

## Thy Golden Light - Paintings inspired by Sri Aurobindo's poems

Jyoti Khare recently opened an exhibition at the Unity Pavilion, consisting of twelve paintings inspired by twelve poems by Sri Aurobindo.



Krishna

At last I find a meaning of soul's birth  
Into this universe terrible and sweet,  
I who have felt the hungry heart of earth  
Aspiring beyond heaven to Krishna's feet.

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

Nearer and nearer now the music draws,  
Life shudders with a strange felicity;  
All Nature is a wide enamoured pause  
Hoping her lord to touch, to clasp, to be.

For this one moment lived the ages past;  
The world now throbs fulfilled in me at last.

In her artistic journey spanning over three decades, she has exhibited her work only twice so far in the format of a solo exhibition. She was at first reluctant to attempt illustrating Sri Aurobindo's words, since she usually writes and illustrates books for children in her spare time. But when Shakti initiated a project in which she composed music for some of Sri Aurobindo's poems, to be accompanied by paintings and dance, she invited Jyoti to collaborate. Jyoti saw it as an offering and started her work of painting this series.

The artist says she grew up reading Sri Aurobindo's poetry and always felt drawn to it. As she re-read the poems before painting them, she felt that the words created an inspiration that then formed a visual image through her mind. Her process as she starts painting then becomes a dynamic work, also because of the use of (fast-drying) watercolours.

Jyoti says that what helps her creative flow is listening to music while painting. What needs to come through can then flow unhindered, while the mind is kept out of it yet something stays alert to what wants to express itself. The colours come to her, choosing her. They come naturally, while she simply aspires for a luminous energy. 'It is a state of being when I'm painting that stabilises in that moment, which I then try to keep in the rest of my life.'



The Golden Light

Thy golden Light came down into my brain  
And the grey rooms of mind sun-touched became  
A bright reply to Wisdom's occult plane,  
A calm illumination and a flame.

Thy golden Light came down into my throat,  
And all my speech is now a tune divine,  
A paean song of Thee my single note;  
My words are drunk with the Immortal's wine.

Thy golden Light came down into my heart  
Smiting my life with Thy eternity;  
Now has it grown a temple where Thou art  
And all its passions point towards only Thee.

Thy golden Light came down into my feet;  
My earth is now Thy playfield and Thy seat.

Jyoti recalls that Sri Aurobindo always encouraged people to use art as a means of sadhana, of opening ourselves to higher inspirations, and she resonates with that approach, so this project made sense to her: 'his poetry are his realisations, his siddhis, whereas what we do is just a little attempt at being in that energy, and that is my humble offering to Them, and I felt guided'.

She feels open to sharing these works because 'it is an occasion for people to come in contact with Sri Aurobindo's poetry, because people don't go towards it so easily. This exhibition is just a medium for giving a taste of Sri Aurobindo's poetry. That is the reason why the poems are printed big and displayed alongside the paintings instead of as small captions. I wanted people to first experience the poems, and then connect with the paintings.'

Regarding her illustration of the poem Krishna, the artist takes us through the process of illustrating it:

'I was looking in my mind for Krishna's face, his flute, the peacock feathers, and I was wondering how to bring out this aspiration for Krishna. At first, nothing except the face of Krishna came to me. But there are many paintings of Krishna, so I asked myself how I could attempt to make it Sri Aurobindo's Krishna. As this process went on for several days, I started sketching Krishna's face, but that concept was somehow pushed away from me. What



Transformation

My breath runs in a subtle rhythmic stream;  
It fills my members with a might divine:  
I have drunk the Infinite like a giant's wine.  
Time is my drama or my pageant dream.

Now are my illumined cells joy's flaming scheme  
And changed my thrilled and branching nerves to fine  
Channels of rapture opal and hyaline  
For the influx of the Unknown and the Supreme.

I am no more a vassal of the flesh,  
A slave to Nature and her leaden rule;  
I am caught no more in the senses' narrow mesh.  
My soul unhorizoned widens to measureless sight,

My body is God's happy living tool,  
My spirit a vast sun of deathless light.

then came to me were Krishna's feet. I just had to draw the feet, so that is what I did. There is this sense of yearning, of searching, of reaching out to Krishna, and this came very strongly to me, so that I just had to paint these hands, reaching out to Krishna, because that is what the poem is about. And if you look at the painting, it is not proportional. The elongated arms represent and accentuate the longing, the yearning, the aspiration, the path to Him.

"The brown is the earth aspiring to Krishna's feet. The flowers represent the grace that is descending. Mother's name for these flowers 'happens' to be 'First sign of Krishna's light in Matter', and before even knowing their name, I knew I had to put those flowers that grow at grass level...these indications just came to me and I followed them. The process was very special, I was going in one direction and then I was pulled into this other direction very briskly and only as I was finishing the work did I fully get the sense of what had emerged. And this keeps happening in different ways.'

Chandra

(based on a video interview by the Unity Pavilion team on the occasion of the inauguration of the exhibition)



# The Chairman addresses the residents


The Chairman of the Governing Board and Hon'ble Governor of Tamil Nadu, Shri R.N Ravi, accompanied by three members of the Governing Board, Smt. Dr. Nirima Oza, Shri Goutam Ghosal and Shri Aravindan Neelakandan, and the Secretary Dr. Jayanti Ravi, addressed the community on 7th November.

Here are some extracts from his 40 minute speech.

- The Governing Board has requested this meeting. This is essentially - you all know it at some level, but I would like to express on behalf of the Governing Board, Governing body - that we have some serious concerns about the affairs at Auroville, and we are here to share our concerns with you and then leave you with these thoughts. And I'd certainly like to have the benefit of your suggestions, your views, because being Aurovilian, you are the one who's supposed to be or should be the one who may be the most interested, or maybe the primary stakeholder, in the development and management of Auroville.
- When this new Governing Body was constituted, we got on the job earnestly to carry out the responsibilities entrusted to us. And our responsibilities, one was, of course, to promote the ideals of Auroville. We have to help the people, Aurovilians and others, on how to promote it. But one tangible part of the responsibility was to implement the Master Plan as duly framed by the Governing Body in consultation with the Residents' Assembly and duly notified by the government in 2010 through Gazette notification. This process, in fact, when it started, unfortunately, there were developments which were unpleasant in nature. There was boisterous opposition to it.
- In fact, the way the whole thing erupted, it gave us a shock. And especially to me as an individual, because I have been a student of Sri Aurobindo right from my college days. I have grown in my personal life following the two great icons, Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo. So, I was shocked, what could be there. Then we started going into the background - why. Now, we also started meeting Aurovilians. And in the last one year, several hundred Aurovilians have met me at least, individually and in groups of two, four, fourteen. They have shared their concerns - some saying that 'this is not the way to do it, this should not be done like this', some saying that, 'no, we must not delay it, we must do it'. So both kinds of views and opinions have been coming.
- Auroville has two parts: a spiritual evolution and physical manifestation, so for physical manifestation of Auroville, the Master Plan was created. The Master Plan was drafted by the Governing Board in consultation with the Residents' Assembly, which finally the Government of India approved and issued through Gazette Notification. Now, when they started implementation, the problem again came. Questions were raised that it should be revisited. That is one part of it as far as the physical manifestation of Auroville is concerned, how the Master Plan should come has become a matter of debate. There are differences, but when we started, I for one started looking into trying to understand, because as I told you, being a student of Sri Aurobindo, there was a deep anguish within me and I wanted to understand why, what is that? Where are we, how are things going on? We tried to understand and study Auroville, how it is functioning, how the individuals are functioning, how the institutions are functioning, how this collective is evolving. In the process, I myself have gone to several areas, I have travelled to farms, I have travelled to the institutions where they are doing good things, manufacturing things. I have travelled to centres where they are producing things for the sake of Auroville.

A question that is lingering and very, very, very crucial. As far as the physical manifestation of Auroville is concerned, this is an area of concern in which there is a difference of opinion, but the core thing is the ideals of Auroville. We are not talking about the ideals of Auroville. We know that and we are all here as students of Sri Aurobindo. We have all been reading him and trying to understand and trying to evolve. The first thing that Mother's Charter makes very clear, that to be in Auroville one must be a willing servitor of the divine consciousness. And in plain and simple language, it means one has to be a *bhakti*, with total surrender to the Divine Consciousness, one must be a *bhakta*, a devotee, that is a *sadhak*, who comes over here with a desire for further evolution to the higher

level of consciousness. And that it's a place of constant education and progress.

- Now, it pains me, when I moved around, the *sadhana* element of it, we find it is GROSSLY deficient, grossly deficient. You may find my statement very provocative, but I want to provoke because after all, we are here not for the brand Auroville but for the soul of Auroville. If the soul is not there, brand has no matter. People often say, we have built the Matrimandir - wonderful. But Matrimandir, which is the soul of Auroville, should be the place where Aurovilians should be regularly going and meditating. It has become a place of tourist attraction, tourists come and visit and go. *Sadhaks* I have met individually, there are very good people who actually, when I met them, some of them the tears started flowing, they just didn't utter a word. I could feel a sense of pain and anguish among them - where are we? Where are we going? They were not even able to speak. Someone very elderly said - Mr. Chairman, 'We have lost the way'. Now, the question is, when I see here, I find a lot of commercial activities going on. Somebody is doing good business. Is it a place of commerce? No, certainly not. Because *karma* is *nishkama karma*, where it is not self desire. I am doing the work but the work is not for my profit for my benefit, it is for the benefit of the community, it is *nishkama karma*.
  - Auroville is not like any other place where we are free to do whatever we wish; here the freedom is the freedom of a *sadhak*. The basic essential condition is that I am a *sadhak*. So, I have a right to be here, and I have the freedom to pursue it following the broad compass, the directions which are illustrated by Sri Aurobindo through triple transformation and *sapta chatushtaya*, how to do the *sadhana*.
  - There may be a lot of problems, a lot of issues, we can keep discussing whether the road should be built here or not built there, we may be concerned about whether the crown is built or which building is built where, these are one aspect of it. But the ideal of Auroville has to be preserved, it has to live here, it has to live in the most vibrant manner.
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- On behalf of the Governing Board, I would request all my dear friends, Aurovilians, to think of how to restore the ideal of Auroville. And I can tell you for sure, so far in this last one year meeting, visiting, I have seen activities which are just the opposite of the ideal.
- Now the question comes: who has got the power? Now these are immaterial matters whether the power is with the Governing Board power or with the Residents' Assembly power or with the International Advisory Council. These are immaterial. As far as we are concerned, there are only two powers - one is the Constitution of India and the laws of India, and second is the Charter given by the Mother. There is no other power. We don't recognize any other power, Sri Aurobindo's teachings and Mother's Charter: that is one, sacrosanct. And the Constitution and the laws of India. It is not important whether the Residents' Assembly has the power or the Governing Board has the power. We have come down to the level where we are doing it for the power struggle. I think we have moved far away from being a *sadhak*.
  - Now, we believe, and sincerely believe, that any way forward should be, as far as possible, in consultation and taking everyone along,



From left: Dr. Nirima Oza, Dr. Jayanti Ravi (secretary), Shri Ravindra Narayana Ravi (Chairman), Shri Aravindan Neelakandan, Prof. Goutam Ghosal.

