

Update on the Matrimandir Gardens



ALL PHOTOS COURTESY MATRIMANDIR COORDINATION GROUP

Aerial view of (from left) the Gardens of Bliss, Consciousness and Existence

“Our work now is focused on the Bliss Garden,” says Marie, one of the three members of the Garden Design Team. “During the monsoon we planted the trees and shrubs; now we can add compost and topsoil. Most of the masonry has been completed. What remains to be finished is the fountain. We expect this work to be over by the end of 2013.”

How do these gardens reflect the qualities that they are meant to express? “The Garden of Existence is in the east, where the sun rises, where things begin. To evoke this idea of beginnings, we have installed a large stone with a small pool underneath it which contains a spring; this shows that something in matter is trying to emerge, helped by the water from the spring which, as it were, pushes the stone up to the surface. Water represents life, the vibration and movement of existence. In front of the pool is a big area with pebbles which evokes the mineral stage, to reflect the beginning of things, timeless and spaceless. The garden has plants that are very old, such as ferns, zinnia, and ficus. A particular type of Hibiscus, which the Mother named ‘*Psychic Power in Existence*’, flowers in massive bushes around its perimeter, creating intimacy and a confined space where one can feel the garden’s message.” She explains that though the garden is shaped in the form of an egg, it is also part of a spiral which leads to the next garden, the Garden of Consciousness.

For the Consciousness Garden, the main feature is a pond, from which water will flow into a cascade of seven levels. Marie explains that the

pond represents oneness, and that the flow of water in seven steps represents the seven steps of consciousness. “It is something like what the Mother had said about consciousness, that it is spreading and being absorbed by each layer.” The flower for this garden is ‘Supramental Consciousness,’ which means that the colours orange and gold, which represent the supramental consciousness, will dominate in this garden.

The Bliss Garden, says Marie, is designed to evoke the idea of a wave of bliss. “The main center which we call the ‘moon area’ will be full of small shiny pebbles with a fountain from where water will flow into seven bowls, which will create a crystalline sound. The seven bowls will be placed like the seven stars of the Big Bear constellation, where, it is said, the seven rishis live who bring bliss to the earth.” She adds that sometimes in the gardens the symbolism will not be obvious, or may be more evident when looking from above, such as from the top of the Matrimandir.

In what ways have Mother’s comments on the gardens been taken into account? Marie explains that the Mother did not give much direction for the design of the gardens. “We have only the names she gave to some flowers, with a comment. So we use those flowers in the corresponding garden. We also work with a collection of quotes from Sri Aurobindo and the Mother on the 12 qualities to be expressed by the gardens, made by the previous Garden Design Team, to get a deeper understanding of the gardens’ spiritual significances.”

What are some of the common features which will unify the 12 gardens? The main unifying feature is called the jewel concept. Marie explains that around the Matrimandir there is a path which

is roundish and something like a necklace. On each part of this necklace there is a jewel, which is part of the whole, but at the same time can stand alone. “With the general leveling from the Matrimandir outward, there are the big petals each of which contains a meditation chamber, and outside those there are the small petals which we have created with Agra stones and concrete, and then there are the gardens. From that wave from the Matrimandir there is one lower part and one higher part to each garden. In one part we can see the garden from a distance, and in the other part, which we call the jewel case, we can walk and smell the fragrance of the flowers, hear the sounds of the wind and the water, and, in the months of January and February, feel the dew on your skin. So you can be still and observe and experience each garden as a kind of beautiful painting which is before you and which helps your meditation, or you can experience each garden by going through it and allowing it to materially work on you through your various senses.”

Marie explains that the present Design Team which consists mainly of Marc, Maurizio and herself was created in 2007. At that time she had been working in the gardens, Marc had been working with the previous Garden Design Team, and Maurizio was a landscaper who was regularly visiting Auroville. With the completion of the Matrimandir, there was a general feeling in the community that it was time to take up the gardens in earnest. The three decided to take up the project and the community feedback was positive. Roger, who had drawn the main layout for the gardens with the paths, the leveling, and general guide-

lines, was also in agreement. “From the beginning we tried to respect and understand why there are guidelines and not to simply observe them blindly. The Matrimandir is the main element of the space, so we need to respect the progression towards the Matrimandir, and not create something which is in competition with it.”

But the team doesn’t work in isolation. Over the years, others helped in the designs, such as Meera, an Auroville architect who now works with them permanently, and visiting Japanese garden designer Martin Mosko who, together with Aurovilians Lala and Alain, has been working with the team on models and sketches for the Garden of Light. “Various people come for a few months to help out, some who know about engineering, some about electricity, some about the landscaping.” Has the team sought out the advice of any famous landscape architects? “No, but when they come we are very happy to sit with them and share.” She adds that the Matrimandir Gardens are very unique, and famous landscapers may not know much about yoga and tend to have conventional design ideas and big egos. “Our office is completely open, but it is not always easy to incorporate feedback within a small period of time because the work is very complex. You may have plenty of ideas but later you realize that here in India not everything is available, and that in Auroville not everything is in agreement with the community.”

As the first three gardens take shape - it may take years for a garden to fully mature - there may be more feedback which the team will take into

continued on page 2



The rock with the pool and spring in the Garden of Existence



View of the pond in the Garden of Consciousness

- Lessons from a selection process
- Battling the power cuts - opportunities for sustainable energy

pages 2 – 3

- The creative legacy of Thane
- ONE ASIA 2012 in New Delhi
- Collective consciousness

pages 4 – 5

- Treating AIDS with homeopathy
- Population statistics
- Rainfall statistics

pages 6 – 7

- Group show of six Pondy artists
- Rodugune performed in Auroville
- New Books

pages 7 – 8

11 Feb

Update on the Matrimandir gardens

continued from page 1

account for designing the next three gardens: the Gardens of Light, Life and Power. "We will present the designs to the Matrimandir Coordination and Support Groups, and afterwards to the community. But so far, nothing has been finalized. We are still playing with models that can completely change. These three gardens will be smaller and will need to be in harmony with the neighbouring Unity Gardens, which are being made by a different team, as well as with the Banyan Tree, which is just beside. These gardens will probably be very simple, with no water feature, and certainly with less concrete, because objections to that was the main negative feedback we received from the community on the Consciousness and Bliss Gardens." When those designs will be ready is an open question. "It depends on the feeling. It can't go on forever, but we don't have a deadline, which is a good thing."

It is also necessary to deal with the issue of the maintenance of the completed gardens. "We have a fantastic garden team led by Tina and Alain, and they are doing their best for an already huge area. We need to control the watering and use only organic pesticides to control the pests, and this requires a lot of time and people who are knowledgeable and can devote themselves to the gardens. We also need people to weed, prune and cut the grass, and for this we want to shift more from paid workers to volunteers. So this is a sort of call for people."

It is said that the gardens are not final and can be changed if desired, but won't that be difficult to do with the amount of concrete and brick that has been used in the three existing gardens? Marie responds that while it is surely easier to change the vegetation than the

hard materials, those also can be changed if needed. "What was important for us was not to make cheap gardens, not to do something that will not last. So there is a balance between creating something durable and maintaining flexibility. But everything is evolutionary." She adds that the Mother herself comments that the gardens will evolve with the consciousness of the Aurovilians.

"We do not say that these are the best gardens and that nobody will ever be able to create something better. But I think it was a good start. Very often it is the way, not the goal, that is most interesting. We grow together when we create these gardens. We link different professions, and work with visitors, guests and volunteers. It is interesting to see the relations that we are building around Matrimandir. It seems to me, we have nine other gardens that have not been finalized, so let us go on and concentrate on those and take what we have learned from the previous ones and use it instead of coming back and revising the first ones."

What has been the greatest challenge in this work? (*Laughing*) "Human relations! It is difficult to work together. From the community we have gotten lots of feedback which has been from a to z. Some people will come and say congratulations, I feel something wonderful here; and other people will say this is not what I want and I don't want to go to Matrimandir anymore. It's interesting to have this range of feedback and also it has made me to be more calm about feedback. We



Ongoing work in the Bliss Garden

will not be able to please everyone, and I don't feel that is the goal. The goal is to do the right things at the right moment with the right people. I think the best thing is just to be open and to be more sincere everyday."

What has been the most rewarding aspect of the work? "To work at this place everyday. Every morning there is a different light in the Matrimandir gardens. Even when it is raining, it is such a wonderful space. I can sit at my computer and draw something, but also I can be on site and put my hands in the soil and plant something. I can use my mind, I can use my vital, I can use my physical here at the Matrimandir! It's really a work for the Mother!"

In conversation with Larry

INTERNAL ORGANISATION

Lessons from a selection process

In August last year, eight members of a new Town Development Council were declared 'selected' by the Residents' Assembly Service. Though the selection process was well-defined, it wasn't fully followed and the outcome failed to meet many expectations.

After the negative experience of the selection process of the Working Committee in 2011, [see AVToday # 271 of January 2012], a group of nine Aurovilians came together to study once again the Auroville organisation and in what ways members of important working groups could best be selected. "We tried to find out how we could transcend the power politics, the limited vision and the apparent lack of common values," says Pashi, one of the members of the study group. "We agreed that it doesn't make sense to elect members of working groups through an election process involving the entire community as this would immediately bring in politics. Instead, this work should be done by a selection committee. But how to form such a committee? We agreed that a wide community representation was necessary: as many working groups as possible should each appoint a selector and a few selectors should be appointed by the community at large. There was consensus that the selectors should be qualified and chosen in view of their knowledge and understanding of the work to be done by the candidates, and not because someone has nothing better to do. And, last but not least, we agreed that the selectors should be chosen and act on the basis of a common set of values."

"Those values we took from The Mother," explains Jaya. "They are the twelve qualities or powers of the Mother, namely sincerity, humility, gratitude, perseverance, aspiration, receptivity, progress, courage, goodness, generosity, equality, and peace. We hoped that the selectors would check if the proposed candidates were willing to work with these qualities, or at least in the group which is to be formed. We emphasized that the presence of these values is as important as the professional qualifications and the knowledge of the candidates. For we feel that those who sit in public working groups and take decisions that affect Auroville and its people, should consider if the proposed decision is in accordance with these qualities. We were, in fact, trying to introduce a new paradigm."

Testing the ideas

"Our ideas were put to test when, in May 2012, the study group was asked by the Residents' Assembly Service to look at the selection process for the members of the next Town Development Council (TDC)," says Tine. "We prepared a full documentation, giving information on the proposed method of selecting the members of the Selection Committee as well as on the way this Committee should function in selecting the members of the TDC. It specified the value system, tasks and required qualifications of selectors and of the future TDC members. We gave open presentations and made all the documents publicly available."

The response, says Pashi, was very positive. "Many people, even people who do not think alike, identified with our work and ideas. When the proposal was submitted to the Residents' Assembly for approval, there was a strong support for it with almost 200 voting 'yes' and 50 voting



Jaya, Pashi and Tine

'no'. We felt tremendously encouraged that we were on the right track."

