

## The first section of the Matrimandir test lake nears completion

The first section of the 10 metres deep and 100 metres long Matrimandir test lake is nearing completion. By the end of September, the digging was finalized, two five-metre high walls of concrete lego blocks had come up on either side of the lake, and the lake's floor and slopes were clad with a high density polyethylene (hdpe) liner embedded between two layers of geotextile. "What's left to do is covering the foil with a 30 cm thick layer of small granite chips," says Jan, who has been overseeing the work. "We'll start putting chips at the bottom and then go up. The slopes are not steep and the chips will remain in place. And then the monsoon can start." He expects the lake to fill by up to the three metres level; if the monsoon is as massive as last year's, it might even fill to five metres.

Yet, five metres is only half of the lake's projected depth. "We have installed 1,200 blocks to the five metres level, we need about 2,500 blocks more to bring both walls up to 10 metres," says Jan. "We are making 16 blocks a day, so in another 200 days we will have a sufficient number of blocks to go all the way up." The blocks, each weighing 2 tonnes, are made on site.

The walls are tapering upwards, from 4,5 metres at the bottom to 75 centimeters at the top. "The walls need to withstand the hydraulic pressure," explains Jan. "The pressure at the bottom of the 10 metres deep lake will be 10 tonnes per square metre if the lake is full. The sheer weight of the wall will prevent that the pressure pushes it away. When we heighten the walls by spring next year, we will thicken them with another 1,5 metres." It is expected that it will take three years for the lake to fully fill up during a normal monsoon. Excess rainwater will be directed into a canyon, from where it will flow into the Irumbai Lake. In the summer, the water level will go down due to evaporation; but for the time being no other sources than rainwater will be used to fill up the lake and maintain the level.

The cost of this project is immense. It is thanks to Michael Bonke's drive and commitment that building the Matrimandir lake has started. He put together the technical team that provided the concept and design and oversaw the execution; he provided a major part of the funds to purchase some of the heavy machinery, and sent the hdpe liner and geotextile from Germany, and paid for the German expert to do the welding of the hydrofoil. And it was through his efforts that the Matrimandir received substantial donations for making the lake.

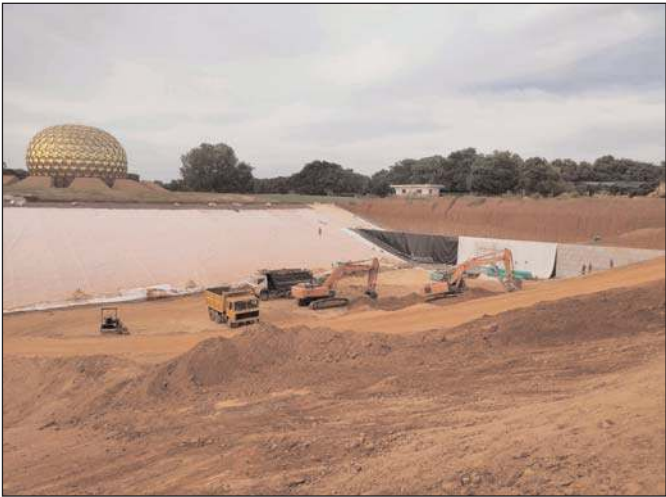
If the test lake functions as expected, the next section of the lake will start. "We are still discussing in how many sections we will make the lake," says Jan. "Originally we were thinking of sections of 100 metres long, but it should be feasible and less expensive to continue now with sections of 275 metres each." The next section will be dug next to the test lake wall. At its far end a third 10-metres high wall, for which another 2,500 lego blocks will be needed, will be erected. When the flooring and sides of the new section have been done, the wall separating it from the test lake will be removed. The removed blocks will be used again for the next section.

One question remains: what to do with all the earth from the excavation. "There is an idea to build a large hill with it in the Greenbelt, with a lake on top," says Jan. "But that still needs to be studied. Another suggestion is to use part of it for the visitors' hill, as suggested by The Mother, from where day-visitors can see the Matrimandir and the gardens. In the meantime, we're dumping all the excavated earth on a hill near the Matrimandir."

Carel



The almost completed Matrimandir test lake. Small granite chips will cover the white geotextile. The walls are clad with hdpe liner.



The end of the dig



Building the wall



A view of the half-finished wall



Blockmaking at the Matrimandir workshop

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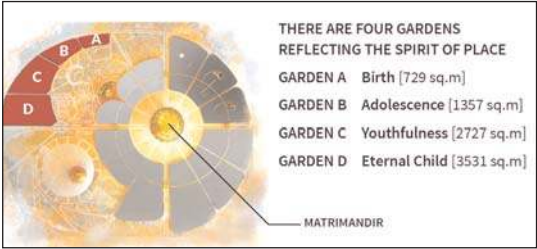


# The Garden of the Unexpected

Situated at the periphery of the Matrimandir gardens is the site of the Garden of the Unexpected, a garden for children for when their parents are visiting the Inner Chamber, or for those days when the Inner Chamber is open only to children from all the schools in Auroville and the surrounding bio-region. In the words of the late Roger Anger, the Chief Architect of Auroville, this garden should be "A place where a child could have an initiatory experience, a place of wonder, a garden for discovering the unexpected." Auroville Today talked to Mona Doctor-Pingel, one of the four team members who were instrumental in creating the garden.

“It was a great privilege to be chosen to do this garden,” reflects Mona. “I love landscaping which I integrate in all my architectural projects, but I never thought I would become involved in one of the Matrimandir gardens. I certainly wasn't interested in participating in a competition about the gardens [see box] as I am not comfortable with competitions within the Auroville context. But one day I got a call from Andreas Bickford, a Canadian architect living in Australia and a friend of Joss Brooks of Pitchandikulam community. I had met him the year before at the Lorne Biennale in Australia. He encouraged me to participate. We would be a team of four, together with Joss who has created the Adyar Poonga Eco-Park in Chennai and Greg Burgess, a well-known Australian architect. We called ourselves ‘the Unexpected Four’ and started working and submitted a design. After a few months, we learned that our design had been short-listed, and shortly afterwards that we had won the competition through a unique Auroville process where Aurovilians had the final say (and not the experts as would be usual. We then discussed with the Aurovilians Jyoti Eri and Lara Davis their shortlisted designs, and incorporated some of their elements into ours.” The work started on 21 February 2019 and took three and a half years to manifest, including a six-months’ slow down due to Covid. “Our team also underwent changes, due to the Covid pandemic, where the Australian architects couldn’t visit and help in the execution. Madhivanan G., a young Aurovilian architect, born in the Matrimandir nursery, became an integral part of our team instead.” The final Garden of the Unexpected consists of four sections: the Garden of Birth, the Garden of Adolescence, the Garden of Youthfulness and the Garden of the Eternal Child.

Is the work finished? For us designers, yes,” says Mona. “But gardens always change. I see my involvement as a long term advisor and have developed the attitude that whatever you do in Auroville, at any time it can change, that nothing is permanent. So change must always be expected. But in its present manifestation, the garden is uniquely beautiful.”



## The competition

An international open design competition was announced in June 2018, inviting design proposals for the Garden of the Unexpected. Twenty-two design entries were received. The jury comprised Ameeta Mehra, former Governing Board member of the Auroville Foundation, Kei Ishikawa, a landscape architect from Japan, Narad Richard Eggenberger, a landscape designer from Auroville/USA, and Piero and Gloria Ciconesi, Auroville, architects from Italy who have been involved in the realization of Matrimandir since 1971.

Stage 1 was the concept submission. Feedback was given by the jury based on the parameters of concept and aesthetics, interactivity and engagement, sustainability and implementation and practicality. Eleven entries were then selected.

Stage 2 Out of eleven entries, three entries were shortlisted.

Stage 3 saw the eleven entries displayed at Unity Pavilion in Auroville. A public panel consisting of forty-two Aurovilians from diverse backgrounds selected the winning entry from the three shortlisted submissions. The team Unexpected Four was chosen to manifest the Garden of the Unexpected.

The final stage involved the integration of interesting elements from the other two shortlisted designs as had been requested in the community feedback. Dreamweaving, in which positive critiquing and learning from each other's strengths were given importance, resulted in the best aspects from the other two designs being integrated into the winning design, without it losing its essence.

## Garden of Birth

This garden is about birth, joy and magic. An entrance portal defined by large granite boulders opens to a Wisdom tree. The path weaves through carefully curated low maintenance plants with randomly placed stones for seating. There is a natural lily pond (self-maintaining) with the sound of fountain. An owl etched in the granite boulder overlooks the garden as children and adults put their head in the humming stone. As children have a tendency to put whatever they find into their mouth, the team has taken great care to only plant trees with edible fruits such as amla, kumquat, roseapple, jamun and bel, and safe to eat herbs such as brahmi and tulsi in all the gardens. A gentle slope wide enough for a wheelchair or pram marks the exit of the garden and leads to the Garden of Adolescence.



The entrance to the Garden of Birth



The lily pond

## Garden of Adolescence

This garden is about hiding, creating and building. The entrance has a foyer of large granite boulders, and a pathway made from left over granite pieces during the construction of Matrimandir meanders through a butterfly garden with splashes of scarlet, orange and yellow. Jasmine flowers flavour the air. One gently descends to a spacious garden filled with pebbles and rocks, where children play. This area is also used for rainwater harvesting. A bridge across this large open space with laterite boulders and laterite stone benches for parents to watch over the children playing in the garden completes the ensemble.



