

Auroville Yesterday

In November 1988, thirty-four years ago, Auroville Today began life, and this month marks our 400th issue. Peter Lloyd, one of our most loyal subscribers and a recent addition to our editorial team gives his reflection.

Issue 400! What a great opportunity to review our collective history as seen through the pages of our journal; to be touched by the lives of those drawn to the Dream and Charter, inspired by projects, exclaim at the recognition of familiar faces, marvel at art, and view thousands of articles and photos conveying this laboratory of evolution. The back issues touched, uplifted and made me grateful for the experiment that is our community. To take a step back from daily life and notice all the goodwill that was inherent in the majority of the pieces; the aspirations, joys and realisations that come with dedicating oneself to this adventure. When I was a long-term overseas subscriber, I would experience something of that spirit and vision of Auroville as conveyed through the magazine, where each issue would ignite the longing to return and participate. With as exacting an eye on the realities of community life as the inspiration, scanning 399 issues felt like going through family photo albums. In the end, community is made of people, with their joys and sorrows, inspirations and struggles. Auroville Today covers our humanity and aspirations, and gives a taste of what it means to be drawn to live here and take part in this utopian adventure.



Plus ça change

Interestingly, given the current challenges, Auroville Today started its first issue featuring the just promulgated Foundation Act, and what it meant for the community. There are many headlines from our past which remain topical in 2022. In issue 55, for example, there was a debate as to whether the Foundation Act was ‘A Springboard or a Straitjacket’. Issue 274 in 2012 led with the title ‘Trees versus Roads, Forests versus City’, whilst ‘Planning the City’ was a special issue in 2003, followed by Sauro’s take five years later on ‘The Challenges of Planning the City’ in issue 297.

Other repeating issues include, in an ever-growing community, the lack of housing, governance struggles, working with ‘divine anarchy’ has been a regular item. The energy

and creativity of our youth wove itself through generations of YouthLink.

Social themes

The magazine has highlighted the realities of living in a multicultural community in India; including how to live in community, the Tamil culture, unknown Aurovilians, the secret lives of ammas, people returning to live in Auroville, mixed-race partnerships, the role of Auroville within India, and the life of women living here.

Environmental issues

Auroville is world famous for its re-wilding and ecological work. Many articles featured this aspect of our community, like coverage of Earth Days, water-saving initiatives,

promotion of organic farming, the Auroville Herbarium, and reforestation of the Tropical Dry Evergreen Forest. But also the environmental challenges, such as the health effects of pesticide use on cashew topes, our decreasing water table, or how we don't grow enough of our own organic food.

Crisis

There is an Auroville truism that a crisis brings the best out of our community and brings out those moments of tangible human unity. From the Auroville Act in the first issue onwards, Auroville Today has covered the effects and response to the tsunami, Cyclone Thane, the threat of a National Highway cutting into our forests, and the current existential crisis of governance.

Spirituality

Our roots in the teachings of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother have been honoured with articles and interviews, notably with Nirodbaran, Shyam Sunder Jhunjhunwala, Georges van Vreckhem, Peter Heehs, Manoj Das, Shraddavan as well as other teachers and writers of Integral Yoga. Huta's paintings on *Savitri* were among inspirations.

Matrimandir

The building of the ‘Soul of Auroville’ has featured prominently, not only in talks with architects Roger Anger and Piero Ciconesi, but also reflecting views of the builders and visitors, accompanied by plentiful photographs by Dominique Darr, Ireno, Giorgio, Marco and

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others. Currently the Matrimandir gardens and lake are being captured in their new forms.

Times have changed

Which newcomer knows what Asia Urbs refers to? The EU-sponsored work in Auroville has not been mentioned much of late. Roger Harris in the early 1990s reviewed twenty-year old *Auroville Notes* from the early 1970s, including references to not having enough food to eat. Who remembers when all entry was paused till our housing situation improved? Or when the Newcomer period was two years?

As Auroville grew in size new themes emerged that were not important for a smaller community. How to deal with the mass of tourists became a theme twenty-plus years ago, and the growth of businesses has been a regular item. What to do with garbage and recycling is a newer issue that we wrestle with. Our emotional health is beginning to be valued as an important quality of life.

Favourite Sons

Some people burrowed their way into Aurovilian's hearts and had prominent roles, reflected in their increased coverage. Dr Karan Singh, for so many years our Chairman, was frequently featured with his benign care for the community. Kireet Joshi and his critical work on the Foundation Act was another loved son. J.R.D.Tata was celebrated. Given their prominence in the magazine, former Secretaries Mr. N. Bala Bhaskar and Mr. M.V. Chunkath were widely appreciated by many Aurovilians.

Unique Articles

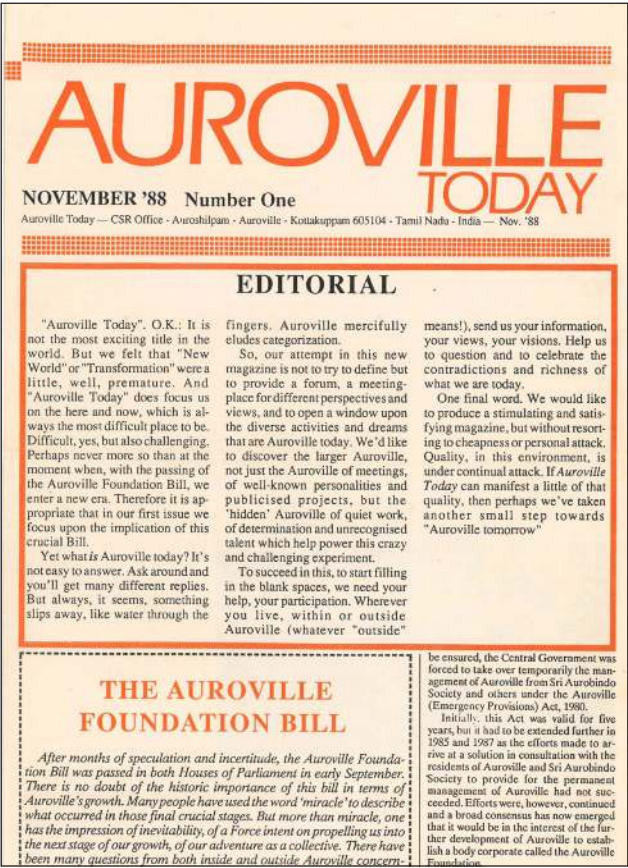
Some articles are more quirky, with some of the creativity that thrives in Auroville. Roger's piece on the unique dialect of Auroville being a good example "Avlish" – he found the nearest was a West Indian white creole accent. Dianne's numerous explorations, such as a simple piece on celebrating living 'in the wrong end' of Auroville in Kulapalayam, were fun. David Clouston's piece on riding on the roof of a bus or his 'conversation' with Pelagius the cat were memorable.

Art and creativity

We live in a cultural and creative hub. Auroville Today has reviewed hundreds of books, countless exhibitions, photos, art, dance, pottery, theatre, musical performances, and poetry recitations. Not just from the more accomplished artists within and outside Auroville, but also children's efforts have been often featured.

Special Issues

June-July's 2019 handover to the Youthlink who created a 'Auroville Tomorrow' (actually the first use of this magazine



current version with its recognisable masthead. Postage evolved from fold-up aerogrammes, to (biodegradable) plastic covering to today's paper A4 envelope. In 2008 colour photos appeared on every page. Initially quite dense, a noticeable graphic design evolution occurred fairly quickly. Now the magazine is available in both paper and virtual format with a recent change being a greater number of digital subscribers. The prices though have gone up somewhat from the original 66 rupees per annum.

Obituaries

From the initial issues onwards, we have covered those passing on. A testament to those who gave their lives to this adventure of consciousness. We featured well-known pioneers who gave their life's work to this soil, those who were external advocates of Auroville, the tragic loss of young lives, as well as the lesser known sadhaks of Auroville. No matter how discreetly or prominently they lived, in passing they were honoured.

Still Today

One constant since the beginning are the two stalwarts who have kept the magazine going: Alan with his philosophical outlook, has run a tight ship dedicated to the highest editorial standards, and Carel, whose push kicked off the magazine in 1988, has long overstayed the six months he thought would be sufficient to get the magazine up and running and was still laying out the magazine and writing articles even when on the Working Committee. Amongst the hundreds of contributors, further credit must be given to Roger, Yanne, Lesley, Bindu, B., and Priya S. for their dedication. And to Annemarie, Franz and Jean-Denis for their background work in finalising articles and photos for publishing.

The Round Table

AvToday started in New Community, where the first meetings were held. The 'office' soon shifted to Auroville's Centre for Scientific Research, using a donated computer with two floppy discs. It shifted again to a private residence in Samasti, where a top floor became the office and meetings were held downstairs. Then the Dutch 'Stichting de Zaaier' made a donation and the derelict water tower in Surrender community was converted into the present four-storey office of Auroville Today. Editorial discussions take place symbolically seated by a round table, where everybody's input is valued.

Thirty-four years of our magazine reflecting Auroville today, conveying some of what makes life here unique. A celebration of what worked and a marking of struggles.

