

# Auroville Today

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## I love Auroville because...

While we project Auroville as an international township dedicated to human unity, in fact we do not know much about each other's lives and aspirations.

Take our young people, for example. It is often said that we need their fresh energy and ideas to unblock and give new direction to our 'fossilized' community processes.

Yet, many young Aurovilians leave the community for longer or shorter periods, or for ever. And even when they return they sometimes need to leave again. Why?

What does Auroville mean to these young people when they live elsewhere? Do they remain connected to Auroville? If so, how do they experience that connection?

While some feel the need to leave, other young Aurovilians have chosen to stay and participate in the unfolding of Auroville, with all its attendant joys and frustrations. What are their stories?

Finally, what about the youngsters who are still at school? What is it about Auroville that they feel drawn to?

In this issue young people speak for themselves. We start with anonymous essays by students of Future School on why they love Auroville.



Students and teachers of Future School learning to clown

**"I** love Auroville because it's my home. I love Auroville because of the freedom I have, because of the beautiful nature I am surrounded with every day, because of all the cultures and variety of people I am constantly exposed to, because of the wonderful school I go to, and all my amazing friends I have met here. I love the fact that we are like a community, and usually I feel very safe moving around, and everywhere I go, every time I drive or cycle around, I always end up passing people I know. I love the fact that in Auroville we like weird and try not to be caught up in the norms of society. I love the fact that as a little kid I constantly ran around naked as I saw no point in clothes, and growing up I was always barefoot. I love the fact that somehow it feels like you always have someone to turn to and you often are friends with and confide in a very vast and different crowd of people. Auroville is my home and I love it, there are many faults to it too but all in all I am so very grateful to have grown up here!"

"Auroville has frequently been labeled a 'Utopia'. I would say it is very close to that word indeed. When one enters Auroville's boundaries, such as Visitors' Center from the back highway, or the Kulapalayam main road, there is an immediate change in the energy of the surroundings and of the person. That energy gives me a 'settling' feeling. Everything seems to slow

down, take its time. Each tree leaps out with its green leaves coated with red dust. The trees welcome me like no one else can or does. The familiar dusty smell or the musty fragrance of the earth after a rain is simply wonderful. When coming back to a place like this generates so much warmth in me, I am reassured that Auroville is nothing other than my home. My life. My salvation. And I love this place with all my heart."

"I love Auroville because it's a place where I can feel freedom. For example, when I am somewhere else, people judge everything I do or what I wear and what I say. Here in Auroville there is not so much judgment; there still is some but in small proportion. I was also born here and Auroville is a home for me which I will always love."

"I love Auroville because there are people from all over the world. In whatever status they may be, when they come to Auroville, everyone has equal rights and respect. It is hard understanding other traditions and cultures, but slowly Auroville's people are knowing many cultures and languages also. It is so beautiful to see foreign girls or women wearing a saree on a Hindu auspicious day. And in the same way, Indian women wearing a kimono or dress gives a feeling that everyone is becoming one. There is so much real-life learning in Auroville. Not just books, but even beyond. There

are the most unique projects happening in Auroville: music, art dance, education, food, sports, clothing, dyes, jewelry and so many more! And the positive thing is that we are together, helping each other progress."

"Auroville is a fantastic place to live and especially to grow up in. You are constantly surrounded by lush nature where every tree, every puddle is a playground. To explore this multitude of playgrounds you have kids from all over the world, with all different cultures and backgrounds and languages, but when you are there, up to your ears in mud and leaves, none of that matters, you are simply too similar playing and having fun. Some people who don't grow up in a place like this have difficulty interacting with people from different cultures and backgrounds but here in Auroville it's second nature and I love it. As a teenager I really appreciate the freedom Auroville gives you because it makes you learn by yourselves, which is the best way I believe. Because of all this and more, I believe Auroville is great!"

"I love Auroville because it is different! Comparing to where I am from, Auroville is really an utopia. Everything is different, but mostly it is the energy. I can sense it, I could feel it from the very beginning when I first came here. All is so peaceful. I am still new in Auroville so I

remember well how it was living in [a European country] and I can say that there was not this kind of energy in the atmosphere around us. This energy effects people positively.

That is why I love Auroville: all is so positive, relaxing and joyful."

"I love Auroville because Auroville gives me a place and a time to find myself, to make myself clean, to make my inner self strong.

There is an energy, a force in Auroville. It makes people themselves; to go find themselves. People here know what is important for them, what is good for their selves. No one pushes them in the back or forces them to do it, but they want to find a higher meaning, a purpose, why they came to earth.

And to connect."

"I love Auroville because it's independent and different from any country in the world. Auroville is unique. In Auroville, I can go play basketball, badminton, and every other sport for free. In other places I would have to pay. In Auroville, I get free education, and the best education too. In Auroville, I get free lunch, in other places people don't even get food. In Auroville, I get free health care, other places I would have to pay before I can even see the doctor. In Auroville, everyone is like one big family, everyone knows everyone. Auroville is unique. Auroville is home. :)"

continued on page 2

- Young Aurovilians
- Ing-Marie
- Smiti
- Ashaman

pages 2 – 3

- Divya
- Mari
- Kavitha
- Manjula

pages 3 – 4

- Mira
- Aditi
- A question of economic equality

pages 4 – 5

- The Auroville website: a new way of communicating
- Passing: Dr. Kireet Joshi

pages 6 – 7

- Art Break Day 2014
- Creative Expressions from Auroville
- Transforming lives

page 8

Personal Copy 25 Oct 2014



# I love Auroville because...

continued from page 1

"I love Auroville because it gives me so many possibilities that I would not have in [a big city in Europe], my hometown. I have the best friends I could ever wish for, I am taking care of ten horses, I live in a house with a garden, I am in an amazing school, and with many benefits I would not have in [a big city in Europe]. But the thing Auroville has given me and changed most is me. Moving to Auroville really showed me that I can't say I don't like something if I don't try it out. It changed my view of the world, it made me curious, wanting to know what the rest of the world is. And also, I think I would have been a completely different person if I would have grown up in [a big city in Europe]. I think Auroville gave me the best childhood I could ever wish for."

"I love Auroville because it has so many great ideas in it. They may not be implemented perfectly but still there is such a potential for great things to happen. I love Auroville because even though it is small enough for me to know almost everyone there are so many cultures, languages and ideas. I really like the way that in a big city it doesn't matter how you look, what language you speak or what you are wearing, you fit in. Auroville is the same without feeling totally lost like you do in cities. I love the fact that in Auroville you can know so many people, to me it often feels like a lot of Aurovilians are a part of my family; though actually they probably are. I love the bit of India Auroville is in, it is so beautiful. I know we all moan about the heat but there is a beauty to the days when the air is full of dust motes, and the sun is so bright it appears to have bleached the color out of everything, but it is only that the sky is such a blue that everything else is dull in comparison. I also love the monsoon, the crash of thunder and the rush of raindrops, the smell of mud and

jasmine. Auroville is a dream pushed into reality so it is imperfect. However, we are all working towards an amazing dream."

"I love Auroville because it is such a free place and you really have a lot more say and choices than in any other place. I think it is especially great growing up here and having your childhood here because it is such a beautiful place and Auroville really looks after you and supports you. Even if it doesn't have much it still gives a lot. I really appreciate that Auroville is special because it is different, and in a lot of very good ways. Even the Aurovilians are different from the rest of the people and we have a unique way of thinking and showing things, and our lives are very diverse to most."

"I love Auroville because it is my home. I think it has been a great place to grow up, because our schools are amazing, the people here are mostly friendly, and there are so many opportunities here in Auroville that in other places you could not have, or would have to pay a lot of money for the possibility. I have no idea what I want to do in the future, but for now the idea of leaving hasn't even crossed my mind. The best and most memorable moments are here, and I don't feel it's over just yet."

"Auroville is special because it's a little town that has so many different nationalities of people living in it. Even though everyone was born in different places (unless you were born in Auroville), raised differently, they are still friends. Auroville doesn't discriminate between nationalities and it has one of the wonders of India: the Matrimandir.

I'm happy to have had the chance to be born and raised in such an amazing place."

"I love Auroville because it is a place created on the foundation of a common dream, a dream of human unity. I love Auroville because I think it's one of the best places to grow up. As a youth here, I am free and happy. I don't worry too much about material things and I have so many adventures. In Auroville I have made many friends who really understand me, and I have such a big family to love and support me. I love how in Auroville we are all unique and embrace that. I love that people of all ages spend time together and Auroville has a young spirit. We are somewhat like a big family and there is a lot of sharing of talent, performances and ideas. I love Auroville because there are so many different cultures and people are never one-dimensional. I think every Aurovilian has this little special piece of them they would not have if they didn't live here – it's a spark that sets us apart from the rest of the world."

"I love Auroville because it's a really different place to anything you will ever find in the world. First of all, everyone is equal, no one is criticized because of their color or religion or whatever, and the fact that we can all live together and learn from each other is really, really cool. Also, there are pretty much no rules in Auroville and we still manage to keep the place organized and safe, which is a really good thing. But it's not only that, it's also that everyone kind of knows each other here, and even if we don't we always say hi and smile, or whatever, and open up and still not feel judged. Also, it's kind of a place to chill because there isn't that stress of 'OMG I need to quickly go to work and there is

traffic' or whatever. And not much competition between people."

"I love Auroville because it's really international and many people from different countries come here. It is multi-cultural because so many different cultures are mixed together, and I find it creates a little bit of our own culture. I like the setting of Auroville – it's in a way in the middle of nowhere, but still in the middle of everywhere."

"I love Auroville because it's a really different society and kids are brought up in a different environment and are really free to make their own choices in life. And kids are not bullied to do what their parents, teachers or friends want them to do but can do what they want to do."

"Auroville is special because you feel special when you are in Auroville. You feel like you are part of something bigger than just plain, old, boring, MUNDANE life. Not to say certain days aren't boring or mundane here, but somehow I love the casual easy-going flow of the people here and how welcoming everyone is. But the most liberating of all the specialties of Auroville is that you are not put on a leash... you have a lot of freedom to experience and learn the way YOU want to. And I think the people, from different set-ups, different cultures, different societies, is what makes Auroville so unique. You have this huge, colorful cooking pot with so many different flavours... and I love that. No society is perfect, not even close. The most you can ask for is a society that suits you the best... Auroville is that society for me... Not too hot, not too cold... It's just right!"

