

Supported by its rich biodiversity, India has since ancient times developed its own indigenous systems of medicine. Medicinal plants are found in all of its 15 ecosystems, giving rise to its unique alternative medical systems: Ayurveda, Siddha, Sowa-Rigpa and Unani, each of which depends primarily on plant based formulations for its medicines. Out of India's 17,000-18,000 species of flowering plants, more than 7,000 are estimated to have medicinal usage and about 1,178 species are estimated to be in trade with 242 species having annual consumption levels in excess of 100 metric tons.

In 2014, the Indian Government established the Ministry of AYUSH, an acronym for Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, Sowa-Rigpa and Homeopathy (a system originally developed by the German physician Dr. Hahnemann in 1805). The name Ayush is also a Hindu name that means "long life," "good health," or "well-being." The Ministry is responsible for developing education, research and propagation of the traditional and alternative medicine systems in India, and for facilitating the international promotion, development and recognition of the AYUSH systems of medicine. The Ministry has set up Central Councils for Research in each system of medicine and has also created National AYUSH Institutes of Eminence: the All India Institute of Ayurveda in Goa, the National Institute of Unani Medicine in Ghaziabad, and the National Institute of Homoeopathy at Delhi. It has also set up the National Medicinal Plants Board to coordinate all matters relating to medicinal plants.

The popularity of the various medicinal systems differs from state to state. Ayurveda and Siddha respectively have greater popularity in Kerala and Tamil Nadu. Unani is better received in the Hyderabad region and among Muslims whilst homeopathy is highly popular in Bengal and Odisha. Sowa Rigpa is the traditional medicine of many parts of the Himalayan region, including Tibet.

Aurovilians have access to practitioners of four alternative systems. There are two Ayurvedic doctors (called *Vaidya*), one from India, the other from France; there are three resident homeopaths; a Tibetan doctor (called *Amchi*) and his team visit Auroville once a month; a visiting Siddha doctor gives twice weekly consults at the Auroville's Health Centre in Aspiration; and one can learn from an experienced herbalist how to use local plants in everyday cooking to treat common health issues.

In this double issue of Auroville Today we carry interviews with these health providers. We also portray Auroville's lone practitioner in *Jyotisha Shastra*, Vedic astrology, which is a recognized course of study in many Indian universities. Lastly, we publish interviews with a few not so well known Aurovilians, who are as dedicated to the manifestation of Auroville as those whose names are more in the public awareness.

Promoting Ayurveda: the knowledge of life

Dr. Bérengère, or Dr. Be as she is known in Auroville, holds a French MBA in International Business. She then studied Ayurveda at the Gujarat Ayurved University in Jamnagar, India. After six years of clinical and scholarly tuition at the University's Ayurvedic hospitals, she obtained a Bachelor of Ayurvedic Medicine and Surgery (BAMS) degree. Be joined Auroville in 2013, gives consultations at Santé (Auroville Institute for Integral Health), does plant research and teaches the basic principles of Ayurveda to apply on a daily basis.



Dr. Be teaching Ayurveda to Aurovilians

Auroville Today. Be, can you tell us about your path?

In the course of my professional reconversion, I had started to learn massage therapy and I had first come to Auroville in 2004, to attend a workshop on traditional Thai massage and went to Kerala to learn Ayurvedic massage. At that time, I hadn't heard anything of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother. Reading to understand the purpose of Auroville, I didn't really understand what it was about. I also realised that if I were to stay here, I didn't have much to offer as there were quite a few massage therapists in Auroville, many much more experienced than I was, so I went back to Europe to work in well-being institutes. After a while of practising as a therapist, I observed that clients didn't only use massage to relax but also because they had health issues (insomnia, gastric problems, joint pain etc). As I didn't have any medical back-ground, I then decided to come back to India to thoroughly study Ayurveda, as I could perceive that it was a great ancient medicine system that could help solve many health issues.

How was your Ayurvedic study at the Gujarat Ayurved University?

Tough, and not always satisfactory. The syllabus was built in the same way as when you study allopathic medicine. In addition, we were taught how to treat diseases in an Ayurvedic way, using preparations from plants that have medicinal properties, and we were taught how to make such preparations. But for me, these were just the basics. I don't want to only treat the symptoms of the disease, but also the reason why the disease happened. Where did the imbalance start? Was the disease psychosomatic with the vital or mental affecting the physical, or was the cause somatic-psychological, starting from the body and then affecting the emotions, the vital, and then the mental and intellectual capacities? Here in Auroville, which is based on Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga, I felt there is the possibility to look at root causes. That, for me, brings Ayurveda to a more holistic level.

While finishing the internship for the BAMS degree in Gujarat and wondering where to go to practice, I dreamed of Auroville. I took it as a sign to visit the place again. The day I arrived in Auroville I met Dr. Ruslan at the Solar Kitchen, who told me that Kailash clinic [*as Santé was known at that time, eds.*] was looking for an Ayurvedic doctor.

The study of Ayurveda made me understand better the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo; it's the same essence. This time, yes, I felt I could offer Ayurveda as a health tool to the community, a knowledge that can help to promote health through prevention, to heal through understanding the cause of a disease and to be aware of who we are and where we are at in our mission of life.

Actually, I had wanted to go to South America, to Colombia. I had heard that there is a village in the Sierra Nevada of Colombia where a people live who have the same kind of knowledge as what is taught in the Vedas. These are the Arhuacos. The chance came when my Ayurvedic professor was invited to teach a workshop in Bogota. As I am fluent in Spanish, I offered to come along and translate. He went for only one week; I decided to stay on and contact these people.

But when I finally managed to locate the village, I was refused entry. They wanted to check my energies and know the purpose of my visit. I waited at the gate. But they didn't allow me in. Mind you, this was not because of some government regulation. This was a decision of the people themselves, who did not want their atmosphere to be spoiled by the atmosphere brought by 'little brothers', those who are disconnected from nature. According to their philosophy, there are big and little brothers. The big brothers are connected to the divine and to nature. The little brothers are disconnected from the divine and will damage themselves and nature through deceitful acts. They don't want the influence of the little brother spoiling their environment with shoulds: "you should do..., you should make..." imposing practices that may not apply to their evolution. It's already challenging to keep the tradition and stay connected with the divine with the constant pressure of modernity and consumerism from the outside society.

I tried again in 2016 when I finally managed to receive an invitation from them to stay one night and one day. At the village entrance I had to write the purpose of my visit, my background, my date, time and place of birth. Then I was allowed in. But they first 'cleaned' me from the energies I had brought from India and Europe. They wanted me to be open, have no prejudices, just observe and listen.

By coincidence I stayed with a family of healers. As this village is also in the tropic of Cancer, I could recognize many similar plants that we use in Ayurveda.

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So we had a really nice sharing on how to use them. And when the day had passed, my host said that, next time, I could stay as long as I wanted. Now, if possible, I go back every year. But it was only last year that the spiritual leaders welcomed me as a person. Before, I was just a visitor, even though I was helping with their health issues and had talked with the spiritual leaders. Last year only they welcomed me as doing the same as they do, and they helped me to be clearer in certain issues. These leaders had undergone a special initiation. They are able to directly contact the akashic records and have a remarkable level of intuition and vision.

Can you explain how you diagnose a patient?

So a patient explains to me the symptoms of the physical discomfort or of a disease. I probe for the reasons: is the discomfort caused by a disturbance in the person's vital? Is there an irritation, an anxiety or a frustration? Is there sadness or emotional depression? Is there a mental acquiescence or suppression? Depending on which *dosha* is imbalanced, Ayurveda suggests how to realign. Because the definition of health is when the mind, the vital, the senses and the body are all aligned with the divine and earth. For when all these are aligned, then the person is in a state of well-being.

The questions are always, "What does the patient need? What will allow the patient to continue being connected to the divine and to the earth?" The answer depends on the level of consciousness of the individual, where the person is on the path. So it can be a medication or bringing an understanding, "Oh yes, it's because I do or think this that I have this problem!" which is then followed up by suggesting different healing techniques, such as hatha yoga, tai chi, meditation, sometimes in combination with other medicines (allopathy, homeopathy, Chinese, Tibetan etc). Astrology can also bring insights.

There are limits to what Ayurveda can do. For example, it cannot deal with emergencies. If a person has a stroke, first of all allopathic treatment is the best solution. Ayurveda can get involved with the after-treatment, with rehabilitation or when the allopathic medications have unwanted side effects. In these cases, allopathy and Ayurveda are complementary systems.

So you try to bring integral wellness?

Ayurveda translates to 'knowledge of life'. Joining Auroville and reading the Synthesis of Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and The Science of Living of The Mother brought the holistic dimension that wasn't taught during our Ayurvedic studies. I'm talking about beauty and harmony in the physical; courage, bravery and enthusiasm in the vital; and a certain silence in the mental to be able to listen to the psychic, which so brings love and kindness. That, for me, is the best way to help, to focus on each of these three points: what to do to keep your body beautiful and harmonious, how to balance your body with the emotions of the vital, how to prevent negative repetitive patterns, and how to bring to the mind the knowledge that allows the patient to listen and receive the inner guidance.

A large part of the science of living is in knowing how to deal with psychological stress. Has Ayurveda an answer for this?

I meet many people who express their anxiety, frustration or sadness about what is happening in Auroville and their uncertainty about their future, whether or not they should stay in Auroville. My job is to check which of the *doshas* is disturbed, in which level of consciousness, that affects body and mind and to recommend a course of treatment or realignment accordingly. It is always an individualised treatment according to where the person is at present and what the person needs to do to become more balanced. It all depends on how the person touches its healing power.

How do you evaluate the current situation where there are so many difficulties in Auroville?

I see a lot of *Pitta* imbalance. *Pitta* is the flame, the aspiration, the inspiration, what allows you to see clearly, which gives joy, which gives the intelligence to grasp knowledge and to share it with the community.

A person with a balanced *Pitta* would wonder if he or she is in the right. Such a person would be at the service of the community, have clear ideas, but would be open to consider other opinions. The balanced *Pitta* results in a vibration that is optimistic and constructive and at the service of the community, and there is brightness. It shines in the sweetness and softness of the voice and the kindness of the eyes. The posture feels strong. When you are in the presence of someone like that, you can trust and go forward.

But if the *Pitta* is imbalanced, the result is imposition of opinions and decisions based on the belief that the person knows better and is better than others. A person who is not capable of reflecting on their own views and views of others is likely to be misled or do something wrong. In Ayurveda, we feel the pulse and observe the person. The pulse never lies. We also observe the person's posture, if there are marks under the eyes, wrinkles in the face, if there is light in the eyes and if they shine happiness and joy. All of this can give the sense if a person is rightly aligned.



Ayurvedic medicine cooking class

How do you deal with traumas of someone's past that suddenly surface?

Old traumas are energies that are blocked in a certain organ of the body as a consequence of a psychological or physical trauma. Take, for example, a trauma caused by child sexual abuse. You can't erase from the past the fact that there was abuse. The behaviour of the person will show an aggravation of any of the three *doshas*.

When the person seeks my help, I find which *dosha* has been affected and I advise how best to do realign the *doshas* so as to free the person from



Dr. Be explains the principles of *Pitta*, *Kapha* and *Vata*

that trauma. There are different methods to do so: hypnosis, psychiatric help, astrology, acupuncture, to name a few. This may result in re-activating the energy that was blocked in that organ. But in essence, a new neurological path will so be created to provide safety and protection which allows the person to let the trauma dissolve.

This sounds like a yoga of the body?

Rather a yoga of the cells. We need to clean and clear all those traumas that have been put in our body during our lives. For these traumas leave their imprint on the cells. The cells need to get rid of that fear, anger or depression or whatever was imprinted on them. Mentally speaking, you can understand where it was coming from and that one has to move on, that it happened in the past. But mental knowledge does not eradicate the trauma from the body. You often see that in the posture of a person: the shoulders hang down, the way a person sits, the person protecting the solar plexus, doesn't look you in the eyes because there is something under the carpet that doesn't allow to share trust with the other. So we need to get rid of that thing through the yoga of cells so that the body can realign and have the posture in the way it should be.

But the body doesn't process things in the way the mind does. The body responds and heals through the discipline of repetition, repeating that it is now safe and protected and happy and enjoying. It has to repeat, repeat and repeat until finally it's accepted. That's why, I think, The Mother so much stressed the need for physical discipline. Because the physical only accepts something by repeating it.

That's something I understood from reading Mother's Agenda. It helped me to have a more holistic picture. At the university, this was not taught. What I know is from my own experience.

And that's why Auroville is such a wonderful place in terms of healing, because it has all the possibilities for someone to find the healing power required.

The Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation recently approved the setting up of an Institute of Integral Medical Education in Auroville, synthesising allopathic medicine with Indian systems of medicine. What is your take on this?

I would of course welcome such a health center, but I wish that it integrates a dedicated space for elaboration of juices and decoctions with the local plants according to the season, with a kitchen that has adapted menus according to various health conditions, a study room where we learn how to look after oneself and understand the mechanics of the body and mind and a big garden where people can come to reconnect with their surroundings and their nature. My ideal community would be one where the people are capable of observing themselves and, as soon as they feel the threat or symptoms of an imbalance, know what to do or seek help, before the symptoms become a disease. Going to a doctor implies that the person has missed many signs that the body or the mind have been giving. Ideally, we should be able to read the signs and realise what we are doing wrong, make the corrections so then we don't fall sick. Education and making people responsible for their health are basic principles of Ayurveda.

Are you expecting Aurovilians to be amenable to this?

Again, it all depends on the person's wish and self-observation. Those who are engrossed in their outward lives may not take the time to look after their health, to observe when the body gets into an imbalance. They will require quick-fix treatments, prefer to take a medicine instead of taking the time to change their diet or do some sports, because their timetable doesn't allow it. But there are many people here who joined Auroville to participate in the Mother's great adventure. That choice puts them on a certain level, not the 'ordinary' level where people go to a hospital or seek medicines to overcome their illness.

The Auroville Ayurveda YouTube videos

1. Ayurveda for Beginners with Dr Be
2. Ritucharya Seasonal Regimen
3. Vata, Pitta & Kapha
4. Dinacharya & Ratricharya Routines (2 videos)
5. Agni, the Digestive Fire
6. Shad Rasa (Six Tastes) (2 videos)
7. Menus Suited for Each Dosha
8. Ayurvedic Nutrition (2 videos)
9. Agni (Digestive Fire) & Ama (Toxicity)
- 10 A Woman's Season | Women's Health
11. Ritucharya Tropical Summer Recommendations
12. Ayurvedic First Aid Kit with Dr Be

During my studies in Jamnagar, I saw many patients crowding the hospital to get medicines to get cured. Some had first tried their luck with allopathic medicines, and when that didn't work, went to Ayurveda. Like allopathic doctors, many Ayurvedic doctors nowadays give a whole bunch of medicines – sometimes in the hope that one of them will work. But that's not the aim of Ayurveda. The essence of Ayurveda is going back to the cause of the illness and making sure that the patient stops feeding this cause. But there are not so many Ayurvedic doctors who have the patience or even the capacity to properly educate or to train the patient – assuming that the patient is open to this. This results in a lot of medicinal waste; people buy the prescribed medicines, try them for some time, and if they don't work, put them on a shelf and dump them after a few years. It is a terrible waste of nature because ayurvedic medicines come all from the plants and minerals.

You teach also?

Yes, it's my favourite spreading of Ayurveda. I have been giving classes to adults and teenagers, teaching the basic principles of Ayurveda. I focus on the different *doshas*: *Vata*, *Pitta* and *Kapha* and how they manifest in the physical, vital and mental, and how to rebalance them when they create symptoms at any of these three levels of consciousness through making changes in the food intake, lifestyle and relating to oneself or others. I try to raise awareness about tuning into oneself through practical, theoretical and spiritual knowledge, and to tune in with the plants, to understand their qualities, and how their energy can be transmitted for healing – even without sacrificing their life. Serena from Auroras Eye Films has recorded 15 of these classes and put them on YouTube where you can find them by typing *Ayurveda Auroville*.

