

The second paragraph of the Charter of Auroville states that “Auroville will be a place of unending education, of constant progress and a youth that never ages.”

For a better understanding of this paragraph of the Charter, we publish in this issue excerpts of the 901 page framework study ‘Governance in Auroville’, made by Prof. Raag Yadava and Nidhi Harohar, which contains an 67-page section on education and research. (The study can be downloaded from <https://rb.gy/gd4qyb>)

We also publish an interview with Dr. Sanjeev Ranganathan, an executive of the SAIER; a report on two integral education training programmes for all teachers held in October and November; and a progress report on the ‘Sea Change’ programme of Auroville’s unit WasteLess, which was launched in 200 selected Tamil Nadu Government Schools. We also profile Martha Ciconesi, who came to live in Auroville in 1968 and experienced the time and the pains when the Auroville schools stopped. Lastly, we profile Induja, a young Tamil woman who speaks about growing up in a small village in Tamil Nadu, studying architecture in Chennai, later ‘joining the Auroville family’ and now aspiring to study Environmental Conservation in the USA.

In 2000, while I was still living in the US, I conducted a conference in Chengalpattu, Tamil Nadu for 120 NGO partners of Asha for Education to learn from each other. Teachers from Auroville’s Isai Ambalam school came and presented alternative education methodologies. They didn’t talk about Sri Aurobindo and the Mother’s philosophy as such, but simply about their fascinating work with children.

The implicit philosophy

At Isai Ambalam, they had worked on many techniques, such as the Glenn Doman flash card method (where children are introduced to words even before they are introduced to letters). [See AV Today 270, January 2012] The scientific basis for the idea is that enormous implicit learning is possible at a young age. And, of course, in Sri Aurobindo’s and in Indian philosophy, it is also the intuitive part of the mind that is being exercised, not the mental or vital part. It’s a very subtle method, although it looks like you’re just showing flashcards. Another example had been adapted from the Learning Ladder method developed at Rishi Valley that allowed children to freely progress at their own pace through different activities around a theme, like art, reading, songs or group games.

The invitation was for people to come to Auroville in order to learn and practise these methods. So my introduction to Auroville education was the idea of centres for excellence, places that had done something well, where people could come, learn and then go back and apply the learning in their own domains. We continue to have diverse creative approaches to education in Auroville, with a number of individuals or groups doing exceptional work, though often in silos.

From mathematics to self-awareness

When I moved to Auroville, I decided to focus on mathematics because I had observed that many children hated it. I felt if I could transform that hate into enjoyment and love, then we would be working, in a way, on the yoga of transformation. Children usually learn mathematics as independent topics and don’t connect the dots. When

they are able to make connections, they understand that the different topics are the same thing seen from different vantage points. This grows the sense of having a perspective and of abstraction, which is also the basis for self-awareness and self-observation. We want children to be self-aware and to observe themselves, and we can help them learn how to do this through our approach to mathematics.

It is much easier for children to describe what happened and what they did, rather than share what they learned through the activity, and even harder to reflect on what they learned about themselves through the activity. Our goal in the educational initiatives is to support children to learn to use the mind in a more grounded way; not simply to think about many things, but actually to still the mind and to be able to look at one thing and themselves from different perspectives.

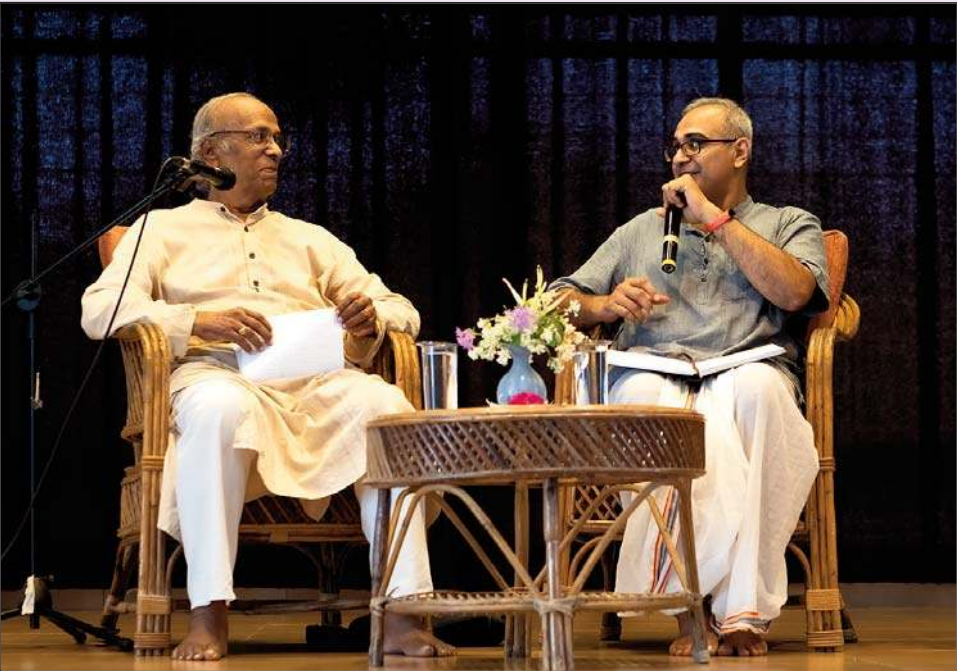
“The quality of a school in Auroville is actually decided by the quality of its engagement with Auroville. How can we create more internships and bridges where children can actively learn from units and organisations which have very good practitioners?”

Tools for deepening self-awareness

This is also something I do with the children and youth as a Radical Transformation Leadership (RTL) practitioner coach. We all engage with these practices together to reflect on self. RTL provides tools and templates that allow us to work on three aspects: who I am, how I think and what I do. Who I am is what I deeply care about, and what universal value I stand for (at my best). For me, those values are self-awareness and equanimity: equanimity being the ability to stay still in the vicissitudes of life. The second aspect is honing my critical thinking or ‘pattern mind’, which is my ability to see the culture or system and what shifts may be needed to align these with what I deeply care about. The third aspect is what I do – my everyday actions. When all three aspects are in alignment, we call it a conscious full spectrum response. My response – not my reaction – is conscious, and it is

Designing an education for humanity

Dr. Sanjeev Ranganathan has been an executive of the Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research (SAIER) since August 2021 and was a SAIER board member from 2016 to 2020. In his ten years living in Auroville, he has initiated a series of educational programmes closely linked with technology: first STEM Land in 2015; then the one-year Shifu training programme for local youth in 2021; and most recently the Mathegramming Academy where children learn mathematics visually through programming. He is the executive of the Isai Ambalam outreach school. He serves as Principal of the Auroville Institute of Applied Technology which has initiated a B.Voc. (Bachelor of Vocation) in partnership with Pondicherry University. He also runs C3STREAM Land Designs, a commercial unit providing rural youth with an opportunity to ‘learn, grow, work and teach’. He first began teaching in 1998 as a masters student at IIT Madras and volunteered with Asha for Education (NGO supporting underprivileged children in India) for 13 years in the US and in Bangalore. Through Asha he interacted extensively with alternative education networks in India. Here he shares his observations and experience of learning and education in and around Auroville, and how he feels these can be generalised in relation to Integral Education.



Dr. Sanjeev Ranganathan (right) in discussion with Dr. Ananda Reddy during the recent Integral Education Practitioner Gatherings

addressing all three aspects. Different people have their own different practices from integral yoga for working on themselves. I am also a Vipassana practitioner. RTL assumes you’ve worked on yourself and offers you ways to reflect on how you’ve grown through that.

RTL and Integral Education

I was introduced to RTL through the Stewardship for a New Emergence programme offered in Auroville by Dr. Monica Sharma, a former UN Programme Director. In the very first session, we talked about what we very deeply cared about, the value that I embodied at my best and designing from a space of universal values. Being in touch with who I deeply am – what we call the psychic being – and letting it manifest in action and design from inside out is very much in line with Integral Education. It is not top down or bottom up.

It’s inside out.

With RTL, we also look at socialised fears that limit us. My first fear was not being in control. I had a very structured classroom with a lot of rigour but no interaction among the children. But what did I deeply care about? Self-awareness. And how was developing self-awareness even possible if children did not interact with others?

As I let go of each of these fears and my ego, I create a structure that is more in line with who I am. Then the classroom becomes more interactive; we work with each other, we do projects together. In a very small way, it’s a transformation simply based on the fact that I notice what’s important for me is not just that children learn how to add fractions, but that they grow, which means they have spaces to engage and reflect with their whole being.

RTL for teams

RTL is not just a personal leadership tool; it’s a team building tool, and all of my teams do it because it allows us to have a common language and find alignment with common goals. Each of us has our *sadhana*, our personal practice. Many techniques and methods are available at a personal level, but we don’t quite know how to bring these into how we work with teams. We are

human; ego creeps in and the growth of the individual doesn’t translate into growth for the organisation. RTL offers team building tools that allow us to pause to see if there is a gap between where we are and what we would like to be.

One of the tools is called ‘breakdown to breakthrough’. It’s a senior practice (building on many other tools) that allows the entire team to be brought together, declare a breakdown and design a breakthrough. When it’s done well, it creates a space like STEM Land, the learning space we opened at Udavi school in 2015 [see AV Today 317, December 2015].

In schools, what similar processes can we have in place that create alignment and allow for new initiatives to flourish? This would allow schools to keep evolving and progressing and not be so dependent on the ups and downs of specific people joining or leaving.

Assessing our progress

Auroville has about 30 diverse educational initiatives with children and youth. Most people, even those who work in education, are not aware of all of them. Each school or initiative has a slightly different understanding of Integral Education, which reflects in their structure and practice. There are individuals of a certain excellence and groups that have done some things very well. Each school also has their area where they feel they have progressed in some way. Lately we’ve been having conversations about how to meaningfully assess ourselves in a way that reflects Integral Education and which could also help us progress. We have worked out one such rubric and the Auroville schools have used it for self-assessment.

A hub for Integral Education?

I had already been working in education for years when I came to Auroville, but I didn’t know much about Sri Aurobindo and The Mother. I just knew there was something valuable here and I was open to learning. I believe many people come to Auroville like this. Once they come, we should be able to have a conversation about the fact that education is not meant to help children fit in, or even to stand out; it’s to actually discover who each of us really is. A soul-centered education.

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Designing an education for humanity

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But we would need to deepen and broaden our own learning (and concurrently document this as research) if we aspire to create an environment where other people could come, learn, interact and engage.

I mentioned earlier the Rishi Valley Learning Ladder which Isai Ambalam school teachers recreated in Tamil and made relevant for Tamil Nadu. This was noticed by some State Government officials who then asked government schools to send teachers to Isai Ambalam for training. The room where we are sitting was built in 2005 for teachers to come, stay and learn. From 2005 to 2009, 300 groups of teachers came to learn.

That is how the Activity-Based Learning (ABL) system became the common standard across Tamil Nadu.

To create and nourish an Integral Education classroom, school and ecosystem is challenging. As practitioners, we tend to be so busy with day-to-day activities that it is hard to take time for inputs other than through peer learning or informal conversations. Our awareness of what's happening beyond our own schools is often limited. We don't get together frequently enough to learn from each other. The recent Integral Education Practitioner

Gatherings were one step in this direction [see the report on the *Aspiration – Synergy – Practice workshop below*].

