

August 15, 2021



PHOTOS: TINE

A dawn fire was lit on August 15th, 2021, in the Matrimandir amphitheatre to celebrate the starting of Sri Aurobindo's 150th Birth Anniversary year and India's 75th Independence Day.

PLANNING THE CITY

Cracking the Crown conundrum

By all accounts, the new Secretary of the Auroville Foundation, Dr. Jayanti Ravi, has shown remarkable zeal and persistence in trying to resolve long pending issues. Twelve days after she took office [*on July 5th, 2021, eds.*] the local authorities, at her demand and insistence, evicted the encroachers from a house in Auro-Orchard and demolished it. This issue had been pending for years. More importantly, she announced to the enthusiasm of all present that she would initiate proceedings to acquire all the privately-owned lands in the City Area of Auroville and assured that obtaining the funds for these acquisitions would be no problem. Overruling objections of some of the members of the Working Committee, she also issued an Office Order giving two-year appointments to all the members, including new ones, of the Auroville Town Development Council (hereafter referred to as the TDC). Though the legality of these appointments is still being debated and may be the subject of a meeting of the Residents' Assembly, the decision itself shows her commitment to getting things done, in this case to start work on the Detailed Development Plans as prescribed in Auroville's Master Plan (Perspective 2025) – plans which were never made. She has also launched regular lengthy working sessions with members of the Working Committee and the TDC.

In an interview with *The Hindu* on August 7th, [*Dr. Ravi is the first Auroville Foundation Secretary ever to give an interview to a national newspaper, eds.*] she listed land acquisition as one of her priorities and advocated her mission-mode approach to advance The Mother's vision for Auroville as laid down in the Master Plan, with a focus on "attaining the closest approximation of The Mother's ideal with zero-to-minimum compromise." She stated that the development of Auroville has to be wholly community-driven and that her role is more of a facilitator. In response to a question on how to manage diversity and evolve a consensus on the way forward, Dr. Ravi said that she is optimistic that even in a situation of conflicting views, the shared vision would ultimately prevail as a unifying force for the community.

One of those conflicting views, on which no shared vision has yet been reached, is the Crown – a circular thoroughway or corridor that encircles the Matrimandir. The Crown has been a bone of contention for years; tempers flared up most recently when an attempt was made to lay a high tension cable following the routing of the Crown through Bliss Forest and the Youth Centre, without the buy-in of the concerned communities. [*Auroville Today reported on this in its February 2021 issue #379.*]

On July 29th, a week before the interview was published, Dr Ravi invited all the residents to join a Crown Walk and Talk event, which happened on July 31st. The Walk started at Savitri Bhavan and culminated at the Unity Pavilion with the Talk, an open

discussion about the Crown "in order to find a harmonious and collaborative way forward towards its manifestation."

About 200 people participated in the Walk during which one of the participants, at the request of Dr. Ravi, recited Mother's student prayer of January 6th, 1952: "Make of us the hero warriors we aspire to become, may we fight successfully the great battle of the future that is to be borne against the past that seeks to endure so that new things may manifest and we may be ready to receive them." This evoked a varied response. The subsequent Talk on the purpose, features and possibilities of the Crown was introduced by the Secretary, saying that the discussion should not focus on



A still from the video shot during the Crown walk

whether or not there should be a Crown, because that decision had already been taken by The Mother, but that people should express what they thought about the Crown.

Most were positive: some felt that the walk had been historic, that they were discovering together something which had been missing and that, hopefully, the Crown would open up new life in the city and become a 'Crown of Unity' which would bring everybody together. Some others were appalled and expressed concerns: that the road would cross forests and residences; that a road would be built without a proper mobility plan; and that, contrary to the Galaxy, the Master Plan is not dynamic and doesn't take into account the existing ground realities, such as canyons.

The next day, the TDC and the Working Committee jointly announced that a survey would start to complete the Crown on the lands owned by Auroville. The Crown, envisaged as a 70-meters wide area which would have residences and parks, would be in accordance with the Master Plan; but the width of the road inside the Crown would be reduced from 30 to 16.7 metres; 6.7 metres for the road itself and 5 metres for each of the road's shoulders. That same week, the Secretary, accompanied by members of the

TDC and the Working Committee, had meetings on site with those who would be affected by the Crown, in particular the residents of the Youth Centre and the stewards of the Bliss Forest, and the residents of Darkali and Centre Field.

Responses

As could be expected, the Walk and Talk evoked both positive and negative responses. On August 1st, a petition was circulated raising objections to the rigid interpretation of the "Galaxy" concept as "Mother's plan" for the future city, beginning with the making of a perfectly circular "Crown Road". It was signed by over 450 people [*see page 2*]. On August 19th, in another petition, another 400 people expressed support for the Crown [*see page 2*].

On August 7th, a well-attended community gathering took place at the Kalabhumi amphitheatre. The meeting had been called in response to the Crown Road Walk, during which some vegetation had been damaged, a fence was broken and a fence and a pillar had been knocked down, all without previously consulting the stewards of the affected areas. The meeting was primarily an opportunity to share feelings regarding this event. But also an unexpected announcement was made: the stewards and caretakers of the communities affected by the Crown had jointly decided to no longer resist but move on, and, as a symbolic action to step forward, had started clearing pathways through their communities following the Crown corridor.

A second meeting at Kalabhumi followed on August 20th, this time called a General Meeting. At around the same time the TDC called for community participation in a two-hour workshop "Imagining Jewels of the Crown, a brainstorming towards a harmonious manifestation of the Crown Corridor" at Savitri Bhavan. As there were only limited seats, the TDC announced that the workshop would be conducted a few times to allow larger participation.

In this issue, we report thematically on the discussions and exchanges that came up in the various meetings – the post-Walk Talk; the community meeting of August 7th; the General Meeting of August 20th; as well as on the AuroNet and on WhatsApp groups. We have focused here on presenting the voices of residents and key players across all these forums, rather than offering interpretations, in order to capture the wider sentiments in the community in all their diversity. However, we have not included the most acrimonious expressions of disagreement. Our effort to present a comprehensive view of the diversity of sentiments, however, has been somewhat challenged by the tendency of some groups to limit the extent of their public communications.

Events are continuing to unfold daily. We will keep our readers updated in subsequent issues.

Alan, Carel, Lesley

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Cracking the Crown conundrum

A statement by Aurovilians on the “city”, August 1st, 2021

“Auroville: At last a place where nothing will have the right to impose itself as the exclusive truth.”
The Mother, February 1968

In recent times, Aurovilians have been under heavy pressure to accept without discussion, a rigid interpretation of the “Galaxy” concept as “Mother’s plan” for the future city, beginning with the making of a perfectly circular “Crown Road”. We firmly object to these pressures which, in our view, put Auroville’s future in jeopardy. There are some clear misconceptions at work, which we would like to respond to:

1. THE GALAXY

- 1. It Is true that the Mother gave her Blessings to the “Galaxy” concept for the city presented to her by a team of architects, but there is nothing to indicate that She ever considered this particular concept as sacrosanct or carved in stone for all time to come. She referred to it as “one of the projects” (Mother’s Agenda, 20 April 1968).
- 2. The Charter was not written “for the Galaxy” concept, as was recently asserted. The Charter (which does not even contain the word “city”) has nothing to do with any architectural plan and belongs to a much higher plane of consciousness.
- 3. In countless conversations with Aurovilians or with disciples, Mother hardly ever mentioned the Galaxy concept. But She did constantly stress the need for unity, harmony, and a change of consciousness that will replace the rigid rule of the mind. Again and again, She warned against dogmatic views, especially those asserted in her name; and it is clear that six decades later, we have not learned those lessons.
- 4. Throughout the years, the Galaxy concept has come to inspire the residents, and the town plan gradually evolves according to it. It is mainly the rigid, indeed dogmatic execution as proposed today, that has prompted this writing.

2. THE “CROWN ROAD”

- 1. On Saturday, July 31, a Walk was organized to study issues facing the road. People trampled roughshod over fences and undergrowth through Auroville communities to clear the paths. This ‘clearing by force’ was unnecessary.
- 2. We consider it incorrect to insist on perfect circularity for the Crown Road, as though Auroville’s future depended on an abstract line. The Crown is one element of the Master Plan (gazetted a few years ago but with the clear and written understanding that it was not to be taken as final) and must not be finalized, especially through coercive means, until the Master Plan itself is worked out by all stakeholders.
- 3. Nowhere in the aforementioned document is it stated that the Crown is a perfectly circular road.
- 4. The Crown Road and the Master Plan have never been approved by Mother, as some people have erroneously stated in recent meetings.

3. WHAT “CITY”?

- 1. We all agree that Auroville must grow into a city. But there are many conceptions for a city, especially in today’s world which is so radically different from what it was fifty years ago. Mother’s vision was always an evolving one, as any cursory reading of her numerous notes and messages on Auroville over the years will show.
- 2. Since 1968, Auroville has undeniably developed. Generations of Aurovilians have done outstanding work to secure the land, improve the environment, manage water resources, pioneer alternative energies, work with the villages – a development praised in India and beyond. Rigidly implementing the “crown” as currently proposed would, in effect, negate this very real progress, since it would involve razing buildings, destroying trees and passing over sensitive areas (i.e. groundwater recharge area) without considerate planning. It would not create a “smart city”, but a ravaged environment. And it is not keeping pace with today’s standard of urban planning.
- 3. Between climate change, rising sea levels, heat waves, wildfires, massive floods, rising social disparity and instability, the world is beginning to realize that its cities are unsustainable. Forward-looking urban thinkers are now proposing new concepts of sustainable urbanism. Why should we in Auroville lag behind, instead of pioneering new ways towards urban sustainability?
- 4. Moving towards a city will require fresh deep thought and not the blind application of an old plan. Several Aurovilians have already worked in this direction, trying to harmonize some of the initial ideas with present and future conditions; also non-Aurovilians such as Shri Balkrishna Doshi who has beautifully articulated the need for fluidity and adaptability. If such minds could come together with no dogmatic preconceptions, something new would certainly emerge.
- 5. In the meantime, we firmly reject any group’s attempt to forcibly impose its own limited vision on the entire community. This violates the very spirit of Auroville and will only end up creating deep divisions.
- 6. It is crucial that we find the way to work together and we commit to doing so, so that we can collectively build a city and a society worthy of the Auroville Charter.

Signed by over 450 Aurovilians

“Support the Future of Auroville”

As the 150th birth anniversary of Sri Aurobindo comes nearer, Auroville is swiftly transitioning to a higher orbit of operation. It is asking us to shake off our collective inertia and move into action.

The Master Plan has been approved by the Mother (1968) as the Galaxy Plan, by the community of Auroville (1999) after much deliberations and community processes and then notified by Government of India (2010). However, we have been hardly able to manifest what we committed to, due to a strong opposition by a handful of Aurovilians unwilling to let go of their attachments to the temporary structures built on the land they were given to take care of as a steward.

This has meanwhile led to randomness of building developments in Auroville & a situation where several undesired developments are taking place, including the purchase & commercial development of plots in the city area and the green belt by outsiders.

