



With Board members Mr. Tayal and Dr. Kapila Vatsyayan, February 28, 1991



With Prime Minister Abdul Kalam, at Auroville, November 2004



With Aurosatprem, at the inauguration of the Karneshwar Nataraj temple, 2006



With UNESCO New Delhi director Mr. Aoyagi for the Auroville Festival, New Delhi, 2007



With Sir Mark Tully at the Auroville Festival Chennai, March 2015



With Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Carel, Sauro and Anirban Ganguly, February 2018



Inaugurating the Re-Centre, Feb 2018



With Jürgen at the Auroville Festival, Kolkata, January 2019

Goodbye Dr. Karan Singh

On November 23rd, the term of office of Dr. Karan Singh and the other members of the Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation came to an end. As the Board could not come to Auroville for its regular meeting due to the Covid situation, the meeting was held online, on November 7th. Dr. Karan Singh, now aged 89, who has been Chairman of the Auroville Foundation for more than 15 years, addressed the Auroville residents in a video message which was screened in the Sri Aurobindo auditorium at Bharat Nivas on November 23rd. It was followed by a 20-minute video tribute to him, made by Auroville Outreach. For those who were unable to come to Bharat Nivas, a link was provided so that they could stream the videos at home in real time. Both videos are now available at <https://live.auroville.org/> and at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a3_ELtCwaHE. Here we publish an edited version of his address and the text of the tribute of the Auroville video.

Address of Dr. Karan Singh

As I come to the end of my fifth term as Chairman of the Auroville Foundation, I would like to address all Aurovilians.

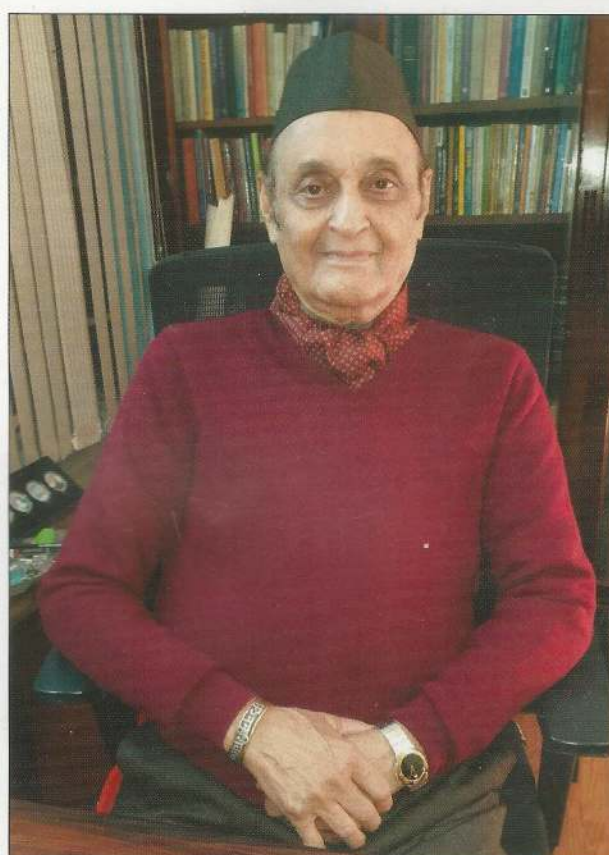
Let me first congratulate you with three miracles that you have performed. The first was the environmental miracle, the way the early Aurovilians converted a dry desert into a flourishing green oasis with lakhs of plants and flowers and trees. It has been extraordinary, a world class environmental achievement.

The second is an architectural miracle, the construction of the Matrimandir. I remember when I first became Chairman, there was only a skeleton; I saw it coming up, how the whole building developed. It was extraordinary how this remarkable structure was built by the Aurovilians themselves. You did all the work and raised all the money. And therefore this miracle, too, goes to your credit.

The third is the sociological miracle, the fact that people from a 59 different countries live together in harmony for 50 years. That itself is a miracle. We have situations in India where people from different communities clash with one another, but in Auroville you have people from all these different countries with their own cultures and languages and backgrounds, who all live together peacefully. There is the occasional ruckus, but that is very small compared to the fact that you have been living and working together as a community for half a century. That is a sociological miracle.

So let me first congratulate the Aurovilians on the world class environmental miracle, the world class architectural miracle, and the world class sociological miracle.

Being Chairman of the Auroville Foundation has been a great learning experience for me because Auroville is an unique attempt. The Auroville Foundation Act was passed in 1988, but the first appointment with me as Chairman was in 1992. So through all these decades I have seen how Auroville has grown and how so many excellent institutions have come to fruition. I have also communicated with many Aurovilians directly, not through the bureaucracy, and apart



from the formal communication with the Working Committee. I have been sending many 'dear Aurovilian' letters, which have been published in a book by Aryadeep and Basu. That shows my direct communication with individual members of the community, one to one. That is what I've always cherished.

This is such a talented community, it is quite extraordinary. There is so much talent in Auroville. I think we reached our peak at the golden jubilee where, at my invitation, India's Prime Minister Sri Narendra Modi came to Auroville and addressed us. We had a tremendous golden jubilee with happenings in Auroville as well as functions in New Delhi, Baroda, Calcutta and Chennai.

But of course, after peaks there are always valleys, and soon thereafter all kinds of problems arose, showing that there is a lot of work to do. Now we have to look at our weaknesses. One of them is how we are going to build the city when we do not own all the land and we don't have an organisational structure that can build it.

We have to think of a way to get all the lands. I would stress to first buy all lands within the city area. We get also

donations for buying land in the greenbelt, which is important. But all the land in the Greenbelt will never fully be owned by Auroville, whereas the city area has got to be owned by Auroville. So I suggest that whatever donations we can raise, go for purchase of land in the city area, so that that can be completed.

Regarding building the city, I am afraid that Auroville's Town Development Council (TDC) is not equipped to tackle the immensity of the problem. This is also due to the fact that your procedures for choosing the members of various committees are extremely long. It is ridiculous that a vacancy takes ten months to fill. What sort of organisation is it when a working group such as the TDC needs seven members and has only two? You can't function like this; the Residents Assembly has to become more active and you have to speed up your processes. The Auroville processes have to keep up with the times, you cannot have a 19th century process in the 21st century. Taking into account what The Mother and Sri Aurobindo have said, Auroville has to speed up its processes.

But how do we build the city? That is the fourth miracle that you have to perform. The city is not going to be built by the Auroville Foundation, but by the Aurovilians. And therefore individual Aurovilians may have to make sacrifices, get over their individual interests and accept that a road or a high tension line goes through their house or the property they are stewarding. That is your main challenge ahead.

I take leave of you with my very warm and affectionate congratulations, and wish you all the best in the future. My good wishes and affectionate support will always remain with Auroville.

I bow to Sri Aurobindo and The Mother.

Text of the tribute from the Auroville video

"An Arrow into the Future": Auroville's Long Journey with Dr. Karan Singh

It is said that the relationships one forms during one's life are far more relevant than one's achievements.

In its long and difficult journey, Auroville has formed myriad relationships with people from all over the world who have joined hands with Aurovilians to create movements of joy and strengths.

Dr. Karan Singh has been one such luminary who, as chairman of the Auroville Governing Board, established a growing and increasingly rewarding relationship with Auroville. This bond has lasted from 1992, when he was appointed the first chairman of the

Auroville Governing Board, to his concluding fifth term in office this year.

We, the residents of Auroville, take the opportunity to thank Dr. Karan Singh for the generous time, energy, and goodwill that he has invested for all these years.

While Auroville's journey with Dr. Karan Singh began in the early 90s, his unofficial association with Auroville commenced much earlier in the 1950s when he visited The Mother at the Ashram and formed a strong psychic link with her and Sri Aurobindo's work. In the 1960s when Auroville, the City of Dawn, was emerging on a physical plane, he eagerly awaited her birth. According to him, Auroville had "a very special ambience, because Auroville was envisaged by The Mother as a concrete manifestation of the new consciousness."

The numerous contributions that Dr. Karan Singh made to Auroville's growth led to its long-term stability and progress in the late 90s and into the twenty first century. Under his chairmanship the residents of Auroville renewed their faith and trust in the Auroville Foundation. With his administrative foresight and amicable demeanour, Dr. Karan Singh won over government leaders and established Indian industrialists to give Auroville the much-needed support.

The process of completing Matrimandir received a strong momentum with Dr. Karan Singh's personal involvement.

During his tenure with the help of Government of India grants, new buildings and infrastructure were added to Auroville's urban landscape especially in the area of the Town Hall, and construction of new residen-

tial complexes received a boost. This development lessened the housing crisis for Aurovilians to a great extent.

Having seen Auroville grow from its infancy to its 50th year, Dr. Karan Singh played a major role in the Golden Jubilee Celebrations in 2018. Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Auroville for the first time and was happy to be felicitated as the chief guest by none other than Dr. Karan Singh and the Auroville community.

It has been largely due to Dr. Karan Singh's down-to-earth attitude and his generous spirit that Auroville values him as a member of its extended family. This connection does not stop with the ending of the tenure. We wish and hope that this relationship of goodwill and trust will continue with Auroville's journey into the future.

Abha Prakash

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The importance of the International Advisory Council

Doudou Diène has had a distinguished career in the United Nations, including being the U. N. Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, and Chairman of the UN Independent Commission of Inquiry on Burundi.

He was also a member of two International Advisory Councils of the Auroville Foundation between 2004 – 2013.

Recently, Frederick spoke to him in UNESCO Headquarters in Paris about what Auroville means to him, as well as his concerns about the failure of the authorities to appoint a new International Advisory Council. Here are some extracts from the interview.

"I am very profoundly an Aurovilian by heart, because you cannot experience Auroville

without being profoundly marked in your consciousness, your feelings, your ethic. All of us who have experienced Auroville over the years have been profoundly marked by what we experienced in meeting the Aurovilians, their motivation and the vibration emanating from them. They are the central actors, building a city and practicing living together. All this is unique and remains with me very profoundly.

However, as a member of the International Advisory Council (IAC) for six years, I am concerned by the fact that today the three 'legs' of Auroville – The Governing Board, the International Advisory Council and the Residents Assembly – are not as strong as they should be.

What I regret very much, very profoundly, is that apparently the IAC has been marginalized and now is not even being renewed. I think this

is a very big mistake for several reasons.