- aboard. We don't like to create any sense of discrimination, or any impression that force is being used - NO. Auroville is not the place where force and coercion should be the choice; that should not be the choice. But we also have an obligation, since the Act tells us to see that the ideals of Auroville are to be promoted. Now when we see that the ideals of Auroville are being compromised, and compromised in a big manner, I have no hesitation to say, because I have not come here to play music to your ears, I have come to tell you what I feel it is a pain, it is the anguish of a person who has been a devotee of Rishi Aurobindo. The issue has to be confronted frontally; it cannot be just wished away by nice talking. If my words hurt you, you are free to hurl at me, I will not mind it; but the issue has to be confronted. And I would suggest now that Auroville has to have a set of guidelines, agreed norms how to conduct its affairs, in terms of who should be allowed to come, who should be in Auroville, what are some common minimum activities which are consistent or necessary for being a *sadhak* in this process of our forward journey. Those norms should be there and not only should be, MUST be there.
- Because it is now not acceptable, and I am telling it plainly, to let the status quo continue. The status quo is not acceptable because India cannot afford Auroville to decline, Auroville to move away from the ideal. Auroville has to be spiritually strengthened, and of course materially reinforced as well, for which we need to have some set of norms, which ideally and I have always maintained that Auroville should be managed by Aurovilians; there should not be any external interference - this is the ideal situation. But when we see that the Auroville community, which is a small community, is not able to reach to a consensus and this is not the first time...
  - Now, we don't like the government to step in again. We would like Auroville to grow with the cooperation the goodwill of all the Aurovilians to make it what is its destiny.
  - As far as the physical manifestation of the Master Plan is concerned, the question is, when the Master Plan was prepared, in consultation with the Residents' Assembly, and it was in process for more than a decade and then it is notified, the question is, do we revisit it? There are people in Auroville who tell me don't go ahead. There are people who say this is not the way, we have to change it. The question is, do we keep revisiting a decision arrived through due process? I think if we continue doing that, there will not be any end to it. I would appeal to you all, if you have some suggestions, in the next one week please send us a mail. What do you wish? How should it be according to you, and what should be the agreed norms for the *sadhaks*, for the Aurovilians to follow.
  - You know, what is non-negotiable is the ideal. The ideal is non-negotiable. And as for a decision taken through the due process, it should also be non-negotiable, but if there is a constructive suggestion, something that is in the interest of promoting the ideals, it is

- welcome. It is not that we are pushing it. But at the same time, I am telling you in very, very plain language, which may again hurt you: Auroville needs a shock, an external shock to bring it to its sense, bring it to its trail.
- A status quo business as usual will not work. In the best possible manner, each one of us has to now jolt ourselves and think.
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- The speech elicited differing responses from residents and ex-residents. Publicly, at least, there were fewer appreciative responses than critical ones, and the following selection reflects this:*
- He was borderline ruthless in his choice of words while pointing out our mistakes and delivered it in a no BS straight-to-face manner. He didn't recite poetry, didn't sing a song, and certainly did not give a 'standup' performance. I think he spoke his mind in a blunt way.
  - What a moving speech! Thank you for this deep understanding of the Ideals of Auroville. A strong, powerful speech that does not admit rejoinders, we just have to roll up our sleeves and work hard for the Community.
  - Resetting Auroville to its original aims.
  - I attended so many meetings in Auroville and outside world but I didn't attend one like that. I am talking about the (GB meeting 07.11.2022) which happened today. It is so vibrant, each and every word from the Chairman is like pearls running on a stone floor. So meaningful it awakened the Psychic Being, he put portion by portion what one has to do and not do in Auroville.
- I am really grateful to him to awaken the Aurovilians to the real meaning of "Sadhak" which many Aurovilians totally forget for a long time. He specially put a weightage on the word "FREEDOM" which many people interpret wrongly in Auroville and do illegal things. At least those people know now what is meant by Freedom in Auroville.
- The top class sentence out of his speech which I like is "We don't need the Auroville brand, we need the Auroville soul", so everything is underpinned by that. Our souls have done a good thing in our past life, that's why we have a chairman like this one in Auroville.
- "Om namo Sri Aravindaya namaha".
- (The next three are extracted with permission from letters addressed to the Chairman)*
- The search for Human Unity, in the history of the world, is probably attempted for the first time in Auroville. Do you think that it is so easy to reach it and that every Aurovilian could be in contact with his own psychic being, and that everyone could see the Divine in each other so easily? Do you think that this can be reached in the present atmosphere of threats, coercions, takeovers and violence which started on 4th Dec. 21?...Being a willing servitor of the Divine Consciousness has many expressions. The Mother did not call for *sadhaks*, in the traditional sense, in Auroville. Do you really



think that Aurovilians do not have an inner search, that there are no *bhaktas* or devotees in Auroville?... Of course, the inner search of everyone can always be more sincere and higher. But who can judge that, except the Divine?

- You have heard or read ideas about Auroville’s collective purpose expressed by those who were closest to the Mother at Auroville’s commencement, such as Roger Anger and Kireet Joshi. Many of us have also heard these ideas from them, as well as from the Mother herself. The message we have received through working with them is that the inner development of the human being through dedication to the Divine is the essence and truth of Auroville, necessary in order to realize its destined outer development, and the ideal of human unity. By assuming that building a concrete city is the first priority of Auroville, you have authorized actions that are contrary to the truth of Auroville and detrimental to its progress and the realization of its aims...

Auroville is not the place that you have described in your presentation. It is not a place without norms where the ideals on which it is based have been compromised. It is not a place where service to the community and its surrounding populations have been neglected, or where a sense of collective purpose and well-being has been lost...

The Master Plan was never set in stone; it was the product of immediate, practical circumstances... However, you must understand that “revision” is an inherent part of the Master Plan, by definition. To revise it after 10 years is the normal course of such an instrument, and not a deviation. Similarly, the norms of life in Auroville were defined by the Mother and are embodied in a living way by the lives of the residents in an evolving way, in accordance with the Mother’s guidelines. It is an inherent necessity and responsibility of Aurovilians to adhere to them, and their lives are a constant endeavor to do so. But such norms, with their developing interpretations and applications, cannot be dictated by an external authority; they are a product and expression of the *swabhava* of Auroville. To attempt to alter them, improve them, determine them from outside the life of Auroville would be a violation of the norms themselves...

- It is clear that India is the only country which can host an international experiment like Auroville (which is both evolutionary and revolutionary), while also understanding the imperative necessity for visa security for non-Indian residents. The Indian Government has hence granted a special visa status for Auroville (as you spelled out for us). However, since the past year, this protection has been selectively suspended for certain people and what should be a routine granting of visas has instead been used as an instrument of coercion and intimidation, causing several Aurovilians deep anguish and uncertainty. But no true *sadhana* and progress

can be made on the basis of fear and a lack of freedom. ..On 15th August 1954, Mother made A Declaration wherein she requested the Indian Government for dual citizenship:

*From the first time I came to India - in 1914 - I felt that India is my true country, the country of my soul and spirit...*

This feeling of deep connection and belonging to India is certainly echoed by many foreign-born Aurovilians. Thus this is my first request - that visas are not used as a means of wielding power to force a certain narrative or viewpoint. Further, that the unwarranted FIRs against individual Aurovilians are lifted, only then can trust be built and a way forward found.

You told us that the quality of the *sadhana* happening here was grossly deficient, that whether Aurovilians have been here for 40-50 years or are 2nd/3rd generation is unimportant, that we are not committed to the ideals or the Charter of Auroville, we are not genuine *sadhaks*/devotees...

Respectfully Sir, the inner life and spiritual experiences of Aurovilians is not for display in public meetings. Whether it is visible or not, inner growth and *sadhana* is definitely our aim, but only the Divine can judge its genuineness. Moreover, lived experience cannot simply be dismissed, and it is a lived experience of several decades that we are aspiring willing servitors to the Divine Consciousness, brought here by the Grace of Mother and Sri Aurobindo, that our lives are dedicated to attempting to live their yoga in the minute details and chaos of daily life, and that despite all our differences, there is a deeper brotherhood in Auroville as we are children of The Mother, chosen and accepted by Them. It is only because something real and true is actually happening here, that Auroville continues to exist and even be a beacon in many fields.

In your address to us, you dismissed craft and other income generation units as merely carrying out commerce or trade, and that too not in a spirit of ‘*nishkama karma*’... Since I happen to work in this sector, I can unambiguously state (on behalf of other unit holders and sectors of work also) that the work is my *karma yoga* and *sadhana*, the vehicle to offer myself to Mother and Auroville while sustainably creating products of beauty and perfection which serve as ambassadors of what Auroville stands for in matter.