What will the next thirty-four years bring? All being well, a review in 2056 will reveal how we traversed the governance, land and environmental challenges and deepened our creative and spiritual journeys to become the city of the dawn that the Mother dreamt we should become.

Peter

REFLECTION

Do we have a future?

We have grown accustomed to having a future. It's why we have children, why we make long-term plans and investments, why we cling to the promise of unending progress. But what if there is no certainty that a future, or one that we could be part of, exists?

At present, there is overwhelming scientific evidence that humanity is making Earth uninhabitable for many life forms, including our own. A recent scientific assessment concluded that 69% of earth's wildlife population has been wiped out in the past 50 years, and in their latest report The United Nations International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), considered the most authoritative body on climate change science, warned that the world's average temperature is set to increase by 1.5°C over pre-industrial levels within the next two decades, and that only the most drastic cuts in carbon emissions from now would help prevent an environmental disaster.

However, while there are admirable efforts to reverse biodiversity loss and the effects of climate change, there is growing awareness in the scientific community that our efforts may be too small and too late to prevent a catastrophe. For the behaviour which causes us to despoil the world in the name of progress seems to too deeply embedded within us, and climatic change is so baked into the system that even if all greenhouse gas emissions stopped tomorrow, temperatures would continue to rise for many years to come. Furthermore, the possibility of a nuclear Armageddon seems higher today than it has been for decades.

The realisation that humanity may face a bleak future is why some spiritual teachers today have abandoned talk of future utopias and say we should treasure each moment, each relationship, to the full. As one writer put it, it's as if humanity is spending its final days in a hospice,

where, in spite of the fear and the pain, we have a fleeting opportunity to grasp what is truly important.

But what does this mean for Auroville? After all, if within this century, or even a few decades, as some studies suggest, southern India may become uninhabitable, drawing up long term plans for the development of our city looks increasingly futile, rather like rearranging chairs on the deck of the Titanic.

And yet, in 1966 Mother had what she called a 'revelation'.

"Even if you don't believe in it, even if all circumstances appear to be quite unfavorable, I know that Auroville will be. It may be in a hundred years, it may be in a thousand years, I don't know, but Auroville will be, because it has been decreed."

In the context of the present existential threat, what could this mean? For Mother noted that the threat is real: "Before dying, falsehood rises in full swing. Still people understand only the lesson of catastrophe. Will it have to come before they open their eyes to the Truth?"

Does it mean that Auroville, because it has been 'decreed', will continue to exist, in spite of the predicted chaos? Or that the 'cure' for all human difficulties— which Mother described as one of the purposes of Auroville — will be found here in time to avert a global catastrophe?

Or that the 'idea' of Auroville, which Mother described as "an action in the invisible...It's not a material, outward action; it's an action in the invisible", will prove strong enough to reverse humanity's current depredations?

Or could it indicate that while the present Auroville may cease to exist, at some future date it will manifest, but populated by beings more advanced than our own? In this context, In 1934 Sri Aurobindo wrote that the supramental transformation was "inevitable". But when Mother asked him how long the process of transformation would take after the descent of

title) which was humming with vitality. Jesse and Aurotaranti a generation ago in 1997 did likewise. Issues 244-5 focussed on the high quality of writing in our community. And then there was the reporting on 'Beyond Awake and Asleep', Auroville's first home-made children's musical, with a wonderful front page cartoon by Emanuele.

Pictures

Over the years some stunning images have graced the insides and covers of the magazines; Aurovilians, local villagers, nature, theatrical moments, character profiles, buildings and art works among thousands of snapped instants. To view back issues is a delightful way to recognise younger faces of today's well-known residents, some unchanged (notably B and Archilles) and others with less or more hair and weight. Cartoons were often a prominent part of early Auroville Todays, notably by Emanuele Scanziani and the punchier output of Laura and Charudatta.

Layout

The layout evolved from the folded up A5 format to the

the Supermind, he replied, 'perhaps 300 years'.

However, later Mother added, "He said 300 years, but you know there is something like Grace—anything can take place, because there is truly something changed in the world."

The change which she was referring to began with the first manifestation of the supramental consciousness in the overall earth consciousness in 1956, which caused her to remark that "a new light breaks upon the earth, a new world is born." Thirteen years later, she announced that a new consciousness had manifested on earth, the consciousness of the 'surhomme' — the intermediary between man and the supramental being — which she described as "working energetically to prepare the earth for the new creation".

At the same time, she was working intensively on making the cells of her body responsive to the new consciousness. After a series of life-threatening experiences, in March 1972 she saw herself in a completely new body. Finally, in November, 1972, Mother reports that for a few brief seconds she had the full supramental consciousness, "and the action is a material one".

Clearly all this represents a huge acceleration in the evolution of consciousness and not, as Mother pointed out, for her body alone. "I think something has been achieved from a general standpoint...it wasn't just the difficulty of one body or one person: I think something was achieved in terms of preparing Matter to receive in the right way, correctly."

Mother said she was instructed to say that Auroville would play a key role in this evolution: "*we will strive to make Auroville the cradle of the superman (surhomme)*". In fact, in April 1970 she confirmed that some 'overmen' already existed, although she didn't specify where.

All these are signs that the action of the new forces, while continuing to be 'engulfed' in the old world, had, as she put it, "*continued very regularly, very persistently, very steadily, and to a certain extent, very effectively*". And one day,

she said, the new world will be strong enough "to assert itself visibly".

Has that time come? And will it precipitate what Tolkien termed a 'eucatastrophe', a sudden and surprising turn for the better?

We do not know.

Yet even if we cannot know the course of the immediate future, it gives an enhanced meaning to our existence here. For if Auroville has an important role to play in the evolution of consciousness, as Mother said, and evolution, as Sri Aurobindo assured us, will continue, then everything that we do here assumes great significance. For if every action or thought can be seen to promote or retard the larger evolutionary progress, there is no issue, however trivial, that can be neglected. Even something like the shape of Crown, which may seem of supreme irrelevance given the scale of the planetary threat, could, if approached in the right manner — in a way which promotes harmony and attempts to express the new consciousness — be the means of furthering such progress.

In fact, Mother was unequivocal about what needs to happen if we are to avoid a 'catastrophe'.

"It is only the Truth that can save us, truth in words, truth in action, truth in will, truth in feelings. It is a choice between serving the Truth or being destroyed".

Never has the choice been more evident. Whatever the eventual outcome, however, it is likely that the coming years will be very testing for everyone. Existential psychology research suggests that people react in different ways to perceived threats to their existence. Some choose denial. Others become more dogmatic, polarised, and prone to conspiracy thinking. Yet others become more creative and caring. And many in the Aurobindonian community, no doubt, will seek higher guidance.

All in all, it will be interesting to see how Aurovilians navigate the stormy waters ahead.

Alan

Kajimba: Bottling the Auroville Teen Spirit

Nahar Emet, now 22, was nine years old when he came to Auroville with his family. He attended Deepanam, TLC, and Last School, and then worked as CRIPA's light and sound designer before joining the Youth Centre team. Two years ago, he and another youth began developing Kajimba as a food manufacturing activity to create interesting and flexible job opportunities for their juniors and peers.

do something myself."

That something is Kajimba, which currently distributes, manufactures and markets several flavours of an all-natural soft drink. The activity currently employs around 20 mostly part-time staff, of whom 75% are Auroville teens. Schedules are extremely flexible, and Kajimba pays a flat, fair wage. "Our schedules are built around the team," says Nahar. "Kids don't have that many free hours. I don't want them to work so much that they have to miss sports or don't have a life. Very often we're slightly overstaffed, just so people can cover for each other. In case they have an exam, tournament or get injured."

New staff generally start in manufacturing. "It's the easiest to join, and it connects them to the product. If you're working on Instagram, and you don't understand how the product is made, it's a bit difficult."

Kajimba is intended to be a space for the youth to learn and grow. "If they're independent, it makes it easier. If I have to do everything, it's very difficult. They pick up a task, fail, learn, and new ideas are born. It's a fun way for an organisation to function, and it lets them discover what they're interested in." Claire, who joined mainly to handle the Instagram account, now coordinates the four-person social media team. One high school student who started in manufacturing now produces Instagram reels, does photography, and is getting into design. Another is also finding their hand at design.

Nahar says that as long as they're

globally on-theme, he encourages people to run with their ideas, and to have fun with them, even if they're small projects on the side. "The more ideas that are in process, the better off you are. In the end, the company is built by these small things. And if they're not having fun, they won't do good work."

Cooking up Kajimba

Working out of the Youth Centre kitchen, Nahar started Kajimba together with Jianghao, "an extremely entrepreneurial kid". They spent all of Rs 2000 as start-up money for the first year. "We needed almost nothing, just a bunch of glass bottles. He developed a recipe. I designed the labels. And the Youth Centre kitchen had the rest."