If Auroville has to protect itself from commercial developments, then it must begin to build its Master Plan. If we will not rapidly move to purchase lands and develop the township of Auroville, then the land mafia and commercial real estate will. They have already begun.

Now is the time to unitedly move towards the manifestation of Auroville, the city of dawn. The newly appointed Secretary of Auroville is happy to support us in this direction. But we must unite ourselves and be ready to work.

The Mother called Galaxy the “Future”, and this is a decisive moment in the history of Auroville where it has to say “Yes” for the Future:

- “Yes for creating homes for aspiring & capable young souls of the world willing to serve,
- “Yes for a city that is sustainable (In the Master Plan, the green belt area is three times the area of the city)
- “Yes for building a city that is at the cutting-edge of materials and spiritual research,

Let us offer our wholehearted support toward building the city that the world needs. Take a moment to sign this form to show your wholehearted support towards building the city of dawn. <https://bit.ly/3k8jjGj>

We are very happy to have received a wide support so far from more than 400 people, and hope that more people will step up to support the future of Auroville. Time for us to make a decisive move. Auroville can honour its mandate and decisions and collaborate to implement it.

Submitted by the Universal Township Support group,
19 Aug 2021, and signed by 400 Aurovilians

What is the Master Plan?

One of the disagreements concerns The Mother’s approval of the Master Plan. Some people, including the Secretary, believe that Mother’s vision for Auroville is laid down in the Master Plan – one person even stated that she had approved it. However, it was pointed out that the first draft of the Master Plan came after Mother’s passing, so she couldn’t possibly have done this. Mother had only ‘blessed’ the Galaxy model of the Auroville township.

The Master Plan is something different. As an Aurovilian planner/architect explained, “It’s a first framework and practical approach towards a possible realization on the ground. It needs to be followed by a detailed development plan. The Master Plan is only a policy protocol, a prospectus or a vision, and is not an implementation plan. It’s a precursor to a plan – it’s not a document to build roads.” It was also observed that, “Apart from specifying the four zones, it (the Master Plan) does not give any detailed proposals for the development of the city area. The detailed planning was envisaged as an ongoing process.” In fact, our latest Master Plan specifies that it should be revisited every five years to assess the progress and relevance of development plans and projects.

Another area of disagreement concerns the legality of the Master Plan. One Aurovilian stated that it is a ‘myth’ that the Auroville Township Master Plan is not binding on the Foundation and its residents, as it was approved by the HRD Ministry in 2001 and notified in the Government of India Gazette in 2010. In fact, the TDC states that their work “is based on the community-approved Master Plan of 1999, which was

subsequently gazetted by Government of India in 2010.”

But, as a community member pointed out in a General Meeting, this is incorrect. The Master Plan that was gazetted was not the document approved by the community in 1999. In fact, the community-approved Master Plan of 1999 was further worked on by a small group and became “The Auroville Universal Township Master Plan (Perspective 2025)”. It was this plan, which never received community endorsement, which was approved by the Ministry of Human Resource Development on 12th April, 2001 and subsequently gazetted by the Auroville Foundation.

In fact, one Aurovilian pointed out that “the Tamil Nadu Government – which is responsible for all land matters in the state – had refused to endorse this Master Plan because it did not take the villages into account”.

What, exactly, was the intention behind the document the community endorsed in 1999? Somebody involved in the drafting of that Master Plan reminded us that the document was aimed more at protection of the Green Belt from speculators, and does not give any detailed proposals for the development of the City Area. As the notes of that meeting put it, “The more detailed planning will be an ongoing progress with all interested wholeheartedly encouraged to participate”.

And, he continued, “It was under these clear specifications that various stakeholders from within the community felt secure enough to formally approve the Master Plan, which likely would have been rejected otherwise. Whoever uses ‘community approved’ as an argument or validation for specific developments of the City needs to understand

the spirit and the actual conditions with which the Master Plan was accepted.”

The issue of how we are planning the city and, specifically, the Crown, was also debated. An Aurovilian pointed out that our present TDC is under-staffed because the TDC constituted by the Residents’ Assembly in 2017 collapsed on its own and had never been fully replaced. “This is the situation where the Secretary has stepped in” [by making temporary replacements into full members of the team eds].

The TDC constituted by the residents in 2017 consisted of an “interface team” to liaise between the residents and the permanent technical staff, but the team never succeeded in fulfilling this function.

An architect with an interest in town planning pointed out that, “There is a widespread aversion – if not resistance – to planning in Auroville. We have neither been able to establish a structure nor a fair and accepted process for town planning through which our ideas and ideals could be brought closer to realisation in a cooperative manner.”

He noted that 47 people had been members of L’Avenir/TDC since 2008, reflecting attempts to balance or include different approaches to planning the town, as well as short fixed terms for membership, and observed, “Planning needs continuity... How can anybody be expected to do and complete a far reaching complicated project when the team is ever changing, dictated by ‘terms’?”

An Aurovilian town planner expressed his professional concern. “I have been living in Auroville for 18 years and I am still trying to understand the logic of the planning of the Crown and other roads.” He emphasized that

planning has many elements to it – economic, social, institutional, physical, ecological, and in Auroville, spiritual.

“All these should be considered, but they are not. In the absence of a mobility plan, a water management plan, an ecological plan and other necessary plans, it is impossible to say that we need the Crown and promote it.”

In this connection it was mentioned that The Mother had written a letter to the Ford Foundation in 1969. Mother was asking the Foundation to do a functional analysis on what systems needed to be designed to create a structured planning process, a work that takes many years. “This letter is the clearest indication of The Mother’s intentions on planning and building the city,” pointed out another Aurovilian. “A lot of us have an idea of town planning as making sketches on a piece of paper: you draw roads and where buildings come up. But that’s not what town planning is. That’s rather the end of town planning. There is a lot which precedes this, and that’s exactly what has not been done.”

A rather different perspective upon planning was offered by an Aurovilian who opposed ‘mental, top-down planning’ to ‘spiritual planning’, a plan which ‘births through the spirit, a download of the Truth in form, the formless flowing as the form... It is the second kind of planning She was downloading as the Master Plan. It is truly the “Master” of all the plans.”

But why the present rush to manifest it? asked another, pointing out that Auroville is, first of all, “a laboratory of evolution for a new form of organization”, and that that the city should come second – not the other way round.

Sri Aurobindo's Five Dreams

On the evening of the 15th August, a webinar was held on the topic of Sri Aurobindo's *Five Dreams*, which was his message broadcast on Indian radio on 14th August, 1947.

The dreams were for a free and united India; for the liberation of the peoples of Asia and her return to her great role in the progress of human civilization; for a world-union; for India's spiritual gift to spread to the world; and for a step in evolution that would raise humanity to a higher and larger consciousness.

The participants in the webinar were Dr. Karan Singh, Sir Mark Tully, Shashi Tharoor, Aster Patel and Ameeta Meera. The convener was Anu Majumdar.

Here are some extracts.

Karan Singh: The first dream of the unity of the subcontinent I think is totally unrealistic. The only way that it could be achieved would be if SAARC develops on the lines of the European Union. In the second dream, Sri Aurobindo felt that Asia had to play a major role in human history, and that she is beginning to do.

While the third dream of a world union is a lovely idea, what is happening in fact is a reversal. Nationalism has turned out to be much more resistant and much more powerful than we had thought. There are lots of international movements, like the environmental movement and the interfaith movement with which I am involved, but the idea that nationalisms will be finally overcome is still a long way away. I think the best we can do is to try and strengthen these global movements to counteract the reverse of very aggressive nationalisms around the world.

The fourth dream [*the spiritual gift of India to the world eds.*] is absolutely correct. It has happened.

Of the last dream [*a further step in evolution to a higher and larger consciousness eds.*] Sri Aurobindo himself said it would be very, very difficult to achieve. It remained his personal hope, and we must strive for the best even though it may be very difficult to reach.

Mark Tully: In rereading the five dreams, what struck me most was the emphasis upon the importance of unity. He emphasised the essential importance of bringing Hindus and Muslims together and said India will not be a complete union until that is done. I think this is still something we need to work on.

Regarding the third dream of the unification of the human world which he thought was underway, the two glaring examples of the lack of world union now, and the need for it, are Covid and climate change.

Shashi Tharoor: I would agree with Mark that the key question is the question of unity. Sri Aurobindo showed great prescience concerning how the seeds sown by Partition would continue



The webinar participants. From left, top row, Anu Majumdar (convener); Ameeta Meera and Shashi Tharoor Below: Sir Mark Tully, Dr. Karan Singh and Aster Patel

to impede India's growth and development, both in terms of external relations with countries like Pakistan and others, and internally in the relations between the communities. I believe this is a very important dream that has not been fulfilled.

Regarding the second dream, the resurgence and liberation of the peoples of Asia and her return to her great role in the progress of human civilization, I would argue that this happened. Asia has done remarkably well, better than anybody in 1947 could have dared predict.

The third dream of world union, however, was predicated on the assumption that nationalism would have fulfilled itself and lost its militancy. Well, if there was briefly hope that that was happening, it has been snuffed out in recent years, and what we seen for the last decade has been a rapid increase in nationalist sentiments in a number of countries, including America, Britain, Turkey, and India.

In some ways it's interesting to look at the Auroville experiment in this context because here the cooperation of people across various ethnicities, nationalities and religions in the larger pursuit of humanistic cooperation seems to me, in some ways, fulfilling on a very small scale the kind of ideal he would have had for a global unity of purpose and cooperation.

On the fourth dream of the spiritual gift of India to the world, I think he wasn't far off. 20-25 years after he spoke those words, that was precisely what was happening, with Indian spiritual teachers achieving worldwide renown.

When it comes to the final dream, a step in evolution leading to a higher and larger consciousness, I believe that was idealistic even when he said it. Two years after the savagery of a World War, of the horrors of the Holocaust and Hiroshima, how could one have seriously stated that human beings are capable of a higher and larger consciousness? I think he was deliberately setting the bar high. In this sense, the dreams are important lodestars, but I would argue there is a great distance to go.

Ameeta Meera: I have no doubt the reality staring at us today is rather bleak, and it is extremely difficult to see how things are going to change. However, evolution doesn't always go in a straight line; it is a spiral, and every time we want to go up, we have to go down. I feel that some of the things Mr Tharoor mentioned, like the rise of nationalistic feelings in countries, are manifestations that have to rise up to be cleansed, and if we are to take the next step we need to be able to see them to be able to deal with them.

In fact, there are many movements, often disastrous, dark and bleak, that are pushing us towards a particular movement of oneness of the globe. Covid, climate change, do we have a choice today? Are we not being pushed into taking action?

In the fifth dream, he talks about the growth of the spirit, the growth of the inner consciousness, and this is perhaps the way towards the realisation of all the dreams. Because a growth of consciousness that sees mankind as one, a realization of mutuality, harmony and unity, will help us take the next step in evolution.