For Auroville to truly succeed, both spiritually in terms of ideals and materially in the manifestation of the city, it needs to be given full freedom to grow, with a minimum of control from external bodies. As you said, Auroville should be managed by the Aurovilians. This is my plea to you.

*The following open letter was presented on 14th November in a meeting called on very short*

*notice to which all residents were welcome, and it was unanimously agreed upon by the approximately 150 people who attended. More people signed up in support of it later. It had 477 verified signatures when it was finally sent to the Chairman).*

Dear Chairman and members of the Governing Board,

We came to meet you on the 7th of November with the hope to discover together how we can move forward with truth, humility and courage. However, we were surprised that the dialogue we were expecting didn’t happen.

We heard, in your speech, many accusations condemning Auroville and Aurovilians on innumerable levels without clear grounds, making assumptions not only about the reality of Auroville but misinterpreting its ideals and true *raison d’être*.

Still we welcome your criticism of Auroville as we acknowledge that we aren’t perfect and that progress needs to be made. Yes, a good honest shake is helpful to the growth process, individually and collectively — yet with the very clear and honest condition that this shake is conscious and not in itself stepping on the essence, ideals and values of Auroville. And on this path which has never been attempted before upon Earth we are in the unknown. Time, patience and endurance are needed to discover the way and who can really judge the spirituality of any individual or group unless one has realised the Supreme Truth we are all looking for?

We do need to improve the way we live together. More discipline, for instance, would surely be welcome. But this discipline cannot be imposed by any external authority. The Mother herself told us that the organisation should emerge from life itself and not be organized by arbitrary mental ideas or conceptions. This is one of the fundamentals of Auroville and why she clearly said - “Only those who have resolved to stay in Auroville for good have the right to intervene in its organisation”.

All of Auroville is profoundly grateful to India - it is her commitment to host all forms of spirituality that allows Auroville to root itself on her blessed land. We are also grateful to India for allowing this experiment which, as per its Charter, does not belong to anyone in particular but belongs to humanity as a whole, in service of the Divine’s Will alone.

Auroville is a township devoted to the Divine but it is not an ashram. Aurovilians are not French or German or Indian or Israeli — they are Her workers. The city to be built is the material tool to evolve our consciousness; it is neither our goal, nor our ideal.

To infuse spirit in matter and evolve our consciousness through this harmony and unity is the essential goal, the ideal, the vision, and the truth of Auroville.

We choose to bet on the beauty of life and on each being, embracing our imperfections and

holding hands with the parts of ourselves that need to grow, knowing that it is Her grace leading each of us through different guises and paths in this infinite and wondrous *Lila* back to Herself. There is a great diversity of people here with a wide range of experience and professional backgrounds in a multitude of fields, from science and governance to arts and poetry, farming to architecture and archaeology, history, education and yoga. While recognised in the outside world for our expertise and achievements, here, we try simply to be useful, to serve, and to learn. The stories of selfless dedication, of sacrifice, of endurance against all odds are not few, and yet mostly remain recorded only in the book of the Divine.

However, the present situation of fear, intimidation, threats of criminal charges, visa renewals being delayed or drastically reduced, cutting of maintenances and much more have seriously endangered the very Spirit of Auroville and our human fabric. For instance, the Dreamweaving exploration was one effort to embody this very Spirit of Auroville — of integrating our differences of opinion, embracing the diversity of our knowledge and expertise, of a true collaboration not imposed but rather a spontaneous, genuine and joyful expression where each can find their place in a holistic development of Auroville. But why was all this genuine effort made by the Dreamweavers suddenly put aside when it was supported by such a large portion of the community? There was so much hope at that time that this would be the way out and suddenly, the whole experience was abandoned by the Auroville Foundation Office without explanation.

We cannot build mutual respect and mutual trust in that way. That will never work.

Mother imagined the development of Auroville as a Tower of Babel in reverse, that instead of becoming divided while building the city (as in the case of Babel), we will unite. When we look at what has been achieved in the last year which amounts to almost nothing except for what has been destroyed, including our roads, we can only conclude that building “The City the Earth Needs” in such a climate and such a division is an impossibility. To restore unity through real collaboration is the only path forward. And it should be with the unity of the three main bodies of Auroville, working hand in hand to collaborate with mutual respect and the honest acceptance of our respective roles in manifesting Her vision.

From this perspective we would like to invite you to a genuine dialogue with the Residents’ Assembly of Auroville, in an atmosphere conducive to honest sharing, understanding of our different views that may lead to a harmonious and peaceful way forward. We trust that we all are growing through this moment of deep crisis and serious disagreements and that beyond our individual preferences, perspectives and limitations “The City the Earth Needs” will be.

At Her service,

*Residents of Auroville*

Reflection

# The hidden order

Auroville is a very difficult place to understand. For example, it often seems messy, chaotic. What else would you expect when a conglomeration of individuals from different cultures and nations, different upbringings, education and motivations, are brought together in a place which lacks the checks and restraints of conventional society?

So some people fight, cheat, seek and abuse power, they downgrade, fear or distrust others, and try to maximise their own advantage irrespective of others’ needs. Yet we can also witness great generosity, solidarity and self-sacrifice in the service of something much greater than ourselves.

What to do with such an unwieldy melange of defects and potentials? If Auroville was a business, an efficient manager would long ago have cut out the dead wood and imposed clear goals with strict deadlines for their achievement, while specifying procedures and behaviour which needed to be adhered to at all times.

But Auroville is not a business, nor a machine to be fine-tuned to perfection. Auroville is an experiment in the collective raising of consciousness and of an evolving group soul.

Ah, there’s the rub. For a group soul is very different from a business: and you don’t take a scalpel to a soul. Like life itself, it cannot be contained in mental formulations, for there is so much the mind cannot understand about this place. Why, for example, some people are here when they seem so ‘un-Aurovillian’ in the way they behave. Or why there needs to be such a mix of nationalities, motivations and personality types when, seemingly, we would progress much faster if only the ‘right’ people came.

Constantly we interpret, we make judgements about people and about whether or not Auroville is making progress, but we don’t really understand what is happening because we cannot comprehend the whole. How, for example, the different ‘life flows’ of different individuals intersect and act upon each other and upon the larger community; how the seemingly most unpromising or threatening situation may be necessary for personal or collective growth; how defeats or defects can presage more comprehensive progress; how extreme diversity may lead to more integral outcomes; how Auroville accentuates a millennia of habits in order to transform them; and how the constant pressure this place exerts on each of us works

differently upon different individuals, according to our stage of evolution.

Moreover, the yoga of Auroville is embedded in matter, and this gives it a very different ‘feel’ from traditional yogas, for it is something that is lived, worked out, in the heat and dust rather than in the protective environment of an ashram. This, along with its collective aspect, makes Auroville a unique experiment for which no precedent exists: it is *sui generis*. Therefore, we can’t rely on old methods or old understandings, even those drawn from the spiritual traditions of India. We should even take care not to use our limited mental understandings to interpret Sri Aurobindo’s and The Mother’s words.

In fact, in order to understand, to live, Auroville we are asked to contact, to identify in some way, with the Force, the Spirit, which animates this place. And this doesn’t depend upon how much of Sri Aurobindo or The Mother we have read, or how often we concentrate in the Matrimandir. It simply requires an openness to that Force, something which Mother saw in those pioneer raggle-taggle Aurovilians who, with their unconventional behaviour and dress, so scandalised the more traditionally-minded Ashramites.

Today, more than ever, we need to trust that that Force is active here, and that we can contact it. For it means that what is happening now has a purpose, and those who are here now are meant to be here; that for the moment we are the perfect ingredients for something that needs to be worked out through the ‘pressure of consciousness’ which is exerted upon all of us.

In other words, Auroville may not be so ‘messy’ after all; there is a hidden order. But to begin to understand it we need to identify first with its inner core, not with its external manifestations.

This doesn’t mean we shouldn’t work on the external Auroville. Undoubtedly, there is much here that needs to change, and we cannot evade the responsibility to improve our organisation and to manifest the city which Mother wanted. But it means that we cannot do this by purely external means, for without contact with the deeper source we cannot act in a way which is consonant with the larger movement.

This is why, although there have been many attempts over the years to bring ‘order’ to Auroville by external means, they have always failed. Although, no doubt, these have also played their part...

*Alan*



# The pandemic's effect upon the local villages

A recent British Academy report on the U.K. post-pandemic situation concluded that “We are in a COVID decade: the social, economic and cultural effects of the pandemic will cast a long shadow into the future... there are a set of deeper impacts on health and wellbeing, communities and cohesion, and skills, employment and the economy which will have profound effects upon the U.K. for many years to come”. Has the pandemic had a similar impact on the villages surrounding Auroville? We asked Anbu of the Auroville Village Action Group (AVAG) to give her view.

*Auroville Today: What is the situation now regarding the impact of the pandemic on the health and well-being of the local villagers?*

**Anbu:** During the pandemic we initiated a project in government schools because schools were shut for a long period and the children were suffering: they were hearing negative stories about the pandemic and some were even experiencing violence due to the difficult socio-economic conditions of the families. So last year the Auroville Village Action group initiated an art project for 2500 children in 23 schools as a form of therapy. The teachers highly appreciated this initiative. However, they also told us that now the schools have reopened, they are finding it difficult to manage the children, much more so than before the pandemic. They complained that children do not pay attention to their studies and find it difficult to stay inside classrooms as they were out of schooling for months. They also said that children of 11 years and older won't listen to what they say, they are glued to their mobile phones even in the classroom, and that a few of them are violent and using illegal substances.

*What caused this? Was it due in some way to the pandemic?*

Definitely. One reason is that because they had missed two years of education, when the schools reopened the students were promoted to a class standard two years ahead, but they didn't have the knowledge to cope at this standard, so this was very frustrating for both the teachers and the students.

Also, the students didn't get the education and guidance needed at the time the schools were shut. After the parents left for work, the children were free at home. They could watch certain things which were not under the parents' control, and the boys in particular were very influenced by what they saw in the films and wanted to imitate their macho heroes. Before the pandemic, fewer children had mobile phones. But during the pandemic all of them were asked to get a mobile for the online tuition, so then they spent most of the time on social media or watching films.