"But when the working groups had appointed their selectors and the Selection Committee started, we realised that we'd made only a small beginning," says Tine. "Our ideals had been well-received; but we were naïve in expecting them to come into place immediately. We had expected a sense of collaborative efforts of all selectors, but, unfortunately, that did not happen. Though initially there was a strong striving to work together, in the end old prejudices came up, fixed mindsets of who is for and who is against the Galaxy town plan came into play, leading to a scenario of 'if you want that person in, I want this one in'. Again our politics came into the picture, though this time it was more in the open and more visible than during the selection of the Working Committee."

"It was a learning process," says Pashi. "Once the TDC had been formed, we went through an extensive review of what went right and wrong and we interviewed each of the selectors for over an hour to better understand what had been going on. Then we got to understand the weaknesses of the process. It appeared that there hadn't been a proper transfer of our intentions. Many of the selectors hadn't read the documentation we had given them, and we realized that we should have properly introduced these papers in a one-day workshop. Some selectors were not convinced about the need for professionalism, which made them select candidates who lacked the specified qualifications. The Selection

Committee also did not deal rightly with the community feedback, in not replying to objections or questions. This was perceived as a lack of transparency and of accountability."

"Yet, it was a good step forward," says Jaya. "Overall, the process was handled in such a way that, even though there were deficiencies, most of the selectors initially knew that the overall intention was to put their personal preferences aside. But the end result was that once again some people have been appointed to do a job which they are not doing or only partly doing. We had stressed that each TDC member should work full-time for the TDC and create a group around him or her, otherwise the work won't be done. So far this has only been initiated for two of the work fields. The present reality is that less than half of the selected TDC members are doing their work full time."

"The Selection Committee's job, in fact, is not finished when it selected the candidates," adds Tine. "It would also check every six months that the work is being done and that the TDC members create groups around them to do the work. The Selection Committee is empowered to select replacements for members who are not performing or quitting. But the Selection Committee has not taken up this part of the work; we have the impression that there is an unwillingness to do that."

A permanent monitoring body?

"It is common knowledge that in each of Auroville's official working groups only a few members work full-time," says Pashi. "There is also

the strong sense that most working groups have a lack of transparency and are not really accountable to the community. Requests for information or objections to a course of action from individual Aurovilians are often not even responded to. This creates a negative and very unhealthy mindset of powerlessness and indifference. It is perhaps in answer to this non-communicative tendency of working groups, that people have started to only give negative comments and not take their own responsibility to come up with a solution to the problem. But we all have a responsibility and actually have to go beyond ourselves. Auroville is a very utopian idea, but Aurovilians should not get used to reaching a comfort level in incompetence and not wanting to go beyond it."

"The Residents' Assembly is a very unorganised and dysfunctional body," says Tine. "Its 'secretariat', the Residents' Assembly Service, has over the years put in a lot of work and organised a lot of meetings, most of which still ended up in an outpouring of emotions, but concretely, nothing much happens. If we want to find a system of self-governance, we have to impose the implementation of transparency and accountability in the working groups and respect that individuals have the right to be heard. To address this issue, we are thinking that Auroville should create a monitoring group of senior Aurovilians to check on the functioning of each of our working groups. The monitoring group should interact with each working group when needed or at fixed times, to see how they function and how their functioning can be improved. It should be able to take action if the working group or if an individual member does not function, for example by replacing a member. In case an Aurovillian is aggrieved because a working group does not respond, this monitoring group should be able to intervene."

"This idea needs more discussion, we are not yet clear on it," says Pashi. "Perhaps, the monitoring group could also act as an appeal body, which is lacking in our system. But the benefits are clear: with such a monitoring body in place, it would be possible to extend the term of office of the members of various working groups to five years instead of the present two-year term for the Auroville Council and Working Committee and four-year for the TDC. Auroville would thus become far more professional in the management of its internal affairs."

What next?

"We are not clear about the next step, such as how to select the next Working Committee and Auroville Council when the term of office of the present committee and council ends by the end of 2013," says Jaya. "The lessons learned in selecting the TDC are very valuable and a step forward and the study group will continue its work. We have an inner feeling that we are moving in the right direction."

In conversation with Carel

Battling the power cuts: opportunities for sustainable energy solutions

Tamil Nadu is experiencing one of the worst power crises in its history. The demand has climbed to a steep 11,000 MW and the official demand-supply gap has grown to 4,000 MW. Power cuts in rural areas of up to 16 hours a day are normal. Auroville has power cuts of between 12-14 hours a day.

“For the coming years, we will have to live with power cuts,” says Ponnusamy, who heads the Auroville Electrical Service. “The authorities are saying that much of the crisis will be over by June this year, when a few new thermal power plants and the Kudankulam nuclear power plant will become operational. But the general expectation is that even then, power cuts will continue. For if more supply becomes available, we can expect that a lot of hidden demand will come up, such as air-conditioners which have not yet been bought because there is no power. Moreover, the demand for power increases by a regular 6% each year. So power cuts are there to stay.”

Is Auroville doing anything about it? “Yes,” says Toine, the founder of Auroville’s Electrical Service and now advisor to the Town Development Council. “The power crisis has, in fact, speeded up our planning. The electricity infrastructure plan envisages that Auroville will have its own dedicated feeder which will connect to Auroville’s own internal high-tension network. This network consists of an underground high tension line that runs along the Crown Road, which we call a ring mains. From it, branch lines will run along some of the radials. Distribution transformers will be connected to these high-tension lines which will step down the voltage to low tension to feed the various buildings and services”.

“We have now applied for the dedicated feeder,” says Ponnusamy. “This means that, from the nearest TNEB (Tamil Nadu Electricity Board) substation in Irumbai, a separate overhead high-tension line of 22,000 Volts will be installed and connected to a high tension switchyard behind the Bharat Nivas compound. We have also started laying the high tension cable along a stretch of the Crown Road and along the Vikas Radial. As soon as the Town Development Council has finalised the right-of-way cross section drawings and reached agreement with the residents of Centre Field and gives the green light, we will continue laying the cable along the Crown trajectory, in front of the Solar Kitchen, then through Centre Field up to Savitri Bhavan and the Unity Pavilion. We will also install the feeder line from the Bharat Nivas switchyard to the ring mains. When this work is done, we will be able to connect 9 communities Sector I of the Residential Zone (see map). This is the first step; I expect it to be in place within the next 18 months.

Phase two of the electricity plan will serve the Industrial, Educational

and Administrative Zones. When the ring mains has crossed the Youth Centre and is connected to its other end, this part of our work will be over. Then, from the ring mains, we will branch out to connect the rest of the city.” How long it will take? “With cooperation from the residents, we should be able to have the ring mains and some branch lines in place within two years,” he says. “That also means that all TNEB overhead lines will disappear, and with them much of the breakdowns, which are due to trees hitting power lines during high winds and rains.”

What about the other side of Auroville, centred around Kuilapalayam? “These communities will be connected to a new feeder that runs parallel to the Abri – Kuilapalayam road” says Ponnusamy. “That work is under way. At present, they suffer more than the rest of Auroville as their feeder line comes all the way from beyond JIPMER and is highly unstable. With the new line, they would have less breakdowns. But there is no intention to connect that part of Auroville to the dedicated feeder for the city.”

Wind

“A dedicated feeder,” explains Toine, “makes it possible for Auroville to apply to be exempted from ‘scheduled’ load-shedding, which is the cause of the majority of our power cuts. There is also ‘unscheduled’ load-shedding, which is due to unforeseen supply-demand gaps and when there are line breakdowns, especially during the rainy season. So during scheduled load-shedding Auroville would continue to get power. But there is a catch: you have to compensate for the load-shedding by purchasing the power from the open market, and the rates are very high. But Auroville has the benefit of owning two wind generators and it is possible to ‘wheel’ energy instead of having to buy it on the open market. So Auroville will first have to fulfil the conditions to apply for wheeling. Once that is done and wind energy wheeling is permitted, applying for

load-shedding exemption becomes feasible. The wheeling of wind energy and the local production of solar energy in Auroville will help us realise the goal of Auroville using only renewable electrical energy.”

Solar

Auroville has more than 500kW of solar photovoltaic panels installed. “There are two types of solar systems,” explains Toine. “There are the stand-alone systems, where solar panels are connected to batteries. The electricity from the batteries is fed into the house electrical network using a stand-alone inverter. The advantage of this system is that it is grid-independent while the disadvantages are the costly and environmentally unfriendly batteries that have to be replaced every 5-7 years and the inefficiency of the system: the inverter uses a lot of energy itself, and there is much loss in the charging and discharging of the batteries.

“The other option is that of a grid-connected solar systems. These systems are more efficient, less expensive and require no battery. But these systems only work when the grid is available or when they can operate in parallel with a diesel-generator backup. This system is used by Auroville’s larger users, such as the Town Hall, (10 kW), the Matrimandir, which will expand its existing 36kW stand-alone solar power plant with a grid-interactive 15 kW, and Maroma (10kW). Others are in the pipeline.

“In this system, whenever the sun shines, the electricity generated by the solar cells is fed directly into the building loads with the surplus, if any, being exported to the grid and the shortfall coming from the grid. If the sun shines but the grid fails, the diesel generator is started, and the solar grid inverter works in parallel with the diesel generator, thereby reducing the consumption of diesel.”

A new development is that Tamil Nadu now allows grid-interactive rooftop solar systems with net-metering whereby the energy exported to the grid is deducted from the energy drawn

from the grid in the energy bill. This is quite common in many countries in the world, but before was not permitted in Tamil Nadu. “Auroville contributed to this new development by successfully doing two grid-connected rooftop solar projects last year in cooperation with the Tamil Nadu Government and the Tamil Nadu Electricity Board. The next step in this journey is to get a feed-in tariff mechanism for rooftop solar since net-metering does not make solar PV projects economically viable with the present electricity tariff structure,” says Toine.

But for grid connected systems also, some battery storage will continue to be necessary with the present grid conditions. “For the next 5-10 years or so, India will need hybrid systems, where a solar system can feed energy directly into the loads and the grid, but also feed a few batteries for some stand-by storage,” says Toine. He warns that Auroville’s existing stand-alone systems cannot be used for grid import and export and net-metering. “It’s an inverter issue,” he says. “Grid interactive inverters are different from stand-alone inverters. There is an interesting opportunity here for inverter designers and manufacturers to develop a hybrid system (stand-alone plus grid-interactive) that is efficient and cost effective.”

