

Proposed National Highway threatens Auroville

Survey markings in the Greenbelt installed by a consultant working for the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) revealed that plans were afoot to build a four-lane National Highway through the Auroville Green Belt for a length of 3.5 kilometres, crossing the Forecomers, Pitchandikulam and Aurogreen areas. The NHAI has now agreed to move the highway slightly to the east of the Master Plan area.

The two-lane congested road from Villupuram to Nagapattinam via Puducherry, Cuddalore, Chidambaram, Sirkazhi and Karaikal will be widened into a four-lane highway by the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI). All towns and cities along this highway will be bypassed, Pondicherry included.

The projected new highway near Auroville aims to connect the Pondicherry bypass to Marakkanam, north of Auroville, where it will join the East Coast Road to Chennai. The new highway will bypass all the villages on the East Coast Road between Pondicherry and Marakkanam.

Once these highways have been made, they will not only carry the Nagapattinam – Chennai traffic but also traffic from the congested Tiruchirappalli – Villupuram – Chennai highway, which has the highest number of traffic accidents in the country. Part of that traffic will be diverted via the Villupuram – Pondicherry – Chennai highway that runs near Auroville.

The new highway will also serve as an artery for an ambitious programme of industrialization. The government aims to turn the port of Nagapattinam into a deep water port, and to make a petrochemical hub in the districts of Nagapattinam and Cuddalore. There are also plans to make an industrial hub in the Marakkanam area. The highway near Auroville, then, will become a busy freight corridor between these industrial estates and other places in Tamil Nadu. It may reasonably be expected that in future, the four-lane will need to be widened to six.

The Auroville response

The work of the consultants, who were doing their work without prior intimation to the Auroville Foundation (allowed under the NHAI Act) was discovered on May 17th when markers appeared in the Greenbelt. A member of the Working Committee managed to get an appointment with the Project Director of the NHAI in Chennai a few days later and expressed the concerns of Auroville. The Director, who initially was not familiar with the area and the Master Plan of Auroville, later agreed to instruct the consultants to move the alignment slightly away from the Master Plan.

A few days later, the consultants joined a meeting in Auroville in which alternative highway solutions to the west and north of Auroville were proposed. They replied that they had been hired to mark out the stretch of the Pondicherry bypass that would cross Auroville, and had not been given instructions to seek alternatives. Moreover, they argued, it would be technically difficult to shift the road west and northwards.

The Secretary of the Auroville Foundation wrote to the



Map showing the new highway through the Auroville Greenbelt (in blue dots) as originally routed and the four bypasses proposed by Auroville: along National Highway 66, and then reaching the East Coast Road along an existing road (in pink) or through fields (dotted green); or along the proposed new railways (brown / light green).

Chairman of the NHAI in Delhi on June 4th expressing concern that the road programme would compromise the future of Auroville, which is protected by an Act of the Parliament. He requested that the integrity of the Master Plan area and also of the surrounding zone be preserved, especially in the south-eastern direction and towards the coast, which has a very fragile ecosystem. The Working Committee brought the matter to the attention of the Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation.

In the beginning of June, a delegation of Aurovilians discussed the matter with the Union Transport Minister, Mr. Nitin Gadkari, in New Delhi. The Minister agreed that the Auroville Master Plan area should not be affected. But Auroville's alternative proposals to route the highway to the west and north of Auroville were not entertained. The Minister's staff observed that those alternatives would lengthen the highway by another 20 kilometres and would not address NHAI's concerns of traffic congestion. They agreed to adjust the routing by 200 metres in such a way that the highway would go outside the Master Plan area, except if required from a technical perspective; in such a case the highway would encroach a little on the Master Plan. But Auroville areas located outside the Master Plan, such as the Forecomers – Ravena area, and communities nearby Kuilapalayam village, such as Arya and New Creation Field, might be affected by the proposed highway.

Community discussion

In a general information meeting on July 12th, the Working Committee informed the community about the proposed highway and the discussions in New Delhi. As was expected, the community was not satisfied with the concession of the Minister. For Auroville is not only the Master Plan area but extends to include many areas beyond the Master Plan located around Kuilapalayam village, such as Auromodèle, Aspiration, Fraternity, Douceur, Petite Ferme, Arya and New Creation. This "outer city" is as vital to Auroville as the "inner city" defined by the Master Plan. The proposed highway, even if built outside the "inner city", would cross the road between Pitchandikulam bridge and Kuilapalayam and so become a massive divider of Auroville. That was considered unacceptable, even if the NHAI would build an underpass.