When Jianghao left to attend university in the Netherlands, Nahar found himself alone. "At that point, we were very, very small. We had 2 clients, and we were doing around one hundred bottles a month, a tiny number." On a Youth Centre 'Pizza Night', he asked Milo and Adelle if they would like to join. Nahar would focus on finance and development, Milo on design, and Adelle on operations. How did they come up with this division of labour? Nahar smiles. "I like Excel spreadsheets; Milo went to Last School, so he had drawing and art experience; Adelle likes painting, and she is learning operations."

The new team made their first large batch of Kajimba ginger ale in December 2021, on the very day that the Youth Centre kitchen was destroyed. But they weren't about to

give up. It had taken a year of work, eight months of "annoying the FAMC every week" in order to get registered as an Auroville activity and another month to get all the licences required for distribution. "I have a big belief in the YC approach to things: Go for it!" he states with a laugh.

After three weeks of using any kitchen they could find, they shifted to the community kitchen at Creativity, which allowed Nahar to expand the team. Less than a year later, they are "just about" breaking even. Kajimba currently has 35 clients in and around Auroville and Pondicherry town. They sell well in higher-end spaces like Tanto, Chez Artizan, and Cafe des Arts and just need a few more Pondy clients to stabilise financially.

Challenges

Ginger ale is a fermented drink ideally brewed in a dark, temperature-controlled space. Kajimba, however, operates in a community kitchen and constantly has to factor in changes in temperature and sunlight. "We make it on Saturday, bottle it on Tuesday and deliver it on Wednesday. It's a clock, and there are no negotiables. If we mess up by one day, the whole batch goes to waste." The product is only refrigerated once it reaches the client, and even with refrigeration, the shelf life is quite short.

"Losses are part of the game," Nahar explains. Kajimba delivers to clients every two weeks, takes back empty bottles to reuse, and replaces any bottles from the previous batch that haven't sold. But the larger losses



have been due to fluctuations in temperature and sunlight. "Everyone's learning," says Nahar. "We make mistakes. Once, we had to throw the equivalent of 500 bottles."

Future Growth

Still, Nahar is not scared to think big. "Ideally," he says, "I would like to manufacture across India. In Auroville, I'd like to focus on R&D. That would be the most fun for the team." After Pondy, the next step is Chennai, where Kajimba needs 20 to 30 clients for the transport costs to work out. "Theoretically I'm six months behind schedule," he says, "I'd like to be in Chennai already." But Nahar has a pragmatic approach and says he's used to allowing things to move organically in Auroville. He explains, "I'd like my Instagram to move faster, but it's youth, and they take time to explore and learn. So there's no way to get things done 'on time'. Things get done when they want to be done."

Influences

When asked about his influences, Nahar mentions Last School where he learned "English, determination, and aesthetics" and his parents. "My mom is a cook, my dad's a software developer, and that's the two things I do now. From my Mom, I learned how things should taste. From my dad, I learned to code and build structures. I write code to facilitate Kajimba's operations." But more than that, "building a company is a lot like coding with humans. You try, you test, you rethink, you have to get the pieces to work together. Coding with computers is a lot easier. Humans are much less predictable."

Seeing Kajimba's appeal and presence on social media and in many of the better local eateries, it seems likely that Nahar and his team will crack that code as well.

In conversation with Gita



The Kajimba team

Dear Aurovillians,

The current situation in your community is affecting not only its residents but also people who may be interested in joining this special community. I'd like to share the point of view of an observer, something from the perspective of a non-Aurovillian.

Every day more and more people in the world learn about this amazing place. This is good, taking into account that the issue of a community expansion towards becoming 50,000 residents seems to be on the front burner. Who are those people you expect to come and join the community?

These people should share the aim of a non-materialistic way of life, they have to be able to bring goodwill along with bright ideas and talents for developing the city, they have to be ready to work together and yet evolve as individuals. They should be aware of the ideals of the Mother regarding Auroville, its principles, values and the Charter. It would also be helpful if these people can donate some money in order to buy lands and/or build houses.

There are, of course, people like that out

there, and they are keeping a close eye on the current situation. And those who are seriously considering to join Auroville want to get more information about the place, evaluate advantages as well as try to find any possible pitfalls. That's what any person would do before taking a life changing decision.

So what do they find? Depending on how far one might advance in this search, one finds a place absolutely unlike any other place in the world. One discovers the beauty of the nature created and maintained by strong, intelligent, honest people working together. There are dozens of unique projects in the fields of environment and waste management, education, health care, social welfare and livelihood, the arts, architecture and sustainable building, and many more, deserving particular attention and spreading to other parts of India and the world.

But what about the pitfalls? One of the first things the person finds out about in the Auroville of today is the bulldozing of structures and forested areas to make way for a 'Crown Road'. Picking up the pieces of available information, people learn about the existing divisions, the Secretary and residents in opposition.

Knowing that something is being destroyed

without the consent of the majority of the community looks alarming. People who consider to accept the concept of no private property and donate their money, would like at least to be confident that the house or other objects built with this money won't be destroyed in such a barbaric manner. It contradicts the values of the community, the Mother's ideals and simply scares people away. Disappointed and intimidated at this point, people stop even making further inquiries.

People may assume that the Secretary is not really bothered by the way it looks for the potential newcomers because otherwise she and her supporters would have avoided such situations in order to keep the place attractive, interesting and safe for those willing to come and commit themselves and contribute to this great adventure.

So here comes the question: who do they want to attract and who will finance further (hopefully non-destructive) development of Auroville? I think everyone who is supporting the Secretary's agenda should ask themselves this question and evaluate the possible options.

Isn't it feasible to find a compromise and reconsider some plans, find other methods

of development in order to keep peace and encourage the ideal of true unity in this unique place? It seems that the Mother wanted to create this community of people working together for the good of these people, and ultimately for humanity, and not for the sake of some architectural design. The uniqueness is within the people of Auroville who have all come here for the same Dream, anything else is secondary.

You see, many of us are watching this situation with aspiration. We are watching how people whose priority values are love and truth are trying to find a way out of the current distressing situation. We are watching how people who have followed a Dream and created a different life, choosing to leave their old lives behind, can find a way to work towards harmony and unity again. We are watching to see if they can do it without fights, without violence. This city must be, but not immersed by common problems of ego.

Auroville, you are truly a hope for us, and should once again become an example to the rest of the world.

Mariya (long-term guest in Auroville)

Perking up the coffee scene

Marc Tormo Altimira is Auroville's coffee entrepreneur, roaster, brewer and consultant. His journey started in Barcelona, Spain, at the age of 23, when he and his wife Matilde opened a few cafe boutiques. In 1996 they joined Auroville, and, as he says, 'started all over again'. They launched Marc's Coffees, a coffee brand dedicated to promote specialty, gourmet and sustainable coffees, and in 2008 opened Marc's Cafe, a coffee shop on the Kuilapalayam-Auroville Road and later the Dreamer's Café at the Visitors Centre.

Auroville Today: What caused your interest in coffee?

Marc: I have a strong emotional connection with this beverage. It's a drink around which you get together with friends and family. I am passionate about it.

Have you special taste buds for coffee?

I have developed them. I am a licensed Q grader, a quality grader. This is known as the highest rank in coffee tasting. There are 40 Q graders in India, and about 7,000 in the world. To become a Q grader, you need to pass very strict exams, amongst which 19 sensory exams, about how you experience the drink put in front of you. The issuing authority is the Coffee Quality Institute in Portland in Oregon, USA, a world-wide institution which operates the Q-grading professional certification programme around the world. I have a license in Arabica coffee, and will soon get the same in Robusta coffee. You need to be trained separately, as these are two very different species of coffee.

Q grading means that you are trained to give a non-biased assessment of the quality of the coffee. If someone wants to buy a container load of coffee, they often hire a few Q graders to assess the coffee. They send samples to different Q Graders around the world, who then give their report and the buyer decides. Their assessment is based on issues such as fragrance, aroma, body acidity, after taste, sweetness, and uniformity. They are trained to find if a coffee has defects, or exceptional 'notes', and stands out and is worth the premium the seller asks.

But I am not working as a Q grader. I became one to better understand the product I am selling. I am applying my skills to ensure that my own coffee is of the highest possible quality.

green beans and roast them in a special roaster. I roast just 10 grams, and then I can tell you the story of this coffee. And if all that is good, we start the negotiations.

In this way I have established many long-term relationships, both with well-known and unknown coffee planters. The well-known ones are usually progressive and will be trying to raise the bar. But I also like to visit lesser known regions.

You also advise on how to grow coffee?

Yes, I have become a consultant to the Coffee Planters Association of Palani Hills, advising them on how to produce the best possible coffee and helping them setup their own coffee processing units. I help with the soil analysis, in collaboration with a laboratory in Bangalore which has developed a technique to deduce from a small piece of paper put in the coffee all the polyphenols the coffee contains, including caffeine, chlorogenic acid, diterpenes and trigonelline, all the good stuff that coffee must have.

I am even considering starting my own plantation. I have been offered some land, but as I, as a foreigner, cannot own agricultural land in India, it would need to be given on a long-term lease. Then I can become a member of the association.

How good is the quality of Indian coffee?