Aster Patel: I went to the Sorbonne in Paris to read the work of Sri Aurobindo in the context of European culture. That's when the five dreams came into a very clear focus for me. India had achieved its freedom, which was the first dream of Sri Aurobindo, and the second dream of a world union was beginning to take shape in the form of the European Union.

The late 1960s saw a tremendous shakeup in the civilisation of Europe and America. In July 1970, Mother sent me to the United Nations to join an assembly of young university people from all over the world who were asked to give their ideas about the future. They all said they wanted to work together, to collaborate, in creating that future. These were the seeds which have only begun to sprout now.

I felt then that the first three dreams of Sri Aurobindo were already on the ground, but not yet

in their fullness. But in the last two decades, the last two dreams have become very important. For now all the foremost thinkers, as well as the youth, are saying that the old civilization is finished, it has hit a wall, and a new civilisation has to arise if we are to survive. This is the next level of conscious being which will come through the pressure of the Supermind.

In this context I'm very aware of the 50 years of the Auroville experience. Here is a collectivity of many generations, drawn from many countries, making a dedicated attempt to discover the spiritual being. The fact that Auroville exists is a hope that a different future is not an impossibility.

Anu: Given the huge challenges facing the world today, what could be a major turning point?

Karan Singh: If we look at the *Athavara Veda*, there are 72 verses which contain the most holistic and integral approach to the environment that you can find anywhere. In our culture we have this great Vedic vision of the Earth as the Mother, a living organism, whom we worship. So I think that this concept of the divinity of the earth, along with environmental movements, technology, and the interfaith movement, together can become countervailing factors to the negative situation we see today. I think that each one of us has got to strive, in our own way, to save the world from catastrophe.

Mark Tully: I think a crucial turning point could be climate change, because with climate change will surely come an awareness of the fact that the way we have been living our lives is barren and materialistic, and does not lead to the fundamental understanding of the unity of man and nature. Many of our problems spring from the fact that we have misinterpreted the first chapter of the Book of Genesis. We think that God has given us charge of the world to do what we want with it. The realisation that that is not so is perhaps going to be a major turning point.

I think this fundamental understanding of the unity of humanity and nature is absolutely essential to tackling the problems of Covid and climate change.

Ameeta Meera: If you look at the whole body of Sri Aurobindo's work, all of it is saying the same thing, touching the same harmonic note, and that is that evolution is not over; that as our consciousness grows, we will grow towards a oneness, a unity, a harmony and a sense of mutuality.

The Earth is the mother, the goddess, and it is the earth that is calling us now through the agony of climate change. I believe the spirit of oneness is already taking hold: the whole world is coming together through things like technology. But I think we still have a long way to go on the road towards its full realisation.

The webinar can be seen at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eli77LdN0yY>

Between the 15th-17th August, a flower exhibition was held at Savitri Bhavan, dedicated to flowers with special significances for Sri Aurobindo and the supramental consciousness. The exhibition hall always has a special atmosphere, but for three days this was enhanced by the simple but artistic flower presentations, accompanied by delicate flower drawings by Jhota Khare and quotations from Sri Aurobindo and The Mother in beautiful calligraphy.

This is the fifth such flower exhibition. "Normally it runs from 21st-28th February," explains Naren, one of the organizing team, "but this one is special because it marks the beginning of the 150th celebrations of Sri Aurobindo's birth."

The initiative for the first flower exhibition came from Ramachandra. He recalls that in his Ashram school in Orissa there was always a special flower arrangement on darshan days. "We would put flowers, along

with incense and Mother's photo, in a room, and people were magically attracted there because of the special atmosphere. I wanted to do the same thing in Auroville. The first exhibition here was very hard work, but now that a team has formed I know it will continue. It's like a dream come true."

Clearly, it is quite a logistical exercise to acquire all the flowers needed

for each exhibition, and ensure they are always looking fresh. How do they do it?

"We divide the work up between us," says Naren. "I do the accounting and purchasing, Poonam the flower decoration, and Surendra makes the nursery here. It normally takes 2-3 months to prepare an exhibition, although this time it came at the request of the 150th anniversary team and we were only given 2-3 weeks to prepare. We generally choose between 70-80 plants that are in season. The flowers come from Auroville and Ashram gardens, but we also need to purchase some from Ooty and Kodaikanal." Every day the flowers are sprayed, and those that are wilting are replaced.

"We were wondering how to do this exhibition at such short notice," says Ramachandra, "but then people turned up at just the right time to help. It's a bit of a miracle. It makes me feel we are just

The flower show



Flower arrangement with Sri Aurobindo's symbol



"Service" arrangement

the instrument. Something else is guiding and working through us."

As one enters the room of the flower exhibition, one senses this is a very special space. "Thank you for the fragrant and luminous atmosphere," wrote one visitor. "Sri Aurobindo came to bless how a physical place came to be transformed into something tangibly spiritual," wrote another. "Comments like these are so encourag-

ing. They really motivate us," says Naren. "Clearly, the exhibition really touches people directly to their hearts. Mother said flowers are a direct link to the Divine; there's nothing much that needs to be explained."

The team will continue organizing flower exhibitions during Mother's birthday week, which includes two days of flower workshops for schoolchildren. But they are also working on a project to establish a permanent garden for the flowers to which Mother has given significances. "Instead of plucking flowers and putting them in an exhibition, we thought, let's enjoy them in a natural environment," says Naren. They need about five acres of land, three acres for what can be grown easily, and two acres for exotic plants or plants that require special care in greenhouses.

"It's our next challenge. We are already in talks with the Town Development Council to find a place. We hope to create a special atmosphere there for visitors who want to experience and learn more about Mother's plants," concludes Naren.

Alan

Should planning be a participatory process?

The topic of participatory planning has loomed large in recent discussions. Important questions of roles, responsibilities, leadership styles, and power have been raised, with people noting that these had not been adequately addressed in recent weeks, but needed to be clarified before the process goes any further, otherwise “power and hierarchy will be wrong or corrupted within.” Many residents have expressed dismay at the general lack of collaboration between groups, and, more specifically, the seeming lack of a meaningful participatory planning process offered by the TDC. Some have claimed the process has so far been very top-down and hierarchical, and that stakeholders must instead aim for a more inclusive planning approach that aligns with Auroville’s overarching values.

The Residents Assembly Service had invited the Working Committee and the TDC to be present at the General Meeting in Kalabhumi amphitheatre on August 20 to give an update on the progress of the surveys and to answer questions. The Working Committee responded by simply acknowledging receipt of the email, while the TDC responded that they would not speak at meetings until the surveys for the Crown were complete. However, some members of the Working Committee and TDC were present at the meeting, and agreed to answer questions in an individual capacity.

Community members mentioned that a JCB earthmover that had been used two days earlier to clear a wider path as part of the surveying process near Savitri Bhavan, without any advance notification to the community, and wondered how this could have happened. The TDC member apologised. “It shouldn’t have happened,” he stated, agreeing that the community should have been informed, and that archaeological burial places should be accommodated in the planning. “We also make mistakes.”

He confirmed that the TDC “does not have a plan” at the present time, but when the current survey concludes, it will present the findings in meetings and publications, and “then the process will start.” “We don’t know yet what will happen after that. We do plan to engage the community.”

But what kind of engagement? One of functions of the TDC is “to prepare and implement communication and consultation processes that encourage an active, constructive and participatory involvement of

professional planners? They are deciding everything. They should be given a brief. Many objected to the TDC and The Secretary setting certain non-negotiables: that the Crown will go ahead, that the corridor will be 16.7 metres wide, that certain homes will be demolished and trees cut down.

Another questioned: “Has the TDC had been tasked with responsibility to implement, as well as to plan?” implying that the TDC had taken on tasks beyond its mandate.

A former TDC member pointed out that the community had approved the new structure of TDC in 2017 (at a RAD), which included the selection of an interface team to bring the voice of the Residents Assembly to the TDC, but this had not happened.

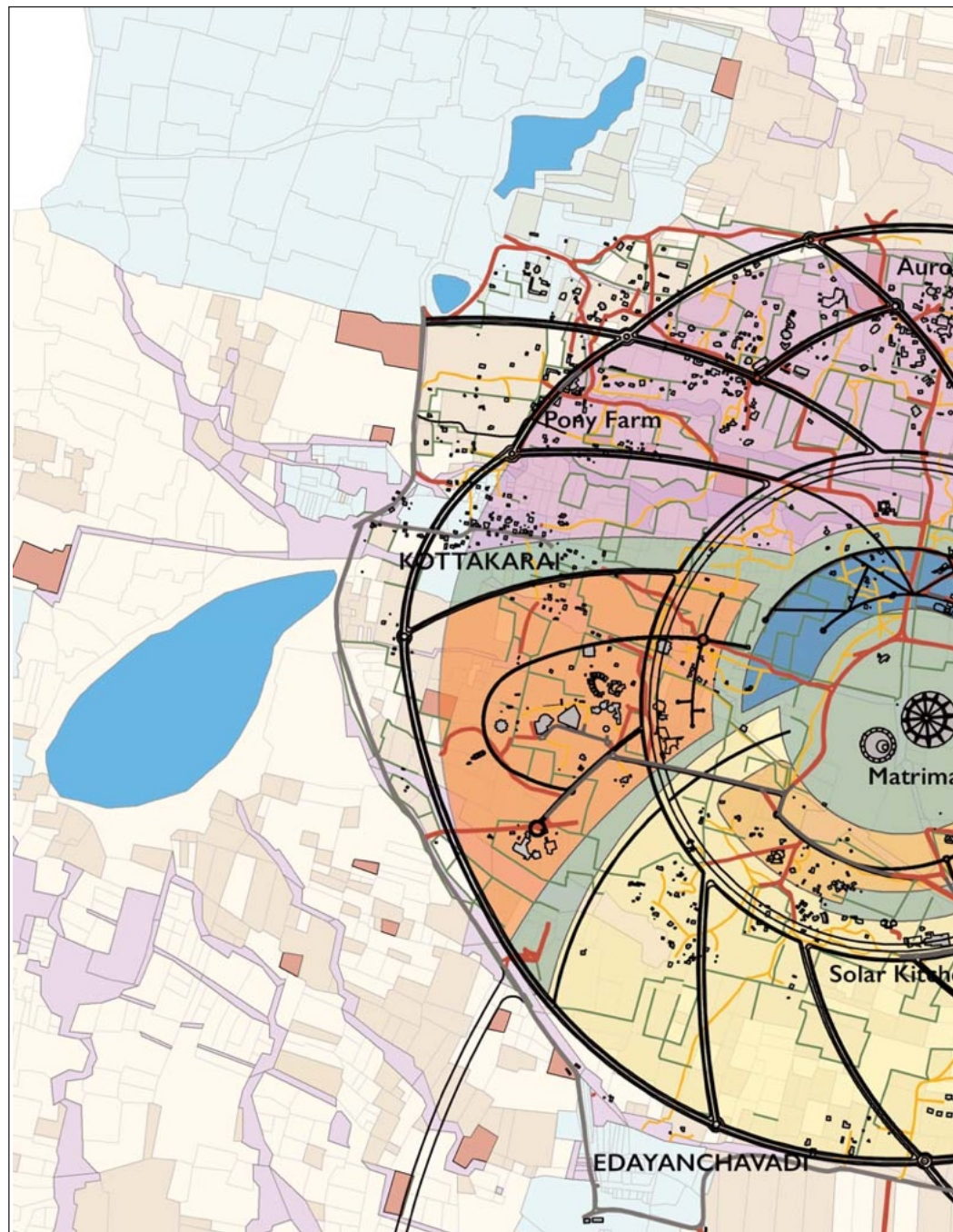
Another acknowledged it is great that the Secretary has brought us now to deal with this topic, after so many years, but also felt that the Secretary and Working Committee were “side-stepping” the selection process for the TDC that was approved by the Residents’ Assembly.