Butterflies in the butterfly garden



The pebble play area in the Garden of Adolescence

## Garden of Youthfulness

This garden is about the struggle of retaining the playfulness and creativity of a child as we learn and grow. One enters the garden past high laterite menhirs (also found on the Matrimandir premises hiding in the bushes) on to a pathway that intertwines between four mature neem trees. The shade of the trees invites the visitors to pause and rest on the limestone rocks. The smell of the aromatic herbs planted in the Edible Curative Garden on the right waft through the breeze. A bit further on the highest point and on an axis to the Matrimandir is the copper-roofed Monsoon Pavilion, a place to retreat into and enjoy the rain. 'Juanita's rock', a huge rock that came from Juanita's garden in Felicity, provides the flooring. The pavilion is situated in a garden of pebbles whose area is precisely defined as a Shalagram - a symbolical connection to the Matrimandir's section. A gurgling brook in natural



The copper-roofed monsoon pavilion and Juanita's rock

limestone rocks with fossils descends from the square pond next to the rock, to join a 5 mm deep lower pond at the base of the garden like a deep reflecting pool ending the journey of the stream. Both the pools are designed for children of all ages to play in or simply dip their feet in. A large wind chime gently adds to the sensorial experience of the space. A tree platform is hanging deftly from one of neem trees affording a bird's eye view of the garden and good breeze at any time of the day. Children are seen doing their homework here. Low hanging limestone rocks oscillate from the branches of the tree creating a mesmerizing experience with gravity of the earth. Granite stepping stones signal the entry into the Garden of Eternal Child.



The tree platform and hanging limestone rocks

The aim of this garden is to give youth of all ages an experience of immersion in and reverence for nature. It aspires to lift the landscape into consciousness, to allow an access – both playful and serious – to enter and discover its nature, to peel off the surface and reveal an experience of wonder. This is a sacred meditation space which aims to quietly occupy children – indrawn – to slip away and reconnect with themselves. The landscape is raised for an inward discovery – to listen to all that is around and within.

Excerpt from the design presentation of Lara Davis

In my understanding, the word ‘children’ is referring not only to children in age, but also to the inner child and the evolution of the psychic being. In this regard the Garden of the Unexpected is a garden for people of all ages who are aspiring for inner and outer progress. This garden aims to bring forth the inner child in all of us, encouraging connection with the psychic being.

Excerpt from the design presentation of Jyoti Naoki Eri

## Garden of Eternal Child

This garden's main feature is a grass covered area, encircled by beautiful 1.5 feet thick yellow cuddapah stone benches. Its 24 metres diameter is similar to that of the Matrimandir's Inner Chamber, while the stone encirclement has been inspired by the low granite benches that used to surround the Banyan Tree long ago. The area is used for gatherings and for group plays. This garden is the largest of the four and has the vast open view of the Matrimandir, the Banyan Tree and the amphitheater to the left. A grove of mixed indigenous low watering shrubs and trees as well as many plumerias brought from the Matrimandir nursery which were awaiting their final destination since years, complete this garden.



The gathering and play area in the Garden of Eternal Child



# Exploring Roger's city plan

This interview with Anupama Kundoo is the third article in the series 'city perspectives'.

Anupama Kundoo graduated from Sir J.J. College of Architecture, Mumbai in 1989 and received her doctoral degree from TU Berlin in 2008. She established herself as an architect in Auroville in 1990 where she designed and built many buildings, including Wall House, Creativity, SAWCHU, Mitra Youth Hostel and the Town Hall complex. She was part of the team that produced Auroville's *Master Plan, Perspective 2025* and worked on the Auroville's urban design of under Roger Anger's guidance. She has taught at various international universities and is currently Professor at FH Potsdam, and the Head of Urban Design, Auroville. In 2021 she received the prestigious RIBA Charles Jencks award and the Auguste Perret Prize. She is also author of the book *Roger Anger: Research on Beauty*.

**Auroville Today: Are cities important? If so, why?**

The short version is that cities are the most efficient way for humans to thrive rather than just survive, and coexist with others with the minimum negative impact on the environment because they offer the possibility of achieving the highest density of population in the smallest ecological footprint. Moreover, due to the critical mass, they concentrate the best services and facilities – the best hospitals, schools etc. – which is why villagers gravitate to cities, seeking a better life. Cities also nourish the mind and the soul, through art and culture. Individuals have the advantage of the collective expertise rather than having to do everything themselves.

Also, those who are projecting the future of the world seem to agree that the development of a collective consciousness is the next necessary evolutionary step for humanity. And cities being the place of collective living are the best place for such a consciousness to evolve. Here the focus shifts from the dominant individual, family, or the tribe, to the commons, and thus all individuals can thrive. An urban consciousness, a civic sense, develops where everybody follows a code of common life which benefits and liberates everybody.

In this sense, the city is recognition that the human does not thrive alone, and provides the alternative to villages, where the human interdependence can get too oppressive, especially if one does not submit to social conventions and prevailing beliefs.

In my years of teaching urban management at the Technische Universität Berlin, our case studies showed that all good cities are those where governance is good, and this enables steady progress beyond problem solving through targets that are set and achieved. And this need for good governance applies to Auroville as well, for which it is firstly necessary to develop an urban mindset and recognise the opportunity and liberation that city life provides.

**And yet for many people modern cities have acquired a bad name.**

True, in recent years cities have become unliveable. This is because of cars and motorisation, an unfortunate consequence of industrialisation. Apart from the pollution, safety issues and noise, this severely impacted the social fabric and led to urban sprawl, as people could now live much further away from their workplace and commute on their own. Streets that were public space and facilitated connection got replaced by roads that divided the urban fabric on either sides of the streets. People lost the opportunity of chance encounters and social contact.

In fact, pollution and urban sprawl, which are two of the major problems of modern cities, are caused by individualism and car-centred mobility.

**How can Auroville benefit from the best of the urban experience and avoid the worst?**

If somebody was to truly look at Roger Anger's city plan with an open mind without preconceived ideas, it really is that kind of human-centric city, and more than that to fulfill Auroville's purpose.

It is said that the way we shape our cities, shape us. So the importance of a city's design cannot be understated. The Mother and Roger proposed a very visionary city. The Mother specifically asked Roger to find new forms for the new consciousness. As it was conceived in the sixties, many have wrongly assumed a similarity to Brasilia or Chandigarh, but in reality Auroville is absolutely the contrary to

those cities, which as we all know were based on celebrating the car and individual mobility.

In 1965, in his first report to the Mother, Roger had predicted and suggested: "The traffic principle needs to be defined right now. Should we allow the presence of cars: It is likely that in hardly a few years, India will witness, like Europe and the US, the major urban problem posed by the Automobile... The choice to be made now is therefore to forbid the use of this means of transportation within the town and replace it by another one, more healthy, less clumsy and noisy and more aesthetical, maybe more recent, if possible." The Mother commented on the margin: "Small size electrically powered vehicles, capable of transporting about 200Kg at a speed of 15km/h."

But mobility is just one such aspect that was so visionary and is still ahead of its times. Various other foundational principles of the city plan are as forward looking and holistic even today 54 years later. I suggest that everyone read that 1965 Report to understand the basic assumptions embedded in the Galaxy Plan.

The Mother wanted a compact city where like-minded people would live in proximity in a certain concentration and collective lifestyle, where they would be liberated from daily chores and be able to dedicate their time to the development of their consciousness in an environment of collaboration, where each one's advances would help the others. Roger responded by designing a compact, walkable city, where the buildings would be intimately interconnected. Furthermore, he addressed the harsh sun and monsoon and included climatic comfort for pedestrians' daily life through multilevel shaded walkways. This is another reason why the fabric of the Galaxy looks so compact.

It is a city without private ownership. In this the Mother was very prescient, for we have seen how land ownership has led to conflicts and wars, as well as affordability issues. The worst of all is gated communities within cities, as they destroy the city fabric by creating small inward-looking groupings.

Despite the high density demand, Roger proposed a city in which the human scale was restored. He anticipated the way that tall, free-standing towers separated from the rest of the urban fabric would impose themselves in the future landscape, and that modern technologies leading to uniform glass facades would create disorientation. He avoided these negative trends through his ingenious urban design. To enable the majority of buildings to remain low-rise, he proposed just a few tall buildings concentrated along radial fingers of infrastructure, called the *Lignes de Force*. Then he designed an urban fabric where the tall towers do not stand oppressively alone, but gently flow into other buildings. In other words, the Lines of Force are not vertical but horizontally interconnected tall buildings that slope down progressively, the residential ones towards the Matrimandir, and the industrial ones towards the greenbelt. This was truly innovative. No other architect at that time had imagined anything like this.

It is also what I am developing now with the design of the *Line of Goodwill*.

Not everybody has to live in these Lines of Force. Others may be happy to live in lower density dwellings which the high density Lines of Force make possible, but many will enjoy living in the Lines of Force because they will have high-tech facilities and everything will be at their doorstep. It's also a very economical use of land and allows for the maximum consolidation of the green spaces in the city.

There is a tug-of-war between development and environment in India, where we have one sixth of the world's population but only 2.6% of the landmass. Therefore, to propose an elitist, green-looking version of Auroville would not make it green enough or replicable for India.