In general, Indian coffee is ok. It is a well-known coffee for blending; many of the large commercial European coffee brands use Indian coffee. But it doesn't stand out, unlike Colombian and Guatemalan coffees. The Indian coffee industry would need a humongous effort to improve the coffee quality and make it of international renown.

India could learn from Colombia. The Colombian government has realised that if they want to move from cocaine to caffeine, they need to invest millions of dollars to allow the planters to shift and produce high quality coffee. And they did so. They also embarked on a huge promotional campaign. It has become a very successful story and coffee is now one of their main export commodities.

of that special energy in Auroville...

So this year I bought 200 Robusta plants from an expert breeder in Kerala. I have planted 120 trees in Auro Orchard, in fields that also have papaya, mango and other fruit trees, and the rest I've planted elsewhere. It will take 3 years for the plants to produce beans, so in 2025 I hope to be able to sell Auroville-grown organic coffee.

I have noticed that local cashew nut growers are also interested. They are looking for another cash crop that could replace cashew. Coffee would be eminently suitable.

You are also active in coffee education ...

Very much so. There are three aspects to that: my own continuous education, that of my employees, and that of the public.

I have just returned from Melbourne, Australia. I was invited to witness the jury proceedings as an observer at the World Barista Championship, an annual barista competition operated by World Coffee Events for the title of World Barista Champion. A barista is a person, usually a coffeehouse employee, who prepares and serves espresso-based coffee drinks. The participants, each one a winner of their country's national barista championship, were judged on parameters such as knowledge, experience, presentation, attention to detail, taste and quality. There were four sensory judges, two technical judges, and one head judge. It was a great event and I learned a lot, which I now communicate to my employees in order to improve their skills. And to continue my own education, next year I intend to take the Post Graduate Certificate in Coffee Excellence from the ZHAW university in Zurich, Switzerland, because every year there are new discoveries.

The other aspect is that of educating the public. We have organized a few courses for people to learn about coffee. One is called *Know Your Coffee*, a two-hour introduction, mostly held on Saturdays. The tourism department of Pondicherry and a few travel agencies have shown interest to promote this. So far, some very interesting people from all over the world have participated. Another one is a holistic five-day course called *Foundations of Specialty Coffee*, where the participants get a good amount of general knowledge, learn the history of coffee, what coffee means in the world economy today, and then learn the various ways of drying, roasting, and brewing. We give a certificate at the end of the course.

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Lastly, we do 9 months internships. These are very intense. The participants have to spend at least 1,200 hours on the job, do research, and learn all they can about coffee.

What about the lay person who just visits your coffee shop and has no idea what coffee to order?

We sell small 100 grams packets and we have published video tutorials on YouTube on how to brew each coffee variety. This has turned out to be very popular, and has also created an engagement with Marc's Coffees and Auroville.

How many coffee varieties do you have?

Fourteen, each with its own distinct flavor. We categorize them by roast profile as customer preferences range from light, medium, to dark roast. We also have a section of international coffees in limited quantities for those connoisseurs looking for something unique and exclusive. We are roasting high-quality low-volume coffee for those



Marc and Matilde

who appreciate buying coffee roasted in small batches, by someone that you can reach and talk about it. Engaging personally with customers is the best way to connect with them and experience the coffee in its setting, and Marc's Cafe has been the best marketing for us.

Marc's Café recently moved to a large location.

We are very happy with our new establishment, which has become a place for people to come together in a quiet quality atmosphere. Many of the eateries along the Kuilapalayam-Auroville road are purely commercial; they want to catch the tourists and earn money. We offer a place where really good conversations can happen, where many interesting people, including artists, writers and scientists, can come and interact while enjoying an excellent cup of coffee.

But the seating capacity is limited. I would like to expand to a larger place with an indoor and outdoor location, a garden area and a large parking. Felicity could be such a place. That's a dream I have, and I have asked Auroville to allocate part of that area to me. If it doesn't happen, I might find other possibilities outside Auroville, as I have a lot of invitations for collaboration.

Rumour has it that you have started a franchise in New Delhi.

That's incorrect. We have started a collaboration with Fig, a high-end restaurant in Malcha Marg in the diplomatic enclave in New Delhi. This means that our coffee varieties, logo and brand name feature on their menu and we sell them our coffees. This place is frequented by all kinds of diplomats and I have already got enquiries and visits from people who have been there. We have started a similar collaboration with Hotel de L'Europe in Pondicherry and are looking to collaborate with other high-end restaurateurs. But there won't be a second Marc's Cafe – this will remain the name of our home base in Kuilapalayam.

Have recent actions of the Foundation office affected your business?

No, not really. Marc's Cafe was also subjected to a special audit, and for a few weeks a number of auditors came and checked my accounts. But they never came back with any findings, which I regret as I am actually very keen to know if they found anything objectionable. If so, I would be the first one to rectify it. For I came to Auroville following a very strong call, and that call is still very much alive. That hasn't changed because of the difficulties Auroville is experiencing today. I plan to grow and expand my business. That might change if there would be interference in my work. But until that time, I do not want to anticipate and waste my time on 'what if' scenarios.

In conversation with Carel



Marc's Café verandah seating



At the counter of Marc's Café

Where do you buy your coffee?

I purchase coffee from all over India, from Orissa to Kerala. But before buying, I visit the coffee plantation. I look at the fruits, I smell the earth, I see if the coffee is grown in the shade or in the open, I discuss with the planter if he has been using herbicides, fungicides or pesticides, I check how he treats his employees and I try to get an idea of the motivation of the planter: is he growing coffee because it is an amazing product and is he willing to go the extra mile to improve it, or has he inherited the farm from his grandfather and has continued without much interest. If this is all ok, I take samples of the

Is coffee cultivation in the Auroville area feasible?

It's already being done! In the 1980s, someone planted coffee in Revelation under a mango tree. I have been observing the plants over the years and last year we did a test: we harvested, dried and peeled the beans, then roasted them and made coffee. To everybody's surprise, it was exceedingly good coffee. All my assumptions that coffee grown at sea level would never taste well proved wrong. As I was afraid that I might be biased, I gave the coffee to many people, who all agreed it was a fantastic brew. I started wondering if this was the effect

The trials of an Auroville entrepreneur

Daniel Emdin first came to live in Auroville in 1977, after a career as a radio journalist and an art dealer in Paris and as a pizzeria manager in Italy. He left in 1981, did “a number of other jobs” and returned for good in 2004, then got involved in many working groups. Today he is known as one of Auroville’s most successful entrepreneurs. He runs four ‘Tanto’ (meaning ‘abundance’) restaurants, known for their high quality Italian food, also a laundry service and, together with his wife Sheril, takes care of the Sri Ma beach retreat.

“Ours is selfless service,” says Daniel. “We don’t need to do this work. But it’s our contribution to Auroville.” Every morning he buys fish at the beach, then till late evening supervises the Tanto restaurants and the retreat workers. “I have a money-making capacity which I have been happy to use for Auroville. Over the years, we’ve given a lot to the community, one year even 120% of our profits, using our reserves.”

But lately, much of the fun has gone. “I am not so happy anymore. For I am treated like a criminal.” Daniel refers to the 4-months special audit, ordered by the Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation, which came on top of the normal 2-months audit. “The auditors were very professional, that’s not the issue. It was actually a pleasure to work with them. But I am upset that Tanto and some of the other units which always have been making substantial contributions to Auroville were selected for that special audit and not any of the myriad units that only pay a minimal contribution. It shows

suspicion that an executive of a well-run unit would be hiding income or doing bad business. Given the apparently negative attitude of some of the Board’s members towards Auroville, I wonder if they were expecting to find fault.” Did the auditors find anything objectionable? “They found nothing, apart from the fact that some invoices from 2019 got lost. We had paid the bills by NEFT, but we – or rather my accountant – had lost the physical copies. It was a colossal waste of time and it eroded my joy of doing the work. I, as entrepreneur, need optimism and steadiness, otherwise I close down. I certainly do not need six months of mistrust.”

“You also need appreciation,” adds Sheril. “It would be so nice if every now and then we would get something positive, a note of thanks, a smile for good work done, anything. Instead, we get a lot of flak and criticism, including that special audit. It is not that we ask for gratitude, but a sincere ‘thank you’ would help. We are used to negativity, even to jealousy. We see that also here in the retreat. The happy guys do not post their appreciation on the net, but those who find fault immediately do so. That’s really not encouraging.”

Ranked among the best

Despite such criticism, Tanto and the Sri Ma beach retreat remain ranked near the top of the list of eateries and places to stay in Auroville and Pondicherry. “Tanto Kuilapalayam is the oldest and first pizzeria in India,” says Daniel. “We started in late 2007 and we have since served more than a million customers.” Yet, the location is not ideal. There is no place to seat more clients and the kitchen and the storeroom are too small. “I would love to move,” he says. “There is a 5-acre area on the Bommayapalayam road, which once was a farm but is no longer used as

such. That place would be ideal, also as it will divert a lot of traffic and has sufficient parking space.”

