

The 2011 Film Festival



PHOTOS: GIORGIO



Clockwise from top left: Raconteurs Paul and Wazo interview Marco at the opening of the Film Festival; voting for a favourite film; flanked by Marco and Paul, Ireno receives his prize; a film show in Cinema Paradiso.

It felt like a carnival came to town. Men, women and children swarmed the parking lot of Bharat Nivas, laughing and chatting. They lost themselves in food or computers at Café le Morgan before ducking into darkened rooms in Town Hall or climbing to the sunny roof of La Terrace. Some ventured as far as Sadhana Forest. They all were on a scavenger hunt, following pictures of two lovingly intertwined orange carrots across Auroville. Their treasure? One hundred twenty and one films, documentaries and shorts that comprised the 2011 Auroville Film Festival.

It was, as promised, "bigger and better" than the inauguration of the biennial festival in 2009. Chief planners Marco and Krishna organized an array of mediums through which the festival could be experienced: films on screen; films on computer; photographs by Giorgio, Rakhal and Ireno; "Mutation in Progress," an art exhibit created by Transition School students that featured film, sound, dance and sculpture; and live discussions broadcast on Internet radio. They also expanded the types of movies included: films made by Aurovilians and the bio-region; projects created in local schools; and films about Auroville and the

bio-region or focused on human unity.

"We decided that after 40 years of Auroville's existence it was now time to show the world how seriously we are researching the concept of human unity, in this case through the medium of film," Marco and Krishna explained. "By inviting people from other countries and involving other festivals, we gave people an opportunity to reflect on this very important concept. It is not a way of making everyone the same, but cultivating the richness in our different traditions and cultures."

International Advisory Council member Doudou Diène was especially touched by this year's emphasis on human unity and urged all Aurovilians to keep it at the core and heart of all of our projects. "We are not given freedom, it has to be earned," he said, and offered two relevant Senegalese proverbs: "Man is medicine for man," and "In the forest all the branches are fighting but the roots are kissing".

But, as we all know, human unity isn't easy. Marco lost three kilograms in preparing for the festival. "Even on a very small level the working out of things together often proved difficult, and the process often pushed us. It was difficult to define

the Aurobindonian concept of human unity without resorting to the Mother's or Sri Aurobindo's quotes or philosophical references. It took us a ridiculous amount of time to even write the announcement for News and Notes asking people to select films that reflected human unity. And it was difficult to get a selection panel of Aurovilians, as the process would involve watching three films a day for many days, but we finally got a team together. At times they really struggled!"

Whatever difficulties plagued the planning period disappeared in the grand opening on Thursday, September 29th. Local raconteurs Wazo and Paul took to a colourfully decorated stage in Town Hall Plaza and provided a charming overview of the four-day event. Orange spots on walls and paths lured film lovers into the Town Hall where a German video of a huge outdoor digital clock changing each minute provoked conversation and imagination. And, serving as this year's logo, carrots were everywhere: carrot key rings, carrot T-shirts, carrot photographs.

No matter how charming the carrots were, they couldn't steal the stage from the films. The flicks came from all over the world – including films sug-

gested by Auroville International Germany and Holland. They were shown over the course of four days primarily at Cinema Paradiso and the Sri Aurobindo Auditorium, with one evening show at Sadhana Forest. The grand premiere – or, at least, the first film shown at the festival – was "Auroville Belongs to Humanity," made by B to celebrate Auroville's 40th birthday.

The shortest in length, "Help Others" by Leela, took just 30 seconds to deliver a powerful message about kindness. Two friends are taking plates of food to the table at lunchtime. One trips and spills everything, which brings out the better side of her companion, who shares her food.

The longest Auroville-made film was 21 minutes and earned a prize at the end of the festival. Called "Ghost" and created by Antonio, it followed a boy named Bhavyo who lives in a very haunted house and relies on his friend Vinith to deal with the problem.

Like the shortest and longest films, some of the most moving – and humorous – entries came from the students. Ten schools had submitted films they had made and all were accepted.

continued on page 3

- New Auroville style and design book
- Downgrading beauty'

pages 2 – 3

- Is there a solution to the upcoming housing crisis?
- Fighting the lorry cartel

pages 4 – 5

- Exploring consensus
- The eyes of an adult
- AVDZines and AV Spirit

pages 6 – 7

- Passings: Mia Berden, Tatiana Duz, Myriam Brettman
- AVI meets in Ethiopia

pages 7 – 8

12/xi

Auroville style and design

PRISMA has just published a new book titled *Auroville Form, Style and Design*. The book, which contains many photos by John Mandeon, is the brainchild of Franz, who explains how it came into being and what it's about.

“After we brought out the book on Auroville architecture, I wanted to publish another one which would focus more on interiors and details of Auroville homes, gardens and products. The yoga of Auroville is very much to do with matter so I wanted to show how it has evolved out of matter.

“The book begins with historical photos, including the construction of Last School, some interiors of Aspiration huts and the beginning of the Matrimandir excavation. Even the excavation, with the rows of steps cut into laterite, is quite beautiful in its way. In fact, this is one of the points of the book. It shows that everything can be beautiful, even the smallest details, if they reflect a certain consciousness. One of the striking things about these early photos is the contrast between the simple huts in which people were living and this thing which looked like a spaceship coming up in the middle of the desert. Of course, it wasn't ‘practical’ to begin with something like Last School, but it embodied all our expectations and aspirations about the future of this place. In fact, Roger played an important role in those early years with his style and aesthetic sense. Through buildings like Last School, Sanskrit School and his houses in Auromodèle he was trying to catch something new: he was always talking about finding new forms for a new consciousness. Mother said that everything was ready in the subtle plane: it just has to be pulled down in completely new forms.

“Today, perhaps, we are not so concerned about this; we tend to be more functional in our architecture and outlook. But I think this is a mistake because we cannot have enough of such things: we have to surround ourselves with beauty. This is what Sri Aurobindo says in his essay, *The National Value of Art*.

A nation surrounded daily by the beautiful, noble, fine and harmonious becomes that which it is habituated to contemplate...

“I was very moved to come upon this 1909 essay because there are statements he made there which remain absolutely valid today. For example, the following, with which I begin the book, could be a manifesto not only for Auroville but also for India.

It is not necessary that every man should be an artist. It is necessary that every man should have his artistic faculty developed, his taste trained, his sense of beauty and insight into form and colour and that which is expressed in form and colour, made habitually active, correct and sensitive. It is necessary that those who create, whether in things great or small, whether in the unusual masterpieces of art and genius or in the small common things of use that surround man's daily life, should be habituated to produce and the nation habituated to expect the beautiful in preference to the ugly, the noble in preference to the vulgar, the fine in preference to the crude, the harmonious in preference to the gaudy.

“There's not much sign of this happening in India today but, hopefully, a new generation is coming up which will recover its own values and heritage. As to Auroville, I don't think we have such a thing as an ‘Auroville style’. Here we have an enormous mix of styles which is inevitable as we have come from so many different backgrounds. I, with my European background, can't produce Indian heritage work but I can remain open to other influences. And that's what you see happening here. The European influence is there in our architecture and our products but there is also the influence of Indian culture and climate as well as Japanese aesthetics. And this whole process can throw up new things.

“Actually, the book shows how much diversity and richness there is in this small place, as well as the high quality of our products: Kenji's work in wood is absolutely world-class. At the same time, I think we are very much in a transitional period: much of what we are doing today is timebound. If we did this book again in ten years I think Auroville might look very different.

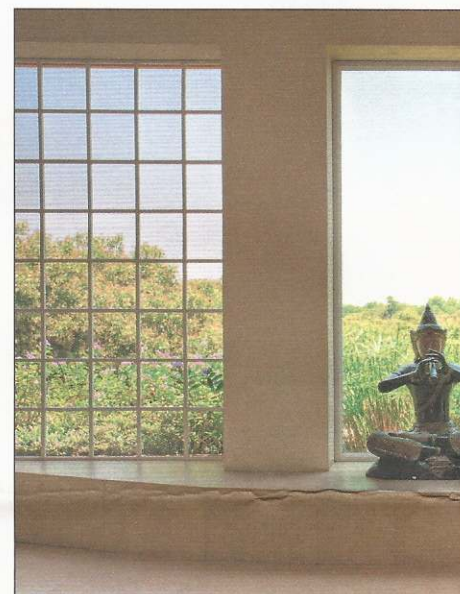
“Ultimately the selection in this book reflects very much my taste and my knowledge of Auroville. There may be other corners of Auroville which are beautiful but which I don't know about. The main point I am trying to get across is that if people surround themselves with beauty, this will help them discover something else. If you live in a non-beautiful environment, it's much more difficult to see the Divine.