In conversation with Carel

A snapshot on Aurveda

Ayurveda meaning 'the knowledge of life' is one of the most renowned traditional systems of medicine that has survived and flourished from ages till date. Ayurveda history dates from the 2nd Century BC. Its foundations are laid by the ancient schools of Hindu philosophical teachings. The Hindu system of healing is believed to be based on four eminent compilations of knowledge (Vedas) called as Yajur Veda, Rig Veda, Sam Veda, and Atharva Veda. The Rig Veda is the most well-known of all the four Vedas and describes 67 plants and 1028 Shlokas. The Atharva Veda and Yajur Veda describe 293 and 81 medicinally useful plants. The practice of Ayurveda is based upon the knowledge gained from these Vedas.

Ayurvedic medicine is based on the idea that the world is made up of five elements — *aakash* (space), *vayu* (air), *teja* (fire), *jala* (water) and *prithvi* (earth). A combination of each element results in three humours, or *doshas*, known as *Vata*, *Pitta* and *Kapha*. These *doshas* are believed to be responsible for a person's physiological, mental, and emotional health.

Every person is said to have a unique ratio of each *dosha*, usually with one standing out more than the others. For example, one person may be mostly *Pitta* while another may be mostly *Vata*. A person's unique ratio of *Vata*, *Pitta* and *Kapha* is said to define their Ayurvedic constitution, a blueprint to achieve optimal health. A disease is also known as having its nature of *Vata*, *Pitta* and *Kapha*.

Tibetan medicine and Auroville

One of the main services of Auroville’s Pavilion of Tibetan Culture is hosting the Tibetan doctor with his trainees and administrative staff for three to four days a month.

The first time Tibetan doctors visited Auroville was during the ‘Tibet Week’ held in Bharat Nivas in 1987. At the time Dr. Dorjee Rabten, who is now the principal of the Medical College in Bangalore, Dr. Tashi and Dr. Tenzin Norbu visited Auroville’s still barren lands. It was Auroville’s first interaction with *Men Tsee Khan*, the Tibetan Medicine & Astrological Institute (TMAI), which is headquartered in Dharamsala.

It was in November 1990 that Dr. Tenzin Choedrak, the personal physician to the Dalai Lama, together with doctors Dorjee Raptan and Lobsang Tsultrim, visited Auroville to give consultations. More than 150 Aurovilians took the opportunity to have their pulses read and purchase the prescribed Tibetan medicines.

Dr. Choedrak also gave talks on the preciousness of the human body and on the origins and nature of the Tibetan medical system. In an interview with Auroville Today he spoke about the mental tension he had observed in many Aurovilians. “Their minds are very busy. They are multi-minded, always thinking of doing many things, but there exists a lack of tolerance. There are certain heights which they want to reach, and when they cannot reach them, they become tense, depressed and overanxious.” [see *Auroville Today* #15, March 1990]

It took more than five years before this visit resulted in the setting up of a permanent Tibetan medical centre in the Pavilion of Tibetan Culture of Auroville. In those years, patients would travel to Bangalore to visit the branch office of *Men Tsee Khan*. Since 1996, Tibetan doctors have been visiting Auroville every month.

“They started with just two patients and gave consultations on one day only,” recalls Kalsang, the executive of the Pavilion. “This slowly increased. Today the doctor comes from the TMAI branch in Chennai for three or four days a month and treats more than 200 patients, either at the Pavilion or by doing home visits.” The patients come not only from Auroville, but also from the surrounding villages and Pondicherry, and even from Chidambaram, Thiruvannamalai, Neyveli and Karaikal.

Sometimes there are miracle cures, says Kalsang. “There was one patient who couldn’t walk and had been visiting allo-



PHOTO: COURTESY DR. TSERING

Dr. Samphel Tsering takes the pulse of a patient

pathic doctors for years, without result. He was treated by one of the visiting Tibetan doctors, Dr. Dorjee Raptan, who gave him certain medicines and treated him with *Sang-bom*, also known as ‘suction cups’, one of the external therapeutic treatment methods of Tibetan Medicine. The function of the suction cupping is to improve the *Loong* (*Qi* and blood) circulation in the channels of the body as well as reduce stress. As a result, the patient slept for a few days, then got up, stood up and walked away. His family, who were attending him, couldn’t believe what they saw. They all started to cry and the patient dashed off to the doctor to touch his feet in gratitude. He was so happy that he started recommending Tibetan medicine to all and sundry, to the point that we

had to ask him to tone down, as his miraculous treatment might not work for everybody and we don’t want people to get disappointed.”

Dr. Samphel Tsering is currently the visiting Tibetan doctor. Born in Tibet, he came as a refugee to India, studied in the Tibetan Children’s Village School in Dharamsala, and then did the five and half year course *Menpa Kachupa* at the TMAI, getting the equivalent of a Bachelor degree in *Sowa-Rigpa*. This was followed by a one year internship. He now works at the TMAI branch office in Chennai and has been treating Auroville patients for the last two years.

Dr. Tsering recalls how, during COVID, all Tibetan doctors and their staff had to be vaccinated, using allopathic medicines, which was not to their liking. “In our experience, the western medicines only suppress symptoms of disease. But we use herbal medicines which deal with the root of the problem.”

Asked to what extent Tibetan medicines are compatible with allopathic or Ayurvedic medicines, Dr. Tsering responds that there is no basic incompatibility. “I have patients who only rely on Tibetan medicine. There are others who take Tibetan medicine along with Ayurvedic or allopathic medicine. The combination works. Though the medicines don’t affect each other, the patients are advised to wait one hour before taking the other.”

Has he also observed the mental tension Dr. Choedrak had seen in many Aurovilians so many years ago? Dr. Tsering nods. “Many of my older patients are full of stress, anxiety, depression, and some suffer insomnia. They tell me it is caused by the present political situation in Auroville. Allopathic medicines, such as sleeping pills, block the functioning of the brain. Tibetan medicine connects to the internal energy level. When there is depression, the internal energy fluctuates too much, and the inner balance is lost. We have some medicines which alleviate these problems. They are unique, in the sense that they connect the mind and heart, and are therefore efficient.”

Like allopathic medicines, not all Tibetan medicines work as hoped. But the Tibetan medical system is increasingly accepted. Kalsang foresees that in the coming years, many more patients will seek the help of Tibetan doctors in Auroville.

Carel

Glimpses into the Tibetan medicinal system

In November 2018, the Pavilion of Tibetan Culture hosted Dr. Tsewang Tamdin, Visiting Physician to H.H. the Dalai Lama. In an interview with Auroville Today, Dr. Tamdin gave some insights into Tibetan medicinal systems. Here are some excerpts from this interview.

In Tibetan medicine, we say there are three principal energies or humours in your body, *rlung*, *mkhrispa* and *badken*, which are there when you are born, and they need to be in balance to allow you to function properly, both physically and mentally. If the balance is disturbed this may manifest, under the influence of factors like diet, age, lifestyle, behavior and the season, as a disease. The Tibetan doctor seeks the specific cause for each individual, unlike Western medicine which often does not diagnose the deeper reason for a disease.

Medicines will act differently on different people according to the predominant nature of the individual. We divide people into seven different natures. In Tibetan medicine, we give the medicine according to the predominant nature of the individual. In other words, the Tibetan approach to treatment is holistic and penetrates to the underlying causes of disease. This is why many diseases which are untreatable in the West can be treated by Tibetan medicine.

We believe that the mind is the number one cause of many illnesses because the state of the mind determines what happens in the body. Tibetan medicine, like Buddhism, teaches that the mind is the creator and destroyer. It can cause both disease and health, depending on the thoughts and emotions that are predominant in one’s experience.

There is also the influence of karma. We believe you have been a human being many times before, and the karmic action, or consequences, of what you did before will manifest in later lives. So karmic action combined with an imbalance in the energy in the body can also cause sickness.

However, a karmic disease will not respond to any treatment. The doctor can help by reducing the intensity of the suffering to a certain extent, but the patient has to suffer until it is over: there is no escape. The Buddha said you have to suffer the consequences of what you did and learn from it.

Tibetan medical science is called *Sowa-Rigpa*, the “science of healing”. Every Tibetan doctor has to undergo a rigorous training before he qualifies. It takes six years to attain the first qualification, a degree equivalent to a MBB, but 30 to 40 years to complete the full training, although, of course, one continues to learn for a lifetime.

Every doctor learns how to diagnose, and how to treat the patient through astrology, herbal and mineral remedies and to use what we call external therapy. This can be moxibustion, compression, massage, purgatives etc. He will also learn about proper diet and lifestyle because in Tibetan medicine we say proper diet and lifestyle are the two major ways of maintaining health and prolonging life.

Interview by Alan

For the full interview see *Auroville Today* # 352-353, November-December 2018.

Auroville’s connection to Tibet

Auroville’s connection to Tibet has a long history. His Holiness the Dalai Lama first visited Pondicherry and Auroville in 1973. On January 17 that year, he met The Mother in her room in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and the next day he visited the Auroville site. Twenty years later, on December 23 and 24, 1993, he paid his second visit to Auroville to lay the eight kg foundation stone of the Pavilion of Tibetan Culture – an earth brick that Aurovilian Claude Arpi had brought from Tibet. During his third visit in January 2009 he inaugurated the Pavilion of Tibetan Culture. [see *Auroville Today* # 240, February 2009]

The basics of Tibetan medicine

The traditional origins of Tibetan medicine stretch back three thousand years. The founder of the Bonpo religion, Lord Sherab Mewo, taught the Tibetan medical system to his favourite son and disciple Chebutishe, who proceeded to write many commentaries on the subject. This system was to prevail for many years in Tibet until it came into contact with Ayurvedic medicine following a visit of two South Indian physicians to Tibet. In the 7th century A.D., an international conference was held in a Tibetan monastery during the reign of King Drisong Detsen, that was attended by physicians from India, China, Persia and Nepal.

During the 11th or 12th century the essence of all the different medical traditions was collected into a text called the ‘Four Great Tantras’, which is still the main reference work for the Tibetan medical system.

Tibetan medicine is based on the notion of the interdependence of the five basic cosmophysical elements: earth, space, water, fire and air. As our bodies are composed of the same elements as our environment from where we draw sustenance, a disrupted environment can cause many diseases. A Tibetan prophecy from one of the medical tantras states that “there will be a time when material progress will be so great that the value of love and compassion as well as positive mental attitudes will be greatly diminished. There will be many conflicts between different ideas and ideologies. Because of material progress there will be great advances in science and technology but due to this, people will engage in the destruction of their own environment. The earth will be shaken and polluted, its ecology destroyed. Pollution of the environment will affect all forms of vegetation and the consumption of affected vegetation will weaken the organs and immune systems of the human body and give rise to a variety of fatal diseases.”

The making of Tibetan medicines

It is the work of the pharmacy department of Men Tsee Khan in Dharamsala to identify thousands of medicinal ingredients obtained from medicinal plants growing in the Himalayan region in India and Tibet, and process them by purification and seeking blessings through performing the rituals of *Medicine Buddha* and *Yuthok Nyingthik*. The department regularly produces 172 different medicines. They include four different types of decoctions, eighteen different types of powders and one hundred and fifty different pills. In addition, the department also produces eight different ‘precious pills’ including the famous *Rinchen Drangjor Rilnag Chenmo*, the precious black pill which is also known as the king of all precious pills.



Medicine Buddha

The formula of thirty medicines is derived from the fundamental text, one hundred and seven from practical instruction of various scholars and thirty five from a combination of both fundamental text and personal instructions. The

Medicines produced from the department are dispensed to all the branch clinics of *Men-Tsee-Khang*. New medicines are also prepared as per the instruction of administration and other departments. The production of new medicines and medicinal protecting pills against



PHOTO: COURTESY DR. TSERING

Tibetan medicinal pills

epidemic diseases are also prepared after thorough research. The department also undertakes research on raw materials which are listed as endangered, and which concern environmental issues.

From the *Men-Tsee-Khang* website.

“This is where I belong”

Michael Zelnick, originally from New York, joined the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in 1968 and later came to Auroville. Here he talks about his work as a homeopath.

Auroville Today: You first stayed at the Ashram for ten years?

Michael: Yes, I came to India specifically to come to the Ashram. I arrived in Pondicherry three days before my 25th birthday in 1968. I didn’t really know much about it; I had only heard of The Mother and had an experience that told me to go there. My spiritual inclinations were more aligned with Zen Buddhism at the time, so I was quite shocked by what I found. Seeing people waving incense sticks in front of a picture of someone’s feet was not Zen at all! But there I was. So, I decided to sit at the Samadhi every day until something either happened or didn’t. If nothing happened, I would go to Japan. It was the sixties, and travel was cheap and easy if one was prepared to rough it.

But then things started to happen. I began experiencing The Mother’s presence, and it became clear that this was where I belonged. I wrote to The Mother, asking to join the Ashram. After hours spent pouring over my letter, I simply ended up writing, “Douce Mère, may I join the Ashram.” One of her secretaries, an American woman named Rijuta, came to see me and said, “Mother said, bring this laconic young man to see me.” So, I went to see The Mother, and that was it. I saw The Mother. Everything since then has been footnotes. That was The Experience, and it lives in me still.

I’ve heard more colorful stories, like that of my old friend Peter Heehs. A book fell off a library shelf while he was wandering in the stacks of his college library, hit him on the head, and knocked him down. When he came to his senses, he saw it was Sri Aurobindo’s *The Life Divine*, started reading it and decided to go to India.

Anyway, I gave myself to Mother, saying “this is it, I’m yours forever,” and she accepted me into the Ashram. I lived there for ten years before moving to Auroville. She was present in the body for the first five of those years, and I wasn’t interested in being anywhere else. My memories of the Ashram are still seen through the eyes of someone smitten; everything seemed perfect and beautiful.

Ultimately, I left, for purely personal reasons, and moved to Auroville during the time of the first revolution. I found it difficult to think of the Ashram as evil or wanting to destroy Auroville, so I wasn’t quite here or there among the revolutionaries, but my life has been in Auroville since then.

To go back to the beginning, what brought me to India was a combination of trying to escape the Vietnam War and my interest in Eastern spirituality. Having graduated university, I no longer had a student deferment and had to do something or I was sure to get drafted. So I joined the Peace Corps and was, on request, assigned to a programme training for India.

During my Peace Corps training, it was discovered that I had a defective wrist, the result of a misdiagnosed fracture years before, which disqualified me not only from the programme but from military service as well. Meanwhile two friends from the programme completed their training and spent the next two years in India, eventually returning to their family home in Seattle. I was living in Portland at the time and decided to drive up and visit them. In the course of the evening we spent together, they spoke of an ashram they had visited in a place called Pondicherry run by someone called The Mother and which they had found so interesting that they spent a couple of weeks there rather than the planned couple of days. Their experience had simply been

‘interesting’, not profound, nor did they then, or since, express any interest in returning. But for me the evening was earthshaking. I was aware of something coming through them, something of which they were totally unaware themselves, that simply zapped me, something that I knew was somehow related to The Mother and that I had to go to Her Ashram.

A month later I had gone back to New York, said goodbye to my bewildered parents, flown to Rome and started hitch hiking to India.

How did you get into homeopathy?

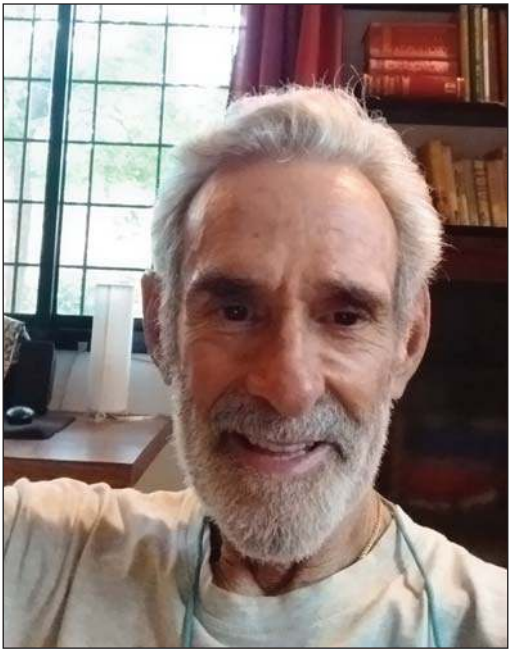
I became interested through my friend Maggi, a gifted writer who had published a number of books and who had been one of The Mother’s secretaries for many years. We spent a lot of time together; she would write, and I would edit her work. Many years later, after I was living in Auroville, she became interested in homeopathy and even went to Greece to connect with George Vithoulkas, the most prominent homeopath of the 20th century. She traveled with him for about six months, learning a lot about homeopathy, and started practicing when she returned to the Ashram.