The Galaxy Plan achieves a balance between a relatively high population density and a green environment. If it hadn't been for Roger, the green belt would not even have existed, nor the abundance of green spaces within the city. These were introduced because Roger recognised that modernist towns had deviated from their coexistence with nature. Instead we have a city centre which is green, our periphery is green and we have a green network which is intended to also function as a green mobility network, something which is not well understood.

**One of the perennial criticisms of the Galaxy plan is that it was devised in Paris and simply dropped over an existing landscape without consideration of existing ground realities.**

It was not 'dropped'. It was the result of three intense years of work and often daily conversations between Roger and Mother, and only after the plan was finalised was the inauguration ceremony held where the model was presented. Roger's office explored many geometries based on these discussions, but also on the terrain and the available data. It is not true that there was no data about the ground realities at that time. Look at the earliest maps and models. All the water bodies and catchments are there, so his team had taken water and climatic data into account. Note that he also pointed out in 1965 that we do not have water for the town, that this would be the biggest challenge.

The larger problem here is that after the Mother's passing, residents began to contest this plan and question even if there should be a city at all. In all records of Mother's conversations with Roger or others concerning Auroville, at no point did she seek the residents' opinions on the requirements, nor feedback on Roger's plans. She had taken a chief architect exactly to ensure that it would be as per her specific vision, and to counter those who expressed divergent opinions, she even issued a message to Aurovilian architects and engineers not to question the plan, but simply to build it.

She wanted people to live in Auromodèle till the city was built, so that the city would be built according to details agreed with Roger and implemented rapidly without the impediments that come when people settle there and acquire attachments. For this was not to be an ordinary city for people to merely live and satisfy individual whims, and get too comfortable. We are building a city for the new consciousness, and she wanted to make sure that this city would be exemplary and the laboratory and cradle she envisaged for the new consciousness. Roger had therefore delivered a design where the whole city was like one organism, and had the necessary coherence. Also he prioritised beauty, as he said beauty had the ability to raise our consciousness spontaneously.

And Roger proved he is the right man for the job. He has not left a single ugly trace in Auroville. Everything he designed – the Matrimandir, Last School etc. – has been to a high standard, far higher than anything constructed since his passing. And his foresight and envisioned city plan remains visionary and more relevant than ever.

Sadly, however, many Auroville architects refused to collaborate with Roger, and some helped spread a smear campaign about him. But 50 years later, what has been constructed? Many separate gated-communities of mostly conventional apartments and increased dependency on cars.

**Another thing that has been said by many of those who admire the Galaxy concept is that the 1999 Master Plan betrayed the essence of that concept in the way that, for example, the road network gained prominence.**

As one of those who worked on that Master Plan, and co-signed it, I don't think we betrayed the essence. We were making a perspective plan, not a detailed development plan, and when you submit a perspective plan you need to respect Indian building codes. Having not yet worked out detailed plans for the car-free mobility, the Town and Country Planning Office wanted us to include the typical standard sections for the various roads according to the norms. We had to incorporate their suggestions.

**So government regulations are not forcing us to modify any essential aspect of the Galaxy?**

No, they are only helping to take it further. And it's worth remembering that some roads defined in the perspective plan are now proposed to have much narrower road sections as we have subsequently detailed them. As we do not want to invite cars, but provide public transport, we are proposing roads that are as narrow as possible. But we shouldn't forget that emergency vehicles will need access...

**You worked with Roger for many years. If he was here today, with all the changes that happened in the world since 1968, including technological changes and climate change, do you think he would have modified the Galaxy?**

He would not have modified the non-negotiables and the central unifying character of the city [indicated by Roger and approved by the Residents' Assembly in 2007 as the *Lines of Force, Four Zones, 50,000 population, Matrimandir and the Peace area, the Crown and city centre eds.*], not because he proposed them but because these are



PHOTO ANDREAS DEFENER

Anupama Kundoo

necessary to achieve the aim. The non-negotiables are not random, they are the core elements, the city's DNA, and if you give up those the entire thing will collapse and be reduced to an ordinary town. Also the interconnected buildings in certain areas, covered walkways and cohesive language of the city are some defining elements. But there are many other areas, such as the Cultural Zone and International Zone buildings, as well as in the Residential Zone sectors 1 and 2, where there is a lot of freedom of expression.

Roger also wanted to ensure liberty for the architects and hoped for a spirit of collaboration among architects in developing the fabric and spirit of the Galaxy, but he wouldn't agree to sacrifice those aspects which were its central defining elements. He was very committed and remained clear about protecting the manifestation of the Auroville as envisaged by the Mother in order to fulfill its purpose.

Actually, all ambitious projects face a lot of external resistance, politically and otherwise, but in Auroville we have a peculiar case where the resistance is from within, while the external support is there, and this has always been the case. But I think the birth pains we are going through at present are essentially a conflict between individualism and collectivism. Even while Mother was physically here, many individuals prioritised their personal preferences and wanted to make Auroville a place to primarily express their individuality. And after her passing, Aurovilians created a culture of individually-driven projects and houses, where neighbours have a say in who lives next to them, and acquired many other habits that are diametrically opposite to what was envisioned in a planned city which prioritises collective life.

In the 1965 document there is one revealing exchange. In response to Roger's "...the architecture of Auroville needs to be controlled by precise regulations defining not only the general layout, a palette of colours, fences and its material, upkeep, etc. checked by an Auroville service that would be in charge.", the Mother commented, "This measure is indispensable."

I don't think there are two camps. There is a new world waiting to be born and old habits that don't serve us anymore but to which we are still clinging. But there is also great enthusiasm amidst all the fears and doubts.

**You have continued to work on manifesting the Galaxy, most recently in your design for the Line of Goodwill. What has this work brought you personally?**

I love doing this work. Auroville's city plan fascinates me and I had given myself to this work: it still continues to be so exciting, so inspiring. Over three decades, I have seen its various details, great opportunities and the ingenious synthesis of all aspects of city living. I hope that it manifests as soon as possible so that also all the others get to see what I see, to enjoy and experience living in the envisioned city.

But it hasn't been easy. I've faced many hostilities and even been ostracised by some Aurovilians, including architects, because of my association with Roger and for having shown great respect and fidelity to his work. Actually, it was only many years after he passed away that I began to realise the immensity of what I received from him, and this wasn't only architectural expertise. It was a whole way of being. I feel fortunate to have been receptive to that which he had to offer, and whatever else I achieved in the world thereafter has surely been impacted by the 17 years of my close collaboration with him.

From an interview by Alan  
Auroville Today October 2022 **3**



# An inner journey

After completing his higher studies at Delhi University, Dr. Jai Singh joined Auroville in 1992. His wife and children joined a year later.

Jai has been a member of the Auroville Council, and has also worked at SEWA, Village Action and New Creation School. But from the beginning until now his main association and work has been with Savitri Bhavan. Here he gives a glimpse of his inner journey.

From my early years I was asking ‘What is life? Who am I?’ In the silence of the morning and evening, I used to wonder about the purpose of coming here upon earth.

My teachers used to ask me about my goal in life. Others would say they wanted to be a doctor or a politician, but I would say that I don’t know who ‘I’ am. And the teachers would laugh at me.

I took up yoga as a kind of hobby. While at college, I had back pain. I was getting treatment for it but it was not working. One day I went to a bookshop and somebody gave me a book called ‘Jain Yoga’. It told me that if you have a pain somewhere in the body, you need only concentrate on that place and it will go. So I concentrated for a week or two on my pain and afterwards it disappeared. It convinced me that concentration or onepointedness had a power.

Later I came across a book by Vivekananda on yoga and started practicing hatha yoga and raj yoga. But I didn’t know where it was taking me because at that time I was 25 and in college, and there were plenty of opportunities to live a worldly life and seek a successful job. Yet, most of the time I was involved in meditation and reading spiritual books.

This is why, when I joined Delhi University for my postgraduate study, I took ‘meditation – a way of life’ as the subject for my M. Phil dissertation. For my subsequent PhD I chose the topic ‘meditation – a way to enlightenment’. My research guide was not happy with this choice because he said, what are you going to do after this? There is nothing along this line that you can teach in University. But I explained that my inner being was searching for itself and I wanted to continue my inner journey. However, I could not tell my family this, they would think I was going mad, so I had to cover up my own interest by making it seem that I was simply engaged in an academic enquiry.

Actually 1983, the year in which I took up this PhD topic, was the year that really changed my life. On 9th March – I remember the date – I was sitting in an easy chair in the students’ hostel. I was feeling quietness in my mind when suddenly my concentration went to the heart centre. I didn’t know what was happening. I was frightened that I might go out of my body, so I withdrew. But it happened a second time, and it felt so thrilling and exciting that I thought let whatever happens

happen. And then I had this very strong experience of the oneness of the transcendental, the universal, and the individual.

After a few days, however, I forgot the experience.

A few months later I went to a friend’s room. He was putting agarbathies before a photograph and I asked him whose photo it was. He told me it was The Mother and he couldn’t believe I had never heard of Her. Then he began explaining about The Mother and Sri Aurobindo. I listened very patiently to him for half an hour, and I felt that this is what I was looking for.

Later he introduced me to Dr Kireet Joshi who explained to me, over a series of meetings, the whole of The Mother and Sri Aurobindo’s yoga. Everything he said entered deeply into me, but I had no idea what I was going to do with this knowledge.