Pumped hydro storage

Another option to stabilise power supply is that of pumped hydro storage (PHS). The concept was introduced to Auroville for the first time in a general meeting in January 2012 [see *AVToday* #271, February 2012], in connection with the Matrimandir Lake. “In Europe PHS systems are a common feature. During the night, surplus grid power is used to pump water from a low reservoir to a reservoir on top of a hill. In peak demand periods, the water flows back with gravity and generates power with the help of a generator,” explains Toine. “These systems help in maintaining a stable grid since big power stations cannot be switched on and off depending on demand. The Tamil Nadu Electricity

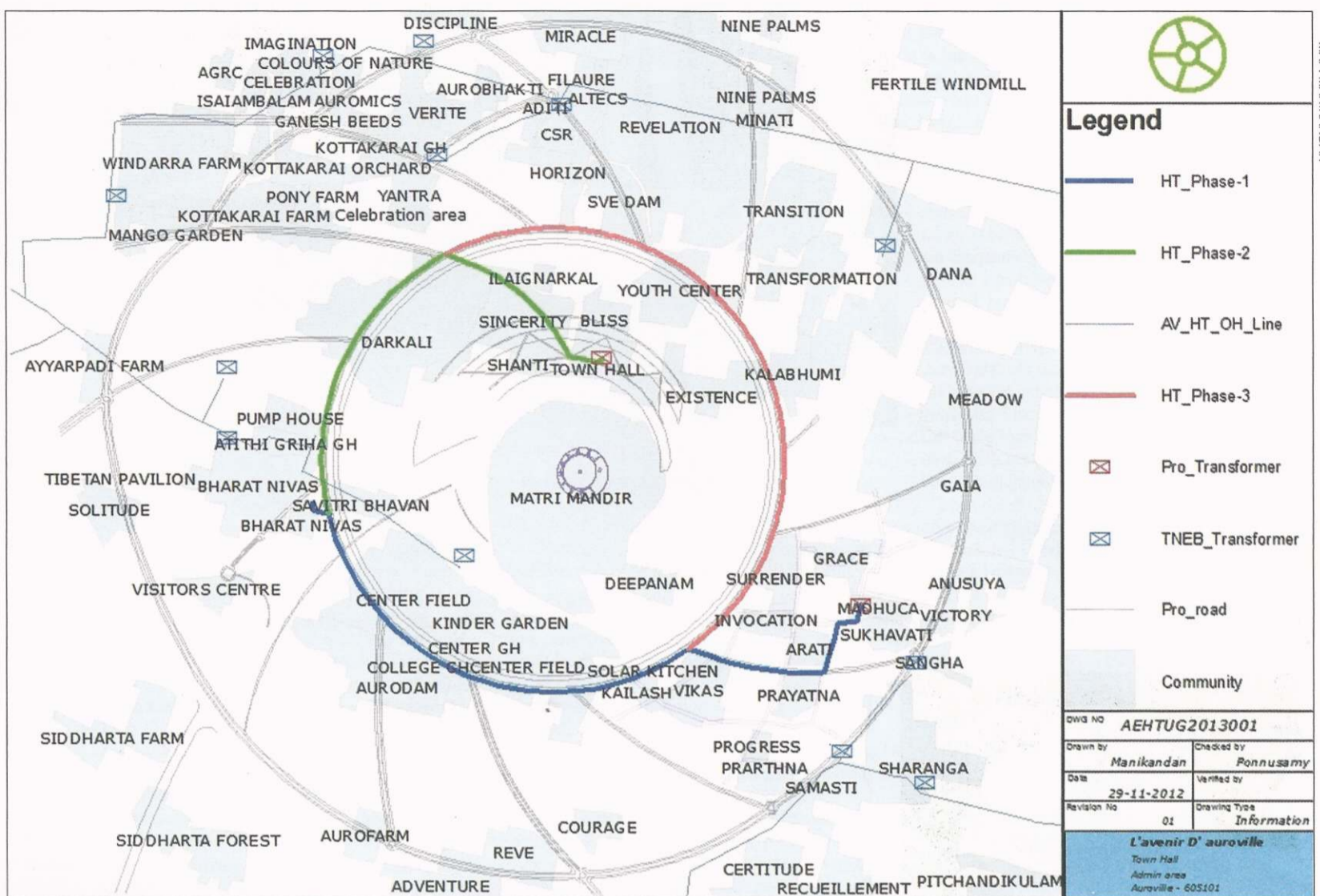
Board (TNEB) too has a PHS system which is used to help maintain grid stability during peak hours.

“But in recent years, PHS systems have a new and even more interesting usage: they help in stabilising electricity grids that have a high penetration from renewable energy sources. Renewable energy sources like wind and solar are not firm. They fluctuate constantly depending on the available amount of wind or sunlight. Grid operators typically accept a maximum of 20% renewable energy penetration, with the remaining 80% coming from firm but not sustainable sources like coal and oil. Renewable energy in excess of 20% tends to destabilise grids. But as we need to keep on increasing the renewable energy component (ultimately to 100%), grids need to operate differently. In Tamil Nadu also, the PHS system will increasingly be used in combination with renewable energy. Tamil Nadu already has an installed wind energy capacity of 7,000 MW and plans to have 3,000 MW of solar energy in the next 3 years. A new 500 MW (4 x 125 MW) PHS system is planned to be set up near Kundah, in the Nilgiris Hills.

“The pumped storage that is envisaged for Auroville should have a double function: it should allow this enhanced renewable energy penetration, and so not only serve Auroville but also the region by helping to balance the grid. It should also serve as a buffer, a backup for a few hours in emergencies.

From the environmental point of view, PHS is as important as renewable energy sourcing. For storage is the main challenge in the transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy. Auroville’s present individual backup systems with inverters, batteries and diesel generators are not sustainable and highly inefficient. A PHS would give Auroville the option of a collective power back-up which is environmentally friendly, economically viable and thereby substantially reduces the dependence on battery storage and diesel consumption.”

In conversation with Carol



The first phase of the ring mains (in blue) will connect Grace, Surrender, Arati, Invocation, Sukhavati, Victory, Madhuca, Arka and Gaia

The creative legacy of Thane

One year after cyclone Thane devastated Auroville, an exhibition was put on in Citadines with the title "Thane – Destruction and Creation – one year after". It recalled the destruction but also showed beautiful products made out of the fallen wood. Here Torkil talks about the rationale behind the exhibition, his future plans and what Auroville means to him.

One reason we organized the exhibition was we wanted to give credit to the people who had worked so hard to clear up Auroville after the cyclone. People have almost forgotten how it was, which is why part of the exhibition is photos of the destruction wrought by the cyclone.

We also wanted to show what happened to all that fallen wood; that we have taken care of it and stored it carefully in preparation for the next stage. The exhibition was also a kind of personal thing for me because the cyclone brought a big change in my life. I've always loved wood and worked a lot with it, but I never imagined that it would be my focus in Auroville. However, after the cyclone, the Land and Resource Management team were suffocated by the work. They only had the energy to collect the wood, there didn't seem to be anybody taking responsibility for storing it and processing it. So I asked my close friend, Uma, "Who will take care of all this wood?" and she said "You"! I thought "OK." Given my relationship to wood it was probably destined that I should go in that direction.

Actually, I want to include everybody who wants to work with wood in this operation. So Erisa will look after the design workshop, and a lot of the production will be done by Ricardo. He has just doubled the size of his workshop and we will put in some modern machinery.



Torkil

The title of the exhibition, 'Destruction and Creation', implies that something positive can come out of a crisis like the cyclone. Actually, the word 'crisis' is of Greek origin, and for the Greeks it meant not only 'disaster' but also 'a time to take decisions'. And that's what happens in a crisis, there is a moment when things that were not possible before suddenly become possible. People and their cultures are, for a short period, more plastic, available to change. The cyclone was like that for Auroville; it was beautiful to see how people worked together. The problem is that the window was open only for a short time and I'm not sure that we fully used that opportunity.

But, in another way, we are using it because the exhibition showed that the fallen wood has immense beauty and that beautiful things can be made out of it, like tables and musical instruments. It can even be a sculpture. I have a very beautiful log of *vengai* wood with a three metre slot or scar, where the tree was wounded and almost managed to heal itself. So my idea is to put it up on a wall with a very strong light behind it. The title that came to me is, 'Light peeping through the veil of Reality'.

But our main focus now is to make furniture out of this wood. Before the cyclone, Upasana was developing this concept of 'conscious living', and the first conscious living shop, *Janaki*, was put up in Mysore. I had made a lot of furniture in Denmark, where I had a big workshop, so Marc and I designed furniture for the shop. It came out quite well, but the quality of the wood was a problem. In India it is difficult to get wood of good quality unless you import it, and if you're going to make a sustainable and environmentally-conscious furniture business you need a source of wood which is impeccable. This is difficult to find. Similarly, most of the Indian wood you find in sawmills has been illegally felled.

And then, suddenly, the cyclone came and we were surrounded by a lot of wood where we knew the source and which hadn't been illegally felled. It seemed like a message.



One of the natural form tables

I think we've probably cut about 400 tons now, and everything has been weighed, measured and carefully stored at CSR. This wood would take up to two years to dry naturally, but we will speed up the process by using a drying kiln, which is being set up close to the local sawmill that we use. We have ordered the biggest planer in India – more than one metre wide – which will arrive next week, and then we can start production very soon. All the raw processing and planing can happen at CSR, a lot of the other work will be done in Ricardo's workshop, and we may take it back to CSR for the finishing. It is better to use hand skills in the finishing and machines for the initial basic work.

Some of the designs are already done. We will have two furniture lines. One, the high-end line, will keep the natural organic form, like some of the tables in the exhibition, but we will also have a more basic line, which will be simple and multifunctional. Indian furniture tends to be bulky, with a lot of embellishments – functionality is secondary – but with my Danish background I favour simple furniture in which function and form go together.

Climate is a big issue in India if you want to do traditional joinery because wood is a living material; it is always shrinking and expanding as it adapts to the humidity and climate. In our climate, the balance point for water content in wood will be around 15%, but it changes seasonally – more in the hot humid summer and lower in the colder winter. In an air-conditioned room the humidity will be below 8%, so if our furniture is taken out of our workshop into an air-conditioned apartment, the wood starts to shrink immediately. Any design has to take this into account. This is why the tables in the exhibition have been designed very purposefully, avoiding any traditional joinery. The plates, for example, are joined together by inserting stainless steel rods in the wood, allowing them to expand and shrink. If we had done this traditionally, we would have had serious problems.

The market for good furniture in India is immense because what is available now is generally expensive and not of good quality. But I'm not that interested in selling, particularly to rich people who can buy anything. I design these pieces because I'm interested in doing them. At the same time, I think that just concentrating on something that will please me as an artist is too egotistical. If I only do high-end pieces and sell it to rich Indians what purpose am I serving? That's why I want to keep a balance by having this basic line that will benefit more people.

Actually, I've been involved in service, in projects which have some social relevance and impact, all my life. For many years I managed the Bestseller Fund, a foundation set up by the Danish Bestseller company. We were very interested in preserving cultural heritage, but we also saw it as a way of alleviating poverty. I worked a lot in Africa, Nepal, China and Tibet but in 2004-5 we started to focus upon India. One of the first projects was restoring Tranquebar [see Auroville Today no. 269, December, 2011]. Through this I met a lot of Aurovilians.