For a year or more many of the older boys were scot-free and could go anywhere. Some became involved in elections: they went round with political parties, helping carry posters and running errands for the leaders, and they got free biriyani every day and sometimes liquor. It made them feel powerful, and they began to shout and bully others. When their parents wanted to know what they were doing, they would resent it and tell them they were doing important things.

Even younger boys of even 11 or 12 were taking up part-time work, partly at the bidding of their parents and partly because they wanted money to spend. As they were working with adults, they got exposed to their habits, like smoking, drinking and bad language, and so their behaviour began to reflect this.

This meant they were losing their childhood and getting separated more and more from their families. For example, one boy became so attached to the biriyani he consumed every day with his earnings that he refused his mother's food.

When we interacted with Women's Group members and other Youth Club members they told us the same story: there was a big change in the behaviour in the schoolchildren. And this was not happening just in our area. At this time in Tamil Nadu there were reports of students

elsewhere being violent to the teachers, even stabbing them, and of boys and girls openly drinking liquor.

Clearly, something had to be done. When on International Women's Day this year some of the teachers addressed the women we had assembled, the teachers said that they had difficulty managing the older boys, who were often violent, and they asked the parents to take more responsibility for looking after their children. Then a head teacher told them that unless the teachers, parents and the larger community collaborated in doing this, it would be very difficult to control them.

AVAG experienced the problem this year in its summer camp for boys and girls. The first few days were very difficult because the boys were teasing and bullying the girls, and were even violent among themselves. When we divided them into smaller groups and asked them to express themselves, some of the older boys said they were pushed by their family to get work to earn money, but others enjoyed watching violent films and wanting to experiment with behaving like this.

Meanwhile, it emerged that the girls are very naïve, innocent; their world is television and social media on mobile phones. They don't go out much; they're much more at home and more controlled by their parents. However, both boys and girls repeatedly expressed their hostility towards each other.

We realized that something needed to be done, so on the fourth day of the summer camp we framed some guidelines for the children. One was to respect each other, not to be violent but to have respectful communication.

Realising that the boys had been thrown into adulthood at a very young age, we also warned the parents that their children were losing their childhood, and that it is illegal for the young ones to have a job.

Also, because some children have experienced violence and abuse not only from other children but also from adults – in Tamil Nadu there were more reported cases of child abuse in this period compared to pre-pandemic – we are planning a mental health programme for them, in collaboration with the Auroville Child Protection group, the Department of Social Work of Pondicherry University and with an organisation in Madurai which is working in the area of mental health in government schools.

*What about the parents? How are they coping? If the parents were encouraging their children to take jobs, was this because they were impacted financially by the pandemic? Have many of the parents lost jobs which they've not been able to return to?*

Many of them suffered financially during the pandemic, particularly in the neighbouring villages because many of them were dependent on the Auroville tourist trade or were employed



Art class

in Auroville production units. But during this time the guesthouses were shut, the production units were shut, and even units run by the Tamil villagers in the villages shut down.

So it was very difficult for them to manage. Some spent all their savings, others mortgaged their jewellery or borrowed money. I didn't see a big increase in suicides, but the economic crisis, plus the fact that now the parents were cooped up together in the house during the lockdown, led to a definite increase in marital violence. When someone has lost their job and has fears about the future, they sometimes take out their frustration on their wife or their children.

One thing that was very helpful during the pandemic was that banks offered ₹5,000 overdrafts to verified women in Self Help Groups having *Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana* accounts to meet their credit needs, without insisting on security. Also, AVAG enabled SHG members associated with it to get loans from the nationalised banks without going to the moneylenders. Women in our network availed loans worth around 5 crores during this period from the nationalised banks.

The farmers were also under pressure because during the pandemic the price of inputs like fertilisers increased and still haven't come down, but the prices for the agricultural yield didn't go up.

*Has the employment situation eased now?*

Many villagers have jobs again, but often not their old job, either because their old workplace has closed or because it is taking fewer employees. So when they take jobs in new places often they get less salary and this again creates frustration. The employment situation also affects college students. Those who received qualifications during the lockdown through online tuition are considered less well educated – they are referred to as the ‘Covid batch’ – and employers don't want to give them jobs.

*What about the larger village community? Has Covid and its aftermath fragmented it or brought it closer together?*

During the pandemic time I think it strengthened the community because people were supporting each other more. For example, the most marginalized - the poorest, the widows, those with mental health problems – were the most affected by the pandemic. But because people saw they were suffering the most, there was more sympathy for them. In many cases, the youth, women and the leaders helped Village Action select the most needy ones so we could support them first with food and other relief materials.

Then again, the Covid vaccinations started before the local elections, and because the villages didn't have a panchayat president at this time, the youth took the initiative to organise the first vaccinations in collaboration with the Health Department.

*What about the relationship with the authorities? Did this improve or deteriorate as a result of Covid?*

The relationship with the government agencies has improved, and Auroville Village Action Group played an important part in this by linking the community with them, particularly with the Health Department. These linkages will continue, and the more we create visibility and awareness in the villages of what the government provides, the more the trust in the authorities will grow.

Recently, for example, the Tamil Nadu government started providing counselling relating to mental health and substance abuse in schools and other places. Another good thing is that after the pandemic the government initiated a new health scheme, called ‘health at your doorstep’. Health visitors visit homes and check blood sugar, blood pressure etc. and give basic medicines free of cost. While the central and state governments provided food essentials during the pandemic, the Tamil Nadu government also provided free rice, dahl and oil during the lockdown to the families of children who had been enrolled in government schools. This was because before the schools shut these children would have benefitted from the free noon meal scheme, and the government didn't want them to suffer.

This support was not available to families of children who were enrolled in private schools. One result has been that a number of families shifted their children from private schools to government schools. Another factor was that they couldn't afford the private schools' fees anymore.

Of course, one of the main reasons why



Anbu

parents enrolled their children in private schools is because the medium of instruction is English, and they thought this would give their children an educational and employment advantage. But government schools in Tamil Nadu are now beginning to provide an English language class.

The government of Tamil Nadu has also introduced a 7.5% reservation for students from government schools for free admission to government medical colleges. This means that while they still have to pass the NEET entry exam, a proportion of them can get admitted with lesser marks. This is a huge thing for local parents who would like their children to become doctors because the fees at private medical colleges are astronomical – typically up to 25 lakhs rupees a year.

Also, while the unorganised employed sector did not benefit from government support during pandemic, this is now possible and Village Action is also helping people from that sector to register for assistance. And we are working closely with the police and social welfare departments to raise awareness about the safety of women and children in the communities.

*The British Academy report said the effects of the pandemic could last a decade in the U.K. Do you think there will be long-term repercussions of the pandemic in the nearby villages?*

I think the impact upon the children and young adults will definitely stay for a longer period. Apart from anything else, it is difficult to see how the younger ones can ever catch up the two years of education they have lost, and this will have long-term consequences. Similarly, the effect of the ‘Covid batch’ stigma of college students may be longer lasting.

I also think the shift away from private schools to government ones may not be a short-term shift. There may also be a shift from private to public medicine because some people say that the way they are treated by private hospitals and doctors has changed. Before the pandemic they could sit next to the doctor, but now the doctors sit far away and don't want to examine them physically. This doesn't happen so much in the government hospitals, where the treatment and medicines are free. So now that basic health care is also free in the villages, why should they go to private doctors?

If these shifts become widespread they would be important shifts, because in the past it was always assumed that the private schools and private doctors were better than government ones.

*Do you think that Village Action's work during the pandemic in supporting the villagers and linking them with the government authorities will assist your work in the future?*

Definitely, and it has already assisted our work a lot. Now we have more contact with panchayat leaders, and this will help us when we try to initiate meetings in the communities for the protection of women and children, or to deal with substance abuse. For without including the panchayat leaders, we cannot do anything.

Our work during the pandemic has also helped to build a lot of goodwill for Auroville, because whatever we do in Village Action is seen as coming from Auroville. So the local people say that Auroville supported them at the right time. They are also aware that those living in more distant villages didn't get the same help during the pandemic because there is no presence of Auroville there.

*From an interview by Alan*



# Surveying Local Sacred Groves

‘No man is an island’ wrote John Donne, adding a few lines later ... ‘and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee’. For the remaining forests and ecological biodiversity of our local area, the bell has been tolling for a long time and there are only scattered islands of indigenous forest left in a sea of humanly degraded landscapes.

One of Auroville’s success stories has been the greening and transformation of severely denuded and eroded land to what is now a diverse, rich and, in pockets, thriving woodlands. For the last decades most of the forests in Auroville are transitioning from the original pioneer species to the indigenous Tropical Dry Evergreen Forest (TDEF) which has grown up in the shade of the larger pioneer trees, and which has benefitted from the bunding, water conservation and biomass build up. Nowadays greenworkers only need to go out seed collecting to bolster genetic diversity of certain species, as Auroville itself has become a TDEF seedbank.

Recently the Auroville Botanical Gardens received funding from Ramco Cements CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) programme for a TDEF conservation project. This included a range of environmental programmes; education for high school children and adult training, for a dry and virtual herbarium and supporting botanical documentation; as well as the work of evaluating the TDEF’s present ecological status by implementing rapid assessment surveys. The idea is to create a comparative study with the initial surveys from the early 1990s to mid 2000s of local forest remnants surviving in sacred groves. This report *Exploring the Ecological Status of TDEF, held within the sacred temple groves of the Coromandel coastal belt* authored by Glenn Baldwin, gives the chance to see what changes have happened since then and with that data how to further preserve the TDEF.