Firstly, Auroville is a world city, Auroville belongs to the world, so it is important that one of the mechanisms, the IAC, be composed of people coming from outside India, so that not only they bring their experience to the Aurovilians but they also help Auroville be connected and to share its experience with the rest of the world.

The second important factor is that the mandate of the IAC obliges the members to advise the Aurovilians and the Governing Board in the spirit of the Auroville Charter. But how do they advise? First, as a priority, they have to listen very carefully, very profoundly, to the Aurovilians because they don't know Auroville. They have to learn what Auroville is and what is going on, because Auroville is something in the making. So it is important to understand the dynamic as well as the problems the Aurovilians are facing.

In my first IAC we tried to do this. But during my second term, all the separate meetings the IAC had had in the past with the Governing Board and Aurovilians to reflect and give advice ceased because it was decided that Governing Board and the IAC would only be meeting the Aurovilians together. So there was no longer this very important factor of separation of judgment, of reflection, which gave credibility to the IAC when they reported and advised the Aurovilians and the Governing Board.

So I think it is highly important and urgent that the Aurovilians remind the Indian authorities that they attach the greatest importance to the IAC. This is absolutely vital because the lack of this institution destabilizes in a way the initial message of the founders of Auroville."

Edited by Alan

COMMUNITY

The sense of community

The term 'community' is used in a very loose way in Auroville. Sometimes it refers to the settlement where people live, sometimes to national sub-groups, sometimes to the residents as a whole, and sometimes to an idealistic or occult aspect of Auroville. But how do Aurovilians experience community today? And is it becoming harder to do so as our numbers swell and our processes become more complex?

Three Aurovilians joined us to discuss the issue. Alain Bernard is a long-term Aurovilian who, in the past, was much involved in community organization. Sathish is a member of the Residents Assembly Service (RAS), and Manoj is an administrator of AuroNet and an educator involved with outreach programmes.

Auroville Today: How do you experience, or how have you experienced, community in Auroville?

Sathish: I joined Auroville in 2007 and for some years I was just trying to sustain my life. Using my computer skills, for a long time I helped the wider community in initiatives like fundraising for land, but in those years community for me was primarily the settlement where I live. But since I joined the Residents Assembly Service two years ago, I've learned a lot about the wider community of Auroville and the other meaning of the word 'community'.

In recent times, I experienced a sense of that larger community when many of us came together in a General Meeting to discuss serious allegations made against Auroville. There was a real feeling of togetherness, a sense that we all care for Auroville and each other.

Alain: My experience of community was quite shaped by what happened in the 1970s. I came in 1973 and very soon there was a fight with the Sri Aurobindo Society. This created a strong sense of community, at least among the so-called 'French group', for when there is feeling of threat it helps to bring people together.

But as for what the real community of Auroville is, while I'm sure it exists, it's... a mystery. Maybe it's something to do with an assembly of souls brought together to do a certain work.

But there is also the very human aspect of the community. On several occasions, close friends who became seriously sick told me how deeply touched they were to discover the care and



For many, the bonfires at the Matrimandir amphitheatre express a close sense of community

this feeling of being welcomed, as if I was coming home.

Does that strong sense of community remain with you today?

Manoj: After joining I started learning about the outer aspects of Auroville, some of which are not so attractive, but that soul connection, the sense that I belong to a family presided over by Mother and Sri Aurobindo, has never left me. The rest is just the outer details that keep changing. I don't really get disturbed by the diversity of opinions or the struggles that are part of the churning here because it's only on the surface: below there is solidity.

Alain: One thing I remember clearly from some early Pour Tous meetings was the moments of 'grace' when somebody would say something, there was this ripple, and everybody felt, yes, yes, that's it! It's because people were listening to each other, but also calling for something, calling intensely for guidance. I don't experience this in our meetings today. Now we are either lectured to or we just sit and look at screens. There is hardly a feeling of being together.

Are there other challenges today to experiencing community in a living way?

Alain: If Auroville is as important as Mother said, it's not obvious we can easily reach harmony because there will be forces which will try their best to disrupt it. And they are being quite successful at present. I don't know what we can do but I wonder if the present system has a future because it doesn't seem to be bringing us closer together.

Manoj: At the moment, some seem to equate collective intelligence with majority votes. But it's not. Besides, it's the voice of the collective soul we must discern. But to hear this signal, we have to filter out all the noise. When I became involved in AuroNet, I imagined that we would be able to harness multiple voices and get that signal. But I was naïve about human nature; I was naïve to think it would show up through so-called freedom of expression. On the AuroNet discussion forum today, I would say 80% is sub-rational, some 15% is the voice of reason and only 5% the voice of the soul.

Sathish: In the RAS we try to be as neutral as possible but at times both working groups and residents complain about us. We're not perfect, but I tend to lose my sense of community when people don't try, don't make any effort, to understand what we're trying to do or how we operate, or when they start pointing fingers at the RAS when they don't get their own way in something.

Manoj: But I have seen the true community coming forward in moments of crisis. When the tsunami hit, there were no big discussions, people spontaneously took up what needed to be done and did it fast and efficiently. At these moments, the soul of Auroville comes forward. Once that crisis pressure is over, we have time to think and discuss and we get lost in the mind.

And then, since we really don't base our discussions or

decisions on knowing the facts, we have a lot of opinions. At the moment, there is more and more political mobilization based on opinions, there are pressure groups and ethnicity-based parties, and this is very dangerous to our sense of unity, to community.

Sathish: I think we need to stop misusing the word 'community' in connection with decision-making. We have a 10% quorum of adult residents for decision-making, but it's rare that we get much more participation, so you can't call that a 'community' decision. Also, people who want a certain decision taken sometimes say they represent the 'community', even though they have little real support. It's convenient to refer to 'community support' when you want to push a particular proposal.

So what is the way forward? How can we strengthen the feeling of community?

Manoj: We need to do a lot more work on organization to increase efficiency and transparency. Some of our basic processes, like the entry process or building permission process, are very vague and operate in a very impersonal way, and the process is very cumbersome and not transparent. We need to make these processes simple and transparent, and here a certain amount of automation can help.

But how can this build community?

Manoj: Because transparency builds trust. Presently our processes are opaque and anybody can accuse them of being manipulated. This breeds the rumours, fear and distrust that break up community.

Alain: We need to learn how to use the new tools well. At the same time, we have to find a way back to simplicity and rediscover the spontaneous interactions that were there at the beginning of Auroville. I also remember Satprem saying that the basic currency of Auroville is sincerity. So we have to trust, to assume that people are sincere, and not become obsessed with creating processes to catch those who are seemingly not.

Sathish: For me it has a lot to do with transparency. It's clear that many people feel there is a big gap between the residents and the working groups, there is no transparency and so trust is not there anymore. I'm sure things will change if the community feels they are listened to and everything is done transparently, which is what we try to do in the RAS. When people feel nothing is being hid from them, a feeling of togetherness comes.

Also, voting has become the first resort when it comes to community decision-making. But voting is divisive: it results in winners and losers and it can be manipulated. We should seek consensus instead.

Alain: I have the impression that many people feel we cannot go on as we are doing at present, something needs to happen. But what? Maybe when we come together we could be mostly silent and call for something, and out of that something new could emerge.

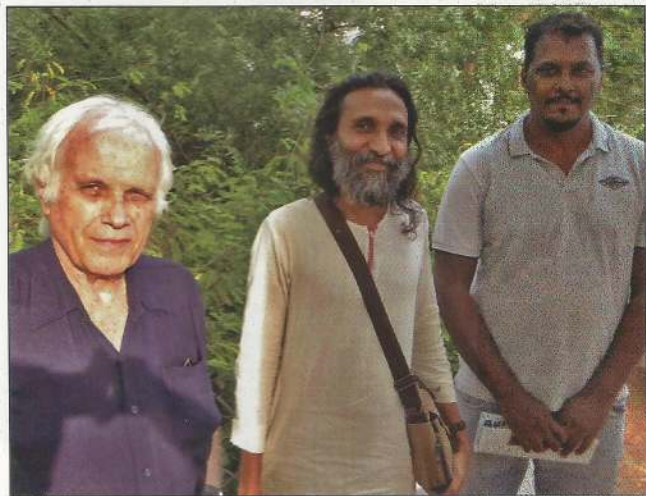
Manoj: I think we need to connect the wisdom of the individual with the wisdom of the collective. At present, these are seen as almost incompatible but I have noticed that when somebody says or writes something from deep within, it touches the group soul and there is a wave of inspiration.

But how to access the wisdom of the collective? We need to rapidly collect feedback from the community on an issue or proposal: that will be the main role of the RAS. Then we need to process that feedback so that the intelligent will of the collective is filtered out, purified. And this requires a higher intelligence.

Alain: There is no escaping from the fact that for the true Auroville to exist, people need to be deeply in-turned, deeply connected to something inside themselves. I have a vision of an Auroville where people are really centred in their true beings, and because they are connected there, they are a community.

Meanwhile, all we can say is that we are the foot soldiers of something we don't know or understand, of something much larger than us...

Edited by Alan



From left: Alain, Manoj and Sathish

tenderness of Aurovilians. It was a very deep experience for them. So, in a way, living here is like being in a family where you often fight with your siblings, but if one of them is suffering you all come together to support them.

Manoj: My sense of community began strongly the moment I landed here in 1995. I got off the bus and asked the way to Auroville, somebody pointed up the road, and I began walking. Then somebody with a bullock cart gave me a lift to the Aurelec turning, and then another man on a moped gave me a lift. This man, who I had sensed was an Aurovilian, took me home, gave me breakfast and explained what Auroville is. And immediately I had

How did Auroville's communities get their names?

In the October issue of *Auroville Today*, we published a humorous little piece that pondered how the names of Auroville's communities came about. We invited community members to write in and tell us how their communities were named. Here are the accounts we've received so far.

Sharanga

Sharanga is the bow of the Hindu god 'Vishnu'. It is said that Bernard Borg founded the community and gave it its name in the 80s. It was then a horse farm.

Cecilia

Fertile Windmill / Baraka

In 1971, I was living in Fertile community and decided to develop some nearby barren land, had a windmill put up for water and began reforesting a whole area which gradually extended to what is now part of Dana, Bliss, Revelation and Darkali, up to close to Kottakarai and the Matrimandir. When I asked Mother to give a name to it, she named it Fertile Windmill. About ten years ago I could no longer manage it for health and financial reasons, so I gave Fertile Windmill stewardship to Achilles, who eventually changed its name to Baraka.