After that my friend introduced me to the Sri Aurobindo Delhi Ashram. I felt I should stay there for some time but I wasn’t sure if this would be possible. One morning, I was walking in the garden of Delhi University. I used to go there frequently and sit quietly. That day I had a book on Vivekananda with me. One of the professors who also frequented the garden had been watching me for many days and asked me what I was doing. I told him I was doing research on meditation: I didn’t reveal my deeper purpose. Then he said, ‘Come to my office tomorrow’. I didn’t understand why, but then he said he was the Vice-Chancellor of the university, and he would give me a recommendation letter. This would allow me to go to any educational institution anywhere and receive for free all the facilities I needed to conduct my research.

I wondered where I should show this letter first. Then I thought about the Delhi Ashram because I knew that Tara, who managed it, was very strict about people staying there, and I thought this letter might help me. I told her I would like to stay for a week to do my research work and showed her the letter. She said “How much will you pay every day?” I was shocked as the letter said I could stay anywhere for free, but she said that a minimum contribution needed to be specified. So I said I will pay Rs15 a day! She immediately agreed.

I used to spend so many hours in the meditation hall there that Tara would tell me my hair would go grey! One day, while I was waiting to visit the relics, somebody came from there and patted me on my shoulder. He asked what I was doing in the ashram, and I told him I was working on my thesis. Then he invited me to visit him in his house on Deepavali, a few days hence, and gave me his visiting card. It was Dr Karan Singh.

So I visited him that Deepavali – I remember he was talking to a Tibetan monk and a spiritual guru when I entered – and on Deepavali days for the next two or three years, and we had long discussions.



Jai Singh

In 1991, he was visiting Auroville for the first time as Chairman of the Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation. He wrote me a letter saying that when he was walking in Auroville and around the Matrimandir, he felt the divine consciousness penetrating the Earth’s atmosphere, and thought I would be interested to hear this.

At that time, I was waiting to take up a job as a university professor in Mumbai. But before that, I visited a friend in Lucknow who knew I had visited the Delhi Ashram, and he suggested that I should go to Pondicherry first.

I arrived in Pondicherry on the night of 14th August, 1992. The next day I met a friend who I knew from Delhi Ashram, and he asked me to accompany him at some time to the Ganesh temple in Auroville.

I went there on 31st August, Ganesh Puja day, and was introduced to some Aurovilians. Judith invited me to come to Auroville. I wasn’t sure where I could stay, but Madanlal told me there was a student guesthouse in Bharat Nivas. I moved there the next day.

At this time, I felt like a dry leaf carried by the wind. I had no idea of my future direction, although I felt that if I needed to become an Aurovilian, I would do so. One day as I was walking around, Judith saw me and took me to meet the Entry Group.

I remember a very important day. I was very fond of going to the inner chamber. That day, after coming down, I sat down under the Banyan tree and started reading *Savitri*. Then I felt I should be reading it aloud, not something I would normally do. But the feeling was so strong I could not resist doing it, even though I was conscious that under the Banyan I should be silent.

Lakshminarayan was nearby and heard me reading. He suggested that we could sit there every Sunday and read *Savitri* together. Soon on Sundays a small group of us started sitting under

the Banyan tree and reading *Savitri*. When it rained, we would go to Lakshminarayan’s room nearby and read there.

At that time the Secretary of the Auroville Foundation, whom I had met before in Pondicherry, phoned me. He said that more people wanted to join the reading, and suggested that we read in the Centre of Indian Culture building, which was more spacious.

So we shifted there. But after two or three months, so many people were coming that we found the room was too small and we felt we needed a new, dedicated place. Finally we were given the land, and with Shraddavan and Helmut’s help Savitri Bhavan was manifested.

So I say that the Savitri Bhavan movement came from my loud voice! And I remembered that moment when Nirodbaran, during the inauguration of the first building of Savitri Bhavan, made the important statement that Matrimandir and Savitri Bhavan are twins, that they complement each other.

For many years I had forgotten what I had experienced that day when my friend first introduced me to Sri Aurobindo and The Mother in the students’ hostel. But when I arrived in Auroville, suddenly I remembered everything. So then I understood what it meant when it is said that Sri Aurobindo is not a teaching but a direct action from the Supreme, because that’s what happened to me. Before I heard about him, I was preparing to do my best to lead a worldly life, but like a bird in the hand of a hunter he did not allow me to take this route. I was forced to have this life.

For in the end we are just instruments. None of us can choose this life, because we are egoistic human beings who don’t know what the divine consciousness is, so how can we consciously choose that? How can we, in our ignorance, be servitors of that? That’s why Sri Aurobindo said we are already chosen for this life, but this is revealed to us only at a later stage of our advance in the yoga when it is brightened by the divine consciousness.

Mother said that the first necessity for an Aurovilian is to make the inner discovery, and that the Divine is in our heart waiting to be discovered, and unless we find our true self, we cannot talk of transformation: until we discover that, the transformation of our lower nature is not possible.

This is not a one day event: it can take considerable time. This is why, while I’ve been living in Auroville for 30 years, I’m very quiet. I’m little involved in Auroville activities, although I practice karma yoga and take classes on topics like yoga and the evolution of man, because my only interest is in this extraordinary adventure of consciousness.

Alan

(Based upon a talk given by Dr. Jai Singh at Savitri Bhavan and streamed live on 11th August.)

## PERFORMANCE

# Harmonies inspired by Sri Aurobindo's poetry

At a time of constant communal agitation, a little jewel of an evening slipped through and gave viewers an inspired taste of Sri Aurobindo’s creative offering. In his own words and throughout the evening a place of greater depth was revealed through performance:

*A secret harmony steals through the blind heart  
And all grows beautiful because Thou art.*

Shakti Balu created and choreographed this inspiring offering



of Sri Aurobindo’s poetry. Recited with quiet authority by Malcolm Boyer, the poems were sung by five singers (Anushka Gunph, Kirtana Krishna, Shanks Kini, Varun Rao and Antoine Colombani) in harmony, vibrantly and with a sweetness. They were accompanied by Shakti on piano and for some pieces by Lauren Chockmanon on flute. Many of the poems were danced in a powerful and sensitive accompaniment by Grace Gitadelila and Asokavadhani A.

Each poem was projected onto the screen, accompanied by beautifully drawn paintings by Jyoti Khare, capturing some of Sri Aurobindo’s poetic inspiration in art:

*I have seen the beauty of  
immortal eyes,  
And heard the passion of the  
Lover’s flute,  
And known a deathless ecstasy’s surprise  
And sorrow in my heart for ever mute*

Two performances in CRIPA were followed by an evening in the Ashram in Pondicherry, linking the two communities through creativity. At the end of the multi-media offering, the two dancers gave all the audience a rose to take home. It felt



like prasad, and we left with a taste of something beyond matter.

*In the thrilled happy giant void within  
Thought lost in light and passion drowned in bliss,  
Changing into a stillness hyaline,  
Obey the edict of the Eternal’s peace.  
Life’s now the Ineffable’s dominion;  
Nature is ended and the spirit alone*

Peter



# Life education is the most important thing

La Terrace coffee shop above the Solar Kitchen is a special place. Not only because of the quality of the food but also, perhaps especially, because of the warm welcome and excellent service offered by Sudhakar and Ramu. Recently, Ramu left, but before he did he sat down at my table and started talking excitedly about a new project he had started in Kulilapalayam. In a later talk, he shared more details about his life and why the new free education centre means so much to him. It made me realise how little many of us know about the lives of the workers who come to Auroville every day, and how very inspiring some of their life stories are. Here is Ramu's story.

I was born in nearby Kulilapalayam village in 1986. I have two brothers and one sister, and my sister and one brother are Aurovilians. I studied in government schools until 12th standard, and then I went to college in Tindivanam, where I studied to be a lab technician.

After finishing college, I worked in different places in Auroville. I worked for one year in the Auroville Health Centre laboratory, then worked for many years at Aurospirul, the Auroville spirulina production unit. Most recently I was working in La Terrace.

So I know Auroville very well. I often thought of joining Auroville because I wanted to give my service to a place which belongs to everybody, which nobody owns. But now it's a little more difficult for me to join. If it happens, it happens.

I love meeting people; this is why working in La Terrace was so enjoyable. I always gave ser-

vice with a smile because I wanted to give love to people and they were giving a lot of love back to me. It's a very nice place, but now that I have stopped working there, it gives me more time to devote to the free education centre I started recently in Kulilapalayam. We call it *Kulilai Kalvi Koodam* (the Kulilapalayam Education Place).

Actually, a group of us started free education for the local children in the evenings in 2002. We were all studying at college then. Unfortunately we couldn't find a permanent place to teach the children, so we had to drop the project.

Afterwards the group went its separate ways, their lifestyles changed and people got married. I also married and I have a son.

But recently I thought that now I am settled and have a family and, until recently, had a small salary, why don't I revive this idea of giving service to the village children? But I didn't want to have the same problem as we had before, so I went to the panchayat office in our village and asked if we could use a panchayat building which was always kept locked. They agreed.

So a group of us cleaned and repaired the building and a few weeks ago we started the classes from 6pm - 8 pm every evening, except Sundays. On Sundays, as it is the children's only free day, we make meals together and we are planning to make trips for the children to see new places, like Auroville's Botanical Gardens.