## TDEF

The TDEF is a narrow coastal belt of forest in South India hosting over a thousand different plant species, three hundred of which are woody. It has adapted to cyclonic weather with a relatively low canopy of 8-10 meters, which holds its nutrient wealth, so if the vegetation is cut the soil is quickly leached and eroded by intense monsoon rains. Shockingly only 0.2% of this



**Mitragyna parvifolia**

range now exists as a TDEF ecosystem in a narrow range 500 km long and no wider than 50 kms hugging the Coromandel coast. Alongside this flora, the fauna also includes smaller mammals, such as mongooses, civet cats, porcupines, as well as many insect species. Sadly, the days of elephants and leopards roaming free has passed. The remaining strands of the TDEF mainly exist in sacred groves that are found around temples outside villages, and which have been preserved as sacred by a religious belief system surrounding the deity protecting the trees. Whilst none of the groves could be classified as a forest, the surviving vegetation would historically have been part of the original TDEF of the area.

## Sacred Temple Groves

In the initial surveys, twenty or so years ago, the Auroville botanical team made the discovery that the last survivors of the TDEF were mainly located in sacred groves. Most of these temples were dedicated to the deity Ayyaner who enjoyed hunting in the woods at night, resulting in forests that were kept sacred and protected.

The latest report focussed on fifty-eight local sacred groves within the Chengalapattu, Cuddalore and Villapuram districts in order to track the changes that had occurred since the first research journeys. The team included Jaap den Hollander who led the first explorations, championing the new, at that time, use of GPS. They were therefore able to compare in detail the loss and to a lesser degree growth of the TDEF forests. The report has ‘before’ and ‘now’ satellite images of every grove, as well as maps of where

particular species are located.

The team had a variety of objectives: descriptions of the state of canopy and understory, noteworthy species and regeneration, notes of large specimens, temple development and the frequency with which each grove was visited. GPS was used to collate the surface areas of each grove, including temple constructions, water bodies and forests, and then this was compared to past data from the early 2000s. The botanists also scanned the groves for the presence of new species missed in the past. The report ended with an additional feature of ‘heritage’ large trees.

Glenn noted that he “wanted the report to be used as a tool, not only as a scientific article, but a tool to protect a beautiful thing. Let’s protect the forest together.” He pointed out that in Auroville’s planning we have the chance of a ‘win/win’ using TDEF flora, which do not need water, and are woody, evergreen and shady. Their drought resistant nature results in him “never having to water a plant I’ve planted.” He notes that whilst regionally the plants utilized in gardens and landscaping are very standard and quite limited in species, in Auroville “we have a wealth of rare and unusual plants, with textures, depths, forms, shapes and colours that are so beautiful and, being native, appropriate to plant here.” Other work to promote TDEF outside the forests of Auroville include the planting in small plots in hotels, factories and on private land whose owners want to restore the native ecology in order to expand the islands of TDEF in our bioregion.

The report concludes that “the ecology of the groves is under pressure and thus it is degrading.... meaning the last remnants of the TDEF are therefore under threat.” It also adds that whilst the “ecology of the groves is on a downward trajectory, they still contain amazingly diverse remnants, and are still holding an important biodiversity gene bank”. It states that with will there is still time to reverse the downward direction, and that through education and campaigns the value of the biodiversity contained within the groves and the need to protect the rare ecosystem could be promoted. As a next step, the team are planning to produce educational materials, including brochures and posters that can be used in local schools. This would be an effort to make the next generation aware of the rare heritage they have on their doorsteps and hopefully, in the long-term, help preserve the TDEF in these sacred groves.

The fifty plus page report ends with a touching epilogue where the team mentions they had noticed a rare, one metre ebony tree seedling in a small sacred grove called Periyamudaliachavady, close to Auroville. In past surveys of this grove this species was never present. The only reason it could be there is that it is within a kilometre of Auroville’s Shakti forest, one of the earliest forest regeneration projects, and easily within the range of the fruit bat seeding propagators. Who can tell how many other unknown floral miracles are sprouting and bringing indigenous diversity back to our local bioregion?

Peter

### Size of groves:

Under a hectare: 33 groves: 58% ; between 1-2 hectares: 8: 14% ; between 2-6 hectares: 14: 24% ; between 6-20 hectares: 3: 5% .

**Average number of species in 58 groves:** 69. Of 25 tree species: 3 were in most groves and ‘secure’, 9 were in 10-20 groves and ‘vulnerable’, 13 found in less than 10 of the groves and ‘very vulnerable’

**Shrubs:** Of 15 species, 8 are in less than 5 locations and ‘very vulnerable’, 6 present in 13-24 groves and ‘less vulnerable’, only 1 is widespread.

## NEW BOOK

# Sri Aurobindo: The Grand Synthesis

On November 3<sup>rd</sup>, Dr. Ananda Reddy released his new book *Sri Aurobindo: The Grand Synthesis* at a function at Auroville’s Unity Pavilion in the presence of the Vice Chancellor of the Pondicherry University Prof. Gurmeet Singh and the Secretary of the Auroville Foundation Dr. Jayanti Ravi. The book is dedicated to Sri Aurobindo on the occasion of his 150<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary.

The book is divided into two parts. In part one, Ananda highlights the turning points in Sri Aurobindo’s life and explains why he considers Sri Aurobindo to be the guiding spirit of humanity. In the chapter *Sri Aurobindo: The Future*, he comments on each of the five dreams of Sri Aurobindo, given as a message for the 15<sup>th</sup> of August 1947 on the occasion of India’s independence.

“The dreams of a rishi are the milestones of humanity’s evolutionary march,” he writes and then assesses to what extent each of these dreams have been realised. The first dream was about a free and united India, which was only partly realized during Sri Aurobindo’s lifetime. But the unity between India and Pakistan that Sri Aurobindo had envisaged has not manifested, not even after 75 years of independence. “By whatever means, in whatever way, the division must go and will be achieved for it is

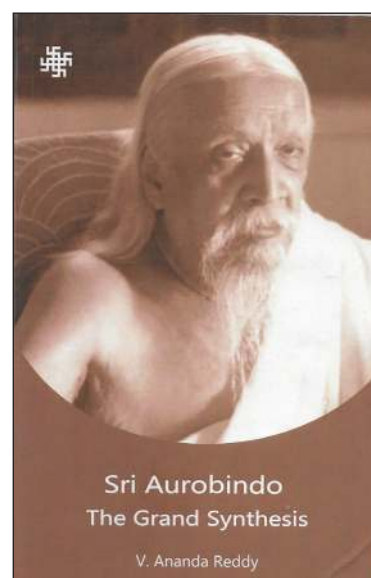
necessary for the greatness of India’s future,” wrote Sri Aurobindo. The author briefly discusses the missed opportunities for unification of the past, and then touches upon the possibilities of a peaceful unification. “The economic boom and the cultural dynamism that are bursting forth on all the levels of Indian life are sure indications of the reawakening of India’s soul, and this itself is the assurance that the reunification of the two countries too will be worked out rather by her inner being than by any political party of selfish and narrow-minded political or social leaders,” he concludes.

Regarding the dream of the resurgence and liberation of the peoples of Asia and her return to the great role in the progress of human civilization, he observes that the dream has come true, but with the danger of the present expansionist policy of China. Commenting on Sri Aurobindo’s third dream of “a world union forming the outer basis for a fairer, brighter and nobler life for all mankind”, he sees the development of the European Union as a step in its manifestation but warns that, as Sri Aurobindo wrote, such a union based on continents might be standing in the way of world unity. The only way out, is that humanity in general turns to a psychological fraternity, or a oneness based on spirituality.

Ananda discusses Sri Aurobindo’s

fourth dream, “the spiritual gift of India to the world”, in the context of The Mother’s statements that “India has become the symbolic representation of all the difficulties of modern mankind. India will be the land of its resurrection – the resurrection to a higher and truer life.” and that “India is the Guru of the world.” Linked to this is Sri Aurobindo’s fifth dream of “a step in evolution which would raise man to a higher and larger consciousness”, which, in fact, is the basis of all the other dreams. “For without the growth of a higher consciousness, all that Sri Aurobindo envisaged in his previous four dreams is not feasible,” writes Ananda. “It is because of its need in taking humanity to the next step in evolution, to the Superman, that India’s ancient wisdom will be revived in its depth and fullness and awaken the sense of spirituality in the general human consciousness.”

Part two of the book has four sections. In the section *Sri Aurobindo’s Contribution to Humanity*, Ananda highlights the stages of Sri Aurobindo’s literary output. In the section *Sri Aurobindo’s Realisations*, he briefly introduces the essence of each of Sri Aurobindo’s realisations as he has written them in *The Life Divine*, *the Synthesis of Yoga*, and *the Essays on the Gita*. In the third section, *Spirit and Significance of Indian Culture*, he discusses, *The Secret of the Veda*, the *Isha Upanishad*, *The Renaissance in*



*India, The Human Cycle and The Ideal of Human Unity*. In the fourth section he discusses *The Future Poetry* and *Savitri - A Legend and a Symbol*.

But what exactly comprises Sri Aurobindo’s Integral Yoga? “*The Life Divine* and the *Synthesis of Yoga* are incomplete. To complete this yoga, we have to add the 13 volumes of *Mother’s Agenda* and *Savitri*. All these books together form the whole of the Integral Yoga as envisaged by Sri Aurobindo,” writes Ananda.

The book ends with an Epilogue, *Sri Aurobindo: The Grand Synthesis*, in which Ananda takes us through a brief history of how Hinduism has unfolded through the ages: from the

Vedic Age comprising the Vedas and Upanishads, to the Six Schools of Indian philosophy, to the Shastras and the Epics, to the Bhagavad Gita and then to the Purano-Tantrik Age. In each stage, a new level of spirituality was manifest; through of all this, he writes, the Indian spiritual psyche of the individual prepared itself for the next stage, which, in the words of Sri Aurobindo, “should render him capable of taking up his whole mental, psychical and physical living into a first beginning at least of a generalized spiritual life.” As Ananda writes, “The ancient spirit which descended from the Intuitive through the Illumined, the Higher Mind, Mind, Life and the Psychic has reached in Sri Aurobindo the Physical – the culmination of the descent.” For no full divine life on earth is possible without the physical transformation. This justifies the title of this book: for in Sri Aurobindo, Indian spirituality has reached its Grand Synthesis.

