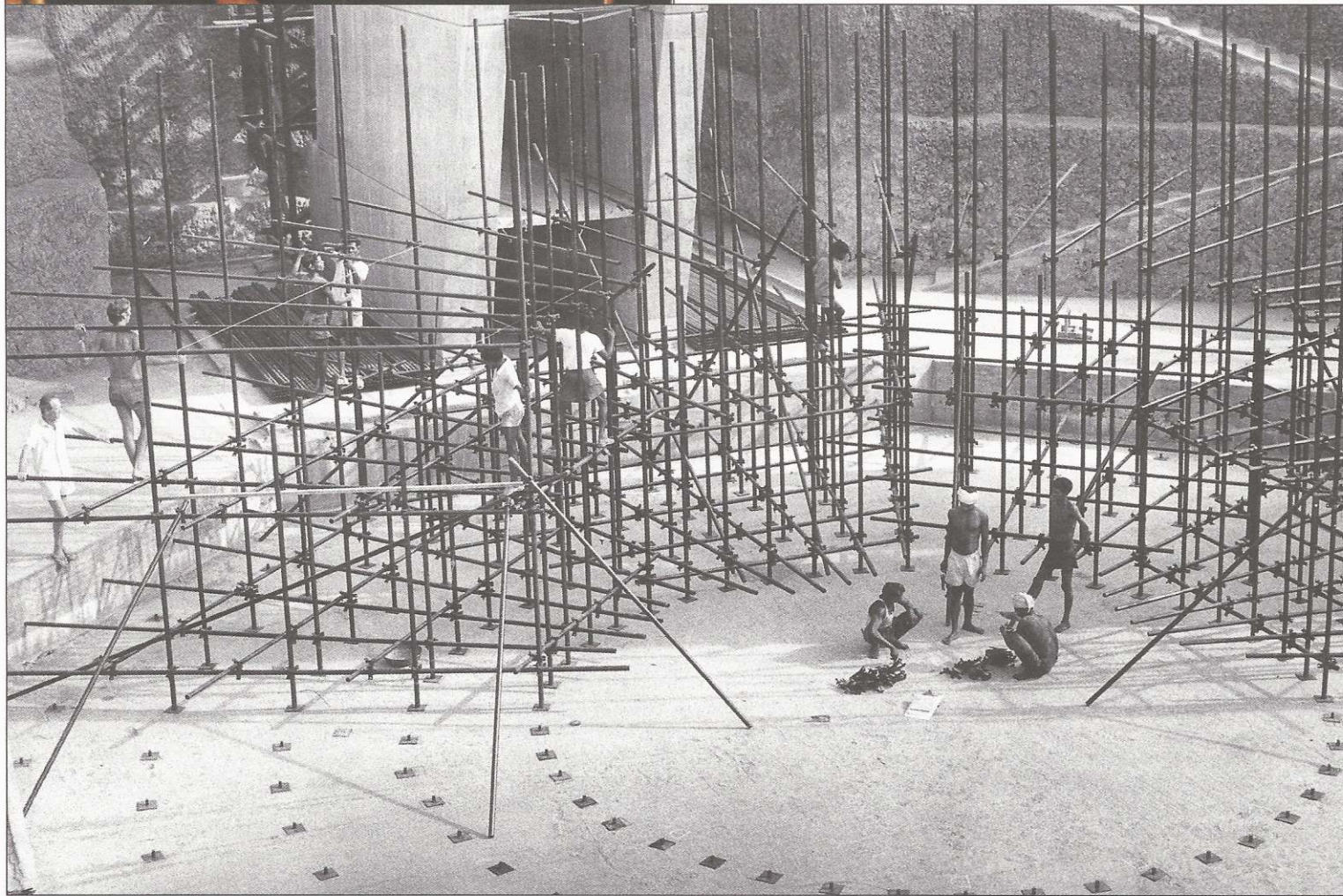
In 1971, Pranab allowed me access to a terrace opposite the balcony to make a photo of The Mother giving balcony darshan. I made another photo of Her in 1973, during Her last birthday darshan. This photo I took from down below in the street, as I had fallen out of favour with Pranab for having become interested in Auroville. For, increasingly, we were drawn to Auroville.