In subsequent discussions and postings, residents pointed out that the highway would have an heavy impact on the villages of Bommayarpalayam and Kuilapalayam, destroy their social fabric, and bring unregulated urbanization.

Comparisons were made with the "100-foot road" in Pondicherry, a bypass where agricultural lands were turned into

commercial and residential areas in just a few years. Moreover, the highway would become a safety hazard for the large number of schools and sports grounds located nearby, giving rise to the prediction that "a large number of traffic accidents are just waiting to happen."

"India since ancient times has nurtured sanctuaries for human development," argued another resident. "These sanctuaries have been located away from urban sprawls in order to provide a safe space for human development. Auroville is one such sanctuary in modern times. A highway near a fast-growing town like Pondicherry will soon become the lifeline of a new town, causing haphazard growth of residences and shops along the road, and bringing tens of thousands of people, who will also want to visit nearby Auroville."

Steps ahead

While the consultants are surveying a route outside the Master Plan area, an Auroville task force has been created to design a strategy to convince the authorities to change the routing of the proposed highway.

A paper outlining the consequences of the proposed highway for the future development of Auroville and the villages is being prepared. It specifies, amongst other things, the safety and security issues – especially with the transport of hazardous industrial products – the impact of sound and vibration, the damage to forests and fauna, the social impact due to the increase of population, and the consequences on the already overstretched aquifer.

The paper will also detail the alternatives and the advantages of the alternative routings proposed by Auroville. Two options have meanwhile been studied: the route along the Keezupudupettai – Kiluperrumbakkam Road connecting the East Coast Road and the Tindivanam– Pondicherry Highway [the route marked in pink on the map] and the route along the proposed new railway. They are both three to four kilometers longer than the NHAI proposed route. However, this disadvantage is more than compensated for by the fact that land acquisition will certainly be less difficult.

The plans to route the highway to the west and north of Auroville also gain credence as the Railways Authorities a few years ago agreed to realign the proposed new railway from Pondicherry to Mamallapuram to the west and north of the Auroville Master Plan area and so connect to Pondicherry's northern industrial zone at Sedarapet.

The new highway could be routed next to the proposed railway line and so also benefit the Industrial zone at Sedarapet.

continued on page 2



With the upgrading of the Villupuram-Pondicherry highway, traffic from Tiruchirappalli (Trichy) can now reach Chennai via the highway near Auroville

Proposed National Highway threatens Auroville

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This would create a minimum of environmental and social problems.

The response from affected villagers

At the end of May, the NHAI called a meeting of all landowners who would be affected by the new highway and discussed with them the proposed acquisition of their lands. Many villagers voiced their disagreement with the project. On July 22nd, the headmen of Bommayarpalayam and Kulapalayam villages visited the Working Committee and expressed their unhappiness that "Auroville had moved the routing outside the Master Plan area," which now affected their lands. They were informed that the change of routing outside the Master Plan was a concession of the Highway Minister, and that Auroville had asked to reroute the high-

way to the west and north of Auroville.

"Auroville," it was explained, "is equally unhappy with the routing that is now being marked." The headmen then expressed that they too will object to the highway going in-between Kulapalayam and Auroville. A signature campaign of the villagers requesting the NHAI to realign the proposed highway in such a way that the Auroville plateau and coastal area is avoided will be started.

Who to approach

A major part of the strategy will be to request the Prime Minister of India, the hon'ble Sri Narendra Modi, who during his visit to Auroville in February this year spoke so highly and movingly of Auroville as "a beacon for the future", to reroute the highway. The fact that the Government of India has recognized that the ideals of Auroville are part of India's highest

aspirations and that the project of Auroville is in the national interest of India and serves the public interest, may be of relevance.

Other measures being contemplated are objecting to giving environmental clearance for the highway and finding legal grounds to fight the proposed routing and going to court.

An uncertain future

With the rapid growth of Pondicherry and its suburbs towards Auroville, and the Pondicherry airport finally getting up steam and waiting to extend its runway for larger planes, Auroville needs to rethink its Master Plan, regardless whether the authorities will agree to re-route the highway to the west and north of Auroville. The "outer city" needs to become part of the Master Plan and Auroville needs to design appropriate mobility plans which not only cover the "inner city", but also the access into Auroville.

If Auroville's and the villages' objections are overruled and the highway between Kulapalayam and Auroville manifests, Auroville should give thought to the area between the new highway and Auroville. This area would need to be designated as a special development zone in tune with Auroville's values and practices or, if possible, be acquired by Auroville, as random developments along the highway would have too great an impact on Auroville. To take immediate steps, the community will need to take a decision on applying for a New Town Development Authority [see *Auroville Today* #347-348 of June-July 2018], as only such an Authority can lay down restrictions on the land usage by private individuals along the highway.