“Of course, we are challenged daily by the mess which is Auroville's immediate neighbourhood. And even in Auroville we could have much more beauty in our public spaces and buildings. This is why I very much like Henk's idea to put pillars with *Savitri* quotations all over Auroville: I see them as kind of acupuncture needles for our collective body. Ultimately, however, people have to start with their own environment, with their home. And here we can learn from the Japanese that every detail, every corner, can be unique, can be beautiful. It's just a matter of developing that consciousness.”

As recorded by Alan

Auroville Form, Style and Design is available from Auroville bookshops, price Rs 490.

For further information contact prisma@auroville.org.in



Downgrading beauty?

"Art is a living harmony and beauty that must be expressed in all the movements of existence. The manifestation of harmony and beauty is part of the divine realization upon earth, perhaps even its greatest part."

The Mother

When, in the late 1970s, I first came to Hope, it was still very much a pioneering community. There were a few simple huts and acres of bare, scorched land which stretched to the horizon. But, improbably, in one corner somebody had fashioned a beautiful arrangement of fossilized wood. I took this as a kind of statement: that this was a place which valued something beyond the immediately practical, functional. That while the 'big', large-limbed work of pioneering was clamouring for our attention, there was another, equally important work to be done and this was the manifestation of beauty.

I was reminded of this when looking through a proof copy of PRISMA's new publication *Auroville Form, Style and Design*, because this shows that this attention to detail and originality of styling is still very much alive in Auroville today. It can be seen in items as diverse as sinuous lamps, hand-crafted wooden tables and beautiful bamboo instruments, as well, of course, in house interiors and garden design.

But whereas in the early years one couldn't go very far before one encountered a striking piece of architecture or beautiful detail – Last School perched on its hill of mud; a hibiscus flower floating in a granite bowl filled with water; a Japanese lantern standing watch over a carefully raked sand garden – today these are harder to find. In fact, the tendency today in terms of Auroville architecture, design and, come to think of it, almost everything in our community life, seems to be towards functionalism and cost-effectiveness rather than refinement and beauty.

Why? It's tempting to put it down to money or, rather, the lack of it. Beauty, refinement, the argument goes, don't come cheaply and Auroville today is a cash-strapped community. But even if the community is living beyond its means, there's still a lot of money swishing around in private hands. And secondly, and more importantly, the manifestation of beauty, refinement, has less to do with the size of one's cheque-book – my corner of fossilized wood couldn't have cost more than a few rupees – than with the eye and consciousness which creates it.

Granted, when it comes to constructing residences it's harder to get clearance these days for some of the stylish eccentricities of those earlier years. Try getting building permission for another Last School or one of Johnny's early keet experiments or Bob Lawlor's innovative 'globe' house, the one which revolved on its axis to control light and shade. Today any new building, whether individual or collective, has to satisfy a host of requirements which, while sensible in themselves, do not necessarily encourage creativity. Moreover, the decision to promote apartment buildings rather than individual dwellings in the Residential Zone may also tend to diminish creativity: apartment projects tend to a certain conservatism of design as they have to attract a wide range of clients. And it shouldn't be forgotten that when projects exceed their budget – as they always do in Auroville – funds initially allocated for landscaping and beautification are the first to disappear.

The present tilt towards functionalism may also be a reaction against some of those earlier 'statement' buildings which were not, after all, very practical. Last School was a nightmare to teach in because, whenever the wind rose, everybody's papers would fly up in the air. Similarly, Roger's Auromodele houses, while they continue to have their loyal adherents, can hardly be described as cosy.

And yet...in those earlier years there was a kind of adventurousness, fuelled by a heady mix of irresponsibility and the belief that material transformation was not only attainable, but just around the corner. In fact, the whole relationship with matter seemed different then. Everybody, it seemed, was getting their hands dirty in one way or another, and when it came to construction or landscaping people seemed to invest more of themselves in it. As one of the earlier pioneers puts it, "one of the big differences between the building of the earlier years and building now is that then we were putting our heart and soul into it. We were trying to be conscious about what we did and this consciousness went into a lot of details. Perhaps we believed more than today that the Divine is in the details."

Of course, in those days there seemed to be more time and fewer distractions, but I'm not sure this fully explains the difference. Something fundamental seems to have changed. Perhaps, as fewer and fewer of us work with the soil or with our hands, it is the belief that matter matters, that attempting to shape and beautify matter can be transformative both of the environment and of ourselves. For while some people continue to create pockets of beauty and refinement in their houses and immediate surroundings, the trend today seems to be towards utilitarianism, towards throwing up functional collective offices and dwellings with the minimum of landscaping. Sometimes this reflects the influence of government funding which requires the maximum facilities for the money provided. But the larger idea seems to be that functional, no-nonsense architecture and design allows everybody to get on with the 'real' work of Auroville without being caught up in the intricacies of construction or the territoriality engendered by the 'made by me' mentality of those who create original homes and environments.

There's something in this. But if, as both Sri Aurobindo and Mother point out, there is a direct and intimate connection between our surroundings and our state of consciousness, this downgrading – because what else can we call it? – of the task of manifesting beauty and refinement in Auroville may yet turn out to be one of our biggest errors.

Alan

The Film Festival 2011

continued from page 1

Sasi, the Coordinator for the Educational Outreach Programme, explained his passion for film education for children: "It is very important for children to be able to develop the ability to discriminate in the messages of the thousands of images they are seeing everyday on the TV, videos, and advertising. Even documentaries are edited to get their message across. By teaching them the techniques and processes of filmmaking, it will empower them, giving them the tools to be aware of the potential manipulation employed by the media."

"Babies" was another favourite among films not made by Aurovilians. An 80-minute silent documentary, "Babies" followed a year in the life of four infants: one in Mongolia, one in Namibia, one in San Francisco, and one in Tokyo. Doudou Diène encouraged festival-goers to "See it. It shows so clearly the power of love."

Four days filled with film culminated on Monday evening in a closing ceremony and presentation of awards. The suspense was tangible as the judges assembled on the stage. The trophy, called Mongbra and designed by Johnny, was a small brass stand on which stood a delicately moulded cobra and mongoose ready for attack. The runner-ups received beautiful ceramic plaques donated by Adil. While the prizes were interesting, there was mixed feedback regarding the awards. "It does not seem in the Auroville spirit to have winners, as the phrase implies there must be a loser," Sasi explained. "Maybe in future every entrant could get a memento instead."

No coverage of the Festival could be complete without noting Johnny and Jessie's film, "Four Goats and a Mixie", which won the prize for Best Short Fiction. A typical Tamil movie with a twist, it was ripe with drama, intrigue and romance – and of course dancing and singing – and entirely performed by kids.

"World Wide Web Lullaby" by Ireno won the Mongbra. "It took us about 400 hours and I could not have done it without my son's help in editing," Ireno explained. "The film was made using hundreds of pre-existing small bits of digital data found on the Internet. The project was taken as a challenge to produce a movie without the need of a video camera and other expensive equipment. An Internet connection and a PC were the only aids. I don't know if the film can be shown outside Auroville due to copyright laws, but that's OK with me."

Two young boys especially pleased the judges – and the crowd. Antonio, a 14-year-old and his friend and co-director, Bhavyo, ran down to the stage three times to collect awards. "To see the inspiration and creativity of these two young boys was very rewarding," said Marco. In addition to "Ghosts," which won the award for Best Actor in a Short Student Non-Workshop Film, their 11-minute long "Parkoueira" earned a prize for Best Short Fiction. "Parkoueira" explores good, evil and friendship as a young boy who wishes for super powers finally gets what he asked for – and subsequently realizes you should be careful what you wish for.

"I wrote 'Ghosts' because I believe in ghosts and I want to show that they exist," Antonio explained. "We developed all the tricks as we went along. It was supposed to be as short as the other films but this time we did not have distractions so we could concentrate and somehow it became longer."

Antonio also had fun experimenting with "Time Stretch," an award-winning 8-minute film that showed things in slow motion. And he's far from finished with film. "Now I need a little rest, but after Christmas Bhavyo and I hope to make a series of five three minute films."

The boys aren't the only ones thinking about the future. "For the next Festival in 2013 we will have a corpus of films on human unity which we can show here and also offer to other festivals," Marco and Krishna said.

They also hope to expand the conversations. This year's Radio-live discussions organized by Auroville Radio and Auroville TV "were a huge success," according to the co-coordinators. "We got some feedback from people all over the world via Facebook and Twitter. It was a big step for us as in 2009 we did not have any discussions around the films but now Chloe suggested a structure that worked well. We ideally need two professionals to lead discussions on film but it is difficult to get people to commit themselves months ahead."

Lack of advance commitment isn't their biggest challenge. "It's funding," explains Marco. "It will be a big problem for the 2013 Festival as the Dutch Stichting de Zaaier, who have gracefully funded both the 2009 and 2011 festivals, have said that they'll not contribute towards any future film festivals."