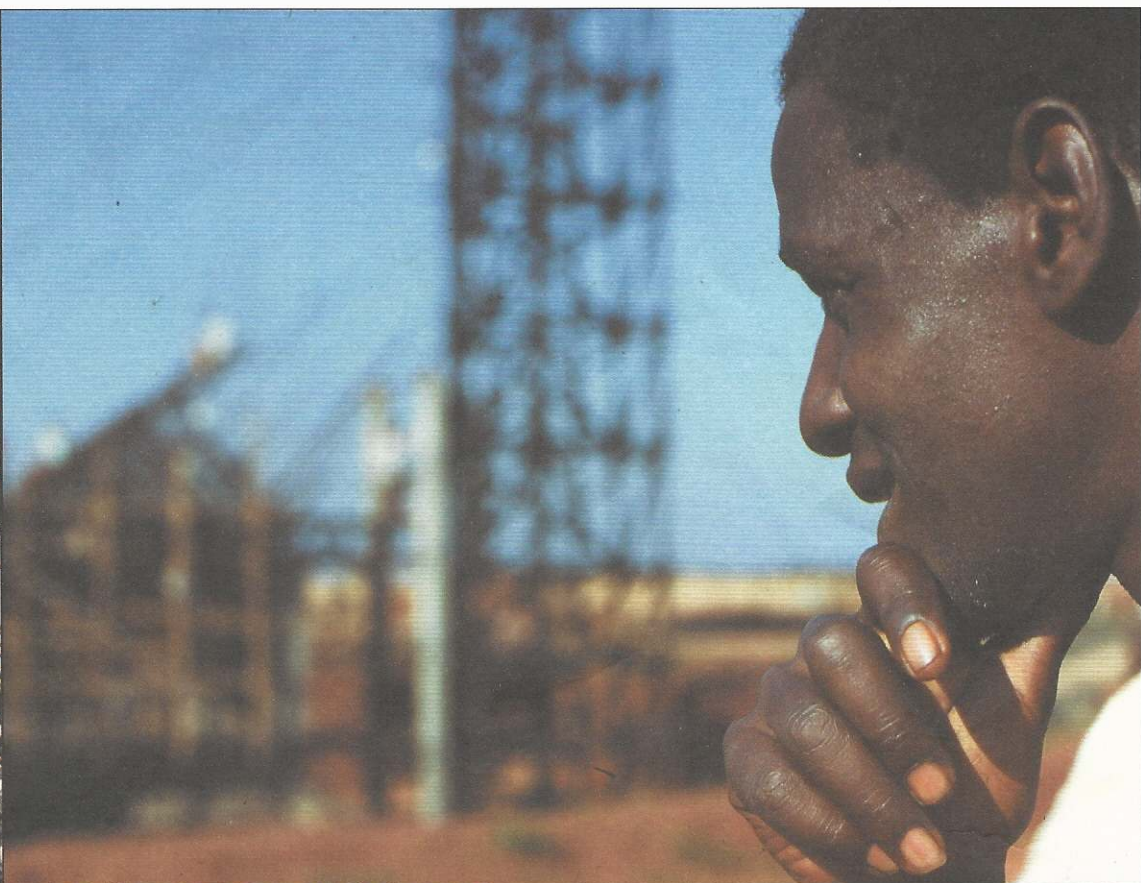
"So we would come to Auroville every year, and my friendship with Roger intensified. I was with him when he was making Last School. The experience was fascinating. For example, there was this one curved wall, and he wasn't happy with the shape. He took a handful of mud, and was directly sculpting it on the wall to show what he wanted.

"But I was not the only photographer in Auroville. Yesterday Paulette showed me some beautiful photos from the early days I have never seen, and asked if they were mine. They weren't and (laughing) I must admit, some were better than mine!

"Over the years, Matrimandir became my main interest and the focus for my lens. I must have been shooting thousands of photos of its construction. The book *Matrimandir - a hymn to the builders of the future* shows a drastic selection of these photos, taken from 1972 to 2008. They, of course, only give an aspect of such a rich development.

"The book has been decades in the making. There were many people involved, and we went through numerous trials and errors. At





s of the future

some point in time I thought we had something nice and we went to Roger to show it to him. 'This is absolutely awful,' he replied. We were crushed. The help came only two years ago, when a Spanish artist and a German volunteer in Auroville, who was a professional graphic designer, got involved. With their help, the book finally got completed."

Matrimandir – a hymn to the builders of the future has twelve sections, each opening with a quotation from Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* and having an introductory text in French and English. There are wonderful photos of the excavation, showing how the local population started contributing to the building of the Matrimandir; there are photos of the slowly emerging sphere; close-ups of its anchoring and the scaffoldings; photos of people and concretings; photos of gold leaf fixing – the first failed attempt – and the making of the gold-in-glass sandwiches; and there are rarely seen photos of the amphitheatre and the Peace area.

The book launch is scheduled for December 20 at the Art Center of Les Citadines in Auroville. These pages of Auroville Today carry some of these photographs as selected by Dominique. For those who love Matrimandir, this book is an absolute must – documenting the birth, as Dominique writes, "of the symbol of the realisation of the future, where spiritual and material extremes meet generating a power of action and the birth of a new energy for the transitional human beings we are, according to the teachings of Sri Aurobindo."

Carel

Matrimandir – a hymn to the builders of the future, published by Centre d'Art d'Auroville. Hardbound, 200 pages. Available from bookshops in Pondicherry and Auroville and from www.auroville.com. Price approximately Rs 3,000.



Caring for Auroville - the Auroville Health Services

Auroville Health Services (AVHS), a team of eight members, is a non-profit service in the area of public health and health care for seniors. It was set up by Dr. Beena in 2001. Rebecca, a member of the original team who is still working with AVHS, remembers that Dr. Beena's experience of treating villagers in the Multi-Purpose Health Clinic in Bharat Nivas made her realize that preventive work in the villages was essential. So AVHS set up education programmes in hygiene. It also raised funds for the Aquadyn project to provide free clean drinking water in 24 public places in Auroville, and for the first ambulance for the Auroville Health Centre.

When Dr. Beena stepped back, Manfred took up her work. "Initially, we continued the work in the villages," says Manfred. "AVHS, together with the Palmyra Centre for Rural Development, constructed 19 compost toilets and provided training in using them in Thenkopakkam village. We also ran a clinic in Morattandi for some years. After closing this clinic the AVHS team decided to again focus upon Auroville instead."

The present team also continued this work of improving hygiene in Auroville units. Today they advise and monitor about 40 units weekly, including Auroville farms, restaurants, schools and units that provide food products. Among other things, they ensure that people cooking food for the public are wearing proper headgear, and that the sanitation and waste disposal facilities of the units are clean and operating correctly. The standards they adhere to are the ones specified by the Government of India. In 2007 AVHS organized a contest between all the units. The winners were awarded prizes. In the following years, the units fulfilling the conditions were issued certificates. Two members of the team, Veeramani and Chitra, also provide training on request for start-up units.