## Leaving Auroville to be part of it

## Why am I in Auroville?



Ing-Marie

"I hear that you're leaving Auroville." The words stung more than I thought they would. Even after years of developing a thick skin and learning to shrug off Auroville gossip, somehow this statement still pinched. "I'm not leaving Auroville," I responded, "I'm just going out for a while."

Going out without wanting to, I thought to myself. My situation is perhaps like many others, who are drawn to Auroville but have external circumstances preventing their full participation. For me, it's student loans. Like so many American students who attended university, I have a hefty quantity of financial debt that tags along with me wherever I go, and is never far from my mind.

Taking full responsibility for the loans that I borrowed, I am working slowly to pay them back. But that work, by necessity, has been outside of Auroville as I cannot earn that kind of money here. There have been perks to working outside, such as being able to travel. Most significantly, I've come to recognize that I have skills that the outside world wants and is willing to pay for. Having a monetary value attached to my skills was a reassurance that I can survive outside of Auroville if I have to.

But that lesson was short lived. Now when I go out, I find myself longing for Auroville more than ever before.

People talk to me about my adventures, and I have a dull ache in my gut. The more I am outside, the more I become more convinced of the work of Auroville, and am eager to get home.

My circumstances have plunged me into a well of questioning, amplified by the collective psychology of our community. People ask me if I've asked The Mother for help. People tell me to have faith. People try to reassure me that Auroville is with me wherever I go. I question my own sincerity, and wonder whether Auroville is even my place.

There are many others in a similar situation, working hard on the outside to be able to come back in. I know people who are managing their student debt in all kinds of different ways, such as by refusing to pay, finding a programme to waive their loans after 10 years, or simply choosing to leave Auroville and find employment outside.

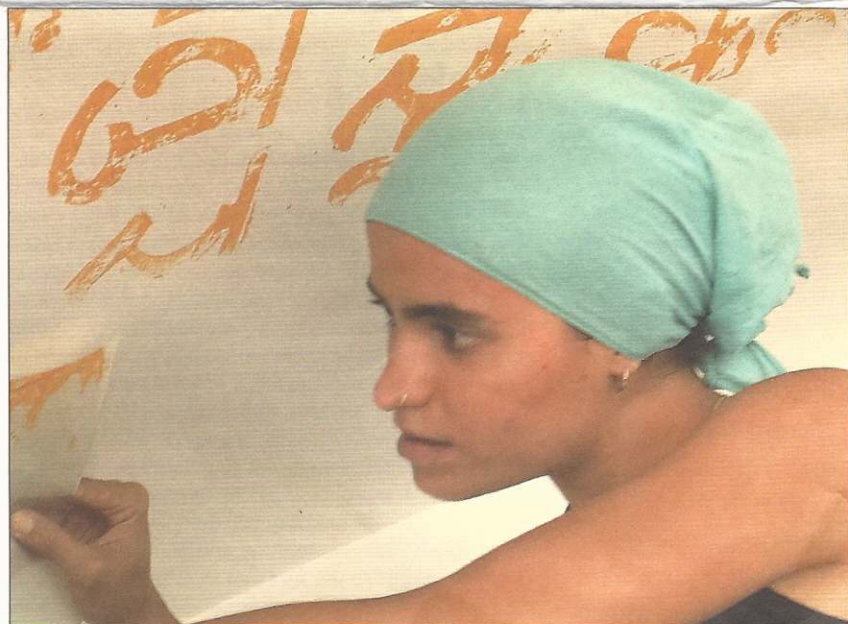
Can Auroville do anything to alleviate the situation? For those of us from the US, there is a federal program in which people working in the public service sector can become eligible for loan forgiveness. Unfortunately the work of Auroville isn't recognized within its scope. It might take years to get that approved, but some of us are working on it.

Auroville might consider giving younger people a preference for housing. After these loans are paid off, the next looming financial burden will be how to pay for a house. (Right now all of the money going into my monthly loan payments could be helping with housing.) And unlike houses outside, which are at least an investment, housing in Auroville is like throwing money down a black hole. Ten years ago, I was eager to throw my meagre savings at Auroville, and I did. That eagerness hasn't worn off, but the money has worn out.

Finally, there has got to be more economic flexibility in helping young people start up their lives here. Perhaps there could be mechanisms that allow people engaged in work in India to continue that work during their Newcomer period.

In the meantime, my questioning continues. Why don't I stop complaining and accept my circumstances, and Auroville's circumstances, for what they are? If life aligns itself as opportunities for further growth, there must be a lesson in here somewhere. But one question continues to plague me. Why does it feel like I need to leave Auroville to be a part of it? And until I can come up with the solution, I keep sending out my monthly cheque.

Ing-Marie



Smiti

Why am I in Auroville? I choose to stay here because I am inspired by Auroville – by its dream and ideals, by its people and their stories, by its beauty and unending possibilities.

Yes, I am idealistic.

And yes, there isn't only beauty and charm. But it doesn't seem to change much whether we criticize or praise, be cynics or saints, somehow we each have a connection with this dream, this place, with each other and with something more. Whether we live here or elsewhere, whether we agree or disagree, whether we like each other or we don't, there is more to Auroville than us.

I do not know why life in Auroville is at times simple at times very complicated, easier for some and harder for others, but who's to judge where and how and why we learn what we need to...

I have always received whatever I needed or wanted. I am now staying in a studio in Citadine and have an 'apprentice maintenance' and I am happy with both. I have never felt unable to do something – there always seems to be a way – and if there isn't, maybe there will be the next

time, or the time after.

I am grateful.

This year I have been working with Shrishti on art-related projects: doing the decor of venues for an event, the interior for an Auroville unit, an art project in the Health Center (with Aurevan), and an installation for an exhibition in the Visitor's Center which is awaiting completion. We also helped shifting Last School to its new campus and are a part of Jean's team of backstage helpers for the Bharat Nivas Auditorium.

For each of these projects, people have been so generous with their time and energy and happy to be of assistance that one cannot help but feel grateful. Those few people who are not spontaneously helpful bring contrast and perspective (and give you a chance to complain!).

All this is not to say that everything is as it 'should be' in Auroville, far from it; or to say that the world outside Auroville isn't full of beauty and unending possibilities too.

But there is something special in the 'air of Auroville'.

That is why I am here.

Smiti



# Between Auroville and the West

In Auroville as a toddler and then raised there from the age of 8, I left Auroville in 1993 at 18 to pursue university studies in America. Although I worked part-time through my education, I still finished my degree with close to \$20,000 in government-funded student loans.

Since 1999, I have divided my time between Auroville and the West, visiting Auroville most years for three to six months at a time, the longest stretch being a year and a half from 1999-2001. Compounding my total debt burden, during one trip to Auroville, I used a credit card both for the journey and for living expenses on my return to the US while I re-established my work situation.

During each visit, as soon as I feel as though I'm beginning to sink my teeth into life in Auroville, I am pulled back to the West to replenish my bank account in order to continue making loan payments. Each time I leave India I invariably think, and say, "This time I will work with a one-pointed focus and wipe out all my debt, then return, free to stay without this obligation."

So far I haven't managed. Drawn into western life, working hard and even earning relatively well, it feels like my regular returns to Auroville take me two steps forward and one step back on the financial front.

Unlike friends raised within their own cul-



Ashaman

ture who have worked for money since an early age, my experience in Auroville was different, and prioritized work as yoga, the focus on inner stance rather than monetary compensation. I've long believed and experienced that doing the right work in a spirit of offering ensures

universal support for one's needs.

This ideal stems at least in part from an upbringing within the Auroville community and financial system where, ideally, we work at what we do in order to grow and to give, rather than to get so that we can pay. The individual who works is taken care of by the community.

My higher studies in classical music and language, while immensely rewarding on a personal level, were not based on a game-plan for earning. Consequently, it has been difficult to hold any steady job in the West that is lucrative and flexible enough to both provide for living expenses, repayment of student loans, and annual travel expenses across the globe, while at the same time allowing for regular and extended absences. So

I've turned naturally to self-employment at a variety of jobs.

Since 1993, I've worked as a landscaper, carpenter, painter, musician, teacher, masseur, fitness professional, and, most recently, a certified arborist on the Hawaiian island of Maui.

I recently discovered that while I had considered living in Auroville and repaying western loans at the same time a personal dilemma, it is a struggle shared by other young people there. Clearly it represents a more pervasive theme in the community.

In fact, many honorary voluntary Aurovilians of all ages grapple with generating sufficient income to support children, studies abroad, their aging parents, flights to spend time with non-Aurovillian family, or to simply to upgrade their quality of material life in India.

For the youth who have so much to give Auroville, I would caution from experience against the easy route of loans for study, as it's far too easy to get caught in a vicious cycle of extending loan life through just maintaining minimum payments, or alternatively, of being stuck outside Auroville for long periods, perhaps working at a less than fulfilling job with minimal time off.

While it is certainly healthy for youth to leave for a period in order to develop their individuality, a time may come when there is a desire to return home and offer one's energies through a work driven by motivation other than that of earning. The ability to choose this freely without external obligation is precious.

However, I do suspect that within the often frustrating situation of returning regularly to the West to earn lies a gift. For me the necessity has created an organic bridge between Auroville and the West, forcing a synthesis of sorts, pulling me out to engage with the world from what could otherwise easily have become a very insular existence. After all, Auroville wants to be a global experiment.

Ashaman

## Auroville is not better than anywhere else

To me, Auroville is supposed to be a place where you are accepted, and fully so, for whom you are, not for whom you "should" or "should not" be. A place where looks, beliefs, levels of income, and so on do not matter. A place where you can dress how you want, eat what you want, do what you want. A place where all this will not be scrutinized and held against you. A place where you can express yourself through a number of activities (be it horse-riding, painting/arts, meditation, etc.) and try to "find/discover yourself" (yes, it is so clichéd, but so true) and make yourself become a better person.

I mean, where you evaluate your own life, your own decisions, your own ideals, and try to live according to those ideals, with yourself and for yourself.