It was pointed out that the Standing Order – a 2017 legal document – was originally issued to give the TDC power to use against outside forces (*such as property developers etc.*), but it was claimed that the TDC was instead using it “against Aurovilians” to gain power and to exclude the community from the planning and development process.

Others noted that the gazetted Master Plan was not created by the community nor through an inclusive community process, and was not ratified by the community.

Another community member clarified that, “We don’t have a governing board, so (the Secretary’s) decisions are not ratified. We need the spark to solve the problem, not to rely on someone else to decide. We need spirit, and elevated consciousness!”

Many people objected to the 24-hour notice given by the TDC about the first installment of the ‘Jewels of the Crown’ series of workshops. The workshop was not widely announced, even though its intention is for community brainstorming for a harmonious



Map of Auroville. The inner triple-line

the same topic as the GM that you declined to come to?” one resident wrote on social media.

But on social media platforms, many people expressed the need not to get bogged down in details by questioning the processes or the Master Plan, emphasising that the community should instead implement the plan as “fast and as best as we can. We should not continue an endless discussion that can be very detrimental to the development of the City,” one person wrote. Another expressed: “Some fundamental things cannot be changed by any RAD, like the name Auroville, the Dream, the 50,000 inhabitants the Mother aimed for...” Many regard the Galaxy design as something that should not be questioned: “This rough design was known decades ago, and by settling here we basically signed up for it, including the name Auroville.” And others questioned the point, substance and flavour of online debates: “Everyone is tired of spinning. [The] Auronet debate will last two days, same 10 participants, some mix of 200+ views. Hardly a [productive] debating platform since a while now, especially as few of the working groups participate. They are busy.”

In the General Meeting, two Working Committee members answered questions in their capacity as individuals. They were asked why they were not communicating better on this topic with the larger community. They admitted that the divisions within the Working Committee itself – with members holding different opinions, which are now “calcified” – made it difficult to speak with one voice. Additionally, attempts to balance pressures from the Secretary and the Residents Assembly made them feel “like being in a crucible”.

The Working Committee members conceded that it was hard to slow down the current speed of events. “We’re still figuring out how to adapt [to Dr Ravi’s pace]”, said one, after likening their work to “jumping on a very fast-moving conveyer belt”. “The processes we have, the participation of the residents, the equal participation, these processes have a long curve and do not align with the push and impatience to get things done. The space for community participation is very compressed.”

The circle, t

The Town Development Committee, acknowledged the completion of the Crown as (1) structures and some value; the mobility; and (3) conce

In the general meeting at Kalabhumi, TDC members clarified his personal view: components have been very slow to move. happy [that things are now moving]. clearly that it is not an easy thing. Things have to move. But we like everything as much as possible.”

He acknowledged that there is a speed to the Crown, “which is easy to say, but that a road is just one element of the town. It includes parks, services, residential road inside it is only meant for cycling traffic. We made a mistake with the speed [from the Solar Kitchen to Kalabhumi] lane where you can drive at 100 kilometers and was never foreseen.” He acknowledged the Crown road will be difficult. “The road is completely out of control, with an increase in bikes. This has to be addressed. We need to manage some types of traffic at certain times. If we open to all traffic, we’ll have chaos.” In fact, Auroville’s roads, there are 5000 vehicles, as well as guests and tourists, and people cut.

Asked if there are non-negotiables, he said the Crown road should be a perfect circle. He gave an exact response. “We at the moment for the simple reason that it was an encounter. That’s why we started the town on the ground such as trees, buildings, canyons, rain level differences. Once we know the outcome of the survey in meetings, we’ll start.” He was reminded that the Crown is a sacred site, with burial remains from the 500 BCE - 100 CE) and he agreed that it was below our feet.”

“The Crown road is envisaged as a circle. There will be areas where we will have to say ‘it should be a perfect circle and that’s the thing’, which is what some people are taking the other position that ‘it doesn’t have to be side to the other.’ We want a circle as a result from experience that when you go from one place to you meet things. This is where the disc



The General Meeting on August 20th at the Kalabhumi amphitheatre

Auroville residents in the implementation of the Master Plan.” But, as one community member put it, “The TDC has been working in a top-down fashion. Will you work in a participatory manner? There are many alternative solutions to this typical 1980s management approach of a boss above, people below.”

Somebody also wrote that it would be good if the TDC published a glossary of the terminology [used in relation to the Crown] “so the community is actually empowered to be part of the conversation.” Another person actually appealed to the TDC to “start with a clean slate. Involve everybody, and release the creative energy which we all have, and which will unite us.”

One of Auroville’s long-standing architects emphasised the need for clarity around the role of the TDC: “Do they represent the community, or are they

manifestation of the structures around the Crown corridor. One person suggested that the TDC was only offering “partial” and “not full participation” in the process.

To help Aurovilians understand different degrees of citizen engagement in participatory planning, one resident posted Arnstein’s *Ladder of Citizen Participation* on Auronet. Levels 1 and 2 – manipulation and therapy – are considered non-participation. Levels 3, 4 and 5 – informing, consultation and placation – are regarded as degrees of tokenism, conceded to citizens by those in power. Citizens only gain real degrees of power at levels 6, 7 and 8 – when partnership, delegated power and citizen control are attained.

“Why are you organising a separate, last-minute event that is not announced publicly and has

What's next?

What could be the next steps? For some it is obvious. "We've had so many studies," said one Aurovilian. "Mother signed the Galaxy, we had two years of discussion which ended with the Master Plan. Now is the time for action." Another agreed, feeling that while we are good at coming up with documents, we are poor at implementing anything. "Now there is energy for action and old habits are kicking in to go back to the status quo where we run meetings after meetings, make decisions and go back to sleep giving a false impression that we did something.... Real answers will come in the field of action." And he warned, "We don't have the luxury in this world to take decades blabbering on about the details of every building, stretch of road and particular tree."

But who will take the lead? It is time to "offer our trust to the TDC and all the experts TDC is beginning to work with", wrote one person.

Meanwhile the TDC itself has started a survey of land on the orientation of the Crown, “to recognise and reconcile with the ground realities”. Once that survey has been completed, it will update the community and promised that “we shall discuss with them (those who are directly affected) and find solutions for their concerns.” In fact, the TDC, along with the Working Committee and the Secretary, have already been holding talks with those who would be most impacted.

The TDC also stated that it is working on a mobility plan “which can be launched in a phase-wise, realistic manner,” and it is thinking about restricted or alternate access to heavy vehicles. The TDC has also begun running a series of workshops to involve the wider community in discussing elements of the Crown. The first one was held recently, and it was, as one participant put it, “very refreshing and uplifting. To work together with no agenda as to outcomes, simply trusting that together we are looking for the inspiration within, and then sharing in a space where each and everyone is heard and allowed to express.”

The TDC is required, by an Office Order, to involve itself in collaborative planning, but some were sceptical about the degree to which these workshops constituted a truly open participatory process, pointing out that discussion only invited inputs concerning structures around the Crown corridor, and not other aspects, like the width of the corridor itself. In this sense, it felt too directed and ‘top-down’.

At the same time, it was recognised that the present heightening of energy around the Crown could have, as one Aurovilian put it, “a high potential for evolution, for growing together”. Another likened it to “a living force attempting to manifest by a stride what Auroville is meant to be. This churning of the ocean is revealing to us the way forward as an impulsion towards action. The only defeat would be if we retreat towards inaction and inertia.”

However, another warned, "Those who believe that they will be able to speed up Auroville's development by defeating their opponents thanks to some outside intervention are fools because the only way to speed up Auroville's development is by being more united. In the long run, increased divisions will only slow down the development of the town and the realization of our ideals."

In fact, in response to 'outside intervention' there is a proposal to be put to a Residents Assembly Decision which challenges the current constitution of the TDC, and requires the Working Committee to finalise a new Standing order based on the 2017 RAD-approved TDC structure.

At the same time, there have been recent attempts to lessen tensions. For example, people living on the route of the Crown have started clearing trees and undergrowth to facilitate the TDC survey. One forester emphasised that nobody was against the Crown itself, merely the way it was planned to be manifested. He felt the key disagreement concerned whether or not the proposed road should be perfectly circular, or if it could be more flexible to respond to what is at present on the ground. He proposed that a symbolic circle on the land would enable the road to deviate a little [see the article "*The circle, the reality and the non-negotiable*, eds.] Another Aurovilian playfully suggested that a flyover would allow a perfectly circular road to exist without disturbing present habitations and forests.

It was also pointed out that concerns about a future Crown road were negatively influenced by people's experience of the present stretch, which is used by heavy and speedy traffic. "Why not experiment on a stretch of existing crown road,

improve the design and present an example of how the Crown-ways could be while considering the reality of motorised traffic, but maybe slowing it down and discouraging through-traffic for non-residents?" wrote somebody with a past experience of planning in Auroville. "Maybe such a good example can convince us all, that the Crown can be something beautiful and worthy of a city the earth needs."

Other Aurovilians have called for a different way of planning the city. An architect/planner explained that to build the city, we need 1) an Auroville Planning Council to provide policy, and 2) an expert planning department to work out development proposals. In addition, there needs to be a shared vision about the kind of life we want to provide for, and agreed aims and objectives by which to evaluate upcoming projects.

Another Aurovilian commended the design process of the Garden of the Unexpected “where there was a clear design brief, design constraints, evaluation criteria, process of synthesis and selection panel put in place for the collective to participate.... There was no drama and conflict because the process design was well made and executed smoothly. So it is possible and it is time that such processes are used for the larger shaping of the city and its life.”

However, one respondent didn't see such a design process as a panacea. "The issue is a human issue and so we need processes that bring human beings together. The criterion for me is that – whatever process, whatever label – does it support us in getting closer to agreeing with each other?"

An ardent supporter of Roger Anger and the Galaxy plan pointed out that there is a way to harmonise development with the environment. "There are plenty of green cities in the world we can learn from. Our city doesn't have to be monoblock concrete. It will have trees, new materials, as well as a new society."

In fact, few people seem to be opposed to the Galaxy, which many find an inspiring concept. The question is to what extent, if any, its key elements – like the Crown – can be modified to reflect evolving circumstances without destroying its integrity. In this context, one Aurovilian noted that Mother had adjusted many aspects of Auroville (including the location, the size of the city and the orientation of the zones) in response to the reality on the ground. He concluded, “We need to adapt our Master Plan to reality, to adjust to the situation as it is.”