Luckily, the 2013 festival is still two years away and Krishna and Marco don't have to worry too much about funding or organizing as yet. When asked how they relaxed after such a successful but stressful event, Krishna replied immediately: "I slept all weekend and watched a couple of relaxing movies."

Until 2013...

Dianna and Catherine

From one of the makers of 'Ghost' and 'Parkoueira'

It was really difficult for me to get hold of a camera. I go to Deepanam School and nobody took me seriously when I said I wanted to make a film. Eventually I was able to use the school's ordinary camera during lunchtime and in the evenings, and I edited the film on a friend's computer. The quality is not as good as the other films in the festival because it is an ordinary picture camera and not a video camera. We had to stop every three minutes to put the film on the computer, and we were also erasing things while filming.

Last year Uriel was giving a filmmaking workshop in Deepanam but it did not fit in with my classes so I could not do it. Then I decided to make a movie by myself, but it didn't work out. Then another friend, Desmond, came and we started to make Parkoueira for the other film festival 2011. I did not know that Krishna who organized the Film Festival would have lent me a camera and proper editing stuff. My friend Bhavyo and I started to do films on our own.

We read a lot at home and watch movies on our computer. I love science fiction films and my all time favourite is "E.T." followed by "Narnia". My favourite comedy is "Home Alone." I like documentaries and the best one at the Film Festival was "Our Generation" about the Australian Aboriginals' struggle for their land and culture.

I am going on the AVI visit to Ethiopia at the end of October to film some of the events there and I made an appeal for funds in News and Notes and people were very generous. My mother, sister and I were involved with the very beginning of the African Pavilion and we spent a lot of time clearing the land and telling African students about Auroville, so I feel I have a strong connection with Africa. It will be a fantastic opportunity for me

Antonio, as recorded by Diana



Paul (left) and Wazo (right) give prizes to Bhavyo (second left) and to Antonio

crisis is coming up. Is there a solution?



Another housing crisis is coming u

In January 2009, a number of housing projects were initiated. Now, two years later, almost all of these projects are being completed and the apartments are fully booked. What are the options for those wishing to join Auroville today?

At the end of August 2011 the Entry Service, in an open letter to the community, stated that from September 1st it would not be receiving new applications because of the lack of available housing for Newcomers and Aurovilians. It observed that people were leaving Auroville because of a lack of housing and that L'Avenir d'Auroville, Auroville's town planning service, had not approved new housing projects.

The concerns of the Entry Service are shared by the Housing Service which, in another open letter to the community one week later, stated that it had been complaining about the situation for a long time and that L'Avenir, even after a General Meeting had taken place on the topic, had not taken any action. The Housing Service, however, distanced itself from the decision of the Entry Service to stop receiving the applications of newcomers, as it felt that such a far-reaching decision can only be taken by the community as a whole. It also recalled that some years ago a previous decision to 'close Auroville' had only led to frustration among potential Newcomers and had not solved the housing crisis.

The Funds and Assets Management Committee also expressed its concerns and added another perspective. It observed that in many cases Newcomers have found accommodation with Auroville guesthouses and with Aurovilians who have spare rooms. Acknowledging the ongoing practice that Newcomers pay rent to those who offer accommodation – an issue which had been hotly disputed in the past as it was considered an infringement of the Auroville Charter – the FAMC observed that in some cases Newcomers have been asked to pay too much. It recommended a ceiling: Rs. 5,000 per month for singles, Rs. 6,000 per month for couples without children and Rs. 8,000 per month for families.

In the meantime, the Entry Service shelved its intention to stop receiving Newcomer applications, and L'Avenir published a list of nine housing projects [see box] stating that 245 housing units are planned to be made available within the next two to three years, followed by at least 270 in the subsequent years. L'Avenir is also proposing the temporary housing project, Transit Lounge, which will provide fast-track housing for 50 people for periods of up to two years over the next 10 years.

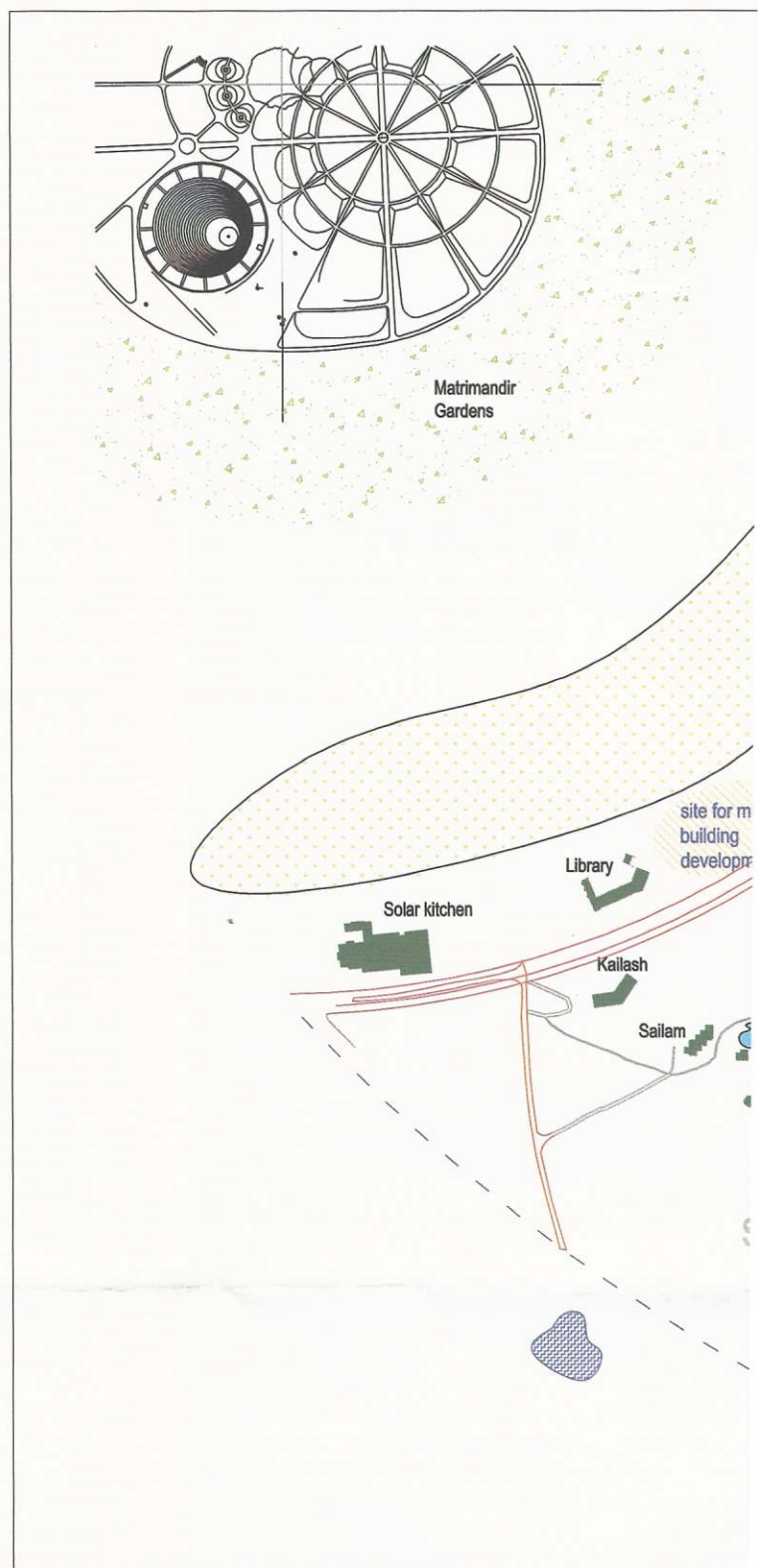
Why have no new housing projects started?

This sounds like an excellent development. But on careful reading of the list of projects it appears that only one of them, Maitreya 2, has received building permission; and even this cannot take off as funds are still awaited. All other projects are far from being ready for implementation. How is it that during the last two years no new housing projects have started?

Dorle, one of the architects working at L'Avenir, gives an insight into the problems. "Sectors 1 and 2 of the Residential Zone have not been properly planned by the previous teams of L'Avenir and its predecessor, Auroville's Future. If you overlay the map of the now realised developments on the Galaxy Master Plan, you see that not one of the manifested projects corresponds to the Galaxy Plan. This is a particular concern for those who wish to develop the city as closely as possible to the Master Plan.

"The present team of L'Avenir is not concerned about following the Master Plan in such great detail. But it wants to ensure that there is a common harmony between all the projects that have already manifested and those that are still on the drawing board. Sadly Roger Anger, the late Chief Architect, has not left any urban design parameters. This has led to a rather wild development. The projects that have manifested so far show a complete lack of coherence in building styles and language. One of our tasks is to define the urban design parameters for the new projects as well as to ensure that the population densities for the individual sectors are achieved.