When I left Auroville in 2005, my whole life was "cramped up" by the littleness of this community. Sure, it's an international utopian city, with people looking for a better place or what not. But in the end, it's just a small village where most people are obsessed with gossip and what everyone else is saying or doing, instead of concentrating on themselves and trying to make their own selves better.

Until now, I've never felt the need to come back, because I don't feel like it's a better place to be than anywhere else in the world. I've come back to Auroville for short periods of time almost every year since my departure, and the mentality and way of life do not correspond to what I strive towards. The problem is, many people around my age just judge you according to your appearances. They barely scratch the surface and then label you, without trying to look deeper at what's inside.

This obviously does not apply to everyone in Auroville, far from it. I've also met people (my age, younger, older) that I've grown very fond of, that I appreciate enormously for their patience, curiosity, kindness, open-mindedness. I've realized over the years that the real beauty of people lies on the inside.

I used to proudly present Auroville to people here in Europe as a place where people were not interested by money, just by their own spiritual/psychological journey. That is not the case anymore. I hear too many stories related to money, houses, land, what belongs to whom. I thought Auroville belonged to nobody in particular?

A place of constant progress: But where's that



Divya

progress? Youth that never ages: sure, I agree, but please become more mature, there is a limit to "staying young forever"!!!

A bridge between the past and the future: not stagnate in an ever-lasting not-evolving present! Human unity? Good try, but not quite. Seriously, more efforts can be done, don't you think?

I've talked to other people that have left Auroville and don't want to come back (yet), and I think we all agree on a few points.

Firstly, we have no energy, courage or strength to (try and) make a difference in Auroville, so instead of living a life here that isn't close to our ideals, we prefer to leave and try and find our happiness elsewhere.

Secondly, the most probable reason behind no change in Auroville probably lies in the people here: they probably don't want it to change. We can't change a place if the people living in that place don't want any change.

Anyway, I really believe that (all) youth should travel and live abroad, as much as possible, especially before deciding to settle down and starting a family. I think that young people born in Auroville should travel, explore the world, live abroad (ideally in different places too) to see if another society or style of life might suit them better. It should be a personal choice to settle down somewhere, not one driven by habits, laziness or fear.

Divya

## I really miss Auroville

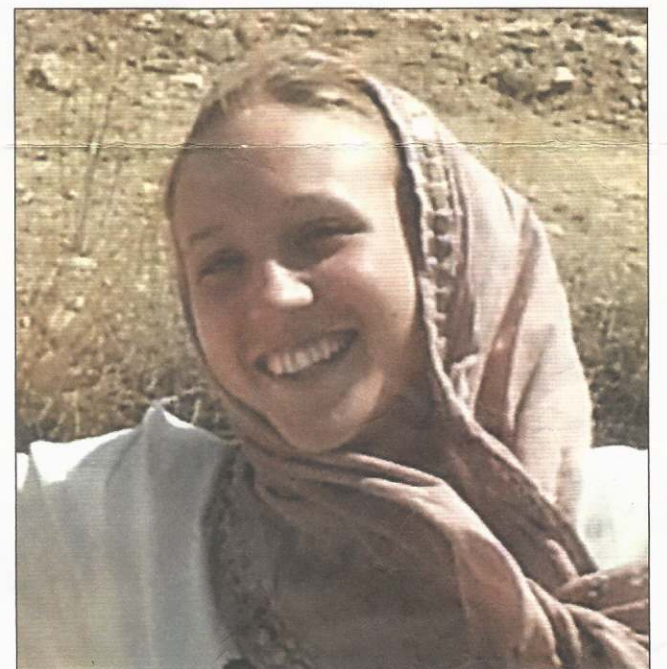
I could never have imagined living in Auroville. Now, I can't imagine my life without having had this experience. I arrived in India for a voluntary work at Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Delhi in 2007. Things did not go as planned and a friend from Brazil who was in Auroville convinced me to come and spend a few days here. After a week, I had an amazing place at which to volunteer - Isaiambalam School - an incredible place to stay - WDK - and had met friends that would become, and still are, my family. The week became six months and even an interview with the Entry Group - I was sure I wanted to live in Auroville.

The plan was to go back to Brazil, save some money and in maybe five or six years come back and establish myself in Auroville. Again life's plan was very different than mine. After a year and a half I had a good amount of money and a heart ready to move back and start my story in Auroville. But I did not come. Why?

Since the first day I felt myself deeply connected with the city, the people, the Mother's visions, Sri Aurobindo's philosophy. The Newcomer period was great, actually I never felt like there was a difference between being a Newcomer and an Aurovillian, that I was and still am an Aurovillian from my first day in Auroville. What is incredible is that there are so many amazing opportunities for innovation, creativity, you can do whatever you want here.

Sure, as everyone else, I had tons of criticism and found lots of faults while I was there. I guess that, once you are inside, you take things for granted, so it is easy to point a finger, to have negative opinions. Although I also think, if this is made from the heart it is a sign that you care for the place and you want to find solutions. I loved how everyone could find tons of solutions to all the problems Auroville was facing.

But, like in any other place in the world, we would do little about it. I feel we tend to idealize Auroville as this magic place and forget its really reason to be, which is to show humanity we can do something different



Mari

together. But we must DO!

So why did I leave Auroville? In my case, it has nothing to do with my age or with Auroville itself. I felt there was some things I wanted to do on a bigger scale. Have being born and raised in Sao Paulo, I had this feeling of needing to do more for the world, and particularly South America, "outside my own bubble. Also at that time - I don't believe this anymore - I was missing something I thought I could only find in big cities. Also I really missed my family, and if I lived here permanently on a maintenance in Auroville I couldn't see how I could visit them often in Brazil. This remains the biggest reason why I haven't yet come back to Auroville. For me the money situation was a big challenge in Auroville.

I really miss Auroville and the life I had there. For me, the biggest treasure of Auroville is the people. It is amazing to me how many people, from ages 3 to 90, live in my heart from those three years I spent there.

And I often say I miss the Mari I was there. And this is why I also want to stay here in Sao Paulo for a while, because this Mari needs to exist everywhere; it is not an outer place that makes who we are but a inner one. So perhaps once I find this place wherever I go, life will bring me back to Auroville. Because I may have physically left Auroville but it will remain part of who I am eternally.

Mari Turato



# Strengthening the link between Auroville and the world

I was born in Auroville, but at the age of 14 I chose to go study at the Kodaikanal International School. I had always wanted to get out. I was always told that Auroville is a special place, and my parents were both here for that reason; but when you grow up it is not so evident why Auroville is special. I was frustrated and felt that Auroville was small and boring, there was nothing to do.

I decided to continue my studies abroad. As I hold a Dutch passport – my mother is Dutch, my father Indian – I opted to study in The Netherlands. I got admission to Leiden University, the country's oldest and most prestigious, and got a full scholarship. I was lucky as I escaped the burden of tuition debt, for which I am very grateful.

Living and studying in Holland broadened my understanding of Auroville's significance in the world. Studying Sustainable Development broadened my understanding that there are many different ways of dealing with human and environmental issues as everything is interlinked.

The study in Holland was overwhelming; I would often come home after a discourse or debate quite depressed, realizing how difficult things are and that there is no one easy solution. Added to that, Leiden University is full of very smart, competitive, kids – that was a bit threatening. I was usually the quiet one; I'd never learned to talk like them and to argue my case but they did respect me. They knew that whenever I would talk, I would be able to contribute something meaningful to the discussion, often something from a different angle and from a life experience thanks to my background of having grown up in India. The exposure to poverty and bio-

diversity, for example, which is so common in India, is only theoretically understood in Europe.

These kids were mostly all from wealthy backgrounds, and I was not, and certainly not able to keep up with them. But I had gone through an identical experience in Kodaikanal, where I lived a comparatively minimal lifestyle, so it didn't really impact me. In fact, I felt very comfortable living on my scholarship and believe I made the right friends within the University who will continue to support my work in Auroville because they remember me as 'different.'

For my thesis I chose the topic of Eco-Villages. And that led me back right back to Auroville. I discovered that Auroville is the biggest 'intentional' community in the world, unique in its national and cultural diversity, and with its government and UNESCO support. I was forced to start understanding how Auroville functions and what living in an intentional community truly means.

But it is very difficult to communicate the Auroville experience: it is not communism, it is not democracy, it is not a cult or religion. I could talk about Auroville's activities and achievements but its governance system wasn't all that obvious. I hardly ever talked about Auroville's spiritual background, and I didn't feel the need to justify my inner experience, which I felt would be reduced by words.

After I got my Bachelors, I decided to come back to Auroville. I landed up at the New Era Secondary School as a substitute teacher and fundraiser, and took up administrative work at the Entry



Kavitha

Service to better understand Auroville's ideals and structures of governance. And now I start understanding how Auroville works practically, in day-to-day life – something I was never asked to think about as a child. And I realized again how incredible lucky I am. Working at the Entry Service you meet all kinds of people who want to join Auroville but cannot find a place to stay; or former Auroville students who want to come back but have a study loan to repay. Years ago, my grandmother Lisa built a house for me in Auroville; and so I am grateful to have that aspect of my life here set up.

I see Newcomers coming through the Entry Service who have such beautiful aspirations and

willingness to give. I also share this strong urge to keep giving to Auroville. But the only way I will be able to do that better is when I have learned, experienced the world, and developed my skills and self-confidence further. So now I hope to go study at the University for Peace, set up by the United Nations, in San Jose, Costa Rica. I may also want to work abroad for some time, but I will continue to return to Auroville.

The world outside needs more help than Auroville does. We need more Aurovilles in the world! I will always attempt to be an ambassador of sorts to strengthen this link between Auroville and the world. Studying outside Auroville has brought me in contact with many beautiful, inspiring people, from very different backgrounds, who I feel also have a lot to offer. We don't call them 'Aurovilian' because they do not live here and perhaps don't even know about Auroville. But this has shown me that Auroville and the Auroville ideals are not confined to this physical place in South India. There is an increasing global awareness of a sort taking place, and it is beautiful to watch!

My home, of course, will remain Auroville. Here I have a large network of friends and family, both in Auroville and the surrounding villages, and I know that I will be supported in whatever I choose to do. This gives me the confidence to work for what I believe in. I will ensure my children will also have a chance to grow from the Auroville experience as well.