Auroville attracts me for a number of reasons. I like working, I have to work, and work here is different because there are so many possibilities and not so many limitations. In Europe I could do something similar, but there everything is so organized you become part of a system. Also, of course, labour is cheaper here. To make a complicated bench out of a eucalyptus log, as we are doing now, would be impossibly expensive in the West.

Of course, I am interested in the social and spiritual aspects of Auroville. When I was young I read all the major philosophers, but while this intellectual approach can create a beautiful construct it is often not very practical. And when you look at the private lives of some of these very famous philosophers you often see they were totally hopeless. I had a similar experience with mathematics. I studied mathematics because I love the subject, but when I observed the people at university who were studying it I thought, I don't want to end like that, just creating an ivory tower for myself.

I was attracted to Taoism but, again, something was missing. Maybe that's why I went out into the world and got involved in development projects. I found this work satisfying to some degree but I always had a wish for something more, to find another angle on reality. I'm not searching for a very personalized divinity – that is difficult for somebody with my European background – but I believe there is something larger behind the daily reality. Our mind has the ability to connect directly with this complexity, but the logical part of our mind thrives on simplicity and abhors complexity, which it cannot analyse, deconstruct or predict. The logical mind creates a simplified version of the world, which helps us to survive and navigate, but it becomes a hindrance when we want to grasp the larger picture. The logical mind is only a tool, but it is so powerful a tool that its simplified focus creates a thick 'veil' that for many people becomes the only reality. If you shift your focus, you can see that this thick layer is not as strong as you think it is and something else is peeping through all the time. That's why I want to call that piece of *vengai* sculpture, 'Light peeping through the veil of Reality'.

At the same time, you realize that this apparent reality is not as ordered, as predictable, as it seems to be. Complexity has always fascinated me as it gives a lot of creative possibilities. For example, I've always been fascinated by the patterns of Muslim tiles. These patterns are often very complex, but they all repeat themselves eventually. When I studied mathematics, we asked ourselves if it is possible to create a pattern with the highest degree of complexity which never repeats itself. An American mathematician came up with a solution in 1966. Using 20,426 different tiles he proved that by using his design you could create something that never repeats itself.

A lot of mathematicians worked on reducing this number. Finally, the mathematician Roger Penrose did the ultimate; he proved that you only need two different tiles to create a pattern which never repeats itself. For me this was one of those divine moments when you see the light behind. To create complexity is not fascinating in itself, but what is fascinating is to see that complexity, unpredictability, is embedded in the inner core of everything. You can realize this by just playing with two simple tiles.

So now my idea is to incorporate non-repeatable patterns into big doors which I have suggested designing for the conference room of the new Centre of Indian Studies. The doors will be Islamic-style *jalis* (perforated latticed screens with intricate patterns which allow people to look out through them without being seen). For me it is deeply symbolic that you would be able to look out through patterns of highest complexity and unpredictability in a building for Indian Studies – one of the most complex of all human cultures.

From an interview by Alan.

For more information contact
torkil.dantzer@gmail.com

ONE ASIA 2012 in Delhi

Between 15th – 21st December, the ONE ASIA 2012 festival was held in the prestigious Indian International Centre (IIC) in Delhi. ONE ASIA 2012 featured eminent musicians and dancers from India, South Korea, Japan, Taiwan and Auroville. There were also film shows, a Kabir Satsang, Kolam and calligraphy workshops, and a major calligraphy exhibition titled “Ek Sutra” (a collaboration with Qalamkaari Creative Calligraphy Trust, Delhi) featuring the work of 20 calligraphers from India, South Korea, Taiwan, Japan, Iran, France, Germany and Mongolia. Aurovilians Jyoti, Dharmesh and Adil took part in this exhibition while Grace and Savitri presented contemporary dance.

The organizer and inspiration behind ONE ASIA 2012 is Aurovilian Jyoti Naoki Eri, who also organized the first ONE ASIA event in Auroville in 2010. Auroville Today asked him about the purpose of these events, their impact and more broadly, the significance of the recent influx of people from Eastern Asia into the community.

How did the ONE ASIA events come about?

I was born into an artistic family, so it is natural that wherever I live I am always attracted to the field of art and culture. When I started living in Auroville I began organizing small cultural events. Around 2010, within a very short time I got to know many masters from different parts of Asia – painters, dancers, martial arts masters and tea masters – and it was like a message. I felt inspired to do something with all these connections since they were also inspired by the vision of Auroville.

This led to me to organize the first ONE ASIA event in Auroville. It was quite a challenging experience, but the feedback was very encouraging, so I felt that I was going in the right direction. This, I felt, is what I could contribute to Auroville.

However, I wasn't sure about organizing another big event because it had been quite exhausting. But at the end of 2011 I had another inspirational moment and began to consider organizing a second ONE ASIA event. I mentioned it to Aster, and she told me to present the idea to Dr. Kapila Vatsyayan, who is a former member of the Governing Board and trustee of the India International Centre in Delhi, one of the premier cultural centres of India. She liked the idea and immediately said I should do the event at the IIC. I said ‘yes’, not realizing what I was taking on; I had never organized an event outside of Auroville before.

However, I received a lot of support from Aurovilians and from contacts I made at a calligraphy exhibition in Delhi in which I participated at the beginning of 2012. I also received very valuable support from Dr. Karan Singh who, I learned, had worked for many years to bring unity among Asian countries. When I told him I had the same dream he simply said, “Do it.” This was a very strong motivation.

The Delhi organizing team formed very fast. I also made contacts with many artists in India and in other countries. They were all inspired by the idea of the ONE ASIA project, and didn't want any payment, just travel expenses and accommodation.



“ONE ASIA Banyan orchestra”: artists from India, Japan, Korea and Taiwan under the Banyan tree in Mirambika School, New Delhi

What is the idea behind the ONE ASIA event?

I have always been very inspired by Sri Aurobindo's remark that unity in Asia will contribute to the unity of the world. One of his dreams (expressed in his “Five Dreams” speech of 15th August 1947) was for the “resurgence and liberation of Asia and her return to the great role which she has played in the progress of human civilization”.

The ONE ASIA project started in Auroville in 2010 with the aim of presenting Asia's cultural richness and profound spirituality to the world. I also felt that Auroville had been missing the energy of the Far East, and this was a chance to present that missing piece to the community for the sake of balance and harmony. The overall idea behind ONE ASIA 2012 was to explore and express human unity, oneness, through the process of inner discovery. Artists are more in touch with this inner dimension, and particularly artists from Asia because the traditional arts of Asia are rooted in an awareness of inherent oneness.

I think most of the participating artists recognized and knew

this, but through the encounters with each other they were able to deepen that understanding. For example, there was a moment when the artists from different Asian countries came together at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram School in Delhi. They all came from different musical traditions – Baul music, Chinese traditional music, Korean shamanic music and Japanese dance – but, at a certain moment, spontaneously, they began to play together under a Banyan tree at the centre of the Ashram school. It was wonderful, as if they had been rehearsing for months. At that moment it all made sense: “This,” I thought, “is what One Asia is all about.”

In fact, a very important aspect of the ONE ASIA 2012 event was that it was like an artists' camp, a place where the artists would naturally get inspired by the encounters with each other. In this respect, the event was a big success. All the artists went back to their homes very happy and with new insights. For example, we had a Mongolian calligrapher. She had a very beautiful presence, but I sensed she didn't recognize she is part of such an important culture. But through the artistic exchanges and the appreciation she received, I think she began to value her own culture.

Was the ONE ASIA 2012 event successful in other ways?

I wanted people who came to the event to be presented with a question – “Look at this and what do you feel? If you are inspired, we can do something together.” The response was very good.

One other thing I was very happy about is that the event was supported by government institutions like the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, the Korean Cultural Centre, India, and the Taipei Economic and Cultural Centre, Delhi. I hadn't expected that governments would accept the concept of focusing upon Asia rather than their own countries so, for me, this was one of the main achievements of this event; to bring these governmental institutes together in the interest of a larger unity.

This could be of importance to Auroville as such events can open a door – through them we can invite governments or individuals to assist in the development of the International Zone. So ONE ASIA is not just a cultural event; it has to be a channel between Auroville and other parts of Asia and the world.

Regarding Auroville's connection to the larger world, recently more people from the Far East have come to live here. What do you think this brings to the community?

During the ONE ASIA 2012 event, when an artist faced a difficulty they didn't blame anything external like the organization; they just went within and found their own solution. This is a very Asian response. So this is one of the ways I think we can contribute a lot to Auroville. It's a completely different way of contributing from, say, the Western way. It's about listening more, it's less conflictual. We can transform situations inwardly, not only through speech.

Auroville reflects the larger world trends, and now that the Asian countries are contributing much more to the world I think the same will happen in Auroville. Asians should express their own culture but in a universal way instead of becoming narrowly nationalistic. Auroville is a very good place for this kind of experiment. Even though I have a Japanese background, I recognise I am being changed by being part of Auroville's cultural mix.

What are the future plans regarding ONE ASIA?

Putting together ONE ASIA 2010 was a huge challenge for me, but for the 2012 event there was always a sense of grace and blessing. There are two government proposals for the next ONE ASIA event. One is to hold the event in Jakarta, Indonesia in 2013, but I think it is more realistic to plan for Taipei, Taiwan in 2014 as the preparation takes a lot of time and energy.

One big difficulty I always had is with fundraising, so for the next ONE ASIA event the financial aspect has to be in place beforehand. Often, when we are talking about spirituality or culture, this aspect is ignored, but it is also part of achieving human unity.

From an interview by Alan

More information at www.oneasiaproject.org

One of the foremost researchers in the field of collective intelligence is Jean-François Noubel, the founder of the Collective Intelligence Research Institute, CIRI. Recently, he stayed for about a month in Auroville, where he gave workshops, facilitated dialogues and made two public presentations of his work. The following introduction to the topic is drawn from his talks and a subsequent interview with Auroville Today.

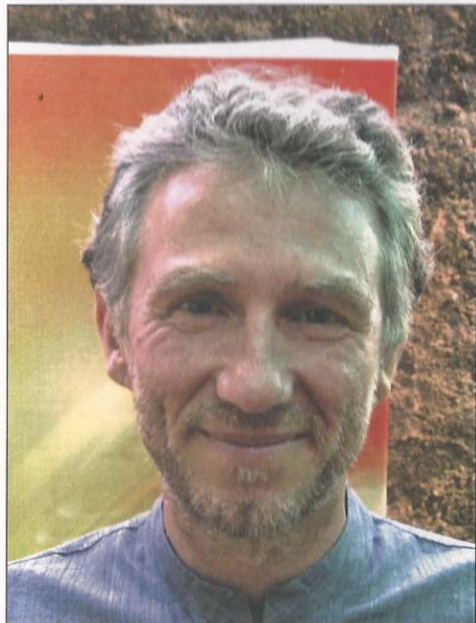
The forms of collective intelligence

Collective intelligence is a property of social life which is not limited to humans. According to Jean-François, it takes many different forms. Perhaps the oldest form of collective intelligence is the 'swarm' collective intelligence exhibited by a flock of birds or a school of fish. The swarm intelligence is amazing but the individuals in a swarm have very little freedom of choice. Another form of collective intelligence is 'original' collective intelligence because this is humanity's original way of coming together. This is seen in small groups such as a jazz band. Every single player knows what to do because each of them has a sense of the whole. There is a back and forth dialogue all the time between the whole and the individual and, consequently, there is no conflict between the individual and the whole. This amazing property is called 'holopticism'.