"We have seen a huge improvement in hygiene standards over the years we have been running this scheme," says Alice, another team member. Now the Government of India makes its own inspections. "However, we will continue with our inspections," says Alice. The names of the units that fulfill the conditions are published in the *News and Notes*.

Has there been a 'knock-on' effect? Have villagers working in these units taken over what they have learned about hygiene and waste disposal and to practice that in their own homes? The team hopes that this is happening but no survey has been done to ascertain this.

AVHS also organizes hospital care for Aurovilians. Indian hospitals insist that a patient is accompanied 24 hours a day. "Sometimes family and friends take up this responsibility for the short-term but finding volunteers to take up this work on a shift basis for longer hospital stays is a big job for a small team like ours," says Alice. "For the past six months we have had at least one Aurovillian hospitalized at any one time."

Medical Care for Senior Aurovilians

At present 20% of Auroville's population is over 65 years old and this proportion is likely to grow. The challenge of caring for the aging population is another one of the functions of the AVHS team.

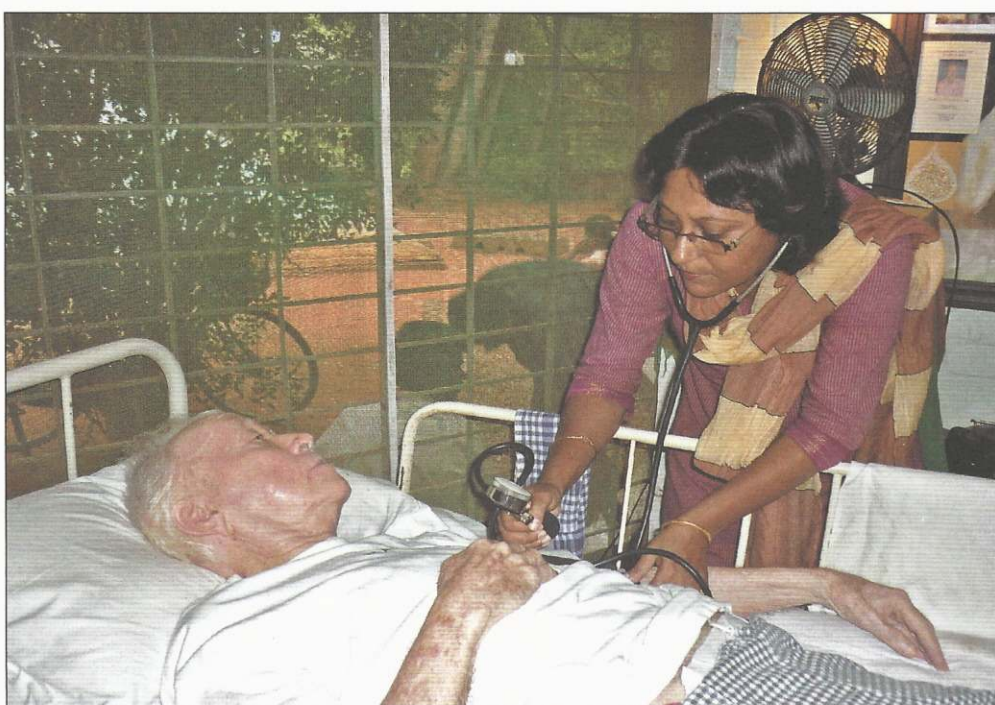
They were pitched into this some years ago when an older Aurovillian developed dementia. Initially there were plans to send him back to his home country, but some Aurovilians decided they would find a way of caring for him in Auroville. AVHS became involved and organized not only 24-hour nursing care but also took over his financial, administrative and social care.

When a hired nurse proved too expensive, the team started experimenting with volunteers. Aurovillian Friederike, who is a professional geriatric nurse, coordinated and trained additional caregivers for a number of years.

Today there are 360 people over the age of 65 in Auroville and this figure is projected to increase to 440 by 2018. At present six seniors over the age of 85 years are receiving full-time home care and this number will surely increase in the future. So is the team capable of taking on such a responsibility?

"The main problem," says Manfred, "is to find skilled attendants to work with us in home care for elder patients."

"People have limitations in their time and energy. This is one factor. But I also think some people are scared to work with old people," says Dany, the professional geriatric nurse who replaced Friederike one year ago. "Not only because they lack the skills, but also because they are afraid they will become like that themselves. Even when peo-



ple are asked to pass by daily for a few minutes to check on someone in their own community, often they don't do it."

Personal relationships also play a part here. If someone lacks friends, it is harder to find people to visit them. However, it is a fragile support system when home care is dependent upon the patients having many friends with the energy to care for them for what may be months, or even years.

Medical Home Care

The new team member, Dr. Amarnath, provides medical treatment around the clock. Kailash Clinic offers a 24 hour ambulance service with emergency doctors on call, while the Auroville Health Centre and Kailash Clinic provide outpatient consultations in the daytime.

But neither the Health Centre nor Kailash Clinic has an in-patient room for intensive care patients. "As in the past, palliative care for dying patients has to be improvised in the patient's home," says Dr. Amarnath.

And then there is the financial aspect. Senior healthcare, when it involves professional outside help and specialized equipment, can be expensive. Who will pay the bills?

Manfred says that in the past, it was a struggle to get financial help from Auroville, and even today professional help is not paid for by the Auroville health insurance. "However the attitude has changed in our financial services and now the Budget Coordination Committee gives us some financial support. But when an Aurovillian receiving home care has financial means, we ask for a personal contribution towards the expenses."

Does the change in attitude of our financial services reflect an increased awareness in the larger community of the need to care for our older people? The team is skeptical. "It is still only the people who are personally involved or who have friends in this situation who are concerned."