Kavitha Urvase Selvaraj

## Auroville changes people...

I left Auroville because I wanted to study and find out how life is elsewhere on this planet. I would love to come back for visits but don't know if I'll be coming back for good. There are several reasons, one being that as a woman I don't really feel safe in Auroville. There is a lot of tension between the Auroville lifestyle and the local one, especially the young people (me included, when I was in my teens) have views that are so radically different from their surrounding that it creates tension. I don't want to blame anyone though – I think there are legitimate reasons for this and the fact that they reserve these views is respectable in its own way. But there is a lack of respect from different sides (locals, Aurovillians, tourists, police, the government officials, etc.) and this essentially creates the problem.

Again, I am not blaming anyone here. Auroville has a very complex social situation which even long-term residents don't have an overview over, and navigating within it without creating tension can be difficult. Studying intercultural communication in my minor made me realize some things I didn't think of as problems before. Auroville needs people who have knowl-

edge about these things to work on its integration, because the tension must be reduced in my view. And I don't mean Aurovillians going to the villages and explaining what Auroville is about and that we have no bad intentions and so forth, though that is in essence good, but there has to be learning from both sides – integrated learning.

In the end, that IS what Auroville is about. I know that this is kind of a taboo topic in Auroville, but I believe if people don't talk about it it will be difficult to tackle. We as foreigners should try to understand and respect the local culture. We should work together with the surrounding villages to create more intercultural sensitivity.

Going abroad made me realize how special Auroville is – people who've been in contact with Auroville seem to have a deeper understanding of the world and the friendships made in Auroville are really lifetime friendships, which is less common abroad. There is something palpable but unexplainable about Auroville that profoundly changes the people living there for life and in a positive way. I feel that Auroville is my home and that it always will be.

Mira

## Why I chose to come back to Auroville

My name is Manjula, I was adopted at a young age by Sanjeev and Miriam, who have lived in Auroville for a long time.

The Auroville experiment on human unity in diversity started right at home. We are a family of four, each of us is from a different part of the world, and arriving at a decision that we all agreed on was a very difficult process. If it was so for an international family of four, then I could only be amazed by how Auroville functioned.

I studied in Udavi School until the age of 14, after which I chose to do my higher secondary education at Future school.

It was during my teenage years that my own exploration of Auroville and of myself began.

Around that time, I had the opportunity to travel a bit in France. This helped me realize what Auroville was giving me, from a quality education to a unique multicultural lifestyle. I understood that Auroville provides each and every individual with an overall development (both outward and inward).

I was grateful to be living here, yet there was a part of me that craved new experiences. I had a feeling that I wanted to reinvent myself as I felt a bit 'moulded' at the time. I longed for new insights. Curiosity regarding the outside world grew. This, combined with my deep-seated interest in biology drove me to Chennai, to do a B.Sc in Biology and Biotechnology. I got admission in Madras Christian College, a reputed and prestigious college, based on merit. This meant my fees were affordable.

I enjoyed my course thoroughly. My college experience taught me quite a bit about the outside world. I met many young people whose goals and values were very different from mine and there were just a handful of people I could actually connect to. I was seen as "different". There was very little awareness about 'The City of Dawn'.

I had grown up protected and supported. In college for the first time I was in an environment which was competitive. I learnt to stand up for what I believed in, to be heard, and to be confident. I was able to shine in my class. Being in Chennai, I was forced to appreciate things that I had taken for granted in Auroville. I gained perspective, I learned to focus on little details of life, on how things worked.

I kept a contact with Auroville all through. One of my visits home was right after Cyclone



Manjula

Nishta hit: trees were down, roads were blocked, the electricity was out. Individuals joined hands, work was done, food was shared and smiles were exchanged, strangers became friends. There was only one goal, to bring Auroville back to a functional level. I witnessed a true Auroville at work. I realized that Auroville is "the city the earth needs". To show the way out of the egoism that possesses the world!

I came back as soon as I finished my degree and discovered that Auroville is a huge family. Each one has a sense of commitment to the community (more or less) and to Auroville as a whole. Auroville has its shortcomings and challenges. At times, it is not always easy to find your role, to fit in, to find housing or get financial help. But I feel that there is so much potential here and willingness to give, that ways can be found to overcome challenges.

Auroville is full of possibilities: I work in Last School, where I teach biology and geography. At the same time I am able to pursue my passion for Odissi dance. I can explore classical singing and sports such as frisbee, swimming, tennis, as well as go for treks to the Himalayas; and I get a chance to participate in many environmental and art-related projects. I am grateful to live in a place where so many innovative ideas are taking shape.

Being here gives me a sense of joy and completeness, which I missed during my college days. But what pulled me back most strongly was the sense of belonging to this unique place. I am twentyfour and may go out to pursue further education or travel a bit just to see the world, but I know that I will always come back home!

Manjula Arumugam

## An amazing worthwhile place

Leaving Auroville was not easy, but important to me personally. I wanted to leave not only for university-level studying but also for my own personal development. I felt like I needed to distance myself from the happenings in Auroville to properly learn to appreciate it better. It was also important to me to experience leaving and finally returning through my own process and out of my own volition. It seemed essential to enable a smoother transition into adulthood.

There are many reasons for me to come back to Auroville. Auroville is both my actual and my true home where I feel free and can find expression. My roots go deep and I can feel their presence even when I am abroad. Then there is, of course, the factor of Auroville being this amazing experiment in inner and outer consciousness that I want to be a part of.

But I am not actually in Auroville right now. There are several reasons for this. Firstly, I have not completed my university education. Beyond that, however, there are also reasons to do with the community itself. For example, the need of a house or flat to be independent, which is something that requires money I do not have. Other than that there is my own ambivalence and uncertainty. Returning seems to be a process of putting trust both in myself and in the community.

My time abroad has also brought me other skills and experiences that might help me in my process. Learning to think analytically; meeting new cultures and ways of thinking during my travels; nurturing a growing sense of responsibility, self-confidence and trust are some examples. I find that when I encounter new ideas and perspectives, I automatically apply them to Auroville and think about how they could be of benefit to the experiment. I find that Auroville is, in a sense, ever present in my life and in my thoughts.

I often ask myself what I would do in Auroville, which niche I would fit into and how to integrate myself into the community. I feel I have many things to bring back, yet how can I find the common thread and contribute in a meaningful way? These things will probably work themselves out when the time comes, yet these questions pose themselves during my time abroad.

When I encounter criticism of Auroville, I actively feel the need to defend my home. This is because I know that in spite of all the complications, it is an amazing place that is worthwhile and has a value that cannot be expressed in words. However long it might take, I know that something beautiful is and will arise in Auroville and I am looking forward to being a part of it.

Aditi



# A question of equality

**T**he Auroville architects, in a rare expression of solidarity, have categorically rejected a recommendation of the Funds and Assets Management Committee (FAMC) to limit their architect fees to 3.5% of the total costs of any Auroville construction project with an overall cost of over Rs 1 crore (Rs 10 million or € 125,000). The Auroville architects questioned why the recommendation was made without consultation, and demanded to know why the FAMC proposed to overrule the scale of charges as recommended by the Indian Council of Architects. The topic raised a spirited discussion on Auronet.

The 'trigger' for the FAMC's recommendation is a planned major housing project where the architect's fee will be 5.5 % of the cost of the construction (Rs 550,000 – € 7,000, for a project costing Rs 1 crore), and the fee for the project manager another 2% (Rs 200,000 – € 2,500). Both percentages are part of the house costs to be paid by future residents, who are Aurovilians. Housing is a basic need. Is it acceptable that some Aurovilians make a profit on the basic needs of another Aurovillian? If architects enjoy the benefits of Auroville's economic model, such as free education for their children provided by teachers who only get a community maintenance of Rs 12,000 a month, cannot they too limit their income?

"We believe that the present situation is untenable, it only increases the existing gap between Aurovilians working in different areas with regard to their income and living conditions," write Joseba and Anandi on Auronet. But why has the FAMC targeted the architects and not all the others whose income exceeds Rs 12,000 a month, such as executives of Auroville's commercial units and guesthouses, those who have an income from large bank accounts or rent out "their" house in Auroville or elsewhere in the world, or those who have an income from work outside Auroville or enjoy a pension?

## The situation of Auroville architects

"Frankly, it upsets me that Auroville architects are suddenly made scapegoats," says architect Fabian. He explains that most architects in Auroville run their offices as a commercial unit of the Auroville Foundation. Each unit has its own infrastructure – an office space with uninterrupted power supply, computers, and printers – and some units employ co-workers depending on the number of assignments. A small office with three or four employees can cost upwards of Rs 60,000 a month. If the unit makes profit, it will contribute 33% to the community, like all other Auroville commercial units.

But do architect units make profit? "Getting wealthy is certainly not the driving factor for running an architect's office in Auroville. No Auroville architect I know has become rich from working for Auroville projects, nor from their work outside Auroville," says Fabian.

Being an architect, he says, is a highly responsible and therefore at times taxing job. "Talk to an average architect and ask him how many weeks or months it takes to get a concept finalized. There's all the dreaming, conceptualizing, talking, drafting, and endless changing till it all fits together, only to change everything again because some parameters have changed. This is even more so in Auroville where we try to stay away from standard solutions because we dream of a new architecture befitting the 'City the Earth needs' – sustainable, open-spirited and ideal to live in, suitable for people coming from all different cultures, affordable, maintainable, beautiful, with spaces for the individual as well as the community."

And often, all the work is for nothing. "Go and ask how many times the work ends in the dustbin because the project has been shelved, or because some 'cheaper' option has been found, or because the architect got fired following a dispute with the all-powerful project holder and is replaced by a non-Auroville architect who then works for an undisclosed fee!" says Fabian.

## Not enough work

Another issue is that Auroville has insufficient work for all its resident architects. A few architects have, on their own initiative, taken up creating entire communities, which implied getting the Auroville bureaucracy to approve the project, conceptualizing the community infrastructure, finding clients, designing all the individual houses and apartments, making bills of quantities, interacting with the contractor, supervising the work and doing the entire project management. It is an exhausting job, and some architects have sworn never to do it again. "Taking up such a project is always a gamble and not easy. This is why quite a few architects prefer working on projects outside," says Fabian.