However, this form of collective intelligence has limitations. It stops working when the group gets too big or the distance between the individuals becomes too large. The answer that humanity created to overcome this limitation was 'pyramidal' collective intelligence, where large groups of people and societies form into social pyramids to perform complex tasks. All of the early pyramidal collective intelligence societies had the same kind of structure. There is a head, a second layer of priests, a third layer of traders, a fourth layer of farmers and herders, and a bottom layer of slaves and unskilled workers. Today, the forms are different – now we have multinational corporations, for example – but the basic structure and the fundamental dynamics are the same: a chain of command embedded in a hierarchy.

Collective intelligence

Collective intelligence, according to Wikipedia, is "a theory that describes a type of shared or group intelligence that emerges from the collaboration and competition of many individuals". The concept is increasingly used in sociology, sociology, political science and computer science.



Jean-François Noubel

The possibilities of this kind of intelligence are enormous. Civilizations have emerged from this, cathedrals, spaceships, poetry; it obviously represented an evolution in the human species. However, there are important limitations. When the issues become very complex, like the ones facing the planet today, the small number of people in charge cannot embrace the complexity of the whole. Other limitations include the difficulty of redesigning the hierarchy takes a lot of time and the fact that it supports a very masculine kind of society where the feminine qualities are much undervalued.

So what is the next form of collective intelligence? One example is provided by the Burning Man event in the Nevada desert. Here, for one week

every year, a city of nearly 50,000 people is created and then dismantled. However, there is no top-down hierarchical control. Instead, this is 'bottom-up' – people connect through the internet and self-organize on the basis of a few simple guidelines.

Jean-François calls this new form of collective intelligence 'holomidal' collective intelligence. Here, every part has a sense of the whole all of the time, and therefore each individual can make informed decisions. It is a very important step. Now big collectives can operate with the same flexibility and sovereignty for individuals as small groupings.

The key to this social evolution is that today information can be shared and many people can make decisions together without the need to adopt pyramidal collective intelligence. This is made possible by the development of the Internet and socialware, like Twitter and Facebook. "Today," says Jean-François, "if I want to ask a few thousand people to think about something and to share their insights or find a solution, I can achieve that in a few hours by using socialware. This is very new. Moreover, when I go on the Internet, if I am really aligned with myself and choose my words and timing very consciously, I will connect with the right people to get the right answer. It's a form of synchronicity, serendipity, which people can be trained to use."

Invisible architectures

Jean-François points out that there is also an inner aspect of collective intelligence which is very little understood. "Spiritual traditions have explored a lot regarding self-liberation and expansion of consciousness, but they have not explored how the collective operates through us as individuals. This happens through 'invisible architectures' which shape us as individuals and collectives."

One of the key invisible architectures is

money. When conventional currencies are used, the money supply is limited and the 'Pareto Effect' ensues. This means that inevitably some people will end up with more and more and others with less and less. It is important to realize that this does not necessarily reflect the sum of the individual wills or the consciousness of the individuals involved, it is just a larger dynamic associated with the use of scarce money.

Other invisible architectures include a society's belief systems and social conventions, which profoundly influence the way we see reality and relate to each other. "If there is no understanding of how money, language, social codes and belief systems operate through each one of us, then the outside world will continue to send its DNA inside any collective that wants to build itself differently," Jean-François concludes.

The Auroville situation

Is this happening in Auroville? Jean-François is wary of making a definite judgement on the basis of his short visit. However, he thinks one of the most powerful invisible architectures working inside Auroville is conventional money. "A collective that uses conventional money is going to have a conventional society as an outcome. If money is scarce, people become dependent on making money and it means you will have to create businesses to 'hunt' it. And those businesses don't have to be meaningful in terms of your ideals; they just have to be good traps for money.

"Social codes are another powerful invisible architecture here. Your social codes are pretty much the social codes of India. However, if you want to let a new species emerge, any norm has to be questioned including, for example, a certain prohibition on body contact and how we relate to each other through our bodies."

He also detects another form of social architecture at work in the way people behave in meeting. Based on his experience of conversation circles which he facilitated while he was here, he observed that "people tended to assert that things are like this or like that; they push pictures of reality in an absolute way. This is an architecture created by the mind."

Jean-François believes that one of the most important steps in collective evolution is to change these invisible architectures. But how? Regarding the use of conventional currency, Jean-François points out that the true wealth of a community lies in its human resources and that other systems of exchange – like the gift economy – better support and augment this wealth. Jean-François himself lives exclusively in the gift economy. "If I can give something, and I feel the rightness of this, I will give it freely: I never charge for it. And everything I receive comes from gifts. I feel amazingly wealthy. All spiritual traditions have said it – give and you will receive. However, I want to take this beyond the spiritual to prove scientifically that, from a collective intelligence perspective, this is a much more efficient system. Today, thanks to new technologies like the Internet, we have ways of sharing huge amounts of information about each other's needs and resources. And this is the basis for massive gift economies which are already happening."

As to how we meet together, he points out there is a need to share our perceptions and experiences in a way that leaves space for other perspectives, and for the larger overall reality to manifest. On a very practical level, he suggests that "if you make a small change, like agreeing that in meetings you don't speak before taking a deep breath, it will have huge consequences. Why? Because you're opening yourself to the possibility of something else coming through you."

And he concludes, "The first phase of Auroville was about building the foundations, the soil, buildings, infrastructure. Perhaps the next pioneering phase is learning how to change your social design. Will Auroville support the pioneers who will explore this?"

Treating AIDS patients with homeopathy

Dutch homeopath Harry van der Zee visited Auroville and talked about the successes in Africa in treating AIDS and malaria with homeopathy.

He came to India with the idea of going on a retreat, with Auroville as its last stop. "But there is little retreating here. There is so much social contact and interest in my work," says Dutch homeopath Harry van der Zee, after giving a well-attended lecture in the Quiet Healing Centre on 10th January.

"Homeopathy is fighting a heavy battle for acceptance in many countries all over the world against attempts to deregulate it as quackery. In The Netherlands and Great Britain, for example, many people oppose anything that is not the allopathic approach. There is a huge pressure from the medical industry. Health care has become a kind of totalitarian system with the allopathic medical paradigm dominant and controlling the money streams. Even though half of the world's population is using other kinds of medicines and healing, they don't seem to have much of a political impact.

India is one of the exceptions. Homeopathy, along with Ayurveda, Siddha and other traditional healing systems, is recognised as a national system of medicine and enjoys government support. There are thousands of registered homeopathic doctors, there are schools of homeopathy, there are homeopathic pharmacies and hospitals, there is even a Central Council for Research in Homeopathy, an autonomous organisation functioning under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare of the Government of India.

In Africa, homeopathy is very new. Here too, allopathic medicine has an enormous importance and other systems are often ignored. Yet, thousands of people work with traditional African medicines, and homeopathy has made inroads. This is partly due to Peter Chappell, an English homeopath who discovered a remedy

with this remedy. It works dramatically well and is effective in all stages of the disease, in the beginning stages, in the middle stages and even in very advanced stages. In all these cases I have seen patients come back to being 'normal'. Bedridden patients, weighing only 25 kg, who were no longer eating and just waiting to die, got their appetite and energy back, got rid of their bodily pains, their constant diarrhoea stopped, they gained weight and went back to work. Their immune system went back to normal, which we checked through blood tests. And now they are symptom-free. They still have the virus in their system, but the system is fine with it, similar to that of healthy persons who also harbour many viruses in their systems.

A true scientific testing of this remedy through randomly controlled trials is still to be done. Recently in Kenya 160 patients were tested before treatment and three months after starting treatment. All patients showed an increase in their CD4 count, the main parameter to test the immune system. Based on this we believe that in HIV-positive patients their symptoms can be completely removed and their immune system restored. But more research is definitely needed before we can claim that this remedy cures HIV/AIDS; for that, serious partners and considerable funding is needed.

This remedy proved that homeopathy can indeed effectively deal with 'disease totalities' and that one single remedy can be used for all those suffering from the same epidemic disease. Now, this is not completely new. From 1918 to 1920, for example, when the First World War had come to an end, the Spanish flu pandemic ravaged the world, infecting 500 million people and killing at least 20 million of them. Though the exact cause of the illness was

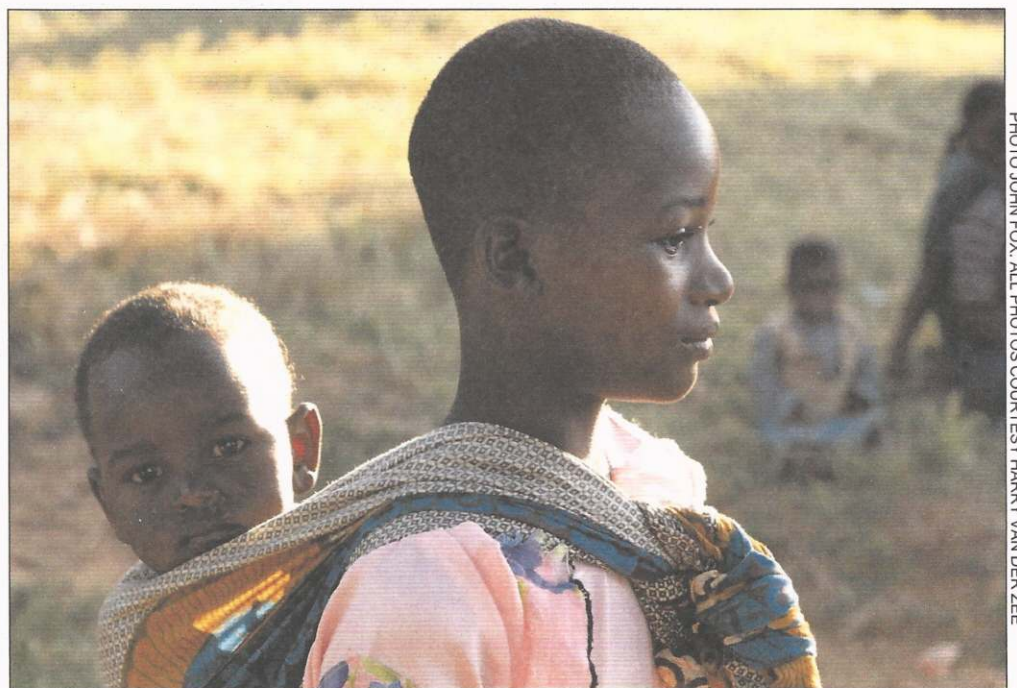


PHOTO JOHN FOX. ALL PHOTOS COURTESY HARRY VAN DER ZEE

The future of Africa: a healthy mother with her healthy baby in Malawi. Children are the future of any country, but the future of some 15 millions AIDS-orphans is very uncertain.

there are collective forms of trauma, such as the trauma of war, of genocide or of rape, or of friction between the individual and the tribe. In Rwanda, Peter found that where people have similar experiences (in this case genocide) they respond with similar symptoms. So we wondered if trauma could be treated in the same way as we were doing with epidemic diseases. Peter asked for a remedy against war and rape trauma. And once again, this remedy proved to be highly successful. Many other trauma remedies have been made and used since.