Truth, Vijay

I renamed the [Fertile Windmill] place because there were too many 'Fertiles' around (Fertile, Fertile Windmill, Fertile Field, Fertile East, etc.) which created some confusion and people kept entering the place looking for all kinds of Fertiles. The windmill didn't work anymore, as the wheel got blown off by the cyclone some ten years ago, and we now use a solar pump. I liked the name and idea of 'Baraka', which is an Arab word originally and means something like 'blessing' – if something has 'baraka', it has some special power or force. I derived the term from the way it is used by the Sufis. There is more to the term, so people can look it up...

Achilles

Isai Ambalam

Isai Ambalam was given its name by Ivar, an early Dutch settler in the Kottakarai area. It means 'school of music'. Ivar was and is an avid musician and in the early eighties wanted to create a school of music at Isai Ambalam. Things changed, but we have kept the name.

Bobby

Kalabhumii

It was in 1993 that I was looking for a place to build my house. Being a well-known artist (painting, sculpture, music and architecture) in Auroville at that time, I requested a place in the Cultural Zone to start the development of art studios, etc. Even though the Cultural Zone is not meant for residences, I proposed to build my house as a "caretaker" house for the practical purpose to be on site for the beginning of this development of, first, establishing the beginnings of an infrastructure, and, secondly, ateliers and studios for art education and practice.

At first my application was rejected, but finally, the Auroville Chief Architect Roger Anger found

my request a good idea and the obvious way to go about developing empty land, devoid of any infrastructure. So I found myself on an empty field, freshly ploughed for the next peanut-planting season, surrounded by cashew trees... but situated right in the Centre of the Cultural Zone, next to the future Crown Road, the future hub of the Auroville Arts and Culture.

Because of this situation of the empty field in front of me and what was going to be the future of this land, I christened this place "The Land of Arts" – "Kalabhumii" – in Sanskrit but also in Tamil!! Actually, the correct way to write it should be 'bhoomi', but the pronunciation is ok and it will be understood also as 'bhumi'.

Many of the other community names were inspired by the high ideals and hopes for a luminous future by the pioneers, or even given directly by The Mother.

Rolf

Fraternity



Saraswati puja at Fraternity on 14 October 1972

I remember that Bryan Walton went to Mother in 1972 to get a name for the community and weaving workshops in Kuilapalayam. Mother wrote the name "Fraternity" on two sign boards. One frame was displayed for a long time in the Fraternity Community Kitchen. After the kitchen dissolved, I took the frame to my house, and this nameboard is still with me. I don't know what happened to the second Fraternity name board.

Franz

Anusuya

This community was originally called Anasurya, which could be translated as "the nourishing sun" in Sanskrit (surya = sun, ana = to feed), because the Sri Aurobindo society initially planned to run a farm here. However, when it became clear that the soil on this site was not suitable for farming, it developed into a forest community. Since the name could also be translated to "no sun", it was changed to Anusuya, which is the name of the wife of the ancient rishi Dattatreya in the Ramayana.

With inputs from Christoph and Govinda

Sri Ma / Far Beach

This community's first name was Far Beach when it began in 1968. It was initially a community of artists, and was also the place where Mother wanted to establish the Hôtel des Visiteurs. But some people felt that the name Far Beach gave the impression it was not really connected to Auroville, and they also felt that the location was not 'far' at all from other communities that comprised Auroville in those days.

So in the early 80s the name was changed to Sri Ma, in homage to Sri Aurobindo and Mother. The name was also inspired by one of the main houses, which was rebuilt at that time in the design of the Mother's Symbol.

There was a recurring idea of selling this land, which is 14 kilometres from the Matrimandir, and the Aurovilians living there thought that it will be more difficult for Auroville to sell lands named Sri Ma than lands named Far Beach.

Daniel, Judith

Révélation, Horizon, Rêve

With the help of Mother, I created three communities in Auroville which bear names that I have given. These communities contain many trees that were planted to give beauty and diversity. Why did I choose these names? Simple: I wanted to move away from the habit of giving ordinary names, and I also wanted names that can be read in French.

Révélation's name (established in 1976) came to me as a revelation in my attempt to claim back Auroville lands that were used by the SAS. It also came as a complete change from me using dead wood as a carpenter to helping nature reclaim its lost ground.

Horizon's name (1980) came to me because it reminded me of [the Egyptian pharaoh] Akhenaton's first attempt to create a city that belongs to no one in particular. Rêve (1983) came to me as the fact that Mother gave us the Dream.

I also tried to establish Sharanalayam in 1979, which is now Hermitage.

All these places, I gave them away as an offering to Mother without any claim.

Paul Vincent

Certitude

In the early days of Auroville, there was just one residence in the area of what is now Certitude, namely Auroson's Home, and for some years the name was used to identify the place where Frederick and Shyama lived, Auroson being the name of their child.

As more buildings were constructed in the area and used this name as their address, it became clear, in the 1980s, that the name "Auroson's" was no longer appropriate – it was specific to one residence only – and a community meeting decided that a more appropriate general name should be found.

In Auroville at that time the community was virtually the only place where *pukka* houses were being constructed, as opposed to casuarina and keet constructions, and – inspired by "Seven Banyans", which was the identifying name for a remote Green Belt area – someone jokingly came up with the name "Seven Fridges"! People laughed, but at the same time it sowed an important seed, because what they were observing was that it was the first community in Auroville where people were constructing permanent residences, as opposed to less durable ones.

Piero, who was the architect for Auroson's home and other residences which were coming up in the immediate area, began to think of possible names. During a visit to the Sri Aurobindo ashram, he saw an exhibition there with photos of the Mother, among which there were four in which Mother was illustrating, via the expression on her face, various states of being. One was titled "Certitude". This struck Piero as exactly the right name for the settlement, and he planned to share it with the others living in the area. Before he could do so, in an extraordinary coincidence Frederick had also seen the same photo in the ashram, and planned to also suggest it.

The coincidence of two Aurovilians coming up with the same name, and its obvious suitability, led to its universal acceptance and use from that time on.

Tim

Samasti

By the end of the 1980s, Ratna and Ajit, Suhasini and Gilles, Ila and Paula and Yoka and I came together to discuss building our houses just outside the city, in a medium density settlement. This would become the beginning of the Residential Zone. It was not the idea to start a community, because we all felt that our true community was Auroville and, unlike other communities at that time, we didn't intend to work together in one particular field of work, or eat breakfast, lunch and dinner together.

We were aware that the names given by The Mother to communities did not necessarily express the quality they manifested; they could also express what they ought to manifest. To put it differently, it was found that the names of many communities were not (yet) corresponding to what we saw: was there aspiration in Aspiration? Was there discipline in Discipline? We felt that the opposite of the name should be as positive as the meaning of the name itself. Ajit and Ratna went for a visit to Arya, the place of Brigitte and Rolf at that time. They knew that we were looking for a name, and Rolf started flipping through the pages of Sri Aurobindo's glossary and read out some of the words. Then he came across the word 'Samasti' – which is Sanskrit for 'collectivity' – and it stuck. Individualism is still very strong in Samasti.

Carel

What is community?

The editorial team asked some Aurovilians for their views on what community is, and how it can be strengthened. Here is a selection of their responses.

What do you understand by the term 'community'?

- ◆ The place where a group of people live together.
- ◆ Togetherness, trust, solidarity, collaboration, sharing.
- ◆ A group of people united by the same idea of way of living, the same meaning, the same goal. The feeling among them should be a feeling of unity because every person feels that he/she is surrounded by other individuals who have the same principles.
- ◆ People who have come together, drawn by a common vision and aspiration and who are willing to sacrifice something of their autonomy for a greater whole, recognizing that only fulfilling personal desires is really not that interesting. It's about working for a bigger vision, a higher goal than self-fulfillment: a collective aim.

How have you experienced community?

- ◆ At work through projects, through acts of kindness and small social gatherings, with friends through shared culture and values.
- ◆ All the time when I am inwardly balanced I feel it. It is an inner experience. If one is identified with the ego, the experience cannot be there.

When the psychic is leading, the experience is there. No dependence on outer happenings.

- ◆ During big events like New Year's Eve in the Tibetan Pavilion, or Clean-up day, or important meetings in Unity Pavilion.
- ◆ On Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's birthday dawn fire ten years ago. Also, the strongest feeling of community was after cyclone Thane.
- ◆ Many times – typically when things go wrong e.g. when there have been land threats and people came together in solidarity, or during the COVID crisis when people came together, volunteering to help and provide assistance.
- ◆ In work / projects when people chose to be together for an agreed upon aim or to manifest a shared value or agreement.
- ◆ Living in Creativity community for eight years where people chose to live together with shared values and agreements.
- ◆ I experienced it in a really specific and concentrated way living in Adventure community where we had the experience over time of being deeply committed to each other. It came alive in the practice of extending beyond ideas of me and mine or right and wrong.

Can the feeling of community be strengthened in Auroville? If so, how?

- ◆ Probably it could be strengthened but I feel it happens in all kinds of ways quite organically.

- ◆ First of all remember why we came here and follow the Charter.
- ◆ Yes it can if the community steps up and commits to addressing some very glaring priorities. For instance, Auroville grows only 10-15% of its food needs. Community is lost because our core values of sustainable food, water and well-being have been passed on to the market to solve. If these and other obvious priorities were to be solved, it will automatically connect people.
- ◆ It is nearly impossible to really form a community when there's such a mess regarding housing: so many people are unstable moving all the time from one place to another. It could get much more friendly and easier for people if, for example, the housing policies to build were more encouraged and not blocked for bureaucracies.
- ◆ Stay people-centric and combat bureaucracy.
- ◆ I sometimes hear people are lonely here – if it's true, that would really indicate that there is work to do to strengthen community.
- ◆ In Auroville we can raise our awareness that community is a shared value. Then individuals may more consciously commit to take decisive action and change personal behaviour that will in turn nurture the conditions towards increasing & strengthening community in its various manifestations. The commitment takes a strong inner will, self-awareness, self-determination and self-discipline to make inner changes in one's behavior to be able to move closer to each other.