Carel

## Sri Aurobindo: The Grand Synthesis

By Dr. Ananda Reddy  
Published by the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts  
Available from SABDA  
227 pages  
Price in India Rs 285.



Legal updates

On 13th October, the Madras High Court dismissed a Writ Petition challenging the validity of an Office Order issued by the Governing Board reconstituting the Auroville Town Development Council (ATDC). The most important rulings were: 1. Only the Governing Board has powers to constitute committees under Section 16 of the Auroville Foundation Act, and it is the only governing authority under the Act. 2. The Residents’ Assembly can only recommend, assist and advise the Governing Board, and the function of the Residents’ Assembly is only to supplement the powers of the Governing Board, and not to supplant the powers vested with the Governing Board as per the Auroville Foundation Act. 3. The present TDC was legally constituted by the Governing Board, and has all the rights and powers to abide by its mandate.

**Tindivanam Court - Abri/Ami/Evergreen land claim.** The case was listed for Friday 18th November, but the judge was on leave. The judgment has been adjourned until Monday 28th November.

**Supreme Court Appeal.** Meanwhile the case of the appeal of the Foundation Office to the Supreme Court regarding the National Green Tribunal Ruling has been postponed until January 2023.

AV Community Gathering Team meets Chairman

On 31st October, some members of the AV Community Gathering Team attended a meeting in Chennai with the Chairman of the Governing Board, Shri RN Ravi. The team described the meeting as pleasant and respectful, and that they felt heard by him. They shared about their work as a Community Gathering Team, and the visa issue and concerns about the current approach to development and parallel working groups, among other points. The Chairman listened and responded with some points of his own, which included a concern that not enough Aurovilians work in the Matrimandir, lack of farming outputs, and the need for an Exit Policy.

Deep Dialogue for Harmony

On 21st November residents were invited to the Unity Pavilion to see a video presentation by Raghu Ananthanarayanan, who had been invited by the GB and IAC to “foster a dialogue that will hopefully help address some of the core issues dividing the community, a dialogue that an outside, neutral voice can best foster”. It was followed by an online discussion with Raghu. More on this in our next issue.

Survey on possible restorative process

The RA Working Groups have launched a survey via mass bulletin to know the community’s thoughts on the possibility of starting a restorative process between the RA, GB, and IAC. A restorative process is any process whose main goal is to create mutual understanding and restore relationships. The outcome of the survey will be used by the RA-appointed working groups as a first exploration into when, and how, a restorative process might be started.

Event to bring the community together

For a few years, YouthLink have organized events to bring the community together. Last month they hosted a vegan potluck and a Blind Babble game session to help people connect. Now they are looking for a place to host their next event called “dancing together”, where they would like to invite all the community to come together, celebrate and dance during a full evening.

Company for elderly residents

An Aurovilian has issued an appeal for people to come forward to form a team to support elderly Aurovilians who have been particularly impacted by the current turmoil. This could include engaging them in conversation or song, reading to them, playing games, or just sitting with them in silence. She notes that “plenty of research can be found online about the mutual benefits of inter-generational connections and support”.

PRISMA publishes Braille

To commemorate Sri Aurobindo’s 150th birth year, PRISMA has published large-format Braille versions of *A Dream* and *Aims and Ideals of Auroville* and these have been sent to fifty

centres for the visually-impaired across India.

They are also preparing a Tamil-language Braille publication which presents Auroville and its work over many years, and building the relevant technology to produce audio books to assist people who are blind, visually-impaired or otherwise print-disabled.

Seized statues

The RA Working Committee clarified that reports in the press that there were deliberate attempts by Auroville residents to engage in illegal activities relating to possession of statues were false. The RA WC asserted that to the best of their knowledge, none of statues seized by the Idols Wing are genuine “antiques” (i.e., older than 100 years), and no Auroville residents broke any rule or law in this connection. Also, full cooperation was extended to the relevant authorities at all times.

Coastal restoration

On 3<sup>rd</sup> November, Dr Ravichandran, Secretary of Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES), Govt of India, visited Auroville along with Dr Ramanamurthy, Director of National Centre for Coastal Research (NCCR), to discuss the restoration of the eroded coast. Probir, Sunaina and Aurofilio from PondyCan explained the efforts of the past decades. After visiting the beaches at Sri Ma and Quiet, which were severely eroded due to the recent construction of groynes in Chinnamudaliarchavadi and Bommayapalayam, Dr. Ramanamurthy said that NCCR will immediately make scientific studies of this coast, based on which they would come up with possible solutions.

Wasteless launches Sea Change

In a first-of-its-kind initiative, Wasteless, in collaboration with the Tamil Nadu government, on 4th November rolled out an educational programme for government school students to raise awareness about microplastics and marine pollution. The programme will be offered in 200 schools in Tiruchi, Virudhanagar and Villupuram, benefitting 10,000 students.

Revelation forest tree planting programme

This monsoon, Revelation Forest is offering a tree planting programme, including practical tree planting skills and the theoretical aspects of tree planting.

Botanical Gardens in Australia

Paul from Botanical Gardens was recently at the 7th Global Conference of Botanical Gardens organized by Botanical Gardens Conservation International (BGCI) in Melbourne. There were over 500 attendees from 45 countries – from all of the continents of the world – and the work of the Auroville Botanical Gardens in restoration and plant conservation was very much appreciated.

Annapurna’s elevated pond



Annapurna Farm has created an elevated pond on top of a hill. The hill was made from soil dug up in 2018 to double the size of the farm’s existing irrigation ponds, and so expand its rainwater harvesting capacity and depend less on groundwater. The elevated water body will serve as a buffer stock of water during the rice growing season, so that the farm becomes less vulnerable to the erratic power supply of the grid.

Sustainable land use planning

Since a couple of years, Auroville Consulting has been looking for scalable solutions for climate action. One of the ones they have developed is a carbon converter which anybody can use to calculate their transport emissions, with an added option to plant trees and offset the same.

Last month they launched *LiLa*, a tool that conducts geospatial analysis to help optimize sustainable land-use planning. It uses satellite imagery, AI & GIS mapping which creates land-cover maps at high spatial resolution for any

area of interest; detects degraded/unused lands; and evaluates these lands in regards to climate mitigation and adaptation interventions such as sustainable water management, reforestation and solar energy generation.

Using this tool, recently they were able to complete a land-suitability assessment for distributed solar energy resources for Mayiladuthurai District in Tamil Nadu.

Electromagnetic radiation

The Centre for Building Biology is conducting a survey to map the current levels of electromagnetic radiation in Auroville. The data will be inserted into the CSR Geomatics’ database and visualized on a related web GIS portal reachable at [gis.avcsr.org](http://gis.avcsr.org).

Arulvazhi yoga prizes

The students of Arulvazhi (school of Yoga and learning activities) won 14 prizes, out of which 8 stood for excellence in yoga, among 300 participants at the State level yoga competition in Dindigul, Tamil Nadu, on 15 October 2022.

Tara Jauhar award



On 21st October, Tara Jauhar, who for many years has been the chairman of the Delhi Ashram, which is often frequented by Aurovilians, was conferred with the Lifetime Achievement Award by the Confederation of Indian Universities (CIU) in recognition of her work in the field of education.

New procurement service

The Foundation ATDC / L’avenir d’Auroville is creating an Auroville Procurement Service to provide all the construction materials and home appliances for building projects in Auroville. Currently, all the building projects in Auroville buy materials either through dealers or retailers. This new service will reduce the need for multiple people to bargain with the same vendors, and also to transport goods individually.

Foundation BCC update

Among other things, the Foundation BCC is currently reviewing maintenance, Temporary Out of Station and Silver Fund policies. From mid December they expect to reach out to the services that generally are supported by the BCC for their 2023-2024 budgetary needs.

New zones

In *Auroville Tomorrow* no. 5, Anupama Kundoo, the head of Urban Design at the ATDC, introduced a proposal for independent transport networks in the city tied to the Crown. The red zone will include all public transport and motorized vehicles; the yellow zone will be completely pedestrian centric, free of any kind of transportation; the green zone will enable bicycle or even skateboard commute; and the blue zone will be a rather meditational route that will end near the Matrimandir lake.

‘Red assets’ to be demolished

A number of assets have been built over the years in areas that are deemed reserved for other purposes according to the Master Plan. These areas include the Crown and the Outer Ring Road. Communities that will see many residential buildings demolished include Pony Farm, Horizon, and Sve Dame.

The Foundation ATDC has announced the formation of a ‘resettlement group’ to facilitate moving residents from these ‘red assets’ to another place. However, it is pointed out these actions are planned in spite of the fact that no Detailed Development Plans have been made or Environmental Clearance sought, as per the NGT order, and Auroville is still in the midst of a housing crisis with no adequate alternative housing for these ‘resettlements’. Meanwhile, the RA FAMC says its aim is to be proactive and to provide as much support as possible to those who are and will be impacted by the “Red Assets” list.

Housing matters

The FA Housing Service recently announced that a dedicated team will be visiting communities to speak with residents. Community members can discuss any ongoing activities/plans that they are carrying out and if there are any challenges. They hope that this exercise will improve the connection between the housing team and all of the residents.

Meanwhile, the RA constituted Housing Board has written a report outlining several decisions taken by the people working in the Foundation Housing Service office, pointing out that this is being done outside of the community agreed-upon mandate. The RA FAMC and Housing Board have created a ‘working group’ to discuss and review topics together. One priority concern is for the residents who will be directly impacted by the development of future roads.

Possible land exchange in AuroOrchard

A concerned resident of AuroOrchard recently reported having heard “that up to 7 acres of prime roadside land of AuroOrchard were going to be exchanged with 9 acres in the city, to consolidate lands in the Master Plan area”. The land that has been earmarked for exchange was one of the few lands blessed by the Mother, who tasked AuroOrchard with growing food for Auroville. AuroOrchard is Auroville’s oldest, and one of the most productive farms. It was purchased by the Mother in 1965. Gérard, who was given the care of it by the Mother in 1969, has lived there and looked after the land for the last 53 years as the steward. Apparently, he was neither officially informed nor consulted about the proposed exchange.