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's philosophy of Integral Yoga and Integral Education is the basis of our work. If we don't work on understanding this philosophy explicitly in schools, we may end up practising child-centred education rather than soul-centred education. With young children the learning is implicit. But as they grow up, if we don't engage in conversations of why we do things the way we do, we may not be engaging them in their own education as intelligent beings. Our role is also to stimulate the interesting existential questions that are already in children and youth to allow for such explicit exploration.

Organisational partnerships

We do have pockets of excellence, but we need to find multiple ways to come together more often, not just for training and sharing, but also working with each other. STEM Land, for example, works closely with Isai Ambalam and Udavi schools; Yuvabe works with Deepanam [see *AV Today 401, December 2022*]. These connections between education and practice (in this case, commercial units) are needed. Partnerships are needed. The quality of a school in Auroville is actually decided by the

quality of its engagement with Auroville. How can we create more internships and bridges where children can actively learn from units and organisations which have very good practitioners? How can we make the partnerships systematic and organisational rather than only through personal contacts, and how can this work be documented?

Higher education

We also need to have a higher education that is in line with what we believe in. We create a beautiful environment of integrality when children study in our schools and then many go into an entirely different system which they cannot connect with. I think the first opportunity Auroville has had to explore what we care about post schooling is the three-year B.Voc. degree in affiliation with Pondicherry University.

We have designed three curricula, which have been approved by the University's Board of Studies: green energy and electric systems; production technologies; and software development and machine learning. The course design builds on our experience from Becoming and Being a Shifu (Master), the one-year programme initiated through C3STREAM Land Designs [see *AV Today 388, November 2021*]. The B.Voc. develops both practical skills and the integral personality, including

leadership, integral yoga, etc. We have started first with the software development and machine learning programme. Last year we had two students, this year we have 15 students and I hope this will grow. It is enriching for me to see the children who studied with me at Udavi, Isai Ambalam and Last school in this programme this year.

On synthesis

Of late, there have been many polarising conversations in Auroville. Our role as Integral Education practitioners is to transcend polarisation and create synthesis. Subhash (who was then the coordinator of Isai Ambalam School) used to say to me, 'Anything we do well with sincerity in Auroville has an occult effect. It will spread everywhere.' We are supposed to have every problem of the world, and when we tackle it, we believe it will express itself in the rest of the world. Isn't that an amazing thought to work with?

We should give an opportunity for all the goodwill around Auroville to come out. Do we create those opportunities as schools? If we realise that our role is not only for the children here, but for humanity as a whole, then we will find ways to make those links. We will then look at our work a little differently.

In conversation with Gita

EDUCATION WORKSHOP

Aspiration – Synergy – Practice



Teachers take part in a systems thinking game

Approximately 300 Auroville teachers working in schools and other educational initiatives under the SAIER umbrella participated in at least one of two Integral Education Practitioner Gatherings held from October 4th – 6th and again from November 3rd – 5th. Having been requested by the Foundation Office to put together an Integral Education training programme for all teachers, SAIER invited the lead individuals from all educational units to take part in designing “a gathering for practitioners to come together to share and learn”. A core group formed to organise the gatherings around aspiration, synergy and practice. The intention was for each participant to be able to deepen their aspiration about Integral Education and their understanding of it, feel a synergy with a community of practitioners, and to take something back for their respective practices to their classrooms and schools.

Although the daily format was meant to start with early morning yoga sessions, these were cancelled for the gathering in November due to rain. Each day, therefore, began with a plenary talk meant to offer inspiration. Over the course of the two gatherings, participants heard from a series of individuals who have explored Integral Education in depth in Auroville or at the Ashram: Dr. Alok Pandey, Jean Yves Lung in conversation with Lopa Mukherjee, Dr. Ananda Reddy, Shivakumar and Deepti Tewari. Participants then split into small study groups to read passages by The Mother and Sri Aurobindo on Integral Education. There was space to share and discuss participants' own relevant experiences and practices. Afternoons were spent in a wide range of small group activities and interactions, featuring various forms of art, music, movement and more. On the last day, the participants offered their own activities. Many participants found the choice of activities at both gatherings interesting and worthwhile, but it was felt that the sessions were too short to achieve any real depth.

The gatherings featured a team building and system thinking game to mixed reviews, and both wrapped up with feedback and reflection on next steps. Overall, the gatherings were felt to be well organised, even though many participants felt they were running a three-day marathon.

Sanjeev Ranganathan elaborated on the experience. “It wasn't teacher training. We were all practitioners getting together to learn from each other. None of us knows it all, but everyone may have experienced something that someone else has not experienced. We wanted teachers to experience a systems perspective, to think about the culture and environment they are creating in the classroom, in their team, and within the larger community of Integral Education practitioners.

“I think there was definitely a deepening of our understanding about the four aspects of physical, vital, mental and psychic; being able to distinguish between what comes from the physical and what comes from the vital; and how to address these in line with Integral Education. We were able to reflect on our classroom practices and the challenges we face and how we have or will address them. For example, many of the outreach school teachers were looking at the challenges of covering an exam syllabus with Integral Education.

“People appreciated the space, the coming together. We added strength to each other. And we had fun.”

Gita



Reflection and feedback session

OUTREACH EDUCATION

Wasteless's “Sea Change” progress

In February this year [issue # 403], Auroville Today reported about the *WasteLess's* ‘Sea Change’ programme which was launched in 200 selected Tamil Nadu Government Schools and reached over 13,500 students between the age of 10 and 13 years. Also the first batch of Auroville students in Transition School started the innovative curriculum. The five-lesson tool kit, which is filled with information, experiments, interactive games and a concluding ‘Sea Change’ Celebration, educates children about marine plastic pollution, so that they can become conscious protectors of our oceans.

The ‘Sea Change’ programme, which is supported by the National Geographic Society, was presented by *WasteLess* co-founder and National Geographic Explorer, Ribhu Vohra, at the annual NatGeo Explorer Festival in Washington DC, USA in July this year. Editors from National Geographic Learning are now working with *WasteLess* to integrate key aspects of ‘Sea Change’ into “Impact”, one of the National



Geographic's “English as second language” textbooks. This collaboration will give *WasteLess's* work a tremendous reach all over the globe.

WasteLess is now looking at releasing its impact study on measuring changes in attitude and behaviour as well as gained knowledge of ‘Sea Change’ students. This will allow sharing the programme across India later next year, as the curriculum is available in Tamil, Hindi and English. To reach this goal *WasteLess* have teamed up with Auroville International USA for their yearly matching Fundraiser in December to raise the \$7,500 needed to successfully complete the project. To participate visit www.wastelessindia.org or head to the AVI USA December Fundraiser at www.aviusa.org.

Luise

Photo left: Empowered and educated students during the Sea Change Celebration in Valavanur West, Villupuram district.

Education and Research: excerpts from a framework study

The study gives a central place to Mother’s vision for Auroville as a centre for research and study. It places education and research as an embedded field of activity across all sectors of Auroville. This “imagines a living and vibrant public culture of seeking and research, backed by a strong material infrastructure, a complex web of tangibles and intangibles that can together generate fertile ground for the individual and collective yoga. A brotherhood aspiring for the descent of Knowledge – the ‘greatest sweat of knowledge upon Earth’. Few collectives come with this constitutional imprint, none at a city–scale or dedicated to the synthetic and terrestrial vision of the Integral Yoga. In the words of The Mother, ‘the creation of a city like Auroville has more weight in the earth’s history than all the groups of the world’.”

The early years

The study gives a thematic summary of developments, starting with the early years when the land to build Auroville was being acquired in parcels and was not yet consolidated. Consequently, “schools and Aurovilians were scattered across varied places between Pondicherry and in early communities such as Aspiration” and there was “a healthy exchange between the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and the early education experiments in Auroville”. But with Mother’s passing, and rising tensions with the Sri Aurobindo Society, this collaborative model was disrupted. Simultaneously, the early years also witnessed a significant thrust in educational activities for the ‘first citizens of Auroville’ i.e., for people in the surrounding villages, notably in Morattandi and Edayanchavadi.

Consolidation post 1984

The situation changed after the 1980 ‘temporary takeover’, leading in 1988 to the Auroville Foundation Act. “The new administrative setup introduced a much-needed channel of funds and an opportunity to consolidate early educational activities into an institutional structure and government grants began to be released under the ‘Auroville Development Scheme’ (1985- 1999). Education emerged as a priority sector for the national government at the time, as the then Prime Minister sought to set up a Central University in the memory of Sri Aurobindo in Pondicherry. Following this, on the proposal by the then Chairman of the Auroville Foundation Professor Joshi, the Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Education Research (‘SAIIER’) was founded in Auroville in 1984. SAIIER was envisioned as an umbrella organization to coordinate and support capacity building and educational and research experiments being undertaken by existing and emerging schools in Auroville and nearby villages. Government aid thus began to flow into SAIIER under the national ‘Scheme of Assistance to the Institutions of Higher Learning of All India Importance’, beginning 1984 through 2002.”

The Pande Visiting Committee

Yadava’s study then extensively reports on the visit and report of the Visiting Committee, led by Professor Pande in 2002, to evaluate a detailed Plan Grant (funding) proposal of SAIIER, submitted to the Department of Higher Education, Government of India. “This Plan Grant Proposal and the Visiting Committee’s Report merit attention, as they represent a comprehensive action plan for Auroville’s education sector,” writes Yadava.

The Plan Grant Proposal envisaged the development of seven Research Faculties: a Faculty of Education for Human Unity, a Faculty of Studies in Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, a Faculty of East, West and Human Unity, a Faculty of Indian Culture and Human Unity, a Faculty of Humanity, Nature and Development, a Faculty of Perfection of Human Body and a Faculty of Arts, Crafts and Technology. A substantial budget outlay of Rs. 29.26 crores was proposed for these faculties, indicating a major push to develop a research infrastructure. The report quotes General Chatterjee, the then-head of SAIIER, in relation to SAIIER’s plans to ‘grow into a world-class institute’, detailing ‘how the entire setting of Auroville provides a fitting environment and also the required personnel in the form of researchers, educationists, thinkers, philosophers, scientists, sociologists and specialists.’ The proposal also included the development of an ‘Apex Body’, the Centre of International Research in Human Unity (‘CIHRU’), which

In the October 2023 issue of *Auroville Today* [# 411] we highlighted the 901-page framework study ‘Governance in Auroville’ of Professor Raag Yadava and his associate Nidhi Harihar. The study is divided into five parts: Part I titled “The Vision and Challenge”, discusses Auroville’s foundational principles. Part 2, “The Vision of the City”, describes Mother’s quartet-city sketch and city concept, the features of the Galaxy, the urban question and the problems of townplanning, known as ‘the elephants in the room’. Part 3, “A Sectoral Overview,” details issues of seven specific sectors: urban planning and infrastructure development, land acquisition, regional and outreach planning, housing, education and research, economy and commerce, and agriculture. Part 4, “Governance Reform”, provides insights into Mother’s ideals for Auroville’s governance, and contains proposals for the restructuring of the Residents’ Assembly and the reform of the Working Groups. Part 5 of the study has an interpretive scheme of the Auroville Foundation Act, 1988. Here we publish a few excerpts from the 67-page study on the Education and Research sector. Given the constraints of space, it was not possible to mention the study’s often extensive recommendations on inter-school linkages; teacher trainings; strengthening planning, peer-review and data collection; and the development of a tertiary educational sector so as to make Auroville a living ‘univer-city’ as envisaged by The Mother.

would “aim at convergence for researchers within SAIIER and around the world who are engaged in the theme of human unity.” Yadava’s study includes a detailed description of the work of each faculty and its expected output.