One day, Maggi called me and said she wanted to write an article about Samuel Hahnemann, the German founder of homeopathy, and she asked if I would help edit it. I agreed, and she sent me some books to get acquainted with the subject. I became totally fascinated by homeopathy. Maggi kept sending me books, and after several months, she suggested I attend a seminar in Bombay for Indian homeopaths. I protested, saying I was neither a homeopath nor Indian, but she knew the seminar leader and urged him to accept me into the programme, vouching for my potential as a fine homeopath. So, I went to Bombay for this intensive three-week seminar, which was the real beginning of my journey into homeopathy.

The teachers were rather young but already somewhat known Indian homeopaths. They had all been in homeopathic college together and were already known as the Bombay School. They’ve all become much more famous since, but they were good even back then. I was the only non-Indian and the only non-homeopath in the course, but I was also the only one who could speak and write perfect English.

I connected with the main teacher, a man named Rajan Sankaran, who is now a very famous homeopath and much published writer. After the course ended, he asked if he could send me manuscripts for proofreading, to which I agreed. That’s how I became friendly with Rajan and a couple of other teachers. When I returned, Maggi insisted I start practicing, despite my protests that I had only taken a three-week course. She insisted and promised to help if necessary.

It just so happened that my first case in Auroville was a lucky one. A person who had been suffering from migraines for years came to me. He had tried everything without success, so he decided to try homeopathy. I took his case, gave him what I thought was the right remedy, and it caused an initial aggravation of his symptoms, which is common. He called me, furious, saying that he was having the worst headache he’d ever had and would like to kill me, but then it got better and in fairly short order he stopped having migraines. Many years later, he called me saying the headaches were starting again. I gave him another dose, and I



Michael Zelnick

haven’t heard from him since. That success made me imagine I really could be a good homeopath, just as Maggi said.

So, I continued studying and practising homeopathy. However, I was shocked to discover how much my mind had deteriorated since university. It used to be quite sharp, but now I would read a page in a homeopathic text and forget what was at the top by the time I reached the bottom. Eventually I spoke to The Mother and said that if She wanted me to be a homeopath as seemed the case, She needed to help me. The response I felt from Her was that She would help me on two conditions: I must never refuse to see someone who wanted to see me and I must never charge for my services. I’ve kept my part of the deal and I figure She has too, though I’m definitely not receptive enough to make the most of it.

Is it true that everyone has their own constitutional remedy?

The concept of homeopathy is complex and not easily conveyed in a brief interview. But in principle, homeopathic lore says that everyone has their constitutional remedy – the remedy they are born with and always revert to. Vithoulkas, the famous homeopath Maggi connected with, defines the constitutional remedy as the one you are born with and always revert to. He suggests that certain circumstances, like an epidemic, might push you out of it, but you’ll always revert back to your remedy. However, in my experience, this isn’t always true.

My experience with my wife, Marush, who discovered her own remedy, challenges this notion. One is not supposed to be able to discover one’s own remedy or that of one’s family members, as Hahnemann’s first principle is to regard the patient objectively. But Marush was reading one of my homeopathy books, identified her remedy, and took it. She was right. It was clearly her remedy. For the next four or five years, whenever anything came up, a dose of that remedy would resolve it. I remember trekking and packing a dozen remedies for myself but only one for her, knowing it would work for anything she faced. Then it stopped working. Despite trying it many times since, it was no longer her remedy. Unfortunately, a new constitutional remedy hasn’t appeared for her.

Recently, I read an article by an eminent homeopath who questioned the whole idea of a patient’s constitutional remedy. He mentioned that in seminars, when a live case is presented, the eminent homeopaths on stage often suggest different remedies for the same patient. What does this mean? Are they all wrong, or is one of them right and the rest wrong? He suggested that real healing might occur through an energy exchange between the therapist and the patient, with the remedy somehow mediating the process. Different remedies might work for different therapists because each homeopath works with a specific set of remedies they are familiar with and resonate with.

There are about 4,000 homeopathic remedies, but no homeopath knows all of them – most work with maybe 100 or 200 remedies, and maybe 50 of those are their go-to remedies. These are the ones they understand deeply and tend to see in their patients. So, there’s a lot about homeopathy that’s empirical. We know it works and certain things work better than others, allowing us to form hypotheses, but that’s mostly what we’re dealing with. Different homeopaths with different approaches can get equally good results.

And this applies to physical, palpable problems as well as psychological distress?

Anything can be treated homeopathically. Every homeopath will have his own take on that. Homeopaths, being human, tend to be better at certain things than others. But you can’t turn away patients who come to you, regardless of their issues. For me, a high percentage of the patients I treat in Auroville are dealing with psychological issues. Auroville attracts people who are working on their consciousness, and stuff comes up that they don’t know how to handle. Supposedly, you can treat anything with homeopathy, and I’ve seen and to my surprise done it. But I can only speak from my own experience.

It fits into the integral approach to healing.

Yes, homeopathy is supposed to cure everything or should be able to if the homeopath identifies the right remedy. Whether the homeopath sees the right remedy depends on the individual homeopath and the problem at hand.

I’m wondering if you’ve seen people coming to you throughout the years when there are situations of conflict, like right now?

I’ve personally only experienced two situations where everybody was sort of affected. One was in the seventies and eighties when Auroville was fighting for its independence from the Sri Aurobindo Society, which it gained by approaching the government and asking for protection. I won’t say more on that subject, but I was there at the time, and it was understandable. And then there is the current situation, which I think affects everyone on some level. There are lots of people now talking about plan B – where to go, what to take with them. They’ve invested everything in Auroville for 30 years, and now they don’t know what to do. So, many people are affected, but they don’t come to me specifically for that. It may come up in conversation, but they come because they’re stressed, which can bring up physical or psychological issues that a homeopath can help with.

Over the years, what has personally given you joy or fulfillment?

Finding the right remedy, for sure. When someone has been suffering from something, physical or psychological, for years and has tried everything without success, and you find the remedy that changes their life – that’s the most gratifying thing. It happens often enough that the less dramatically successful cases don’t overshadow the moments of significant results. You do what you can, and it’s nice to have those successes where you can say, “Wow, I really helped somebody.”

And apart from homeopathy?

Homeopathy is not the only satisfaction in my life. It’s a big one, but not the only one.

There’s a wonderful aphorism by Sri Aurobindo: “*Whenever you find yourself holding an opinion vehemently, remember that the opposite is also true.*” What else to say? He also says, “*Who can follow the footsteps of the Divine Mother?*” I have absolute confidence that whatever is happening, whether the players are conscious or unconscious, the Divine will turn it to the best possible outcome. It doesn’t mean it’s necessarily pleasant to live through, but everything is turned to the best. Another aphorism I like is: “*What happened had to happen, but something better might have happened.*” Plan B doesn’t really occur to me. I’m given to The Mother and The Mother’s project, and as long as I’m allowed to stay, I stay. Whether I live to see the final outcome or not, it doesn’t matter, I’m 80 years old, you know. That doesn’t mean I don’t have opinions, but I see them for what they are – opinions.

Coming back to homeopathy, I should add to what I told you about this seminar in Bombay. After about nine months of practicing in Auroville, I called up Rajan and said I needed more training. He said, “Come to Bombay and I’ll let you sit in my clinic and watch me take cases.” Nowadays, he’s much more famous, and I realize that this is an offer that graduate students would kill for. That’s how you learn homeopathy, watching somebody take a case. For about four years, I would spend three or four weeks in Bombay sitting with the teachers in Rajan’s circle. I saw a lot of good homeopathy being practiced.

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Sri Aurobindo on homeopathy

Sri Aurobindo: Homeopathy is nearer to Yoga. Allopathy is more mechanical. Homeopathy deals with the physical personality – all the symptoms put together and making up this personality. Allopathy goes by diagnosis, which does not consider the personality. The action of homeopathy is more subtle and dynamic.⁽¹⁾

Q. I am puzzled to think how such infinitesimal doses in dilution can act on the human system

Sri Aurobindo: That is no puzzle to me. Sometimes the infinitesimal is more powerful than the mass; it approaches more and more the subtle state and from the physical goes into a dynamic or vital state and acts vitally.⁽²⁾

To bring out the latent illness and counteract it is a recognised principle in homeopathy and is a principle in Nature itself.⁽³⁾

Q. A symptomatic treatment can’t be applied in cases where the same symptom is produced by two or three different diseases because the symptoms will always recur so long as one doesn’t go to the root.

Why can’t it? There is a possibility that you can strike at the cure, whatever it be, through the symptoms and you can kill the root through the stalk and leaves and not start by searching for the roots and digging them out. That at any rate is what I do.⁽⁴⁾

Is it not the very principle of homeopathy that it cures the disease by curing the symptoms? I have always heard so. For that matter I myself cure more often by attacking the symptoms than by any other way, because medical diagnosis is uncertain and fallible while the symptoms are there for everybody to see.⁽⁵⁾

Quoted from Nirodbaran: Talks with Sri Aurobindo (1); Purani: Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo (2); and Nirodbaran: Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo (3-5).

Practising Siddha Medicine

Dr. Sharavanan Padmanabhan runs the Sri Aurobindo Siddha Research Foundation in Pondicherry. He first graduated as an allopathic doctor before specializing in Siddha medicine. Since November 2023, he visits Auroville twice weekly to give consults and provide Siddha medicine at the Auroville Health Centre in Aspiration.

Auroville Today: Why did you, an allopathic doctor, take up Siddha medicine?

Dr. Sharavanan: Allopathy is basically a sort of a stop gap arrangement. It has its value in emergencies and essential surgeries. But it generally falls short in the treatment of chronic diseases such as diabetes, arthritis, hypertension, etc. I’ve found that Siddha provides much better healing as it goes to the root of the disease. In Siddha I look at the patient in a holistic way, both body and mind, whereas in allopathy, I would only be looking organ-wise or speciality-wise. But Siddha doesn’t offer miracle cures. Acute cases can be treated relatively quickly. But the treatment of chronic problems takes time. And in advanced cases of Parkinson’s and cancer, we’ll need to use allopathic treatment methods. In such cases, Siddha medicine can only be complementary. But you need to know how that can fit in.

When you look at a patient in a holistic way, do you use the dosha system of Ayurveda?

Yes, I do. But it’s rather the other way round. The concept of *doshas* was first developed in Siddha medicine, because Siddha is a more ancient than Ayurveda. The *Tolkappiyam*, the oldest palm leaf manuscript in existence, written in old Tamil, has Siddha medical texts; it dates from around 3,000 BCE. The Siddhars (who attained perfection) were the progenitors of the Siddha system of medicine. The Siddha system was reportedly able to diagnose 4,448 kinds of diseases, through three *doshas*, *Vata*, *Pitta* and *Kapha*, ten gases and five elements of nature – earth, water, fire, air and ether. This indige-

nous medical system of the Tamils has been found to be very effective in curing chronic diseases which allopathy fails to do.

Doesn’t Ayurveda claim a 5,000 year old history, based on the Rig and other Vedas?

(Laughs) Let’s not go into that controversy. Ayurveda and Siddha developed in different parts of India, Ayurveda in the North and in Kerala, Siddha exclusively in Tamil Nadu. The systems have developed on identical lines, but there are some conceptual differences and the medicines differ due to regional variations because of the availability of herbs. And as all the Siddha texts are exclusively in the Tamil language, Siddha has been restricted to Tamil Nadu and to places in the world where Tamil speaking people live, such as Sri Lanka, Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand. But today, it is also being practised in other states of India. It’s becoming popular.

How do you evaluate a person?

When a patient walks into my room, I first determine the constitution, the *dosha*, the patient was born with. That can be judged from the person’s appearance, the way they speak and from a few other indicators. But what we treat in Siddha is based on the current *dosha*, the *dosha* which is prominent at the time the patient comes for healing, and which can be different from the *dosha* at birth due to many factors and influences, such as the person’s lifestyle, the food choices, the living and work environment and so on.



Dr. Sharavanan taking the pulse of Ricardo

I then read the person’s pulse (*Nadi* diagnosis), which usually gives a fair understanding of the imbalance in the body. If necessary, I use urine diagnosis (*Nei Kuri*). That’s a diagnostic method where some urine of the patient is put in a Petri dish. Then a drop of ghee or sesame oil is put on to the urine. The shape the ghee or oil takes – for example a pearl or a ring – is a good pointer to the existence of a certain disease. I use allopathic investigation methods such as blood test, x-ray or scan if I think that is necessary, but not routinely as is often done in allopathy.

Once the disease has been diagnosed, I prescribe specific Siddha medicines for healing or for mitigating the disease’s effects. I also prescribe change of diet, e.g. what foods to take and what foods should be avoided. In some cases, especially when it comes to mind related problems, I prescribe homeopathic medicines, as I am also a qualified homeopathic doctor. I would also suggest Asanas or Pranayama if necessary.

Siddha initially included surgery. Is surgery still being practised as part of Siddha?

Not anymore. Because of the advancement of surgery in the allopathic field, this has dwindled out. Until recently there was a family living near Pondicherry whose members practised Siddha eye surgery for generations.

How is it that you have started giving consultations in Auroville?

I run a Siddha clinic in Pondicherry. Quite a few Aurovilians have come there, some for more than 20 years. As the trip to Pondicherry became inconvenient for elderly people, and as more Aurovilians started showing interest in Siddha healing, I was requested to come to Auroville twice a week. It’s working out well. Many people benefit, also as the Siddha medicines are much cheaper than allopathic medicines.

Websites such as Wikipedia abound in labelling Indian medicinal systems as ‘pseudo-science’. What’s your take on this?

Personally I’m not bothered because I know they work, and work well. But I have also seen a slowly increasing acceptance of these systems in the West. Actually, there is more opposition to Ayurveda, Siddha, Unani and Homeopathy from allopathic doctors in India than in the West. The Ministry of AYUSH has been trying to develop medical institutions where all systems of medicine would be together, but this has not yet taken off. The main reasons are the difference in the philosophies of practice; disparities in the approach to specific clinical conditions; and ethical issues such as unfriendly relationships between practitioners of different systems. But this may change. The AYUSH Ministry has done much work to promote the Indian systems and I think they will increasingly be accepted by the Indian allopathic establishment.

In conversation with Carel

This is where I belong

continued from page 4

When you go to school, they teach you a very formulaic way of taking and solving a case – A, B, C, and there’s the answer. But every homeopath develops their own way of taking a case and their own approach. Possibly because of my limitations and because I have backup, my way of taking a case is very unformulaic. I just ask the patient what they want to tell me and let them talk. Every now and then, I may ask them to clarify something or ask for details, but basically, I listen. Somewhere along the line, they tell you what they need or give you what you need to know. Many patients have told me that just being able to talk to someone who’s listening, non-judgmental, and sympathetic made a great difference. If I happen to see the remedy and can give them help, that’s why. But I don’t have much of a structure.

Have you had somebody asking you to teach?

Many times.

And have you?

No. What I’m asked more often is by somebody who’s studying homeopathy who would like to sit in when I take cases. I feel bad about it because that’s how I learned and it’s probably the best way to learn. But I always say no because the way I take cases totally depends on the patient trusting me not

to talk about it, being sympathetic and non-judgmental, and creating that safe space. Another person in the room is not what I want.

I remember at one point in time when I was in Bombay studying, I asked Rajan if he would take my case. He said yes, and when I came to his office, he introduced me to a former student who was going to sit in. He asked if I minded, and I said no. But I didn’t like it. I wanted to talk about things that were really difficult, and I didn’t want anybody else to be in on it. I did it, but I don’t want my patients to be put in that position.

And what about those special remedies that you developed with Maggi?