As we understand it, these epidemic diseases are teachers of mankind helping us in our evolution. The epidemic disease can also be a way in which the collective heals itself of a collective trauma but at the expense of people suffering and even dying. With our remedies we can fulfil the purpose of the disease with much less pain.

You might expect that these remedies would hit the front pages of the world's newspapers. Well, they don't. For a westernised mind, confronted with AIDS and convinced of the need for heavy medication such as antiretroviral drugs for the rest of a patient's life, it is hard to believe that a little water containing certain information, that costs nothing and is completely safe, can have an effect. I was recently interviewed by *Trouw*, one of the main Dutch dailies, who sent a reporter along with me to Africa. He came with a very positive newspaper article. Then, in order to appear 'neutral' I suppose, they asked an

allopathic specialist to comment. All he could say that it was probably all baloney, as he couldn't imagine it to be true. Even though the facts belied his views, he did not want to believe. We live in a very sceptical world.

But the remedies are spreading throughout Africa. I, and several other homeopaths have been teaching others in a few hours how to treat AIDS, malaria, war trauma etc, and how to administer our remedies. It doesn't require any special medical knowledge. It grows like wildfire. For example, I trained one Kenyan pastor who had 20 AIDS patients under his care. One year later I met him again and he had meanwhile treated 850 people.

I expect that these remedies will also work wonders here in India. Already a few Indian homeopaths are using them, and news is spreading. On World AIDS Day last year I gave a well-received lecture in The Other Song Academy in Mumbai, where homeopath Dr. Rajan Sankaran and his colleagues practice and teach. I talked about our work in

Africa dealing with AIDS and malaria, and also about our success in healing the traumas of rape. That touched a sensitive chord as the issue of rape is coming to the forefront in India as never before.

Can you speak, in India, of a collective rape trauma? If you read the newspapers of the last two weeks, seeing the tremendous public outcry against rape after a gang rape in a bus in New Delhi, I think we can. And it is my hope that many Indian homeopaths will start using Peter's remedy for rape trauma. For this, in our experience, would not only heal the individual, but also have an immense effect on the collective. For we have started to discover that if a sufficient number of people use the same remedy, this resonates in the collective and could even be a help in healing its cause. This type of research needs to be done further, and perhaps Auroville could play a role here.

India, in fact, is a very interesting country for doing homeopathic research. In Kolkata, steps are being made in treating cancer homeopathically by Dr. Prasanta Banerji, who runs a homeopathic research foundation and hospital. I talked to the medical director of Amrita Institute of Medical Sciences in Cochin – better known as 'Amma's Hospital' after its founder, Mata Amritanandamayi – about treating diabetes, a disease which affects 20% of the population in Kerala, which makes it kind of epidemic. He showed interest in working with Peter's diabetes remedy. But in countries such as the USA, homeopathic research is much more difficult, certainly in conditions like AIDS or cancer, as a doctor who would refrain from prescribing antiretrovirals, chemotherapy and all of that, would be held liable and face criminal proceedings.

I am very happy that homeopaths in Mumbai, Madanapalle and elsewhere will start using Peter's remedies. In Auroville, some 20 homeopathic practitioners and apprentices have meanwhile started using them. I believe that this will be of tremendous help for a large section of the world's population.

In conversation with Carel.

For more information visit <http://www.vital-remedies.com> or contact harry@homeolinks.nl. At www.ARHF.nl more information and several short videos can be found that give an impression of the work in Africa.



Aids patients in Kenya lining up for homeopathic treatment

that relieves all the AIDS symptoms in African AIDS-patients and can be given in any stage of the disease.

Generally, in homeopathy we deal with cases on an individual basis. But there is one exception, which is when dealing with epidemic diseases. There, you can treat a 'disease totality' instead of an individual constitution.

The remedy

Peter couldn't find a remedy against AIDS in the existing homeopathic materia medica, which lists some 3,000 remedies. But in his spiritual practice he had come into contact with a disembodied entity which he calls 'a benign presence' and which he describes as 'loving and intelligent'. Seeing the misery of AIDS patients all around him, he decided to try. He placed a bottle of water in front of him and described inwardly the disease and its symptoms. He then asked that a complete homeopathic remedy for HIV/AIDS be made on the spot. To his amazement, the resulting remedy worked incredibly well; it not only helped, but relieved the patients from all their symptoms.

I came to know about this remedy by seeing a video in 2003. I went to Africa for the first time a year later, and ever since I have been working

not known – and may still be disputed – most homeopaths who were treating the Spanish flu found *Gelsemium* to be the main indicated remedy. *Gelsemium*, a plant remedy, deals with grief, bad news, and the loss of loved ones. This suggests that the trauma of World War I – an external source – may have been the cause of the pandemic.

For Aurovilians all this may not sound as absurd as it does to a hard-core materialist. The Mother, in 1953, explained to the students of the Ashram school that the Spanish Flu pandemic was caused by the vital remnants of human beings who had been killed in bombardments during the First World War. They had been thrown violently out of their bodies and those vital remnants had turned into vampires, trying to find life in others they did not have in themselves. The Mother said she took some effective action to stop it in herself, after which the pandemic stopped in all of Japan where she at the time was staying. [The Mother, *Questions and Answers 1953*, CWM vol. 5, 182 ff.]

Peter did not stop with AIDS. He subsequently asked his 'benign presence' to make other remedies for dealing with malaria and many other infectious diseases of an epidemic nature. Here too, we observed consistently positive results. And then we started to realize that



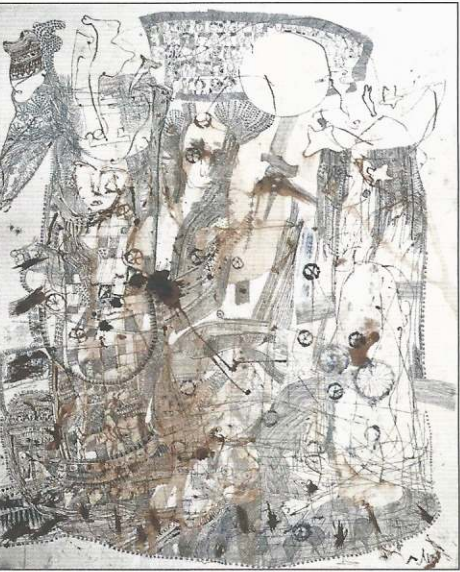
Rape victims in Kiliba (democratic republic Congo) and their children born after the rape, treated for rape trauma with homeopathy

ENTREZ

Inviting and intriguing, Entrez, an exhibition at Gallery Square Circle, hosted V5, a group of six talented artists from Pondicherry representing the vibrant art scene that is evolving in South India.

world through my colours,” he says and his abstract images and vitality of the forms reveal the intensity with which he works. “I am a very homely and private person. I spend most of my time with my family. My inspiration comes from the magic forms I dream of. I am a dreamer and my world is my colours. It is not important for me to travel or go to galleries and museums, I get fatigued when I visit museums; it is like eating too much when I see too much, I can’t digest.

“I do not need much appreciation as I think I will get stuck. My world of colours is like a forest, you discover new things, there are varying feelings and it takes me to magical places out of this world. I love to travel through my art. It is not about techniques, it is more about feeling it. I learn from the spaces I create in my paintings and I feel these places exist somewhere.”



Painting by Thirou

The one hour I spent at this exhibition with this friendly collaborative of artists from Pondicherry, discussing their inspirations, style, influences, confluences, dreams and travels, taught me more about them than my casual chats with them during the last years. It was as fascinating as their works; as if opening a whole new way of looking at art, giving a totally new perspective.

Danasegar, Ezhil, Sridhar, Vengatesh, Thirou and Gurunathan have come together one more time at Gallery Square Circle in Kala Kendra, to share their work with the viewers. Most of the visitors are surprised at the variety of styles and techniques and the unassuming beauty of the works of this humble, youthful group of artists.

The conversation takes off in Danasegar’s heavily French-accented English. “I see the



Painting by Danasegar



Painting by Gurunathan

Ezhilaresan has moved on to a completely new experimental style in his work, where playfulness takes over from the child-like imagination he is known for. “We don’t meet or interact too much even within our own group,” says Ezhil. “We meet occasionally for a cup of chai but we work in our own independent ways. I am the only one who travels; if I am not travelling, I am painting. I go on painting for days together. For me, it’s a fresh beginning every time I start painting in my studio. I have grown with my work; I have gone through a phase in which I was influenced a lot by masters, but now I am free, I feel fresh. I live my paintings, I am sad with my paintings, I feel happy with my paintings; sometimes I also fear my paintings.



Painting by Venkatesh

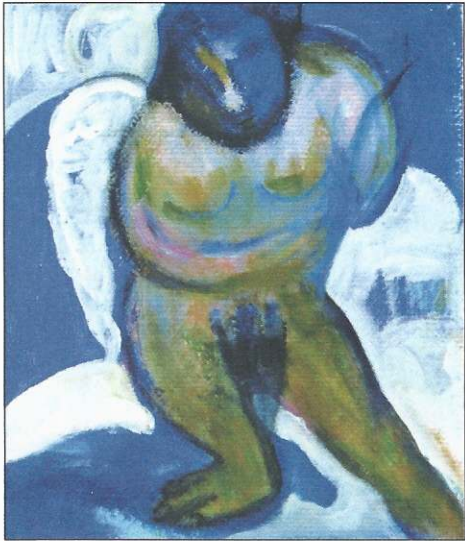
Sridhar is the quietest of all, but his intense works speak volumes on what is going on within. His style is more of silence, but a whole new world emerges as you go through his works spread around the gallery. “I am a nocturnal artist. My world of dreams comes to life at night. I catch them in my paintings. How it comes, I do not know, it is a natural process. You can call me a painter of dreams as I work with no direct inspiration.”