The Plan Grant Proposal also suggested an embedded educational setup, with schools integrated in the various sectors of work in the city, which is “an important ideal for Auroville to experiment and develop today, both to translate Mother’s vision of unending education into institutional form and to leverage the city- environment that is uniquely suited to anchor such a model.”

Another aspect of the Plan Grant Proposal was SAIIER’s aim to make ‘a major contribution to the world of education’, with an ‘experimental syllabus with regard to value-oriented education that can be adapted in any school programme.’ Auroville would lead curriculum development for teacher training and value-oriented education to service the educational needs of India. The Plan Grant Proposal included a draft curriculum for ‘Value-Oriented Education (Class I to XII)’, a draft curriculum for a ‘Bachelor of Arts in Applied Philosophy’, and a draft curriculum for ‘Value-Oriented Education Under the Teacher Training Programme’. The Report of the Visiting Committee noted that SAIIER’s envisaged programme for publications would benefit the country with a very rich treasure of resource materials “from which new kinds of books will be made available to millions of students and teachers of the country”.

Government of India funding

On the lines of the Plan Grant proposal and the Visiting Committee’s report, substantial funding was approved by the Central Government. However, writes Yadava, “records indicate that most work-streams identified in the Plan Grant Proposal were not systematically developed, indicating accountability concerns: the seven research faculties were not organized along the lines proposed (and are, as of today, not in operation); curriculum development, publication of learning materials and development of teacher training programmes for broader use in India were not finalized; the stress on publication was met with limited success; and plans for CIHRU or the multi-disciplinary research framework too did not materialize”.

Moreover, if expenditure till 2007 was equally spread between research, infrastructure development and teaching maintenances, subsequent years show a general decrease in research and infrastructure development spending. Post 2012, it appears that no development plans for the education sector were drafted, as government grants continue to flow in based on previous recommendations. Yadava concludes that the evolution of education planning in Auroville since 1984 reveals several challenges in relation to (i) the planning process (the nature and extent of consultations), (ii) implementation (improving the quality of human resources through capacity building and clear delegation of executive powers), (iii) a robust monitoring/review mechanism to assess progress vis-à-vis plan deliverables and (iv) the financial sustainability of running educational programmes in Auroville without reliance on government funds for recurring expenditure.

The study then describes the consequences of the infusion of government funds into Auroville. “The plans of the Auroville Development Scheme 1988-1995, and of SAIIER’s five-year plans 1997-2002, 2002-2007 and 2007-2012 exhibited a two-fold focus: (i) building and strengthening pedagogy (along four areas viz. a new education (teacher-pupil relations, methods of assessment etc.), developing learning materials

and a new syllabus, furthering research and promoting outreach) and (ii) infrastructure development (construction and upgradation of school campuses).” But an analysis of successive educational budgets also reveals an over-dependence on foreign donations and government grants (both Plan and non-Plan grants). “This dependence on government grants, given the limited surplus available from income-generating units, persists till date, with institutional risks tied to external funding,” writes Yadava.

Snapshot of the educational sector today

Nonetheless, while planned development is lagging (as in city-planning), the expansion and work of the educational sector continued through individual enterprise, with notable initiatives and work. As of the last available SAIIER Annual Report, the educational landscape in Auroville comprises 42 sub-units, including eight Auroville schools under the umbrella of the School Board, and six Outreach schools, six units or centres of research and a Teacher’s Centre for capacity building. The study does not contain observations on the qualitative aspects of schooling in Auroville – the pedagogical approaches and practices, particularly in relation to the five essays in Mother’s *On Education*, which is outside of its purview, but mentions that, “in general, the reflections of individual teachers across schools, reflected in the SAIIER Annual Reports demonstrate the dedication and of those involved in this sector and the vibrancy of the sector.” After describing eleven ongoing experiments, the report details a systemic concern, that the translation of these practices into documented research – that allows both critical evaluation and assistance to other setups in the country – is a challenge. “A more thorough study of the five layers of Mother’s ‘*On Education*’ and Sri Aurobindo’s ‘*three principles*’ in relation to schooling practices, conducted variably by individual schools over the years and begun more systematically SAIIER in its May, 2023 consultations with Auroville schools, presents an avenue to document, discuss and evaluate teaching practices across schools. This could serve as a pathway to a common pedagogical research handbook – an Auroville Schooling Handbook – and a curricular framework that may be offered to schools outside Auroville, as was originally proposed to the 2001 Visiting Committee.”

Retaining youth and certification

The study lists a number of challenges of Auroville’s education. A major one is retaining youth and certification. The absence of certification has led youth to the option of either pursuing higher education outside of Auroville or of staying back in Auroville to learn ‘on the job’ through apprenticeships in domains of interest. The study notes a preference for the first option, where it observes a significant rate of drop-out between primary level and high school, with the rate of the drop-outs for Tamil and Indian children appearing to be higher. “There is a trend of children dropping out post Transition School and choosing to either enroll in an Indian / foreign school board accredited school (CBSE/IGCSE/IB).”

The study argues, after an in-depth study of Mother’s comments on the topic, that She was not objecting to certification per se. “Mother’s concern is with a ‘utilitarian’ system of education that ties itself solely to monetary success or employment, one that does not value learning and the development of the learner’s faculties for their own sake.” The Mother, in a conversation of 17 July 1960, made it clear that those for whom the only thing that matters is to prepare themselves and learn how to earn money, are out of

place at the Centre of Education of the Ashram. The study proposes that, in line with a globally developed body of literature on this subject, Auroville develops a *sui generis* certification system (an ‘Auroville School Certification and Accreditation’ system) that caters to the core tenets of the free progress method whilst validating ability and providing students the necessary support to enter professional fields of study outside Auroville if they so wish.

Research

Another challenge is the absence of sufficient educational research. The study notes that over the years twenty books of independent research have been published. But research is ad-hoc, lacking systematic research programmes, clusters or faculties that can absorb researchers. SAIIER’s policy for research grant allocation (in terms of supported areas, disciplines, outcome / impact etc.) is not clear, and there is no generally defined research agenda / medium or long-term research development plan across disciplines. The study also observes a lack of fellowship / funding opportunities to invite external researchers.

This concern was identified at the 2015 Retreat, where a ‘milestone’ to ‘transform SAIIER into a research organization’ by 2016 was planned. This has not happened. “From interviews, it seems that human resource constraints and the multiple roles played by teachers (as administrators and mentors) spare little time for dedicated research. As a result, there is a conspicuous absence of peer-reviewed research studies, of the kind published in leading national and international journals, whereby educational experiments in Auroville can speak to emerging developments elsewhere.” The report stresses the need for encouraging teachers and educationists to translate their experiments into writing and publish the research in order to generate well-documented knowledge from the on-ground experiences of working with children; contribute to the growth of knowledge and practice by eliciting feedback and learnings from other practitioners in the field; allow Auroville to concretise learnings over the years and generate a body of pedagogical knowledge that can sustain institutional memory; and put Auroville’s unique experiments ‘on the map’, which will aid in drawing aligned researchers and practitioners to Auroville to bolster efforts to increase population numbers. “In this context, Auroville may consider housing a peer-reviewed educational / pedagogical research journal, plugging a gap in India’s research landscape in general, with a yearly conclave – the Auroville Educational Research Conference – as a focal point for researchers from across the world, and reviving the publication of *Ritam*.”

Curricular Integration

The third challenge is the integration of Auroville’s founding ideals, history and philosophy, and current civic issues (in terms of urban planning, manifestation of the Galaxy, environmental conservation, outreach etc.) into the school curriculum, to enable healthy debate and informed opinions, to develop a cultural ethic that allows the next generation to effectively participate in city-building. This is particularly important because Auroville youth in most cases have not made a conscious decision to be here, unlike their parents, and may have a limited experience of life elsewhere which can serve as a model for comparison or choice. An understanding of Auroville’s founding rationale is thus necessary to allow the youth to evaluate matters objectively outside the usual frames of reference they may be accustomed to. This would require innovative curriculum development, with immersive participation and regular dialogue with those involved in each sector. The practice of integrating Auroville units within the curriculum may be considered, whether through service weeks, externships / apprenticeships with units, part-time faculty drawn from units etc., to develop a system of embedded learning, in line with The Mother’s ideals.

The first and last marker of research and education in Auroville, its *raison d’être*, is knowledge sought on the inner journey through spiritual practice, a progressively expanding experiential identification with the Divine in the vast, complex and ineffable inner terrains.”

Auroville needs the world

Having arrived in Auroville as a child with her parents in 1968, Marta provides a unique perspective as a member of the first generation of children within our community. She later made Sweden her home, having lived and worked there with her partner since 1985.

Through my work with visual arts within theatre and set design in Sweden since 1987, I've met a lot of people who do creative things, but I've also been able to work individually by taking on projects that allow me to strive for what I'm searching for. We're working with contemporary dancers and forms of performing arts that are striving for a critical point of view on society and are also pursuing expression and beauty at the same time. It's an interesting field in which one searches for something without really knowing what will emerge.

Theatre is a dynamic and intriguing realm. Over the years, the focal points have shifted every two or three years, reflecting societal trends, although themes like feminism have long been woven into the fabric of theatre, followed by emphases on ecology and multiculturalism.

Work is an all-pervasive process to me. My colleagues within the theatre sometimes ask me why I never take breaks and stop working, and I tell them that I stop only when the project is completed. It's like a cultural attitude that I took from the early days of Auroville. One sets the goal as close as possible to the vision, not to the limits of the ground reality. And this is timelessly applicable. It's like the pioneering spirit of Auroville is alive and active in your daily life.

My family moved to Auroville in 1968. We didn't make it to the Inauguration, but arrived a few days later. I turned five that year. We had sent our photos to The Mother and got accepted. When we arrived we moved to Promesse, because at that time there was no other place to live in Auroville, but already a lot of interesting things had started happening and we were put into many learning circles.

I remember there being really very creative people around and an extreme sense of dedication and responsibility and joy. There was a strong sense of limitless possibilities, even though the limitations were very obvious. For everything had to be reimagined from scratch.

In other words, there were extreme limitations from without – yet no limitations from within. It's something I have carried with me afterwards in everything I do. We learned that if you want things to happen, you just have to make them happen yourself.

At that time, all the kids of Auroville were working at the Matrimandir and participating in the concretings at night. There was nobody telling us it's dangerous. We were all part of the big collectivity and the big movement, and there was this enormous trust and faith that everybody was doing the best they could.

In Promesse we were almost living in Morattandi village. It was a calm little village. We heard the bullock carts going home in the evenings with the driver asleep in his seat until the cart got home. The big wooden wheels of the carts rolling under the huge tamarind tree alleys – it really had its own atmosphere.

In 1972 the new Sanskrit School and Last School were inaugurated and run with all these different cultures and teachers from many countries and all over India, and each teacher was speaking his or her own language. So as we had a singing teacher who was Bengali we learned music in Bengali. And we learned French by learning mathematics! The teachers were young and enthusiastic, and included us in such a way that there was no separation between teachers and students: one really felt a comradeship.

In a similar way, one didn't feel the separation between all the different cultures and nationalities in the community. We were floating in all these different atmospheres here. Everyone brought their own world with them.

Looking back now, those first four years of organised school were years of super activity for kids and intense participation for everybody.

Then Mother died. We were still in Promesse and somebody called in the middle of the night and told us that She had passed away. So we jumped on the motorbike and went to the last Darshan, and saw Her lying there, downstairs. The whole of the Ashram was there, along with a handful of people from Auroville.