That’s another story. One day, Maggi, who was still practising to some extent in the Ashram, called me up and said, “Michael, you know, when homeopathic remedies are prepared, the original substance is put through a process of dilution and succussion, which we believe liberates the subtle energy associated with the material substance and allows us to transmit that to the patient. Mother spent a lot of time and energy trying to bring the supramental into her body. What if we potentise some cells from The Mother? Do you think we would have a remedy that could transmit that energy?” I said, “Wow.” But who has cells from Mother? She said, “I do. I have a lock of Mother’s hair that she gave me once with the words, ‘All of me is in this’.” So we did it. Eventually we convinced ourselves that we had something of interest and started giving it to people without telling them what it was.

Maggi suggested letting people know about it. I refused, saying that it would mean exposing myself. Maggi was living in seclusion. I saw two possible outcomes: either I would be lynched for doing something sacrilegious, or everyone in the world would want it. I wasn’t interested in either.

Maggi left the decision up to me, so I did nothing. A couple of years later, around The Mother’s birthday, I felt compelled to let people know. I wrote an article about it for the Auroville News and invited people to a meeting at Quiet to learn more about the remedy. I expected a large turnout, but only five people showed up, including one who was already taking it and just wanted to see who else would come!

Over the years, quite a number of people have used it. The remedy generally works for a certain amount of time and then stops. You can take it as much as you like, but it won’t do anything after a while. I believe this indicates that the remedy has a consciousness and stops working when it’s no longer needed. Most people I know take it for a while and then stop. Some continue taking it, but at long intervals.

I’ve also known people who found it incredibly useful as a pain reliever, especially in terminal cancer cases where they didn’t want to take morphine. The remedy helped them manage pain effectively.

We asked people to record and write up their experiences with the remedy. Maggie, who is now 95 and in the Ashram nursing home, sent me feedback several months ago. It’s a very heavy file, much of which is in different languages. I even discovered my own testimonial in it.

That’s all I can say about it. I have a lifetime supply and dispense it to those who ask for it.

So you didn’t get either of the responses you anticipated?

I’ve had people tell me they think it’s disgusting, like relics in Christianity, which were monetized for centuries. Some people find it offensive, but no, I was very surprised to get very little response, both in terms of interest in the remedy and criticism of it.

What’s interesting is that we started off with a lock of The Mother’s hair. About a year later, Maggi said, “Should we do Sri Aurobindo now?” I replied, “Sure, but do you have cells of Sri Aurobindo?” She laughed and said, “I know where to get them.”

So Maggi went to Manoj Das, the managing trustee of the Ashram. Since Maggie had been one of The Mother’s secretaries for many years, he gave us some nail clippings from Sri Aurobindo. They seem to have an inexhaustible supply of those. I had the clippings potentised, and thus, we had remedies from both The Mother and Sri Aurobindo.

I was never able to tell the difference between the two, but they worked. When *Harmony*, the one from The Mother, stopped working for me, *Samantha*, which is what we called Sri Aurobindo’s remedy, continued to work for a while. Then it stopped too. In the end, most people mixed them, which also worked very nicely.

That’s the story. Now you know everything.

In conversation with Chandra

Healing with nature: reconnection, grounding, gratitude

Parvathi Nagarajan is a healer, herbalist, educator and community builder who spent 24 years running and supporting Pitchandikulam Forest projects in local communities. In 2023, she registered a trust, Avarohi Traditional Herbal & Wellness Centre, in order to share her knowledge more extensively with individuals and organisations further afield. She offers consultations and training on a range of subjects as well as weekly ‘Food as medicine’ sessions in Auroville.

Auroville Today: Can you tell me a little bit about how you came to this work?

Parvathi: I come from a family of traditional healers going back six generations. Thirty years ago, many village women knew many medicinal plants. Everyone knew how to use edible herbs, how to mix these with their cooking. But in my family, the women had more specific knowledge about treating various chronic issues. My grandmother was a specialist in treating skin problems and wounds. I used to help her collect plants, prepare remedies, and treat people from nearby villages. I learned how to identify many plants, but at that time I didn’t think this was very important work.

I was born and brought up about 40 km away from Auroville in a very small, interior village. I had never heard about Auroville. Then in 1999 I was invited to join Pitchandikulam Forest as a community health worker on a project working with medicinal plants and nature-based remedies.

I thought Auroville might be a big town, like Pondicherry. But when I arrived, I didn’t see any buildings, just trees. It was all very new for me, seeing all these different kinds of people. It took me a month to make sense of the whole thing.

I started a programme for Pitchandikulam to support the government primary health centres and pre-school teachers in the ICDS Department [Integrated Child Development Services, eds] in the bioregion. I developed a very good relationship with the health centers, the doctors and staff nurses, and was able to share with them nature-based solutions for common ailments like fever, cough and cold. The nurses were so happy to learn how to identify local herbs and how to use them in rasam, tea or decoction as simple remedies. We made kitchen gardens with all these medicinal plants.

I was also happy to reconnect with so many plants I knew. I had spent my childhood helping my grandmother collect the herbs, but I had put all of that aside in order to go to school and to support myself and my family financially. After coming to Pitchandikulam, whenever I faced a problem or something stressful, I would go to the garden to see and speak with the plants, and I would feel happy. I started to understand more and more that the plants have all the solutions. I learned so many things from the plants, and then from the insects and the animals - more than from human beings.

I would observe the plants. When I put a seed in the soil and give it a little bit of water, it grows and will fruit continuously for two or three years. The plant gives me so much. Maybe my family and my neighbours also come and collect the fruits. The human gives a little, and the plant gives back in multiples of that, with no selfishness. We all need food that comes from the plants and the soil. We are very good at knowing how to cut, break, clear plants. Still the plants sprout and reshoot. This is nature’s gift. But what do we give back? Humans aren’t thinking about nature’s living balance. That is missing.

Everybody talks about the problem of economic poverty in the world. But I feel the real poverty is poverty of empathy, of love and kindness. And I feel that if we can heal this, then we will arrive at the solution of sharing, and economic poverty will go.

I don’t tell people to take medicines. It starts with your constitution. Then you look at where there are imbalances - for example, emotional, mental, physical - that are causing health problems. Then we look at how to rectify these health problems with edible herbs and spices, or with nature-based solutions for daily products like shampoo, soap, cream, lipstick, kajal.

People think their internal and external body are very different, like they’re 100 km away from each other. If a product is not safe to eat, then how can you put it on your lips? You have to feel the connection between internal and external.

And this body is not mine. I’m a tenant of my body. It is gifted by the universe. All the elements of the universe function in my body, and all of these bodily organs have amazing functions. So I think about all the things happening in my body, and I feel blessed and loved.

In life, the soul and the body are connected and moving together. The soul needs the body in order to manifest what it needs to do. Mother, Sri Aurobindo, while they were alive in a body, they shared all the things they needed to, and now we continue to follow their message.

Whatever I’m feeling and thinking, I have to share it with the universe during my lifetime. It doesn’t matter whether or not the world is ready to accept what you have to share. Whatever good things are there in your soul, you share it, you manifest it, and that creates movement. Life is movement.

We all have worries and challenges. But with grounding, when you connect to who you really are within, then you will pass through all the challenges. That is what I teach. Reconnection, grounding and gratitude.

If people don’t first respect and love themselves, then how will they respect and love other people, animals, or plants? First they have to understand, realise and respect. I plant that seed in the people. When it has germinated, when they are ready, only then I’ll show them the plants. We have to touch the plants respectfully, ask permission from the plant to take what is needed. This is what I teach, not just knowledge about how to prepare medicines, but our connections with nature.

Your shop, where we are sitting in Kuilapalayam, is called Sri Siddha Forest Herbs?

Our traditional system is Siddha medicine. This came through the Siddhar saints.

Some years ago, the Indian government created official Siddha colleges. How is that training different from yours?



Parvathi giving a Food as Medicine cooking demonstration

The government college syllabus for Siddha medicine has been extracted from traditional texts. But the syllabus is only reading. I interact with many Siddha and Ayurvedic doctors who have completed the five year government course, and they say very frankly that they have very limited practical knowledge of the plants. They know the formulas in the textbook, but they can’t identify the living plant. Two days ago, an Ayurvedic doctor came from Maharashtra, and he wants to learn from me, as both Ayurveda and Siddha are similarly constitution based.

Our traditional healers also prepared mineral, metal and animal products, but now we no longer have people with that kind of experience and knowledge. A few people may still know some of the methods. As for the Siddha pharmaceutical companies, they follow formulas written in pharmacopoeia books, some 10 to 20 books. But Siddha is really about food and diet, and my focus is about food as medicine.

What are the types of problems you see and are able to treat?

People often come to me with a chronic condition. They have already tried to get their problem treated at so many places and have suffered for a long time. I have also helped people with advanced diabetes, kidney disease, fertility issues. Diagnosis is very important. Once you understand the root of the problem and the person’s constitution, then many issues are easy to treat with the right food.

Each individual or community has different needs, so I have to read the pulse of that group, connect with them, understand their needs. In one tribal community, the issue was that people were knowledgeable, but they would go and buy outside junk food or toiletries rather than using their indigenous knowledge to make their own products. I was invited to set up a women’s enterprise. So now the women collect their local natural resources and know how to make herbal medicine and food products, both for themselves and for sale. We created many recipes for chutney powder, cosmetics, creams, hair oil.

Another community had all sorts of health problems - joint pain, back pain, reproductive health disorders, skin problems. They had to walk many kilometres in the sun, and they were weak. So I did cooking classes for them to learn how to make nutritious food from their own local resources. How to use spices differently. How to add cooling vegetables and leaves.

You say you picked up your knowledge about plants and health from your grandmother and then from the plants themselves. But you also have two Master’s degrees. How and why did you decide to do that?

I went to primary school in my village, but when I wanted to continue my education after that, I didn’t get any support. For four or five days, I cried and cried. I started fasting and wouldn’t talk to anyone. But no one even reacted, so I decided I had to wake up. I went to my primary school, met the master, and got my transfer certificate. Then I followed one boy who I knew was going to school. I walked six km to reach the school. Along the way, I had so much time to think and feel depressed about the way girls were treated in the village. There was so much gender discrimination. Girls were considered stupid, useless, and a financial burden. A girl’s family had to bear the expenses for marriage and other functions, and I was the second of four girls in my family.

My elder sister stopped school after fifth standard, but I was not willing to stop. So without informing anyone, I went to this school and stood there for one day in front of the headmaster’s room, waiting for admission. I needed someone to sign as guardian. Finally some unknown person agreed to support me. I was also supposed to pay 14 rupees fees, so I asked the headmaster to give me one week’s time to get it.

Walking back to my village, I was so happy because I had gotten admission. I decided on that day that I didn’t want to depend on my parents’ earnings. I was around 11 years old, and I started working, agricultural labour, any kind of work. I managed to earn the money to go pay my school fees, to buy the books, notebooks and uniform. I had just one dress.

You were an 11-year-old girl, and you went and enrolled yourself in school. How did your family react?

The day I got admission, when I came back, my father beat me. He was very angry and asked how I went without informing my parents. Then somehow he decided to accept it, but with certain conditions. Every day when I got back from school, I had to collect a basket of cow dung and bring it to my father’s field for fertiliser. So after walking all the way to school and back, I would do that.

My father wasn’t encouraging at that time, but he accepted it. And I decided that I didn’t want a single rupee from them for my expenses. Better I manage for myself. I actually earned more money than I needed, so I was able to contribute to my family financially. It was really challenging, but having gone through it, I now feel it was a good experience.

All the movement in my childhood was from my own initiative to keep advancing, step by step by step. I cried many times. But even at that age, I already believed in the energy of the universe. So when I was walking those six km alone in the dark, I would call on that energy for support and security. I would call, ‘Tree, come with me! Birds, come with me!’ I didn’t have any people to depend on, so I depended on the universe. And even now, when I go back to my village, I feel very peaceful and I feel that energy with me.

And you managed to finish high school.

That school went up to 10th standard, and I completed that, with good marks. For higher secondary school, you had to travel about 25 km to Tindivanam by bus. But a girl couldn’t travel alone by bus. People were very scared of a girl talking to a boy, then running away with that boy. In the village, the word ‘love’ meant a man and woman together, and as a child I understood ‘love’ to be a shameful, scary word.

I decided I wanted to break with all these thoughts. So, again, after I fasted for one week, my father gave in and went to get me admitted. Once the teachers understood my skill, they came out to my village to meet my parents and to explain to them what a good student I was. That’s when my father started supporting and encouraging me.

I used to be badly teased by the boys at the high school. They would write bad things about me on the wall. So I would often be crying when I reached my home. But my father helped me. He told me that with poverty, patience, and skill, I had everything I needed to achieve in life. So many wealthy people in my village were sending their sons to school. But those boys didn’t study, didn’t get good marks. I was the best student. But I had to believe in my own skill.

My father would say, “Whenever you feel you are suffering, when you start believing what others say and put yourself down, think of grass growing in the field. If you step on that grass, it will be flattened. But take your foot off the grass and observe it for a few moments, and you will see the grass come back to life and stand tall.” He would tell me that I was a beautiful human girl, and that he believed in me, believed I had the strength to stand tall like the grass.

After I finished high school, I wanted to go to college, but I didn’t have anyone to guide me, and it seemed too difficult and too expensive. So I did a number of things. I worked at a kindergarten school; I worked in non-formal education with an organisation that offered evening classes to children who had dropped out of school; I conducted a small tuition class at my home. I also worked in community development and women’s empowerment, with the dalit community, with women’s savings groups.

At one of the organisations, there was a girl who had done post-graduate studies, so I started to think that I could go for something like that. But then, after my elder sister’s marriage was completed, my family started looking to arrange a marriage for me. I knew that if I stayed in my village, then definitely I would have to get married, and I really wasn’t ready to yet. I wanted to do something with my life, and I knew I would have to come out from my village in order to do that. But I hadn’t had any exposure, and I didn’t have the courage to choose to just go somewhere.

So I prayed for help. And on the third day, two people from Pitchandikulam Forest came looking for me and invited me to Auroville. I agreed simply because I was ready to leave my village.

How and when did you go on to higher education?

I completed a Master’s in Sociology and a Master’s in Human Rights while I was working at Pitchandikulam. I was working with communities where caste and gender discrimination were very strong, where there was a lot of domestic violence, so these seemed like good topics. After that I concentrated more on women’s empowerment, still using health and natural remedies as the focus. I started many women’s groups. Then after many years of awareness and education to these groups, I started three entrepreneurship development groups and helped them create a federation, which became a model enterprise in Tamil Nadu.

Two of these groups are still running successfully, and I continue to support them in terms of connecting them to other NGOs and government, for training and networking. After leaving Pitchandikulam, I have conducted programmes around Tamil Nadu to support women to develop entrepreneurship-based groups so that they can stand on their own legs. Whatever I learned from my own childhood, I continue to share all these lessons today.

‘In conversation with Gita

Practising Vedic astrology

Vedic astrology, called *Jyotisha Shastra* in Sanskrit, is the traditional Hindu system of astrology which has its roots in the Vedanga Jyotisha, one of the earliest texts about astronomy within the ancient Vedas. Aurovilian Vikram Devatha practices Vedic astrology in Auroville.

Auroville Today: Vikram, how did you get into Vedic astrology?

Vikram: It was an interesting journey. In the 1990s I studied economics and statistics at the Queensland University of Technology in Australia, during which time I also developed an interest in occult sciences such as reiki, healing crystals, aura reading, tarot and the iChing. I dabbled in all of them and wanted to continue when I got back into India. But I found nothing like that in India. Then, one day, I saw a three-line advertisement in a newspaper announcing a programme in Vedic astrology. The course was given by ICAS, the Indian Council of Astrological Sciences. I signed up, and there has been no turning back since. I developed a passion about the Vedas, and have been studying Vedic astrology, yoga, cosmology, philosophy and vedic mathematics for several decades. I completed a post-graduate diploma in Vedic Astrology, and subsequently taught astrology for three years at Bharatiya Vidya Bhawan in Bangalore. By now I have more than 20 years of experience in reading charts and teaching Vedic astrology to people from all over the world.

So you became a full-time Vedic astrologer?

Not in the beginning. After I returned to India in 1997, I worked for companies outside Auroville, then taught at Auroville’s Future School and afterwards joined Auroville Consulting. Vedic astrology was consistently there in the background. It was only this year that I decided to make the jump and fully devote myself to Vedic astrology – a bit of a challenging decision as I wasn’t sure I could earn an income doing this work. Now I run a unit under the KKT Trust of the Auroville Foundation. I offer private consultations and teach a one-year on-line programme, meeting a couple of hours a week on-line, along with off-line retreats.