What about the – very few – larger buildings funded by donations or government grants? "According to my experience, Auroville has no selection process to speak of," says Fabian. "Project holders as well as Auroville working groups such as the Housing Service select the architect they like and that's it." He feels – and many architects agree – that Auroville should tender the designs for all public buildings, whatever their intended use in an open competition. "Architects should be invited to come up with a design and, if the project budget allows for it, be

compensated for their work, even if they are not selected. A team of qualified people should make the selection. That's the process which is pretty much followed everywhere in the democratic world." Alternatively, he says, a group of Auroville architects could be invited to jointly submit a proposal which would then be evaluated by a peer group. "That might lead to a design which is better than any individual would be able to come up with."

## The collapse of the maintenance system

It's clear that restricting an architect's fee, as recommended by the FAMC, would do very little to improve Auroville maintenances. "From the discussions on the Auronet one gets the impression that those who object to Auroville architects earning 'that much', while teachers etc. are only earning 'that little', seem to believe that if only the architects would stop 'making big bucks' on their Auroville projects, all the problems of the Auroville's maintenance system would be solved. That's nonsense," says Fabian. "The failing of the maintenance system is not due to the architects."

What then, exactly, is the problem? The major one is that Auroville's income is insufficient to carry the costs of all the services. In consequence, those working in the service sector receive incomes (called 'maintenances') which are substantially lower than the income of those who work in commercial units or who support themselves on an income from outside. Over the years, the increase of these service sector maintenances have barely kept up with inflation.

To what extent such an income inequality is acceptable and how the inequality could be addressed are questions that have never been answered. If the FAMC believes that architect units earn too much on Auroville projects and that an Aurovillian shouldn't earn a profit over the basic needs of another Aurovillian, then why did the FAMC not target executives of commercial units that produce basic needs for Aurovilians? If the FAMC believes that a too large income inequality is not acceptable, then why hasn't the FAMC asked all those who have an income exceeding the community maintenance to contribute a percentage of the difference to the Maintenance Fund? Why has it acquiesced in the present-day reality that those who solely depend on a community maintenance are left to fend for themselves and, if they need more than their maintenance, have to figure out how to earn a second income outside the maintenance system?

Fabian mentions some consequences of the present Auroville maintenance system. "Those who live on an Auroville maintenance have less

and less chance to afford some of the nicer things of life. This includes even the products made in Auroville such as cheese, peanut butter and jams (which cost more than their counterparts in a German fair-trade or certified-organic shop). Neither can they enjoy a nice meal in a restaurant in Auroville or Pondicherry, or simply repair their motorbike. Life is even more challenging for those who come from a culture not based on a daily dose of cheap food like idly and sambar or dhal and chawal, but who want to have more expensive organic and healthy food on the family table.

"Last year we travelled to Europe. We hadn't seen our families for years, and a part of our travel expenses was paid for by my architect unit – which is my only source of income. But do I have to feel bad because my unit can afford this, while someone who lives on a maintenance cannot? Or should I, at 45, have asked my parents to pay for the tickets of their son, his wife and their children because they live in Auroville? Keeping contact with aging parents and other family members is part of my minimum needs, which should be taken care of."

"Am I worried that at one point of my life I have to depend on the goodwill of our Auroville economy and social system because I have reached 70 and maybe am too tired to work like I do now? Because I have decided to be part of Auroville, worked within the framework of the system and put the last financial reserves I had into my life here? Yes, I am. But I also trust that Mother's grace and people of goodwill will solve it. But part of me still wonders, shouldn't we start talking about social security for when we all are old and in need of support, now that some of us have given almost everything to Auroville?"

## A community review is badly needed

For Fabian, it's high time that the community has an open, non-judgmental discussion about all this. "There is so much hypocrisy. Instead of continuously shooting at one group of professionals or another the community should put all these topics on the table and discuss them openly."

Joseba and Anandi also ask for a community review. "The present inequality puts in danger essential Auroville values such as equality, solidarity and fraternity that should prevail in all Auroville economic activities," they write. "This is the big contradiction in our economic model today and it is calling for an urgent revision and an aligning with the values that have been developed already in a good number of other areas of Auroville."

Carel

## ALTERNATIVE BUILDING TECHNOLOGIES

# World Bamboo Day in Auroville

**I**n 2009, the World Bamboo Congress in Thailand declared the 18th of September to be World Bamboo Day (WBD). This day is intended to raise awareness of bamboo, one of the best renewable resources, as one possibility for meeting the growing needs of our global population. Bamboo, the giant of the grass family, grows incredibly fast, doesn't die when harvested, converts more CO<sub>2</sub> into oxygen than any tree, and withstands compression more effectively than concrete. The range of uses for bamboo is equally impressive: framework, walls, kitchen utensils, boats, soaps, fabrics, jewelry. It's even edible. Bamboo also offers a realistic opportunity to move away from unsustainable deforestation. Each year since WBD's inception, bamboo organizations all over the planet host celebrations of this unique plant, and the celebrations are growing louder. What started as an idea at a conference has become a worldwide movement. This year seventeen countries hosted official World Bamboo Day events, marking the most successful year to date.

Following suit, on the 18th of September 2014 a monumental event

took place as a collaborative effort between the Auroville Bamboo Centre and the South Asia Bamboo Foundation. The two organizations invited farmers from the region to meet at the Bamboo Centre, joined by government officials, including the Director of Agriculture for the Villuppuram District of Tamil Nadu.

The discussion outlined the subsidies and carbon credits offered by the government for including bamboo in intercrop plantations and raised awareness of both the financial and environmental benefits of bamboo cultivation. The officials clarified they were present to show their commitment to promoting sustainable, livelihood-supporting opportunities in the region.

After the meeting, the government officials joined the Bamboo Centre team for a ceremonial first bamboo planting at the new Auroville Bamboo Grove. This is designed to serve as a model for a new era of intercrop bamboo farming. The government's gesture greatly



Participants of the Auroville World Bamboo Day in front of the prototype bamboo toilet

added to the excitement everyone at Auroville Bamboo Centre already felt regarding the official inauguration of Auroville's new plantation.

The Auroville Bamboo Centre also ran a special workshop for World Bamboo Day. In response to Prime Minister Modi's call to build millions of new toilets throughout India, the Bamboo Centre has developed a low-cost bamboo, eco-sensitive toilet design. The workshop attendees constructed the first prototype at Auroville Bamboo Grove. The final version will be displayed at the upcoming Kerala Bamboo festival.

Auroville's World Bamboo Day celebration concluded with a special bamboo dinner. During the meal, the local percussion group, Mohanam Sound Crew, performed for the guests. As dinner finished, attendees joined the Sound Crew, dancing and singing. The bonfire lit among the crowd was a perfect end to a day of enkindling fires within the hearts of the bamboo community.

Matt Strombom



# The Auroville website: a new way of communicating

**O**n August 15th, the new Auroville website was launched. It was the result of almost two and a half years of work. Manoj, who leads the technical team, first became involved with the Auroville website in 1998. Manohar, the content manager, joined the team at the end of 2004.

*Why was there a need for a new version?*

**Manohar:** The new version was needed so that people could find what they wanted more easily. On the old website, there was such a wide spectrum of material that it was difficult to navigate.

**Manoj:** This is the fourth version. The third version was conceived in 1998-9 and at that time the Internet was very different; the approach to design, the language and the nature of the content was different. Our old website had become antique – for the new internet generation it looked like an old government site. It was also out of shape, like a big fat elephant.

However, it took us some time to get going on a new version as we knew it would be a huge work. We also had to find the right people and to get funding: it is expensive to develop a new website and we had no funds for development. Finally, Stichting de Zaaier funded us in two phases (it has cost around four lakh rupees so far).

Our first task was to understand what visitors to the Auroville website are looking for. We made a survey and discovered that visitors' top priority was to understand the vision of Auroville. The second priority was to know how to participate in activities here and how to join Auroville.

So the basic structure of the new website on every page is tripartite: the vision, the actual reality on the ground, and how you can participate. The old way of thinking was that the site was a place for the dissemination of information. The new paradigm is engaging with the visitors, welcoming them and providing them with things they can do. This is a radical shift in the way we look at communication.

*Does this imply a lot more work for the people managing the Auroville website?*

**Manohar:** Yes. And sometimes it is difficult to answer people's emails when they come with unusual questions. Just today there was an artist who wants to come and perform in Auroville, and I didn't know who to refer him to. We don't have a structure to receive these people.

**Manoj:** But that structure is emerging. SAVI looks after volunteering, Auroville Consultants offer retreats and sustainability workshops, the Auroville Campus Initiative will provide outreach education, Auroville Art Services is coordinating art activities, and all of these need visitors as participants. So our next work is to find ways of linking the visitors more effectively with these Auroville groups.

In terms of workload, we are looking at the possibility of streaming information from the different sites that exist already in Auroville, rather than publishing everything on the Auroville website. Then the Auroville website becomes a gateway for other content providers within Auroville to stream their specialised content through us, allowing our site to remain simpler and less bloated.

*Has the nature of the content also changed on the new site?*

**Manohar:** Yes, now we are emphasising a more visual approach using many more photos and video clips as these can communicate immediately. For example, after visiting the Matrimandir people often ask what more can they do. I am making a video of a walk they can take to Savitri Bhavan, Bharat Nivas and the Tibetan Pavilion to promote this possibility. I will make other videos on the schools, the environmental work etc. In fact, almost everything that was text on the old website can be shown through video.

**Manoj:** The first fundamental requirement regarding online content is to understand the psychology of the visitor. When you are reading a book or magazine you are concentrated on that and ready to devote time to it. When you are browsing, you may be doing five other things at the same time, and you are scanning, not really reading.

So the task for the designer of a website is akin to designing a billboard for a car that is travelling past at 100 km an hour and there are only a few seconds to attract the driver's attention. In our earlier websites, the visual element was not so developed, and we were going for lengthy textual explanations. Now we have to be visually striking and be very crisp in our language to get people's attention for those first key seconds.

*Is there not a danger of oversimplifying Auroville by reducing it to visual or textual 'bites'?*

**Manoj:** We often equate quality with lengthy content but this need not be the case. You can communicate very deep things in seconds as images convey messages instantly. Conversely, if you have very lengthy material, it does not mean you are communicating quality.