For everybody, it was a big question mark: how was this possible? It was as if the director of the play had suddenly died in the middle of the rehearsals. So what do you do then? The script was not finished: Auroville had just barely started.

For me it was an even stranger experience because since I arrived here, and up to the age of

ten, I had seen The Mother quite a number of times. And I have a very clear memory that she used to laugh a lot and be really happy. I remember having done a little drawing on her lap; I drew a rooster who was drinking coffee. She laughed so much at that, she was so alive and playful and so joyful: a real person, real in the sense that we understood each other. And, in contrast, around her were all these serious people with their extreme reverence. But when she disappeared, it was not real. It was like putting a blanket over us.

When The Mother left her body, everything began to change. There were people who were trying to misuse power (the attempted management takeover of Auroville by the SAS), thinking that their truth was the only truth. And that's when things got muddled.

That's what happened in 1976. The schools were closed. We kids experienced in a short time-lapse (from '68 to '76) the first rudimentary teaching circles where improvised teachers could disappear at any moment, and then organised and complex schools rich in subjects and sports with the luxurious regularity of permanent teachers, and then the abrupt ending of it all. It was never spoken about, but there had been a strong collective sense that our teachers would take the responsibility to follow us, that the school would re-open after the monsoon, but this didn't happen. Any sense of responsibility towards the children vanished.

The day the school stopped, whatever age you were, you suddenly became an adult. Everyone was suddenly responsible for themselves. We all came out of a bubble, and understood that things can go wrong. Before, we were living a kibbutz kind of reality, where everyone is the parent, and you can turn to anyone and be at home in their home. At times, we children were staying for months in other people's homes, taking part in their lives.

From one day to the next, that was over. All the children felt abandoned.

Numerous North Indian kids that were boarding at Aspiration were sent back home. The Tibetan children went back to different places in India where they had their contacts, many local Tamil kids were faced with an ultimatum – come back or you'll be cut off from the villages – and, gradually, many foreign kids also disappeared to relatives abroad or to international boarding schools in India.

The place was called Ami, and the children ran it. We were so tired of the grown ups because we felt that they had deceived us, so we were really happy just to be on our own. We looked after each other, we'd cook together and had ongoing collective projects like creating circus events for the community. During that time of food scarcity (as a result of the SAS freezing Auroville's funds), we only had bread and ragi and peanut oil, which we put as jam on our bread. Luckily we were allowed to eat our dinners at the Matrimandir camp Unity Kitchen in



PHOTO: COURTESY MARTA

exchange for washing the dishes.

But it felt like that schooless monsoon would last for years – and it did. I was really longing to find someone who wanted to teach me something. Wasn't there going to be another future? I always felt that my parents were so busy, and respected them for that, so I did not ask for anything. When I told them later what really happened, that I struggled, they were surprised.

I began working at a tailoring unit in the afternoons, and in the mornings I finally found back some of my old teachers who agreed to just give me a lesson here and there. We were dependent on these individual adults teaching us things, but the self-discipline to keep pursuing studies wholly depended on your own will.

Some of the kids started living very political lives, especially our friends in Aspiration. They, too, became grown-ups immediately: they were sucked into the world of what the adults were doing.

Back at our old school, there were the abandoned sports facilities: a running track, a

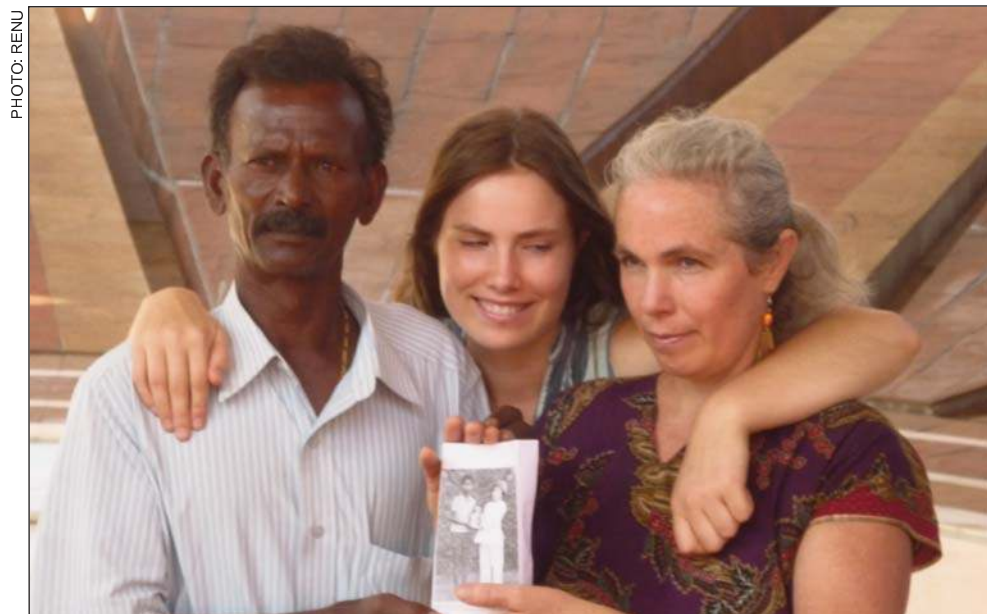


PHOTO: RENU

Ramalingam and Marta, embraced by Marta's daughter Marina, holding the photo when they, as children, laid the inauguration stone of the Matrimandir.

Suddenly, just a handful of children were left here.

My peers who had teachers as parents, continued being taught privately by their parents, or by correspondence, or they went to boarding schools outside. But none of that was shared. For us remaining kids, we went from community support to individual survival.

We were decimated. So after about a year, something was created for us by some adults who made a children's community. But they also left it up to the children to decide what to do with it.

When I moved in, I was turning 14. My 7 years old sister Grazi joined first so I promptly followed her. There were huts and one central house with a kitchen and we had a few animals.

football and basketball field, and gymnastic equipment. So that became my thing, I just threw myself into sports because it was a discipline that kept me in contact with something that I knew.

While I was in Ami, I ran every morning at 4:30 all the way to Discipline and back, then I did gymnastics. And then I went to take some lessons here and there from different people, worked at the tailoring workshop, and by 2:30 pm I would go to the sportsground again till nightfall.

This went on for four years, with nobody teaching or supervising us. I ended up doing too much, and hurt my back. The back pain lasted quite a long time, and it was then that somebody offered to take me to Europe, saying somebody

could help with my back there, and, at the same time, I could see what Europe was about.

There I met an architect and his wife who was a theatre critic who discovered that I was good at drawing (thanks to making botanical drawings at the Auroville Nursery) and that I loved art. And they had a library full of art books. So suddenly I felt that I could communicate with someone, and they understood what skills I had and could develop.

The architect had studied at the Art Institute in Florence and strongly encouraged me to apply there, since I had relatives in Florence. Of course, I had no certificates, but a teacher there discovered a loophole in the rules allowing Italians over 18 to apply through an entrance exam, without having previous diplomas.

After never having left Auroville and never studying in Italian, I suddenly had to study all these books in Italian on art history, trigonometry and geometrical drawings within a month. The exam went well, I gained entry to the second year of five, and then a whole new experience started. It was such an utter relief to finally be in a structured context, learning so much. I had this amazing thirst for knowledge, and finally I had access to this knowledge and all these possibilities, and these places imbibed with culture.

I remember how visually for me seeing the cradle of the Renaissance world felt familiar. The colours of Tamil Nadu resembled the style and colours of the Italian Renaissance. And Indian women with their wonderful saris resembled these silhouettes and faces from Etruscan museums. The big golden earrings of Magna Graecia, Pompei frescoes, late Hellenistic art, all drew parallels to India for me.

In those days it was a big thing to leave Auroville, because you felt you were betraying the project, taking an irreversible step. Also, because of this whole experience of what happened in the second half of the 1970s, it took me seven years before I even just considered coming to visit. I met my family only once during those years.

I strongly felt that I had to find my own identity and my own life. On my first day at the Art Institute, as I was cycling back to where I was staying, I lost my thread necklace with my Sri Aurobindo symbol. That somehow gave me a concrete feeling that now I was doing it all on my own. Nobody was going to help me out, not even the people who had blessed me on the way.

The feeling that you have to step into fire, and that you won't always be protected with someone holding your hand, the feeling that you have to wake up and find your own path, that's what I learned through that experience.

After finishing my studies in Italy, I visited Sweden in 1984, because there was an Auroville International meeting there. I was very curious about Sweden because my parents, Piero and Gloria, had worked for two years in Finland, before we moved to Auroville in 1968, and often described Scandinavia positively, and during that meeting I met my life companion Johannes.

So I thought I would just check it out and see how things could work there for me – and I am still checking it out. I started working with my partner, who is a music composer, and we initially collaborated on different projects. It's quite difficult to combine our fields, because orchestral music and set design most often come together in opera commissions. Then I got other assignments, for theatre and dance performances, and I am still working in that field.

In 1992, our daughter Marina was born. And that brought flashbacks to my own childhood, wanting to share the beautiful experiences of Auroville. It brought me closer to my family, but it also brought up things from the past, regarding the immense value of education for children that shouldn't be played around with in the name of ideologies, risking to burden children's lives or disorient them.

It also reminds me of an experience I had about ten years ago, coming back here. I watched the introductory film on Auroville at the Visitors Centre, trying to be as open minded and neutral as possible. And yet, I couldn't help but feel this is some form of propaganda, giving the message that this is the best place on earth.

I kept hearing that Auroville is the place the earth needs, but I think it is Auroville that needs the world.

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"Auroville has given me opportunities to discover myself"

Induja, a young Auroville architect, talks about how she came to Auroville, the work which inspires her and her hopes for the future.

I come from a small village in Vellore district of Tamil Nadu, about 200 kilometres away from Auroville. Our family has a farming background. I grew up in a very beautiful place with vast agricultural fields surrounded by rolling hills and in a very free environment. I was curious as a child and took every opportunity to explore the beauty that nature has offered. My parents let me grow up like that. And our village had a sense of community, where everybody knew and cared for each other.

Within a few years, the beautiful rural landscape of my childhood started changing dramatically. Vellore's river had dried up, there was a lot of water scarcity, and new industrial establishments, even polluting ones, came up. A lot of people sold their agricultural land to developers, and the road close to our house became a State Highway with many commercial enterprises springing up along it.

I remember when I was in 10th grade, when we were losing all the hangout spots we had enjoyed as children that I first learned about NGOs, and how they work to protect the environment and improve the social life of people. So I thought if I could start an NGO I could plant trees and do social work to stop the destruction which was happening around me. When I shared this with my father, he didn't take it seriously, but I think this was the seed of my interest in helping people and the environment.

I enjoyed studying but the only options for higher education known in that area were engineering or medicine, as well as commerce for the students who did not do well in science subjects.

All my cousins chose engineering because medicine was too costly. But I instinctively felt engineering was not my thing because I always had this free spirit which I felt engineering would not allow to blossom. I also knew that education was important for me to take any steps to bring a change. One day, as I was exploring in the internet centre what to study next, I found architecture, which I felt could help me change how the place where I grew up was being developed. The creative and multidisciplinary nature of the study interested me. But it was a five year course, it was expensive, and I would have to study it in Chennai.

My extended family said to my father, 'Why do you want to put all this effort and money into a girl who you're going to send off to another family when she gets married while living was getting difficult for us with the increasing stress on the farmers?' But because I was determined to pursue this, he supported me. I got into a good architecture school in Chennai. It was the first time I had lived away from home and in a city. Only seven of us students came from villages, the rest were from the city, and my English was not very good in those days. But everything fell in place because the subject was so interesting, it allowed me to express myself and learn new things.