Astrology is often judged as a pseudo-science. What’s your take on this?

Let me first give you the official position. In 2001, India’s University Grants Commission (UGC) decided to include *Jyotir Vigyan* (the ‘science of astrology’) as a course of study in Indian universities. The decision was challenged in court, with the petitioners stating that the UGC’s decision was wrong as the accuracy or correctness of *Jyotir Vigyan* had never been established by scientific tests or experiments. It went all the way up to India’s Supreme Court which, in 2004, dismissed the petition on the grounds that the Expert Body of the UGC had examined this question and had recommended including Jyotir Vigyan for study and award of degrees in universities, and that it was not up to the courts to decide as to what course should be taught in a university. Today, astrology is being taught at more than 25 universities in India.

For me, the discussion whether or not Vedic astrology is a science is a bit beside the point. I am well aware that many western and Vedic astrologers engage in predicting the future and that the validity of such predictions has often been tested to the reality that later developed. But for me, that’s not the essence of Vedic astrology. The objective is self-realisation. Vedic astrology is a tool to help that, not a tool to predict.

Yet, in India astrology is often used to assess the compatibility of the partners before marriage, or for a career move taking up a certain job.

It all depends on the reason why a client wants a consultation. What is the objective of the marriage? Is it wealth, is the objective to continue the family line, to ensure that the romantic life will be okay, or is the objective to realize one’s Self? If the question is on career, why is it that you want to take a certain job? Is it to make more money, or for a better job satisfaction, or as a means to develop oneself? Depending on the answer to these questions, the way I read the chart will be completely different.

Let me take the example of an alcoholic. Everything in his birth chart points at him picking up the next bottle. Evidently, this is not

his highest interest. I can tell him that. But the decision to change and stop has to come from him. Only then will I look and see what could be done and recommend a course of action such as changing a lifestyle, breaking patterns, sometimes visiting a doctor to get medicines, all for helping the person to open up to the influence from within. But if he responds that he’s fine as he is, then there’s nothing I need to do because he’s living out his natural tendencies. But in both these cases, I don’t predict whether he will quit the addiction or not.

It is a bit like I come in in the middle of a chess game. The pawns have all moved. I analyse the board and maybe suggest sacrificing this pawn or playing the queen. But in the middle of the game, I can’t move pieces back. That is karma, that’s the past. But now the person has to move a different piece. There is a choice, that is free will, but that choice is contingent on how one has played in the past. So there is both fate, which is the past, and free will, but if fate has trapped the king, you can’t move it. I’ll have to advise to move another piece.

For example, I’m reading the birth chart of a 30-year-old person. What I’m reading is how the pieces were placed 30 years ago, how the planets were placed at birth, which gives an indication of possible tendencies. But the person has played many moves since then. I’ll have to study the transit chart before I can recommend the person’s next moves; but that is a huge task because the transit chart changes from moment to moment. This is where it gets complicated, because I have to take the positions at birth and the positions of every day and every month since, to see what this person has played. Here a certain amount of intuition comes into play.

Pisces 12 th house Mars ♂ in Andromeda, Saturn ♄ & North Node ♋ in Revati with North Node Return	Aries 1 st house Ascendant with Pleiades Rising	Taurus 2 nd house	Gemini 3 rd house
Aquarius 11 th house Sun ☼ & Moon ☾ in Shatabhisha with Saturn ♄ in transit	Auroville Wed 28 th February 1968 10:00 am IST rectified to 9:45 am IST, 12° N and 79° E 49’ using the Sidereal Zodiac with Lahiri Ayanamsha and Full Sign House System, made on Wed 29 th May 2024		Cancer 4 th house
Capricorn 10 th House Mercury ☿ in Delphinus and Venus ♀ in Altair			Leo 5 th house Jupiter ♃ in Regulus
Sagittarius 9 th house	Scorpio 8 th house	Libra 7 th house	Virgo 6 th house South Node ♋ in Spica with South Node ♋ Return

The birth chart of Auroville

You have been studying the birth charts of many Aurovilians. Do they have something in common, as they all chose to leave their ‘normal’ lives behind to join this adventure of The Mother?

The questions I get from people outside Auroville are almost always about careers or relationships. Here in Auroville, inevitably, it’s about ‘am I on the right path, am I doing the right thing?’ But apart from these questions, many of their problems are the same as outside. But I haven’t read many charts of the old-timers, those who came here in the early days of Auroville. There may be a difference.

How do you answer the question if someone is on the right path?

I look at how the sun is placed in the chart. Most Vedic astrologers focus on the moon and the ascendant, but I prefer to first look how the sun is placed, because that tells me about the soul’s purpose, even when someone is asking me about relationships or career. The sun is the center around which life is revolving. I consider the sun to be the symbol of the soul or inner self. The moon, for me, symbolises the mind.

To answer those types of questions I work with archetypes. If I choose the archetype of Aquarius, the water bearer, who is pouring water

to everybody in the village, my questions will be about who or what a person is serving; and as the water carrier is said to be naked, what does nakedness mean? These types of questions get different answers based on someone’s life situation and aspirations. Is ‘pouring water’ considered a service, then the question arises if the person is of service to others or to a community. If someone is doing that, he or she is going along the flow of a river. But if the ‘water pouring’ is for profit, for their own self-interest, whether it’s in a career or whether it’s in a community life, then the person is swimming against the flow. I may then suggest some strategies, but it is ultimately the person who decides which way to go. I stay away from deterministic statements that this or that is going to happen.

You mentioned one particular archetype. How many archetypes do you work with?

Many. Each sign of the zodiac is an archetype. So we have 12 archetypes. But also each *nakshatra*, and each planet is an archetype. One of my roles is to find out which archetype is necessary for this person at this phase of life.

For instance, if you ask me a question on your spiritual path, I would study your birth chart and then focus on a certain archetype. If you ask about relationships, I look at Venus in association with the sun. Often, I have to make additional charts, such as the *prasma* chart which is based on the date, time, and place when the question was asked, to find the most suitable archetype.

You have also drawn the horoscope of Auroville?

Yes. I have made Auroville’s chart taking February 28th 1968 at 10.00 am as the birth details, but you can argue this as Mother’s first public message about Auroville dates from 1965. But the official inauguration was in 1968, so it is probably the best date.

I found that in Auroville’s chart the sun and the moon are in almost the same position. But the chart also shows that they are being covered by Saturn which is in transit through Auroville’s 10th, 11th, and 12th houses. The sun also stands for authority, for governance and management; the moon for nurturing the other person. Saturn’s influence is shaking all these things up, in particular how we manage, how we govern ourselves, how we portray ourselves to the outside world, and how we nurture the community.

Auroville’s birth chart shows other planets in these three houses. There is Mercury, which is the planet of communication, there is Venus, the planet of harmony, relationships, love and community feeling. All these too have been severely shaken up with the transit of Saturn.

Saturn is also influencing Mars – the planet associated with qualities like leadership, strength, ambition, determination, and physical prowess; and Rahu, the planet representing materialism, mischief, fear, dissatisfaction, obsession and confusion. We are truly living under Saturn’s transit in these times.

How long will the transit last?

Seven and a half years, of which about five years have been completed. We have another two, or two and a half, years to go. But that’s not the end of the transit period, as Rahu, which is generally considered to be a malevolent plant, and which is all about wanting more and more, about expansion and abundant expansion, but which also brings a lot of confusion, will next year transit the sun and moon. So it doesn’t look like Auroville will be in calm waters soon.



PHOTO AND CHART COURTESY VIKRAM

Vikram Devatha

Can you be more precise about the impact of Saturn?

What Saturn wants to teach is humility, patience, perseverance, discipline, and structure. It’s very easy to apply this to a person. But how to apply this to the Auroville community? For example, how can we promote humility? Is there a sense of ego superiority, a sense of pride? Do we think of ourselves as being spiritually or otherwise superior to outsiders? All these attitudes Saturn is trying to break, and teach us humility. And regarding structures, are we actively looking at developing new structures to organize ourselves that are different from what we used to have? If we don’t try to learn those lessons, the future can become very painful and we will be heading into more chaos.

When you make a chart of an Aurovilian, does it show that people should better leave?

That question has not yet come up in my consultations. But when I speak with people casually, they are often talking about having plan B. Since last year, many of my Indian friends have left Auroville, which is very sad. That’s because of the present political situation. They no longer feel that Auroville is their place.

Something has fundamentally shifted.

Yes. And I have observed that the image of Auroville has diminished because of what’s going on now. Earlier, people used to look up and say, ‘Oh my, you are in Auroville!’ That’s no longer there. There is no longer a charm of being in Auroville. And that also implies that there is no longer a strong attractiveness for somebody to come here and put their money in Auroville.

Have you seen anything in Auroville’s birth chart that would indicate how harmony can be brought?

No, not in particular. But one of the things I have observed is that both sides are stuck in their sense of rightfulness, that neither is willing to step down from their position and attempt to come together and resolve issues. Yet, for me, this is a necessity to bring back harmony. As The Mother once said to two warring factions in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram: “You must all agree. That is the only way to do good work. For everyone to agree each one must rise to the summit of his consciousness; it is on the heights that harmony is created.”

I am convinced that if all of us, would be willing to let go of our egos, step down from our positions, re-evaluate our beliefs and engage in some form of conflict resolution, for example professional mediation, harmony could be brought very fast.

In conversation with Carel

To contact Vikram, email vikram@auroville.org.in or visit www.allthingsvedic.in

Auroville's democratic heartbeat still strong

Auroville's communal fabric is having a difficult time of late with the Residents' Assembly's voice being ignored. The recent Selection Process showed that our collective spirit is still in good health. Peter, who recently joined the Residents' Assembly Service, reports.

The 2024 Selection Process started on 18th March with a call for nominees. The Working Committee appointed by the Residents' Assembly (RA-WCom) decided that our democratic lives should continue, despite it having emergency provisions to appoint members for the next six months. Three working groups were open to new nominees: the RA-WCom needed two members; the Auroville Council required six; and the Admission Committee (aka Entry Board) also had six openings. The Funds and Assets Management Committee (RA-FAMC) and the and Town Development Council (RA-TDC) memberships were on hold as explained in the RA-WCom's latest report to the community.

Participatory Working Groups process

Using the new process, based on the lengthily titled 'Participatory Working Groups and The Selection Process of their members 2022' (henceforth PWG), the Residents' Assembly Service (RAS) had a type of bible to follow. This year was the third Selection Process since it was instituted two years ago. Whilst cumbersome and time consuming compared to a one-off vote, it ended up not just working, but enabling and strengthening some of the democratic fabric of Auroville.

Nominees

The nominees included those who self-nominated and those nominated by others, though they all needed to confirm their willingness to stand. Somewhat surprisingly, two of the Auroville Foundation Office's (AVFO) approved Working Committee members were nominated for the RA-WCom, as well as a member of the AVFO approved Budget Coordination Committee standing for the Entry Board (though she later withdrew). The RAS emailed all nominees who had not confirmed their acceptance of standing. This sounds easy, but in a reality check of our bifurcated community, all emails coming from auroville.services or auroville.community to auroville.org.in email addresses are blocked. Instead, we sent emails from a private email address to all the nominees. For some we had to follow up with WhatsApp messaging and phone calls to confirm their willingness to stand, as well as, for a few, help them with their online application form.

In the end, we had a total of 24 people standing for the three Working Groups who confirmed their willingness to participate. To have ample candidates was a relief given the challenge of being in Working Groups at present, and we were happy to see there was and is still a desire to serve the community through its leadership groups.

Feedback

From 9th April, the community was given a

two-week window to provide feedback on the nominees. In that time, 294 individual feedback entries were submitted. As provided in the PWG document, feedback was not made public, and the feedback givers could opt to remain anonymous (however their names were recorded by the RAS) or to disclose their name to the Selectors. The feedback was communicated anonymously to the nominees prior to the selection day, to give them the opportunity to respond or withdraw their nomination, and the feedback on the withdrawn nominees was deleted.

Feedback was and is a delicate issue, requiring as much confidentiality as possible. So rather than have online access, a system was set up where limited printed copies of feedback were shared among the Selectors at the time of selection. The feedback was then burnt to ensure that what was shared stayed private.

Selection

Using the Master List, the RAS created a pool of randomly chosen Selectors. To address past queries about this process, this is now done using a virtual randomising tool in the presence of three independent observers and also Silent Presence Keepers, and the whole process is filmed. To reach the maximum of 40 Selectors (with a minimal quorum of 24), more than 500 emails were sent out.

The email address issue continued to make life difficult, with about a third of potential Selectors using auroville.org.in email, so a personal email address was used to contact them. This was followed up with WhatsApp messages, and also with phone calls and even SMS. Phoning people brought home life's realities. Responses I heard included: "I'm sorry but I'm in hospital", and "Sorry but I am due to give birth in three days." Other residents were leaving on summer trips, and some politely declined. Thankfully and in time, a sufficient number of Selectors were found (initially 37 people).

Training weekend

The training on 20th - 21st April was mandatory for Selectors and took place on weekend mornings. On the Saturday, there was a digestible presentation on the history of the Auroville Foundation Act; Working Group structures and mandates; and the Charter, Dream and 'To be a true Aurovilian'. This was followed by a lengthy Q&A, with all questions answered thoroughly. On Sunday, the programme - facilitated by the Citizens Assembly group - focused on listening skills, recognising bias, consensus building and working with community feedback. This was both fun and experiential. As a whole, the training weekend provided high quality presentations with plenty of Q&A opportunities. The Working Groups also came and explained their requirements for new team members, such as full- or part-time hours, teamwork ethos and other specifics aimed at group equilibrium and optimal function.

The logistical arrangements were a bit fraught for the RAS, with numerous locations being too small for 60+ people, unavailable, or hesitant to be viewed as publicly supporting the RA. But two venues came forward at the last moment, which we used for the training and selection weekends. Both places hosted us with joy, generosity and good spirit. The RAS has been locked out of its office and had its budget absorbed in a separate AVFO-RAS, but the community came together and supported the RAS work with wonderful volunteers, technical help, tea and cookies.

The Selection Process

The Selection Process of the PWG is somewhat cumbersome. Firstly, the Selectors are randomly split into four groups. Then these four groups discuss and review the nominees and make a selection. In the first round, individuals are deemed 'selected' if they are chosen by all four groups. In the second round too, anyone chosen unanimously is deemed 'selected', while any candidates selected by two or three groups are put into a metaphorical hat (actually a Tupperware box) for lottery. Those with only one or no votes are not entered. Groups may also choose 'null' - the equivalent of 'none of the above', and this allows Selectors to indicate they don't wish to fill every post or feel that the remaining candidates don't fit the requirements of that Working Group. On Saturday morning, with the support of our excellent facilitator, we had a mock preparation with this process to give Selectors a feeling for what was involved. For each Working Group selection, the Selectors were randomly re-assigned to new groupings.

Selection weekend

By the time of the 27th-28th April Selection weekend, the Selector pool came down to 29 people. We had decided to start with the Working Committee selection as a possibly easier introduction since there were only two openings and four nominees standing. After the Selectors had read the feedback, the nominees presented themselves and were asked questions for up to 15 minutes, including one candidate who joined virtually from abroad (as provided for in the PWG). For the first time - using the current three-year old procedure - the two vacant positions were filled in the first round itself, as all four groups chose the same two candidates. So, an early and tasty lunch was had.

The Auroville Council was to be chosen that afternoon. This was more complex, with eight people standing for six places. Again, feedback was read for half an hour, with print-outs passed around among the Selectors; then the presentations and Q&A. The Selectors were very involved, with many questions to the nominees. It was heartening to see the active interest and involvement of younger Aurovilians who had grown up here. This was one of many positive outcomes from the weekend.

The Selectors chose four Council members in the first round and no additional candidates in the second round. As with the morning, a somewhat quicker and more decisive experience than the past.

On Sunday morning, the Entry Board had eight candidates for six places (four nominees withdrew before the weekend). Four members were chosen in the first round. The second round resulted in two candidates and a 'null' option being put in the 'hat' for selection by lottery. In the end, one candidate and the 'null' option were chosen through lottery pick by an unaffiliated person. An employee of the location was requested to look away and put her hand in to choose the outcomes, and all was, as before, filmed for democratic proof should it be needed. This took a little longer than the day before, but still finished in time for a closing lunch.