- ◆ Each one of us can make more space for the other to get closer to the experience of 'community'. This can be achieved by putting into practice being fully present, empathy, deep listening, genuine openness, and non-judgment.
- ◆ It is necessary to move from the individual position / opinion towards a wider perspective that includes more of the whole. Actively, consciously respect human, plant and other animal diversity.
- ◆ I cannot change others. It is important that people in a community feel they matter. But it does not guarantee a sense of community. That can only grow when the consciousness deepens.
- ◆ I think that the feeling of community will grow when the people will be able to shift their focus from outside to inside. To get the feeling of community even without meeting.
- ◆ There is a lot of polarity and I think group based practices and experiences where we can get better at listening and appreciating diversity can also help build trust, which seems to be a basis for strengthening community.
- ◆ It has to start first from the level of each small community, and at the same time be supported on a macro scale through the general decision making and planning for Auroville as a whole. For that you need the willingness of the individuals AND the working groups to deeply question things beyond the 50 year-old ideal and plan.
- ◆ It could be strengthened by common and compulsory meetings for all Aurovilians. This could provide a space for the community to give suggestions to connect the community.

A new breeze called Soffio

By the end of October, the last houses in the new community of Soffio in the Residential Zone were completed. *Auroville Today* spoke to architect Dorle.

AVToday: You grew up in Auroville, studied abroad and then returned. Can you share something of your journey so far?

Dorle: I came to Auroville in 1976 when I was seven years old. My mother, sister and I lived first in Discipline, but when I was 10 years I joined the youth community Ami. I left Auroville in 1992 to study architecture in Münster, Germany.

It wasn't easy for an Auroville-grown child to adjust to the German mentality. I had no problem at school and the university; but I couldn't relate to the excessively formal working environment. So as soon as I'd finished my studies, I went to work in The Netherlands at the architectural office where I had done my apprenticeship. I like the country and the people; their mentality is relaxed and so different from the German. You can even see the difference in the proportions of their houses. German houses have small windows; the Dutch have big open windows. Dutch architects, in my view, have a more grounded vision of proportions and aesthetics.

in 2016. We designed a community of 10 houses for about 27 people, with a lot of greenery in between.

Our first work was to study the site and see how to position the houses in order to secure cross ventilation in all the rooms, while providing a maximum of privacy, both visual and noise. This resulted in staggered houses, with most housing blocks placed 25-30 metres from each other.

Then Anita dropped out, as she joined the TDC and couldn't do both jobs. I continued alone. In May 2018, construction started. It took two and a half years.

And then you had to become a jack of all trades?

Oh yes. Together with Anita I'd done the plot layout and the basic grid of the houses. Afterwards I found the clients, designed the individual houses – seven big and three small units – prepared the Bill of Quantity, supervised the tendering, managed the money, supervised the construction, and did all the financial and technical administration. It was tough. I'm now in for a long holiday.



PHOTO: COURTESY DORLE

Two houses in Soffio community

the carbon footprint low.

You also built your own house in Soffio?

(laughing) I know what you think – many Auroville architects have experienced the disadvantages of living in the community they built, as their former clients kept coming to them to resolve their housing problems. Let's see how this pans out. We haven't had our first community meeting yet, and I may bring this up.

Did you receive help and advice from other Auroville architects when you took up this project?

Most of it I figured out by myself. I had built my first house in Ami when I was 19, and the years spent living in Auroville before I left for Germany and my later work experience in Europe had given me a pretty good base. But the work here is very different from Europe. Here you do your detailing based on what you know can be built. In Europe we came up with proposals which the engineers had to figure out. Here I tried to push the envelope and had lots of discussions with the contractor, the steel workers and the carpenters. Sometimes it worked, at other times it didn't. And my site presence became a daily requirement. I learned that I had to repeat my instructions over and over again, to the extent that I became notorious for repeating the same message at every concreting, such as "put the spacer before the concreting!" Soon the workers started showing me that they had already done it, the minute I came on site.

Why did you choose the name 'Soffio'?

Soffio is the Italian word for 'breeze'. It shows the focus of this project, which is cross-ventilation. I studied this concept for my graduation in 2001, and signed off with a thesis on cross-ventilation for tropical houses. At the time, I was thinking of high-density housing clusters, using compressed stabilized earth blocks. But for the Soffio project I dropped the earth block idea when I saw that it was not cost-effective and the blocks could not be made on site. I used ordinary fired bricks in a hybrid and load-bearing frame structure on a concrete pile foundation.

Does the cross-ventilation work?

Yes. Those who moved in during the summer reported that it was six degrees cooler inside, as if the air conditioner was on. This is partly due to the cross ventilation, partly to the building materials we used – lime mortar and lime plaster for the walls, which absorb moisture and heat and ensure a good breathability, and sandwich panels as roof insulation to reduce the heat-gain and radiation into the houses at night. We used a minimum of concrete and steel. I focused on using natural and local materials wherever possible to keep

has a provision for solar panels and for a solar hot water heater and it will be possible to install one or two air conditioners, but hopefully this will not be necessary. During construction, there was a slight cost increase of about 10%. Some of my clients complained about having to shell out the extra cash, but for me it is important that they received a house which is aesthetically pleasing and has a lot of quality.

Would you like to do more housing projects?

I wouldn't mind taking up another project, but then only the architecture and the site supervision, not the administrative part. This should be done by someone else. There are two plots neighbouring Soffio where a new project could start. One has a higher density, the other a comparable density to Soffio. Earlier, two architects had developed plans for these plots, but these didn't take off.

What are your views on the overall housing development in Auroville?

There is lots of room for improvement. Now that Soffio is finished, only one housing project, Vibrance, is under construction and it will probably take one to two years before it is finished. This is bad news for the



PHOTO: COURTESY DORLE

Dorle

To what extent is Soffio an intentional community, in the sense that there is a high degree of social cohesion and teamwork and the residents share responsibilities and resources?

It isn't. I was asked to build residences, not to build an intentional community or even a community with common facilities, such as a community kitchen and shared washing machines. I had the community experience when I was living in Ami, but this phase seems to be over in Auroville. There aren't many communities where people have their meals together every day and where there is daily a deep community interaction. The residents of Soffio will probably meet once every few months to plan collective issues, such as the community landscaping and resolve problems that may arise.

What did the Soffio houses cost?

The costs were in the range of 40-45 lakhs for a 100 square metre house. This included all development costs, a small septic tank for each housing cluster and separation facilities for black and grey water. We re-use the grey water for gardening. Each house

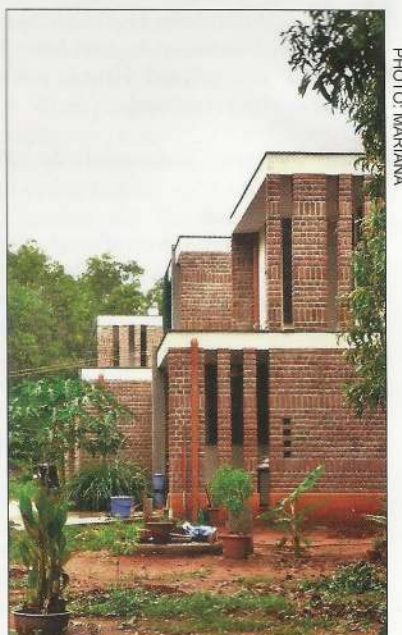


PHOTO: MARIANA

Side view

many pre-Newcomers, Newcomers and Aurovilians in need of housing. New housing projects need to take off as soon as possible, given Auroville's time-consuming bureaucracy in getting the required site and building permissions.

In conversation with Carel



PHOTO: COURTESY DORLE

Simple and elegant interiors

It was a relief to interact on the informal level I was used to in Auroville. I picked up the Dutch language, in which I am now more fluent than German, and became a Dutch citizen a few years later, renouncing my German nationality. I worked in The Netherlands for about eight years, doing many diverse projects, among which were several housing projects, with a focus on prefabricated, energy-efficient housing. I returned to Auroville in 2010.

And you continued your architecture work?

I set up a "one man" office when I came back, but it took some time before serious architectural assignments came in. I worked for some time at L'avenir d'Auroville, Auroville's Town Planning Department, and later for Auroville Design Consultants, an architectural office. In 2011, I started my first big project in Auroville, the design of the Farewell Centre. Other projects followed. Most recently, and parallel to the Soffio project, I did the design of the Re-Centre building for WasteLess and the Up-cycling Studio, all with a focus on the principles of climatically-appropriate architecture.

In 2015, together with Anita, I submitted a project for clustered housing. The site permission process was tedious. The Town Development Council (TDC) took a long time evaluating different plots, but finally we received permission to build on the present site. The prescribed density was 'very low': clustered houses in a park-like setting, based on the Detailed Development Plan for sector I of the Residential Zone made by the visiting town planner, Luis Fédouchi,

You designed each house separately?

Each client had specific requests, and though I had not planned this – architects tend to go mad trying to meet all the differing demands – I had no choice. The basic grid of the houses is identical; but there are many differences.

Did you have any problems being a woman functioning in the traditionally male building environment?

No. I don't have a mindset of being 'a woman'. My upbringing was an advantage. My family has a 'lack of men' history: my grandfather was killed in the war, my father was never really a part of my life, my grandmother and mother were working women, so I never really felt that 'being a woman' should be any kind of hindrance or restriction. Probably

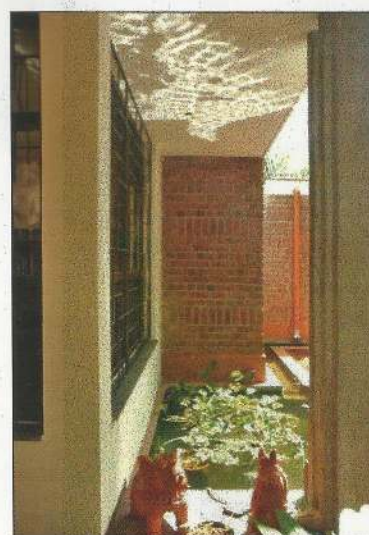


PHOTO: COURTESY DORLE

An ant channel prevents ants from entering the house

Findhorn and Auroville

There is a Kulapalayam shop with the name 'Same Same but Different'. Having lived for over ten years in the community of Findhorn in Scotland and now as a Newcomer here in Auroville, I frequently reflect on their similarities and differences.