Responding to the challenges

One of the problems in the past was that volunteer caretakers lacked proper training. Recently AVHS started a training programme. At present, six trainees are being taught skills like how to give a bed bath, how to lift a patient from a bed to a chair, and what to do in an emergency. "It is also important to stress good communication," says Dany, "like talking to the patient and explaining what you are going to do for them."

"Every Auroville community should have at least once member, ideally trained in first aid, to care for community members who need medical help," says Manfred.

The team is aware, however, that there will not be enough volunteers to provide home care for individual patients in their own houses in the future. "This is where the assisted living home for seniors comes into play," says Manfred. This project is for elders who need some assistance and who wish to live together. Permanent accommodation for 10 seniors would be provided in a complex where they can be cared for on a 24 hour basis. Such a set-up would require less carers per person and medical resources could be shared.

The project has not been without its difficulties, however. When AVHS made a survey in 2008 to ascertain how many seniors might wish to use such a facility, it proved an unpopular option. Perhaps it smacked too much of "Old Aurovilians' Nursing Home" and many people did not like the prospect of moving out of their own homes. However, when the team ran another survey in

2011, there was a more positive response to the idea. What caused the change?

"I think some people became more aware of what they would need when they got older," says Alice. The assisted living project, (estimated to cost Rs 200 lakhs – approximately US \$ 300,000) has been allocated a site in Arka and has limited seed money. They have site permission, but the building permission is still pending.

Regarding the financial aspect, Manfred's 'dream' is that all Aurovilians pay extra into the Health Fund, or into a Seniors Fund, so that home care has a more secure financial basis. When somebody is hospitalized and needs specialized treatment or equipment, this can be very expensive. Intensive care in a hospital like Apollo, Chennai, can cost up to one lakh rupees a day (approximately \$ 1,500). However, if Auroville purchased certain medical equipment, this could lessen costs dramatically. "Recently a senior Aurovillian was hospitalized in PIMS. His one week stay cost Rs. 1,50,000, mainly because he needed oxygen," says Manfred. "But to purchase an oxygen-producing machine costs only 1 lakh rupees. Auroville needs additional equipment like this."

At present Arka community prioritizes two rooms with bathrooms for convalescent but not for permanent care. In the future more rooms will be needed for medical care for seniors. The new

Integral Health Centre is being constructed nearby. Will rooms be available there? "There are two tiny rooms planned for in-patients," says Alice, "but they are not really appropriate for our needs. We have to explore the options further."

Psychological care for the elderly

AVHS is not only focused upon physical medical care. The AVHS team is also concerned with providing psychological care for all senior Aurovilians. One of the issues here is loneliness. "We know of people who are alone in their communities, who have nobody to visit them or accompany them in a taxi. I'm very saddened by this," says Manfred. "There have been people who have been sick or hungry but we don't know about them because they don't contact us. So we plan that someone from our team will visit all the older people in Auroville in order to find out how they are doing. But, once again, this takes time and energy, and we are a very small team."

Meanwhile, AVHS has organized computer classes and lectures for older Aurovilians so that they feel more involved and less isolated. "Transport is fundamental to allow older people to attend films, and enjoy activities," says Franca, another member of the team, "so we have organized a taxi service for seniors which is proving popular. Our larger vision is to promote collective transport which will benefit everybody in the community."

Another issue is mental health problems, which afflicts not only some seniors. "These problems are getting bigger and bigger," says Manfred. "In the past we had a group who looked after these issues, but the group disbanded. Now we would like to set up a helpline for any Aurovillian or Newcomer who needs psychological help. We started this work with a guest who had experience in this specialized work but he left and we are looking for a replacement."

While AVHS is clearly facing many challenges, perhaps one of the key ones is attitudinal. As Alice points out, "the concept of 'eternal youth', a 'youth that never ages', is a big thing in Auroville." Does this make it more difficult for some people, particularly those pioneers who came here in their 20s, to acknowledge that they are aging and will require help in their later years? Does a community dedicated to physical transformation find it difficult to face up to the realities of aging? Whatever the reasons, it is clearly time that the dedicated efforts of the AVHS team receives more full-hearted support from the community.

Alan

COMMUNITY SERVICES

Auroville Council getting up steam

The Auroville Council has made a promising start, says Sindhuja, one of the new Council members, "particularly considering that it consists of many young people who have no previous experience in working in an Auroville working group. The dynamics are catching up and it is working out." The Council is busy studying the revision of various mandates and policies, such as those of the Housing Service, the Funds and Assets Management Committee, the Entry Policy, the Friends of Auroville policy and the mandate of the Residents' Assembly Service. "Some of them are quite outdated and do not reflect the reality of today" she says. The Council has called various individuals to give feedback and help rewrite the policies, after which they will be submitted to the residents for approval. Another challenging task of the Council, that of dealing with conflicts between Aurovilians, is being handled together with Koodam, the Auroville mediation centre.

"What hasn't worked as anticipated," says Sindhuja, "is the interaction with the resource persons. In the 'Participatory Working Structure' as originally conceived, the Council would be assisted by resource persons as and when needed. Resource persons were meant to be a resource for specific tasks: they were meant to study them, interact with others on the topic, come to a conclusion and report back to the Council with a recommendation. But only a few resource persons have been doing that consistently, while others are less involved in the actual execution of tasks. Another factor that needs more clarification is the definition of roles and responsibilities. In meetings, for instance, with sometimes 18-19 people attending, it is often not clear who all carry the responsibilities of the decisions made. Some Silent Listeners also attend these meetings, but they do not speak, and are there only to observe the functioning of the Council".