Whilst our current selection method is lengthy and needs commitment from Selectors, I found that it worked, and worked well. The randomly chosen Selectors did their citizen's duty as one would in a jury, and the nominees bravely faced the Selectors and answered questions. This allowed candidates to present themselves and seems to have given the Selectors a better feel for the candidates' suitability beyond their written statements. In recent years, the Citizens Assembly team has helped us become aware (in Auroville and internationally) of the wisdom available in a group which is randomly selected and then given high level information, training and a mandate. This Selection Process exemplified that type of democracy in action with an Auroville community spirit.

There was an energising background of focus and harmony that helped us overcome challenges, including running this process at a time when people are afraid to stand out and also in the stifling heat of April end. This harmony manifested in the speed of choices on the first day, but also in a good humoured, vital and thorough approach to selection.

There was a large amount of Auroville goodwill and support on display throughout the process. A 'magic team' provided not just meals, but also fresh fruit, snacks and teas. The Silent Presence Keepers were a benign presence sat just outside each selection group. We had volunteers offering help, and an excellent facilitator who continuously juggled schedules, explained the process in simple language, welcomed and thanked all the nominees, all with a light touch. Both locations offered help; on the last weekend, lunch was cooked and an endless supply of water and lemon water was made available to hydrate us.

Overheard at the end of the weekend were comments from Selectors including, "Having felt far from Auroville for 2 years, I now feel hugged by her", "Didn't realise it would be such a good process" and "The weekend was a jewel." It was a window into the best of communal Auroville, coming together to serve the community in its next steps.

REFLECTION

The larger context

When we are in the midst of deep, disruptive turmoil, as we are in Auroville at present, it's easy to believe that the most important issues are the ones we are dealing with daily. But perhaps there is a much wider context, and one which gives much greater significance to how we act in the present circumstances.

For Auroville, we are told, is much more than a specific geographical location on a tiny, insignificant planet spinning through the universe. Firstly, this planet, as Mother made clear, is far from insignificant:

From the occult point of view of the universal creation it is a symbol which represents the universe so perfectly that by transforming the earth one can through contagion or analogy transform the universe, because the earth is the symbol of the universe.

Moreover, it is the only world, as Mother pointed out, where evolution is possible.

Secondly, if Earth represents the universe, India, according to Sri Aurobindo and Mother, is the symbolic representation of the present condition of mankind. And this is where Auroville has a very special role to play. In fact, as Mother came to understand it, this is precisely why Auroville was created:

And the clear vision: the same thing which in the history of the universe has made the earth the symbolic representation of the universe so as to be able to concentrate the work at one point, the same phenomenon is occurring now: India is the representation of all human difficulties on earth, and it is in India that there will be the... cure. And it is for that - it is FOR THAT that I was made to create Auroville.

But how can Auroville contribute to the 'curing' of mankind? It sounds preposterous, and extraordinarily arrogant, particularly when one considers the present state of Auroville which, in many ways, rather than representing

any 'solution' appears to faithfully mirror the larger problems of India and humanity.

For, clearly, at the moment Aurovilians do not, by any stretch of the imagination, represent the 'cream' of humanity. While we may have more than our fair share of idealists and aspiring karma yogis, we also have our liars, cheats, corrupt and power-hungry, just like any other place in the world. One is tempted to think that if only we had better human material, we would progress much faster and be more of a force for good.

Interestingly, in 1935 a sadhak, bemoaning the poor quality of the Ashramites, had exactly the same thought. However, Sri Aurobindo explained to him that:

It is necessary or rather inevitable that in an Asram (sic) which is a laboratory for a spiritual and supramental Yoga, humanity should be variously represented. For the problem of transformation has to deal with all sorts of elements favourable and unfavourable... If only sattwic and cultured men came for the Yoga,

men without very much of the vital difficulty in them, then because the difficulty of the vital element in terrestrial nature has not been faced and overcome, it might well be that the endeavour would fail.

And a few years later, he elaborated:

Ours is a problem of world-change. People here are an epitome of the world. Each one represents a type of humanity. If he is changed, it means a victory for all who belong to this type and thus a great achievement for our work.

This is an extraordinary revelation: that the victory of one individual over the defects of his or her nature would represent a victory for all individuals who share that nature, and this is why the Ashram, as a centre of global transformation, had to include representative samples of every type of personality, both the 'good' and the 'bad'.

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Four radical questions

After nearly three decades of engaging with Auroville (along with over 100 other 'sustainable communities' around the world), a twice-aborted Newcomer process (first due to Covid and then to pursue my 'dream job' as Director of Education at the Findhorn Foundation in Scotland), and having just spent of 2.5 months there, I would like to share a few radical questions about the future of Auroville for your consideration. I recognise I am simplifying some very complex issues so I ask that you receive them with an open heart and an open mind from someone who loves Auroville and feels fully committed to manifesting its core vision of a transformed humanity.

Radical Question #1: What if... our current conflicts cease, not because the larger systems work, but because the larger systems fail?

Let me explain. Many of us have at least partly placed our bets on the Indian legal system weighing in our favour and resolving the crises once and for all. While possible, this is hard to predict and far from guaranteed.

Another, even more dramatic scenario, seems at least as likely, however. You may remember, during the pandemic, seeing cartoons in which a small fish is eaten by progressively larger fish. The 'joke' was that we may think of Covid as a big deal, but it's a 'small fish' compared to looming economic collapse, food system failures, millions of environmental refugees, and other predicted consequences of the climate crises.

If even only a few of these predictions come true, they may well lead to a level of global chaos where the GOI simply no longer has the resources to exert any control over Auroville. In this potentially near-future scenario, the Mother's 'Divine Anarchy', that many here feel is now being suppressed, may revive on a scale scarcely imaginable.

Auroville is clearly a microcosm of the whole world. What if our current crises in community governance, as large as they now appear, are actually 'small fish' and merely the training ground for much larger challenges to come — not just locally, but globally?

It may well be that our current and coming crises are exactly the catalysts we and humanity need to shake loose our core stories of separation and ego. With our collective karma catching up with us and 'business as usual' becoming increasingly untenable, the world may be finally ready for new worldviews and new ways of living in harmony with each other and the planet.

The question that keeps arising in my mind is 'Who will Auroville be then? What role are we to play in this threshold moment in planetary history?' I firmly believe Auroville has the potential — even the responsibility — to be a key pivot point in this 'Great Turning'. While this will certainly involve many systems and solutions pioneered here for over half a century, I believe our biggest impact will be the extent we can 'be the change we wish to see in the world' — both individually and, even more importantly, collectively.

Which leads me to...

Radical Question #2: What if... our 'city' has now become the cocoon in which our caterpillar must transform into a butterfly?

I want to first acknowledge that I am speaking from a position of privilege, having come and gone from Auroville for decades. While I feel 100% aligned to the Soul of Auroville, I am not heavily invested in its physical form. I wasn't here to help build the Matrimandir. I've only planted a few dozen trees, not thousands. While Auroville feels like home to me, I don't have a permanent dwelling here and my visa is not at risk. I fully honour those who have committed their lives to this place and I fully recognize I would likely feel different if I were among them.

And yes! Of course! Let's build the most ecological city in the world! I desperately hope we can do it together. And I do believe regenerating the land, and building our Temple of the Mother and other structures were necessary endeavours to bring us together and to physically unite us in our purpose.

And... like a caterpillar building its cocoon, perhaps we are nearing the end of our larval stage, which was about growth and

repeatedly shedding our 'skin'. That phase was essential to building our structures and our community. But now it seems new 'hormones' and 'enzymes' are calling us to dissolve, like caterpillars, into a nutrient soup. Perhaps it is time to let go of everything we thought Auroville was and is meant to become. Perhaps it is time to reorganise around our 'imaginal discs' that were always there in the caterpillar — and in us — that contain the blueprint for the butterfly, but lay dormant while in our larval stage.



Daniel Greenberg

Thinking about how to do this leads me to...

Radical Question #3: What if... resolving our current challenges have less to do with reaching high and more to do with digging deep?

Our 'imaginal discs' — our ultimate objectives — seem clear. We have our Charter; we have the Dream; we have the transcendent visions of integral yoga. Ever striving to understand and embody these new ways of being, perfecting our inner practices and concentration, and aspiring towards supramental consciousness are all essential aspects of this endeavour.

And... my sense is that to really move forward, even more than 'reaching ever higher', we now need to acknowledge and heal the shadows that exist in all of us and that are creating our current polarisation and conflict. From a spiral dynamics perspective (shout out to David Nightingale for his efforts to bring these concepts to Auroville), we all exhibit both healthy and unhealthy aspects of multiple worldviews. Let's appreciate our beauty and light while also compassionately calling out and transforming our traumas and inner wounds.

In particular, I want to say....

Thank you to all of us who have worked so hard to regenerate this land and build a safe and inclusive community. I honour your deep empathy for people and our planet. And... let's acknowledge how, sometimes, our suspicion of leadership (on all sides) and not wanting to leave any one (or any tree) behind has led to us getting bogged down in process and has paralyzed our decision-making ability.

Thank you also to all of us who feel a sense of sacred service to the Mother's ideals and plans. I respect your desire for structure, for moving the city forward, and for seeking order and stability. And ... let's recognize when we might mistakenly trust centralised bureaucracies over Divine Anarchy and perhaps desire to punish or even expel those who stand in opposition to what we perceive as clear 'truths'.

We all strive to manifest Divinity through our all-too-human forms and our all-too-apeish neurology. Believing we can transcend our traumas without confronting and healing our unresolved emotional issues and unfinished developmental tasks is

akin to spiritual bypassing (There! I said it!).

If we are to truly become a city for building human unity, we must welcome everyone (including all their worldviews) that we have not yet accepted or forgiven. We must hold our personal and collective shadows, not as negative attributes to shun, but as signposts to exactly those places we most need to heal and develop.

And finally...

Radical Question #4: What if ... we have everything we need to transform?

As the City of Dawn takes shape, let's not forget it is merely the chrysalis of the true experiment — our personal and collective evolution in service of Divine Consciousness. This is present and available regardless of any external circumstances. In fact, it is often catalysed precisely by these outward conditions.

How can we reclaim Divine Anarchy as our right and not a privilege? How can we build solidarity and human unity within and across our diverse factions and tribes?

A few humble suggestions:

- Local/foreign council: I was inspired at the community meeting in March where Major Arun spoke truth to power and pointed to a gap in how welcomed Tamil Aurovilians feel at events hosted by mostly foreign Aurovilians. How about we constitute a council with the specific purpose of bridging this gap across diverse cultures and backgrounds within our community.

- Time off for community meetings: Let's encourage all Auroville Units to release workers and volunteers for 2-3 hours per month in order to allow greater participation in our community meetings.

- Grief circles: Grieving for what has been lost, not only in our community, but on our planet is critical to our emotional and spiritual health. Creating ways to deeply mourn together helps us reconnect with our love for each other and our vision for a better world.

- Beyond 'human' unity: This may get me in trouble, but I've often thought, many of our conflicts around urban planning might find resolution if we just drop 'human' from one of our taglines and become a 'City for Building Unity' -- which includes both the human and the non-human worlds!

- Post-capitalist experiments: In the predicted climate and economic chaos, the world will desperately need community models that transcend market mechanisms and profit-driven motives. Let's lean into past, current, and potential systems such as Circles (where groups of Aurovilians combined maintenance), local currencies, resource sharing, and universal basic income so we can show the world how we can all live well and lightly together.

- Allies for diversity: I recently created a WhatsApp community for anyone to declare themselves an ally for diverse identities and expressions of love, gender, and sexuality in Auroville. Let's support our 'unity-in-diversity', regardless of our politics or how we identify. You can take the pledge and join the community by following this link: <https://chat.whatsapp.com/HA6i9PZXIX2HJzgy0UBRMp>

- Community networks: All too often I have felt resistance to 'outside' ideas within Auroville because 'We're different!' Not only has this insulated us from valuable support and potential solutions, it has limited our solidarity with other aligned groups around the world. As one . to 'pop this bubble' I am excited to be working with Gijs Spoor to co-develop Green Silk Road travel/exchange programmes between Auroville, Findhorn and regenerative communities and initiatives en route between them.

In my recent 2.5 months at Auroville, I had over 100 conversations with friends and strangers about how to help our community manifest its vision and potential. Putting our heads, hearts, and spirits together in this way is key to our evolution and it is incredibly precious and powerful. This is Divine Anarchy in action! It can't be scripted. We can't even know where it will lead. We can only follow our bliss and what we feel called to pursue and must trust that, together, we will evolve in ways far beyond anything any one of us can imagine. If we can do that, I am confident the world will follow us into the City of the Dawn.

Daniel Greenberg

The larger context

continued from page 8

Of course, as Mother later pointed out, this makes the work:

a bit more complex and difficult...but from the overall point of view—for the Work—it's indispensable and even inevitable. And in any case, as we were later able to verify, each one represents simultaneously a possibility and a special difficulty to resolve.

Nolini Kanta Gupta, Sri Aurobindo's foremost disciple, also explained why the Ashram is far from being a paragon of virtue:

Mother told us long ago that our Ashram is an epitome of India. It represents all that is good in India and also all that is bad—all the bad qualities, the weaknesses, all that is crooked and false, dark and obscure. And the Ashram, being a concentrat-

ed centre of all that, represents it in an especially intense form. Now the pressure from above has come to change things and for that purpose all the dark points, all that has to be changed and rejected, have been exposed.

Given Mother's indication of Auroville's purpose, what is true of the Ashram is also true of Auroville: it is a place where all the problems of humanity are concentrated, exposed, in a particularly stark way so that they can be worked on as a contribution to the 'cure', the solution, of humanity's difficulties.

But this gives us a huge responsibility. It means that our every act, every thought, potentially has repercussions far beyond our individual understanding, and far beyond its impact upon our immediate lives. It means that our every thought, every act, has the potential to create ripples that will impact, either positively or negatively, humanity as a whole.

Does this sound too far-fetched? I admit I find it very difficult to get my head around it. But it is the only conclusion I can draw from what Sri Aurobindo and Mother have said. And it's a conclusion underlined by Nolini in an Ashram talk in 1976:

Each one of us who is here in the Ashram is an epitome of the Ashram and all the good and bad elements and movements are in one way or another represented in us—even in the best ones the wrong movements can cast a shadow. So it is a task for each one, especially the so-called "best" ones, that is, those who are more conscious, to detect and reject and change all that is wrong and false in them and develop all that is true and good, and thereby help to change those very elements in the Ashram atmosphere as well as outside it. That is the only solution and the only remedy—to cure the ills individually, personally in one's own consciousness. Then only a conscious collective conscious-

ness can grow and develop in the Ashram with all these living and conscious units or cells and thereby change its own condition as well as the condition of India and also the condition of the world.

Does this mean, then, that we should stop focussing all our attention upon the Master Plan, the Matrimandir lake, or the correct interpretation of the Foundation Act?

I don't think so: these are the issues we are given to deal with today. But I think that the way we approach these issues, and the way we relate to each other in the process, is crucial not only in determining whether or not we grow as individuals, but also whether the vibratory quality Auroville transmits to the larger world is 'curative', or merely adds to the present confusion.

Alan

(I am indebted to Gilles Guigan's research which has formed the basis for this article.)

“The whole world is here”

Sathiya, a second-generation Aurovillian, speaks about her upbringing and her unwavering commitment to Auroville’s ethos despite external pressures.

Auroville Today: What was your childhood like?

Sathiya: My dad is from Edayanchavadi Village. As he was facing challenges with his family, he moved to Auroville and over time worked in many units such as Aureka and Aurelec. He met my mother in Auroville. She was born in Kodaikanal, a hill station in the Western Ghats, and came to Auroville to avoid marrying someone she didn’t know. She’d heard about Auroville, took a train to get here and started working, initially at Auroville Health Center, then shifted to New Creation School. For the past 30 or 40 years, she’s been devoted to Transition School, coordinating workers and organising. I was born in 1986 and lived my entire life in Auroville. My entire schooling journey unfolded within Auroville, from Kindergarten to Future School.