Findhorn is an eco-village, a spiritual New Age community, and a well known alternative education centre in Britain. Founded by Eileen and Peter Caddy and Dorothy Maclean (who only passed away this January aged 100), the community emerged through a mixture of the spiritual guidance received by Eileen, Dorothy's connection with the nature spirits and Peter's physical work in grounding the guidance. Until CORONA hit, more than a hundred folk worked directly for the Foundation and over 500 lived locally, with varying degrees of relationship to the community.

Both Auroville and Findhorn were conceived and birthed in the spiritual and social turbulence of the 1960s, catching the wave of those searching for all that a 'City of Dawn' would offer. Findhorn dates its start to 1962 when the founders pulled their caravan into a trailer park, and it became more communal in the late 1960s, around the same time the South Indian experiment was being inaugurated in the amphitheatre.

Same Same

I can imagine that certain sections of Auroville may view Findhorn with suspicion, given its new age orientation, and emphasis on groups and emotional sharing. Yet there is and has been a connection between the two communal projects.

The Hexiad project in the early 1980s came from a vision of linking the communities of Arcosanti, Findhorn and Auroville, and there has been a formal exchange programme between the latter communities for many years. In the 1970s a few Aurovilians moved to Findhorn, including Eric Franciscus who would return regularly to Auroville with Findhorn tours some years later. Paulien Zuidervart who had lived in Findhorn for six years in the late 1970s, moved to Auroville



Circle dance in the Universal Hall of Findhorn

for twenty years till her untimely death a few years ago. Michael and Gail Shaw, long time Findhorn residents since the 1970s, regularly spend half the year here and Monique Gauthier, Dan Greenberg and myself arrived a year ago.

The informal sharing of inspiration has long mutually enriched each community. For example, ecological projects in Findhorn have been inspired by the greenwork here, and some principles of meeting facilitation were brought to Auroville in the early 1990s from Scotland.

Both communities share common beginnings, with young volunteers turning up in the early days willing to immerse themselves in a new life, and inspirational Founders who gave directions and core principles. In Findhorn, the first building was the 'Sanctuary', which to this day is the main meditation venue. Matrimandir was similarly an early priority for Auroville, the centre point for the new city-to-be. But the main large project for Findhorn was the Universal Hall, a pentagon used for community meetings and gatherings, musical concerts, conferences and plays.

Findhorn Foundation: Common Ground Guiding Principles

1. Spiritual Practice

I have an active spiritual practice to align with spirit and support me to work for the highest good.

2. Service

I bring an attitude of service to others and to our planet, recognising I must also consider my own needs.

3. Personal Growth

I am committed to the expansion of human consciousness and my own personal growth. I endeavour to recognise and change personal attitudes and behaviour patterns that are limiting.

4. Integrity

I embody congruence of thought, word and action. I take responsibility for the spiritual, environmental and human effects of my activities.

5. Respecting Others

I wholeheartedly respect other people – their differences, views, origins, backgrounds and issues. I respect all forms of life and the Community's and other people's property.

6. Direct Communication

I use clear and honest communication with open listening, heart-felt responses, loving acceptance and straightforwardness. I talk to people rather than about them. In public and in private I do not malign or demean others. I may seek helpful advice but do not seek to collude.

7. Reflection

I recognise that anything I see outside myself – any criticisms, irritations or appreciations – may also be reflections of what is inside me, and I commit to looking at these before addressing others.

8. Feedback

I am willing to listen to constructive feedback and work with it. I offer feedback to others in a caring and appropriate way to challenge and support each other to grow.

9. Nonviolence

I do not inflict my attitudes or desires on others. Where appropriate I step in and stop violence, manipulation or intimidation of myself or others, or at least say that I would like it to stop.

10. Perspective

For the benefit of the whole Community I may need to put aside my personal issues. I acknowledge that there may be wider perspectives than my own and deeper issues than those I am immediately aware of.

11. Cooperation

I clearly communicate my decisions to others who may be affected by them, and consider their views respectfully. I recognise that others may make decisions which affect me, and I respect the care and integrity they have put into their decision-making process.

12. Peacekeeping

I make every effort to resolve disputes. I may call for an advocate, friend, independent observer or mediator to be present, and will use and follow the Community's grievance procedures as necessary.

13. Agreements

I respect the law of the land, keep agreements I have made, and do not break or try to evade any Community guidelines.

14. Commitment

I bring the spirit of this statement of Common Ground to all my dealings.

Both centres have inspired many to work with nature, despite being birthed in mundane locations: Findhorn in a trailer park, sometime rubbish dump, next to an RAF base; Auroville on an eroded plateau. Findhorn's caravan park and the surrounding wild dunes motivated Dorothy Maclean and others to work with nature spirits and the intelligence inherent in nature. Auroville's reforestation work inspired 'rewilding' before the word was even coined. They both promoted organic food production from their earliest days and have influenced many people to live more in balance with nature. They share an emphasis on work offered to the divine. In Findhorn the principle of 'work is love in action' is a core value; in Auroville, Mother emphasized the need for karma yoga. The best way to really understand both places is to work there and get your hands dirty.

They were both conceived into being through higher agencies. Mother's force and presence is what really carries the community of Auroville. Likewise in Findhorn, there is a palpable connection to what is known as the Angel of Findhorn who overlights the community. Both centres are joined in the wish to create a new humanity based on spiritual values.

Different

The most immediate difference between the two places is climatic, with the dry heat of Auroville contrasting with Findhorn's chillier northern location, where at Christmas time, solstice darkness descends by 3.45 pm. Auroville is noticeably larger and more spread out: I can bicycle for 30 minutes to get to Kulapalayam from my home in Kottakarai. In Findhorn you can walk from end to end in about five to ten minutes.

Another stark difference is in the number of residents, Auroville being about four times larger. One of the visions of Findhorn that Eileen Caddy received was that it would first become a village, then a town and a city of light. But this is not so much spoken of anymore whereas in Auroville the 'city of 50,000' is an oft-mentioned goal.

In the early 1990s, when Findhorn was sending groups on annual pilgrimages to India, beginning in Auroville, the late Diane Falasca told me that 'Findhorn is group and Auroville individual'. This insight into their differing spiritual purposes and ways of connecting with the divine is immediately noticeable. Most people who arrive in Findhorn have signed up for full-time courses and are allocated a room with a set programme and meal times. Until COVID, the Foundation earned 90% of its income from its guest programmes. This contrasts with Auroville's less structured approach, where you are left to find your own way regarding accommodation and the work that draws you. There is a more overtly communal life in Findhorn, with daily meditations, attunements (connecting before work), and shared dining with two main kitchens cooking for hundreds of people.

The community is well known for its work with group consciousness and a strong emphasis on emotional literacy and working consciously with relational conflicts. This work produced the 'Common Ground', a one page document for how to live and work in community, articulating

the visions and principles of living together (see accompanying box). Integral Yoga has a much more individualised *sadhana*. When Ram Das visited Auroville some years ago, he couldn't detect a collective practice.

In the early 1990s when I joined the Findhorn community, a seismic change took place, for they embarked on selling off or even giving away buildings and parts of the community to let them find their own identity. The Steiner school, bakery, shop, press, cafe and other enterprises, which were originally community work departments, are now independent entities. In Auroville, all fixed assets and enterprises belong to the community, while the Auroville Foundation is the legal umbrella. This creates quite a different community feel. My perception is that there is a greater ambition and scope of utopian idealism alive in Auroville. There are so many communal offerings; not just infrastructure services, but also video and book libraries, its own educa-

tional pedagogy, Auronet, a language lab, cultural performances and more. Auroville has many free facilities and events. This is less common in Findhorn; most, though not all, events are charged for.

The Findhorn Foundation is based in two locations, surrounded by a wider community. Auroville has many dozens of neighbourhoods, work places, shops, cafes, spread out amongst three villages, like Joseph's quilt of many colours. This variety and individual freedom allows a high amount of creativity to organically emerge. There seem to be many artists, musicians, architects, writers, entrepreneurs and individuals who have found or are on their way to embodying their inner destiny. Mother's emphasis on 'divine anarchy' provides a seed bed for unique experiments, both personal and collective.

One notable difference is in governance. In Findhorn community meetings are usually well attended, whereas in Auroville you are lucky to get the 10% quorum of the adult community for even a 'hot' topic. Big meetings in Findhorn, such as the annual internal conference, will often fill the Universal Hall. The Findhorn Foundation is the charity running most of the educational programmes and owning much of the residential buildings and land. Over the years it has experimented with different governance forms but has always had some kind of centralised executive group and community forum. In the 1990s, as the number of people living outside of the Foundation grew and diversified, the New Findhorn Association (NFA) emerged to represent this wider community of families and small businesses. The NFA is run by two 'Listener Convenors' (one male, one female), who are selected every two years.

Whilst there are a number of nations in Findhorn, predominantly though not exclusively Western, there are only a few Scots. In contrast, Auroville is home to 59 nations, including many people born in the local villages, a melting pot for what is hoped to be a new way of being.

In 1999, a gathering organized for those who had lived in Auroville since the 1970s brought together about 300 people. At that time in Findhorn, there were only about thirty people who had been there in the 1970s. Findhorn has always been a training centre, after which people are meant to go back to the world to offer their skills. A consequence is that children who grew up in Findhorn have only exceptionally returned to live there, though that is beginning to change as the wider community becomes more settled. In Auroville, while many children leave at one point to pursue careers outside, quite a number decide to return later. But, Auroville, like Findhorn, is a 'greying' community.

While the average age of communities worldwide is reputed to be about a year, both Findhorn and Auroville have survived well into their fifties and are two of the largest of their type in the world. With very different locales, cultures and national mixes, they share a commonality of wishing to accelerate our evolution, to be seed beds for experiments that a new culture will need to grow in, and both provide a welcoming ark for that journey into the future so many of us dream of.

Peter

Urban Forestry: an introduction by the Treecare team

Since July this year, Auroville Green Practices (AGP), a community organisation managed by Auroville Consulting, has been hosting numerous webinars, with over 1,500 people participating on more than a dozen topics, such as zero waste, upcycling, water management, vegan raw food, permaculture, and earth architecture, natural building technologies, ferro-cement, solar energy, and many more.