Yet Sindhuja feels that the 'Participatory Working Structure' is a good development because it obliges the Council members to work in a participatory way, calling resource persons for advice, forming sub-groups and delegating decision-making rather than holding on to it. "The culture of forming sub-groups allows us to talk less and work more, as only the final decision on a topic needs validation from all the members. The work can go faster, with a single person, or sometimes two, in charge of a particular topic. Because of this, and thanks to Koodam greatly helping with resolving conflict situations, the current Auroville Council is a lot more efficient in its working and carrying out of tasks than previous ones," she says.

A problem to be addressed is the lack of full-time members and the fact that not all members are fully active. "All of us have a part-time job elsewhere. I signed up for half time, but have landed up doing much more. Others have less time to commit. It means that a few people, by necessity, have to do more. The 2 new members who will come out of the Selection Process will be of great help to the team."

The Study Group, which conceived the structure of Council and its support groups, continues advising the Council on how to build a fully functional team. "Once a month we all try to meet together for a day and this definitely helps the group dynamics," says Sindhuja. The work includes changing the image of the members of the Council. "Old habits die hard and many in the community still see us as 'politicians' rather than people doing a community service. There is still a lot of mistrust and we are subject to quite a number of attacks." More trust and encouragement from the community would help a lot, she feels. "Yet, the experience of the first four months together has been positive and uplifting, if nothing else."

In conversation with Carel

The sounds of Divine Harmony

Many visitors to Auroville have heard the 'Russian Singing Bells', a set of differently sized brass plates of rectangular shape, which are hit with several kinds of mallets. Vera, an Aurovilian from Minsk, Belarussia, discovered this special instrument which was invented by Russian bell-master Alexander Zhikharev.

"When I first heard the Bells, I was frozen to the spot and started seeing images of ancient Russia," says Vera. "I was fascinated by the sound of this instrument that gave me the experience of plunging deep within and soaring high above at the same time, almost transporting me to another dimension. It was 'love from the first sound'."

Vera invited Alexander to come to Auroville to create a set of plates here. They were presented to the Auroville community on the 22nd of December 2007. Since then, Vera has been giving many public concerts at different places in and around Auroville and, in the last few years, in The Netherlands, Switzerland, Turkey, and the USA.

"To learn to play them properly was a big challenge. Since the instrument is unique, there is no school for it. I had to discover everything on my own. I learned to enter a state of inner silence first, and afterwards to start playing. It

was not easy. But I got a lot of encouragement from Aurovilians."

Since then, the Bells have been used on many collective occasions, such as at the Dawn bonfire on the 40th anniversary of Auroville, for the re-dedication ceremony of the International Zone, and for the opening ceremony of the Hall of Peace.

Vera feels that this instrument can contribute immensely to collective harmony. Over the last three years she has been researching this subject in her 'Tuning to Harmony with the Russian Singing Bells' workshops. She distributes one plate to each participant, and suggests they create harmonious music together, following their inner sense of beauty.

"We focus on exploring the feeling of being 'in concert'. We first learn to tune to something deep within and then express it through sound. And gradually joining these inner sounds, we come to a musical interaction. Each one is intuitively finding a proper place for his sound, according to his inner feeling of beauty. This adds to the totality of harmony."

The experience, she says, is overwhelming each time. "It brings a very joyful widening of consciousness, as one needs to play and listen at the same time, to be true to one's own tone as well as to accept, appreciate and provide space for

the tones of other fellow beings. We tangibly experience what it is to be truly One Human Instrument." For her, this is the message this instrument brings to the collective experiment of Auroville: "Each one of us vibrates with a special tone, and however soft or loud, delicate or prominent, high or deep, each is indispensable for the total harmony. We just need to remember a few simple things to let the Harmony manifest through us."

There is a passage in Sri Aurobindo's *The Life Divine* which describes the experience, says Vera. "He writes how the divine soul, conscious of its oneness with the Supreme and with other souls, would experience life: 'all these selves and their relations will play consciously into each other's hands; they will part and melt into each other as the numberless notes of an eternal harmony.'"

Both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother said that music is one of the important means for spiritual education. Vera recalls the Mother's wish for an auditorium in Auroville with a grand organ, where music is constantly played for anybody to come and listen. As She said to Satprem, "And this music was like a Consciousness coming down and exerting a Pressure on people to make itself understood. It was very beautiful! I hope it will be like that! Much better than words."



Vera playing the Russian Singing Bells

Vera now has started two projects. One is the creation of a Bell of Peace for the International Zone, which Alexander Zhikharev has agreed to make. "It is much needed in the actual world situation," says Vera. The other project is more ambitious: to create a proper place in Auroville for the Russian Singing Bells, "a specially designed acoustic theatre, a Sacred Sound Space, where listeners would be immersed in harmonious and healing musical vibrations. And not only to receive passively a special musical experience, but also to get a

chance to participate in the creation of Harmony, to learn to play and be together in Harmony, with the help of these sounds that are so conducive to inner silence, meditation, contemplation and expression of deep inner feelings."

These projects are gradually developing. A fundraising campaign for the Bell of Peace has already taken off. For more information about this project and the Sacred Sound Space visit www.Russian-Singing-Bells.com

Christian Feuillette
Auroville International-Canada

NEW BOOKS

Sri Aurobindo – Selected photos

Four years after publishing a book with selected photos of the Mother, we are happy to present the companion book with pictures of Sri Aurobindo. The basic concept of both publications is the same. We aim at giving access to the depth of spiritual vibration which radiates from Sri Aurobindo's photos. We are not trying to provide a pictorial biography or satisfy intellectual curiosity. Therefore we have purposely refrained from using a chronological sequence to the pictures.