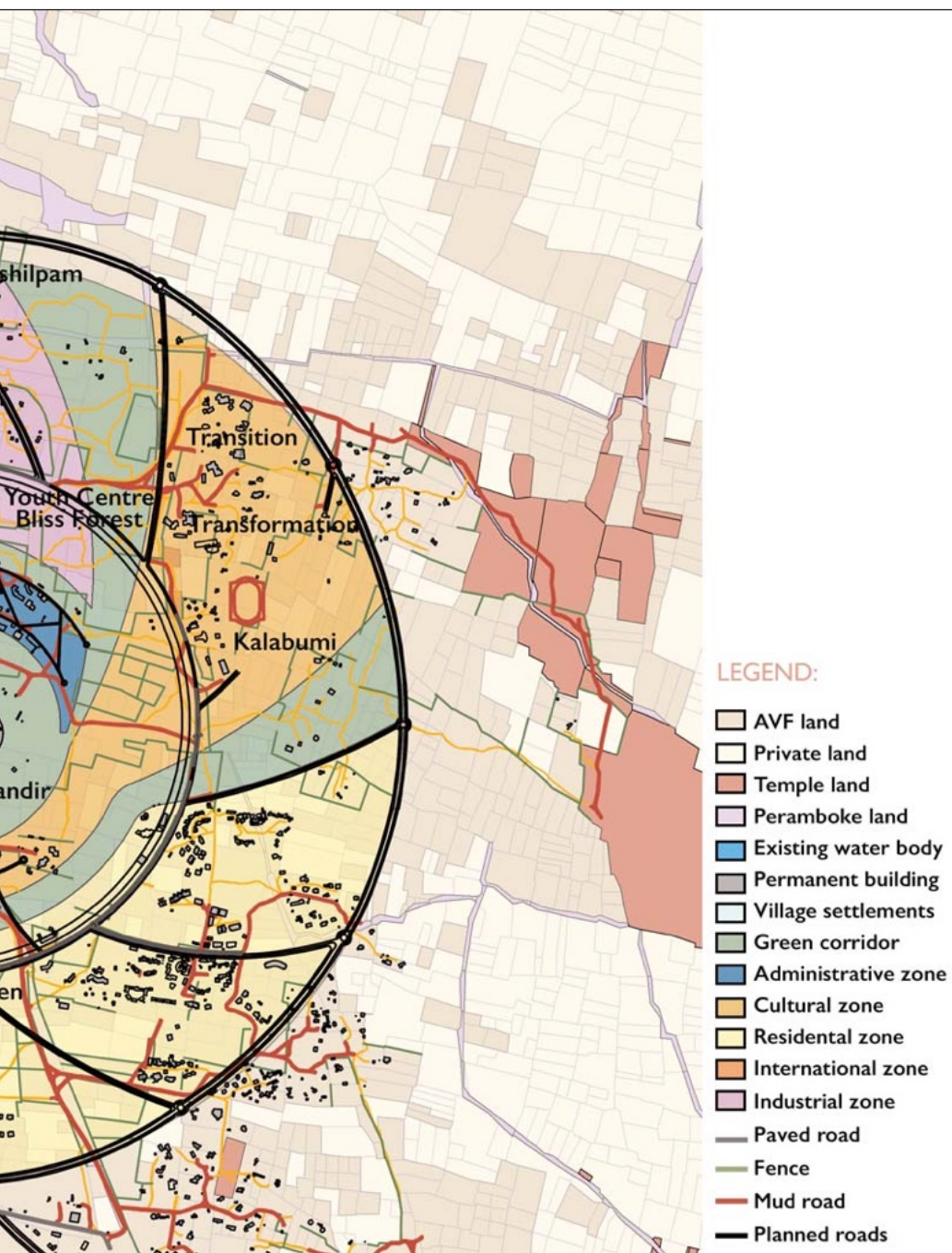
“We need to build a city for the Aurovilians of the distant future,” wrote another, “but not at the expense of the Aurovilians of the immediate present. If we can agree to grow in response to present and future needs in a way that demonstrates care and compassion, then we not only build a city, we build a better world.”

"I can see that the Crown and how it manifests in the different areas of Auroville can become the next great step in Auroville's development, ideally bringing us as a community together, structurally and spiritually," wrote another.

“What a chance to work together on the Crown where City meets the Youth Centre meets Forest, each benefitting each other, parts of a larger whole. Working with the aim to further Human Unity in all of our steps, looking at what has grown and what was envisioned, what is required now and in the years to come, leaving rigidity and judgment aside, unimposing. This could be such a game changer and if we manage that, we truly can set an example and the energies which we all felt have been blocked for so long could unlock. I am ready for that and I know many are as well.”

But perhaps, as another Aurovilian pointed out, the first need is surrender. “The work needs self giving as with all other work we do for Auroville. If the Crown path is there to hold us all together, we have to first agree to it, accept it with some love – then half the battle is won already. Then we have to do it together. Another half won. Then we won’t have to worry about human unity – because we would all be in it.”

Or, perhaps, we simply need to open our hearts to each other again. As one Aurovilian put it, “Either we can go about being two opposing bipartisan groups who claim to possess the truth and try to impose our viewpoints and will on the other, or else we can all come together with the understanding that all of us truly have the best interests at heart for building Auroville, and try to come to an understanding of each other so as to develop together a common approach towards building Auroville. In order for this to happen, we have to open our hearts, sit together and truly be willing to listen to the other, attempting to understand as deeply as possible our approaches.”



The circle indicates the Crown corridor

the reality, the non-negotiables

council, in a message to the community, lists the major impediments to the community's goals: (1) concerns related to the existing old-growth trees; (2) concerns regarding the ownership of lands. On August 20th, one of the speakers at the meeting stated that the Galaxy's beautiful view is one of the community's assets. He said, "so in that sense, we are fortunate." On the other side, we see very different concerns. He said, "Things will happen, and perhaps people are going to go [forward] in harmony,

strong urge by some to manifest not so easy to do.” He stressed the Crown. “The Crown is much denser, it is very green and the streets, pedestrians and emergency vehicles stretch of road that exists already [in the *eds.*]. We do not want a wide road, 100 metres an hour. That is ridiculous. We have decided that regulating access to the Crown traffic in Auroville is now coming. A number of cars and motorbikes may have to close the Crown for a while. If we would open the Crown for traffic in addition to Aurovilians using the Crown for coming daily for work, and using Auroville roads as a short-

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a circle of 16.7 metres wide. But we have to reconsider. It is too easy to say that we are going through everything, saying. It would also be too easy to say that it doesn't matter, and let's go from one thing to the next as much as possible. But we know that we are far from an ideal to the ground reality, and the discussion starts. If we can do that in

an open and transparent way, most people – I am not saying everybody – will be happy.”

He was reminded that flexibility is a quality: “Mother adjusted many aspects of Auroville, such as its location and the diameter of the city, in response to the reality on the ground,” noted one participant. “We need to adapt our Master Plan to reality, to adjust to the situation as it is. We can manifest the symbol together.”

At an earlier meeting, an Aurovilian remarked that residents were living in fear: fear of the Crown happening and what that implies; and fear of the Crown not happening. "Essentially, we are facing different expressions of faith," he said. "We all have faith in The Mother; we all express that, and that's why we are here. But this faith expresses itself in very different ways. There is a group in the community that feels that the Crown is an important part of the expression of their faith to the point that the road part of the Crown should be a perfect circle. There are others who have a different view." And he asked if it would be possible to de-link the perfection of the Crown circle from the Crown road and so move forward together in a creative and energetic way. "Would a symbolic circle, such as a perfect brass circle, satisfy the members in the community who wish a perfect circle? Then the road can move away from the perfection of the circle, and we can allow the manifestations on the ground which have already come into existence – the Youth Centre, the Darkali Forest and the residences in Centre Field – to continue to exist and let the process evolve over the next years."

Yet a circle, as another Aurovilian pointed out, “as one of the major platonic shapes, has naturally a compelling significance, especially, when it encompasses the peace area and Matrimandir as the spiritual centre of Auroville. In terms of infrastructure, it represents the shortest possible way and is therefore favoured by engineers and financiers. The danger: once violated, it becomes a precedence and excuse for further violations and therefore loses its compelling advantages. But a perfect circle is probably impossible to carry through. Small violations I think are okay. Bigger ones should be avoided under all circumstances.”

Another resident emphasized the power of symbols. "There is a reason why there are 12, not 13, qualities of the Mother. There is a reason why Auroville Township is akin to a galaxy and the Crown is round. Not because of dogmatic, religious superstition, but because of a knowledge which is beyond the narrowness of the rational utilitarian mind, which has a hard time appreciating beauty or spirituality or the feminine power."

However, a very practical note was struck by a planner/architect who has made a preliminary evaluation of Auroville's developmental needs. From this, she concluded that "It is evident that the Crown that is already paved serves the needs of the projected population benchmark of 10,000 persons by 2025. So, it is not the lack of Crown road from Kalabhumi to PTDC that is preventing Auroville from growing or developing. Maybe the stagnation of Auroville is elsewhere and not because of circular roads or underground cables."

Overseeing healthcare in a pandemic: Auroville's Covid response

Aurosugan coordinated Auroville's Covid response in the second wave, drawing on his experience in health care administration at the Aravind Eye Hospital, working together with the Auroville support team.

Auroville Today: Aurosugan, What is your background?

I was born in Auroville and I'm part of the third-generation here. I did all my schooling here and completed my undergraduate degree in microbiology, and went on and did an MBA in healthcare administration in Madurai and a diploma in sociology of health. I then did a fellowship in hospital management at Aravind Eye Hospital, and then worked there for ten years, in administration and quality assurance, handling new projects, and focusing on sustainability initiatives. I have travelled to many places, like Nigeria, Tanzania, Kenya and Nepal, to help them build their eye care systems. I also worked on reducing the hospital's waste and improving environmental sustainability - these eye care initiatives won me a lot of awards and recognition. I've published and presented papers on environmental sustainability at various conferences. It was a proud moment to be selected as International Eye Health Hero and to interact with Queen Elizabeth online for World Sight Day last year.

I always wanted to come back to Auroville and to contribute to building this community as Mother's dream, but due to financial constraints it took time, and she knows when to call. It was a hard decision to leave Aravind, because of the opportunities, recognition and inner joy of doing something beautiful. But I felt the time was right now, and I received the call from her grace. I approached Santé and there was a need to take responsibility of Covid health management. By then, the Covid task force team that had handled the first wave had dissolved, and Santé had been given the task of the healthcare coordination, with communications support from the Working Committee. I was given the responsibility of coordinating Covid management, due to my experience in handling this at Aravind Eye Hospital, where I led the Covid safety protocols during the first wave in a facility that sees over 2,500 patients daily. I was ready to take this responsibility - at that time there were no signs of a second wave. I was also asked to look at strengthening the health system in Auroville as part of the coordination work.