In October, AGP collaborated with TreeCare to hold an online course on the topic of Urban Forestry. TreeCare is a team of nine tree surgeons (five Aurovilians, two Nepalis, one young man from Kulapalayam and one German volunteer) that provides professional care for the trees, landscapes and green spaces of homes, businesses and communities, including tree pruning or removal, cabling and bracing, shrub pruning and grass trimming. Led by three ISA certified arborists, the team also offers workshops and training sessions to all those interested in turning this passion into a profession.

When they started their unit, the TreeCare team was aiming for business expansion, but, as Julian said, “we were dreaming of building an empire where there was not even an industry.” They then turned towards education, as the ideology of TreeCare has to spread throughout India to create the foundation for a vibrant industry. “The campaign is not only to provide information, but also warn against misinformation,” Julian added. “It is important to share knowledge about trees and their needs with the clients, but they also need to know about workers’ safety; sometimes the latter do the job without any specialised gear, which is very dangerous.”

The online course was set up in four modules. Using educational material, field-based highlights and case studies in India and abroad, the modules covered a wide range of urban forestry topics. The aim was to equip professionals in the field of urbanism with knowledge about the biology and relevance of urban trees in order to incorporate their health and wellbeing into urban landscaping.

The main topics covered were tree biology, urban forestry, pre-development planning, post-development follow-up and maintenance. During the live Q&A sessions at the end of each module, the arborists gave detailed insight into how to apply these learnings in each of the aforementioned professional fields: which trees to integrate into an upcoming development project or future city infrastructure, how they grow and react in urban environments, how to cater to their needs and prevent unintentional damage in this hostile environment, how to maintain them, etc.

One of the presenters, Anadi, emphasised that arboriculture is only 100 years old and people have learned and discovered more in the last 15-20 years than in the first 50. The learning has been exponential in



From left to right: Top: Jonas, Anadi and Bagirath from TreeCare; Bottom: Balu, Priya, Nivetha and Inge from Auroville Green Practices

this field, with regular changes in standards and norms linked to new discoveries and know-how. In Europe, arboriculture has since become the norm: no town planning work starts without the visit and advice of an arborist. The TreeCare team shared that unfortunately, the Indian market has little knowledge about arboriculture: tree care here is done in a very need-based and haphazard way.

Despite many of the participants in the webinar sharing that they were hearing about arboriculture for the first time, the course

highlighted that this industry is relevant to all professions in the fields of sustainability, the environment and town planning (town planners, engineers, builders, contractors, landscapers and architects). Yet, “There is no need to become an arborist to understand and integrate urban forestry knowledge into one’s profession,” said Jonas, one of the three TreeCare executives.

The TreeCare team was impressed that the participants’ questions were very specific and technical, enabling them to delve more deeply into the subject. As Inge of AGP explained, the main difference between previous AGP webinars and the one with TreeCare is that instead of being a one-off, the TreeCare course consists of four progressive modules that constitute an entire course, providing more in-depth knowledge and practical information that people in the field can apply immediately.

At the end of the course, all participants received a Certificate of Completion. About 20 people followed the whole course. Senior AGP member Balu was surprised to see that – for the first time since AGP has started organising webinars – all the people who signed up for TreeCare’s course attended all the modules; this showed they were genuinely inspired, interested and invested in the topic. For Bagirath from TreeCare, it was a new challenge to create something professional and educational, including quality of work and confidence on subject. Since arboriculture is a new science, there was a lot of learning involved in the teaching. Nivetha (AGP) shared that, despite not actually being educators themselves, the TreeCare team set a high standard in terms of how they presented the material, and motivated and interacted with the participants.

While the AGP team was impressed by TreeCare’s professionalism and pedagogic approach to teaching, as well as touched by their overt passion, TreeCare really appreciated working with AGP as they were a great help with organisation and held the interface needed for an effective sharing of knowledge. Having witnessed the repeated cutting down of trees in her hometown Pondicherry since her childhood, Priya from AGP hopes that the TreeCare team can also raise awareness at the level of municipalities and governments.

The course was held again in November and can be repeated as often as requests keep rolling in!

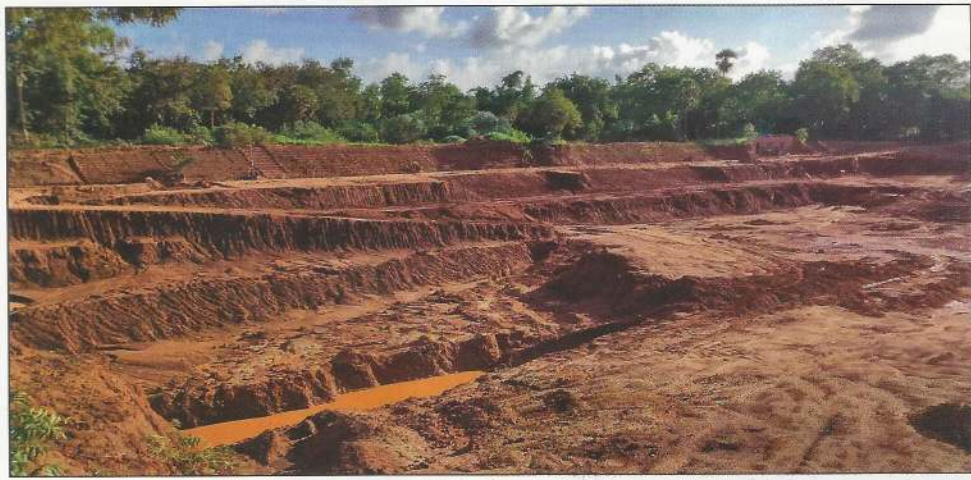
Divya Lieser

For more information: <http://treecareindia.com/> or <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yLCKEJ5EiPk>
Also visit <https://agpworkshops.com/workshops/auroville-a-journey-of-sustainability/> about the role of Auroville in India and the world’s sustainability agenda

GEOLOGY

Explaining a stratum

In order to best determine how the lake around Matrimandir should be constructed, a large test pond is being excavated, exposing layers of earth, gravel, sand and clay. Aurovillian Geologist Giulio took interested Aurovilians on two-hour tour of the site, illuminating the distant past.



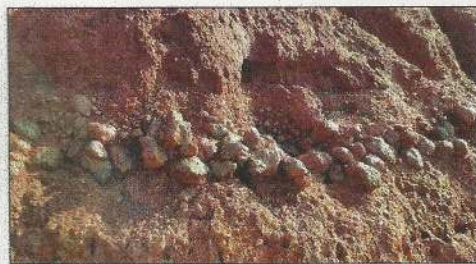
The excavation of the test pond for the Matrimandir Lake

Going down a steep slope into the site, we reach eight metres below the surface. The excavation will go to ten metres, but it has been temporarily suspended during monsoon. It is planned to be finished by March.

“The excavation of the Matrimandir Lake gives us a beautiful opportunity to study the geological formations beneath our feet. You see different layers. They are a testament to the forces of wind and water that shaped the Auroville plateau over millions of years,” says Giulio. Pointing at the reddish walls around us, he explains that we are looking at a stratum called *Cuddalore Sandstone*, after the city of Cuddalore where this geological formation was first described. “This looks like red soil. If you go further westward in Auroville, you’ll find different soil types: yellow soil at the Visitors’ Centre, gravel at Pebble Garden, blackish clay at Annapurna, and then again reddish soil. These are different strata that formed over millions of years on top of each other, like a multilayered cake. Due to earth movements, these strata tilted, so that lower strata also came to the surface; that’s the reason why you can see different soil types next to each other, as for example, near the Visitors’ Centre and Buddha Garden. There you see the border between the *Cuddalore Sandstone* formation and that of the next formation, which is called *Manaveli clay*.”

Giulio explains the particulars of *Cuddalore*

Sandstone by taking a bit of the red soil between his fingers; he spits on it, rubs his fingers together, and invites his audience to do the same. “What do you feel? Smooth? Grainy? Sticky? Rocky? Does it feel scratchy, like sandpaper? If so, what you have is sand. If the feeling is soapy, it’s silt. And when it’s sticky, it’s clay. This is the simple way for geologists to determine the texture of a geological formation. The difference between the three is measured in the size of the grains: sand goes between two and



Iron manganese nodules

0.0068 millimeter, silt is smaller, and clay even smaller. But what we have here is mainly sand.”

The *Cuddalore Sandstone* formation stretches from Marakkanam north of Auroville to Kanyakumari, the southern tip of India. In Auroville, the formation has a depth of about 30 to 35 meters – we know this from the many bore wells that Auroville has dug – but in other places the

stratum goes to a depth there of about 440 meters. “This is a relatively young geological formation, it was formed between 1.8 and 23 million years ago. Below it are older formations, with the oldest cropping to the surface 25 kilometres west of Auroville. That one is between 2.5 to 3.8 billion years old,” says Giulio.

We are impressed by an ancientness none can imagine. “Over these millions of years, many things have happened. As is well-known, some 160 million years ago the Indian tectonic plate broke off from Africa and started moving towards the Asian plate. The collision that caused the Himalayas happened some 55 million years ago – that is 10 million years after the dinosaurs had disappeared. At that time, the place we are standing now was a reef.” He shows a sample of limestone, which has small shells embedded in it. “Those reefs were not made of corals as we know them today, but of shells. Those shells died out at the Cretaceous-Tertiary extinction event, when all the dinosaurs and a good 75% of all organisms on the planet died, some 65.5 million years ago. That’s how we know how old this piece of limestone is.”

But what happened in all these millions of years, we’ll never know, says Giulio. “From the boulders and gravel we find we can deduce that there once was a river here – but maybe there were many rivers in those millions of years that wandered over this area.” He points at smoothly rounded boulders and lots of small pebbles, and explains that they all were brought here by water. “When water flows, its energy can move objects. The large boulders must have been moved here from many kilometres away, perhaps from Gingee, otherwise they wouldn’t have become so smooth. They must have been carried by large fast-flowing rivers. The smaller pebbles came when there was less energy in the water – when a



Giulio

river was wide or slow moving. If an area is flooded and quiet, the receding waters leave sand, silt or clay behind.”