Many of Sri Aurobindo's photos, which are now being sold, have been touched up or restored from the material that was available. Sometimes the expression of Sri Aurobindo is thereby distorted and not much is left of his original aura, which is the thing we are hunting for in this book. We have avoided as much as possible to repair or improve on the old negatives that we had as the base for this book. Whenever we had several versions of an old picture, we have chosen the less altered one.

There are four categories of pictures. The "historical" pictures of Sri Aurobindo's youth in England and of his political period before his imprisonment; pictures of his prison-time in Alipore and his early stay in Pondicherry; the pictures taken by Cartier-Bresson within a period of just three days in April 1950; and pictures of his Mahasamadhi.

We had the great good fortune to receive a full set of negatives (there exist three or four such sets) of the Cartier-Bresson photographs; scanned them in Germany; and used them as one of the main materials for this publication. During his short stay in Pondicherry, Cartier-Bresson had not only taken pictures of Sri Aurobindo, but also of the daily Ashram life. Some of those pictures we have reproduced in this book, to let Sri Aurobindo appear in the context of the environment he lived in at that time.

A hint of the timeless planes in which Sri Aurobindo lived inwardly transpires from his physical expression. To capture this hint from beyond, and the message it carries, is what we are aiming at. We have had the courage to subordinate all other aspects and compose the material available in such a manner that it gives this element full freedom to manifest itself. The pictures are of a size and quality which will allow the reader to catch something of the profound impact of Sri Aurobindo's physical appearance.

Michael Bonke

Sri Aurobindo – Selected photos is published by Mitra, Auroville. Hardbound, 200 pages. Price in India approximately Rs 1900, excluding packing and mailing charges. Available from bookshops in Pondicherry and Auroville and from the Auroville online store www.auroville.com.



One Asia 2014

In 2010, the first 'ONE ASIA' event was held in Auroville. It brought together artists and tea masters from various Asian countries to explore and strengthen unity between their cultures, as well as introducing the richness of Asian cultures to Auroville. The second ONE ASIA event took place in Delhi in 2012 and the third, ONE ASIA 2014, was held recently in Taipei, Taiwan.

"Taiwan is a very special place," says Jyoti, the Aurovilian who founded and organizes the ONE ASIA project, "because it is a kind of repository of classical Chinese culture." However, from a funding point of view it brought complications. The Taiwanese Ministry of Education did help with printing costs and one of the major National Universities hosted many of the events, but the sensitive nature of Taiwan's political relationship with China meant that there was no governmental support from other Asian countries. Instead, the event was supported by individuals and organizations like the Foundation for World Education and the Auroville International centres.

The purpose of the ONE ASIA events is to express and strengthen Asian unity through bringing together dancers, artists, musicians, calligraphers and tea masters from Asia. This year they came from Taiwan, Japan, Korea, India and other countries. "One of the differences this time," says Jyoti, "is that we had a lot more workshops for the public and students of the National University. Another new aspect was the experimentation in the performing arts. For the first week the artists presented their various disciplines, but at the end we invited all the artists to work as one team in a public performance called 'An offering to Mahasaraswati'."

"This was one of the highlights of the event," says Isha, Jyoti's partner, who accompanied him to the event. "They only had a short time to rehearse for this, but people who had not known each other a few days before worked together as if they had known each other for many years. It was a fabulous show."

"When people from different traditions work together, the energy field changes and you feel you are observing something completely new being born," says Jyoti. "It is very exciting because at that moment we become one being: it is very uniting, and that is contagious."

Jyoti says it was the more significant because Japanese and Korean artists rarely work together in the field of traditional art. But are the Asian cultures really so different?

Jyoti explains that China today is a conglomerate of very different artistic cultures – the south, for example, is very different from the north – and although Korean art and religion originally had a huge influence on Japanese culture, later they diverged. "The Korean way is more emotionally expressive, more outward, in comparison to the Japanese. In Japanese traditional art, we focus very much upon silence and then through the silence something else emerges. It emerges because we contain rather than express our emotions. The Chinese influence was also very strong upon Japan, particularly during the period that we call the Golden Age, the Tang Dynasty in China. The beauty of the Tang Dynasty was that there was a kind of unity of Asian cultures at that time because there were free exchanges between nations through the Silk road. ONE ASIA very much resonates with the idealism of that time and wants to bring it to a contemporary audience."

In fact, he feels that a unification of the cultures is happening today worldwide. "However, the driving force today is mostly economic, not spiritual or cultural. Artists have a common understanding that spirituality and culture have to lead the economy and the politics, not the other way round, so we want to put politics and economics back into alignment with spirituality and our deeper cultural values.



Jyoti and Isha

Personally, I feel this is my dharma."

Does he feel that the Asian population of Auroville, which is steadily growing, is trying to perform the same task here? "Here it is somewhat different. I think that Asian people as a whole has a tendency to give a higher priority to community life, an aspect I feel is missing in the individualistic Auroville culture of today. If we don't care for each other, there will be no possibility of individual growth or of the collective evolution of consciousness. We need to give some space to others for them to experience and grow. This is why it is important that more and more people from Asia come to Auroville."

So how does he see the connection between the ONE ASIA events and Auroville?

"First of all it is a way of letting people hear about Auroville. Among 28 participating artists, five Aurovilians participated in ONE ASIA 2014 and sometimes we had deep conversations with other participants. Artists, in particular, like to hear about Auroville because they feel a resonance with what we are doing here (in fact, quite a number have visited already). Grace did a wonderful workshop and performances. Dharmesh also made a presentation to the architecture department of a university in Taiwan that was really appreciated. Now the architects office in Taipei is planning to come to Auroville to visit our architects."