We began with 15 students, but now we have 60, from the ages of five to sixteen. It's not anything like a school. Although we give them time for and help them with their homework, we also have other activities, like singing and dance classes, and art classes, too. We have four college students in the village who come to help them with their homework, a dance master comes twice a week, and I am looking for a music teacher to give music lessons. We're also looking for someone to help with yoga, and with English classes. In future, I would also like to have sports, more cultural activities, some books.

The basic idea is that whenever we see a student with some potential, we try to find a way for them to develop it. But first we need to understand each student individually to know what they need and how best to develop this.

Another thing which is very important is teaching them good values, because everything has changed in the village. When we were young, we gave a lot of respect to our mother and father but now the lifestyle has changed totally, so all these values have changed as well.

Now students are going the wrong way. When they come back from school they go to play, and some of them have bad friends, and they learn to drink and smoke.

We cannot change those who are following the wrong ways after the age of 18 because by then it has become a habit, but we can give them a good foundation when they're younger. That's why we focus upon the younger children, so they will become role models when they grow up. We cannot change everyone, but we can change a few, then those few can change a few of their friends and so on. And, slowly, this will change the village.

At the centre we tell them to respect people. In schools they don't learn sharing, but at the centre, when they cook a meal together for example, they learn how everybody can contribute something and share the output. In this way, they learn about unity and how to help others. Also, the older students are helping the younger ones with their homework. This collaboration makes everybody happy, and breaks down the difference in ages.

When it is somebody's birthday, I buy a cake and everybody wishes that person 'happy birthday'. This makes the birthday person very happy as some parents in the village don't celebrate their children's birthdays.

The parents are happy that their children are coming to us and learning things. During Corona, all the students got cell phones because the government was providing online learning programmes, but the students only studied these for a few minutes a day and spent the rest of the time watching films or texting friends.

However, the parents want us to focus only on academic learning at the centre; they are less interested in the cultural activities we provide for their children. But these children already spend eight hours a day at school, and their school teachers are very strict, so we don't want to tell them "study study, study" when they come to us. We want there to be an element of play. Otherwise, they will be mentally upset and won't come to the centre.

In fact, if somebody wants to come to the centre at another time just to play, that's fine, we don't want to stop them coming. We want them to feel it's their place.

But we don't neglect their studies. When one of the students gets first mark in a subject at school, we all celebrate their success and I give them a little prize, like a pencil or a pen. This encourages the others.



Ramu

We need book education, but also life education. Life education is more important than book education because you learn books for an exam, but afterwards you often forget what you learned, whereas life education is useful for your whole life. This is why my main goal at the centre is to teach the children to develop in the right way.

I don't have a big book education, but I do have a good life education. We all need inspiration and role models to keep us on the right path, and develop the right character. Everything I've learned, I've learned from different people who were role models. I always looked for people who had the right vision or special talents and then I tried to catch up with that. When I was young, my papa was my role model. He had no bad habits. He didn't smoke or drink and I have followed him.

The centre is free for the students. We don't ask their parents to pay because some have more money, some much less, and we don't want students who are poorer to feel guilty and stop coming if their parents are not contributing. We don't want there to be any differences among the students: whoever comes to the centre is equal.

I pay the teachers Rs 1,000 monthly. It's not much, but that's all I can afford out of my salary, as we have no other funding. There are also a few expenses like pens, pencils, and the occasional birthday cake. Whenever I get money I spend it on the centre. But I don't worry about money; if you think about money your mind is always trying to work out how to get it. The main thing is that the students are happy. When you give to people, you feel happy, that's the main thing for me. And if the students are happy and we are doing the right thing, the support will come. And even if it doesn't, I won't stop. I'll find some way to keep the centre going.

From birth to burning it's a short life. We are all going to die, but if we can achieve something in between for people, that's a good life.

As told to Alan

For information about the centre contact: [kalvikoodamfreeeducation@gmail.com](mailto:kalvikoodamfreeeducation@gmail.com)  
Whasapp +919843348994



Studying at Kulilai Kalvi Koodam

## EXHIBITION

# Auroville 80 – The poetry of daily life

Nadia is a photographer, geographer, and has been the president of AVI-France for the last ten years. She first came to Auroville in 1973.

In mid September, she presented some of her photos of Auroville from the 1980s at an exhibition at the Centre d'Art in Citadines.

The exhibition showcases a selection from a wider collection of photos published a couple years ago in the book *The Poetry of the Daily Life*. In these photos that capture moments of daily life, she gives us an intimate glimpse of the Auroville she lived in during the 80s. Accompanying texts beautifully weave the historic and present-day context of these shots from the 80s (for example on afforestation



and dam installation), reminding us of the progress and success that has been achieved over the years.

At the time there were only about 500 people residing in Auroville, and the small scale and simplicity of things compared to today is the most striking element of the exhibition. Forgotten moments of everyday life are captured in the images, such as the bullock-cart deliveries, small general meetings, as well as the more familiar and iconic barren red expanses of soil with the ocean still visible from a distance. During the opening of the exhibition, one could see these images brightening up people's faces with smiles. For some, the



PHOTOS: VALENTINA GAROZZO

images represented glimpses from their childhood, for others memories of their pioneering days, and for others who might not have been present at the time, a peek into a collective history they have not lived.

The exhibition conveys how

much work and perseverance was put forth over the years. Manifested in the harshest conditions, the foundations were laid for the abundance that has manifested today and that is yet to come.

Chandra



# Rejuvenating the farms

Auroville has 22 farms, ranging in size from 120 to about 6 acres. Each farm is managed by one or two farmers. Jointly, they run the Farm Group. But the farmers' cooperation has left much to be desired – until a group of young Aurovilians stepped in. Ramanan recounts.

Ramanan, 31, was born in Edaiyanchavadi, attended Udavi school and later studied business management. He joined Auroville in 2011 and worked at Pitchandikulam in the Sustainable Enterprise Development in Auroville Bioregion (SEDAB) project, managing its spirulina section. In 2016, after attending an Auroville Farm Festival, he realised the need for young people to get into farming, and joined Auro Orchard soon afterwards. Ramanan has travelled widely in Tamil Nadu and Thailand to study different farming practices and has been giving trainings in organic farming to thousands of people in Tamil Nadu through his Tamil language training videos on YouTube. He also hosts 20-25 farmers each month for one or three-day workshops and offers free consultancy all over Tamil Nadu when required, and organizes workshops for Aurovilians and their gardeners at Auro-Orchard.

"We are six, all are in our early thirties. In 2020, after witnessing the endless ego clashes in the Farm Group, we felt that enough is enough and came forward with the proposal that, henceforth, we would coordinate the farms. 'We' is Suhasini (Herbert's daughter); Guru (Iyenar's son), Prakash (Ponnusamy's son), Sathyavan (Murthy's son); Manickandan; and myself. All of us have plenty of farming experience, either as the son or daughter of an Auroville farmer, or because of farm studies.

We made a presentation: the coordination team would be advised by senior farmers and all proposals would be decided by majority vote in meetings of all farmers. We also proposed to divide the roles and responsibilities into four areas: (1) internal communication and coordination; (2) external representation and communication; (3) finance; and (4) production and research. And we would employ an accountant and a secretary. The majority of the 22 farm managers, though not overtly enthusiastic, welcomed the initiative and gave us the green light to go ahead for a six-month period.



Ramanan explaining the principles of organic farming at Auro-Orchard

It was an interesting time. We started with a lot of enthusiasm and came up with written proposals for all four areas. But unfortunately, the farmers who have a track record of making it difficult for the Farm Group to come to an agreement gave us a lot of opposition. For them, we were just young kids who knew nothing and they blocked us from working on important areas. We coped with the situation till the trial period was over. But even though the majority of the farmers supported us to continue for another six months, we decided to quit as we felt that we were continuously being undermined by this small but rather vocal minority. We wrote a voluminous report, detailing what we had worked on and what needed to be looked at, sent copies to all farmers and the major working groups, and then resigned.

Yet, that wasn't the end of the matter. Our resignation led to some deep thinking. The majority of the farmers felt good about the coordination idea, but questioned the composition of the coordination team as all the members were from the same age group. The solution we found together was to create a core-group of representatives of the various subgroups: the grains group, the vegetable group, the dairy group and the poultry group. Each would send two representatives, who, together with one functioning member, an accountant and an interim secretary, would function as the core group. We drafted a guideline on the roles and responsibilities of this core group, and this was approved.

The core group now is accepted by almost all farmers. Thomas and Ayarpadi Moorthi represent the grain group; Charlie and Renuka the dairy; Iyyanar and Rajan from Buddha garden the vegetables; and Suhasini and myself the poultry group, with Allan as interim secretary. The agreement is that the core group will address everything and give feedback to the larger group, but that we decide together by majority vote. Only in urgent cases can the core group take decisions by itself.

The work of the core group has become intense. We started meeting once every two weeks, but now need to meet weekly. Many major topics are at on the table: finances, farm land allocation, the proposed new Gratitude farm, the proposed division of farms into three or five-acre plots, and community participation.

Farm finances

Finance is a major issue. Auroville does not provide financial

support to the Auroville farms, apart from paying the maintenances of the farmers. Each farm has to manage its own income and expense and all farmers struggle to make ends meet. This has led to a number of problems.