What happened when you came on board with Santé?

I started work officially in February, and at that time there were no Corona cases in Auroville. Then there were two cases and, suddenly, a lot of cases appeared. It was a big coordination work, and being new to Auroville and not knowing people made it difficult to handle. The members of the task force volunteered to help with case investigation. We needed to arrange a lot of testing, case investigations, quarantine facilities, and set up a team to do the vital monitoring. My work was to oversee and coordinate all the activities, to update the Block Medical Officer and plan resources.

How many people were in the team?

First, I was helped by Helena from Santé. When the cases spiked, the old team (Induja, Prashant, Shivangi, Tejaswini) stepped up to help with case investigations. The ambulance team -Alok and Srijita and volunteers - helped in monitoring vitals monitoring, and Naren delivered instruments and medicines. The Santé Team (Helena, Sumeet, Ayesha) all came on board to help with medical management. The physician team (Dr Brian, Dr Gayatri, Dr Uma) took care of health monitoring and consultation. The Working Committee (Chali, Sauro) helped with communications and other coordination matters. The team effort helped us overcome the tough situation. A special mention to all volunteers who supported us in all ways.

Was it like a baptism by fire?

Yes, what with being back to Auroville after a big gap and being the sole contact person for this task. The second wave was totally unexpected, and came very fast, and was highly symptomatic. We didn't have time to think about what to do, the cases kept multiplying. For one and a half months, it was a very difficult time with new cases being reported every day. We handled around 100 people. In this period, I was overwhelmed with messages, calls and emails. There were days when I couldn't handle more emails in my inbox, and was praying that people would not need to be shifted out [to hospital] for treatment. It was a lot of work to track everybody, do case investigation, to ask people "Who did you meet?", but it was great to get support. Even the government had not planned for this wave, but the impact in Auroville was less compared to the outside. We were very lucky, by Mother's grace, to have survived the second wave with minimal hospitalisation and mortalities.

How many Aurovilians were hospitalised?

We were blessed not to have many hospitalisations, as finding hospital beds with oxygen was a nightmare at the peak time. In total, four people were hospitalised and, unfortunately, three passed away - two of them were aged and one had comorbidities. One person recovered in hospital. At that peak time of hospitalisation, my father-in-law got Covid and also passed away, so I was in the hospital with him while the team took care of situation here.

At the peak, was your team running to catch up?

Yes, it was very hard, but there was great team work and we collaborated closely to do our best. We knew the limitations of our health infrastructure to take care of our residents during the peak. We had a lot of meetings to come up with a protocol of how to handle cases: when to transfer patients, when to treat people in-house. We could get equipment such as oxygen cylinders, but it was difficult to find extra resource persons in Auroville, such as a doctor or nurse, because the outside health system was already burdened. The biggest challenge was when we had a few cases in Mahalakshmi old age home. That was scary for us because there were people staying there together, and four of them were diagnosed with Covid. The team there cooperated with us, so we arranged some outside nursing staff, and the doctor gave some treatment. So, we were able to take care of our aged residents there. The challenge is that we don't have the human resources to take care of our health system. Building a building is easy - we have a lot of buildings in Auroville. Buying equipment is easy, as we can get the funds. But where do we get the people? We needed a medical doctor trained in Covid protocols, and foreign doctors cannot practice here unless they have been registered. In Auroville, we don't have cases all the time, so how can we recruit people and pay them a high salary? That was a challenge we really faced.

One Aurovilian couple wrote a letter that was published in News and Notes, saying they felt unsupported when they were sick, and the doctor did not answer the phone, and they called the ambulance in the end. What happened there?

They were the initial cases when I had just taken on the job. I was liaising with them but the coordination did not happen well. They wrote a letter, and the Santé team apologised for the incident. Then, we did a lot of changes: we created the protocol for doctors' availability, delivery of medicines and when to call the ambulance team. So, we had more clarity. But then, people with fever started ringing the ambulance team for every simple thing, so the team was running here and there just to check vitals, and they were also burdened. This all came up because the team was in transition when the second wave started. The second wave was not like the first wave; people had heavy symptoms in the second wave.

You mentioned there was a total of around 100 cases in Auroville - do you think this was the true number, or were there many more who didn't report themselves to your team?

There could have been a few more [unreported] cases, because some people did not want to deal with the questions and maybe had mild symptoms. But I don't think the numbers would be much higher: this is a small community, so if some people are not well, the information reaches us. In the first wave, there were only government labs doing testing and Aurovilians were transported there, so all the results were available to the team. In the second wave, a lot of private hospitals and labs started testing, and private home collection of samples started. Some people in Auroville called those testers directly, and didn't directly inform us of the result. But I'm sure it's a small percent of people.

We put the names of people in quarantine on a semi-public list. We had a lot of discussion about that, as it's not general medical ethics to make the health status of a person public. But this being a pandemic, we decided it's legally right to make the names known to the community. The reason is because sometimes a person didn't know the next neighbour was in quarantine. And lots of people weren't taking quarantine seriously. Some felt they shouldn't be in quarantine. We also respected the request of a few people that their names not be put on the list, so we informed key people who might have any contact with them. However, there were a lot of arguments. People who didn't want to believe the test result quoted a lot of articles to us. I had a tough time. We cannot impose anything, health is people's own business. If we advised something, we would have ten positive emails and ten negative emails. But the majority cooperated and didn't mind having their name on the list. Once we talked with them, they understood how important it is to cut the chain of transmission. We asked them to inform people, and to get tested.

Did people mostly observe quarantine?

Not fully, and this was a worry for our team, as we put in a lot of effort to cut the chain of spread, but some people did not take this seriously. I got a lot of complaints and calls, such as, "We saw a person who is supposed to be in quarantine moving without any safety precautions." Or, "What are you people doing? There are Covid-positive people walking around, and you're not taking care." The Working Committee and friends were asked to advise such people to do the quarantine. That's another reason why this common quarantine list was semi-public. We can't police things in Auroville, so we contacted their friends to advise them to stay at home, for the benefit of others. I felt disturbed: "We're doing all this hard work to prevent the spread, and then people with Covid are just moving around without masks."



Aurosugan

Did you feel caught between different ideologies at times?

The first thing that I was told during the initial handover was that getting along with people would be the difficult task and that everyone is different here. That is the beauty of Auroville- so I was already prepared. A good example is the vaccination. There were a lot of people against vaccinations, saying that Sri Aurobindo said that vaccinations were poison. But another group was saying, "We should bring vaccines here as it is difficult to get vaccinations outside." The Santé team was clear that vaccinations could not be administered in Auroville due to infrastructure reasons. We felt that people should make their own choice for their health. I had to agree with that, because none of the Auroville facilities at that time met the government requirements to deliver vaccines. But we could have had a vaccination camp here for those who were interested and who could not travel. As it is, we don't know how many Aurovilians got vaccinated, and we don't have good data on health or a common health database in Auroville. It would be useful for the future.

Another thing: when we would release an email about new cases in the community, we'd get ten emails from people saying, "This virus is not serious, you're trying to create fear." So, we decided to go by the local government regulations and to focus on how to best give health care, whether the email was negative or positive. Everyone is right in their own way. We forwarded the negative emails to the Mother's grace - 'I'm sorry Mother, I don't have time to take care of this! You take care of this! I'll take care of what we can do best!'

Were there any cultural tendencies in attitudes towards the pandemic?

Like in all fields, there were cultural differences. Westerners tend to ask more questions and look up literature and share it. There was also a difference in opinion about vaccines, because even different governments had different approaches, and it was not clear whether other countries would recognise this vaccine when people travelled abroad. In Indian culture, we are used to listening to what healthcare professionals say; we don't ask many questions. But people received a lot of misinformation on WhatsApp and social media, and these messages spread fast. There was big hype that people had bad reactions to vaccinations. [One Tamil movie star died after vaccination, attributed to heart attack, eds]. That really affected [attitudes]. My parents didn't want to take the vaccine after that. It's new, in trial and people don't know what to do. Now it's said that children will be affected in the third wave. So, I hear more people are getting vaccinated now, because they are concerned for their children.

Did Auroville do OK overall, compared to other places in India?

It was Mother's grace that saved us, because we were not well-equipped to handle such a pandemic. Maybe our environment with good oxygen and health monitoring saved us. We were fortunate to escape with minimal damage considering what was happening outside. The medical team did well with our limited resources. We had some good tracking systems and gave out monitoring equipment to all cases and kept tracking them continuously through their quarantine.

Do you think there will be a third wave? What is your plan?

I see there's a possibility of the third wave, but I don't know what impact it will have.

Some of our volunteer team members have stepped down after the second wave, they have other work to focus on. I had a meeting at Santé about what will we do if there's a third wave. We now have Standard Operating Procedures, and more understanding about when to shift patients to a hospital. There will be always support when the need arises - I am confident about that.

Lesley

Better to Have Gone: Love, Death, and the Quest for Utopia in Auroville

This book evolved out of Akash Kapur's deeply personal quest for an explanation of the tragic deaths, in Auroville in the mid 1980s, of Diane and John Walker, the mother and adoptive father of his wife, Auralice.

The precipitating event was Diane's fall while working on the Matrimandir. Suffering terrible injuries which resulted in lower body paralysis, after initial hospitalization she refused medical assistance because she had been told she should be healed by the Mother's force alone. When Diane did not improve, she became almost totally dependent upon John for support. When John subsequently fell ill himself with, possibly, very treatable ailments, he likewise spurned medical help, and this finally resulted in his death. Diane died by suicide the same day.

This double tragedy continued to impact Auralice. At one level, therefore, the motivation for writing the book, in which Auralice fully participated, was therapeutic. As Akash put it, it was "part of a process of healing for Auralice".

However, in seeking for a deeper explanation of the tragedy, Akash needed to expand the frame to include what was happening in the larger community at that time, and how this influenced the lives and choices of Diane and John. Apart from the pervasive idealism of the 1960s, these factors included tensions engendered by a conflict with the Sri Aurobindo Society (SAS, here pseudonymously referred to as the CFY, or "Committee for the Yoga"), a belief in the wider, even occult significance of certain happenings, and a widening understanding – aided by the gradual publication of volumes of *Mothers' Agenda* – of Mother's work on transforming her body.

According to Akash, however, the most powerful influence upon Diane was Satprem, a charismatic individual who had worked closely with Mother. Satprem, a strong supporter of the community's attempt to free itself from control of the SAS and with a group of devoted followers in Auroville, viewed Diane's fall in apocalyptic terms. It was the "sign of a Falsehood", "an indication of the divisions within Auroville and of the corruption of the Mother's dream."

Consequently, he tied her healing to the healing not only of Auroville, but also of the wider world. In healing Diane's broken body he saw the possibility for the continuation of Mother's

work of physical transformation, so he told her that the healing must be done by the Mother's force alone, not by doctors.

Diane wholeheartedly embraced this injunction. This, the triumph of principles over humanity, as Akash put it, is for him the explanation of the subsequent tragedy which also swept up John (who also refused medical help). But what also becomes clear is that even if Satprem was the dominant influence, Diane and John's stubborn idealism made them willing accomplices.