He refers to the traffic jams on the Kuilapalayam - Auroville road where Tanto Kuilapalayam is located, which are now a regular occurrence. Many eateries have sprung up along this entrance to Auroville, and the other entrance through Edayanchavadi. “Today there are 50 or 60 pizzerias along these roads. Most of them were started by people who worked for us in the past,” says Daniel. Does the competition affect Tanto? “There are so many people nowadays visiting Auroville that it actually doesn’t.”

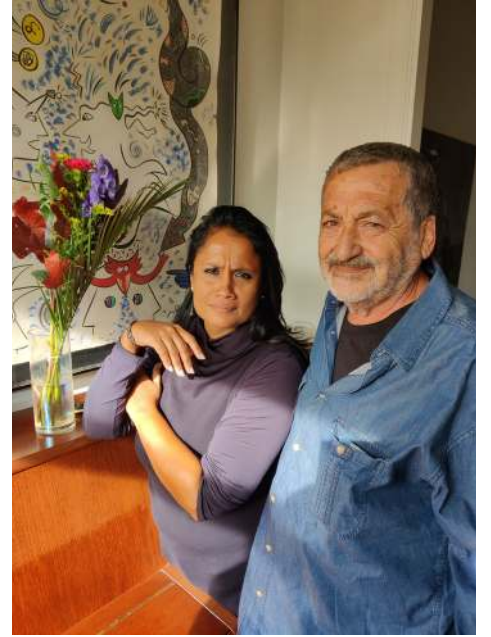
Increasing demand was the reason for Daniel to start four more restaurants: one on the East Coast Road (ECR), one in the Sri Ma beach resort, one in Pondicherry and one in the Auromode building complex. The ECR Tanto recently closed as the widening of the ECR destroyed its wastewater treatment plant and ruined the atmosphere of the place. Daniel is also considering closing the Pondy pizzeria or moving it elsewhere, as the location is not ideal. “The Auromode Tanto is intended for Aurovilians and their guests,” he says. “There we do not intend to make a profit, we are happy to break even. The main money-makers are the Kuyilapalayam Tanto and the Sri Ma resort.”

Entrepreneurial stagnation

But apart from Tanto and a handful of other units, there is not much development in Auroville’s entrepreneurial sector. “We do not have a favourable climate to run a business,” says Daniel. “Firstly, you need a lot of energy, and not many people are willing to work 12-14 hours a day. Then there is the present-day climate of mistrust and control, which makes all of us unsure of what will happen tomorrow and how it might affect our business. Lastly, the ideal of helping Auroville to develop, and the spirit of generosity which many long-term Aurovilians brought to Auroville, seem to have disappeared. We have hundreds of small businesses, but many if not most only contribute the minimum and quite a few use the rest of the profits for the needs of their family – housing, children’s education and the like. Some Aurovilians even operate two units: one inside and one outside Auroville, so you know where the profits are made. And if someone comes to start a new business, the starting capital is no longer donated but is given as a loan, so that they can get their money back if something goes wrong. In the early days, people just gave. The atmosphere has changed.”

Community support is necessary

Daniel believes that the community should start actively supporting Auroville business. “A think tank needs to be set up to decide what needs to be improved and how best to promote business”. As a first step, he would like to see



Sheril and Daniel

more transparency. “At present, hardly anyone knows how Auroville businesses are doing. In the early days I published a yearly resumé of Tanto, a brief report on what we had been doing. It was appreciated, but as I got more work it got forgotten. I think that the community would feel more connected to Auroville business and be more inclined to help promote it if each unit would publish a simple summary of the year, what worked and what didn’t.”

Next to transparency, there is a need to provide for more professional accounting services and for legal and financial support. Could Auroville units that have large deposits finance units that need start-up or development capital? “That’s one of the many issues we have to decide together,” says Daniel. “And we also have to look at the logic of having so many separate small business units that are active in the same area. Could they be fused?”

Ageing

Daniel then lists another problem, that of aging and succession. “Quite a few of Auroville’s early entrepreneurs are getting on in years. I am 75, and my age is catching up. To run a restaurant, you need lots of energy and you have to be always present. Tanto Kuilapalayam often serves 700 clients a day! That’s heavy, not only for me but for all who work there. The Auroville students and the other workers I employ are usually exhausted at the end of the day, and that goes for me as well. So I’ve put out an advertisement asking for eight people living in Auroville to do my job. I got only one answer, of a person who is unsuitable. Do I have to hire people from outside?”

While the question remains unanswered, Daniel continues ‘as usual’.

In conversation with Carel



It is always busy at Kuyilapalayam Tanto

INTERNAL ADMINISTRATION

The last room

Peter reflects on many months of keeping the council office in the Town Hall available for the Auroville Council.

On July 1st the Foundation Office’s newly appointed members of the Town Hall management, ACUR, issued an order that the Auroville Council was to vacate its office with 24 hours notice. Since then, the office has been attended permanently by a minimum of two volunteers with the intention of preserving its usage for the Council and the Residents Assembly. It’s a smallish meeting room on the first floor of the Town Hall, dominated by a large table and an overhead projector, above the Financial Service with a balcony directly facing the Matrimandir. Since July 1st over a hundred people have volunteered thousands of hours there.

As so frequently happens in Auroville, it’s when things are challenging that the best comes out of the community. So much goodwill, creativity and community building has emerged to support the room’s continuation as a Residents Assembly venue. As an occasional volunteer I’ve got to meet Aurovilians I didn’t know, and felt enriched by who I encountered there. Always visible is the golden view of the Matrimandir, shining in sun or moonlight, and inspiring conversations to reflect soulfully into what’s going on in Auroville, from the practical to the esoteric.

Three different community restaurants offer free meals for those who are there during meal times. When the air

conditioning was cut off by the Town Hall management a pukka magnetic mosquito net was quickly installed at the outside doorway. A ‘chi’ machine – a kind of massaging tool – was gifted and games are played with a scrabble and rummy set with a never-ending supply of coffee and occasional biscuits. Weekly pot lucks are combined with video showings, and also ‘Flow games’ are offered.



Diwali celebration outside the Council Office.

Two mattresses and tents were donated for those sleeping over and are rolled out and then up again every evening and morning. What was a rather unassuming functional room in a Town Hall has now become a colourful site of creative presence, with ‘peace’ prayer flags inside and often people sitting outside observing the Matrimandir discs.

Three times there have been attempted take-overs of the room, once regrettably with force, but months later the office with its constant presence keepers has remained in the hands of the Auroville Council. Thousands of hours, organized via a google calendar, have been spent there, including sleeping overnight during the heat of the summer. Diwali was celebrated there with chanting and with candles in the shape of Auroville’s symbol.

Recently, when discussing whether to continue this presence keeping, the Working Committee of the Residents Assembly urged the community to continue holding it as the last symbolic room of the Residents Assembly in the Town Hall. Symbolic too, is the closeness of the Council room to the Foundation Working Committee meeting placed directly across from each other. Hopefully the day will come when that divide will disappear as quickly as it appeared.

Peter

The Chairman visits Auroville

The Hon'ble Governor of Tamil Nadu and Chairman of the Governing Board, Shri R N Ravi, visited Auroville on 18th and 19th of October, 2022. He was welcomed by the Collector, Mr D Mohan of Villupuram. Along with the Secretary, Dr Jayanti Ravi and a few members of the Foundation supported Working Committee, he met Aurovilians at their places of work and interacted with them.

For the first time, the Working Committee selected by the Residents' Assembly also had a 2-hour meeting with him. In this meeting, the RA Working Committee presented some of Auroville's efforts over the past decade towards developing the city, emphasizing the fact that while there is still a lot to do, much has already been done and expertise is largely present within the community. They also spoke about the current state of affairs, insisting that for a positive way forward to be found, people need to feel secure and the current state of fear needs to come to an end. Specifically this would involve recognising and respecting the Residents' Assembly and its committees, stopping the culture of intimidation and coercion, restoring all community platforms for information sharing and communication, and including Auroville experts and community in planning processes.

The Chairman listened with focus and attention, asked questions throughout and shared his views on several aspects of Auroville, its current reality and its aim of being a gnostic and spiritualised society.

The RA Working Committee felt this was an important first step in establishing contact with the Governing Board through its Chairman, and hope that it will open the way to a better understanding of the residents' perspective.

Visit of Union Minister of Education

On 2nd October, Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan visited Auroville. The Minister met only with the Secretary of the Auroville Foundation and Foundation endorsed working groups. Each group presented short overviews of their work and the help that was needed, both financial and practical, to complete the infrastructure for the city and other issues.

His response was positive. The Auroville Foundation reported that he had “assured the Auroville Foundation of the Government of India’s support to expedite the development of pending works and completing the Auroville project as per the original vision of its founder, The Mother”.

General Meeting of RA working groups

The four main working groups of the Residents' Assembly (Working Committee, Auroville Council, Town Development Council, and the Funds and Assets Management Committee selected by the Residents' Assembly) met with residents at a well attended meeting on 17th October to update them on the current situation and their work, and to answer questions.

Register of Residents survey

On September 28th, the Foundation appointed Working Committee announced that a house-to-house survey of Auroville would take place over the following two weeks. They explained that the survey was necessary for the update of the Register of Residents, and for updating information held by the Bommayapalayam panchayat for house tax purposes. The RA appointed Working Committee contested that a house-to-house survey was necessary for the latter purpose.