One is the pricing of farm produce, which is fixed by the farmers and not by the clients, e.g. the Aurovilians. As the prices are higher than in Pondicherry, any farm surplus cannot easily be disposed of. Another consequence is that many Aurovilians prefer buying their rice and vegetables in Pondicherry. Lastly, it has resulted in farmers wanting to grow crops that have a high market price. This has led to competition, farm surpluses and tension, and to the fact that crops that have low prices are not grown, or not in sufficient quantity.

Farmers also need loans: long-term infrastructure loans, short-term seed loans, and sometimes emergency loans. We are grateful that an Aurovilian donated about Rs 15 lakhs to the farms, which now serves as our loan fund. All loan requests are first discussed in the subgroup; they pass it on with their recommendation to the core group, which takes the final decision. The maximum loan for infrastructure is Rs 3 lakhs.

To solve these problems I have been proposing that Auroville starts experimenting with the model of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. The Ashram farms operate on a budget - this includes their infrastructure needs - and they supply all their produce to the Ashram. The Ashram farmers do not decide on pricing, and therefore are not in competition. This, I believe, is the model which should be followed by Auroville.

Farm land allocation

Farm land allocation is another difficult topic. Today, we need to take decisions on two plots: a 6-acre plot at Rayapudupakkam and a 15 acre plot at Irumbai. Both are lying fallow. The Rayapudupakkam plot is suitable for growing ground nuts, millets and vegetables. The Irumbai plot is ideal for rice cultivation. To start operating both plots, major funds will be required for infrastructure (fencing, roads, farm housing and sheds). Our views are that this money has to come from Auroville. We cannot allocate land to people for the single reason that they have the personal resources to pay for the needed infrastructure. That would not only be unfair to people who do not have such resources, it would also create a wrong sense of entitlement. Auroville will need to invest in its farms if it wants to follow its ideals, such as self-sustainability, to the extent possible in our climate.

Traditional rice varieties.

The Irumbai plot has raised another question: what we are going to do with all that rice? Auroville has three major rice producers: Annapurna farm, managed by Tomas; Siddharta farm, run by Herbert; and Ayarpadi farm, managed by Moorthi.

We discussed how the Irumbai farm would fit in. The answer is diversification, going back to the roots of paddy growing in India. Before the Green Revolution, which introduced high-yield

rice varieties, India boasted of hundreds of traditional rice varieties, each with their own specific quality, such as for lactating mothers, for its fragrance, or its specific taste. And that's where Auroville has to go to. We know that in our climatic and soil conditions many rice varieties are easily cultivable without risk. Herbert is now even successfully growing Basmati rice. And those traditional varieties, grown in certified organic conditions, can be sold in Pondicherry without any problem, for here is a big market.

We have a big market, though. The yield of traditional organically grown paddy will be a bit less than normal paddy and the process of converting it into rice is a bit different. Auroville does not have its own rice mill, but with the addition of Irumbai Farm, I think we are getting to a sufficient volume to justify having one. The option of going to an external paddy processor, a commercial rice mill, is not ideal: there will always be adulteration with normal rice as we would be supplying a limited quality only.

Gratitude Farm

Recently the Secretary proposed to develop a new farm, called 'Gratitude farm'. The core of the proposal is that from an existing 4-acres demonstration farm near Certitude, now managed by



Ramanan

Kumar, which started in 2018-2019, half an acre will be set apart and be developed by a few non-Aurovilians with a subsidy from the Auroville Foundation of 4.75 lakhs. The non-Aurovilians would supply the manure and fertilizer required. They also propose that half of its produce would be supplied to Auroville, the other half would be sold by these non-Aurovilians in their organic stores outside Auroville.

The Farm Group was not been consulted on this proposal and neither was it invited to evaluate it. We learned that the Foundation Office had invited a few farmers - mainly those who do not agree with the work of the Farm Group - who were given a presentation. We heard they were impressed. But when we looked at the proposal - to the extent it was shared with us - we concluded that there was nothing new, and that, in fact, we could do much better with that 4.75 lakhs than what was proposed. We would prefer it if the subsidy be used to help develop existing Auroville farms. And if those non-Aurovilians need organic produce, some of the Auroville farms have been certified as organic producers and can sell it to them. We have many questions, but we have not been given any answers.

Three or five-acre plots?

The Farm Group has also discussed another proposal from the Auroville Foundation office, to split Auroville farms into plots of three or five acres each. This too needs to be evaluated. In our experience, if you set up a new farm from scratch, a three or five acre farm makes sense. But if you divide well developed farms into five-acre plots, then you will face many challenges: you'll need to share resources such as water and electricity; you'll have extra infrastructure costs; and the community will need to pay more maintenances. We concluded that this would lead to large additional expenses, interpersonal problems, and essentially would not benefit the community.

We discussed this idea in the context of the Rayapudupakkam and the Irumbai plots. While it is clear to us that Rayapudupakkam should be managed by one person only, there are ideas that the Irumbai plot could be managed by 3 farmers, each holding 5 acres, with a commitment to share resources. We are still discussing the pros and cons of this idea - my personal preference would be that one farmer takes responsibility. Another idea is that the plot is put under the management of the Farm Group to ensure that it remains dedicated to farming and will not be diverted to guesthouses or other money-making activities.

What it boils down to is that we need people who are willing to do farming, not just 'managing' but being active in the field themselves. We need people to work, not people sitting behind a computer. Auroville farming requires the involvement of much manual labour. For we still lack the finances to buy machinery such as for planting, weeding, sowing and harvesting. There was a proposal a long time back that we would jointly purchase such machinery, that one person would be the overall caretaker and visit the farms whenever needed. That idea did not materialize, but I think we should give it another try.

Farm festivals

Community support for the farms leaves much to be desired. We have put out calls in the News and Notes and on the Auronet, asking people to come and help, but with little success. Quite a few people, including Newcomers, have given it a try, but few remained as only those who have

a strong connection to farming will connect. We are now thinking of organizing a few large farm festivals, inviting the entire community to come and help rice planting or harvesting or whatever, with a potluck and bonfire in the evening. This may bolster community interest.

*In conversation with Carel*



## Essay and film competition

The Auroville Foundation has invited schools and college students to submit essays and short films in connection with Sri Aurobindo's 150th birth anniversary celebrations. The topic of the essay and short film competitions for schools is 'Sri Aurobindo and Auroville: Reigniting India's Greatness' and for college students it is 'Sri Aurobindo & Auroville: India's Gift for Humanity'.

## UNESCO conference

In commemoration of Sri Aurobindo's 150th birth anniversary, an event was planned on 30th September at UNESCO headquarters in Paris. Titled 'Sri Aurobindo's Dream of Human Unity: manifesting at Auroville', the central theme was to be Sri Aurobindo's five dreams, its message of a progressive unity and the next evolutionary step, along with a presentation of Auroville.

The event was organised by the Office of the Auroville Foundation, together with the Indian delegation to UNESCO, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Culture of the Government of India. The programme included a panel focusing on "Building the city according to the Master Plan, presented before the world already in 1968" for which the Auroville panelists had been selected by the Foundation office. In response, concerned members of the Residents' Assembly formulated an appeal letter, expressing gratitude to the Government of India and UNESCO for organising an event to honour Sri Aurobindo's 150th anniversary, but also concern that this programme would not reflect the present reality or the aspirations of the community, and may be used to promote a dubious interpretation of Auroville's aims.

A few days before the conference was due to take place, the Working Committee of the Residents Assembly reported that the conference had been postponed until further notice.

## Abri/Ami corner land update

Land on the Abri/Ami corner and Evergreen which has been in the possession of Auroville and Mr. Michael Bonke for many years has been claimed by a local businessmen. A court hearing was scheduled on 22nd September to decide the matter, but this was subsequently postponed until 14th October 2022. On Friday 23rd September, one person showed up on site with around 100 women and other workers, and put up a gate and fence. Aurovilians trying to document the action were harassed.

After a delegation of Aurovilians met with the Collector, on Monday 26th a Status Quo order was issued by the Revenue Division Officer, instructing that no new development should take place until the court verdict.

## Land exchange

Several communities have been visited recently by unidentified people who claimed their visits were due to ongoing land-exchange negotiations. A land exchange has been conducted recently between the Auroville Foundation office and a private party, in which a portion of Djaima land has been given away.

## Housing Service receives Office Order

The Housing Board and Housing Service appointed by the Residents Assembly received information from the Foundation office that they had been replaced by an Office Order and a new group appointed. In response to this, the RA-appointed FAMC replied by email to new members that the Office Order concerning reconstitution of the Housing Service is without merit and is unequivocally rejected, citing the results of the recent emergency Residents' Assembly Decision.

## Council Meeting Room Presence

On 1st July the Auroville Council were sent an email by a member of the Foundation-appointed Town Hall management teams telling them to

vacate the Auroville Council room. The Council refused this request and since then a group of Aurovilians have kept a 24/7 vigil in the room, which is a vital resource for the continued functioning of the Working Groups of the Residents Assembly. The Council reported that on the 14th September, the power supply to the room and to the Council desk had been disconnected.

## Eviction threat

Elodie and Tsuma, whose bathroom is on the proposed Crown Road, received a letter signed by Dr G. Seetharaman, AVFO's 'Officer on Special Duty', informing them that they are illegal occupants of 'public premises', and threatening them with eviction if they do not move. The letter says that alternative accommodation in Maitreye II was offered to them, but Maitreye II is a Government of India-funded apartment block intended solely for Newcomers, not for long-term Aurovilians.