There is a neat black line about midway in the wall of the excavation which looks like a thin layer of small blackish rocks. Asked what they are, Giulio replies “they are not rocks.” To understand what they are, he says, you have to look at soil first. “Soil is the result of weathering and modification of bedrock due to climate, vegetation and micro organisms. Soil also

contains minerals, including iron, and over millions of years these minerals dissolve and seep down till they reach a place where they cannot go down any further. This process happens because there is a certain balance in the chemistry of the ground. When that balance is no longer there, the seeping process stops. When it stops, the minerals cannot go further down and then, over millions of years, they coagulate into iron nodules.” He breaks a nodule with a hammer. Inside we see orange, yellow, and red, outside the nodule is red and black. “Orange, yellow and red indicate iron, black is manganese which has coated the nodule,” explains Giulio.

He takes up another piece of rock, reddish and interspersed with white lines. “We call these ‘bio-galleries’, he says. “A bio-gallery is a channel made by either a living a micro-organism like an earthworm, or by the root of a tree. The weathering of the bedrock and erosion led to calcium leaching downward these channels. That’s why they became whitish. This white is calcium carbonate. The bio-galleries prove that once upon a time, there was a rich forest area here.”

While the sun slowly sets, Giulio speaks about the chemical processes that shaped this area over millions of years. When he concludes his talk, he has just scratched the surface of the depths.

Carel

Seductive simplicity

“Everything should be made as simple as possible, but no simpler.”
Einstein

Everybody loves simplicity. It makes life easier in so many ways – who doesn’t love the words ‘plug and play’? But there are times, as Einstein points out, when one can oversimplify. However, we seem to be living in a world where oversimplification is a daily fact. Newspapers and TV channels rely upon superficial sound bites when covering complex issues, algorithms lock us into personal echo chambers, and many politicians and activists worldwide espouse simplistic, often extreme, views as a means to garner votes.

Conflict accentuates this tendency to over-simplification. Typically, adversaries in heated debates quickly move towards extreme ends of the spectrum. The middle ground is lost and, along with it, nuance, the awareness of complexity, and the ability to hold differing perspectives and work towards integral rather than exclusive solutions.

All this may seem a long way from Auroville. Yet we haven’t completely escaped the same tendency. Every time we pigeonhole somebody on the basis of their latest posting on Auronet, or something that happened 20 years ago, we do this. Every time we fall into the ‘us’ and ‘them’ mentality (working groups versus ‘residents’), every time we suggest a simplistic motivation for why individuals or groups act in the way they do, (“it’s a power trip”), every time we refuse to listen to a view that challenges our own, every time we echo simplistic formulae found on the internet (“all mainstream news is suspect”), we fall into this trap.

Of course, it’s comforting to believe that a complex world can be reduced to a few simple formulae, particularly at a time when that world is experiencing so much uncertainty. And it’s often much easier to reduce people to stereotypes than to see them ‘in the round’.

But we are not one-dimensional entities. Each of us is complex, composed of different, often conflicting, attitudes, inclinations and preoccupations. And we live in an increasingly uncertain world where multiple factors interact in complex and often unpredictable ways.

Moreover, simplistic explanations tend to spawn simplistic solutions which don’t touch the core of an issue or may even make matters worse. (For example, South African President Mbeki’s refusal to endorse proven AIDS drugs because he believed they were a Western plot to weaken his country cost hundreds of thousands of lives.)

So what can we do? After all, we don’t have the time or energy or resources to exhaustively investigate every allegation made on Auronet or in the world’s mass media. At the same time, we don’t have to give our immediate assent to any view or allegation that is being propagated. We can practice a certain detachment: we can suspend judgment and be willing to embrace a degree of uncertainty.

Alternatively, rather than remaining transfixed by happenings in the external world, we can try to step inside ourselves to discover “a being free, vast and knowing, who awaits our discovery and who ought to become the active centre of our being and our life in Auroville.” For it is here, rather than on websites or in political manifestos, that Mother tells us that the true guidance is to be found.

The inner turn, the inner discovery, is far from easy. As the *Katha Upanishad* puts it, *The Self-Existent made the senses turn outward. Accordingly, man looks toward what is without, and sees not what is within.* Yet here, within, lies the simplicity so many of us yearn for. But this is a profound simplicity, one that immediately grasps essence and provides a sure compass through the mazes of the world, not a spurious simplicity that simplifies by eliding inconvenient information or by making illegitimate linkages between unrelated phenomena. For this ‘being free, vast and knowing’ is closer to the Source and able to grasp the truth directly, through identity, rather than through the pirouettes of the mind.

It’s worth remembering that Einstein himself, the greatest scientist of the 20th century and schooled in the rigours of the scientific method, experienced a mode of knowing beyond mind, for some of his greatest discoveries came in a blinding flash rather than through prolonged mentalisation. It is why he could affirm, “All great achievements of science must start from intuitive knowledge”, for “the intellect has little to do on the road to discovery. There comes a leap in consciousness, call it Intuition or what you will, the solution comes to you and you don’t know how or why.”

Alan

LETTER

David Nightingale’s urban design comments in the October 2020 *Auroville Today* article bring attention, again, to some main town development points. These include: a conventional Crown road would be destructive; parking for polluting vehicles outside the Crown at the radials; and urban spaces on the Crown.

An urban spaces ‘Squares’ on the Crown town planning study, originally called plazas on the Crown, was integral with the petal parks idea and based on the existing land and developments at that time, the early 1980’s. I was working with Dorothee at the Eco House organizing land maps, working with several green-workers, and surveying for water conservation projects partly funded by the Tamil Nadu Forest Department, and developed a fairly comprehensive sense of the land and existing buildings. The nine urban ‘Squares’ seem to fit, at the intersection of radial roads at that time, and in part formed a Crown reference diameter. Part of the idea was by building the Squares/plazas on the Crown, polluting vehicles could come to the plazas along radials, and go out from the plazas, and movement from Square to plaza to piazza on the Crown could be less noisy and polluting, and more easily controlled. Below ground, rain water storage tanks were considered as parts of the urban spaces connected by a Crown bund surrounding the higher grounds containing the Peace Gardens. An urban places on the Crown town plan study was in the *Auroville Review* No. 5-1981.

Sincerely,
Joel Goodman, USA, November 5, 2020

Population statistics

I have an ambivalence about writing about population trends. I enjoy the statistics, and what they reveal about which nations are drawn to Auroville, and especially when a country ‘wakes up’ to Auroville. On the other hand, for those of us who grew up with parents of different nationalities and/or as a dual nationals, we’re reduced to one choice of nationality for Auroville’s statistical purposes. For those of us who grew up in a third country to both our parent’s nationalities, our identity is even more complex. For example, the kids who grew up here and returned as adults seem to belong more to Auroville than to their passport.

So maybe we can consider these national identities as broad brush strokes, under which lie unique inheritances and cultures that may not exactly fit these national definitions, but do belong to what the Auroville Charter speaks to:

Auroville belongs to nobody in particular. Auroville belongs to humanity as a whole. But, to live in Auroville, one must be a willing servitor of the Divine Consciousness.

Mother also wrote:

Auroville wants to be a universal town where men and women of all countries are able to live in peace and progressive harmony above all creeds, all politics and all nationalities.

This year our population statistics were influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic. When the quarantine was started in March, the Entry Group closed for some months, which delayed the entry process for those wishing to become Newcomers. The Yucca programme for aspiring Newcomers has only recently restarted, and the time lag will spill over into 2021 entry numbers. Yet as life is often a mix of fates, it’s also noticeable that there are a number of guests who were stuck here for the lockdown and have ended up joining Auroville.

This year our population grew by 89 people to 3262, up from last year’s 3173. Of those 89, 60 were from India, with India continuing its growth of Auroville residents from 1415 to 1475. Last year the US and Netherlands were tied in 5th place on 105 nationals each, but there has been a leap in Americans (from 96 two years ago to 112 today) and no change in the number of Dutch. Other minor increases include Iran, from 7 to 9 people, Canada to 29 from 27, Russia increasing to 77 from 74, Korea to 57 from 55 and South Africa growing to 13 from last year’s 11. France keeps its historic second place with 456 nationals (up from 449), with Germany running third with a consistent number of 259 folk. After a somewhat meteoric rise in recent years, Israel stabilised at 52 residents, and China stabilised at 16 after a recent burst. The only noticeable decline was Switzerland, dropping to 41 from 44.

The gender split as last year was almost a statistical tie, with 1301 women to 1290 men and with the children an even closer 333 girls to 338 boys. This total consists of Aurovilians, Newcomers, Pre-Newcomers, and their children. We grew to 59 nations from 57, welcoming residents from Ecuador, Cambodia and Croatia, while losing our Serbian representative.

As countries change politically, these larger shifts slowly filter through to Auroville. Since last year, Macedonia is now North Macedonia (with four residents) after its political agreement with Greece on its nomenclature. The Czech Republic is now known by its short form name of Czechia, with a sole Aurovilian representative currently.

Africa and other Asian nations continue to be relatively low in numbers when compared to the number of Indian and European residents. But countries from South and Central America continue their steady growth; with Brazil (11), Argentina (9), Mexico (6), Colombia (5), Chile (2) and Ecuador (1).

After our last two years of 200 plus increases, this year’s increase is smaller. Yet Auroville continues its population growth, most notably from our host nation, while also becoming more international with the inclusion of more countries. Even COVID-19 has not stopped people wanting to join and live the Dream of Auroville.