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NEW BOOKS

Chronicling Auroville

The compilation *Chronicling Auroville: A selection of articles from Auroville Today 2006 – 2018* has just been published. 189 articles cover 19 different aspects, including history, environment, town planning, economy, the arts, humour, people, outreach and Auroville and the world. Here is a brief selection.

Fertile Memories

I remember so well: it was 1st April 1973 when my little daughter Aurojina and I finally arrived in 'Fertile' – to stay. Having sent our belongings ahead by bullock cart, we made the journey from Pondicherry by cycle. It was a cool morning for April, and as I was fuelled by a sense of new beginnings, the journey was memorable. Jina travelled in a wicker seat on the front of the cycle, and we brought with us a little black kitten that rode calmly in its basket at the rear.

We were representing America, France and Australia, and I felt a loving appreciation of all these individuals who had mysteriously come together in this odd outpost on this desert plateau.

In those days there was the wide peripheral sweep of the horizon: the sun rose, shone down relentlessly and set, and the moon was obvious in all its phases.

The children at this time were stimulated by simple things and satisfied with their interaction with nature. We would spend an hour or so watching the major tragedies of a mynah bird couple, or invading snake, the inquisitive monkey, the mongoose's journey up the palmyra for an attempt on their eggs.

September 2009

The Water challenge

Giulio: We need to put all our energies into finding ways of providing enough water for people's needs. At the same time, we have to start a campaign to change people's attitudes to water in the larger bioregion. The combination of these gives you a water management system. If we do not go for both of these things the system will fail, that is for sure.

Tom: What is important now is helping people open their minds so that they understand the present situation. If we come with our models and try to impose them, this will not work. But it is also clear that we have a limited amount of water here and we cannot go on wasting it. This is why we must invest in the bioregion in terms of education, projects, and helping people use water in a conscious way.

Auroville Today: You are talking about changing mindsets.

Giulio: Exactly, this is the most important thing. They must not feel that you are talking down to them, but that we are all in this together; that it is not 'us' and 'them'. And it shouldn't be forgotten that Aurovilians also have a lot to learn in this respect.

June – July 2015

B.V.Doshi. What happened to AV's spirit?

When I came here first in the early 1970s, I was completely bowled over by the kind of architectural experimentation that was happening. Here were houses with thatched roofs, houses built half into the ground and with arches made out of bricks and ferrocement. At that time Indian architects were asking themselves how to make do with the minimum of resources yet develop something else, like the long-term overall sustainability one sees in nature, bio-diverse yet harmonious. When I looked at Auroville then, I thought it was probably the most important architectural pioneering work happening in India.

Some years later I came again and met Roger. I saw some of his buildings. Those buildings told me about the adventure of the spirit. Later I went to Roger's office and it was full of models and drawings, just like Le Corbusier's Chandigarh office. It really felt like a new world was emerging.

Sept 2009

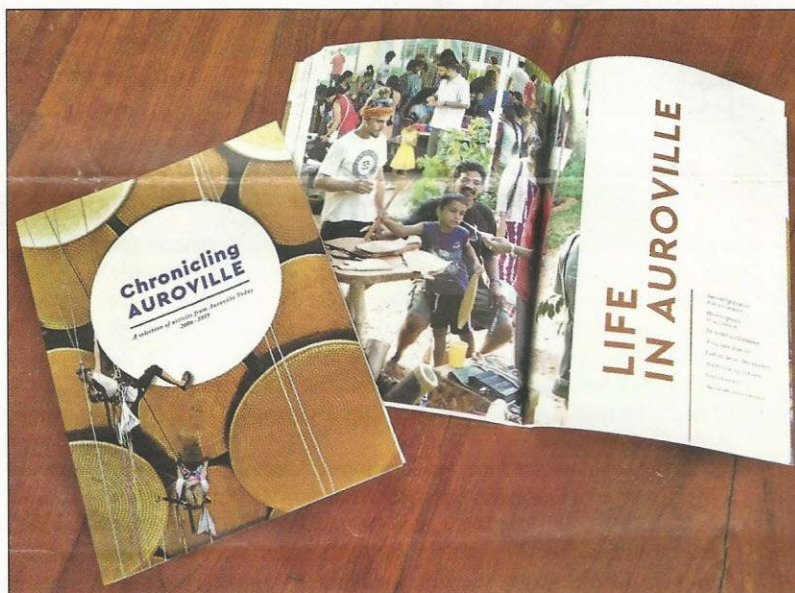
Building Community: the Vérité experience

Bhavana: I see community happening on different levels. There is the material level, where it is ecological to live in community because it's a better use of resources. On the emotional level, it's a social unit of a manageable size which provides the possibility for healthy social interaction. On the mental level it's a

tool of *sadhana*, for learning how to live in close community can be very helpful in moving you out of the prison of your mind and ego into another consciousness.