## Infrastructure message

The ATDC appointed by the Foundation office issued a message recently reminding all residents/groups and services of Auroville, that any work in Auroville, be it digging, fencing, demolition, building, or planting, needs the explicit approval of the Auroville Town Development Council. It also reminded residents that any money spent on any projects within Auroville must be routed through the Unity Fund or via an Auroville unit.

## Legal update

Upcoming dates:

20.10.2022 – Supreme Court appeal regarding National Green Tribunal Ruling

10.11.2022 – National Green Tribunal hearing with regard to the Joint Committee report

To be announced – Madras High Court hearing on the FAMC case

To be announced – Hearing of Foundation Office appeal of the Madras High Court judgment of 12th August.

To be announced – Madras High Court hearing on the Office Order appointing the ATDC.

## Standing true to our values and ideals

The Council issued a statement that "During this painful and deeply sad-denying time for us all and Auroville, our best recourse is that of standing true to our values and ideals while also aspiring for a truer and more spiritualised way of being.

"With this in mind the Auroville Council feels strongly drawn to bring to everyone's attention the persistent animosity expressed by certain individuals towards their fellow Aurovilians through certain public communication channels and platforms. We would like to say that regardless of one's points of view, to ridicule and aggress our fellow brothers and sisters is not concomitant to the values of Auroville and is harmful to Auroville as a whole."

## Deep dialogue for harmony

At the recommendation of Dena Merriam, Chairperson of the Auroville International Advisory Council, the Governing Board and Secretary, Auroville Foundation, Mr. Raghu Ananthanarayanan, founder of the Sumedhas Academy for Human Process, was invited to 'help address some of the core issues dividing the community' with the purpose of 'enabling the stakeholders of Auroville to arrive at a consensus and commit to a way forward'. Consequently, Mr Raghu had Zoom conversations with a variety of Aurovilians and groups to help him understand the present situation.

Some Aurovilians were concerned that the intention was to mediate the present conflict, and pointed out that the present environment was not conducive to this, and the stated aims did not acknowledge the core issue which, in their opinion, is an ongoing hostile environment created by the Secretary.

Mr. Raghu responded that after meeting with team members from the Resident Assembly Service (RAS),

Auroville Council (AVC) and messages exchanged with both sets of the Working Groups (appointed by the AV Foundation Office and the selection process facilitated by the RAS), he understood that not everyone is ready for a formal dialogue process, but he remained open to hearing from anybody who wished to contact him.

## Moving forward together

The moving forward together team has announced a programme of events for October. They include walks for unity, body in light – energy healing and coaching, Tibetan mantra singing, and a silent receptivity gathering of members of the Residents Assembly.

## Walk for Unity every Tuesday

Community members are showing solidarity by coming together on a weekly basis. Every Tuesday evening, a 'Walk For Unity' takes place, starting at the Solar Kitchen at 5.20 pm. The event has been taking place for several weeks and there is reportedly a good attendance and an atmosphere of community spirit.

## First Aid campaign by Youth Link

A First Aid Awareness Campaign by YouthLink, in collaboration with Auroville Safety and Security Team, was carried out on the 5th of August in the Solar Kitchen corridor. The objective of this campaign was to raise awareness of the importance of a quick response to medical emergencies, the possible lack of trained first aid people in our community, and to disseminate easily digestible information on how to preserve life in emergency situations.

## Mystic beings

On a lighter note, Aurovilians were surprised to learn, in a recent article on Auroville education in the Financial Express newspaper, that the aim of 'the transition schools in Auroville' is 'to convert students into mystic beings'.

## IN MEMORIAM

## Doris van Kalker

On September 11th Doris van Kalker (born Griethe) left her body at the age of 76 in Mahalakshmi Home. She had been taken there on August 9th to recover from a fall, then went to PIMS for a few days to find the cause of her unbalance and difficulty with walking, where she was diagnosed with Myeloma. She returned again to Mahalakshmi home. Her situation had been rapidly deteriorating in the last months of her life,

Born in Germany and after studying anthropology, Doris worked as a Lufthansa stewardess in the 70/80s, travelling to all corners of the world and loving it. In an interview with Auroville Today much later on, she mentioned, "I remember how once in the information room where all the flight crews used to meet, someone had an article on Auroville and read its Charter out to us. *Traumtaenzer* (dreamdancers)! I laughed and immediately forgot about it. But one thing did stick with me for years – Mother's reference to never ending education..."

The time came when she had had enough of the hectic life and at the end of the 90s she accompanied a friend to Auroville. "When I climbed out of the taxi in the middle of the night at Centre Guesthouse and put my feet on Auroville's earth I somehow knew I had arrived somewhere very special." Returning for good in May 2002, she stayed for a year in Sailam, lived in various places as a housesitter, and worked at the Auroville website with Mauna and Manoj in their office at Aurelec. When two years later the Indian Ocean's tsunami struck and Doris, then Auroville's webmaster, started posting images online of the havoc created in township and



villages, she felt "that something new was happening to me by being exposed to this remarkable experience and that soon my life would take a different direction."

It did. Seeing the enormous post-tsunami clean-up work and Auroville outreach projects spontaneously emerging in the fishing villages nearby, she observed in a meeting that it all should be documented. As is bound to happen in Auroville, someone said "Go get a camera and do it!" and that was it. Her first 10-minute 'Tsunamika' clip was soon born. Being "shocked when I learned that so little of Auroville's history had been recorded, I knew that was where my path lay. Auroville is an experiment and it should be documented", she got in touch with Auroville film maker Basile, studied him at work, and grew into her element: documenting the emerging city. This was her way of life. She would take up something new,

involve herself fully, getting the equipment needed, researching the topic, plastering her white board with information, and then doing it with all her being. At the time, she also moved to Arati.

Having teamed up with Francis in founding 'Auroville Video Productions', from then on the pair steadily produced treasures such as 'Matrimandir, a labour of love' chronicling its construction and olden-days inspiration; 'The Second Generation' and 'Born at the Right Time' about the children who had grown up here, as well as the moving 'Interview with Serge', the musical 'Sorcery at Sea', the 'Sacred Groves' project, 'The Retreat' and many more filmed interviews and performances with little fun Auroville moments captured in between.

When, several years ago, the Auroville Archives shifted to its new place adjacent to the Multi Media building, Doris gladly moved in and painstakingly built up the Auroville Digital Archives, a centralised repository of the various existing Auroville archive materials with state-of-the-art software and know how, containing more than 350 videos on Auroville. The rather abrupt take-over of the Archives in June of this year left her deeply shocked and hurt but not disheartened, as she wrote to a friend: "There is still hope, we can turn it still around, that's what I as a strong believer in Mother believe."

During the last weeks in Mahalakshmi Home, where Doris had expressed her open readiness to gently and naturally fade away, many Aurovilians passed by to give her a last hug and bid her farewell, and were touched by the sweetness in the air. The cremation of Doris's remains took place on September 15th at the Adventure Burial and Cremation grounds.

## Christine Besson



In the evening of Sunday 25 September, Christine Besson left her body at Marika Home, where she had been taken two weeks earlier when her struggle with lung cancer became critical. She was 65 years old.

Christine came from France to Auroville in 2008. Having worked in the Parisian banking world, her accounting skills were readily welcomed by the Financial Service, where colleagues remember her as a kind and pleasant person to work with.

She moved into Vikas, where she lived an unobtrusive, reserved and solitary life. True to her lifestyle, she expressed the wish to have no visiting hours at Farewell after her passing. Her remains were cremated at the Adventure Burial and Cremation grounds on the afternoon of September 28th.



# Dreams in times of conflict

Our dreams at night can offer perspectives that our cognitive mind can't reach. They are potential doorways to understanding different dimensions of what is going on in our lives individually and collectively. In times of tumult, such as those which Auroville is going through at the moment, these night time journeys can bring messages from dimensions beyond ourselves.

Here is a small collection of dreams from the community during one of the more heightened times of our existence.

None of the following dreams are interpreted or edited. Whilst each is personal to the individual there are also collective motifs and symbols that may apply beyond the specific receiver of the dream to the collective.

A few people seem to have had prophetic dreams.

From September 2021:

I am in a vast open field, under the sky. There are no trees, no buildings but this vast field is full of people whom I recognise as Aurovilians. Everyone is busy around himself, active, doing their own stuff.

All of a sudden, a lot of water floods this plain. The water rises fast, like a flood. I see people jerking up, getting in panic, becoming hectic. I hear screaming all around me. The water is not yet that high but I see that everyone jumps into the water to swim. I also see some of them struggling in the water. I am surprised. To me, the scene looks a little strange. As the water is not yet that high and I ask myself "But why are they all jumping into the water?" The loud noise of voices and the agitation in the water continues. I am even a bit amused by it... Then I say to myself "No, I am not going to jump into the water like that".

I am standing in the water while it continues to rise. I look ahead and see the upper part of a kind of parapet wall sticking out of the waters. I am telling myself: "Perfect", and step on that wall. It is quite narrow but I walk ahead with light and easy steps. The wall turns out to be a meandering path in the landscape. I am very happy walking there, making a few jumps, like kids would do when they play. I do not seem to be affected by what is happening to the others.