So far, teams have visited a number of communities. In many cases, information about the house itself was not sought or given, but only personal identification (such as passport/aadhar card/place of work) was requested.

Ami/Evergreen contested land

The case around the Ami/Abri/Evergreen contested was listed in Court on Thursday, 20th of October. The judgment is expected to be given on the 2nd of November. In the meantime, Friend of Auroville Michael Bonke, whose land is opposite Evergreen and a portion of which has also been claimed by the local businessman, had his documents updated and clarified. This has a positive impact on the Auroville land under contention at Ami/Abri/Evergreen. However, the community has to await the outcome of the full course of justice before any changes can be made on the ground, and the current status quo that no work can be carried out in the disputed area until the court order continues.

Letters of recommendation / visa update

A small group of people have been given letters or recommendation for very short time periods (for example, 3 months instead of 5 years) seemingly for holding opposing views to the Foundation Office. In several instances, family members of those expressing disagreement with the Office have also been targeted. Since the Auroville Visa Policy as published by the Ministry of Home Affairs does not provide for 3-month visa extensions, these visas could not be processed and some Aurovilians have been forced to leave on Exit Visas.

A much larger group of people have been given one year letters instead of the expected five years. In most cases, the letters of recommendation are given just a few days ahead of the visa expiring, in spite of the required paperwork being handed in several months in advance. In other cases the visas expired months before, and the residents are still awaiting their letter of recommendations without news.

This has created fear and uncertainty amongst the section of the community reliant on visas to stay in Auroville. Travel plans cannot be made with any clarity as it is not known when the letter and therefore the subsequent visa will arrive. Additionally, one year visas are over time significantly more costly than five year visas, creating a new financial pressure. These practices have upended several decades of visa stability for foreign Aurovilians, stability essential for building the international community as envisioned by Sri Aurobindo and The Mother.

BCC loses control of Auroville's finances

On 14th October, the RA Budget Coordination Committee (BCC) announced that they “no longer have any control or oversight over Auroville’s City Services budget” as their access to the Financial Services has been removed. They explained that they are no longer able to access Auroville Service accounts or execute transfers for both services or individuals (for visa and passport refunds, for example). This could have very concerning consequences for the financial stability of the Auroville community, as full control of the budgetary system is now in the hands of a small group of inexperienced people.

The Foundation FAMC responded that over the last several months they had invited former BCC members to collaborate and work together to prepare an annual work plan, streamline budget collection for timely submissions, and submit budget details for a joint review on priorities for more productive and effective services support with proper accountability and transparency.

“As it became clear that no cooperation was forthcoming, the (Foundation) FAMC has restructured the role of BCC and new modalities are being framed. New team members are brought into play for a transition to the changed needs of Auroville.”

The RA BCC pointed out that, in fact, they had completed a new services budget but did not know if it would be implemented. They also called on the community to financially support Aurovilians who have been placed on bridging maintenances by the Foundation appointed FAMC. After December they will no longer receive any support from the City Services Fund. To date, 20 people have been placed on a 3-month bridging maintenance. Most of the affected people are actively working full time for the RA-endorsed working groups.

Stop cash payments

The Foundation FAMC has announced that all units, services, activities have to stop receiving cash payment. Blue book or digital payments are the two modalities that have to be adopted now.

Beyond mandate?

The RA approved Housing Board has also been removed from their positions, and have been locked out of the Housing Google accounts as well as the Housing Service office. They are concerned that the new group largely lack experience and is overstepping its mandate by allocating Auroville assets without following the guidelines of the Housing Policy.

The RA approved Housing Board, like other RA approved groups removed by Office Orders, say they are continuing to serve the community to the best of their ability. However, they understand that it is not possible to ask the community not to approach the new team as

many day-to-day issues are urgent and have to be dealt with. But they advise the community to approach them with care and ask for all decisions to be given in writing.

House-sitting changes

The Foundation appointed Housing Service announced that from now on house sitting arrangements will be made exclusively between Aurovilians-Aurovilians and Aurovilians-newcomers. SAVI volunteers it will no longer be possible to take advantage of this opportunity.

New development plans

The Foundation appointed TDC/L’Avenir announced they are in the process of designing the new Sunshine Housing Project, a low-density project in the Gaia/Grace area, and invited people to apply to join the project. They also announced the start of a new collective project “Food court and market plaza” at the Southern Secondary Service Node (near Gas Service). Food courts, markets, information kiosk, public toilets, children’s play area etc are being planned. A number of Auroville units are interested in participating. A mobility plan is being put in place and a petrol vehicle parking node is also being planned here with a possibility to switch over to e-vehicles within the same node.

In addition, they reported they have completed the base draft guidelines for certain areas, like the Crown and Crown buildings, the Line of Goodwill in sector 5, and development of collective transport, cycle and walking paths in the parks and within the City Centre, and are working on Detailed Development Plans with the help of CPWD’s architecture and engineering team.

They also said they are working with the Working Committee and the FAMC to make big systemic shifts wherever needed for Auroville to move to its next stage in its collective life. Stewardship models are being revisited, feedback processes are being redefined, and building violations are no longer just accepted as an unavoidable part of a city with no enforcement power, but are being dealt with systematically.

Imbalance?

In their September report the Foundation appointed FAMC stated that they wished to address a perceived “systemic fault and ... imbalance towards the building of the City the Earth Needs” which, they claim, exists because forests and farms receive a higher number of maintenances than the ATDC. They stated that “the current imbalance is heavily loaded against development in general in the city center of the Master Plan”. The Forest Group as well as a member of the RA Working Committee contested this statement, pointing out that a great deal of additional money beyond the maintenances of the FAMC members is allocated to city development, and that, anyway, the development of the Green Belt and the parks is an integral aspect of the overall city. Furthermore, the Forest group stated that “nobody in the Forest Group is against development and the persistent narrative that greenwork is by its nature anti-development is incorrect and misleading”.

The Foundation appointed FAMC have also announced they are in the process of consolidating GST submission across all units and services registered with Auroville Foundation, and requests all units and services executives to keep in mind the new changes for GST filing.

In their September report, this FAMC clarified that the FAMC has been set up in the Foundation Act to coordinate the funds and assets of Auroville held in trust for all. “In view of this, the thrust of FAMC is to move forward on compliance, accountability and transparency in all areas pertaining to funds, assets, utilization and coordination with necessary human resources for the best results. Without cooperation, all new and ongoing work cannot progress with harmony and progress stalls for Auroville as a whole.”

Crown Road work restarted

The Foundation appointed FAMC explained that the Crown work continues under the supervision of CPWD and L’avenir d’Auroville, and is planned to be finished as per schedule. The road re-laying work has restarted on the stretch of road passing by the Youth Centre where the old paving blocks were taken up. The reason for a delay in the work is that L’Avenir d’Auroville and CPWD decided to go for a precast concrete road to ensure it will last much longer, with

almost zero maintenance. The Foundation FAMC claims this has resulted in a better design than before, both technically and aesthetically. The installation of these much larger pre-cast panels will go faster than the laying of the originally intended pavers, thus making up for any lost time.

Clearing of cycle paths

On 30th September and 1st October, a JCB accompanied by an engineer from the Central Public Works Department (CPWD) and a survey team started clearing a 2.5m wide path between the trees through Existence forest towards Bliss forest. This bulldozing of understory forest regeneration is the first step in creating cycle paths that have been proposed by Dr Anupama Kundoo, and is being implemented by the CPWD on instructions from the Auroville Foundation Office (AVFO) Secretary. Neither the stewards nor the Forest Group had been informed.

Residents showed up on site, with RA TDC members questioning the clearing since the National Green Tribunal order clearly states that Environmental Clearance and Detailed Development Plans need to be ready before any development can take place, including right of ways.

The ATDC appointed by the Office of the Secretary responded to this intervention by announcing that the work is in required compliance, and that “It’s a legal offense to obstruct this work in progress. Anyone obstructing this work is doing so at their own risk and necessary actions may be initiated with the videos and photos of the people involved”.

Varuna to adjust electricity scheme

The Tamil Nadu Electricity Board has increased rates for almost all services provided to its various subscribers. The increase ranges from a few percent to over 50% for certain categories.

As the income of Varuna remains unchanged, it has become unavoidable to make adjustments to the Varuna electricity scheme. Consequently, the monthly free allowance to residents on both the high tension and low tension supply in the city has been reduced by 10%.

PTPS transition completed

On 7th October Pour Tous Purchasing Service completed a year of transitioning to becoming an Auroville service. This was the consequence of an RAD decision taken in 2019 by a majority vote to make PTPS a service managed by a management board and new executives. The management invited the community to an opening community market on 29th October to participate in the festive re-opening in Kuilapalayam.

Dreamweaving movie and discussion

On 1st October the Dreamweaving team invited the community for a documentary screening and panel discussion on the recent ‘Dreamweaving the Crown’. At the conclusion, the Auroville Community Gathering Team, which had organized the event, invited the community to sign a letter of support for the process, stating that “we hope that this process can be used in further planning and implementation of the Crown in Auroville”.