How was school for you? Did you enjoy it?

Immensely. Even if I faced challenges in certain subjects, there was always a teacher to support me. It’s not like that outside; there, you’re left to figure things out on your own. Here, there’s a tremendous amount of care for the children. Each child is looked after individually, addressing their unique needs, and that’s what makes it so beautiful here.

Children here are given more autonomy to learn and explore their interests. Personally, I believe Auroville offers the best education. I’m immensely grateful for the opportunity to have attended Auroville schools from kindergarten through Transition and Future School. The dedication of so many teachers, to name a few, such as Mary, Clare, and Lisbeth, who continue to inspire future generations, is truly remarkable.

What choices did you make after you finished your education at Future School?

Many of my classmates were exploring different paths, some opting to study and travel abroad to discover the world. But the idea of venturing outside never interested me because I felt everything I needed was here. Auroville offers diverse communities and a multitude of nationalities, making it a rich and fulfilling environment to grow up in.

There was no pressure from your parents for you to pursue further education?

Exams were not at all a source of pressure for us. They understood that Auroville was the ideal environment for exploration and discovery, so they allowed us the freedom to pursue our interests without the burden of exam stress.

You never felt that need to leave?

Never. Despite invitations from my sister in France to explore the world, I’ve never felt the urge to leave Auroville. Every summer, she calls me urging me to visit, but I always find myself drawn to simply stay in Auroville. I can’t quite explain it; this place is home, it has everything I need.

I simply don’t feel the need to leave, when I hear from everyone, especially French people, that India feels like home. The outside world seems too busy and narrow in some ways, not like the life I want to live. Here, in India, there’s freedom, warmth, and a vibrancy that I cherish. Though I haven’t explored much, based on others’ experiences, I feel like I belong here. This is my place.

So what path did you follow after leaving Future School?

Future School offered opportunities for part-time work, allowing its students to explore various areas of interest within our community. I helped Aryadeep in the Land Board, managing acknowledgments and receipts for donations. Subsequently, when a secretary position opened up for the Council, I applied and was happy to have been selected among three other candidates.

You have been with the Council for a long time. Why this interest in the work of the Council?

I’ve been with the Council since 2007, nearly 17 years now. It has been a fulfilling journey and still is. Working with diverse individuals at the Auroville Council allowed me to gain comprehensive insights into the structure and functioning of Auroville’s various working groups.

Recently, I was chosen as a Council member. I didn’t nominate myself; it was the residents who felt I should take on this role. After all these years, I believe it’s time for me to step into this new responsibility.

Initially, I was hesitant to step forward, hoping to see a diverse representation from the community in these groups. I believe it is essential for more residents to explore and comprehend the inner workings of the Council and working groups. Those actively involved in these groups grasp the complexities and challenges they encounter, which are often underestimated.

Can you elaborate on these challenges?

When you’re actively involved in a group, you begin to appreciate the time and effort invested in crafting policies and mandates, ensuring a balanced approach that considers various perspectives. However, when these policies are presented to the

community, there’s often a disconnect. People feel they haven’t been adequately consulted or that the process lacks the right spirit.

Despite undergoing a thorough community review process, important documents and mandates often go unnoticed by individuals who fail to read emails or engage with the content. It’s a common human tendency to overlook matters until they personally impact us. Even then, attitudes may not shift, despite the realisation that one can actively participate and influence outcomes.

It’s disheartening to see a lack of proactive engagement, especially when addressing a concern is as simple as starting a conversation. For the Council is not a closed group. It is very open to people, and it welcomes people exploring new ways of working together and collectively improving our community lifestyle. People need to step up and voice their ideas for change. Too often, they dismiss the possibility, assuming no one will listen without even trying. But before they claim nobody listens, have they even attempted to engage? There are numerous platforms available for expressing proposals and gathering support. It’s intriguing because we frequently hear complaints about inaction, yet there are numerous avenues available for action. It’s important to recognise that proposals aren’t solely the Council’s responsibility; they require community approval. We serve as intermediaries between residents and groups. If someone wishes to enact change, they can propose it to the council for review, but ultimately, it’s the community’s feedback that matters most.

Unfortunately, the current situation we are facing involves policies being imposed rather than collaboratively developed. The working groups constituted by the Governing Board prioritise imposition rather than collaboration and do not consider the human aspect. For example, recently we received reports of people being asked to leave their homes without alternative housing being proposed, which goes against the spirit of Auroville. This shift in attitude is disheartening, especially considering our long-standing efforts to uphold the collaborative spirit of Auroville. The attitude baffles me. They make decisions without truly knowing the community members or understanding their backgrounds and contributions. In housing surveys, for instance, there’s a disconnect when decisions are made by people who lack personal connections with those affected.

Has the Council been recognized by the working groups constituted by the Governing Board?

Not really. There was at one time a request to submit to them the Council’s financial accounts. Despite our cooperation, without warning our maintenance budget was completely cut a few months ago, from one day to the next. This follows the takeover, two years ago, of the Auroville Council’s email IDs. When questioned about how we were supposed to receive notifications, they claimed it wasn’t their concern. They are solely focused on their own agenda.

Has the Council been involved in visa issues?

We are aware of the issues. Maybe the new team can see with the Secretary on this even though it is not the role of the Council, but a concern of all of us. It’s deeply troubling to hear that some individuals are being denied their visa extensions. It pains immensely to see people’s lives being disrupted, especially those who have dedicated decades of their lives to Auroville.

Yet the Council continues its work ...

It’s like we’re swimming against the stream. And we need to keep going. Auroville is The Mother’s project, and it will persist despite any obstacles in our path. We try to maintain a positive mindset and continue moving forward. The success of the recent selection process for members of the working groups constituted by the Residents’ Assembly fills me with hope and gratitude for everyone’s contributions. It was conducted very beautifully, very harmoniously in the spirit of Auroville. As soon as you entered the room, you could feel the warmth and beauty emanating from the people there. Even when addressing potentially negative feedback, it was done in such a caring and respectful manner that you never felt attacked or offended. It was truly a beautiful process, as many have attested.

What are some of the other positive things you’ve encountered during this period?

I’ve noticed that we’re becoming more united. There’s a growing sense of generosity, care, and understanding among us as we get to know each other better.

I used to be somewhat detached, in my own world, but now I actively participate in many meetings, fully engaged and aware of what’s happening. Everyone is striving to uphold the spirit of Auroville, and it’s truly beautiful. This sense of unity and purpose is something I hadn’t felt before, or maybe it used to be stronger in the earlier days, or perhaps I had forgotten, but now it’s resurfacing amidst the challenges we face.

So your commitment to Auroville hasn’t changed?

It hasn’t. I’m immensely grateful for being part of this community, surrounded by so many individuals whom I consider family. It’s not just about knowing people; it’s about caring for them deeply. The love and support I receive from them are truly heartwarming.



Sathiya with her daughter Tharunika

Yet, you have sent your two children to a school in Pondicherry. Is this because of all the tensions that are happening in Auroville now?

Things have changed. When I went to school, all the children were very connected to nature. There were no mobile phones, there were hardly any TVs, we were immersed in the wildness of the trees. Back then, there was nobody really watching over us. We’d leave home at seven in the morning and return at six, spending the whole day out and about. There were no worries about kidnappings or anything like that. It was a carefree time.

But my children do not have that same bond with the earth, the trees and nature. Sometimes I feel bad seeing them spending so much time on their phones or watching TV.

I initially wished for my children to be in Auroville. However, as times change, so do our dreams for our children. They have been accepted into a school outside Auroville, which is also a good opportunity, although different from what I had envisioned.

Was this of their own choosing?

I wanted them to be in Auroville, but their father had a different perspective. He believed that though the situation in Auroville is unique, they should experience life outside as well. He feels it is important for them to explore the world beyond Auroville, what life outside is like. They will come back eventually.

My younger daughter often expresses her longing for Nandanam School in Auroville, where she had such a wonderful time. She believes it’s the best school, even after being at the Pondy school for almost three years. She misses her classmates and the activities like swimming pool outings that were a part of her time at Nandanam. She finds the current school outside Auroville boring and feels disconnected from the other children there.

Here, there’s the opportunity to meet her friends in their homes, spending quality time together. So she has maintained her friendships here in Auroville.

You expect them to continue living in Auroville when their schooling in Pondicherry is over?

I don’t know if they want to pursue further education in India or abroad. That’s up to them. But I have noticed that many Auroville children who have studied abroad or elsewhere in India, and even have worked there for some time, eventually return to Auroville.

In conversation with Chandra

Composition and mandate of the Auroville Council

The Auroville Council consists of nine members. They are selected taking into account gender balance, cultural diversity and a mix of skills and ages in the team. At least five members are working full-time. The Council’s responsibilities include gathering resident feedback, encouraging organisational evolution, drafting guidelines, overseeing conflict resolution, supporting psychological well-being, ensuring security, and coordinating with other working groups. Goals include strengthening the functioning of the Residents’ Assembly, increasing community participation, enhancing communication, simplifying bureaucracy, maintaining a public repository of mandates and policies, and establishing an independent conflict resolution body. The Council also deals with issues that fall outside the purview of other working groups. The Council is accountable to the Residents’ Assembly.

Arriving Home - my first days in Auroville

Rolf Lieser arrived in Auroville in 1981 and during his thirty years stay here, among other things, he practised and exhibited his paintings and sculptures, played music in various bands, did graphic design (including working with Kireet Joshi on certain projects), designed and constructed a number of houses, and started Kalabhumi community in the Cultural Zone. He left Auroville in 2012 for various reasons, but has stayed in touch ever since and considers Auroville his soul's 'true 'home'.

The first time I'd read something about Auroville in South India was in a book about the Findhorn community. This was after a series of life changing experiences during a four week holiday in Sri Lanka and my decision to return to India before the year was over.

Then, only after dissolving my material existence in Köln, Germany, such as a very successful career, apartment and belongings, and after I had the ticket to India in my pocket, I discovered 'by chance' a brochure on Auroville in a bookshop on my last day's way to work. Reading more about Auroville, and especially some quotes from Mother and Sri Aurobindo, made it clear for me that Auroville would be my first destination after arriving in India.

But first I went again to the same place in Sri Lanka to prepare myself for this adventure: shake off the stress and hectic pace of Köln and practise continuous meditation to achieve inner peace and equanimity.

When I arrived in hot and dusty



Rolf in 1982, when he was working in the Saraswati graphic design unit in Fraternity

Auroville on 30th December, 1981, I came walking with my three kg luggage (one kg of which was Die Synthese des Yoga by Sri Aurobindo) from the bus

stop in Mudaliarchavadi up to Aspiration, where I met Deepti in the Auroville Boutique. As there was no free guestroom nearby, she sent me on to the Centre. There, Rod had pity on my dusty feet and lent me a cycle to go to Fertile Windmill to check if Vijay or Dee had a place for me to stay. And yes, near Fertile Windmill watchman Perumal's house, opposite to what is now Transition School, there was a small village-style house with mud walls and palm leaf roof where I could stay. The door to the house was an open welded iron-frame with a 15 cm gap to the floor, and inside there was nothing apart from a village-style bed frame with mattress.

Between the two houses there was a hand-pump for water, but, of course, no electricity.

Equipped with my torch and a kerosene lamp, I went to sleep on my first night in Auroville. While lying in bed in the dark, covered only by a thin blanket, I woke up because something was crawling on me. I could not see anything, but judging by the weight and movements, it felt like it was an approximately three foot long snake! So I told myself, "No panic, don't move, stay calm inside, don't fear, but surrender to the Divine Will"... And after some time, the snake went on its way.

First thing the next morning, I decided to get myself a mosquito net and a bicycle. As in those days there was no such thing in the nearby villages, I had to walk from Fertile Windmill to Bommayapalayam to catch a bus to Pondy.

These first impressions of Auroville made me aware that this was not an ordinary place like other tourist destinations. I thought that an 'aspirant' for a longer stay had to pass tests, such as dangerous nightly visits and endless walks under a hot sun in the dusty middle of nowhere, to see if he or she had the right attitude and was worthy to stay in Auroville.

Returning in the evening from Pondy with my new cycle, I was tired but happy to be back 'home' after an

adventurous but successful day in town.

Only a few days later, when returning to my 'guesthouse', I discovered my friend the snake lying curled-up under the door-frame. So, instead of waking up and upsetting the snake to risk being attacked, I silently unlocked the padlock, carefully opened the door, and calmly stepped over the sleeping snake.

I felt that it was another test for me, and that I had to be very calm and centered, tuned into an all-embracing consciousness and deep inner peace, to handle such situations in the 'right spirit': not based on fear, doubt and mistrust, but confident, in harmony with nature, and trusting in the Divine Will.

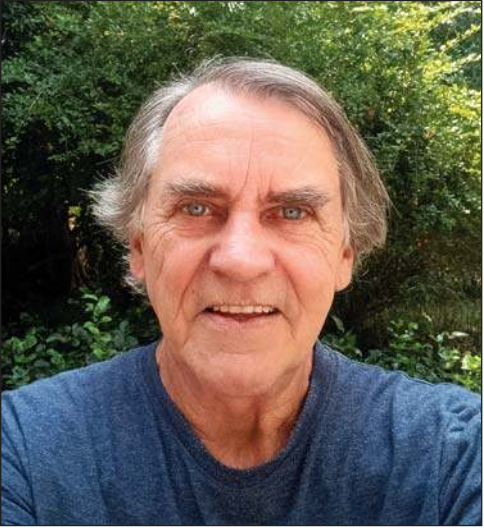
And I was happy to have a new friend, who protected my place.

On my second day in Auroville, I went to the New Year bonfire and met many extraordinary people. Afterwards I went with Sigi to his place, seeing the concrete pillars of Matrimandir behind all the small saplings which had been planted around it.

This was all very nice and interesting for the tourist I was then, looking from the 'outside' at this wondrous place called Auroville.

Somehow I knew inside that I had arrived 'home' from the start, but the moment I actually decided to stay for good, everything changed. There was suddenly this kind of 'Truth Presence', no longer only an outside view or mental understanding and interpretation of the input from the senses, but a very special energy and a much deeper and more integral 'feeling' or 'being'.

Gone were the days of lofty meditations and mental silence, to be replaced by a rough awakening of the physical and vital realities, a forceful pulling down of the feet back onto the ground, an unavoidable look in the mirror, no place to hide, and no more option of ignoring anything. This was the beginning of serious work on oneself while



Rolf Lieser

integrating all parts of the being – of becoming 'whole'.

I understood that there was much more to 'understanding Auroville' than what appears to the superficial mind, much more depth than what appears on the surface when seen from the 'outside'. but this cannot simply be defined by words. I had had many experiences on my spiritual path before, but this was entirely different.

In short: Auroville cannot be understood by the mind or what the ordinary senses perceive. Unless one decides to "stay in Auroville for good", in surrender and dedication to "serve the Divine Consciousness", it is next to impossible for an outsider to understand Auroville.

And it's not so much a question of 'understanding' - Auroville has to be lived and experienced, and a true understanding can only come by 'being'.

And Auroville today, over forty years later (written in December, 2022).

Considering the above, Mother's directive comes to mind, making all the more sense now:

"Only those who have decided to stay in Auroville for good have the right to interfere in its organisation!"

Therefore, the collective processes

of decision making and internal organisation by the Assembly of its Residents is the only possible manner of doing due justice to the complexity of diversity which is Auroville. Human Unity can only work by integrating everybody.

Any authoritarian form of governance and proclaimed 'Human Unity' by a few, issuing orders justified 'In the Name of The Mother', will be a superficial and artificial construct without substance or Truth.

If we talk about building the city while destroying roads and houses in order to build roads and houses, if we can speak of galactic citizens against foresters and anti-city miscreants, if we fall back to old patterns such as 'Indians versus foreigners' - all these are the outward signs of the big confusion and division prevailing at present. But one thing it cannot destroy: the deeper Truth of the Spirit of Auroville! This is always present - despite us.

When thinking back on the thirty years I spent in Auroville, there is one thing which is permeating everything: the deep Love and Oneness within our big family! This 'connectedness' is felt almost physically in Auroville and is the source of true joy and bliss. Whether it is during the bonfires, celebrations and cultural events, or also at meetings or over a plate of idlis and a cup of coffee at Le Morgan, lunch in Solar Kitchen or where and whenever - this is the ever present 'Spirit of Auroville'.