It allowed me to travel a lot and learn from different people and places all over India about architecture: that really opened up a lot for me. Towards the end of my study, I had to do one year of internships. One of these I did in Chennai with the Public Works Department, which was not a very inspiring experience for what I sought to learn. Then my friend who came from Pondy suggested that I do an internship in Auroville.

I did my internship at Auroservice in the Town Hall. The experience didn't just restrict me to my internship work but it gave me an opportunity to learn more about Auroville.

Above all, here I started discovering myself again, including my interest in urban planning. Auroville brought back memories of how free I was when I was a child, for everybody here accepted me for what I was and encouraged me. So I decided I wanted to come back after my studies.

However, when I told my father I wanted to return to Auroville he was not happy. He wanted me to go to one of the cities that every cousin of mine went to: he didn't want to send me to this new place.

But then something happened which gave me the strength to stand up to my father and say this is what I have chosen. I had a friend in college whose sister had become an inspiration for me. When she was young she couldn't do a lot of things, but she changed all of that and became a triathlete, an artist and a vegan mountain climber: she was breaking all the traditional barriers. But when she went trekking with a small group of women near Madurai there was a forest fire which trapped the whole group. After a few days of fighting for life in the hospital, she died.

I kept hearing from friends and some of their parents that 'This is why girls should not be allowed to do whatever they want alone. If they had had a man with them, they would have been safe'. Even my parents said this, that girls should not be allowed to do everything they want. That shattered me.

PHOTO: COURTESY/INDUJA



I asked my father, 'What do you want me to do in life?' He said, 'Get a good job and settle down'. I said, 'I want to do things differently. I want to focus on social issues, I want to be there for people who want me, and I want to discover who I want to be on that journey. I cannot run behind money; that is not my motivation.' It was a shock for him. He said, 'That's not a life, that cannot happen'. But he could see I was adamant, so in the end he didn't try to stop me.

When I returned to Auroville I thought I would be working with Auroservice again, but Luigi told me they didn't have the funds to support me. But I didn't want to go back to my parents, I wanted to stay here. I remember well how helpless I felt. Then Luigi put me in touch with the Matrimandir team who were putting together a competition for the design of the Garden of the Unexpected. They wanted somebody with architecture experience, so I helped the competition team with communication and evaluation of designs.

But this was only part-time work. One day I walked over to the Town Development office and asked if I could help there in any way. They interviewed and selected me for part time work and then it became full time after six months.

It was refreshing to see town planning from a new perspective here than the one I was exposed to in my study. In my Chennai course we were trying to solve problems of existing developments, whereas in Auroville we had the opportunity to manifest a city by eliminating the conventional problems. The concept of Auroville city with an interplay of green, blue and the developments was fascinating for the young architect I was.

I liked the challenge of marrying the developments according to the Galaxy concept with the ground realities. I primarily worked on creating a Detailed Development Plan for the Residential Zone which we intended to build upon the previous studies. The attempt was to create a holistic plan which integrated all the aspects and those that were missing in previous studies. Emphasis was given to green corridors and water networks.

Water became one of my prime interest areas not just in Auroville but also at a bioregion scale. I have developed an interest to protect the traditional knowledge of water management systems in our country and have been doing independent preliminary research on that.

Now I'm working on a big water project with *Sunlit Future* which combines both the technical and social aspects which I am interested in. The project aims to bring water to remote villages in eight states using solar energy. Our aim is to cover 100 villages a year and so far almost 600 villages have benefitted. As the project manager, it involves me going to each village to see if it is technically feasible for us to provide them with solutions, and then to visit each village again during the implementation and for post-implementation surveys.

Often these are remote tribal villages, and the only way to get to them is to trek there on foot. The people there live in beautiful ecosystems but they are under a huge stress due to lack of access to basic infrastructure and pressure from many external factors. Yet, they were for me a true embodiment of resilience, abundance and courage. Some women have told me that they felt happy to see a woman come that far to solve their problems. And I always told them that they were the source of my strength and my inspiration to go there.

Through being involved in this project, I started doing many new things, like making movies and managing social media to communicate the story. *Sunlit Future* gives me this freedom: whenever I come

up with new ideas, they encourage me.

Of course, the work involves a lot of traveling and can be quite exhausting, which makes my father wonder why I am doing such a stressful job. But I tell him it's not stressful: in fact, I'm enjoying every moment.

I've also been involved in a lot of community events in Auroville. The first feeling I had when I came here and which stays with me, is that unlike in my birth village where there was always a kind of family connection with the people and everyone knew my background, here I'm a totally new person, and yet I feel accepted for what I am. And we are a community, we are a family. Even in difficult situations, this feeling has only become stronger for me.

For me it reinstated a faith that we can be connected not by blood relationship but by a very different, innate form of connection. That feeling is a very big core of whatever I am doing here.

It was at a very crucial moment that a group of us got together to organise a community potluck at Certitude with our big Auroville family just to celebrate the spirit of our community.

If anybody asks me what the best thing is that I have achieved in Auroville, I would say that it was working on that. As one of the organisers, I was fascinated by the way everything fell into place and how about 95% of the resources were found within our community. Every help that we wanted came and we didn't have to handle even a single rupee as cash to organise such a big event.

That's when I felt this community is great, because we received so much love and support. It was true that not everyone in the community participated, but I remember sending personalised invitations to everyone possible, keeping aside the disagreements. Some of them even acknowledged the invitation, yet didn't feel able to participate.

This reflects a certain breakdown in dialogue between certain sections of the community. Yet Dreamweaving gave me an opportunity to engage in healthy dialogue with people who had extremely opposite ideas to mine. This was because as architects we were focussed on bringing inclusive solutions and were willing to help each other achieve it.

Auroville has given me opportunities to discover myself and to refine more and more what I want to do with my life. My work at *Sunlit Future* focussed on providing water access to remotely located tribal habitations in various parts of India, which caused me to travel widely throughout India in the past few years and exposed me to various issues they are facing at the grassroots level. I have seen how all these ecosystems which are so rich are yet so vulnerable and I understood better what will happen if they break down. Working with NGOs on their water issues also gave me a new perspective, for they work on many other issues as well. I understood from this that water is not a stand-alone problem: there are so many interconnected elements which also need to be taken care of.

All this gave me a very rooted understanding of what is happening, and fuelled my passion to bring positive changes in society while protecting the indigenous knowledge and environment. It also helped me better understand what I need to do next towards realising this passion, which is to work on environmental conservation and planning.

I realised that I need to acquire knowledge and skills in those fields to be able to engage in meaningful action, so I applied and was accepted in a Masters programme in Environmental Conservation at the University of Wisconsin, starting in June, 2024. Subjects like conservation planning, climate change and issues of indigenous communities are part of the curriculum, which culminates in a practical training.

It is a fantastic opportunity for me to learn from and network with peers from around the world, skills that I want to bring back to Auroville and India to help build the better future for which we all aspire.

The challenge now is finding the funding. I have to raise \$45,000 by January 2024, although I'm hoping I will get a scholarship to defray some of the cost. Meanwhile, I am embarking on crowd funding and appealing to the community in addition to other external grants that I am exploring for help to make my dream come true.

I remain very positive as I realise that everything that has happened in my life has brought me to this point. Because even if I didn't understand at the time why certain things didn't work out, I'm very happy about where I am now and what I am doing. I am sure that I will be where I want to be because I have you all with me in this.

From an interview by Alan

For more information contact ginduja397@gmail.com

Auroville needs the world

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We're not disconnected from the world, we are already 50,000 inhabitants with the villages around us, but we are trying to stay in a bubble that is impermeable to the reality around it. It is like multiple transparent drawings on top of each other, which, when looked at all together, show the reality, but we choose to look at only the one layer that we like.

There are fantastic things going on everywhere. The world needs to become an ecologically balanced place, that's the most important project at the moment, and it's just as spiritual to be able to hold hands and say things such as, the ice is melting, we are going to change that.

So I spontaneously never talk about Auroville or tell people they must go visit. Only when someone really gets to know me,

the topic comes up. Maybe I don't talk about it because the whole world is there too, and there is so much interesting stuff going on and that is a magnet in itself.

That's why it took me so many years to come back. I'm a bird you know, I fly and migrate and move. I may go back to the home island, but birds are beings of the future. They fly. They have an inbuilt orientation, nobody knows how. And there are no country borders to birds. They just fly and take seeds from land to land. And suddenly a palm tree is growing somewhere, and that's how you mix cultures. And that boundary-less freedom is so wonderful.

Growing up here I had this experience of growing up with a sense of curiosity, and I've carried it with me ever since.

In conversation with Chandra

While recounting her narrative, Marta emphasised that her story is a subjective account, reflecting her unique experiences in Auroville. It does not offer an objective representation of historical events. For a more comprehensive perspective, future issues of *Auroville Today* may include voices of her peers who went through similar experiences, but who might have lived them very differently, providing diverse viewpoints on Auroville's early years, as experienced by those who were children in those days.

"Our common childhood has created strong ties between us giving us an understanding of the different outcomes of our stories that somehow converge into an initial spark of light."

Alan’s analysis of The Mother’s supposed physical disappearance [see *AVToday* # 410 September 20213, eds.] struck a chord within me. This question, which has troubled us for over fifty years, has never been satisfactorily answered. Alan explores The Mother’s departure as a means of reuniting us in the embrace of her imperishable memory.

As for Satprem, his books on the matter are sometimes far too accusatory of the human condition, which according to him, is what did not allow The Mother to “conquer death”. But it was undoubtedly something entirely different than a departure caused by the ignorance of her disciples, something that we are not yet capable of understanding; in any case, something that is totally unknown. “Obviously, logically, I should be invisible until the day I appear in my new form”. (27/06/62)... “A mystery of the unknown [...] A very, very strange sensation. A sort of new vibration” (04/04/1970) “There will be a miracle. Death is not the solution” (27/10/71)

Admittedly, the state of the world, and of those close to her, her disciples, did not favour her task: “We have set our sights on overcoming this accident” (Death) (14/10/53)... “It’s almost as if it were THE one question I’ve been given to solve” (28/09/63). The Mother certainly had a sense of humour, She used to say, “Death is a bad habit” (11/01/56), until that memorable date of the 29th of February 1956, marked by the descent of the Supramental into the earth’s atmosphere, a moment awaited for millennia, which would herald the beginning of the realisation of a life divine on earth.

As contemporaries of this unique event in earth’s history – this New Creation – we have a tremendous responsibility and the extraordinary grace of being the first specimens with which the Divine is working out in individual consciousnesses the conditions for His divine Work. “Never will we be able to comprehend the marvellous immensity of Its action (the Grace) and the precision and exactness with which it accomplished itself. We will never be able to grasp the extent to which the Grace does everything, is behind everything, organises everything...”. (01/08/56) Suffice it to say that in the course of a few months, this Consciousness was at work, and that we had not yet grasped its full significance for the future of the earth, trapped as we are in our own little stories. “...It is only you yourselves, with your conception, your attitude and the acceptance of certain supposed principles, who are closing the door to the possibility of a miracle”. (03/10/56) To fail to link the great adventure of Auroville with the even greater adventure of our Masters is to betray both our coming to earth at this crucial time and our mission to participate in the creation of the “cradle of the Superman” in Auroville (as The Mother once said).