New degree course offered

The Auroville Institute of Applied Technology at Aurobrindavan campus is now taking admission of students who have passed 10+2 or equivalent for its Bachelor degree courses (B.Voc.) in Software Development & Machine learning, Production technology, Green Energy and Electric Systems. The B.Voc. courses are affiliated to Pondicherry University, and are more skill-oriented than the regular B.Tec. or B.E courses.

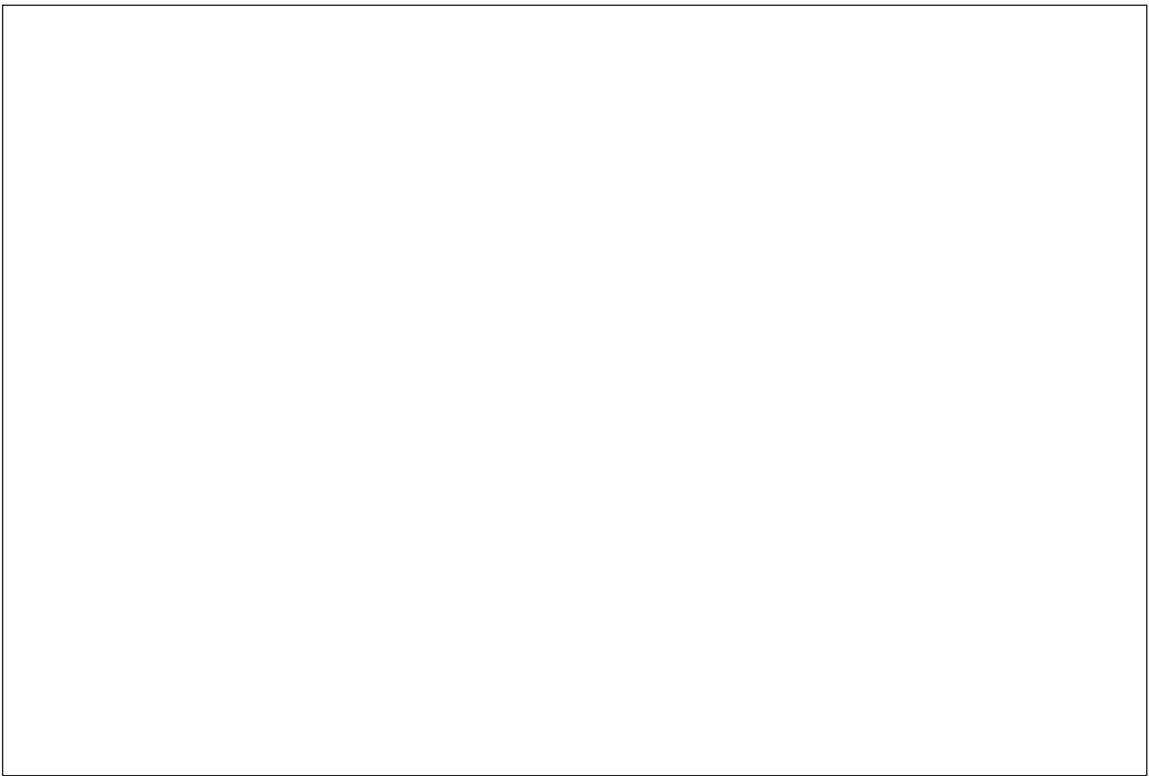
YouthLink offers tech help

YouthLink are aware of how difficult it can be to keep up with the ever growing world of technology. Consequently, they are offering house visits to the elderly to help solve their tech issues.

Auroville at the Lisbon Triennale

The Auroville project, the city designed by Roger Anger, occupies the first room of the “Visionaries” exhibition at the Lisbon Triennale. It includes a rich corpus of drawings, photos, and films of different stages of its conception and manifestation, and highlights the experimental dimension of this adventure.

Presence and Flow



In mid October, Aurovilian Frederic Martin Duchamp presented ‘Presence and Flow’, an exhibition of photographs from different parts of the world at the Centre d’Art in Citadines.

For him, ‘presence and flow are deeply rooted in the act of dance. This exhibition wants to be a celebration of these states of Being that we all can experience through movement and music.’

The exhibition consisted entirely of Frederic’s signature black and white shots of dancers caught in intimate, quintessential moments of their art. Each photo seemed iconic and alive with the dynamism and presence captured from an ephemeral moment or detail that would escape the naked eye, especially in the context of the action of a dance.

The rooms felt richly filled with the monochrome prints, while simultaneously giving the impression of ample distance and space between every piece on the gallery walls.

Although the images were captured in different countries and at different times, there was a palpable synergetic thread that brought all of the cultures represented together. This coming together may be explained by the linking thread of the gypsy route. Starting from India, to Persia, to Spain and beyond, the movements and expressions of all these dancers seemed to move to the same beat within these gallery walls. Faces from a variety of ethnicities and cultures are all depicted engrossed in the bliss of their art, often with eyes closed, a subtle inner smile on lips, and ecstatically flung limbs accompanied by flying hair.

After first being greeted by half blurry arms thrust in the air with Flamenco passion, there followed Persian swirling dancers, Rajasthani Kathak dancers, Bharatnatyam scenes, and other perhaps lesser known styles, such as the Odisha Afro-Cuban dance.



Certain photos showed larger scenes, such as a crowded stage of dancers moving in unison, an impression that was then juxtaposed by the next photo with a zoomed-in perspective, showing just a detail, such as the shaking bell-anklets of an Indian dancer.

The stunning centrepiece that undoubtedly stole the show was a shot of a Terukkuttu Tamil street theatre performer. The photo captured him gripping a sword, mid spin in a warrior-like stance, with an extremely still fierce face, sharply caught by the photo in all of its detail. The contrasting blurry swirl of skirt costumes caught afloat in a flurry around him gave the idea of an oil painting, and then the whole image was grounded again with the dancer’s foot firmly planted on the floor, in sharp photographic detail once again. To see both such visual clarity and blurriness in one photo, playing so harmoniously and astonishingly together, was truly breathtaking.

This massive image covered the length of the glass wall, and was printed on a transparent film, so that the silhouette of the dancer became translucent and the light from outside the gallery lit him up, giving a ‘presence’ to the piece.

Frederic was happy to share about his passion and admiration for all of the dance forms he has encountered on his path, and spoke knowledgeably about the history, evolution, and context of some of the lesser known forms (such as Terukkuttu and Odisha).

Although he is a skilled photographer with many years of experience, he says he is still a beginner in photography, and that he is ‘in the exploration and the fascination of the ‘Critical Moment’ of Henri Cartier Bresson, the Stillpoint, the Thehrav (Hindi for ‘still-point’) moment, expressed as witnessing an event that is ephemeral and spontaneous, where the image represents the essence of the event itself.’

And that is exactly what comes through every photo.

Chandra

Unexpected

On the 25th of August, Charles Zanon opened his sculpture exhibition ‘Unexpected’, at the Auroville Botanical Gardens, where he showcased a collection of pieces in black granite that he had been working on over the past year.

Charles’s background is widely eclectic and includes sculpture, but it was only after moving to Auroville that he started dedicating himself full time to this passion of his, or as he puts it, to the only thing that truly moves him creatively and makes sense to him at the moment, that which gives him the motivation and willpower to get up in the morning.

His journey working with the local black granite started a year ago. In the past, he worked with the classic white European marble, and he initially thought that changing to black granite would be a challenge because of its more dense tonality, but as he discovered this new medium, he found the experience wonderful and enriching, opening up a whole new realm of possibilities.

During the summer months, regardless of the extreme heat, he worked all day, every day to finish his creations, in spite of the sweat, dust and occasional pieces of granite sand getting stuck in his eyes. He was the first one to arrive at the workshop in the early mornings, and he says he did not even notice the heat or the physical fatigue, as if his efforts were carried by a creative muse.

For Charles, the process of creating a sculpture is a spiritual exploration of giving a concrete shape and bringing into matter something vast and impalpable, sourced from immaterial realms, from dimensions beyond space and time. He feels that taking inspiration from inner visions and shaping them abstractly into something so concretely rooted in matter such as stone, is the essence of the artist’s exploration.

The outcome of his year of work was a dozen large, abstract statues, arranged near the centre of the Botanical Gardens. As one walks around one statue, it seems to fluidly morph into astonishingly different shapes. Different elements seem to play with the static stone and breathe life and movement into the sculptures. The contours seem to take on different shapes from different angles and distances, and the finishings of the stone, from the perfect black smooth polish to the matt grey, play exquisitely with the light and shadows cast on the pieces by the natural surroundings.

Sometimes, Charles says, a certain magic from a more subtle realm seems to inhabit and shape some of his sculptures, and although he says that it is all still a work in progress, this makes it all worth it.