As website designers, we must constantly remember

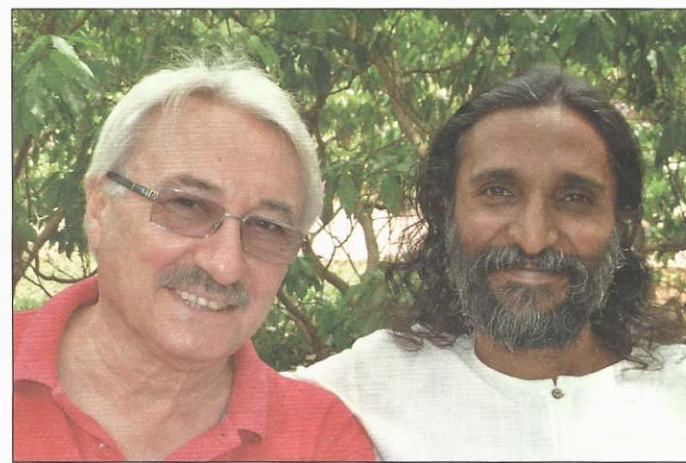
that understanding the user is at the centre of our process. We have to get out of our personal preferences and listen deeply so that we can communicate in terms of their context.

**Manohar:** However, in terms of quality of information on the website, to make an analogy with food, I think you need "slow food" as well as "fast food". So for those who want to explore deeper, we still have a large archive of material. I would like all this information to be available somewhere, even if it is only of interest to one visitor in a hundred. The challenge now is to integrate some of these pages from the old website into the new website and make the content very easy to follow.

**Manoj:** When we started this site fourteen years ago, archiving was important because nobody else was doing that at that time. Over time, the accumulation of archive material led to the old site cracking at the seams, and visitors getting lost. But then we developed AuroNet, which is where the community's life is documented and archived in real-time, and now we have over 100 other websites in Auroville, so we can refer visitors to them for archive material.

But we have kept some of the old archive. We had around 4000 pages, which included much duplication. We have reduced this about 3000 pages, out of which we have published around 500 on the new site.

Actually, 70% of the visitors are first time visitors and not looking for the archive function. The archive is only needed when people start engaging with Auroville on a deeper level.



Manohar and Manoj

*How does a user get from the first 'flash-card' level to a deeper understanding of, say, a concept like Integral Yoga?*

**Manoj:** At present we have two levels of information on the site. One is the first five second level, with the image and brief text. If you want to know more, you will get related links that will take you deeper. At present, about 30% of the people who contact the site are returning visitors, and many of these will need detailed information.

**Manohar:** On the introductory page on Integral Yoga you get links to Savitri Bhavan, Pitanga and workshops on the topic. You can also go to another level and explore more deeply by downloading the writings of Sri Aurobindo.

**Manoj:** Providing automatically-generated and contextually-meaningful links for a wide variety of users is one of the biggest challenges of designing software and it is something we will be continuously improving. Basically, the site is just a doorway which provides a visitor with access to a group or individual in their particular area of interest. Until we establish a person-to-person connection there is no real foundation for the next stage of somebody's involvement with Auroville. So this is our primary aim. The website is only a channel for this.

*How successful has the new website been so far in attracting visitors?*

**Manoj:** The number of daily unique visitors has shot up since the new site has been in place. It used to be around 500 but now it is more than 900. In addition, the average time they spend on the site has increased by about 140% to about four minutes, and the number of pages they look at (3.68) has increased threefold. At the same time the 'bounce' rate has reduced to below 50%, which means engagement with the site is good now.

*What do you need to work upon in the next one or two years?*

**Manohar:** I will be very focussed on the visual side. This used to be a website where the webmaster put out all the content; it was a one-man show. Now it needs the involvement of many other people to provide information. It is now a collective endeavour where everybody must be responsible for what they feed into the system.

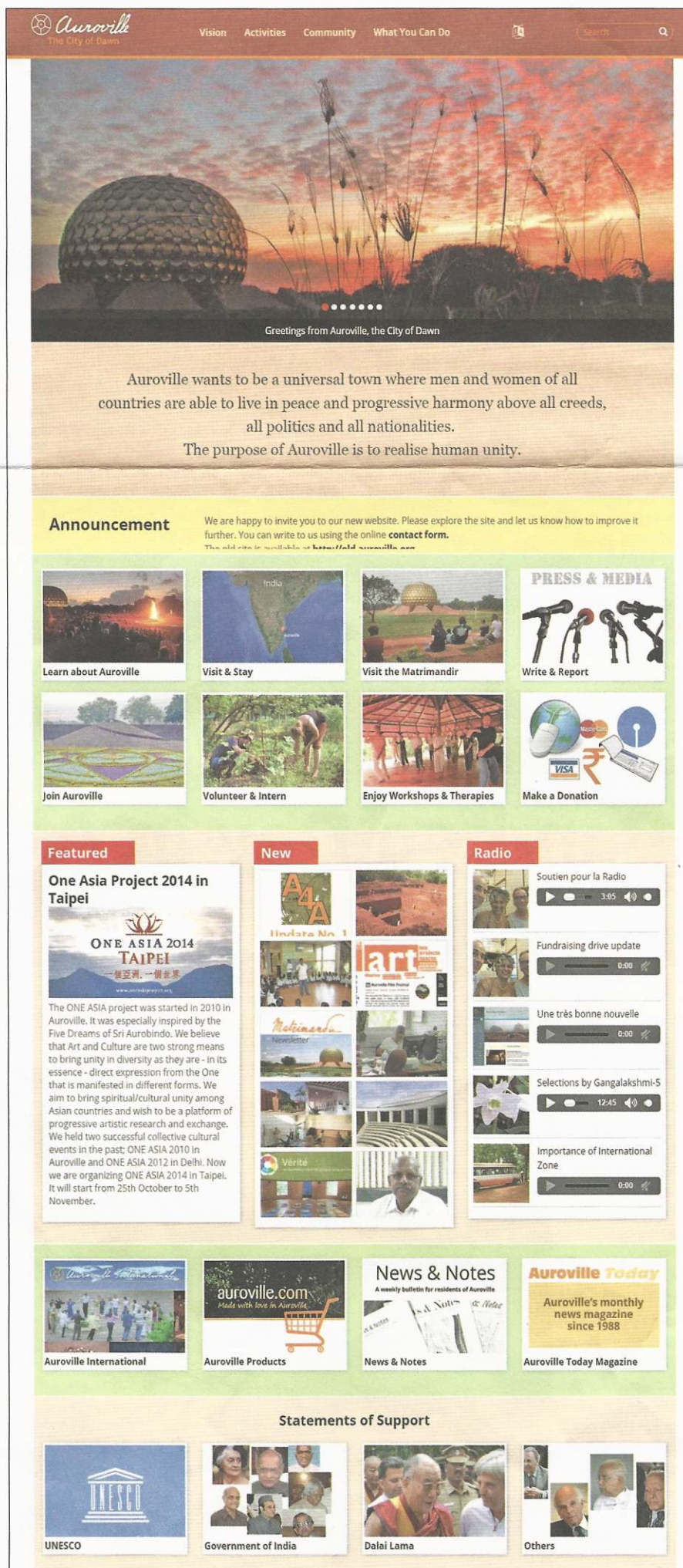
**Manoj:** This site is very much a work in progress; we need to continuously study the actual dynamics of the site, to understand who the users are, to see what they are looking at and how they respond, and then accordingly redesign the site. These people could be future Aurovilians, so we need to get to know them, their aspirations, their difficulties. Finding out about them and communicating to them what they may need to know about Auroville is the most fundamental shift we have to make as web designers.

*What has been the most satisfying aspect of this work?*

**Manoj:** There have been many things, but I would really like to thank programmer Shankar and his team, who are all young, self-taught, and who have shown an enormous capacity to learn new technologies and adapt. We started with one technology, and then halfway through we dropped it for another one. They managed to learn the new technology and then to implement it. One of them said this project helped him break through his limits and reach new levels. Shankar himself has decided to join Auroville. All this makes me very, very happy. Also I would like to thank Ajith, a freelance designer, for designing information architecture, Laurel for guiding us with her professional expertise in content creation, Mirao for the footer graphics, Jothi Charles for preparing quotes from Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, and Mauna for fundraising support as co-project holder.

**Manohar:** I think the Auroville web team is a great team. We have been together now for ten years and we have never had a problem. If we can realise the ideals of Auroville in our work place it is already a very important beginning. I am very grateful for this opportunity to be of service.

*From an interview by Alan*



The home page of the new Auroville website



## In memoriam Dr. Kireet Joshi

With the demise of Dr. Kireet Joshi on 14 September 2014, the Aurobindonian firmament has lost one of its brightest stars. Born on 10 August 1931, he studied philosophy and law at the Elphinstone College under the University of Bombay. In 1952, at the suggestion of Prof. Chubb, he met K.D. Sethna alias Amal Kiran at Bombay at the latter's residence. The interview with Amal Kiran which lasted for more than an hour made young Kireet feel 'greatly widened' and 'deeply happy' (to quote his own words) and he began to regard Amal Kiran as his first teacher in regards to the teaching of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo.

In 1953 Kireet Joshi was awarded a gold medal and the Vedanta Prize for topping the Master of Arts examination. In 1955 he was selected for the I.A.S. and in the following year he was posted as Assistant Collector of Surat. However, in November 1956 he resigned to join the Sri Aurobindo Ashram at Pondicherry as an inmate. In 1958 he was made the first Registrar of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, where he taught philosophy and psychology to the students of the Higher Course. Under the guidance of the Mother, he took part in several educational experiments which included the Free Progress System. He authored educational materials based on Sri Aurobindo's *The Ideal of Human Unity* and *The Human Cycle* and conducted studies on *The Life Divine* and *The Synthesis of Yoga* as well. To share the results of his extensive research on a larger scale, he organized numerous seminars and symposia. It was also due to his efforts that the Sri Aurobindo Ashram was recognized as a Research Institution by the Government of India and exemptions under sections 35 (i) and (ii) of the Income Tax act were provided to it.