Akash has shaped an immense amount of research conducted over many years into a riveting if, at times, uncomfortable, read. In elegant prose, marred by an occasional weakness for the over-dramatic ("hunger and malnutrition stalked the community"), he provides fascinating background on Diane, and, in particular, John, the East Coast socialite from a wealthy family who, in the words of one observer, "was a swan trying to be a crow". John's eloquent letters to his family back home chart his discovery and celebration of that early Auroville, as well as his personal 'pilgrimage'.

They touched his father who, while irritated by his son's persistent funding requests, wrote: "I admire you on your pilgrimage. May it have a good ending. But no matter, better to have gone on it than to have stayed here quietly. At the end of my life I realize that there is nothing worthwhile except love and compassion and the search, which I have not made, for reality."

While the book lucidly traces out the main lines of the influences which precipitated the tragedy, Akash admits "There are things that happened in those years that defy explanation. I have trouble understanding them". Consequently, he explains he is taking the stories he's been told at face value and he leaves it up to the reader how he/she interprets them.

But, of course, any author has to make choices about what to include, and this inevitably shapes the narrative. In this respect, writing about a complex, multi-dimensional experiment like Auroville is particularly challenging: write one sentence, it sometimes seems, and you've already got it wrong. Having said this, Akash does a fine job. He is remarkably even-handed, insightful, in how he handles the complexities of that period.

Occasionally, however, he succumbs to a questionable generalisation. Speaking of Auroville's 'revolution', for example, he says nobody will "escape the flames", "not Diane, not

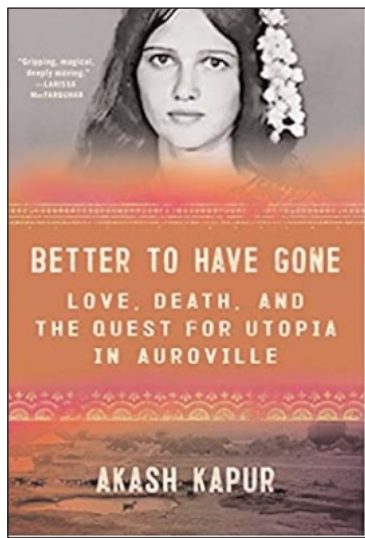
John, not Auralice, nor the scores of combatants and innocent bystanders whose lives (and hopes for a more perfect world) will forever be singled by this disheartening period in the community's history".

I suspect that many Aurovilians who lived through that period, while agreeing it was a difficult time, would not feel they have been "forever singled". And it's important to remember that the subsequent 'civil war', which Akash describes as 'all-consuming', did not affect all Aurovilians equally. Many of these "idiot savants of endurance" continued quietly with their work of afforestation, education, or putting the fledgling Auroville economy upon its feet.

Akash admits that most Aurovilians were not radicalized. But it is, perhaps, an inevitable consequence of the book's focus that this 'other' Auroville tends to be neglected or coloured by the central tragedy. This makes the 'very different' Auroville Akash encounters when he revisits in 1994, a place of freedom and opportunity where people are trying to build a better world, somewhat inexplicable for the uninformed reader. For, in truth, those other aspects were always there, running alongside, or underneath, the more dramatic moments in our history.

An important question raised in the book concerns the nature of extremism and its relationship to idealism. At one point, Akash describes Auroville's revolution as "revealing the dark and often extremist underbelly of utopia". So do communities like Auroville with high ideals tend to attract or engender extremism? And at what point does fierce commitment to an ideal topple over into extremist behaviour, to intolerance, to a tendency to divide people into sheep and goats? Akash would reply that it's when one loses touch with one's humanity. It's a good response. But the question remains, does the particular form of 'irrationality' which drives one on an adventure like Auroville's open the door at the same time to the possible eruption of that 'dark underbelly'?

These are deep, important questions. Akash would probably be the first to admit there is still much to be understood here, although he hints at his awareness of the complexity when he writes that extremism is much less prominent in the Auroville now, for Auroville's society has become more conventional, "for better or worse". And he finds himself admiring, even envying, John's faith, despite its calamitous consequences; for "so few of us find that kind of purpose".



Moreover, he questions the easy attribution of 'craziness' to the main characters in this story. "Crazy is a blunt concept. There are levels of intensity, degrees of deviation from the norm. There's no doubt that John and Diane stepped pretty far out on the scale, that they pushed the boundaries of normalcy (another blunt concept). But I've spent almost ten years chasing this story, and I know that there were many versions of reality, many versions of the truth, that played out in my hometown. I'm not prepared to say which one was right. I'm not here to say anyone was crazy."

A comprehensive study of the nexus of idealism and extremism would require a major work, although it may be pertinent that in *The Life Divine* Sri Aurobindo explains that in a laboratory for consciousness evolution (like the Ashram or Auroville), the forces of both evolution and what pervert or oppose it tend to get raised to the highest pitch:

It might be that, in such a concentration of effort, all the difficulties of the change would present themselves with a concentrated force; for each seeker, carrying in himself the possibilities but also the imperfections of a world that has to be transformed, would bring in not only his capacities but his difficulties and the oppositions of the old nature and, mixed together in the restricted circle of a small and close common life, these might assume a considerably enhanced force of obstruction which would tend to counterbalance the enhanced power and concentration of the forces making for the evolution.

While a deep exploration of this phenomenon was not Akash's intention in this book, without it the

complexity of motivations behind incidents like the book burning or head shaving in Aspiration remains unknown, providing easy ammunition for those who wish to denigrate societies like Auroville which have high aspirations. "A flawed utopia" – the headlines write themselves.

Some Aurovilians may criticise Akash for writing this book (which is being widely reviewed and selling very well on Amazon) precisely because they fear it will engender this type of bad publicity. Yet it is very important that this crucial period of Auroville's history is examined in more depth, because so far most of the accounts of what happened then have been superficial and one-sided.

To paraphrase the philosopher, George Santayana, "Those who have not learned about the past are condemned to repeat it." And who can say that the past is really past when the roots of idealism and extremism, of belief and dogmatism, seem so deeply entwined?

Ultimately, though, this is also a book about personal change. Akash and Auralice, after living in the U.S., returned to make a home in the community. "We have lived with this book for more than a decade, and the experience has changed how we see ourselves and our community; and changed, also, our feelings about the very idea of utopia and the search for perfection," writes Akash.

If Auralice still seems somewhat uncertain that her past is fully processed, for Akash something seems to have shifted. In a recent interview, he mentioned that he started writing the book with "skepticism" towards things like idealism and faith. "But to my surprise I ended up somewhere different. I saw a certain nobility in faith. A door has been opened ... I have not yet walked through it."

This is a fine book, an important book, particularly for Aurovilians. For in helping us begin to make sense of a critical episode in Auroville's past, it warns us of the shadows that sometimes lurk in the corners of the brightest lights. And it underlines the need not to lose touch with our basic humanity even as we reach for the highest ideals.

Alan

Better to Have Gone: Love, Death, and the Quest for Utopia in Auroville, published by Scribner, 2021, is available on Amazon.in in hardback and paperback. On Amazon.com it is also available in Kindle format.

OPINION

Auroville's 'warrior' women

I understand that one has to be very careful in talking about gender issues today, but as a man from a generation where gender rules were far more defined, usually to the detriment of women, I have been struck by what I term the 'warrior' quality of some Aurovillian women.

What is a warrior? For all but a few people the word usually conjures up the image of a fierce, highly trained male fighter. But can women also be warriors?

Setting aside the fact that women are today increasingly playing combat roles in the armed forces of various nations, if one looks back through history it is certainly not hard to come up with other examples of women warriors of a militaristic nature. Joan of Arc immediately springs to mind, and the semi-mythical tribe of Amazons from ancient Scythia, who are said to have frequently fought battles with the Greeks. There is also England's Celtic Queen Boudica, Greece's Artemisia, Japan's Nakano Takeko and Tomoe

Gozen, the Apache Lozen, India's Jansi Rani, Rani Rudrama Devi, Rani Velu Nachiyar and Queen Chennamma, and many many others, including Pallas Athene, Durga and Kali on the divine plane.

However, what I have in mind is a different type of female warrior, the non-militaristic warrior women written about by Carlos Castaneda in his books on sorcery in New Mexico, in which the Yaqui Indian Don Juan acts as a Guru-like figure, the Nagual, to a group of female "warriors" as well as to a number of men.

Re-reading one of Castaneda's books not long ago, what struck me was a certain similarity between those women "warriors" and many of the women of Auroville. Castaneda depicts them as having an extraordinary range of qualities, from beauty, warmth and humour (at one point he refers to the Nagual woman as exuding affection and purity) to power, fierceness, poise, balance, control, self-discipline, integrity, unwavering focus and impeccability. He portrays them as beings 'at war' yet fully at ease, able to meet any situation

and confidently handle it alone. In Auroville I believe we have a number of such women who have, in addition to other qualities, a strongly disciplined side which can be fierce, determined, powerful, a side which acts as a channel for what Sri Aurobindo refers to as the 'Shakti' force. It is not surprising that many of Auroville's successful enterprises, services and programmes today are headed by such women, and that they are also very active and influential in many fields, including teaching, farming, medicine and healing, as well as martial arts like t'ai chi ch'uan, aikido and kalaripayattu. A few were members of the Auroville Guard when it was functional some years ago.

What did Mother want from Auroville's women, from the women of the future?

At one point She remarked, "All men are feminine in many respects and all women are masculine in many traits, especially in modern societies." With this in mind she encouraged people to get in touch with – and learn to bring out – latent

'balancing' qualities within themselves, especially those associated with the opposite sex i.e. she wanted men to find within themselves the ability to be more caring, nurturing, less testosterone-driven, and women to find within themselves the ability to be more organizational, executive, dynamic and forceful. In fact she said of women, "Women are in principle the executive power. You must never forget that. And in order to receive the inspiration, you can take support from a masculine consciousness if you feel the need for it." Then a little further on, "...for the execution, it is you who have the power to carry it out in all the details, with all the power of organisation."

In my view, some of the women of Auroville are unlike the majority of women elsewhere. They have that warrior quality which Carlos Castaneda refers to in his books – a certain air of controlled power and impeccability which distinguishes them and makes them formidable instruments of the shakti force.

Tim Wrey

Janet

On August 8th, long-term Canadian Aurovillian Janet Fearn quietly and peacefully slipped away from her severely emaciated body after weeks of gently fading during which loving contact with family members and friends always remained. The transition took place in her own Arati home with L'aura and Raji by her side. Janet had suffered from cancer for several years; she would have been 80 in September.

In her own words:

"I discovered Auroville in 1968 following a year of traveling, and a few months in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. After spending a day in Auroville helping a friend build his house, I moved into a hut with 2 other people situated where the Matrimandir Gardens are now. A little later I asked the Mother if I could stay and when she said yes, I built my own hut where the MM Nursery is today. I lived there for 2 years, surviving, planting trees and learning about the villages."