Chandra

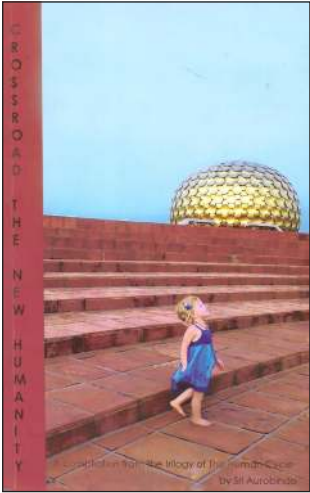


BOOK REVIEW

‘Crossroad: A New Humanity’

Paulette has published an interesting new compilation in celebration of Sri Aurobindo’s 150th birth anniversary. ‘Crossroad: A New Humanity’ contains extracts from “The Human Cycle”, “The Ideal of Human Unity” and “War and Self Determination”.

After examining the transition from the infrarational to rational, subjective and, ultimately, the spiritual age, along with the corresponding societal changes, the focus



shifts to Sri Aurobindo’s research on the nation and group-soul, and a World Union of all the people, concluding with what Sri Aurobindo called the need for a ‘Religion of Humanity’ and the dawning of the spiritual age.

The compilation also includes photos of Ashram sadhaks and Auroville pioneers, as well as drawings by masters of the Italian Renaissance.

The compilation is very timely as it reminds us, at a difficult moment, of the larger

context of evolution, and that inner change, and not any form of social engineering, is the essential precondition of spiritual progress. “For it means that no machinery invented by the reason can perfect either the individual or the collective man; an inner change is needed in human nature...”

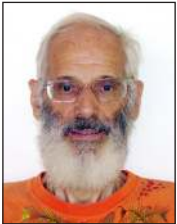
‘Crossroad: A New Humanity’ 1st edition 15th August, 2022. Published by PRISMA. Rs. 250 from Auroville outlets, SABDA and auroville.com

Francis Malan

Francis Malan of Citadines peacefully left his body in the morning of Wednesday 5 October while listening to ‘A New Birth’, told by the Mother. He was sitting outside on the terrace looking out over the garden of Marika’s Home where he had been taken several days ago after suffering a stroke. He was 81.

Hailing from France, Francis was visiting Auroville since 2006 and made it his home in 2009, officially joining in 2011. He was always happy to help in many ways: teaching French and mathematics, supporting educational projects and his many friends. He particularly loved the Matrimandir where he spent many hours on duty, meditating or walking. Until very recently, he would go every morning to watch the sunrise at the Amphitheatre and in the evening to see the sunset there as well.

Francis’s body remained in Farewell during the week and was cremated at the Auroville mandapam on Monday October 10th.



PASSING

Building a 'New Earth'

Every so often a story comes along that captures the spirit of Auroville in a unique way, bringing to light aspects of its deeper purpose of transforming the world we live in to create a spiritualized life on our planet. 'New Earth' is one such story, captured in a colourful coffee table book with hundreds of vivid flower mandala images accompanied by a few short texts. Conceived and photographed by Avigal Lemberger, the book is intended as a meditative opening to the language and significance of flowers and mandalas.

The New Earth story started on October 13, 1972 when Auroculture brought an all-flower compost to The Mother who "put her lovely hands on it and meditated on it." This original batch has been constantly added to, and taken from, in a homeopathic manner, so that a direct link back to Mother's first touch and concentration remains. Before her passing, Auroculture designated Avigal to follow in her footsteps with the work of creating this 'New Earth'.

The gathering of fallen flowers for composting has continued since on a daily basis. In addition to collecting from the Matrimandir's garden, every Sunday at 4am the team heads early to the Samadhi in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram to pick up those flowers which will not be reused or given as *prasad* (blessing) and bring them back to Auroville.

The harvested flowers offer a last flourish of their beauty and vibrations in daily and uniquely created mandalas before they become part of the alchemical New Earth. It is these fleeting images which are so vibrantly captured in this book. Sometimes the colours and shapes that are chosen later reveal deeper meanings and synchronicities, one example being the Indian national colours of orange, green and white emerging in one mandala only for the creators to later realize it was Indian Republic day.

Mother attributed a profound spiritual significance to flowers and named plants to indicate the inner attributes they bring. In response to a question of whether flowers kept

their force after decaying Mother replied:

"Perhaps it brings energy to the soil, that's quite possible; but still, when it decays it is good only to make manure to grow other flowers. But if it dries up, it is preserved, it can remain for quite a long time".

CWM Vol 6., p 231.

Auroculture was convinced that the vibrational work with flowers had a power to affect not just Auroville but also the world. She wrote, "Through observations it has been seen that the manifestation of a higher consciousness in matter through plants is not only a possibility but a reality. Mother has given to us a whole book full of vibrations She has identified while meditating with flowers. She has very much used flowers for Her Divine Work and also to change circumstances and happening.

"In the many years of collecting tons of flowers and making earth out of them, it has been regularly observed that wherever these flowers were used new things manifested and there was

a change in the environment... Transformation flowers would change things and with Prosperity flowers abundance resulted... Plants that have been planted in this substance made from flowers and treated in a special way transfer their energy change of structure or consciousness to other plants of the same species... This work is very fascinating and if done more extensively will one day lead us to many still undreamed of possibilities."

Auroville has a history and ethos of working with nature to transform eroded land back to forest. This vibrational flower mandala offering, and the composting of those flowers, combined with the blessing that came through Mother's hands onto the soil, is a special addition to the Auroville story of working deeply with nature to transform the very earth we live and walk on.

Peter

For more information: newearth.org.in



Interview with Avigal, author of 'New Earth'

Auroville Today: Has the 'New Earth' been created daily since the 1970s?

Avigal: Yes – it started with Auroculture, who did it religiously every day. At first she didn't have a proper composting place in Auroville. Only in 1999 was she assigned a pukka place in the Matrimandir gardens. Auroculture was a special woman, a true sadhak. She was into earth making since the 1970s. For her it was more like 'let's make the earth'. For me, the form and shape are also crucial, and that resulted in flower mandalas.

Auroville Today: How did it come about that Auroculture designated you to become her successor?

It's a story of Grace. I visited India in 2001 before starting a PhD and immediately felt my spirit say "this is your home". I changed my doctoral thesis to the 'Future of Religion and Spirituality', spending months in different ashrams in India before I came to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram where I was suddenly mesmerised by everything. I realised I was not here to study intellectually, and started volunteering cleaning the flowers for the Samadhi and in time I began accompanying the Golden Chain group who came to work in the

Matrimandir gardens on alternate Sundays and so got to meet Auroculture.

Five years before Auroculture left her body, she had a stroke, but she was still lucid and looking for an Auroville newcomer to continue this work. I was asked if I could come and work there.

I had no intention to move to Auroville at that time, but was free from August, so I arrived as a volunteer and started work seven years ago. At first I thought it would take a few years to fully move here – my mother was still in her body – but it was offered to me so I took it. It was absolutely a Grace. So I came for the flowers, which are my anchor in Auroville. I feel it's much bigger than me and whatever is happening around us.

How was the book designed?

I worked with a wonderful graphic designer, Vivechana and with Dr. Vandana (the publisher) who makes flower remedies with Mother's flowers. I would sit at home and send a bunch of mandala pictures and Vivechana would intuitively know where to place them in the book. The words are not important - the mandalas speak for themselves, they don't need me to add anything, although for every mandala

there is a story. The quotations in the book would just come to me when I opened the computer and saw Mother and Sri Aurobindo's writings.

I do not want people to feel they have to read cover to cover, the purpose is to get a feel of it. At the end of the book are tiny mandalas, an endless world. We have a website where we post a daily mandala picture. They are evolving all the time. I really wish I could understand a fraction of it. I am there as a vessel and not so important in this process.

Can you elaborate on the power of flowers?

Open a little to a flower and you will get everything, the power is there. There is no need to say anything. The same goes for mandalas: they are not meant for the intellect. You can really feel vibrations through flowers, they are the subtle worlds coming to life and they make this energy very accessible. For this work of creating the New Earth, flowers are a great way to tap into the energy that is there.

One of my favourite quotes in the book is from Sri Aurobindo about how perfection and harmony are signs of the divine.

It is this bondage to a perpetual stamp of imperfection and disharmony that is the mark of

the undivine; a divine life on the contrary, even if progressing from the little to the more, would be at each stage harmonious in its principle and detail. It would be a secure ground upon which freedom and perfection could naturally flower or grow towards their highest stature, refine and expand into their most subtle opulence.

Sri Aurobindo, CWSA Vols 21-22, p 404

Do you see the 'New Earth' as a metaphor for the type of new world Auroville is wishing to create?

Yes, Auroculture used to say this. In the first batch she made, Mother concentrated on it and Auroculture felt that Mother put all the information she needed for the rest of her life into that earth. We always leave a little bit, to retain a culture from the beginning. Auroculture used to tell me that she had a voice in her head which said. "If you want a new body, you have to make New Earth." Auroculture wanted it to grow special food with its special vibration and Auroculture said when she fed it to spinach they had five times the normal size. It came to me that this New Earth has the quality of the biblical Garden of Eden, and how the Earth was supposed to be before we exploited it.

In conversation with Peter

About Auroville Today

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