1976 was a significant year in the life of Kireet Joshi. A greater Call came to him from the outside world in the form of an invitation from Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India, who, well aware of his competence in the field of education, made him the Educational Adviser in the Ministry of Education. In that same year, he was appointed Member-Secretary of the National Committee on Viswa Bharati under the Chairmanship of Dr. K.L. Shrimali. He not only redesigned and redrafted the Bill for Viswa Bharati University but also developed the ideas as well as the Bills of Pondicherry University and Indira Gandhi National Open University. Also in 1976 he was made a Member of the Central Advisory Board of Education, a post which he occupied till 1988. In 1976 he was elected as Vice-President of the International Commission on Education at Geneva for a period of two years.

In 1981, Kireet Joshi was appointed as the Secretary of the Auroville International Advisory Council set up under the Auroville Emergency Provisions Act. In 1983, he played a pivotal role in the establishment of Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research (SAIIER) at Auroville. In 1991 he was appointed member of the Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation; in 1999 member of the International Advisory Council and later that year Chairman of the Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation, a post he occupied till 2004.

In 1981 Kireet Joshi was made a Member of the University Grants Commission, a post he held till 1990. During the tenure of his membership, he rendered outstanding contributions towards the development of new methodologies of education in the tertiary system. He conceptualized

organization. He also developed Rashtriya Veda Vidya Pratishthan and served as its Founder-Member and Secretary. From 1983 to 1989 he was a Member of the Executive Board of the Institute of Advanced Studies at Shimla. He represented India as a delegate in many UNESCO conferences and chaired the UNESCO Committee on International Education from 1983 to 1987. He was also the Vice-Chairman of the UNESCO Institute of Education (Hamburg) from 1986 to 1990.

In 1983 Kireet Joshi was appointed Special Secretary to the Indian Government in the capacity of which he organized several programmes related to the various aspects of higher education, youth services, language development and UNESCO affairs. In 1987 he conceptualized the International Hindi University at Wardha to

Educational Advisor to the Chief Minister of Gujarat and he held the post for two years. In 2009 he was appointed as the first Executive Chairman of the Gujarat Educational Innovations Commission.

Kireet Joshi was associated with The Mother's Institute of Research from 1977 to 2001 as the Managing Trustee. The Institute undertook the task of translating the thirteen volumes of *Mother's Agenda* into various regional Indian languages. He was also quite close to Satprem and Sujata Nahar. It was to Kireet Joshi that Satprem had sent a note in 2006 in which the latter had written: 'Je suis arrivé au bout' ('I have reached the goal').

As a pioneer in the field of value-based education, he received many recognitions and awards. In 1989 he received an award from the Indian Council for Child Education for his invaluable contribution in the field of child education. In that same year he received the National Citizen's Award. In 1996 Rashtriya Sanskrit Vidyapeetha conferred upon him the degree of D.Litt. In the following year he received the Sewa Ratna Award.

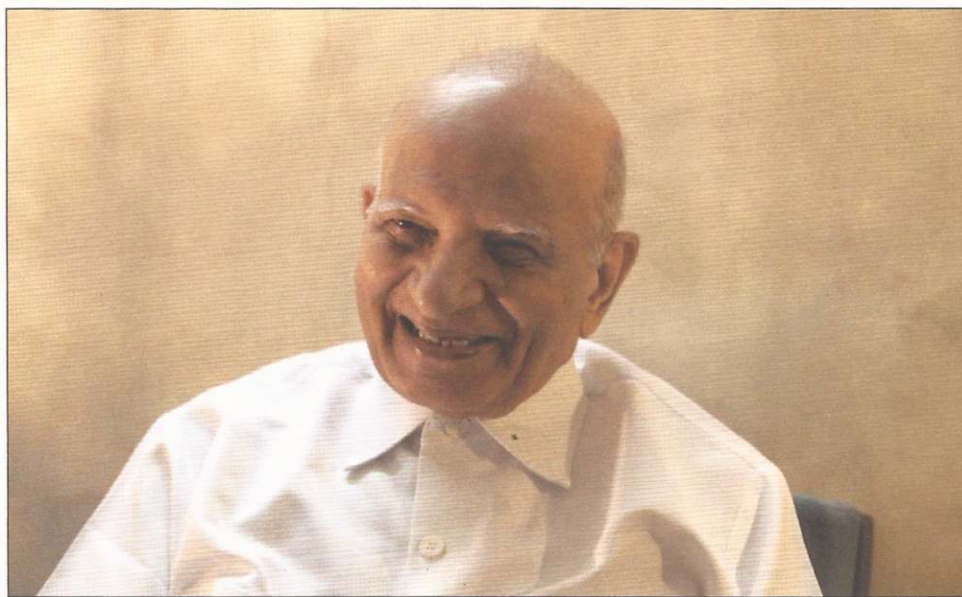
Kireet Joshi was also a prolific writer whose published works cover a vast variety of themes including education, Indian culture, philosophy, spirituality and integral yoga.

A few years ago Kireet Joshi returned to Pondicherry where he stayed at the Care Nursing Home of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. This homecoming did not imply that he retired; on the contrary, he continued to guide scholars on themes related to 'Science and Spirituality' and 'Spiritual Education'. He was the living example of the Sanskrit shloka: *vidya dadati vinayam*. Always approachable, he encouraged youngsters to work on Sri Aurobindo's philosophy. This author fondly recalls how he had taken an avid interest in the former's booklet Sri Aurobindo on Ethics and had asked him to work on a monograph on Sri Aurobindo's political life. Our organization, Overman Foundation, was privileged to honour Kireet Joshi with the 'Auro-Ratna Award' in August 2011.

In his tribute to Kireet Joshi, Shri Narendra Modi, the Prime Minister of India, tweeted: "Saddened by demise of Kireet Joshi. He will be remembered as a fine scholar and educationist, devoted to the principles of Sri Aurobindo. As advisor to Gujarat CM, Kireet Bhai played a key role in setting up of Children's University and Institute of Teacher Education."

With the demise of Kireet Joshi the Aurobindonian community has lost the last among the Greats. The emptiness is irreparable.

Anurag Banerjee



autonomous colleges and proposed several innovations with the view of providing cultural understanding and spiritual values through aesthetic studies. He also promoted the concept of value-based system of management.

In 1982 Kireet Joshi was made the Member-Secretary of the National Commission for Teachers (for school education) and National Commission for Teachers (for higher education). He played a significant role in the creation of the Indian Council of Philosophical Research, which was established to promote Indian philosophical traditions. For a number of years he served the organization as the Member-Secretary and from 2000 to 2006 he functioned as the Chairman of the

develop and promote studies in Hindi both at the national and international levels. As the Vice-Chairman of Rashtriya Sanskrit Sansthan, he guided the activities of the organization in the field of Sanskrit and also developed schemes for the promotion of Sanskrit studies in various Indian universities. Not only did he frame the constitutions of Sri Lal Bahadur Shastri Rashtriya Sanskrit Vidyapeetha at New Delhi and Rashtriya Sanskrit Vidyapeetha at Tirupathi, but also worked to provide the status of deemed universities to both the institutions. From 2006 to 2008 he was the Editorial Fellow of the Project of History of Indian Science, Philosophy and Culture.

In 2008 Kireet Joshi was appointed as the

## Kireetbhai, a lover of Auroville

I was asked to write a few lines so that Aurovilians who may not know much about Kireet Joshi, who has just left us, would understand better how important he has been in Auroville's life. The problem is that I cannot just write a bland piece describing his work for Auroville. So I hope you will pardon me when I become quite personal.

For those who may not know, Kireetbhai came to the Ashram at the age of 25, having resigned from government service. After only two years, in 1958, Mother made him the Registrar of the Centre of Education, a position which he would continue to hold till 1975. He was then called to work as Educational Advisor to the Central Government in Delhi by the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. She had been told by The Mother, whom she deeply respected, that it would be good if Kireet could work for her in the future. He became quickly quite close to the Prime Minister. This is how Kireetbhai could help Auroville when the need arose in 1976 and during twelve long years thereafter.

The work he accomplished for Auroville, often in difficult circumstances, is truly phenomenal. Like few others, I have been a close witness.

The most obvious and most difficult work was to secure for Auroville a safe status. A few weeks ago, I was happy to present him with a booklet dedicated to him which was the English translation of a talk about the genesis of the Auroville Foundation Act, in which he has been

the central actor. When one sees the formidable odds that had to be surmounted from 1976 till 1988 one feels that Kireetbhai was truly a miracle worker. There was fierce opposition at every step, and till the last moments in 1988 there were chances of a final adverse result of all these efforts.

I remember vividly one circumstance in 1987 where I was sitting with him in Delhi and he was telling me that the Auroville file had to be taken from him due to too many negative letters having been sent to the Minister. Of course, on our side, we had forgotten to write supporting messages. When I blurted out that he must feel bad about our ingratitude, I remember him nearly jumping out of his seat and saying with such joyful élan, "Oh no, oh no, what a wonderful privilege we had to work for the Mother; you and me, we have seen miracles happening, oh no, I feel so grateful..." he was literally bubbling with enthusiasm and joy. It made such a profound impression on me, I can still see the scene.

I had the privilege for many years during the 1980s for the SAIIER work to often sit in his office at Shastri Bhavan when he was in charge of the Department of Higher Education (which included all the universities, colleges, many research centres, a tremendous charge). And yet he was adding to it by working toward devising new policies for education through two large education commissions of which he was Member-Secretary, and he was the originator of two major research centres, one

on Philosophy and the other on Sanskrit. (He was able to speak in Sanskrit. I remember numerous occasions when, hearing it spoken by him, I realized it was such a beautiful language to listen to.) And of course he managed many other major works that I would not know about. Despite all that, his office was an oasis of calm. It was a ceaseless work, which he would continue at home late at night. I remember sitting with him while he was dealing with piles of files.

But he was always ready to work for Auroville whenever needed. Mother's work was a priority. He had to manage the Auroville case in the Supreme Court of India in 1981 and 1982, a period he remembered as being particularly heavy because he had additional preoccupations and work. In addition, there was a very difficult beginning of the case. From 1983, he initiated the creation of SAIIER, as he was very concerned with the development of education in Auroville. Soon large grants were made available supporting teachers' maintenance and the development of educational facilities, such as Transition School, from 1984.