Peter

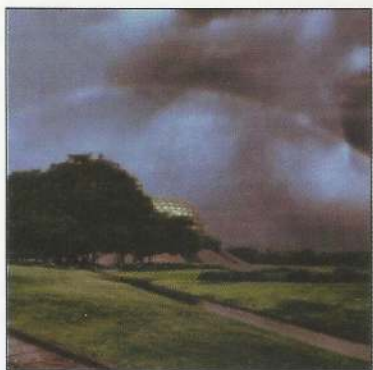
Total Adult Residents	2591
Female	1301
Male	1290
Total Children	671
Female	333
Male	338
Total Residents	3262

2020 Distribution of Residents of Auroville (including Aurovilians, Newcomers, to-be Newcomers, and their children)				
		2018	2019	2020
1	India	1336	1415	1475
2	France	426	449	456
3	Germany	257	259	259
4	Italy	162	170	172
5	USA	96	105	112
6	Netherlands	104	105	105
7	Russia	72	74	77
8	UK	66	67	68
9	Spain	55	60	62
10	South Korea	44	55	57
11	Israel	46	52	52
12	Belgium	41	45	46
13	Switzerland	45	44	41
14	Canada	25	27	29
15	Sweden	27	29	28
16	Ukraine	21	22	22
17	Australia	15	19	19
18	China	14	16	16
19	Japan	13	14	14
20	South Africa	11	11	13
21	Austria	13	13	12
22	Brazil	11	11	11
23	Hungary	9	9	9
24	Argentina	8	8	9
25	Iran	6	7	9
26	Nepal	7	8	7
27	Denmark	4	7	7
28	Slovenia	6	6	6
29	Mexico	5	6	6
30	Colombia	4	4	5
31	Kazakhstan	4	4	4
32	Latvia	4	4	4
33	Belarus	4	4	4
34	North Macedonia	4	4	4
35	Ethiopia	3	3	3
36	Sri Lanka	3	3	3
37	Tibet	3	3	3
38	Bulgaria	2	2	2
39	Finland	2	2	2
40	Ireland	2	2	2
41	Lithuania	2	2	2
42	Norway	2	2	2
43	Philippines	2	2	2
44	Portugal	2	2	2
45	Rwanda	2	2	2
46	Taiwan	2	2	2
47	Chile	1	2	2
48	Cambodia	0	0	2
49	Ecuador	2	2	1
50	Iceland	2	1	1
51	Algeria	1	1	1
52	Czechia	1	1	1
53	Egypt	1	1	1
54	Indonesia	1	1	1
55	Luxembourg	1	1	1
56	Moldova	1	1	1
57	Poland	1	1	1
58	Romania	1	1	1
59	Croatia	0	0	1
		3006	3173	3262

Auroville Foundation issues

The term of office of the present members of the Governing Board ended on November 23rd. When this issue went to the press, there was no news about the appointment of new members. Similarly, the appointment of the Secretary of the Auroville Foundation, pending since July 2019, is still awaited, as is the appointment of new members of the International Advisory Council, pending since March 2017.

Cyclone Nivar



The first cyclone of the season, named 'Nivar', made landfall near Marakkanam, north of Auroville, in the early hours of November 26th. Throughout the night Auroville was subjected to storms and heavy rains, with occasional thunder and lightning and some eerie silences in between. The cyclone left little wreckage behind, mainly some uprooted trees which were soon removed by the teams of the Land Board, the Auroville Road Service, TreeCare and other volunteers, while Auroville Electrical Service worked to restore electricity supply.

Aurovilians abroad can return

The Government of India has agreed to cancel the suspension of all visas other than tourist visas, which means that all Aurovilians abroad who hold an Entry Visa for Auroville can now return.

The Auroville Entry Policy 2020 / Entry and Exit Regulations / Exit Policy

A decision of the Residents' Assembly called by the Working Committee on the proposed new Entry Policy failed due to a lack of quorum (10% of adult residents). The Working Committee will soon call for a decision of the Residents' Assembly on all issues to do with Entry and Exit, e.g. the proposed amendments to the official Entry and Exit Regulations passed by the Government of India; and the two internal documents, the Entry Policy and the Exit Policy.

Annapurna Farm struggles

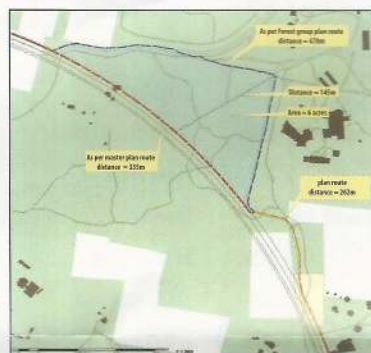
The dry summer has delayed the start of the paddy season at Annapurna, Auroville's largest farm. Annapurna's traditional paddy varieties need a growing season of 140-150 days to mature and are season

bound. These varieties are grown since they have a nice taste, are more resilient, and grow well under organic conditions. But if sown out of season (September, October) they will not develop properly. Annapurna is also doing a trial with a paddy variety which was developed by the Tamil Nadu Agricultural University at the beginning of the eighties, specifically for the conditions prevalent at Annapurna; this variety has a shorter growth duration and is not season bound. Annapurna hopes it will give a bit more breathing space in an erratic season like this year's.

Gold award for EVER SLOW GREEN in China

The Handle Climate Change Film Festival 2020 in Shenzhen, China, awarded Aurovillian Christoph Pohl the Gold Award for his film *Ever Slow Green*, about Auroville's forests. The film was given the highest award out of a total of 1,113 films submitted from 90 different countries and Chinese districts. The award was received by a Chinese friend of Lijun, an Aurovillian of Chinese nationality, who also gave Christoph a crash course in Chinese for the beginning of his acceptance speech, which was screened via video during the ceremony.

Right of Way disputed



Map of the disputed area. In red, the HT line following the Crown, in blue the HT line following the existing dirt road.

Members of the Forest Group and many others Aurovilians are objecting to the partial clearing of the existing forests to allow for so-called Rights of Ways (RoWs) – three-metres wide stretches of open land to lay High Tension and other cables – along the proposed Crown road, the proposed Outer Ring Road and the proposed Radials, as has recently been advised by the Acting Secretary of the Auroville Foundation to the Town Development Council (TDC). The first focus is on the proposed partial clearing of the Bliss Forest which has a rich tree cover and houses the Youth Centre, for the laying of a high tension (HT) underground cable.

The Forest Group observed that the proposed clearing would have an immense impact on Auroville's afforestation work and the present-day unique character of Auroville in this region and beyond. It would mean the near destruction of unique afforested areas within the Auroville city area and the Greenbelt. In the case of the Bliss Forest, it pointed out that the laying of the HT cable with its required service access along the

existing road would be easier, faster and at a similar cost than cutting through the planted area of Bliss and the Youth Centre, as was shown in the Environmental Impact Assessment made by the Forest Group.

The Forest Group informed the Secretary about the ongoing discussions between the Forest Group and the TDC to find common ground with regard to the laying of the HT cable as a first step towards participative planning on issues which have blocked Auroville's development for a long time. Only if this would not result in finding common ground, the matter would be brought to the Residents Assembly for an informed decision-making process.

The Impact of COVID on internal transactions in Auroville

A study made by Lyle on transfers made within the Financial Service between services/units and between services/units and individuals shows the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic: there were 38% less transfers in the COVID-19 months in 2019-20 than in 2018-19. This analysis does not suggest that external transactions have been similarly affected by COVID-19.

Pitchandikulam Forest Newsletter



Mottled owl drawing by Eric

Pitchandikulam Forest has issued its 2019-2020 newsletter which includes: reflective musings on the 47-year old history of Pitchandikulam Forest; the story of a monograph on the Owls of South Asia; a report on Pitchandikulam Forest's nursery which is responsible for the growing of around 20,000 seedlings a year to help re-establish the Tropical Dry Evergreen Forest (TDEF) in Tamil Nadu; a report on the Environmental Leadership and Skill Development Programme for 350 Rural Women; the work of Pitchandikulam Forest in building water retention landscapes and the restoration of the twin lakes of Siruseri Chennai; environmental artwork for Toyota Kirloskar Motors, Bangalore, on a 25-acres ECO-ZONE; and creating a master plan for an Ecopark/Nature lab and teaching space for practitioners of Restoration Ecology on a piece of land near Ousteri lake. For a copy please email pitchandikulam.outreach@auroville.org.in.

Matrimandir works

Work at the Matrimandir is focused on three projects: the continuing development of the Garden of the Unexpected; the building of the foundation for a group of large quartz crystals in the Garden of Existence; and the construction of a new section of the cobble stone road encircling the Matrimandir gardens. For more information, email: matrimandir@auroville.org.in

The test pond excavation



The Test Pond excavation as seen from the top of Matrimandir September, 2020

The excavation of the test pond reached the target depth of ten meters below the zero level (i.e.: below the level of the oval road which runs around the gardens' outer edge) on October 8th. The moment was marked by a symbolic concentration on that deep, sandy layer of the excavation.

The Garden of the Unexpected



The iron wood tree on the open backed lorry being moved to the Garden of the Unexpected

The fourth section of the Garden of the Unexpected, called the "Garden of the Eternal Child", has recently had two unexpected additions. One is a large, nine ton iron wood tree which needed to be transplanted from the test pond site. After placing the tree carefully in its new location, a pipe structure has been built up around it, and it has been covered with a green shade net to shelter the tree from the sun while it recovers from the transplant operation. The other unexpected addition is the 14 ton granite stone that had stood till recently in the Garden of



The 14 ton stone from the Garden of Existence being settled in the Garden of the Unexpected

Existence. That stone, having been installed 11 years ago, was removed after long deliberation in order to make way for a new centre piece for that garden. It now sits quietly and massively near the central circle in this new garden.

The Garden of Existence.



The concrete foundation for the crystal group in the garden of Existence

There will be a new centre piece for this garden, a group of large natural quartz crystals that came mostly from Brazil. Work on the foundation for this installation is now being completed. The placement of the 32 crystals will be a very delicate job, as some of them weigh tons, and each needs to be precisely placed and then anchored.

The Oval Road



130 metres oval road being prepared for its surface cladding of granite cobble stones

Another ongoing project is the 1.1 kilometers long cobble stone oval road which will encircle the gardens. In early 2020, just before the Covid lockdown, an initial stretch of about 75 metres had been completed.

New land purchases

Since the start of the seventh year of Acres for Auroville, thanks to donors to Acres for Auroville and Lands For Auroville United, six new Greenbelt plots have been purchased, adding 6.47 acres of rich agricultural land and helping consolidate other land.

The Spirit of Auroville in Chinese

Auro e-Books has published a bilingual English-Chinese version of the book "The Spirit of Auroville". The Chinese translation was done by Anandi Zhang and proofread by Ni Hui, while Olivier Barot took care of the English text and picture selection. All texts in this book have been selected from the works of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother. The book can be freely downloaded from mail@auro-ebooks.com.

Auronet Guidelines

The Auroville Council has published draft Guidelines for the publication of documents and views on the Auronet, the Intranet portal of Auroville. Reference has been made to a letter of Sri Aurobindo to a disciple, outlining the psychic self-control needed during discussions. These are also applicable to one's publications on the Auronet. Moderators and a Moderation Support Group will see to it that the Guidelines are respected. The Residents' Assembly will be asked to approve the Guidelines.

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