The scene changes. I am in a large hall with many other people. Again, I recognise that these are Aurovilians. Again, everyone is busy with something. I am standing still. Close to my left leg a big, white, dog with a lot of fur is seated. The dog looks up to me. Near me there is also a woman. I feel a very strong heart connection to her but I cannot see who she is. Then I hear a noise, something like a rolling sound, very deep. Everyone hears it and stops their activity.

Everyone in the room including me turns to the left. There is a huge window. I see an enormous wave rolling towards us, incredibly tall. The wave has the most luminous colours of light green, light blue mixed with transparent white, sparkling with white foam on top. It was immense, majestic, something so beautiful... The roaring increases...

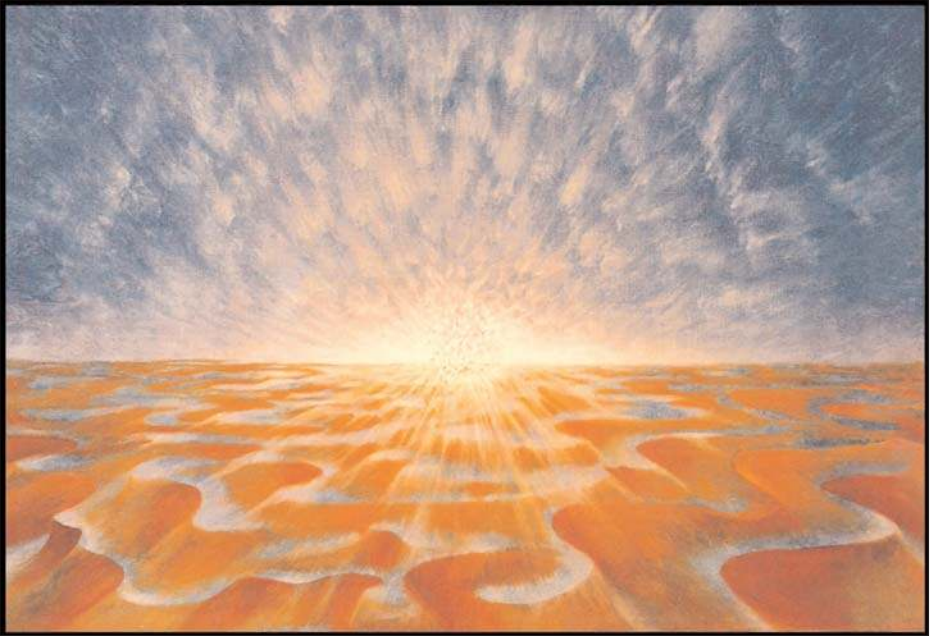
Within seconds, people in the room start screaming and running around hectically. The room is filled with fear and terror.

I am still looking at this gigantic wave and say with a low, quiet voice: "Oh my god". I then turn my body around, back to the position I was before. I am not moving my legs to do this. My body turns smoothly like a pivot, by an inner will, and when back to the same position than before I immediately start to curl my body inside, very slowly: The head and spine bend forward with the forehead touching the navel and while curling I repeat the Mother's name several times very quietly. There was no hurry, no fear but a deep quietude.

After a while, which could have been an eternity, my body opens slowly like a flower would open its petals and all is quiet around. There is light. There is no one around...



Return of the elements. Painting by Rolf Lieser



Crystal Light. Painting by Rolf Lieser

From a dream on 26 December 2021, after the Youth Centre and Darkali forest cuttings.

I was with a group of Aurovilian friends. We were going down a path and came to a section that was muddy and it required us to navigate it like a mudslide by going on to the ground and sliding downhill. Some of us got naked and others kept their clothes on but what was clear was that there was no way through except by going through the mud.

For some, the intensity of the conflict is reflected in their dreams: From August 3:

A whole bunch of us are all in a gathering outside of Auroville, in one of the outer communities. Suddenly the landscape gets dotted by half a dozen earth to sky cloud funnels. One gigantic one with grey pink clouds is fast approaching us where we are. Someone instructs us to go to the basement immediately. We all troop in, in an orderly manner – all 50-60 of us into a spacious high ceilinged unfinished basement.

As soon as we get in, almost immediately, a tornado rolls in above us. The sound is deafening – like a train running over our heads. The floorboards over our head are loosening and coming off. We can see the brightness of the sky through the slats. The noise is unending; going on and on for what feels like 5-7 minutes. Then we see the wall of the house caving over all of us, burying us. I feel myself not wanting us to die or be trapped. The tornado is still going on above. Then one by one the bricks and rubble that have fallen over us, get sucked up and soon we are free again. Then suddenly, it is all silence; the tornado has departed. We emerge out of the basement one by one, somewhat dazed. There are no more any buildings around us. The tornados have gouged out red tracks in the landscape. But it is bright green in between the tracks. As we walk out back to our homes, there are people offering us food and delicacies to eat... And there is community kitchen full of people and music.

For another person:

I flew all night from one place, one situation to another. There was no centre, no orientation, as if I was being hunted.

On August 12, the day on which the High Court judgement would take place, a few Aurovilians dreamt of our prospects.

This early morning (maybe around 9 am in Auroville), half waking up in the process, I had a vivid dream: The Mother was meeting Sri Aurobindo for the first time! Their souls, their spirit, immediately merged into one, united in the Divine Consciousness. All in deep silence, the interior of the room disappeared and was filled instead with eternal Peace and Light ... very powerful ...

Silently observing, I was myself emerged in this Light, joy, and deep inner peace ...

I never had this kind of dream ... but then I knew that everything is going to be all right !!

Another resident dreamt that:

I was fighting and in the midst of the scuffle a knife fell to ground. For the longest time we both looked at the knife, then I reached out for it (and promptly awoke). I felt then more reassured about the court outcome.

The 150th birthday celebrations of Sri Aurobindo were celebrated in the midst of the conflict and He made dream appearances during this week.

On August 13:

This morning I also had a nice dream.

I was in a sort of open-plan layout, not fully outdoors and not fully indoors. Each area was functional but no people were present. In different areas there were statues of Sri Aurobindo. Some were bigger and some were smaller; each had its own individuality. In the dream I knew it was the morning of Sri Aurobindo's birthday. And the statues started to wake up. They started to move. They started to walk, calmly, flowing out along one corridor, which led out somewhere where something important was going to happen. Each one had a sword in the left hand and a stick or staff in the right hand. I did not feel like following them but knew that something 'serious' and also very good was happening.

I went to 'my favourite place' in the open-plan layout, which was a small garden with grass and plants. There was a bigish Sri Aurobindo statue there. This one was stylized like a samurai, with clean lines, almost anime style. I was comfortable there for a moment with this statue and then it too woke up and walked in the same direction of the others.

I followed this statue but sort of hung back because I didn't want to disturb what was happening. I also had a small sword. Then the progress became slower and I found myself closer to this statue. He looked at me, and I offered him my sword. He 'smiled' although I didn't see his face at this moment: but the whole air was full of a smile.

He handed me back my sword and it wasn't a sword any more, it was a beautiful, silvery bugle. (Like a trumpet which can play only one or two notes.) A word was engraved on it. I don't remember the word. But my understanding from the bugle and its word was: this is for communication, for marshalling ideas (which are also concrete powers) and weaving them together and this is your 'sword'.

I tried to make a sound with the bugle. First I had to hold it correctly, and it was awkward. Then I had to blow on it correctly, and I couldn't manage this. I felt a bit silly. A sound would not come out. Then I thought, maybe it's not really for blowing, maybe it's only symbolic, maybe what really needs to happen is something else, activated by this symbol.

Some dreams reference some of the players in our drama. An Auroville Youth:

I was with other young Aurovilians on a high tower, without railings, so somewhat risky. But we had a lot of fun and joy and were being a bit loud. Underneath us the Secretary suddenly appeared and ordered us to come down which we did. We were scared of her, she was angry with our behaviour and loudness, called the police and we were taken to prison.

And by the same dreamer:

I was driving with someone else, and am even at the steering wheel. Did it rain? We are driving through terrible mud, get stuck and try to get through. Even Madame Secretary comes in her car. She is able to get through the dirt and mud. She gets out by her door at home, turns around and laughs at us, that familiar smile. We fight on but somehow seem stuck.

Amongst the storm and mud dreams were also toilet dreams

"I was about to clean a completely 'shitty' toilet bowl". Dreamer associated this with the current situation in Auroville.

There were also numinous dreams pointing us towards inner directions in this febrile atmosphere.

Three dreams. I met the Mother for the first time in my dream. I came to her, for a personal darshan as used to be customary. Before me was a young Asian woman. Then I entered from the left side. Due to the present situation here and my role in it I felt insecurity, pain and self-criticism. She looked at me with a friendly and reassuring way and said (similarly as she used to with Satprem), "But you are doing quite well. Everything is as it has to be. Just go on". Then I exited the room on the right, peacefully and confidently.

The second dream was short and bad. Two cars collided head on. What happened there I don't know. But upon awaking I knew that I must focus more on myself and identify less with the actual conflict.

The third dream: I should, like we used to before, write down in a book was has to happen and what was planned. A type of Agenda. A young man (Tamil) gave me the book. I opened it, the first page was blank. I turned it around and opened it from another side, likewise blank. I notice that it is a brand new book. I knew immediately: there is no past any more. Only the future counts, which I and we must and are allowed to shape in a new and creative way. I felt so freed and lucky.

Collated by Peter

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