Some need a leader to tell them what to do, others know by intuition what is right and what is wrong.

All these divisions of us versus them, of pro-city versus anti-city, are just superficial impressions, outer appearances and misunderstandings, hiding the deeper Truth of Love and Oneness from view.

And even if we don't see it or don't want to see it - it's there for sure.

Rolf

PASSINGS

Martin Zbinden

Martin Zbinden, a resident of New Creation Field, passed away on April 30th due to a heart failure.

Martin came to Auroville in 1997 with his family from Switzerland, Nadja, Luca and David. He started working at the Forecomers nursery, then worked at the New Creation School kitchen, then at the Matrimandir Nurseries and enthused everyone with his love for plants. For the past 12 years he was an integral part of the Botanical Garden team, tending to the Plumerias and other garden areas he had created, as well as welcoming and mentoring so many of the volunteers who came to the gardens. He also had a great appreciation for the landscape of Tamil Nadu and was particularly attracted to the rocky landscapes of Gingee where he created a sanctuary forest – a place he would often retreat to on weekends to spend time in quiet reflection as well as working to develop the area.

Martin was known to be generous of spirit, hard-working, and dedicated to the people and projects that he had committed to. Along with his wife Shivakala, he contributed to the lives of many, taking responsibility to support and guide youngsters from the local area through college, providing for them a safe and secure home to grow up in.

Martin's body was cremated on May 2nd at Auroville Burial and Cremation Ground.



Velmurugan

M. Velmurugan son, of Madhusudan left his body on May 13th. He was 53 years old.

Velmurugan along with his parents have been part of Auroville from its inception. He and his family lived shortly at Djaima community, Lakshmipuram, and he worked as an accountant at the Auroville Unity fund. In 1996 he moved to Promesse, got involved in farming, and was its caretaker for the last 25 years.

His remains were buried on May 14th at the Auroville Burial and Cremation Ground.



Tia Pleiman

On June 1st Tia Pleiman, an Auroville resident hailing from America, passed away in her home in Surya Nivas in Auroville. She had been working as an art therapist with Maatram. In accordance with her wishes, her remains were buried the same day at the Auroville Burial and Cremation Grounds.



Mahalingam

On June 2nd, Mahalingam, the husband of Mayavathi and father of Saravana and Gopi, passed way. Mahalingam was one of the early Tamil people to join Auroville in 1975. He then worked at the Auroville weather station. For some years he left Auroville and worked as a postmaster in the Auroville post office. He later became a land surveyor and worked for Vanur Taluk. He re-joined Auroville as Returning Aurovilian in 2005 and worked for the Land Board till 2010, assisting in acquiring various encroached lands and correcting land records. On June 2nd his body was buried at the Auroville Burial and Cremation Grounds.



Krishna



Krishna was born in 1969 in Kulapalayam village. He soon came to live in New Creation Boarding. Being an enthusiastic and active young chap open to learn many things, he rapidly got involved in community life. He first joined Aureka and worked with Slyvio. Then André Tardeil gave him an old Ambassador car to drive people around in Auroville. This seeded an interesting idea: to start a transport service for the community. It was the birth of New Creation Transport Service which he started together with André and Mani.

It was a demanding job. Krishna worked day and night to offer this important service. In 2007 he left New Creation Transport Service and started Unity Transport Service. But his hard work took a toll on his frail health: in March 2022, he suffered a stroke and was bed ridden for almost two years, being taken care of by his wife and daughters. He passed away on May 29th. His body was buried the same day at the Auroville Burial Ground.

(till June 12th, 2024)

Report on Land Exchanges

The Working Committee constituted by the Residents’ Assembly (RA-WCom) has shared with the community extensive information regarding land exchanges and transactions that have taken place in the last two years. It submitted a detailed report, a spreadsheet with a list of land exchanges that have taken place since 2022, and the conservatively estimated value it believes Auroville has lost, and a map of the plots involved. The RA-WCom added that the exact extent and location of land exchanged on some plots is not precise and that it is only sharing what it knows, but that there may be other exchanges of which the RA-WCom is as yet unaware. The RA-WCom stated that Auroville is facing governance and financial mismanagement challenges, including opaque and dubious land exchanges conducted by the Auroville Foundation’s Governing Board (GB) and related bodies. Its key concerns include (1) Lack of transparency in recent land exchanges, bypassing consultation with key committees and stakeholders; (2) Allegations of undervaluation of Auroville lands, resulting in significant financial losses. (estimated at more than ₹150 Crores or US \$18 million); (3) Disregard for established procedures, including independent valuation and government approvals; and (4) Failure to uphold the principles of mandatory community (Residents’ Assembly) consultation and adherence to Auroville’s founding ideals. The RA-WCom has requested government intervention to freeze ongoing land exchange deals and conduct independent investigations; has sent legal notices to authorities regarding violations of finance rules and lack of consultation; and has raised concerns about the secrecy surrounding land exchanges and conflicts of interest among involved parties. It has called for immediate intervention to halt all land exchanges and address malpractices in order to ensure transparency and adherence to proper processes and Auroville’s principles.

Letter from IAC to the community

On June 9th, the Auroville International Advisory Council (IAC) shared with the community that during a joint meeting with the GB on May 31st, it had called for a more transparent and inclusive land exchange process. The IAC affirmed that it understands and supports the need for the consolidation of land in both City and Green Belt areas, so that the city the Mother envisioned can be built. But it also stated that a city is more than infrastructure and is about the people who create, live in and maintain the city, sacrificing so much to actualize the Mother’s vision, which, if successfully achieved, will benefit all of humanity. “We are convinced that the city is about the spirit more than the material manifestation. However, that manifestation is a vessel for the spirit, and HOW the city develops does matter,” wrote Ms. Dena Merriam, the IAC Chairperson. “We believe that promises made must be kept, losses must be compensated for, and careful consideration given to which lands are being exchanged, which implies a fair process of consultation with the concerned residents and relevant working groups.” The IAC has communicated to the GB much of what it has been hearing from the Aurovilians and will shortly be recommending ways to move forward in a manner that, in its estimate, would be transparent and unifying.

RA-WCom on Supreme Court’s interim stay on the TDC verdict

The RA-WCom informed the community that the hearings in the Supreme Court of India on the verdict from the Madras High Court of 15th March 2024, which had invalidated the GB’s Auroville Town Development Council (ATDC) and had called for more collaboration between the GB and the Residents’ Assembly (RA), will probably take place in the second week of July. The RA-WCom clarified that the stay order of the Supreme Court on this verdict does not validate or legitimize the GB’s ATDC or their actions,

which remain sub-judice. The RA-WCom expressed concern that the ATDC a) acts in total defiance to earlier decisions of the Residents’ Assembly, and the residents’ advice or well-being; b) fully ignores environmental and sustainability concerns and accomplishments, even though they are among one of Auroville’s biggest strengths in an increasing planetary crisis; c) does not respect national and international standards in terms of planning and development; d) misuses funds generated by the residents of Auroville without their consent; e) violates on all fronts the values and ideals of Auroville. The RA-WCom also expressed its regrets that the Office of the Secretary, supported by the GB, have repeatedly appealed judgements which were fair and remain an invitation for mutuality and collaboration, in the true spirit of Auroville. This, stated the RA-WCom, “undoubtedly shows a lack of understanding of Auroville’s purpose, values and vision.”

Statement from the Forest Group

On May 6th, the Auroville Forest Group, which was constituted by the RA in 1982 and which is endorsed in the Auroville Universal Township Master Plan – Perspective 2025, circulated an email reiterating its commitment to nurture and protect the green spaces and provide an integrated ecological basis for Auroville, physically and spiritually. The Forest Group reaffirmed its dedication to a wider economic approach that supports Auroville’s enduring commitment to a gift economy. The Group stated its intention to avoid commercializing its activities for profit, emphasizing that its work in addressing Climate Change and the loss of two-thirds of the global biodiversity involves intangible values essential to community survival and the common good, rather than mere monetary gains. As stewards of the Auroville forests, the Group sees itself as custodians of biodiversity, soil regeneration, erosion control, aquifer recharge, air quality, afforestation and the preservation of cultural practices and ancestral knowledge vital for sustainable living. The group also commits to upholding the rights of nature. The Group stated that it continues to operate beyond profit-driven objectives to embrace a service-based model that is communally oriented, not only for Auroville itself but for the entire bioregion, and attuned to the pressing environmental concerns. The Group recalled that it is presently working under challenging circumstances, as its Financial Service accounts have been frozen, budgets have been cut without consultation and the maintenances of 42 foresters and 62 forest workers were abruptly discontinued by the GB-constituted Funds and Assets Management Committee (GB-FAMC) by email in June 2023.

Auroville Farm Group questions fruit tendering process

In the beginning of May, the Auroville farmers published a report in the community edition of the Auroville News and Notes questioning the results of the imposition of the fruit harvest auction by the Auroville Foundation Office (AVFO). The farmers had been told that they had to agree to their fruit being harvested and sold to outside contractors. Since then, the harvest of the fruit trees of Auro-Orchard were purchased by a consortium from Auroville consisting of the Visitors Centre Cafeteria and the PTDC. The fruits from three other Auroville farms were purchased by outside contractors for a total cost of Rs 28,000. Recently these contractors started arriving at the farms to assess what is available. Having done this, the contractors are now ready to take cash from the farmers to buy back the contract for a slightly increased cost of Rs 30,000. This could be because it now appears that the harvest won’t be as good as they first thought, so they are likely to lose money. The Farm Group, however, did not feel this option to be correct. “While buying back the lease may be a tempting way to keep the fruit for Auroville consumers it is also expensive as the fruit is bought twice over. It also shields the AVFO from the consequence of its actions and means that both they and the

contractors don’t get to feel the effects of what is a very impractical and immoral way of dealing with Auroville farm assets. Impractical because it is difficult to see how putting the fruit out to tender improves the food security of the community. Immoral because food is not just another asset to be sold to the highest bidder, but a basic need to which everyone should have access, especially when the food is carefully grown to be as healthy as possible, free of pesticides and other poisons and doesn’t deplete our natural resources of soil and water,” wrote the Farm Group. The Farm Group also questioned who will take care of the fruit trees once the contractors have harvested the crop so they can continue producing healthy fruits for Auroville, and who will pay for this. The Farm Group stated that there are still many other unanswered questions. According to the conditions of the lease contract, the harvested fruit must first be offered to Auroville before being offered to the open market. How will this be done? Many contractors pick the fruit in large amounts and then ripen it artificially, in contrast to Auroville farmers who tend to ripen the fruit on the trees and to pick in smaller quantities according to the needs of the community. Moreover, if the fruit is ripened artificially, how will it be kept separate from other fruit in the usually very large containers which are used for this purpose? There are different methods of artificial ripening and some of the chemicals used can be very poisonous. If this is the way the fruit is going to be ripened, it will completely negate the careful organic way in which the fruit has been grown in Auroville. In the light of these concerns Auroville farmers think that this contracting out of fruit and cashews should not be repeated. The Farm Group also questioned if it is the purpose of Auroville farms to grow food for the community or to make profits. There is no information what is done with the money collected from the fruit leases. The farmers feel strongly that they should be reimbursed for the work they have put into planting and maintaining the trees and preparing them for harvest. A few months ago all farmers’ maintenances were cut so this loss of harvest income is acutely felt. Requests to the GB constituted Fuds and Assets Management Committee (GB-FAMC) for the money from the lease contracts have only been countered by requests from the GB-FAMC to each farm to create a budget, but no indication has been given that even if a budget is created the farm will receive the amount of the budget requested or any money at all. In fact, some farms have been told that in future 40% of any income they make will be taken by the Auroville Foundation Office, although there is no transparency about where the money will go and whether it will be used to support farms in the future.

New donation guidelines take effect

In April 2022, units and projects that had been receiving donations from abroad were informed that the Funds and Assets Management Committee constituted by the Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation had come up with a process to ensure compatibility with the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA). Thus far, all foreign donations had been received in the Unity Fund with the donor earmarking the beneficiary, and the Unity Fund executives then transferring the donation from the Unity Fund account to the unit’s or project’s account. The new process put a stop to this simple mechanism. Now a budget proposal or a paper describing the project, indicating those responsible for the utilisation of the donated funds; and a clear financial and narrative quarterly and yearly reporting about how the funds are utilized would be required. A monitoring team was to be created to ensure that all required information is obtained before donations received in the Unity Fund would be disbursed to the beneficiary and that the reports would be submitted in time. Beneficiaries were informed that no funds would be disbursed unless these process points had been completed; and they were warned that 80% of funds received must be utilized in the same financial year.

But for almost a year nothing happened. In July 2023, beneficiaries were informed that Guidelines for the channeling of donations had been crafted by the GB-FAMC, which would serve as a foundational document for the operations of the Donation Channeling Group (DCG), a subgroup of the GB-FAMC. The GB, in its 65th meeting held on 12th December 2023, approved the constitution of the DCG. In January 2024, the DCG informed the beneficiaries that (1) Units and projects seeking donations for the first time must register before commencing fundraising activities; (2) all units and projects currently receiving or intending to receive donations need to file a “Project Registration Form” (PRF); that (3) a “Donor Information Form” (DIF) must be filled for every donor, ensuring comprehensive documentation of donor information; and (4) that for every request for withdrawal of funds from the Unity Fund, a “Funds Release Form” (FRF) needs to be filled in. The DCG warned that only units and projects registered with the DCG will be eligible to receive donations through the Unity Fund or via donation portals; and that non-compliance of the guidelines may result in a pause in fund releases or even the replacement of project holders. Release of funds is also conditional on the payment by the unit of its profit contribution and payment of the City Service contributions for or by those who work for the unit. The key highlights of the new process include an Approval Mechanism – PRFs will be processed within seven working days of submission, with rejection subject to discussion with project holders and the FAMC; the introduction of “Project Assessment Criteria” – projects are evaluated based on their alignment with Auroville’s ideals, sustainability, and tangible outcomes; and Compliance Enforcement – failure to comply with guidelines may result in fund release delays or further disciplinary actions. The DCG said that donor information will be treated with utmost confidentiality and disclosed only as required by statutory obligations. Yet, the process did not take off. In March 2024, the DCG wrote that, though the Unity Fund had received donations for units and projects in the first months of the Financial Year 2024-2025, funds were not released “as the DCG was waiting for updated Guidelines for book-keeping specific for donations from the Auditors,” and that “Once received, approved and communicated to the Community, the release of funds will start.” In the beginning of June this year the green light was given – apparently by the Governing Board in its meeting of May 31st – and units and projects who had received donations were invited by the DCG to send it the FRFs.

Auroville dog shelter needs immediate funding

The Auroville Dog Shelter, home to nearly 300 rescued dogs, urgently needs financial support. Despite being a municipal service, it receives only Rs. 50,000 per month from the Budget Coordination Committee, far short of the Rs. 3 lakh needed for basic expenses like food, wages, vital medicines and vaccinations. All services like sterilisations, vaccinations, free veterinary treatments and emergency rabies rescues are now halted due to the lack of funds. The dog shelter cannot take in any more dogs due to lack of funds, quarantine facilities and staff. Without immediate funds, the shelter will have to start releasing dogs in the streets.

Corrections

In the News in Brief section of the May issue of Auroville Today it was mentioned under “Awards for Auroville architects” that Suhasini Laxman Iyer had won the Indian Institute of Architects IIA National Award 2022 in the category Residential Projects for the Humascapes Habitat buildings. This is incorrect. Suhasini has won a commendation for these buildings. Also, only Auroville architect Ganesh Bala Iyer won the award in the category Conservation and Restoration and Preservation and Adaptive Reuse for André and Prema’s old house in Auromodèle, originally designed by Roger Anger. Architect Neha Dighe had collaborated in this work but was not awarded.

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Contact: Auroville Today, Surrender, Auroville 605101, Tamil Nadu, India, Phone: +91.413.2622572. Email: avtoday@auroville.org.in.

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Editorial team:

Alan, Carel, Chandra, Gita, Peter.
Proofreading: Gita. DTP: Carel. Print Editing: Jean-Denis.
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