But I would like to come back to the mystery of The Mother’s disappearance to our physical eyes. Alan is right in insisting on the perpetuity of Her presence, which we can perceive when concentrated in silence. We can also listen to the indications She gives to our consciousnesses so that they are in line with both our personal development and our attitudes in everyday life, in our actions and in our relationships with others.

This separation between us and the earth is only a façade, and to be convinced of this we need to reread the unambiguous passages of Her *Agenda* with great care.

It reveals a strategy that was not yet obvious to Her, but which She was gradually discovering. It is us, reading the conversations compiled in *The Agenda* by Satprem, who are in a position to put forward hypotheses that may seem far-fetched to outsiders, but which open up horizons that will prove to be obvious in the future.

The very first key conversations were about the right to total and earthly immortality. “If Matter were to become sufficiently flexible to follow the inner progression, death would no longer be necessary”. (06/02/57) Thanks to Satprem, the question was being narrowed down. He was not a silent scribe; he carried within him The question

A Supreme Strategy

of the earth, to which She mysteriously replied: “...One has the sense that there is an extraordinary secret to be discovered, that it is there, almost under one’s fingers.” (24/05/60) And then, in 1962, the question became so overwhelming that She was doubtful about the possibility of defeating Death: “Is it madness? No one has done it before, so there’s no one to tell me”. (13/02/62) Later, the accuracy of her vision was confirmed: “A kind of certainty from the depths of Matter that the solution is there.” (30/10/64)

After much experimentation and questioning, the Supreme’s strategy began to emerge. A strategy that would lead her to a state other than death as we understand it. And the signs were becoming clear: “What is needed is to universalise this body; that is the basic condition for the Supramental to be able to descend without everything breaking down”. (21/04/59) It was a sort of first step for the physical substance to undergo the process that was about to begin in Her body: “A sort of prescience that only the body can know.” (06/06/61)

By 1962, the mechanism was becoming clearer: “I feel that something is leading me towards the knowledge of the phenomenon (that life and death are the same thing) – that is, the power to change.” (08/09/62) The knowledge was given to her in the body through experiences **at the level of her physical cells**: “I am constantly faced with this problem: how can these cells remain cells without vaporising into a non-physical reality, and at the same time have this flexibility, this lack of fixity?” (12/01/62).

Satprem has dissected at length in his books, with logic and depth, The Mother’s journey towards victory over Death. Thanks to him we have been inspired, but he does not seem to have given a satisfactory explanation other than the pitfall of experience due to the conditions of ignorance of the world and its surroundings. I have never been satisfied with this conclusion.

The first clue that prompted my search for an outcome other than “this idiotic death”, as She called it, I found in certain passages of her *Agenda*: “The body was told that it would progress until the complete purification of the cells and that it would then decide for itself whether to continue or to dissolve: to act in agglomeration or to dissolve. This is obviously a new way of dying”. (31/07/63) This conversation is very important because it underlines for the first time the role of the cells in the body according to the choice it would have to make: to act in agglomeration or to dissolve after death. “There must be a difference even in the behaviour of the cells when you leave your body”. (10/08/63)

We must remember that The Mother always said that for the mental and the vital not to be dissolved after death they had to be ‘psychised’ and that then they would not be diffused into the universal mental and the universal vital. We are led to conclude that the same process concerns the cell. What is a psychised cell? Is it an immortal cell? Then everything becomes clear!

“The body is everywhere! It’s THE body, and it’s no more my body than other bodies”. (06/04/63) Could it be that The Mother was moving towards a possibility other than that of physical immortality, which, according to her, would be an impossibility in the current conditions of humanity, and which would overturn too many things? “I’m faced with a problem: when the body dies, the cells return to dust. As a result, it would be a waste, I would have lost all my work. It’s before that something has to enter into it. In other words, before this body dissolves there has to be a new creation.” (26/08/64) And later it became more precise: “... The cells are in the process of becoming more and more conscious; so instead of dying and entering another body, all the cells come together to form within oneself a new body with matter superior to ordinary matter, and one enters into it. The other can dissolve, that no longer matters”. (15/03/69)

The solution didn’t seem satisfactory, and neither was it to The Mother: “I feel ... on the threshold of a great secret, but ... something ...”. (09/04/71) “I am on the threshold of an extraordinary discovery,

but ...” (08/09/71) “A kind of certainty at the bottom of Matter that the solution is there.” 18/09/64)

We are approaching the strategy of the Supreme.

For her, of course, death was not the final outcome: “We are therefore looking for another solution. There must be another solution”. (21/11/64) “There should be a direct power from cell to cell”. (10/07/63) And a month later: “There must be a difference, even in the behaviour of cells, when one leaves one’s body.” (10/08/63) Is this direct power not the Mind of the cells that, as she said in 1966, would find the key to the transition? “A universalisation of Bodily Consciousness”. (30/03/68)

The last four years of her life were dedicated to the only solution she kept coming back to, which was that her cellular body alone served as an occult instrument for a new creation that would no longer be death. A kind of cellular ubiquity “... In its 91 years on earth, this body has never felt such happiness: no limits, no impossibilities, nothing. It became all the other bodies... These cells, other cells, it was life everywhere, Consciousness everywhere”. (15/02/69) “Bodily consciousness has become both individualised and independent, that is, it can enter into other bodies, a physical entry.” (12/03/69) I don’t know whether such a statement is given its full weight. It explains what is meant by a new strategy other than death and the supposed process of agglomeration of immortal cells at the bottom of a tomb as imagined by Her in July of 1963, and the other process that She foresaw as a possibility, the scattering of Her cells in the Cells of Matter! “A kind of certainty in the depths of Matter that the solution is there”. (30/10/64) “It’s at the atomic level that things have to change.” 12/11/64) “A universalisation of body Consciousness.” 30/03/68)

And a certain question that seemed crucial kept coming up: “The only thing that is required of the body is this total, transparent immobility.” (04/12/68) As if preparing it for something else: “... The quality of time that changes.” 28/12/68. “The only remedy is to be like this... where time doesn’t exist [...] I feel, I know that my body is being acclimatised to something else”. (10/12/72) And then: “Why do I want to scream? I think it’s something so new that the body is frightened [...] a powerful immobility.” As if in an awakening death.

“Are you ready for anything?” (09/06/66) Let there be no doubt about it, the two solutions for the state of her body after death seemed to point towards an agglomeration of her cells or their diffusion, as had been indicated to her. But these two solutions should be seen as one and the same process. Nothing prevented her cells, which had been divinised, from remaining agglomerated in the tomb, and from having diffused occultly into the cells of Matter. “...Like an attempt to make you feel that there is no difference between life and death”. (09/12/72) “That it’s neither life nor death, it’s... something” (10/12/72)

“I’m accessing another world. Another way of being... dangerous but wonderful. [...] The impression that the relationship between life and death is becoming increasingly different, completely different. [...] It’s not death that’s disappearing, it’s not that at all: both are changing... into something we don’t yet know, which seems both extremely dangerous and utterly wonderful. A dangerous unknown”. (12/07/72)

And in fact, The Mother exists in each individual cell. As a result, it is us, with our unconsciousness and our bodies, who have made The Mother more or less dead, or to put it in a positive way, who have made The Mother more or less alive, depending on our level of spiritual sincerity.

To conclude this long argument, what I wanted to say is that The Mother is not dead in the way we understand it, She who said: “There will be a miracle. Death is not the solution.” We still have to “awaken her in us”, through our attitude every single day, an attitude of Truth in every part of our being.

Janaka

The current conflict in Auroville

At this time, late 2023, the world currently has two conflicts with the potential to grow into major global wars. Catastrophes. Given the nature of Auroville’s collective yoga, I believe it is pertinent to consider how it deals with its own seemingly localised conflict in relation to wider world events, as there is evidently a relationship and a synchronicity between the global and the local. And from personal experience over 60 years of witnessing conflict in my own life and in world events, it becomes apparent that the same forces of division are at work behind all conflicts, whether interpersonal or international. And the same challenges and potential solutions apply.

Conflicts are usually the consequence of a combination of individual and collective ego and ignorance of the hidden forces that motivate human action. The actors are motivated by greed, ambition and the arrogance which makes them believe that their beliefs are superior to those of their fellow humans who, for the purpose of the play, are regarded as opponents. But what rational human being wants to get caught in an endless and expanding cycle of violent retribution? If you’ve killed my child, am I justified to vengeance, knowing that my actions will result in the death of someone else’s child? There is, however, the paradox that baffles the moralist in us. It was not by non-violence that Hitler’s ambitions for world

domination were ended. According to Sri Aurobindo, the victory of the Nazis would have set back civilisation by a thousand years. And yet, he advised a disciple: “You write as if what was going on in Europe were a war between the powers of Light and the powers of Darkness – but that is no more so than during the Great War. It is a fight between two kinds of Ignorance... The only way out is through the descent of a consciousness which is not the puppet of these (hidden) forces but is greater than they are and can force them either to change or disappear.”

Sri Aurobindo endorsed direct action against the British when he was in his revolutionary period and later also endorsed involvement by his followers in whatever it would take to resist the triumph of the Asuric forces behind Hitler and the Nazis. Direct action was and is right in resisting evil, injustice and oppression, and this invariably involves violence. But the Master’s consciousness was also aware that all involved in these conflicts, the ‘goodies and baddies’, were and are essentially still mired in the Ignorance. And that is what these quotations clearly state. It seems nuanced and difficult particularly for those of us brought up with the moralistic notion that fighting is bad, violence an inferior response to the violence of others.

And looking at the present day conflicts one is irresistibly drawn to the conclusion that Sri Aurobindo’s comments are a fuller statement of the evident and hidden reality. All parties are in the

Ignorance. But there is right and wrong action and a rule of law that needs to be followed, or those who believe themselves in the right succumb to unjustifiable actions.

These reflections have a bearing on Auroville’s predicament. The community of residents needs to search its soul and admit to those things that need to change in the way it has lived and organised itself. It needs also to feel the need for more dynamism in its manifestation of the Dream. But equally the Governing Board needs to accept responsibility for clumsy and inappropriate actions and change them. Dialogue and trying to work together on an agreed programme of action is essential, otherwise the conflict will persist and Auroville will be seen as the City of Human Unity that is unable to manifest its core purpose and is at war with itself. That would be the end. The Dreamcatcher process has also demonstrated a workable methodology by which the best ideas of the participants can be harmoniously combined in a workable and mutually endorsed course of action.

A change of consciousness is the whole meaning and challenge of what has been happening and the realisable opportunity The Mother has given the community and its supporters.

One of the essential evolutionary functions of the collective and individual integral yoga is to provide a discipline which has the love, power and knowledge to lift humanity above the limited and

divisive mental levels and thereby to liberate us into the harmony of human unity. A unity which is our essential inner state, but covered over in the Ignorance. A unity, be it noted, that is not uniformity but a consciousness that accepts, respects and values the true self of all people and all created things. Sri Aurobindo and The Mother have, by the creation of Auroville, given us not only the experiment and the challenge, but the example and the tools, the means of succeeding in making the transformation. But we must want it like the need to breathe. And, essentially, it is the need to breathe.

One can look at history and see that war, conflict and disharmony have always been with us. In this light, the need for Auroville to demonstrate that a change of consciousness can begin to change patterns of human behaviour becomes all the more imperative. The only way that Auroville can truly claim to be the city of human unity and rise to the challenge of being an example to the world, is by rising to another level of consciousness. Auroville’s current conflict is not really just about the detail of how Auroville should be planned and built, or governed. It is about changing consciousness. We need to ask ourselves, can we afford to fail?

Vikas

(Vikas is a pioneer Aurovilian who at present lives in the UK.)