"Another concern is to find suitable locations for all the upcoming housing projects, which includes finding proper access and ensuring that construction doesn't disturb the neighbours too much." Dorle sighs. "There is quite a lot of the 'not in my backyard' attitude prevailing among Aurovilians," she says, "As we are more or less replanning the entire Sectors 1 and 2, some people object that a



previously envisaged green corridor behind their houses might become a building site. This makes locating the new projects quite a challenge, even if you consider that we are only planning low to medium-density projects. We are also wondering if the open spaces between the various communities could be allocated for building individual houses."

Has L'Avenir ever thought about locating individual houses inside existing

communities? "We have," says Dorle. "But though quite a few communities have a lot of open spaces where new houses could easily be built, the answer we receive is a resounding negative. The reasons range from 'difficulty in giving access to the community's water resources' to 'we do not want a two-year construction site in our community with all the disturbance that brings.' Only two communities have allowed a new house to be built, a permanent one in Samasti and a transit house in Sukhavati."

This brings us to the Transit Lounge. [see AVToday 263-264] "There is a lot of progress," says Dorle. "A site opposite Courage community has been approved, and the first group of people have come forward. We expect that they will start building soon." Asked why the Transit Lounge has not found a place in Sector 1 or 2 of the Residential Zone, Dorle answers that the site for the Transit Lounge was selected near Courage, located in sector 3, because it has some common infrastructure in place and this sector will not need to be developed in the near future. "The site

New Housing Projects proposed by L'Avenir d'Auroville

project name	location	housing type	nos of units	status	holder/architect	finance
Maitreya 2	Next to Vikas Radial, near Maitreya 1	apartments with common facilities	27 apartments	building permission received, contract procedures pending	project holder: Joseba, Vijayi architect: Pino, Sheril	Indian government
Maitreya 3	next to Maitreya 1	apartments	30 apartments	site allocation has been given	project holder: Joseba, Vijayi architect: Sonali	private
Green Casbah	next to Realisation	houses with shared infrastructure	50 houses	awaiting building permission	project holder / architect: Satprem	private
Incremental row housing	sector 1	row houses with back gardens / front gardens	40 houses in phase 1, 20 in phase 2	awaiting site permission	project holder: Housing architect: Dorle, Mona	private
Kalpana	between Arati and Grace	apartments	96 apartments in 4 phases phase 1 : 24 units	site identified awaiting permission	project holder: Satyakam, Devasmita	private plus donation
Share	near Gaia	clustered individual houses	40 people mainly families	access land purchase needed	project holder: Elvira, Anita architect: Poonam	private
Merville		clustered individual houses	5 individual house for 11 people	awaiting allocation	project holder: Anne Hildebrand, Claire Mussier	private
Sukavati	between Sukavati and Madhuca	clustered individual houses	2 buildings 15-20 people	study completed	architect: Bertrand	private
Sunship	near Citadyn	apartments	200 residential units for 300 people in phase development	phase 1 (40 units) site permission given, fund raising stage	architect: Pierre and Louis	private plus donation

It added another perspective. It observed that in many cases Newcomers have and accommodation with Auroville guesthouses and with Aurovilians who have spare rooms. Acknowledging the ongoing practice that Newcomers pay rent to those who offer accommodation – an issue which had been hotly disputed in the past as it was considered an infringement of the Auroville Charter – the AMC observed that in some cases Newcomers have been asked to pay too much. It recommended a ceiling: Rs. 5,000 per month for singles, Rs. 6,000 per month for couples without children and Rs. 8,000 per month for families.

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can be used for the coming 10 years, after which it can be dismantled to make place for permanent development.”

The financing of the proposed new housing projects

There is another problem with the proposed new housing projects, and that is how they are going to be financed. Auroville does not have the money to realize these projects. Only three housing projects plan to benefit from donations: Maitreya 2 is envisaged to be funded by the Indian Government, while Kalpana and Sunship are planning to be partly funded by donations. The majority of the proposed housing projects, including part of Kalpana and part of Sunship, will require private funding which can only come from those who will join Auroville.

And here is the crux: Auroville only allows Newcomers and Friends of Auroville to contribute to a house or an apartment. Auroville does not accept contributions from outsiders who would like a house or apartment to be built and join Auroville as a Newcomer once the house or apartment is ready. In other words, only those Newcomers who either have built a temporary house in the Transit Lounge or who have rented a place in Auroville or in a nearby village or who are lucky enough to find a temporary place in Auroville to ‘house-sit’ are allowed to contribute towards a house or apartment in any of the new housing projects.

This leads to a number of problems. If we assume that it takes 2 years for a new housing project to be finished (none of them have as yet started!) today’s Newcomers will be forced to live for 2 years in a small temporary house in the Transit Lounge or in a rented house or room somewhere inside or outside Auroville or do multiple house-sits before they can move into their own new house or apartment. Probably this will take more than 2 years as it will take some time before a Newcomer has decided on which housing project to join.

The second problem is that in that period no new Newcomers can join, as the Transit Lounge will be full. For the Transit Lounge is planned for only 50 people, while the Entry Service last year admitted almost 100 people as Newcomers. It is difficult to see where all the other Newcomers can be housed, except in the surrounding villages (in which case we could expect an increase in rents).

The third problem is that Auroville cannot manifest 245 units in the next 2-3 years as planned by L’Avenir if only those who have been admitted as Newcomers can contribute to a house or apartment. For many of the planned housing projects will not be able to take off as there will not be a sufficient number of clients.

And lastly, many people who would like to join Auroville may not be willing to live for a minimum of two years in temporary conditions in the Transit Lounge or in less than ideal conditions in a room in an Auroville guesthouse, with an Aurovillian, or in the village.

A possible solution: the Potential Newcomer

A possible solution would be to introduce a new category of ‘Potential Newcomer’.

A Potential Newcomer would be a person who is living outside Auroville and who wants to join Auroville as a Newcomer as soon as a house or apartment in Auroville is ready for them. To become a Potential Newcomer, a person would first meet with the Entry Service who would evaluate if the person meets the conditions to become Newcomer. A Potential Newcomer then would be allowed to contribute towards an apartment or house in an Auroville Housing Project through the Housing Service.

Once the house or apartment is ready, the Potential Newcomer would meet again with the Entry Service who would decide on admitting the person as a Newcomer. If the Potential Newcomer does not become a Newcomer (for his/her own reasons or because s/he is not admitted as a Newcomer by the Entry Service) the contribution towards the house or apartment (without interest) will be repaid by Auroville as soon as another person has been found to take the place. If the Potential Newcomer is accepted as a Newcomer, he/she can move into the house or apartment.

If the Newcomer does not become Aurovillian after having lived in the apartment or house during the Newcomer period (for his/her own reasons or because s/he is not admitted as Aurovillian by the Entry Service), a major part of the contribution will be repaid by Auroville as specified in the present Newcomer Housing agreements. If the Newcomer becomes an Aurovillian, the right to the refund would lapse.

This solution would be a win-win situation for both the Potential Newcomer as well as for Auroville. The Potential Newcomer would have a house to move into as soon as he or she joins Auroville and can contribute his or her energies directly without concern for the housing situation. Auroville would not have a financial risk; for if a Potential Newcomer does not join Auroville, the house would be made available to someone else who would put up the money to repay the Potential Newcomer.

For Auroville, acceptance of this proposal would mean that the proposed housing projects can begin and that the housing crisis may be substantially lessened.