Gurunathan finds his inspiration in the dense forests and foliage around. He is refreshingly honest in his works and manages to bring the same feel and energy to his studio work, as from where he starts them, as palm size sketches in the forests. Being a sculptor, his paintings reflect a certain complexity that one finds in nature, behind the obvious simplicity in techniques and treatment.

Thirou’s works are dominated by his fascinating sketch work and his preoccupation with lines. His lines take you for a walk in nature and to the depths of ocean filled with sea creatures. With distinct characteristics of his own, Thirou delights the viewer with his expressive line that is enriched by his control of the medium.

Vengatesh is exceptionally talented with his techniques and his intuitive and instinctive nature is central to his paintings. His paintings are influenced by his travels within India; while it carries the simplicity of ancient cave paintings, it also derives from European masters.

It is not very usual to see young artists who are not commercially-driven but still manage to live through their art. This group of artists is a radiant, happy lot. The appreciation their work has received in shows in Mumbai, Chennai, and other cities has now encouraged them to take it to other



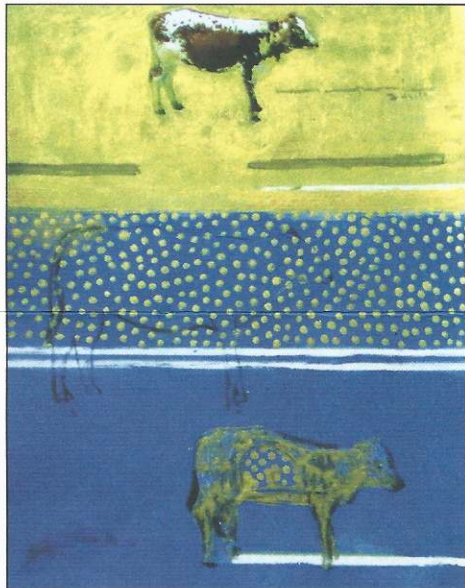
Painting by Sridhar

major centres in the country.

As artists they seem to have found their calling in this group. They have a very spontaneous way of being; an almost mystic bond seems to exist between them. Their preference for an independent art movement that is not dictated by the gallery circuit in the country is very evident when they speak their mind. “I do not want to market my paintings,” smiles Danasegar. “I have a few friends who appreciate my works. They are our collectors; they see us in our paintings and find themselves in our works.”

They, like each of us, are trying to reach the depth of their being through work, whatever it may be. It was heartening to see this aspiration in this unassuming group of youthful artists. As if the stillness in their work suddenly started speaking volumes about each one of them.

Dharmesh



Painting by Ezhilaresan

Population statistics 2012

After last year’s miserable population growth – Auroville’s population increased by a mere eight people – this year has seen a magnificent spurt. No less than 24 people joined the community, which works out at a growth rate of just over 1%. At this rate, it will take a yuga or two for Auroville to reach its projected population of 50,000.

The big winners this year are the Chinese, who have increased their representation by 700%. The Russians also continue their relentless march, adding a further 10%, while the Italians, attracted, no doubt, by the profusion of pizzeria in the area, continue to creep up the league table. Overall, the Indian, French and German communities continue their domination – together they make up no less than 67% of the total inhabitants – although the German community is hardly bigger today than it was in November, 2005.

The losers are the Americans, who have shed five members of their community and, somewhat surprisingly, the Koreans, who have lost 10% of their representatives. A lone New Zealander and an individual from the Philippines are the only new entries, which means that today Auroville comprises inhabitants from 50 different countries.

With 531 minors in the ratio of 278 males to 253 females, there are 1.09 males for every female. For those over 18 the ratio, with 894 males and 844 females, is 1.05.

Comparative overview by nationality							
Nationality	Nov. 06	Nov. 07	Nov. 08	Nov. 09	Nov. 10	Nov. 11	Nov. 12
Indian	760	799	876	918	932	951	961
French	279	290	303	323	324	332	334
German	232	226	228	242	247	235	228
Italian	89	93	100	111	118	116	120
Dutch	75	83	78	81	88	86	84
American	65	67	70	80	80	80	75
Russian	41	45	46	52	50	55	61
Spanish	32	33	34	36	43	42	44
Swiss	50	53	52	57	47	45	42
British	51	45	49	47	46	41	41
Israeli	21	28	23	27	42	37	35
Korean	25	19	24	31	36	38	34
Belgian	19	19	18	19	26	26	28
Swedish	13	14	17	24	22	20	23
Canadian	23	24	23	23	17	19	19
Ukrainian	16	16	16	15	16	15	15
Australian	12	12	12	13	13	13	14
Argentinian	7	7	7	7	6	7	8
Austrian	10	7	7	8	8	8	8
South African	1	6	7	6	8	7	8
Chinese	0	0	0	2	0	0	7
Japanese	4	4	4	4	7	7	7
Slovene	2	2	4	7	6	6	6
Tibetan	6	7	6	6	7	5	6
Braslian	3	5	3	3	5	5	5
Hungarian	3	4	6	6	3	5	5
Icelandic	1	1	2	2	3	5	5
Danish	3	3	2	3	6	1	4
Latvian	2	2	2	2	2	2	4
Mexican	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
Sri Lankan	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
Belorussian	1	1	2	3	3	3	3
Bulgarian	2	2	2	2	2	3	3
Colombian	2	1	1	2	2	2	3
Nepali	1	3	4	4	4	3	3
Portuguese	0	0	0	1	3	3	3
Estonian	0	0	0	0	0	2	2
Moldovian	0	0	1	1	1	1	2
Algerian	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Ecuador	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Egyptian	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Ethiopian	2	2	2	5	2	2	1
Finnish	1	1	1	0	0	1	1
Greek	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Irish	1	1	2	2	1	1	1
Kazakh	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
New Zealand	1	1	1	1	0	0	1
Philippines	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Taiwan	0	0	0	3	3	2	1
Lithuanian	2	1	1	1	1	0	0
Norwegian	0	0	1	1	1	0	0
Thai	1	2	2	1	1	0	0
Total	1865	1936	2045	2184	2237	2245	2269

Rainfall 2012

The year 2012 was drier than usual. The total rainfall was approximately 900 mm, considerably less than the average which is around 1350 mm. The monsoon yielded only 623 mm against an average of 843 mm, and 75% of this rain fell in October. November and December were much drier than usual, November having less than 25% of the average rains.

Between February and the end of June there was only 27 mm of rain, well below the average for these months of 199 mm. Summer temperatures were high, partly due to the late onset of the summer monsoon.

In terms of Pondicherry, 1968 was the driest year over the last century with only 566 mm. The wettest year was 1943, when 2604 mm fell. Recently, 2008–2011 were wet years, when the annual average was 1785 mm. The century average rainfall for Pondicherry is 1288 mm.

Auroville Rainfall Chart						
	2011		2012		Average	
	days	mm	days	mm	days	mm
January	1	18	1	10	2	11
February	1	13	0	0	1	38
March	0	0	0	0	1	30
April	4	185	1	1	1	16
May	1	5	0	0	3	61
June	3	32	2	15	4	54
July	6	80	4	100	6	57
August	8	195	5	86	8	109
September	7	170	5	65	7	134
October	12	337	14	470	11	282
November	14	332	2	84	12	364
December	5	348	6	69	7	197
Total	62	1715	40	900	63	1353

STATISTICS

CORRECTION

Dear Editors

I appreciate the write up on 12-12-12 in last month issue. However, the children in the photo published are from Arulvazhi school and not from Nandanam school as described by you.

Varadharajan

Rodogune

Auroville's production of Sri Aurobindo's play Rodogune is praised

Sri Aurobindo wrote *Rodogune* in Baroda shortly before he moved to Calcutta. This first version was later seized by the police, and based on various drafts, he reconstituted another version during his first years in Pondicherry. It is a play in five acts and revolves around a love triangle between Rodogune, the slave attendant of Queen Cleopatra of Syria, and the queen's twin sons who both fall in love with her. It is a complex play with interesting characters expressing both noble and ignoble human qualities.

It has an engaging plot and beautiful lines. Together with the development of the characters, the plot builds step by step without haste and without becoming wearisome. It begins at the death of Cleopatra's second husband, King Antiochus, whom she despises for having exiled her twin sons from her previous marriage to Egypt. She now reunites with her now grown-up sons, Antiochus and Timocles.

Antiochus is a noble and courageous warrior, who expresses respect but not affection for his mother whom he does not know, whereas the younger and somewhat childlike son, Timocles, bestows on her much love and tenderness. During their reunion, both fall in love with Rodogune, a Parthian princess who has been enslaved and now attends on the queen. She is beautiful, both in form and character. Rodogune reciprocates her love to Antiochus, but not to Timocles, who becomes jealous.

The secret concerning which of the twins was born first, and so is the rightful heir to the throne, is known only to Cleopatra and her nurse, Mentho. Intrigue enters the tale with the ambitious Phyllus, a counselor to the court, and his sister Cleone, who also yearns for power. They feed and use Timocles' jealousy to their own ends. Cleopatra, who is hurt by Antiochus' emotional coldness to her, but who also would like to maintain her power through influence over her son's rule, proclaims the younger passive Timocles as the elder and heir to the throne. The nurse Mentho

proclaims it a lie, and there is a rupture of the court, with Antiochus fleeing to the mountains with Rodogune and his guards, and Timocles crowned as king.

After some initial victories on the battlefield and expectations to overtake the royal palace, Antiochus faces a reversal when Timocles' forces receive help from an ally. Even though forewarned of disaster by a mysterious hermit, Antiochus chooses to relinquish his claim to the crown and return to the palace to serve his brother. Although his return is greeted with joy, Timocles expects that Antiochus will also relinquish Rodogune, but that is not to be. Through the scheming of Phyllus, Timocles agrees to have his brother assassinated in order to have Rodogune. But on seeing her beloved husband dead, Rodogune herself dies in grief beside him. At this tragic climax, Timocles, overtaken with grief and regret for his murderous act, gives his power over to his faithful commander of the army.