Re-envisioning the Residents Assembly

Many years ago, Kireet Joshi gave a series of talks about Auroville's organisation. As the architect of the Auroville Foundation Act, about which there is so much discussion and litigation at present, it is important to understand how he envisaged the role of the Residents Assembly in particular.

Interestingly, for Kireet the prime function of the Residents Assembly was neither to debate issues nor to take decisions. Rather, it was to be the vehicle for the residents to come together in a shared aspiration to understand the Divine's will. In his words, "We have to be reminded every time we are here for the Divine. So I would like to suggest that the Residents Assembly is basically a collectivity for promotion of the knowledge of the Divine's will. Nothing else. Or (anything) else is secondary."

He added that the Residents Assembly should not be an instrument for disagreement or agreement, but it should meet regularly, ideally "in quietude", to generate harmony among all residents and "mature constantly the sense of all of us as a collectivity devoted to the Divine's will". "If you sincerely meet and talk to the Divine in your heart, and if this is done weekly, monthly, a real collectivity will be gathered, will be

created, all dedicated to the Divine's will".

This, he explained, would not preclude discussions. But these discussions would be held in a very different atmosphere from the one to which we are used. Positivity and harmony would be emphasized and we would never lose the sense that we are fellow seekers.

For Kireet, this meant that the Residents Assembly should be a caring assembly, an all-inclusive body, "an assembly which looks after each and every individual resident. We have to arrive at that point where each individual resident is awake, he is alive and he is very keen, as Sri Aurobindo says, to perfect himself and to aid and to be aided by others' perfection. This is the stage where we should reach. And the Residents' Assembly is an instrument for springing into this. As long as individuals are simply put aside or simply taken up sometimes for getting their opinion, it is a mask and it is very inadequate and a very, very unsatisfactory form of service to the divine consciousness."

And he stressed, "It is not a question of majority and minority, it is not a question of opinion building, it is not a question of a few against the others. If you read Sri Aurobindo's writings, there is a constant emphasis on all, and therefore our organisation must be such that it

serves all... We must take care that every individual develops."

As to the powers of the Residents Assembly, "I would like to say very clearly, I do not like when it is said that the Residents Assembly is the Authority. No. The Authority is only ONE in Auroville—the Divine."

Kireet's suggestions have sometimes been dismissed as impractical given the present reality of Auroville. And it is difficult to see how some of his suggestions—like the one that we should all meet together regularly, or that there should be some individuals who know every resident well enough to ensure their perspective is understood and integrated in every discussion and collective decision—can be implemented given the size of the present community and, it should be added, our present state of collective consciousness.

But this misses the point. Kireet was not offering a temporary fix for our present problems, nor was he offering something that is immediately 'practical'. He was offering an entirely different conception of what the Residents Assembly could be; something which he believed was founded upon The Charter and other indications given by The Mother, and, therefore, something which we should aspire for. The practicalities of how it could be implemented

would need to be discovered, but the important thing was the willingness to make the experiment. For if, as he asserted, Auroville is a unique spiritual experiment upon Earth, why should we rely upon old world methods of understanding, of decision-making and ways of exercising authority?

Granted, his suggestion requires a veritable revolution in the way we think about decision-making and how we relate to each other. The Residents Assembly would no longer be viewed primarily as a body to discuss issues or take decisions but as a means of uniting us in a collective call for higher guidance. The focus, in other words, would shift from us—our disputes, failings, frustrations—to an appeal to something higher. And a genuine call, Kireet pointed out, would inevitably elicit such guidance, and then the way forward would emerge naturally. Harmoniously.

Today, we are far from that. Dogma and ideology seem more common than genuine spiritual seeking, conflict has replaced feelings of mutuality, individuals are often viewed as mere instruments in the fulfillment of a 'higher' agenda, and administrative *diktats* or decisions based on head counts have replaced attempts to understand divine guidance and integrate the concerns and higher aspirations of everyone in the communi-

ty. And the Residents Assembly itself has either been dismissed as irrelevant or it has become politicised, claimed by rival orientations, while the majority of residents are failing to participate in it in any meaningful way.

Even if one does not agree fully with Kireet's reflections, clearly something is amiss with the way we are conceiving of the Residents Assembly and the way it is functioning. Of course, it can be argued that we live in exceptional times, that Auroville is experiencing disruption on an unprecedented scale and therefore whatever means that can be used at present—including involving the Residents Assembly in the political realm—to protect its integrity should be employed. But this ignores the fact that Auroville's strength lies precisely in its spiritual foundation and aspiration, and when we use other means in an attempt to protect these, we weaken rather than strengthen that foundation.

One thing, at least, is clear. The remedy lies with us rather than with any external authority. It lies with our willingness to pour new energy into making the Residents Assembly an expression of our collective aspiration and care for each other's spiritual welfare. For nothing else is really worthy of the great experiment to which we have been called.

Alan

EXHIBITIONS

The Way of the Artist: the Audrey Wallace-Taylor retrospectives

After Audrey's recent passing [see *Auroville Today* issue 410, September 2023], there have been three retrospectives in Auroville of her artistic work, which are a reflection on her life and the energy she put into promoting art in Auroville.

A year or so ago, whilst walking out of her community of Creativity, I found Audrey sitting on the ground by a mostly excavated, few feet wide tree stump. She was busy digging out the mud, clarifying the sinuous curves, caverns and muscles of its root branches and she was immersed in the red earth, the moment, and that tree's particular history.

As I walked around her black and white art in her exhibition on Pitanga's clean white walls, I kept recalling that memory of her immersion in the moment, in movement, and life.

This exhibition juxtaposes the minimalism of black and white with the vitality she squeezed into passing motifs. Audrey's ability to catch what was under the surface was evident in images like 'held flying', with a star-like burst, or 'wave mass', capturing greater depth in movement. Some of her titles alone had this sense of verve: 'Go', 'Drama',

'Bite damn you', 'Wild wind'. And 'Scribble' and 'Splash' had an explosivity beyond what you'd expect.

The plain simplicity of 'relationships' with extended, almost linear, smudges, hinting at a pool of fish swimming, was a personal favourite. In contrast, the swirling dark tendrils of 'Family Patterns' conveyed emotional entanglement. 'The story is given, everything is dying', with a mix of black blocks, swirls, and interwoven lines, is one of her many pieces of art indicating her inner travelling to an essence, and then her return to capture something in abstract forms. Perhaps somewhere in this there is an image of Creativity's gnarled tree root, kept vividly alive for posterity.

Featuring both colour and black and white pieces, the Kala Kendra exhibition featured a mix



Through Tones 2

of drawings, paintings and hanging canvasses. The colourful canvasses had holes cut into them, some with the painted canvas still hanging behind the picture, creating a dimensionality beyond the 2D image. Seeing both colour and black and white together there was a sense of Audrey's art finding greater expression in black and white, bringing more out of less.

In the Centre d'Art exhibition, Audrey shared the space with Eva Mulkulski who also recently passed away. This homage to both artists who were dedicated to Auroville's artistic life had some of Audrey's best pieces. The choice of large colour pieces had a beauty and quiet authority which the abundant light of the Centre d'Art helped bring out. As the gallery introduction framed her creative output, "Her art

was delightful, be it her landscapes, water colours or sketches. Experimenting with colours textures and techniques Audrey reinvented herself almost every few years... Audrey taught how to approach art, how to play with it, how to experience and enjoy it." This sense of enjoyment, exploration and constant creative re-invention was tangible when viewing her vivid and unique offerings.

The Pitanga and Centre d'Art exhibitions-cum-fundraisers were organised by her close friends 'in loving memory of Audrey after her recent passing', and to continue supporting CREEVA's (Centre for Research, Education and Experience in the Visual Arts) purpose as a platform to experience art, which Audrey had founded. The exhibitions' tribute to her pointed out that, 'she was gifted with the means to explore, to find her own expression, to follow her passion to paint, to draw,' which led on to CREEVA's purpose to 'experience art first hand... experiment with mediums, form, themes' and the 'chance to go on a journey to find expression, as each one has an individual expression and style.' These three retrospective exhibitions show how Audrey lived and created from a place of that deep individual expression.

Peter

PASSINGS

Klara Brogli

On October 30th, Klara Brogli, Aurovillian resident of Surya Nivas, left her body in her native country, Switzerland. She was 81. Due to a medical intervention which substantially reduced the quality of her existence, Klara chose to terminate her life for which in Switzerland officially recognised assistance is available.

Klara had been coming to Auroville since 2001 and joined in 2004 for good. She started volunteering with office work at the then Development Group and worked for years in the SEWA team where her care and support for the financially underprivileged became evident.

She was an open and curious woman, always ready to reach out and give a hand. With her background in investment banking and as a lawyer by profession, she displayed clear insight and was keen in choosing her projects. The Auroville Puncture Service was one of them, and she became its executive in due time.

Always eager to embrace new technology, Klara also had the courage to build a steel framed house in Auroville in which she lived the last 20 years, expressing her elegant and highly aesthetic sense in finely detailed elements of house and garden.

Klara was deeply interested in Auroville's experimental organisation and collective processes. She cherished the Charter of

Auroville, and had an enormous trust in Auroville's succeeding. A commemoration in honour of Klara was held at the Matrimandir Banyan on November 4th.

Lucas Posada

On October 13th, Colombian Lucas Posada arrived with his 10-year old son Salvador in Chennai to start his Newcomer year in Auroville. His wife Gloria and their 14-year old daughter Gaia would follow a month later. During the night journey to Auroville, their taxi collided with a trailer. They were taken to JIPMER hospital where Lucas was diagnosed with multiple injuries. The son was in shock but recovered when his mother arrived 24 hours later.

During two weeks in ICU, while inwardly working on himself and receiving good energies and prayers from many friends, Lucas seemed to make promising progress and was moved to a private room, flourishing in the care extended to him. But on the morning of October 31st, he suffered a cardiac arrest and passed away. He was 60 years old.

Lucas had been searching all his life, travelling the world as a teacher and artist. A few days before his passing, he mentioned in a voice message to those who had been supporting him in their prayers, "I want to send to all those people that have been



sending love and all those beautiful caring intentions..., I am so grateful, my family is so grateful..., this is precisely the reason that I always knew that I wanted to be in Auroville... I am very very grateful to everyone..."

Lucas's remains were buried at the Auroville burial ground on November 5th. In his remembrance, an exhibition of his paintings was held at the Kala Kendra Art Gallery

Tara Nayak

One of Auroville's young children, Tara Nayak, had a lethal fall from the roof of Sunship on November 7th. She was 12 years old.

Born in Delhi, Tara came to Auroville in 2019 at the age of 8 with her mother Fakeera, and studied at The Learning Centre and in later years at Deepanam school. Due to her sweet and outgoing nature she made many friends and was very much loved. Auroville's young children were deeply saddened by the accident and two days later joined a 'Prayers for Tara' gathering, brought together in grief, chanting familiar mantras and prayers and lighting their candles for Tara. In the afternoon of the same day, Tara's remains were cremated at the Auroville cremation ground, with many children from various Auroville schools attending, — mourning and chanting, lovingly carrying the space, and supporting Fakeera and each other.



Study on Auroville’s organization

The study on Auroville’s organization, made by Professor Raag Yadava and his team, can be downloaded from <https://rb.gy/gd4qyb>

Correction

The report on Auroville’s Singing Festival, published in our previous issue, mentioned that “the festival was a diverse offering, not only in terms of performers and musical genres, but also in languages, including four Indian dialects, major European languages, Mandarin and Hebrew.” The offering was in four Indian languages, not dialects. We apologize for the mistake.