RA TDC on proper planning

The RA TDC reports that they are meeting with technical persons and people with planning experience to bring together an informed roadmap for Auroville’s planning and development. Some of the elements to be included are: Auroville principles and processes; state and national requirements for planning and environment; documents and plans that are relevant to the process; and securing teams to help them take up the planning work in a participative way.

Roadmap for development

Two members of the International Advisory Council wrote to the Working Committee of the Residents Assembly stressing the need for a roadmap for development to be presented “as a comprehensive vision, which integrates not only urban development, but the economic, environmental, educational and social development of the bioregion, for which Auroville has already made so much commendable work...

“We feel an urgent need for such a roadmap to be formulated, possibly on the basis of already existing studies or documents, i.e. without waiting for more complete plans currently under elaboration. In our perception, such a roadmap could be presented to the Governing Board, and its Chairman in particular, to our Council, and to the Government of India, and would in effect offer a way out of the current impasse.”

Matching donation for services and outreach projects

Auroville International USA has helped many Auroville projects set up unique donor portals that allow them to collect donations in any currency through GooglePay, PayPal, Apple Pay, and credit card. Beginning from December 1st, any funds raised through one of these unique donor portals will be matched by AVI-USA.

Donations must be received through a unique donor portal created by AVI USA for a specific Auroville service or outreach project – they cannot support commercial work or personal expenses of any sort –and each project can only receive a maximum match of \$2,500. AVI-USA will retain 10% of every donation to cover banking fees and other overhead costs.



# Strange times: a review of the Auroville population 2022

Normally the population review is a prosaic, gentle piece to write, padding out a statistical survey by noticing subtle quirks, long-term trends and trying our best to bring the figures to life. In January 2014 (AV Today issue 294), Alan sarcastically concluded his population review “And so the long, tense wait for next year’s population figures begins,” little suspecting that, some nine years later, our slow growth rate would be chosen as the defining metric used by some to declare the whole adventure of Auroville a ‘failure.’

Since 2012 we grew by around a hundred people a year until 2016-19 when the growth was closer to two hundred per annum, or roughly 8%.

But the last two years have been unusual in the decline in this rate of growth, notably in European nations. This can provisionally be attributed to two main reasons, Covid and our current crisis. The first lockdown in 2020 resulted in the community and Entry Board being closed for months, resulting in a growth in population by the end of 2020 of only 89 souls. In 2021 the population increased by even less, only 24 people, to a total of 3286 people, mainly due to a spillover from the quarantine time and the delay it took in reopening Auroville to Newcomers.

This year we have only 22 new

Aurovilians, Newcomers, pre-Newcomers and their families.

We are being told that we need to grow to 15,000 people by 2025. Ironically, our decline in population growth can most likely be attributed to the current turmoil – the divisions in the community and uncertainties surrounding visa guarantees etc. – which makes many Aurovilians, particularly non-Indian residents, feel insecure.

Regarding the latest figures, there are a few areas of unclarity. One is whether those abroad who have been waiting months for their visas have been included. Also, it is not clear what these numbers will total once the Register of Residents is finalized.

In terms of the statistics, India continues to be the fastest increasing population, now totalling 47.5% of residents, adding 79 residents this year to make a total of 1583. Previously the percentage of Indians in Auroville had remained notably consistent, being 43.2% in 1972 and 44.4% in 2018, but of late it appears the growth rate is around 1% per annum.

Auroville lost 57 non-Indian nationals last year, some through death, but others left the community.

In order of the next highest total of nationals, the French and Germans both declined by eleven, the Italians, British and Dutch by four each, the Russians by ten to

117, whilst the USA bucked the trend and grew by three to 117. Other foreign increases included three for the South Koreans to 55, and Japan by one to 14. Austria also gained one to 13 whilst Chile more than doubled, but only from only 2 to 5 residents. Other nations either stayed the same or lost one or two of their population. We returned to 60 nations from our high of 61 with the loss of our polar climactic opposite Icelandic resident.

As recently as 2019, the total of Europeans (EU plus UK, Norway, Switzerland, Former USSR {not Kazakhstan}) was just ahead of Indians, 1340 to 1336. But this year Europeans total 1347, two hundred and forty people less than India, and comprise just over 40% of Auroville’s population, an insignificant increase over three years. The rest of the world – the Americas, Africans, Australia and Asia – have a combined total of 378 residents, an eighth of our population, which represents a measured growth from 330 in 2019.

As to gender, for an alternative community to have more males than females, as was the case before, is unusual, but this year there is a small majority of females: 1661 to 1647.

This year has been an extraordinary one for Auroville, and next year could be equally significant. We await it with great interest.

Peter

## PASSINGS

### Ramalingam

Ramalingam Ramachandran, the manager of Sustenance Farm, passed away on 29<sup>th</sup> November in JIPMER hospital due to post surgical complications. He was 62.

Ramalingam was born in Kuyilapalayam and involved in Auroville right from its beginnings. Initially he joined Auroville Polyester as a worker at the age of around 12. In 1982, he became an Aurovilian and lived in Fraternity.

He worked on Matrimandir and then played a pivoting role in the setting up and managing of the early community kitchen in Bharat Nivas. Later, he was in-charge of the Auroville Boutique in Pondicherry. While there he helped Auroville with land encroachment at Quiet. Soon after, he was involved in protecting another adjoining land and personally took care of it. He has played a major role in creating Gokulam Farm, in collaboration with Perumal.

Ramalingam has also been involved in Auroville’s organisation and was a member of different working groups and committees.

Ramalingam was among the first

Aurovilians who voluntarily gave the land under their stewardship for a land exchange within the Master Plan area. Going beyond personal interests, he devoted himself to the collective cause.

Later he moved to the Sustenance Farm, managing the farm and the farm’s kitchen to the very last moment. He had been learning farming for 14 years under the guidance of the head of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Farms. Even when he started the kitchen at Sustenance Farm, his main objective was to provide affordable quality food to everyone.

Ramalingam was a multifaceted person with diverse talents in various fields. He had a great affinity for Thiru Pugazh, a form of devotional singing, and was part of a traditional theatre group. He would often travel to far-off places to take part in Thiru Pugazh programmes.

Recently, he concentrated on his far-reaching project to transform farming in Auroville from being a business to being a service for the community. He was just about to start a training at Sustenance Farm for everyone interested to learn about organic farming in theory and practice so that they

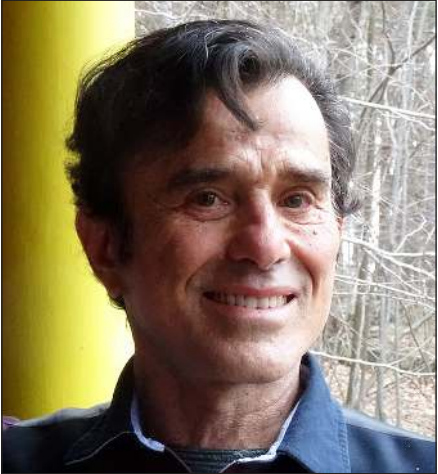


could take up farm lands for stewardship after this period of education.

This, the last project Ramalingam which worked upon and for which he had dreamed so long, will hopefully be continued by like-minded residents and collaborators.

He was a sturdy and reliable colleague and friend who will be truly missed.

Ramalingam’s body was cremated on 29<sup>th</sup> November at the Auroville Burial and Cremation Ground.



community and friends from Pondicherry. As another pioneer, put it, “They were bright and beautiful and created in that barren nowhere land a life for themselves and others”.

After their first handmade dam in Forecomers’ canyon got washed out in a cyclone, they returned in 1971 to the US to recover their health, and further study Sri Aurobindo and sacred geometry. They returned in 1973 for two more years, during which they translated *The Temple of Man* by French Egyptologist, R. A. Schwaller de Lubicz.

After leaving Auroville, Bob continued to work on The Temple of Man in the US and France and published *Sacred Geometry, Philosophy and Practice*.

In his later years, Robert lived on Flinders Island and King Island in Tasmania with his third wife, Joanna, and continued to study and write, including a book about Australian aboriginals called *Voices of the First Day*, while regularly visiting the US, giving lectures on his findings.

In 2018 he revisited Auroville where he met many of his old friends and gave a

talk at Pitchandikulam on his final book, *A Geometry for the End of Time*. In an interview with Auroville Today [issue # 344] he said, “Overall, I’m very positive about the Auroville of today. It has not yet realised the dream, but it is certainly something that is not erasable any more. Now the concept of a society based on these principles must happen in a more dispersed way or else the world is not going to change.”