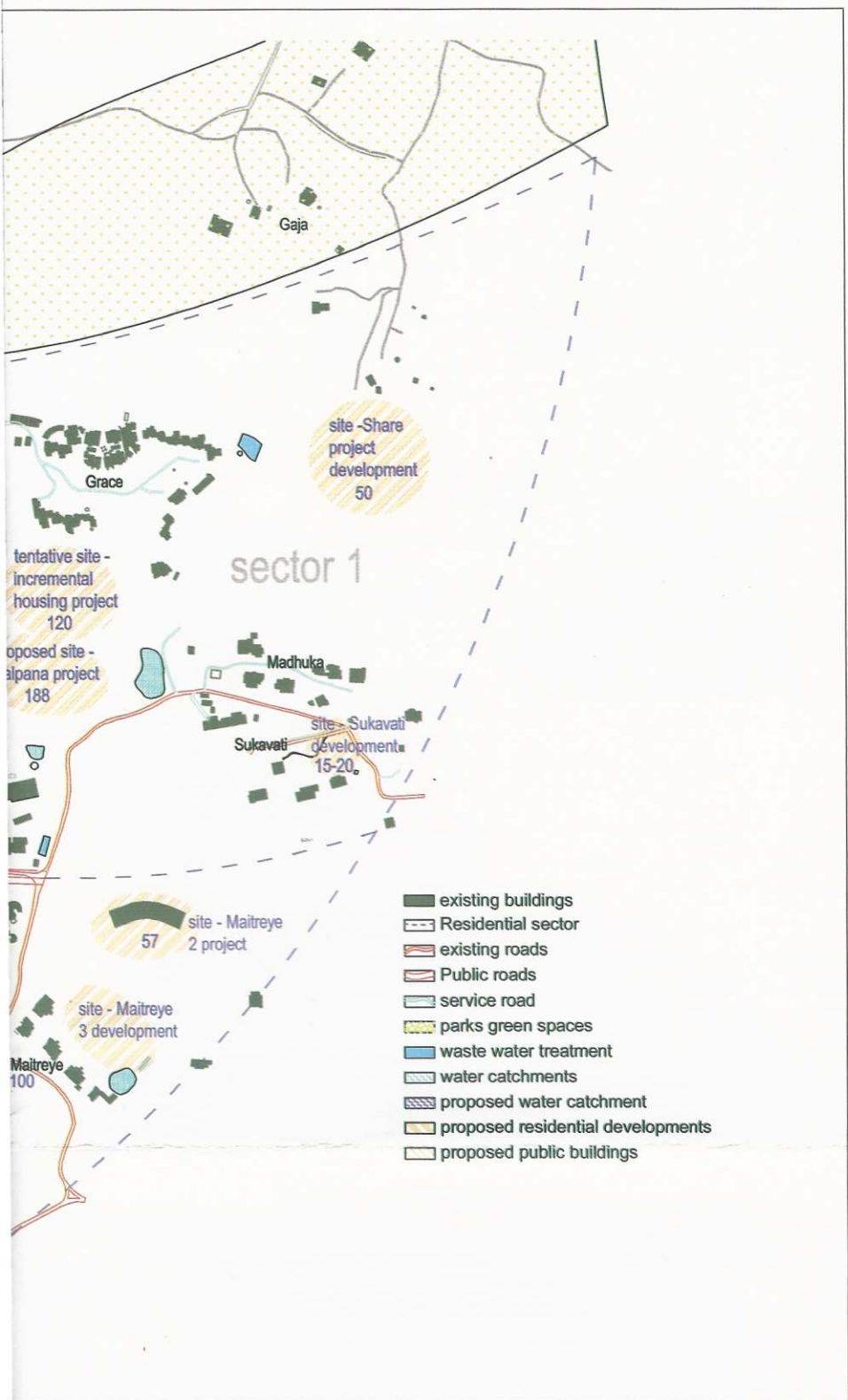
The Funds and Assets Management Committee, the Housing Service and the Entry Service are now considering this option; subsequently it may be submitted to the Residents’ Assembly for its comments.

Carel

New Housing Projects proposed by L’Avenir d’Auroville

project name	location	housing type	nos of units	status	holder/architect	finance
Maitreya 2	Next to Vikas Radial, near Maitreya 1	apartments with common facilities	27 apartments	building permission received, contract procedures pending	project holder: Housing architect: Pino, Sheril	Indian government
Maitreya 3	next to Maitreya 1	apartments	30 apartments	site allocation has been given	project holder: Joseba, Vijayi architect: Sonali	private
Green Casbah	next to Realisation	houses with shared infrastructure	50 houses	awaiting building permission	project holder / architect: Satprem	private
Incremental row housing	sector 1	row houses with back gardens / front gardens	40 houses in phase 1, 20 in phase 2	awaiting site permission	project holder: Housing architect: Dorle, Mona	private
Kalpana	between Arati and Grace	apartments	96 apartments in 4 phases phase 1 : 24 units	site identified awaiting permission	project holder: Satyakam, Devasmita	private plus donation
Share	near Gaia	clustered individual houses	40 people mainly families	access land purchase needed	project holder: Elvira, Anita architect: Poanam	private
Merville		clustered individual houses	5 individual house for 11 people	awaiting allocation	project holder: Anne Hildebrand, Claire Mussier	private
Sukavati	between Sukavati and Madhuka	clustered individual houses	2 buildings 15-20 people	study completed	architect: Bertrand	private
Sunship	near Citadyn	apartments	200 residential units for 300 people in phase development	phase 1 (40 units) site permission given, fund raising stage	architect: Pierre and Louis	private plus donation

a solution?



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Carel

Fighting the lorry cartel

Work on a new stretch of the Crown Road from Kailash to the Pour Tous Distribution Centre was recently forcibly stopped. A lorry drivers' cartel threatened the workers with violence if the management would not accept their demands.

"This is a mafia!" says Alain Grandcolas, one of the executives of Auroville Road Service indignantly. "We are facing a group of lorry owners in Edaiyanchavadi who are acting as a cartel. Together they own about 10 lorries and have decided that all the construction material for Auroville, such as blue metal (small pieces of broken granite), sand, bricks, cement and steel must be delivered through them at their prices. As we refused, they blocked work on the road, stopped deliveries of materials, and threatened to beat up our workers. It's awful!"

He takes a sip of tea and explains how it all started. "For some years the Road Service has been constructing permanent Auroville roads. Last year we did the road past the Kindergarten and Bharat Nivas. This year the Road Service has been building the Crown Road between Arka and the Solar Kitchen. We also made the first Radial Road towards Arati.

"We received our materials, such as sand and blue metal, from the local lorry owners. But as our needs are steadily increasing – we now require about 120 lorries a month – we decided to go directly to the crushers to be supplied at the best possible prices. It was then that we discovered that over the years we had been paying far too much – in fact, about Rs 1,000 per lorry above the normal market rate! Subsequently I found out that over the last 10 years we in Auroville have been dealing with a cartel of lorry owners who meet daily in two local teashops to fix the prices. While this has been working well for them, Aurovilians have been vastly overcharged.

lorries he needed. Unthinkingly, I agreed. But this was not accepted by the cartel. It triggered an uproar and I was forced to allow them to supply the blue metal to him at an extra charge of Rs 500 instead of Rs 1,000 a load.

"But that was not the end of it. At the end of July they came to us at the road construction site with the ultimatum that we had to use their lorries at the earlier prices (Rs 1000 a lorry extra), 15% higher than we had meanwhile been paying. We refused. After one week of unsuccessful negotiations they took action. They blocked all deliveries, and when we ordered deliveries using other truckers, they stopped those trucks and prevented them from unloading at our site. After hours of heated discussion, they allowed the truckers to unload, but told them never to come back. And they didn't.

"Three lorry owners from the surrounding villages did not agree with the cartel and accepted our rates. For some time these lorry owners unloaded at night. But soon this was discovered. Then the cartel started telling our Road Service workers not to touch the materials that had been unloaded at night, otherwise they would be beaten up – not on the site in Auroville, but in their homes in front of their families. All our workers stopped work – they knew that these were not idle threats and they were afraid. That's how, in the 3rd week of August, all work on the new road stopped.

"A lot of discussion followed. The cartel offered us 5% discount, which we didn't accept, not so much because the price difference was around 15%, but as a matter of policy. It is the Road Service which must manage road construc-



After nine weeks of being blocked, work on the Crown Road resumed.

"We then informed the lorry owners that this was no longer acceptable and that henceforth we would be paying the price that we considered reasonable. From January onwards, we accepted only truckers who were delivering at our rates.

"One day an Aurovilian asked me to help him out. He needed urgently one load of sand. I agreed, and asked a lorry driver, a man from Pondicherry, to deliver the load at the Aurovilian's place instead of at the work site of the Road Service. To his surprise, the Aurovilian found that he was paying Rs 1,000 less than what he used to pay. So I realized that, though the cartel were delivering to the Road Service at our prices, they were continuing to overcharge the other Aurovilians. But this delivery – and the fact that the Aurovilian had noticed the price difference – came to the notice of the local lorry owners. That evening they phoned the man who had made the delivery and threatened him: he would be beaten up and his truck damaged if he ever he turned up again in Auroville. I lost this supplier.

"About one month later another Aurovilian asked for help. He needed 70 lorries of blue metal. He asked me what price I was paying. He discovered that he had been paying far too much in the past. The 70 lorries would cost him over Rs 70,000 extra if he would order them as usual. Naturally he asked me to take care of the delivery of the 70

tion in Auroville, not the lorry owners. We went to see the Secretary of the Auroville Foundation, Mr. Ramaswamy, who forwarded our complaint about threats of violence and work blockage to the police. But he declined to follow up with the higher police authorities. Nothing happened.

"We took up the matter with the Working Committee. They, too, contacted the police, but without much result. For more than two weeks nobody showed up for work, while the lorry owners blockaded our site.

"The Working Committee and L'Avenir d'Auroville then decided on a different course of action. They blacklisted the seven most aggressive lorry owners of the cartel and informed all the Auroville architects, builders and contractors of this decision and the reasons for it, asking them not to use any of them until further notice. This, we know, has hit them hard and they have lost a lot of business.