During this period, the mid 80's till the mid 90's, we would hold large workshops with him in Delhi for research on value-oriented education. We would come by train, 15 to 20 of us, for at least one week and would sit with him during the late afternoon and at night when he managed to free himself. All those, and there are many, who participated in those workshops will remember the light and joyful atmosphere, the creativity,

and, above all, how much Kireetbhai deeply enjoyed these moments. These workshops resulted in the production of three books, *The Aim of Life*, *The Good Teacher and The Good Pupil* and *Mystery and Excellence of the Human Body* as well as preparing the ground for further research work in the form of monographs for vital education.

During the same period, immediately after the successful outcome of the Auroville case in the Supreme Court, his preoccupation with a permanent solution for Auroville which would guarantee its autonomy became prominent, for which he was continuously consulting experts, friends and various government officers as well as Aurovilians. I remember meeting him in Geneva for 3 days sometime in 1984, during which we worked on a kind of mock-up of an Auroville Act. After many twists and turns, and many anxious moments when the chances of success looked very dim, the Auroville Foundation Act ended up being passed by the Indian Parliament on September 5th, 1988. It was the end of three amazing weeks during which Frederick, Krishna Tewari and myself could see the miraculous workings of Mother's force.

Later, somewhat unexpectedly, Kireet became Chairman of the Auroville Foundation, from 1999 till 2004. Among his preoccupations, besides education, Auroville's internal governance was high. He participated in a collective research in Auroville as a place for divine anarchy. But it became overshadowed with the difficulties

around Matrimandir which created a painful controversy. This weighed heavily on him and saddened the end of his tenure. Nevertheless, it was during this period of his chairmanship that he initiated the making of a large development plan for Auroville. This resulted in a sizeable increase of the yearly financial allotments from the Central Government for the development of Auroville, opening a new and larger channel for funds to flow into Auroville.

After a stint from September 2008 as Educational Advisor to the then Gujarat Chief Minister, Shri Narendra Modi, during which he promoted the development of a vast educational programme, including a Children's University, following some health problems he had an inner command to come back to the Ashram. He responded immediately in June 2010. He was happily living in a small room of the Care hospice of the Ashram when in 2013 he unfortunately developed a throat cancer. He waged a courageous battle against it and had to suffer many very difficult moments. Those who had the privilege to assist him would, I am sure, testify to the beautiful atmosphere of surrender and peace around him. And the blessing of his beautiful smile, to the very end.

Quite recently Kireetbhai told me, as I believe he had said to quite a few other people, "Whenever I think of Auroville, I feel happiness in my heart". It was not the first time that he had told me this or something similar. Kireetbhai was -is- a great lover of Auroville.

Alain Bernard



# Art Break Day 2014: India!

**A**rt Break Day is a community art event which occurs in locations around the world on the first Friday in September, including 29 sites this year in Mexico, the Netherlands and the US. It is sponsored by the US-based non-profit, Art is Moving.

For the second event in Auroville, we saw dozens hesitating to sit down, particularly adults, claiming they are "bad at this kind of thing". With encouragement, many were able to gradually open up and express themselves. In the morning, school groups of children (including The Learning Community, Deepanam and the Life Education Centre), came one after another with creative ideas on the theme "wish". Some were personal, including many dreams of flight or flying, and a common hope to have colourful, cooling ice cream on a hot day; while others wished for peace, happiness, love, kindness and for the preservation of nature around the world.

Three wishes for our planet at ART Break Day 2014: India! One for saving our trees, another for a flying superhero to remove all ocean pollution, and a third hoping for kindness and sharing between all people! Of nearly 300 participants, some commented on how it brought

connection and concentration to the community in a very special and positive way. Throughout a day filled with activity and creation, there was actually a precious and dynamic silence. Just as last year, we saw adults and children, Tamil villagers and Aurovilians, single-day guests and long-term volunteers all sitting down together to create. This remains a very unique interaction bridged by the universality of art.

There was also a moment I looked around and saw a cat, several dogs snuggling up against tables, birds in the surrounding trees, people moving and painting, and I really felt the blissful harmony of the atmosphere on this day. And amazingly, exactly like last year, the moment we packed up the materials, heavy rain came pouring down!

My effort to share art therapy and events like Art Break Day in Auroville is called *Sankalpa*, which is a Sanskrit word for intention or affirmation. In the last four years here, I have helped many individuals to express wishes and dreams and combine them with creativity to help manifest them. Ultimately, Art Break Day is my own wish coming true, to be able to provide a supportive open space and



Adults and children at work during Art Break Day

access to the tools for creative expression. the deeper work of art therapy. Community art is an important foundation for

Krupa

## NEW BOOKS

### Creative Expressions from Auroville

**A**bullock has coloured yarns wrapped around its horns; a brightly-coloured scarf flies past the Inuksuk in the International Zone; a lithophone bridges a canyon crevice; Bendi toys join in a yoga class...

These are some of the unexpected images contained in *Creative Expressions from Auroville*, a lavish coffee-table offering from Auroville Collaborative. "It's an introduction to the diversity of the arts and crafts of Auroville," explains Vimal, the photographer and initiator of the project. "But its not no attempt to sell these products. its more about the feeling of the artistic scene here; who the artists are and what comes out of their explorations, set against the larger background of Auroville."

Consequently, the photos in this book are as much about process – artists and craftspeople at work in their studios, shots of their tools etc. – as about products. Even some of the photos have an unfinished feel, as if catching a precarious moment in the creative process. The minimalist texts, based on the words of the artists themselves, also give insights into how they work and what



A brightly-coloured Auromode scarf flies past the Inuksuk in the International Zone

they are attempting to manifest. For example, a photo of a concentrated woodworker, Kenji, seen through planks of wood in his workshop is characterized as "the moment that the seeker becomes the translator; where he meets the wood face to face. At this moment a dialogue begins and both – the wood and the man – decide what the wood wishes to be."

As for the unexpected juxtapositions, they are not driven solely by aesthetics. They also say something about the Auroville creative process. How people here are looking for a new way of perceiving things, playing with new combinations of materials and perspectives. And how the heat and dust of our daily lives, mediated through an artists sensibility, can throw up unexpected results. As Mallika Sarabhai puts it in her introduction to the book, in Auroville "red mud lanes, dusty for most of the year, lead to hidden gems of immense beauty".

"It is also partly an introduction to Auroville through the arts and crafts," explains Vimal, "I wanted to show different aspects of Auroville through the products. In fact, the whole feeling of the Auroville background was very important for me. Sometimes I would have a piece with me for weeks before I found

the right place to shoot it."

Vimal explains that the larger idea behind the book was to find a way of bringing Auroville artists and craftspeople together, in the same way that Auroville Consulting created the education and green portal initiatives to bring people together in those fields. "We printed one copy as part of the project and made a public presentation of it to the artists," explains Vimal. "This copy also went to the Auroville exhibition in Delhi. For a long time, we could not find a publisher for the book, so I thought that it was supposed to be a single piece, just like the other art pieces in that exhibition. But then Dharmesh of Kala Kendra said that it was a good book and came up with a revolving publication fund to publish the book."

*Creative Expressions* is an unusual and creative production, marred only by some elementary type-setting errors. In its impressionistic approach it captures or, at least, hints at that search for inner beauty and truth projected into outer forms that is one of the most important aspects of our explorations in Auroville.

Alan

*Creative Expressions from Auroville.* Published by Kala Kendra, 2014. Rs 2,500 from [Auroville.com](http://Auroville.com)

### Transforming lives

**T**ransforming Lives, an introduction to Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga, is a compilation of articles by Larry Seidlitz that have appeared in the journal *Collaboration* over the last ten years. Larry is a practitioner and scholar of integral yoga, who conducts online courses for the Sri Aurobindo Centre for Advanced Research in Pondicherry, and is a former editor of Auroville Today.

This book is not a compilation of the writings of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, but contains well-written and insightful chapters on various aspects of the yoga.

After a brief introduction to the life and work of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, the first chapter provides an overview of some of Sri Aurobindo's teachings: the central tenets of his philosophy; his views on the psychology of social development; his exposition of the components of Indian culture and art; his concept of the poetry of the future and his views on integral education.

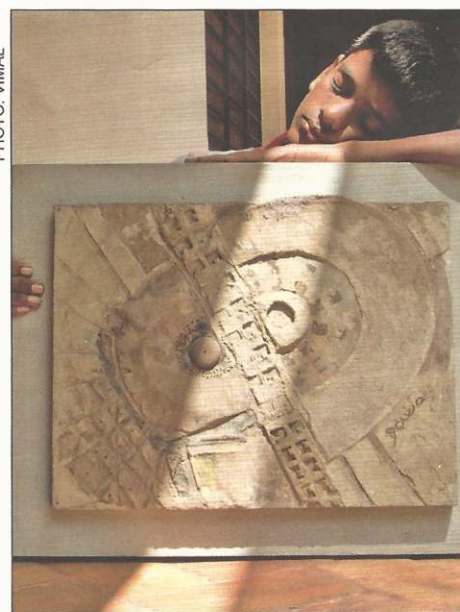
Chapter 2 deals with Sri Aurobindo's contributions to Indian spirituality: his views of existence; his ideal of psychic, spiritual and supramental transformation; and the spiritual discipline he and The Mother elaborated. In the next chapter titled *The Secret Knowledge*, Larry goes in some detail into Sri Aurobindo's epic poem *Savitri: A Legend and a Symbol*. The chapter titled *The Ideal of Integral Perfection* is an introduction to the chapters that follow: *Practices in Integral Yoga*, *Seven attitudes for Spiritual Living*, *The Divine Grace*, *Emotion and its Transformation*, and *Spiritual Activism and Integral Yoga*.

The book ends with a chapter titled *Glimpses of the Mother's Supramental Transformation*, where Larry discusses the later stages of the Mother's *sadhana* as recorded in *Mother's Agenda*.

A glossary of yogic and Sanskrit terms is found at the end.

Carel

*Transforming Lives, an introduction to Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga.* Published by the Sri Aurobindo Centre for Advanced Research, email [sacar@auromail.net](mailto:sacar@auromail.net). Price in India Rs 250.



Mixed-media relief by Chantal

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