At the same time, it is very good for us Aurovilians who participated to learn more about other cultures because we always bring back new perspectives."

Jyoti plans to bring ONE ASIA back to Auroville, where it started, in 2018. "One of the elements I really want to develop further is the homage 'An Offering to Mahasaraswati', not just because of its unifying effect but also because Mother gave the significance of Mahasaraswati to the International Zone. This is where I would like to hold the event."

The next ONE ASIA event may be held in Kyoto, Japan, in 2016. Jyoti has already met the Mayor, who is enthusiastic about the idea. Is Jyoti planning any changes in the format or participation? "Even though we had a sponsor from mainland China, artists from the mainland were unable to participate this time because of their schedules. Also, artists from South East Asia and West Asia were not well represented in Taiwan, so I really want to focus on including them next time. It is very important that we have as much diversity as possible because that makes the final unity much stronger."

A few months before the Taipei event, Jyoti met the famous Indian art director Rajeev Sethi in Delhi. "When he heard about the upcoming ONE ASIA event he was very happy and told me, 'You are planting the seeds of the Banyan tree. Eventually, everything will become one.' What he said made absolute sense. Through these ONE ASIA events I feel we are planting something, in our small way, not only for Asia but also for the world."

From an interview by Alan

For more information see www.oneasiaproject.org. Also the Facebook page, search "ONE ASIA project".

New location for Sri Aurobindo statue at UNESCO

Auroville International France, which has had a close relationship with the UNESCO headquarters in Paris through the years, has been collaborating to change the venue of the Sri Aurobindo statue at UNESCO. On October 21st this statue, which is similar to the Sri Aurobindo statue at Savitri Bhavan, found a prominent place overlooking the Garden of Peace, directly adjacent to the UNESCO entrance of Avenue de Suffren. The installation of the statue took place in the presence of Ms. Irina Bokova, UNESCO's Director-General, Ms. Ruchira Kamboj, Ambassador, Permanent Delegate of India in UNESCO and Dr. Karan Singh, member of the UNESCO Executive Board and chairman of the Auroville Foundation. In her speech, Ms Bokova called the placement of the statue a recognition of the immense spiritual work for humankind done by Sri Aurobindo. She mentioned that Sri Aurobindo's vision is at the origin of the Auroville project, and that his vision continues to inspire and educate the world. "He represents that which is most precious in India, as did Swami Vivekananda whose birth anniversary was celebrated last year."

Dr. Karan Singh then took the floor, retracing the life of Sri Aurobindo the philosopher, revolutionary and visionary, and suggesting that yoga be added to the 'UNESCO list of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity'. He ended his speech by reciting the beautiful 'Who' poem by Sri Aurobindo.

First Matrimandir test pond completed



Laying compacted clay slabs on a geotextile under-layer in one of the six mini test ponds at Matrimandir

In a group work that for some people was reminiscent of the Matrimandir concretings of the past, the lining of the first of the six tests ponds of the Matrimandir [see AVToday September 2014] was completed early November, just before the monsoon rains. The import of the geotextile fabric and compacted clay from Germany was delayed for about 6 weeks, as these materials were unusual for the customs inspectors and there were also political strikes and public holidays.

With threatening monsoon clouds drifting in, the unloading and laying of the ten centimeters thick clay slabs, each weighing about 80 kg, was done under the guidance of two engineers from Germany. A vibrator machine then 'kneaded' all the joints between the slabs, causing them to form a single continuous, waterproof layer of clay. The clay layer was subsequently covered by another thin geotextile layer to protect the clay from abrasion from above, and a thick layer of granite stone chips to protect it from burrowing crabs. One hour after finishing, the Auroville area was gifted with a tremendous downpour of rain, the first of the winter monsoon season.

Code of conduct

The Auroville Council announced that attempts to create a 'Code of conduct and eligibility criteria' for members of working groups has failed due to limited community participation and widely diverging opinions on the topic. The Code was expected to deal with issues such as people involved with acting against the ideals of Auroville, acts against protection of Auroville land, violence and violations against person(s) and property, and it would also address the issues of required skills to be eligible.

The Auroville Council has stopped the process, as it feels that "some fundamental questions need to be asked and answered by us as a collective, including the need and implementation strategy of such a document" before the next attempt can be made.

Land Board

The Governing Board, in its meeting of August 2014, decided on the merger of all land related working groups, such as the Land and Estate Management group, the Land Resource Management Group, the Land Consolidation Committee and the Land Development Group, into one overarching Land Board of seven persons. It directed the

Residents' Assembly to constitute that Board. Five resource persons were chosen: 2 by the Auroville Council, 2 by the Funds and Assets Management Committee and 1 by the Town Development Council, to select the members for the new Board. Its selection of five people was discussed in a turbulent General Meeting of November 3rd. Subsequently, two more members were selected.

Working Committee selection

On October 27th, the Residents' Assembly passed a revised Participatory Working Group proposal and a three-day selection process for the new Working Committee members with 291 people voting in favour, 133 people against and 25 abstentions. This proposal stated that the seven Working Committee members, also called 'coordinators', would be assisted by a pool of voluntary persons to support their functioning and efficiency as well as to foster transparency. Facilitators would help facilitate subgroups created to deal with specific topics; resource persons would offer their expertise and experience on specific topics as needed; and silent listeners would silently observe the ongoing process of the working group.

The Auroville Council subsequently decided to call for nominations for the seven members of the Working Committee and two Auroville Council replacement members only. All Aurovilians were invited to nominate up to five community members, whom they felt are competent for this work. Self-nominations were allowed. This resulted in 250 Aurovilians nominating 391 Aurovilians. Of these, 49 Aurovilians accepted to become a member and 45 offered to support the Selection Process.