In 1970 Janet went to Canada to raise funds for a well, returned in '72, and moved into the Centre Field house that had come free at the time, enlarging it throughout the years to accommodate her various activities. While also working at Matrimandir, in 1973/74 she cycled every day to Alankuppam and Pettai to show village women how to crochet. Just before her son Sukrit was born in 1975, she built a workshop next to her house so the women would come there to work. Her Joy Handicraft workshop (named Joy after the name that Mother had given to her original house) eventually focused more on knitting and continued until 1992. It was then turned into a backpacker guesthouse which catered as 'College guesthouse' to students from Living Routes and other international student groups. Janet ran this guesthouse until 2008. Later daughter L'aura would live in the place.

Meanwhile *"I became interested in Auroville's organization in the 80's and was on the "executive council". This was before the Auroville Foundation Act was ratified in 1988, so there was no Working Committee. Later the Working Committee replaced the executive council, and many of us felt that something was needed to look after internal affairs that did not concern the Auroville Foundation directly, and the Auroville Council eventually came into being. I was very active in organizational work at that time, and many different things were tried."*

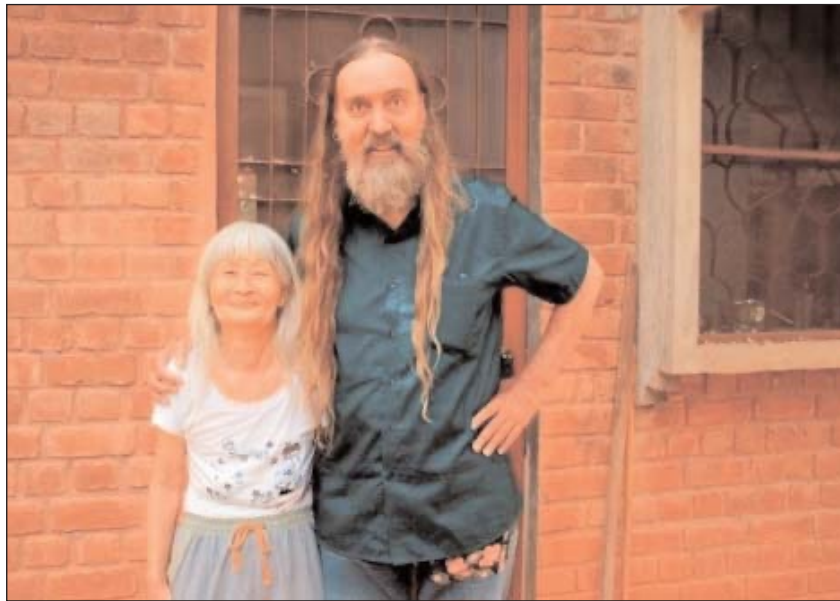
Since 2005 Janet was also a very active member of the Aikiyam School Support Group, enabling the school to considerably develop over the years and having great joy in seeing how school, teachers and children thrived in the happy environment. It was only when her health situation demanded it that she left the school.

Throughout the years Janet had become involved arbitration and conflict transformation, and wrote in 2017: *"Over the years my understanding of how we need to be organized has changed as I have observed the gap between Working Groups and the rest of the community. This gap does not seem to be related to who is on the groups. A certain mindset seems to take over when one feels entrusted with a lot of responsibility, which does not encourage the growth of collective intelligence or respect the potential of the community at large. I think we need a systemic change to a kind of organization where the distribution of power is more equal. . . . I believe that if Auroville wants to become more leading edge it must be organized with more shared power and have structures that encourage the growth of collective wisdom. I think Restorative Circles is one way of contributing to this change so it is where I intend to focus my energy for now."*

These last years, during her illness, Janet has been steadily working on her 'Memories of Auroville' 1968 - 1973', now posted online and to be published in hardcopy soon. Her always upbeat and defiant approach toward obstacles in life, refined style and innate anchoredness in the Mother, combined with her close relationship with both L'aura and Sukrit, helped her come through these last years with stubborn courage and grace.



Ananda



On August 26th, Ananda (Jean-François R.L. Bertaux) left his body at Marika House at the age of 68, after coping with Parkinson's disease for many years. The moment of transition had come quite unexpected, as Ananda had been moved two days earlier from Fraternity to Marika House and was looking forward to get in better shape and had plans for the future. His partner Michiko and caretaker Raji were with him at the time.

Born in Paris, Ananda discovered there the yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother in his early twenties. Before coming to Auroville, he stayed in Japan, where he learned Aikido, the Japanese language and teamed up with life partner Michiko, who helped him translate Satprem's book 'The Adventure of Consciousness' into Japanese, and made a very first start of establishing an Auroville centre in Tokyo. In 1982 the pair joined Auroville where he picked up on the work of black belter André Pithon who had taught Aikido in Aspiration in the early 70's. Now an authentic dojo emerged in Fraternity and under Ananda's guidance, skill and teaching Aikido entered Auroville for good. He also took over the remaining part of the 'Lotus Fraternity' unit, producing hammocks, Japanese lampshades and floor mats, while at the same time running a Girls' Boarding at the entrance of Fraternity (one of whose participants, Raji, was grateful to be by his side at the time of his passing). At the same time, Ananda started performing accounting services for various units, and since 2009 he functioned as internal auditor of Auroville commercial units and coordinator of the Auroville Board of Commerce.

Ananda was a linguist with an enormous feel for language; he would learn a language for the sheer fun of it. His and Michiko's weekly language sessions at Solar Kitchen's La Terrace, mostly in French but easily expanding into other tongues, were lively and fun and attracted quite a few participants. It was heartening to see this man, who had a friendly, gentle and unobtrusive way of being, growing into his full element, animatedly expressing him himself in various modes of linguistic expression.

REFLECTION

Different cultures?

In 1959, the physicist and novelist C.P. Snow gave a famous lecture in Cambridge in which he distinguished two cultures: the scientific and the intellectual literary cultures. His concern was that neither understood nor communicated with the other, and that this was to the great detriment of society as a whole.

In Auroville we like to put the emphasis upon unity rather than our differences. However, while this is the ideal, it shouldn't disguise the fact that, at present, we may have rather different 'cultures' – different ways of perceiving and experiencing the world – which make it difficult, at times, for them to understand and communicate with each other. There are, of course, the national cultures where differences of language, customs etc. can present communication challenges. But perhaps there are other 'cultures' which we don't recognize so readily, cultures which are defined by work experience as well as by the propensities of those who are drawn to these activities.

I wonder if, for example, those who work on the land and those who are office-based planners could be seen to constitute somewhat different cultures. And this may be why, almost from the beginning of Auroville, a certain tension has existed between these two groups.

Making any kind of generalization about Aurovillians is perilous, because there seem to be so many exceptions to the rule. However, here are some very tentative suggestions about some of the things that may distinguish these two 'cultures'.

Planners are conceptualists, mind-based, whereas land workers tend to be more experiential and body-based.

Planners are primarily shapers of an environment, which is viewed as manipulatable, while land workers are responsive to the needs of an existing environment.

Planners are future-oriented, while land workers tend to be focussed more on the grain of the present.

Planners focus on the needs of society as a whole, while land workers focus more upon the natural environment.

Clearly, these are very broad generalizations, and there are plenty of planners and land workers who span or don't fit neatly into these categories. But if the broad lines are correct, it may explain why it is difficult at times for each 'culture' to understand the other, and why they have different views about how and in what form the city should develop.

For example, one reason why many of our land workers favour 'organic' rather than planned, top-down development is that they are dealing on a daily basis with the ground realities of organic life here – water catchment, afforestation, soil protection etc. – and understand how close attention, even identification, with nature provides emerging indications of what needs to be done (or not done) that are naturally in tune with the planet. Wedded to the slow rhythms of nature, land workers also tend to be conservative when it comes to contemplating any kind of dramatic change.

Our planners, on the other hand, are more interested in forms which shape the landscape and society, and which call the future. This potentially (although this does not always happen in actuality) makes them more interested in experimentation, less tied to present ground realities and determinisms, and more eager to see quick results.

These differences can be seen, to a certain extent, as reflecting the mind/body dichotomy. The mind is more agile, adventurous, the body more grounded.

Clearly, each perspective has something important to learn from the other. If planners don't listen to land workers, there is a danger that their plans will devastate our environmental base. For, as John Le Carre pointed out, "a desk is a dangerous place from which to view the world". If environmentalists don't listen to planners, there's a danger that certain ideals Auroville aspires for – like the manifestation of new material forms to support new forms of consciousness and social behaviour – will be neglected.

In fact, the need for each culture to understand and work with the other was understood earlier. In the 1980s, the Auroville Resource Centre brought together architect/planners and environmentalists to work on plans for the developing township which would integrate these different perspectives. Unfortunately, after a few years of harmonious work, the experiment was discontinued.

But before its demise, the environmentalists and planners agreed upon a vision which is a model of collaboration and integrity:

We agree with and appreciate the salient features of the original concept of the city like the four zones surrounding the MM, the inner ring road, the crown, the need to build dense and the general spirit of unity in diversity as expressed in this concept.

Our approach is holistic: we are working on the harmonious interpretation of a developing urban process in this environment (human and natural). We aim at using consciously and judiciously

the resources put at our disposal so that AV – the city the earth needs – may become an example for India and the world, as we are very concerned by the devastation of the environment that is linked to the overexploitation of the world resources, due to modern patterns of development.

Our task is to help the community – now a living being – to grow and experiment. Like other types of organization (town planning is the spatial organization of the town), it has to provide a frame for our development but remain flexible. The unity and harmony of the city of the future we do not see so much as a finished product of designers but in the diverse living and working process of a growing community longing for it in all aspects of life.

It would be wrong to reduce the present controversy over the Crown Road to merely being a clash between these two cultures. For it also involves Aurovillians who are neither planners nor land workers, who differ, for example, in how they view the symbolism and sacredness of form, or how Mother's words are to be interpreted. However, as the controversy also threatens to harden the line between planners and land workers, it makes it all the more urgent that each of these orientations tries harder to understand, as well as appreciate, the other.

More profoundly, it points to the urgent need for each of us to try to transcend the influence of the internal and external factors which divide and shape us into different cultures. How? Mother gave the clue. By making the 'inner discovery' of who we truly are, "behind social, moral, cultural, racial and hereditary appearances".

Alan

About Auroville Today

Auroville Today is an activity of the Kattidakalai Trust of the Auroville Foundation. The GST number is 33AATA0037BXZV

Contact: Auroville Today, Surrender, Auroville 605101, Tamil Nadu, India. ne: +91.413.2622572. Email: avtoday@auroville.org.in.

Subscription information

Subscription rates for 12 issues :
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Alan, Carel, Lesley, Peter. Contributor: Archana. Divya. Proofreading: Alan. DTP: Carel. Photo editing: Jean-Denis. Published by Carel Thieme on behalf of the Auroville Foundation. Printed by the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press, Pondicherry, and published at Surrender, Auroville 605101, Tamil Nadu.

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