"Meanwhile, we have bought our own lorry, and another Aurovilian has also acquired one. This will have a further impact on the cartel, for now we can make deliveries by ourselves. They may try and respond with violence, damage the lorries or threaten the drivers. We'll see. But we are determined. Auroville must be able to purchase materials at the best possible market rates.

In conversation with Carel

At a recent General Meeting, the Residents Assembly Service announced that they would like to experiment with making consensus the default option for community decision-making. Elvira, a member of the group, has wide knowledge and experience of the process.

Auroville Today: For many years we in Auroville have stated that our preferred mode of community decision-making is consensus. Yet, over the last few years, we've veered more and more towards voting. Why?

Elvira: One reason is many people want easy-to-use decision-making processes and consensus seems too complicated. It's true that if you want to comprehend consensus you have to read at least one A4 page, to ask questions and 'get your hands dirty,' and this takes time and energy. This is often the point where we go back to voting because we think we don't have the time or the space to devote to this kind of work. But if, collectively, we all gave a few hours per month to working on things like consensus, I think it could evolve into something useful. Consensus is not perfect, it's not a panacea – it cannot be used, for example, by people who cannot or will not cooperate with others – but I think it's very promising and it needs us to use it in order to become something that's really alive.

In fact, we've never sat down and tried to define what consensus means for us, so there are many different ideas about it floating around this community.

So what is the working definition you would propose?

Consensus is a community decision-making process. It allows all participants to modify proposals without voting to come to decisions which have the highest level of commitment from the largest possible number of people.

For Auroville we could envisage a process where, firstly, a universally-agreed goal is identified (the Auroville Charter, for example). Proposals for change can then be made which would move us closer to that goal. Each proposal would be presented to the residents who, after question and answer sessions and further explanation, could respond with a yes or no. If they choose no, they would have the responsibility to do either one of three consequential steps: either they participate in the modification of the proposal to make it better suit their needs; or, having expressed their concerns, they stand aside; or they block the proposal's progress. All modifications and blocks would be considered in the light of the goal to be achieved.

Let's look more closely at the main objections to the consensus process. The first big objection is that we often have to make quick decisions and consensus takes too long, it's too complicated, for such decisions. Another objection is that a few people can block a consensus process and this gives them enormous influence.

Exploring consensus



Elvira

I don't see that we often have to make quick decisions, but I think that if there are decisions which are really urgent then we should just go for a vote: there's no need to be dogmatic about this. Generally, however, an efficient consensus decision-making process would be equally as fast as anything we have now because, while it might take longer to come to a decision, once you've made it, it takes less time to implement as you have more people invested in seeing it happen.

As to blocking, some people will always try to block decisions. It's true that with a voting process you have more of a chance of ignoring them, but in my view this is not a solution, neither on a human level nor on an integral yoga level. When people take the extreme step to block a proposal, I think we need as a community to find out where that unconditional "no" is coming from, because generally it's not to do with the proposal but with something deeper. And if we can get them to talk about the things which make them say 'no', maybe there is a way that we could disconnect this blocking energy from blocking specific proposals.

Actually, we would like to try to make blocking such a huge thing to do that it would hardly ever happen. We could say that if you block you have the responsibility to work with the proposal. The main challenge here is to make it impossible for just one person, or even a small group, to block a proposal.

Some communities practice a form of consensus which requires a minimum of 5% of participants to block a proposal.

I think that's a very good idea, especially for us to start with.

Another objection to consensus is that Mother never intended Aurovilians to make decisions like this. She spoke more of the need to elevate one's consciousness.

For me consensus is a stepping-stone, it's not our ultimate form of decision-making but it's an acknowledgement of where we are today. Nevertheless, I would love to sit with people with a deep knowledge of what Mother said and see if we can combine it with some of the principles of consensus.

So what are the advantages of consensus?

Unlike voting, a successful consensus process is not divisive – there are no winners and losers as everybody feels to some extent invested in the outcome.

Also, an eminent economist proved that it is impossible to reach a fair and equitable solution using voting, because with voting you tend to simply tally existing preferences. Consensus, however, is a tool that allows for the cooperative evolution of a proposal: it allows anybody to contribute towards the outcome while requiring them to be willing to change their initial positions. Here I see a connection to the spiritual level because to do this you have to step back and consider why you are holding a position, something Mother recommended. I find it tremendously attractive that an everyday activity

like governance can become a tool of introspection, of working upon our prejudices.

Do you also see consensus as an instrument for rebuilding trust?

Yes, exactly. However, I can see that is quite a difficult tool to start with so maybe we also have to look at other ways of unifying our energies. Decision-making, how we communicate in meetings and conflict-resolution are interconnected: in a healthy society you have to work on all three. For example, the success of consensus also depends upon not taking on conflicts which are deep and difficult to resolve. If you have individuals who are blocking a process because they are in conflict with each other, and not because of a content issue, you have to be able to tell them to solve their conflict before participating further in the consensus process. So there should be mechanisms in place which can help them do this.

For me, consensus also fosters an attitude which requires you to take responsibility for making your input positive rather than negative and to make it future-oriented.

Consensus requires a critical mass of committed people for it to work. Yet, over the years, many capable people have stepped back from the governance dimension of Auroville. Do you have any ideas about how to involve them again?

This is a major problem. Do we just sit and wait for people to come forward? This makes me nervous because around Auroville people are not sitting and waiting and a lot is happening now that will be irreversible, or at least hard to undo. One idea is not to begin by trying to get everybody to come to big meetings again, but to create de-centralised platforms in communities and neighborhoods. On these platforms, some skills training could take place. You could have two facilitators per neighborhood who would be trained in facilitation, participatory approaches and consensus-building and who would introduce these ideas.

Another idea is to ask the people who no longer participate in the governance process what would make them come back. Actually, it's really difficult to envisage what must happen for people to get involved again because the level of frustration and disillusionment is huge. People don't want to sit in meetings because our meetings are horrendous. We find it very difficult to listen to each other, to value each other. We've lost the human touch.

Has consensus ever been tried in a community this big and this diverse?

No. It's usually tried either in relatively small groups or in large homogeneous groups. This is one more reason for me to want to try it here because this is exactly what I perceive Auroville is for, to playfully experiment with this level of human diversity. I wouldn't be doing this work here if I didn't think we could make a success of consensus. But as a community we need to be less scared of failure and be willing to jump a bit more into deep water. And remember that we are here for each other.

From an interview by Alan

REFLECTION

It is not often that I enter the glass doors of Bon Bakes, one of the two Westernized cafeterias in Pondicherry, to have a cappuccino and a croissant. I find the experience, a perfectly normal event in Europe or America, to be surreal. Sometimes I am the only dark-skinned customer there, and I find that disconcerting. Nevertheless, one Sunday, I found myself making my way to Bon Bakes, breaking into a sweat in the dazzling mid-morning sun and the reflected heat from the asphalt roads. As is customary with me, I was wrapped the ubiquitous "dupatta" [a thin shawl and an article of modesty for Indian women] to shade myself from the sun and protect myself from the smells of the city – the putrid stench of the overflowing sewage canal that runs right through Pondicherry and past the glass doors of Bon Bakes and the nauseating exhaust fumes of the buses and trucks.

It was with a sigh of relief that I pushed open the glass doors for a bit of civilized cool of the air-conditioned cafe and sank into the deep arm-chairs with the Sunday papers, ordering my repast of coffee and croissant from the black-suited waiter. I was comforted by the fragile sense of sanctuary that the imposing glass walls offered from the Indian heat and its urban chaos. I was half-way through the papers and down to my last bite when I was startled by the sound of an urgent tapping on the glass. Right outside on the side-walk, with just a plate of glass separating us, was a ragged boy, no more than 8 years old, in a red-checked shirt half-open, torn trousers and bare feet, gesturing that he was hungry. I could not hear him through the glass but the sunken despair in his dark eyes was unmistakable. I looked away. For, having grown up in India, witnessing poverty is not a novel experience for me. An estimated one-third of the country's population, (and that literally amounts to hundreds of millions of people) live on a few meagre rupees a day, and sadly, statistics indicate that in India's ill-thought rush towards economic globaliza-

The eyes of an adult

tion, the divide between the poor and the rich, the little boy and me, is increasing and not decreasing. I looked away in a deliberate attempt to continue with my reading. But...

As a teenager in high-school, I used to volunteer at teaching a group of slum-children. To say, I was teaching is misleading. The group ranged from toddlers who would cling to my skirts to gangly shy youth in their early teens. And what can one possibly teach in those couple of hours every week? But the experience of those years was one that shaped me, forcing me to ask deep existential questions about life and its injustices. The experience also humanized me, for the abundance of collective joy, love, and excitement with which the children greeted me every Saturday afternoon when I came for my weekly class is something that I neither had nor ever felt since in a group setting.