		2019	2020	2021	2022
1	India	1415	1475	1504	1583
2	France	449	456	459	438
3	Germany	259	259	260	249
4	Italy	170	172	176	172
5	USA	105	112	114	117
6	Netherlands	105	105	106	102
7	Russia	74	77	81	71
8	UK	67	68	67	63
9	Spain	60	62	64	62
10	South Korea	55	57	52	55
11	Israel	52	52	50	49
12	Belgium	45	46	43	44
13	Switzerland	44	41	41	39
14	Canada	27	29	26	26
15	Sweden	29	28	24	24
16	Ukraine	22	22	22	21
17	Australia	19	19	19	17
18	China	16	16	16	15
19	Japan	14	14	13	14
20	Austria	13	12	12	13
21	Brazil	11	11	12	10
22	South Africa	11	13	13	9
23	Argentina	8	9	9	9
24	Iran	7	9	9	9
25	Hungary	9	9	8	8
26	Nepal	8	7	6	6
27	Slovenia	6	6	6	6
28	Mexico	6	6	6	6
29	Colombia	4	5	5	5
30	Denmark	7	7	4	5
31	Chile	2	2	2	5
32	Kazakhstan	4	4	4	4
33	Latvia	4	4	4	4
34	North Macedonia	4	4	4	4
36	Belarus	4	4	4	3
37	Ethiopia	3	3	3	3
38	Sri Lanka	3	3	3	3
39	Tibet	3	3	3	3
40	Portugal	2	2	2	3
41	Bulgaria	2	2	2	2
42	Finland	2	2	2	2
43	Ireland	2	2	2	2
44	Lithuania	2	2	2	2
45	Norway	2	2	2	2
46	Philippines	2	2	2	2
47	Rwanda	2	2	2	2
48	Taiwan	2	2	2	2
49	Cambodia	0	2	2	2
50	Ecuador	2	1	1	1
51	Algeria	1	1	1	1
52	Czechia	1	1	1	1
53	Egypt	1	1	1	1
54	Indonesia	1	1	1	1
55	Luxembourg	1	1	1	1
56	Moldova	1	1	1	1
57	Poland	1	1	1	1
58	Romania	1	1	1	1
59	Croatia	0	1	1	1
60	Sudan	0	0	1	1
61	Iceland	1	1	1	0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>3172</b>	<b>3261</b>	<b>3285</b>	<b>3308</b>

<b>Adults</b>	2658
Male	1320
Female	1338
<b>Children</b>	650
Male	327
Female	323
<b>Summary: 60 nationalities, 3308 residents.</b>	

There they experimented with building methods, planting trees, cultivating and consuming algae and experimenting with dance and other forms of art. They built a theatre out of palm leaves and put on amazing dance dramas for the small Auroville



# Yuvabe: Work - Serve - Evolve

Sriman Kota and Anupama Jagadeesh both arrived in Auroville four years ago and happened to meet some time later at STEAM Land while exploring how they could best contribute their energies and skills to Auroville. They had both spent a number of years working in the corporate technology sector in the USA. Sriman also had a background in business and had been based in Singapore before he and his family decided to first visit and then explore a life in Auroville. Anupama had developed a special interest in education after choosing to home school her own children while living in the USA. They founded Yuvabe in 2020, supported financially by a business partnership with Quilt.AI, a Singapore-based new age marketing research and technology start-up.



The Yuvabe team

For those unfamiliar with the tech world, a conversation about what Yuvabe does can feel like a sudden immersion in a foreign language: AI, ML, Fullstack, market research, desk research, business solutions, open source ERP software, dashboards. But the larger picture is overwhelmingly human: virtuous cycles of symbiotic growth, with the community investing in youth and these youth becoming invested in sustaining their communities. "Our intention," says Sriman, "is an organization which enables youth empowerment at a higher order scale."

## Work

Quilt.AI was itself only two years old when its two founders, one of whom had been Sriman's neighbour in Singapore, essentially agreed to fund Yuvabe in exchange for Yuvabe serving - but only part-time - as its back office. "It was quite bold of them, being a start-up, to say we're going to see how it goes," says Sriman. He and Anupama identified a dozen local engineering students and recent graduates and put them on the job. The team began learning the skills they needed in real time as they worked for Quilt's own clients. Anupama explains, "We started with the tech team first, doing all the data mining, insights, and then together with content and design teams we started putting together reports."

A little over two years later, it is clear that the gamble has paid off, though it has taken, as Sriman states, "18 months of work in the trenches. The first year we used to sit and read books. We worked on grammar, writing and phrases. They've come a long way."

Anupama elaborates, "Initially there were times when they could not be put on a call to talk to the client. From that to the Quilt founders now directly pinging them for work is an amazing transformation. The team has many youth from the bioregion, and they didn't have spoken English or the confidence to speak. So it's tremendous. Now, unless I'm asked to help, I don't step in. They're just by themselves doing their own thing directly with the client."

Sriman continues, "Quilt has a few software products now, and the backbone of that is because of the work that was done in Auroville. The technology that was built, the whole infrastructure in terms of the pipelines which allow data management and AI processing, has all been done with Anupama and the youth team."

"Today Quilt also has clients all over the world, and we do solid work to support them. For example, the content team puts together reports for the Gates Foundation. One of the projects was to understand the perception of their brand in India. So kids from Edyanchavady sat and put together this super polished report, 50 slides,

using digital data accessed through the tech team. This went to the Gates Foundation leadership in India and in Seattle. Quilt does a lot of work with UN Women, with the Satyarthi Foundation, and other foundations. The team in Singapore is more qualitative researchers, but our team puts the reports together, about 250 over the last year."

## Serve

But this work is restricted entirely to weekday afternoons. Every weekday morning, the entire Yuvabe team works only for the community. Some teach at Auroville Outreach Schools. Others have helped Anupama develop and run a hands-on STEAM (STEM plus Arts) programme at Deepanam School, which has proven highly successful and may soon be scaled more widely. Still others have worked on design



Beach clean up

and tech projects for Auroville service units. Sriman reels off the list. "Currently we work with Solitude Farm. We work through Flourish to support other Auroville units. We have done work for Hemp Planet and helped Pitanga, Solar Kitchen, BCC." They've just created a small tool for the Auroville Bakery which they're hoping the bakery will start using. The idea is to encourage units to make use of better business solutions using open source software.

Sriman goes on to explain how the community angle is essential to Yuvabe at multiple levels. He notes that Yuvabe's monthly city service contribution is always among the ten or twelve highest. "So although we are set up as an income generating unit, we run it as a not-for-profit because every month we pay out what we get, and we basically have nothing in the bank. We're just doing this to get as many young people as possible in here driving it."

And drive it, they do. Anupama mentions how meaningful and fun the community work is for the youth. "Some of those who teach have gone through these schools. They have studied at Transition, Deepanam, Udavi, and then they ask to go back to their school and do these projects. After last year's STEAM Fest (an event open to the community), a lot of new youth joined the team, saying, 'Oh, we didn't know this was

going on in Yuvabe', and because they see doing community work as fun." "Anupama makes it fun," says Sriman, "because she does amazing experiments."

## Evolve

Saturday is reserved for self-development initiatives and looking at ways the team can help each other build their own capacities. Sriman offers some examples. "We've done a workshop on social and emotional learning with Matram. Recently, we did a play completely driven by the team doing the Quilt work. Twelve of them came together with guidance from Rashmi at Matram. They scripted it, and they presented four little stories in a 40 minute play. All of them went through a process of emotional expression that was phenomenal. And the idea now is to take it to the villages."

But Yuvabe's weekday ethos is just as focused on individual, team, and community evolution and growth as the Saturday programming. Sriman and Anupama's palpable energy and contagious enthusiasm play no small role in making it so. "The work a Svaram or a Pitanga does is so interesting, just learning about it is fun, and then to see how we can customise software to handle their needs is also super fun," says Anupama. Each new assignment is welcomed as a learning challenge. "Svaram is a fairly decent sized unit, and to put an ERP (Enterprise Resource Planning) system there is not straightforward. So the team, completely new, has done it from scratch, figured out the software, figured out the engagement, figured out the listening skills, all of it," says Sriman.

Anupama highlights another aspect of the team's learning. She says, "I think this exposure with outside clients, and the combination of that and the work we do with Auroville is a very good balance. Otherwise everyone's stuck in their own bubble inside Auroville. So there are deadlines, there is a work ethic. You stick to a schedule, you plan, you deliver. The youth actually learn how to do things here."

Yuvabe now has around 40 mostly local staff. Around 30% are Aurovilian and 35% are women.

At any given time, they are working on ten to twelve projects across four or five sectors. There is also a growing team of experienced mentors who can guide different aspects of Yuvabe's work, including technology, design, business, and, more recently, climate science, impact, and sustainability. Sriman notes, "We've started generally to get work from Auroville (Svaram is our first paying customer), and from a few organisations outside, but our effort is to see that we can support more youth in other areas and make sure that the way of sustaining it can

be independently managed, not just from one source."

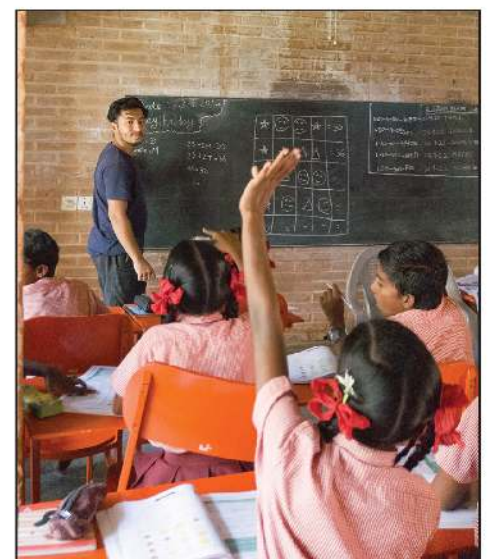
Over the longer term, 'evolve' means examining the ways Yuvabe can support Auroville sustainability. Sriman explains that they have formed a specialised team and will use impact analysis as a tool to come up with blueprints for what a sustainable community could mean. They've begun by speaking to units like Eco-Service (waste), Kinisi (mobility), and Ecofemme (circular economy) and will next look at farming and water. Yuvabe is also piloting a one-month intensive education programme they are calling the "School of Sustainability", which will blend theory and practice in Auroville.

## In hindsight

"We both came in fresh from the outside, and we did this pretty much figuring things out ourselves," says Sriman. Both he and Anupama feel Auroville should offer some guidance to people who join and want to start a unit. "I would hold their hand," adds Sriman, "and say, 'You want to set up something, let me see how I can help'." With all the skills available in the community, both find it unfortunate that there is not greater support available. "And nevertheless we still ran at high speed for two years and got to 40 people. We hire youth. We train within our constraints."

The proposal they had submitted for Auroville to fund maintenance for 10 Aurovilian youth - who could be trained, focussing entirely on Auroville service unit projects, and who could then be placed directly with the service units - has not been approved. Sriman is still hopeful that Yuvabe will get the support required to enable youth specifically for community projects. Anupama clarifies, "We are still doing service work. But we are saying we could scale better." Sriman sighs, "We would serve the community better. But we're generally optimists."

Gita



Teaching

## About Auroville Today

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