This production of Sri Aurobindo's drama of nobility and courage was a success on several levels. The overall direction by Aryamani, who has already conducted two other plays of Sri Aurobindo, *Perseus the Deliverer* and *Eric*, was admirable: the play sustained momentum and interest from the dramatic opening in which the cast of 30, draped in white cloaks, slowly descended the aisles onto the stage, until the ending nearly three hours later in which they exited in a reverse manner chanting Sri Aurobindo's translation of a mantra from the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, 'Lead me from non-being to true being, from the darkness to the

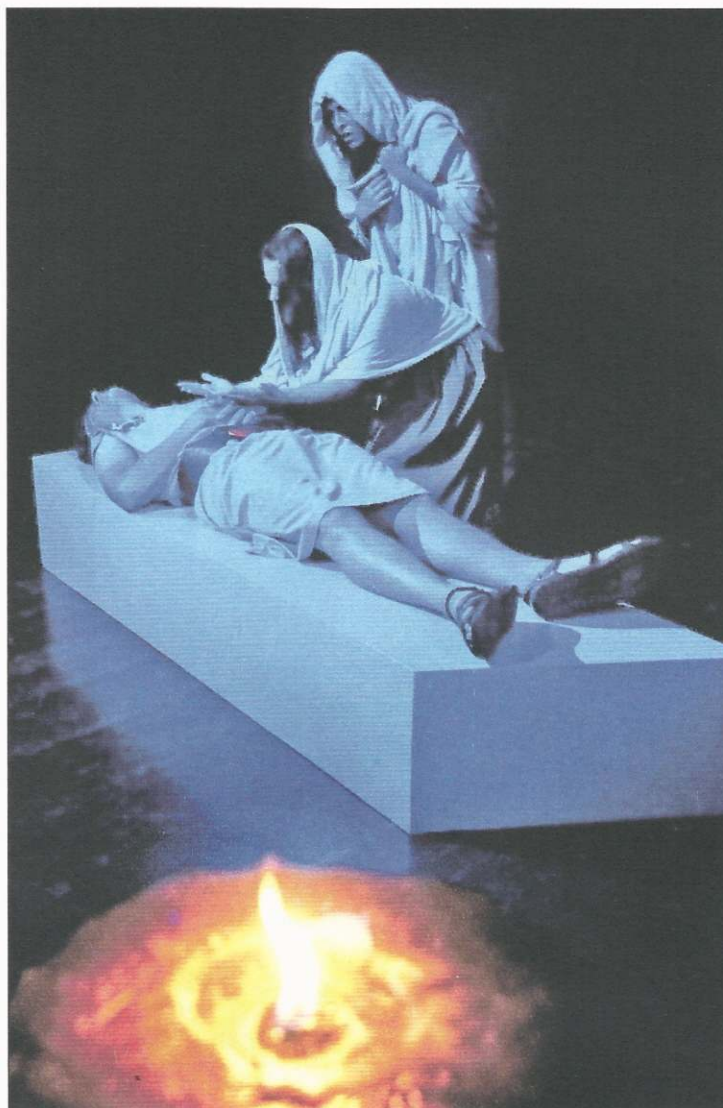


Photo: Ireno Guerici

Mourning the murder of Antiochus

Light, from death to Immortality.'

The production, with theatrical assistance from Norman, was smooth and harmonious with good lighting and sound. Each line could be heard clearly. The stage set was simple yet elegant, as were the costumes by Loretta and Coco. The continuous music provided by Aurelio and Nadaprem kept the momentum and sometimes added a deepening

atmosphere.

The performances by several of the actors were solid and thoroughly entertaining. Joy made a convincing Cleopatra, nicely blending her regal and maternal qualities. She appeared a confident and strong leader, and yet conveyed the softness of a mother for her sons. Antiochus was impressively played by Thomas who conveyed the higher qualities of a king – truth, honour, courage and fearlessness, even of death. Michael's portrayal of Timocles' character, while generally good, seemed to overemphasize his childlike side, missing an opportunity to effectively combine his complex neurotic qualities of emotional weakness, lust, jealousy and treachery. Anandamayi made Rodogune's character convincing by her graceful appearance and movements, as well as with her relatively few but moving lines. Charudatta convincingly played the scheming Phyllus, the main instigator of the tragedy. The supporting roles for Cleone (played by Elke) who seduced Timocles, and of Eunice (played by Shkati), Rodogune's friend and supporter, were well-acted. Some of the minor characters were also played well, others less effectively, but all turned in satisfactory performances.

Along with many others, I left the auditorium with a smile, feeling that I had experienced a fine and sincere offering from a dedicated cast and crew. As one Aurovilian remarked as we walked out, "Auroville's drama producers are finally coming into their own."

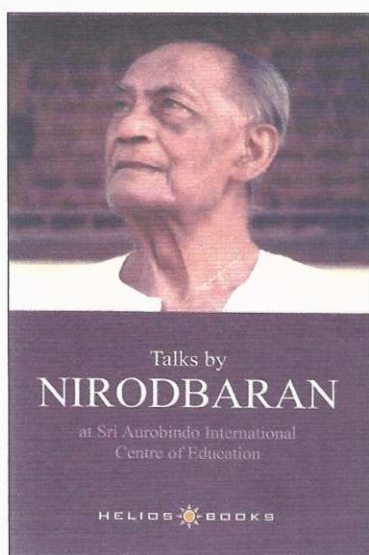
Larry

NEW BOOKS

Talks by Nirodbaran

The weekly talks which Nirodbaran gave to the students of the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education from May 14th to December 24th, 1969, have now been made available in this book. His book, *Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo* was based in part on notes taken during these talks. Also, some of Nirodbaran's correspondence and talks with Sri Aurobindo are discussed in this book, so there is some overlap with his previous books. Nevertheless, there is much new material here as this book is a more wide-ranging narration on events and people and issues, and expresses more of Nirodbaran's own personality, wisdom and humour.

It's been a long time since I read Nirodbaran's earlier works on his talks and correspondence with Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and his reminiscences about that period, which certainly are classics in the Sri Aurobindo literature. Reading this book took me back into that same elevated and joyful atmosphere. This book presents Nirodbaran the story-teller, one who is delightfully humorous, frank, humble, and whose aim is to spiritually uplift as well as to inform and entertain. While presenting a biographical sketch of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, he meanders along side-roads and bypaths, touching on many subjects that include most prominently



yoga, poetry, politics, and revealing discussions on various disciples such as Nolini, Pavitra, Champaklal, Amal, Nishikanto and himself. Regarding himself, there is an interesting discussion of Nirodbaran's own imprisonment for revolutionary activities. Sometimes I found his meanderings, abrupt deviations and digressions a little taxing, but they do highlight the light, informal style of the talks.

Nirodbaran often reads out passages from various books and journals to inform his student audience about Sri Aurobindo's life, and these are included

in lengthy quotations. For example, there is a long article by Charu Dutt, who was an associate of Sri Aurobindo during his political days, that appeared in the journal Sri Aurobindo Circle. There are extended passages from Purani's classic book, *Evening Talks*, which are discussed, as well as reminiscences from Nolini Kanta Gupta. There is also an article written by Nirod-da himself called "Sri Aurobindo: Creator of Poets," which chronicles this aspect of Sri Aurobindo's activities. There are excerpts which shed light on Sri Aurobindo's "accident" in which his leg was broken, others on his final passing. Generally, such material is accompanied by further elucidations from Nirodbaran.

One theme that frequently recurred throughout the book and which for me most characterized it as a whole was the reality and power of Sri Aurobindo's presence and the action of the grace. Nirodbaran illustrates these in various ways, recounting numerous instances in which they revealed themselves to him. For instance, he recounts how often he would be awakened at his appropriate waking time by Sri Aurobindo's voice calling his name. Another time, he was about to be attacked by some dangerous dacoits, when a voice seemingly out of nowhere induced them to flee. But less dramatically and more frequently, Nirodbaran recounts how he was guided or inspired to find a topic to discuss for

his weekly presentation to the students. Along with this recurring evidence of the action of the guidance and grace, even in the smallest of things, is Nirodbaran's own example of reliance on them, and quotes from Sri Aurobindo's *Essays on Gita* which proclaim the power of this inner attitude.

A related aspect of the book is Nirod-da's occasional advice to the students. One such instance was his comment, "I'm sure that all the best lines of English and international poetry should be on your lips..." along with a commentary about how elevating and helpful they can be, especially various mantric lines from Sri Aurobindo's poetry. This commentary is followed by a discussion about the power of prayer, especially

sincere prayers that well up from the soul. Elsewhere he speaks of the importance of developing the intuition through practice, and the intuitions and insights one can get through one's dreams.

All in all I enjoyed the book, and think it will be appreciated by many readers who appreciate an informal style of presentation, especially one richly peppered with humour and light-hearted stories, along with interesting biographical information and profound, sage advice.

Larry

Talks by Nirodbaran at the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education. Available from SABDA, Price in India Rs 300

So small that you cannot see it

On January 25th, Auroville Press and Auroville Papers presented their new project, a harmonica book for children which tells a story from the Chhandogya Upanishad; the story of Svetaketu, a young boy who, proud of his education, returned to his village to learn from his father the essential lesson of life, 'that thing which, knowing it, all the unknown becomes known.'



"Split open a banyan seed."
"It is split."
"What do you see?"
"Nothing."
"My child, out of that nothing this huge banyan tree has grown. Of that, the whole universe is made. That is what exists. That is what is. And you, Svetaketu, you are That."

Price in India Rs 465, contact aurovillepress@auroville.org.in

Subscription rates (including postage):

- ◆ One year subscription rates: India Rs. 450; other countries Rs. 2,000 equivalent.
 - ◆ Two year subscription rate: India Rs. 800; other countries Rs. 3,700 equivalent.
- Those for whom the subscription rate is an obstacle are invited to contact *Auroville Today* for information on reduced rates. *Auroville Today* does not receive any funds from Auroville. Your subscription (or your supporting contribution of double the amount) helps us to continue this work.

There are three ways to subscribe:

1. **Through our website:** Subscriptions can be ordered and paid on-line through www.auroville.com/auroville-today
2. **By sending your contribution directly to Auroville Today:** Surrender, Auroville - 65 101, Tamil Nadu, India. Cheques sent directly to *Auroville Today* should be made payable to Auroville Unity Fund, specifying: 'Contribution for *Auroville Today*'. Personal cheques are preferred to bank cheques. Please do not send postal money orders or cash.

3. By sending your contribution to:

- ◆ **U.K.:** Auroville International U.K., c/o Martin Littlewood, 30 The Green, Surlingham, Norwich NR 14 7AG. Tel.: 01508-538300, fax: 01508-537122, email: info@aviuk.org
- ◆ **USA:** Make checks payable to Auroville International USA and send to: USA: Pondicherry, 12 Tinker Street, Woodstock, NY 12498, tel.: (1) 845-679-2926, email: info@pondi.biz

- ◆ **Germany:** Auroville International Deutschland e.V. Solmsstrasse 6, 10961 Berlin, tel. (49) (0)30-42803150, fax: (49) (0) 30-92091376, email: info@auroville.de, GLS Gemeinschaftsbank, BIC: GENODEM1GLS IBAN: DE16430609678019389200.

- ◆ **The Netherlands and Belgium:** Auroville International Netherlands, Athlonestraat 77, 6524 BJ Nijmegen, Triodos Bank nr 1984.20.927, IBAN: NL26 TRIO 0198 4209 27, BIC code : TRIONL2U, email: penningmeester@avinl.org.

Editorial team: Alan, Carel, Larry, Mandakini. Contributor: Bindu. Proofreading: Alan. DTP: Carel. Photo editing: Jean-Denis. Published by Carel Thieme on behalf of the Auroville Foundation. Printed by Brihat Consultants, Pondicherry, and published at Surrender, Auroville - 605101, Tamil Nadu.

Auroville Today does not necessarily reflect the views of the community as a whole.