And then there was the time when, in one rare visit to Kolkatta, I befriended another group of street-children. I was a young woman with my first camera and was focusing my lens on this charming scene of four children, including a girl with a baby cradled in her arms swarming over an ice-cream seller's push cart. The children saw me before I got my shot and rushed over begging, "paisa," "paisa." I refused to dole out money for one never knows whether it actually does any good, but I offered to buy them ice-cream. They were delighted with the offer and abandoning the ice-cream push cart with its poor fare of colored stick-ice, made me pay for cones of "Italian-soft" cream at a shop, yes, with glass windows advertising its status. That encounter over ice-cream led to a weekend of friendship. I took them to the zoo and the planetarium, and we ate "chaat" together from the roadside stalls. I saw Kolkatta through their eyes and learnt how to ride the metro without paying the fare.

Somehow growing up, I had edited the poor out of my heart. Perhaps as the idealism and confidence of youth that makes one believe one can change the world evaporated, I gave up on social activism and settled down to a more intellectual life of teaching, writing, and studying philosophy.

Until now. The tapping on the window had taken on a greater note of urgency. Perhaps, in the fleeting second that our eyes had met, he had sensed both the sympathetic compassion in my heart and the nagging guilt about my obvious privileges and was determined to make it work to his advantage. Noticing my growing discomfort, the black-suited waiter went out and shooed the child away. Still pretending to be absorbed in the papers, I observed that the urchin just moved a few feet away from the store doors to join his comrades – a small group of children even younger than him.

I pushed away my unfinished croissant and coffee. And on a sudden impulse, bought a loaf of sliced bread and walked out. I went over to the group, who momentarily seemed to have lost interest in begging, and handed out the loaf awkwardly to the child nearest to me. He grabbed it only to be accosted by his comrades. A fight broke out over plain white sliced bread.

I quickly established my authority and demanded the loaf back. Then counting carefully, I divided the slices equally between all of them. The children were soon munching contentedly. I was about to go on my way when suddenly that boy, all of 8 years old, stuck his hand out. It wasn't a gesture of gratitude. It wasn't a gesture of respect that the young give to the elder in this culture. It was a gesture of equality. As he gazed straight into my eyes and gravely shook my hand, I noticed that the helpless look of despair I had seen a few moments ago had left. These were the eyes of an adult, of a mature person who exists by the capacity of his own strength and who knows it.

Bindu

"We have arrived"

Some of the best inspirations can be found in the most unlikely of places. I found mine in a bunch of youngsters, most of whom would be brushed off by my fellow designers as "just another bunch of uneducated boys that came to Auroville". They can be found at AV Dzines & AV Spirit, as they have rechristened themselves from the formerly graphic section of Auroville's Future. They are one of the most unassuming lot of youngsters in Auroville today with qualities that match those of some of the most dedicated Aurovilians: confident, independent and, most important of all, always smiling.

Here what seems to have succeeded is pure hard work with dedication, armed with humility, simplicity and teamwork. Guna is the mentor behind this team and he plays a pivotal role in keeping this bunch of bright souls together. They have created an atmosphere of learning, growth, respect and sharing that many teams in Auroville could learn from. Guna's early work at Aurofuture prepared him for passing on capacity-building skills to others. He has managed to mentor a team of youngsters who came without any formal training, with almost no computer knowledge and no design background in the conventional sense. He has created a team that very professionally does most of the community jobs related to graphic design and publishing.

Their public relation skills, the ease with which they handle their clients, have to be seen to be believed. It is a rare sight in a graphic design studio for a client to walk in with an idea and then actually get to sit with the designer to get what they want on the computer. Then there is the speed with which they switch jobs between themselves. Every lunchtime they take a power nap for fifteen minutes: "The need to find inner peace in the midst of the hectic day is a must," says Rajan, whose interests range from calligraphy to Sanskrit.

How on earth do you manage to concentrate on

your job when the client is sitting next to you all the time?

"It is hard for people to take us seriously as we don't have that attitude of a designer," says Tixon, who comes from New Creation school boarding and has spent two years doing his international baccalaureate in UK. "We see our work as a means of expressing our client's needs and taste rather than proving ourselves as designers. At times it is difficult to deal with over-enthusiastic clients who actually want to do the job themselves on our equipment and there are times when we are over-worked and cannot cope with the demand for immediate action. That is when I put my foot down."

Tixon came to the Graphic Section as a young Auroville teenager. Today he is one of the brightest designers in the group and handles Auroville's "international" clientele with confidence and ease. A very charming person, Tixon values the mentoring he got from Guna and, in turn, prepares other youngsters who have since joined the group. His ever-smiling face as well his understanding of the spiritual ideals of the place at an age when most Auroville youngsters are still exploring and experimenting is impressive.

"We are like a family, we depend on each other for moral support and encouragement," says Praba who has been with the Graphic Section for over a decade. "We are constantly learning from each other, joking and sharing both inside and outside of office hours. We do not shy away from doing any work in the office; no job is too small for us, be it cutting, pasting, printing, photocopying, etc."

"We do not think we are great designers, we simply provide a very essential service and that works for us," says Murali. Prabha and Murali take care of the regular jobs now which gives Tixon



From left to right: Murali, Rajan, Guna, Tixon, Prabha

time to develop his interest in web design, learning the finer nuances of graphics and keeping himself updated with the ever-evolving world of graphic design.

Rajan, who is rather an introvert but with a deep interest in the ideals of Auroville, has managed to keep himself away from computers: he takes care of the photocopy department. "I play the role of critic and observer in the group. I keep them anchored in their place, so that they do not fly too high," he jokes.

While the team is happy to be independent now of L'Avenir, all of them give credit to the former Aurofuture team. "The atmosphere of goodwill, growth and an urge to excel was instilled in us all by the team at Aurofuture," they say. Visiting professionals were also always welcome there. "Many of us learnt our first lessons in graphics and on how to handle equipment from

visiting professionals in the town planning office in the early days," says Guna. "In the past we also took a few young Aurovilians as apprentices, but they were quite impatient and got bored with the job very easily. Probably this work does not provide them with the outlet they needed for their energy, maybe they wanted to be involved in something 'big'."

So what's the future?

"Branding ourselves," laugh Guna and Tixon. "We would like to raise our bar to a higher level, to earn the respect of the professionals: we are still not seen as serious designers. It would be great to be equipped to do all the publishing and printing jobs here in-house and to receive further training. However, we think we have arrived. You will see a lot of interesting work coming out of here in the near future."

Dharmesh

PASSINGS

Mia Berden

On October 24, after a long and rich life, Mia Berden left her body in her house in The Hague, the Netherlands, at the age of 97. From the early 1980s, Mia had been a staunch supporter of Auroville, either through Auroville International The Netherlands or through the foundation Stichting de Zaaier.

Mia, who was born in 1914, was one of the early fighters for women equality. She had already experienced male discrimination during her formative years when her family decided that she, as a woman, would not need a higher education. This decision, she said later, had determined her entire career, as she could only attend a social academy but was not able to pursue any higher education. She faced male discrimination again when she started work in the early 1930's, experiencing a work culture where men were dominant and women subservient. She started working to increase the education possibilities for women and to promote their greater participation in society. Sometimes this created difficulties for her, for example when she joined the Dutch Ministry of Social Affairs as a labour inspector and objected to a law which was being prepared that would forbid married women to work. The government changed and the law was shelved, but, she said, it showed how The Netherlands, in 1938, was still far behind some other European countries in according women full rights.

In the 1970's Mia started working at the Institute of Social Studies in The Hague. Here, too, she discovered an appalling gender situation: only three of the sixty staff members and only 17% of the students were women. Moreover, as the women would rarely speak up when they were in an almost exclusively male group, the women students had acquired the reputation of being less intelligent. She decided to do something and brought together women from Asia, Africa and Latin America for four months to discuss the problems women face in developing countries. It was a shocking experience for all the participants. But the conference was also an eye-opener for her male colleagues who discovered women's energy and outspokenness. As a follow-up, the Institute decided to create an M.A. course on women and development, and invited women from developing countries to come and teach. It was the first such course anywhere in the world. This conference ultimately changed the attitude towards women in the Institute.

In the early 1980's, Mia joined the board of Auroville International The Netherlands. In 1986 she also became a member of the Board of the Dutch Foundation 'Stichting de Zaaier' and came to hold the Auroville project portfolio. During this tenure, Stichting de Zaaier became one of the largest private contributors to Auroville, supporting projects selected by the Project Coordination group as well as giving special grants to large projects like the Land Fund and the Town Hall – and even sponsoring Auroville Today so it could acquire its office. Mia also promoted grants for study



and research projects, both to individuals and to Auroville student groups who went to attend biodiversity conferences in Mexico and Canada. Her yearly visits to Auroville became opportunities for many Aurovilians to discuss their needs and obtain her advice. During these visits Mia obtained an in-depth knowledge of Auroville and helped study how some areas, such as Auroville's small industries and farms, could best be supported.