Aurovilians were then invited to send positive or negative feedback on the names proposed "with sincerity and deep introspection". This feedback was then to be studied by a 'Temporary Feedback Review Committee'.

In all, the 'Review Committee' received 600 electronic feedbacks and 41 confidential feedbacks from 125 Aurovilians. Out of this total of 641 feedbacks, 407 were supportive of individuals who had put themselves forward, 224 expressed concerns, 8 gave no reason and 2 were annulled. The Feedback Review Committee will process the feedback and publish the names of those who will participate in a three-day selection process, to be held from 5 - 7 December, 2014 in the Unity Pavilion.

Housing issues

The Housing Service and the Housing Board have concluded that as at present there are no funds available for housing for Aurovilians without financial means, it is not possible to accept any more new Aurovilians without them having the minimum funds for housing. The Housing Board has created seven options as solutions for permanent housing. These seven options are (1) booking a house or apartment in a housing project under construction; (2) becoming the steward of an existing house through transfer; (3) sharing co-stewardship with another Aurovillian; (4) living in a staff quarter with a commitment to work there for a minimum of 5 years; (5a) building a house in a place where it is possible with community agreement (even temporarily); (5b) building in Auroville communities outside the City area; (5c) building in the Greenbelt with permission; (6) donating Rs 3 lakhs, refundable for future housing options; and (7) having long-term, like a 5-year house-sitting, agreement. An exception can only be made for a few very special cases such as for young Newcomers with certain skills (like teachers or nurses), or thanks to fundraising efforts by the Auroville International centers.

House steward's absence

The Auroville Housing Policy stipulates that if a house steward has left Auroville for longer than 5 years, the stewardship lapses and the asset returns to the community, to be re-allocated by the Housing Service. The Housing Service has experienced, however, that it is almost impossible to ask the steward to release the stewardship even after 5, 8 or 10 years, even when the people have not lived during these years in Auroville or have just come for a few months a year. "There is a lot of pressure from friends and the stewards, and for this reason the relocation of these assets has simply been almost impossible in the last years," writes the Housing Service. The Housing Service now proposes to change the Housing Policy in two ways. Those who will leave Auroville for good can be offered a repatriation payment. And those who leave temporarily can either give their house for temporary occupation by a Newcomer, in coordination with the Housing Service; or transfer their house permanently while the counter value would be deposited with Auroville to be used for acquiring a house in Auroville later. The proposals are still under discussion.

Firewood shortage

Due to the weather and the fact that the wood stocks from Cyclone Thane are slowly decreasing, there is not enough dry firewood available for various Auroville units like the Bakery, Tanto Pizzeria and the Visitors Centre. The Forest Group, committed to provide this much needed resource to Auroville units on a priority basis, is facing the

problem that due to price differences some stewards prefer selling wood outside Auroville. The Forest Group decided to find a more unified and organized way which still allows the stewards to generate some income while providing the Auroville units with the much needed wood at a reasonable rate.

International Zone developments

In a meeting between members of the International Zone Coordination Team and L'Avenir / Town Development Council, it has been agreed that the Coordination Team prepare a number of applications for approval such as the loop road, the fencing, an urban design plan and a preliminary study for a Detailed Development Plan. The International Zone Coordination Team is an open group of interested Aurovilians, presently consisting of 22 members, who meet on a weekly basis and who work in different subgroups such as development, security, communication and financial accounts.

Auroville International The Netherlands

Auroville International The Netherlands reported that its Facebook page is frequently visited, particularly its Trend Watching posting, which contains a report by two Dutch students of the Fontys Academy for Creative Industries ('International Lifestyle Studies') who are doing a research project in Auroville. The Centre has also been instrumental in guiding a study tour of eight educationists from the Netherlands through India, exploring various educational institutions in New Delhi, Pondicherry and Auroville, to find out what they can learn from India in the field of education, with a special interest in Integral Education. The Centre has also secured funding for a Sunlit Future project to bring a reliable source of non-conventional power to the remote village of Basgo in the Leh district of Jammu and Kashmir, 13,000 feet above sea level, by harnessing the power of the sun.

Mosquito control

There are two types of mosquitoes in Auroville. There is the large slow *Armigeres*, which breeds in septic tanks and grey water. Then there is the zippy little striped one, *Aedes*, which transmits dengue, chikungunya, and filaria. A team from the Vector Control Research Centre in Pondicherry has visited Auroville to teach how to prevent mosquitoes breeding. It was observed that bats do a phenomenal job of keeping mosquito numbers down.

Korean evening



On November 27, the Korean Pavilion team organized a Korean evening. It included a Korean new wave music performance by the group Noreum Machi, which visited India to celebrate the opening of the Consulate General of the Republic of South Korea in Chennai. Spectacular percussion, haunting shamanistic chants, and enchanting dances mesmerized an enthusiastic audience.

Deficient monsoon so far

This year's rainfall stands at around 1180 mm as against the yearly average of 1299 mm.

Enforcement of Food Safety Regulations

Auroville Food Units have been warned that the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has stepped up enforcement measures. All Auroville food processing units have been advised to maintain the highest level of conformity to food safety regulations.

Passing

On Sunday 23rd November, Poongavanam, the mother of Shivagami, Rajaveni, Mani and Shiva, left her body at her house in Kulapalayam at the age of 75. Poongavanam is remembered as a fine, strong person who has worked in various Auroville communities. Her body was cremated at the Kulapalayam burial ground in the afternoon of the same day with many people attending.

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