5th Tamil Nadu Young Thinkers Meet

The 5th Tamil Nadu Young Thinkers Meet was organised between 3rd and 5th November in Auroville’s Savitri Bhavan. The community was not informed of this closed event. According to the programme, speakers from Auroville included the Secretary, Dr Jayanti Ravi; the recently appointed Deputy Secretary, Smt K Swamambika; and Dr Mollika Ganguly, a recently appointed staff member of the AVFO. Other notable speakers included a spiritual teacher, Swami Mitrananda, as well as political figures, such as the Chief Minister of Puducherry, Thiru N Rangaswamy. According to testimonies, about 50 young people from ABVP (a student organisation affiliated with the RSS) attended the meeting. The programme included a visit to AuroOrchard, one of Auroville’s largest farms, which was attended by many participants.

Auroville redefined by AVFO in Letters of Recommendation

The AVFO recently changed the wording on visa Letters of Recommendation (LoR). The previous wording stated that “Auroville was founded by ‘The Mother’ of Sri Aurobindo Ashram on 28th February 1968”. Now, it reads that Auroville is “functioning under the administrative control of the Ministry of Education, Government of India”. Mentions of The Mother and Sri Aurobindo have been removed.

Voice of Auroville issue #4

The November 2023 issue of the bimonthly journal *Voice of Auroville* is now available from voiceofauroville@auroville.services. The journal, endorsed by the Working Committee of the Residents’ Assembly of the Auroville Foundation, aims at informing well-wishers and friends of Auroville in India and abroad on the current unfolding events with factual updates and articles. The content aims at conveying perspectives from the majority of Auroville’s residents. This issue carries articles about Integral Education in Auroville, a sampling of Auroville schools, has a summary of events in Auroville in September and October, and has two myth-busting narratives, shedding light on misinformation about Auroville. The myths that are being countered are that those ‘opposed to development’ have never offered alternatives; and that the 3,500 current residents are blocking 46,500 new residents from joining.

Auroville Timeless

Some months ago, a new magazine was announced by AWARE Auroville called *Auroville Timeless*, which aims to bring the reader “closer to the vibrant and ever-evolving world of Auroville”, while “exploring the profound journey of fostering harmony and understanding among individuals from diverse backgrounds”. Topics covered in the July issue included collective housing; the International Zone; and nurturing human unity. For more information contact timeless@auroville.org.in.

A new website for Stand For Auroville Unity

Stand For Auroville Unity, the community-aligned campaign that was launched in December 2021 after the events at the Youth Center, Bliss Forest and Darkali, had faced technical issues with its website over the last few months. On 31st October, the Stand For Auroville Unity team published a new website containing information about the current situation, as well as useful resources to understand the crisis. You can access the new website here: <https://standforauroville.org/>

AVFO Working Committee information meeting

On 2nd November 2023, the AVFO Working Committee held a closed meeting at Unity Pavilion. The invitation, sent only to selected “friends”, explained “in the recent months, people have become confused by some of the stories and fears that have been spread ... we want to take the opportunity to hear your views and questions and try to answer them as best we can.” Around 20 people attended the meeting. Topics reportedly discussed included the problem of democracy, housing issues, the Prosperity proposal, and issues implementing the Crown Road.

Foundation groups open meeting

On 18th November, a meeting was organised by Community Connect for the four working groups that work with the AVF – the WC, the FAMC, the ATDC and an alternative RAS – to make pre-

sentations and answer questions from community members. An attendee noted that 40 people were present and the information shared included that there are 22 court cases involving the community today (3 initiated by the Foundation, 10 by individual Aurovilians); 90 people have still not filled out their application for the Register of Residents; 90% of visas are granted for the length of time requested; HUDCO has proposed to finance a building with 300 rooms and 1000 beds for volunteers; while four new big housing projects are ready to be implemented, to be financed from loans: Line of Progress, Line of Goodwill, Habitat and New Birth (individual family houses); and the reason that maintenances in the Greenbelt have been cut is that the Tamil Nadu Forest department said that for our acreage they would only employ 12 people while we had over 100 workers and Aurovilians receiving support.

Entry Service clarification

The Entry Service clarified that certain statements made by the AVFO Working Committee at the open meeting (see above) were incorrect. It was said that the Entry Board is maintaining a ‘blacklist, of Applicants / Newcomers, and that emails asking for clarification were not being answered. The Entry Service denied both the statements. They clarified they do not maintain a blacklist of individuals and their actions are guided solely by the policy approved by the community in 2017. All candidates are requested to fulfill the criteria of working full time, living in Auroville, and being motivated by and understanding of the Charter and *raison d’etre* of Auroville. It was also stated in that meeting that the Entry Service hasn’t been answering emails. But since August 2022 the Entry Service lost access to its Inbox and drive on ‘auroville.org.in’. They have not received any official or unofficial explanation regarding the disconnection but provided an alternative email at which they can be contacted.

CPIO of AVFO reprimanded by IC

Several Right To Information (RTI) requests addressed to the Auroville Foundation have gone to appeal due to incomplete or no answers from the Auroville Foundation’s Central Public Information Officer (CPIO). The Information Commissioner in all these instances expressed “severe displeasure” over the conduct of the CPIO for not responding, giving incomplete replies or responding outside of the stipulated time frame. Concerning the Governing Board minutes, the IC also observed that the CPIO was obliged to ensure it is published for the public through the internet in an easily accessible electronic format.

Visa issues

Many foreign residents of Auroville experience often long delays in obtaining the mandatory Letter of Recommendation (LoR) for their visa. Awaiting the letter, Aurovilians and Newcomers abroad have to find employment and housing; those in Auroville are facing penalties imposed by the registration authorities if their application for visa extension is received after the date of expiry of their current visa. Some LoRs contain a sentence stating that the person “has been obstructing the work progress as per the Master Plan approved by the Governing Board and gazetted by the Government of India”, which may lead to a refusal to grant the visa or visa extension, and then a request to the individual concerned to leave India. It is also a concern that a large number of residents have received a recommendation for a substantially shorter period than that for which they were eligible since December 2021. In most of these cases no reason has been given.

Pour Tous Purchasing Service (PTPS) update

The Pour Tous Purchasing Service team announced they are “happy and proud to announce that we have now completed ONE full year in ‘full control’ as far as that is possible or even desirable...” Among their accomplishments they list lowering profit margins way below the required 15% (20% for cooled products) except for unsustainable items; reducing a Rs 575,000 loss in 2022 due to theft etc. to a Rs 50,000 loss; empowering many of the women working there by giving them computer training and greater responsibility; expanding the Auroville, bioregion, local and organic offerings while removing many articles that were unsustainable or bad price-quality; and installing solar panels to power the shop and storeroom. Future plans include providing online shopping and delivery possibilities, and building an onsite water catchment which will double as an aquaponics and free swimming pool for Aurovilians and village neighbours.

Legal update about the RA

On September 4th, 2023, the appeal bench of the Madras High Court noted in an interim order that the Residents’ Assembly, as a statutory body, cannot be restricted from performing its duties as per the Auroville Foundation Act. This decision effectively nullifies the AVFO’s justification for curtailing residents’ rights to make decisions for Auroville. Subsequently, the Working Committee of the Residents Assembly emphasised that while the legal journey is ongoing, this development serves as a pivotal milestone and they remain committed to ensuring that the Residents’ Assembly’s role is fully recognised and respected. A final verdict from the Court is still awaited on the matter.

Legal update about the NGT

On November 21st, India’s Supreme Court heard an appeal filed by the Auroville Foundation office against the ruling of the National Green Tribunal (NGT) of April 2022. which emphasized the need for comprehensive town plans and environmental clearance before embarking on any development, while giving conditional clearance for creating the Crown Road. Supreme Court Justice J. Kaul found that all of the events and actions of the NGT are as per its jurisdiction and that there was no cause for any special actions. The next hearing at the Supreme Court has been scheduled for December 7th.

Other court issues

Other legal proceedings are ongoing. One of these is with the National Green Tribunal Southern Bench, against actions by the AVFO which are believed to be in contempt of the National Green Tribunal’s ruling of April 2022, according to the lawyer for the Auroville petitioners.

Land exchanges

On November 29th, the AVFO Working Committee shared a letter received from the Special Officer of the Auroville Foundation which stated that the Foundation has exchanged 10 acres of unutilised land in the Auro Orchard and Hope communities for 15 acres of land owned by a private developer in the city and greenbelt area. Stating that the Hope and Auro Orchard communities together steward 46 acres of land, of which Auro Orchard is only farming 10-15 acres, and that the Hope community has [only] a furniture workshop and three houses, the letter mentioned that the Foundation intends to exchange another 2.5 acres of unutilised land in these communities for the Auro Oceanic resort in the Kottakarai area of Auroville and another 3.5 acres in the near future for privately-owned lands needed for the Matrimandir and the city. This leaves 2 acres for Hope and 28 acres for Auro Orchard. The location of the 6 acres to be exchanged will be done after consultation with the landstewards. The Special Officer stated that the exchanges had been approved by the Governing Board in its 64th meeting. Earlier, the Working Committee of the Residents’ Assembly (RA-WCom), having learned through its own sources that the land exchange registration had happened on November 11th, and having neither been informed about the exact nature of the exchanges nor about the permission of the Governing Board, as the minutes of the 63rd and any subsequent meetings of the Board have not been shared with the residents, had raised concerns about the exchanges: that The Mother had sanctioned the purchase of this land in 1965; that the deal had been concluded in secrecy and that there was no subsequent information from the office of the Auroville Foundation. The RA-WCom also questioned the financial proprieties of the exchange and wrote that it would appeal to higher authorities to reverse the land exchange. A resident of Auro Orchard has meanwhile issued his disagreement with the term ‘unutilized land’, and pointed out that many fruit bearing trees have been planted on the lands that have now been exchanged. He also stated that the land to be exchanged included the central borewell of Auro Orchard and irrigation junction, which “forms the heart of the farm as all the water gets directed from here”.

Pebble Garden under threat

Many objections have been raised to the proposal that a major part of the land of Pebble Garden, a pioneering project in wasteland regeneration and research that is well known throughout India, are proposed to be allocated to AuroYali, a contractor, as storage space for building materials. This land, located on the outskirts of Auroville, has undergone careful re-afforestation over the years, and is well-known in India for its success in restoring eroded land.

62nd Governing Board meeting

The RA-WCom has published extensive comments on the minutes of the 62nd meeting of the Governing Board, held in December 2022, which were only made public in October this year. The RA-WCom observed that, as no sufficient prior notices are given to the Residents’ Assembly or its duly appointed Working Committee about the agendas of the Governing Board meetings, it has not been possible to give any meaningful advice or suggestions as envisaged in section 19 of the Auroville Foundation Act. The RA-WCom stated that the Governing Board cannot render such a role, which is specifically envisaged by the Act, redundant by not asking for such advice nor by unreasonably rejecting the advice of the Residents’ Assembly, as the decisions of the Governing Board must subserve the objects of the Act which are, *inter alia*, to further the development of Auroville and its residents “in accordance with the original Charter of Auroville”. The RA-WCom also observed that since 2021 almost 200 people, who have completed their process to join Auroville, are waiting to be entered into the Register of Residents (RoR). The direction of the Governing Board, recorded in the minutes of its 59th meeting of April 2022, that an update of the RoR be completed by July 2022 has not been adhered to.

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Auroville Today does not necessarily reflect the views of the community as a whole.