But the position of women was never far from her mind and she often criticised Auroville for not being in the forefront of progress in this area and allowing old gender patterns to persist. In an interview in 1997 she noted a gender bias in the various management structures that prevail in Auroville, as well as in its meeting culture which, she said, "tend to be primarily mental and therefore typically male" and which, as evidence from around the world has shown, do not to give the best results. "It won't be easy, but I'm sure that if men and women here in Auroville can work out gender issues by going deep within themselves and transforming deep-rooted attitudes, then the whole world can be helped," she said.

In the Auroville International organisation, too, Mia made a lasting contribution, with her unwaveringly positive attitude towards Auroville and the Auroville International Centres. In recognition, Auroville International awarded her honorary life member of Auroville International and, during the Auroville International Meeting in 2009, publicly thanked her for all her services to Auroville and Auroville International.

In the last years of her life, Mia made Sri Aurobindo's epic poem *Savitri* her focus. She held regular *Savitri* reading sessions in her house. She was keen that, from the several Dutch translation of *Savitri* made, one integrated version would be published. This is expected to happen soon.

Mia left her body in the presence of her adopted daughter, Glory, who lovingly guided her through the last stages.

Carel

Tatiana Duz

In the evening of October 4th, cycling home after her duty in Kailash Clinic, Newcomer Dr Tatiana Duz from Russia met with an accident involving a lorry on the road between Djaima and Aurelec. She was taken to the Pondicherry Institute of Medical Sciences (PIMS) where it was confirmed that she had left her body due to internal injuries. Dr Tatiana was 47 years old.

During the last 5 years Tatiana and her family had been regular guests in Auroville. They became Newcomers in April this year. Her work as a gynaecologist in Kailash, described as "an unobtrusively caring attitude, with an angelic aspect," was appreciated by many Aurovilians.



Myriam Brettman



On October 3rd, Aurovillian Myriam Janssen-Brettman left her body in her home in Frankfurt, Germany, due to pancreatic cancer. She had been warmly supported by her son Geo, daughter Lilian and other family and friends during the last days, weeks and months.

Myriam, who was an art therapist, joined Auroville in the early nineties and left in 2006. Aurovilians

remember her for her bright and always upbeat bearing. She worked in the Auroville Health Centre and taught in Transition School. She will most of all be remembered for the energy she put into Repos, making it a clean and pleasant place and providing first-aid to fishermen and villagers. Myriam came to Auroville for a last visit during the first two months of this year.

Auroville International meets in Ethiopia

For the second time in its history, a meeting of Auroville International took place on the African continent, this time in Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia. From October 24th to 29th, 'Auroville' was presented in various locations. The opening programmes and the majority of the presentations were held at the Red Cross Society Training Institute. Additional programmes were offered at the Ethiopia Institute of Architecture, Building Construction and City Development (EiABC); at the National Museum of Ethiopia where two presentations were given on the topic of human evolution and human unity in evolution; and at the Itegue Taitu hotel where several films highlighting human unity from the 2011 Auroville Film Festival were screened.

The conference focused on topics related to Auroville's research and achievements directly relevant to the sustainable development of the African continent. The presentations were conducted in collaboration with UNESCO and EiABC.

In a wonderful turn of events, a delegation of the Auroville-Ethiopian conference organizing team, and later a group from Auroville International along with a few of the Aurovilian presenters, were granted personal interviews by the Ethiopian President, Mr. Girma W. Giorgis. The team was given the opportunity to describe Auroville's achievements and express Auroville's willingness to share its experience with the people of Ethiopia. The President developed ideas of his own to further these plans.

The conference started with Haimanot Alemu, a famous Ethiopian actor, TV moderator and university professor, introducing the Auroville theme with sentences like, "When we say that the cradle of humanity is Africa, we might say that the cradle of human unity is Auroville." This was followed by a speech of Mr. Shimelis, former Minister of State, who had come to Auroville for the inauguration of the African pavilion site last October. "Humanity always had high dreams and ideals but it was always difficult to keep promises. Now Auroville is there to bring these dreams into reality," he said. Then the representative of President Girma W. Giorgis brought the President's welcoming greetings. At the conclusion of the first morning session, Sonia Dyne handed over a beautiful gift from Auroville to the Ethiopian people, the complete works of Sri Aurobindo. They were received by a representative from the John F. Kennedy library at the University of Addis Ababa. During the remainder of the day Auroville presentations were given: on the ideals of Auroville; on the ground realities and how they have changed over almost 44 years of Auroville's existence; and on Auroville education.

The first day of the conference was filmed by an Ethiopian television team and broadcast that same evening on the 8pm news of Ethiopian TV, showing some of the panels, the president's representative speak, Jaya giving an interview, Sonia handing over the books and a full screen shot of the book pile on the table with the name 'Sri Aurobindo' very visible!



Ethiopian President Girma W. Giorgis, along with, from left: the Head of Protocol of H.E. the President Mr. Belay Girmay, Margarita Correa (sitting), Ms. Selamawit Wagaye, Marc Tormo, Julian Lines, Jaya Berggreen-Clausen, Joss Brooks, Lourdes Nadine Epinal, Tekeste Berhan and Carsten Michelsen.



Dr. Berhane Asfaw, leading Ethiopian paleontologist, giving a presentation at the National Museum of Ethiopia.

During the later days of the conference the speakers presented a wide range of topics. There was more on education, with a special focus on primary education and education for rural areas; on social environmentalism, including afforestation; about work and experimentation in bio-diversity, organic farming, and traditional healing, including the conservation of traditional medicinal plants; on appropriate technology, renewable energy, water conservation and sanitation, as well as on appropriate building technology, and small-scale industries.

The conference also dealt with integral healthcare, introducing research and field work on malaria prevention / vector control, and safe drinking water systems using Natural Probiotics with efficient organic, low cost methods. This topic was especially enthusiastically received by the young students at EiABC. One afternoon there also were talks on the work of the International Zone, the Nakashima Foundation for Peace, the Hall of Peace and the Africa House.

After the conference there was a second session of presentations at the Addis Ababa Building College with a fully packed audience. There was also a visit to the National Museum of Ethiopia to visit mankind's ancestor, Lucy, where there was a very interesting exchange with the well known paleontologist, Berhane Asfaw.

On Thursday 27 October some Aurovilians and members of Auroville International set out to see the land which an Ethiopian well-wisher of Auroville would like to give to Auroville for its projects in Ethiopia. The trip of approximately 600 km was to the town of Asebe Teferi (aka Chiro). It started at 6:30 am but lasted longer than planned as the van broke down. The team nevertheless managed to reach the site, where a small consecration ceremony was performed. It arrived back at the hotel after midnight.

Jaya, who did much of the preparatory work in Addis Ababa



Two visitors viewing Auroville posters at the Red Cross Society Training Institute.

and during the conference, stated that an event like this could not have succeeded but without a strong organization like Auroville International in place, along with the support from the Foundation for World Education and many individuals, such as Tekeste with his unflagging determination, and other Ethiopian friends of Auroville. "Without them all this wonderful, strong interaction would have never taken place."

Amy, Jaya and Julian, with inputs from Friederike.

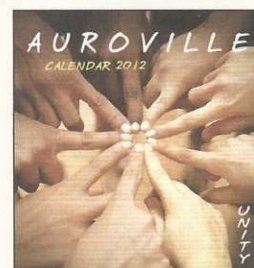
NEW PUBLICATIONS

Auroville Calendar 2012

The theme of the Auroville Calendar 2012 is unity. The photographs depicting this theme, taken by Ireno, were chosen to reflect the positive aspirations for the year to come, which has been associated with many predictions for our planet.

The Auroville Calendar 2012 is a wall calendar, size 28 x 30.5 cm. The calendar is printed on matt art paper and is spiral bound. The calendar includes spaces to write notes each day. It also has a page with the Mother's Dream.

The cost of each calendar, inclusive of air mail charges are Rs 295 in India, € 8 for European countries, and \$10.25 for the U.S.A. and other countries. To order please visit <http://www.auroville.com/auroline-auroville-calendar-2012-p-2893.html> or contact ireno@auroville.org.



On the steps of the National Museum of Ethiopia.

SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION

Subscription rates (including postage):

- ◆ One year subscription rates: India Rs. 450; other countries Rs 2,000 equivalent
- ◆ Two year subscription rate: India Rs. 800; other countries Rs 3,700 equivalent. Those for whom the subscription rate is an obstacle are invited to contact *Auroville Today* for information on reduced rates. *Auroville Today* does not receive any funds from Auroville. Your subscription (or your supporting contribution of double the amount) helps us to continue this work.

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