Aurelio: I think the function of community is to bring us from the individual level to the next level of consciousness. Ultimately, the urge to live in community is a preparation for global consciousness. Community can be an amazing tool of spiritual progress because it brings up all the different realities and unknown parts of yourself and you have to deal with them.

December 2005



I love Auroville....

I love Auroville because it's my home. I love Auroville because of the freedom I have, because of the beautiful nature I am surrounded with every day, because of all the cultures and variety of people I am constantly exposed to, because of the wonderful school I go to, and all my amazing friends I have met here. I love the fact that we are like a community, and usually I feel very safe moving around, and everywhere I go, every time I drive or cycle around, I always end up passing people I know. I love the fact that in Auroville we like weird and try not to be caught up in the norms of society.

November 2014

Auroville's spirituality

"I often compare the education system of Auroville with that of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram," says Ashesh. "At the Ashram there is emphasis on the direct study of the works of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, and from childhood a psychic attitude is being cultivated towards the masters. But compared to Auroville, the richness, the wide embrace of life, is lacking. In future, the systems may incorporate parts of each other. I do hope that in Auroville their works will become part of the curriculum. For that brings a different dimension to individual and collective life. If people study more, they can contribute so much more to the future."

August and September 2016

The Changing face of Upasana March 2009

"Money," says Uma, "had been an issue in Upasana for a long time. One day, I complained to The Mother that it was not worthwhile to run a business for the sole purpose of making money to survive or to help Auroville grow. We were looking for something else."

The answer came when the Upasana team started to contemplate what to do with all the Tsunamikas. Did they have a commercial value? Should they have a commercial value? "The decision to distribute Tsunamika free came in an inspired moment," says Uma. "I had given the doll to a customer, telling her that her name was Tsunamika, and that it was made by the survivors of the tsunami. The

lady held it to her heart, and I saw that she was crying, saying that it was so beautiful. I shared it with Manoj, my partner. He suggested that it should be given for free, but that we would suggest to the recipients that they could make a donation if they felt like. It was a very intense moment. The gift economy was born."

March 2009

The Love of Life through clay

"For me the day starts with an unknown – I have no idea what I want to create. When an inspiration comes, I follow its thread. I try to pick up and flow with the energy. Sometimes I feel I am hollow and the wind is blowing through me. I may just create one piece based on that inspiration, and nothing more may come. But that is enough. I don't judge what I make. On the contrary, I feel I am falling in love with each piece as I am making it. Each work opens for me a little 'window into the universe'."

November 2014

A big mirror facing you all the time

There is something very deep that unites us. We are all a part of a big family that is spread all over the planet. Little by little, each one of us is coming back to being together and it is the soul in us that is bringing us here. But our surface personalities are so impossible. We find it very difficult to act collectively. Our highest ideal is human unity, and our biggest challenge is human disunity.

June-July 2012

Vikram's Journey

I remember one day in AV I had no money for food and no belongings: all my things had been washed away in the cyclone that destroyed the house where I had been staying in Quiet. And I thought, "Man, what a relief. Mother has given me this perfect liberation."

One day, my friend, Jyothi, who works in Nandanam kindergarten, asked me to come dressed as Santa Claus for the kids at Christmas. I thought, "Really, a black Santa Claus?" But I went and spent some time with the kids. Then she asked me to join them as a kindergarten teacher. I told her, she must be kidding. "I'm big, I'm heavily tattooed, the kids are going to be terrified of me!" But I dived into that thing and it changed my life forever. Mother gave me the exact work that I needed at that time. A tenderness came into me. My hands became looser, my soul became looser, my spirit gave up this big urge to search for things and it settled down into helping these new beings.

December 2016

The Prime Minister visits Auroville

"The world has received positive vibrations from Auroville, in many forms, over the years. Be it unending education, environment regeneration, renewable energy, organic agriculture, appropriate building technologies, water management, or waste management, Auroville has been a pioneer. May Auroville continue to come up with ideas to empower the ordinary citizens of this country. May people from far and wide bring with them new ideas. May Auroville become the centre where these ideas are synthesized. May Auroville serve as a beacon to the world. May it be the guardian which calls for breaking down narrow walls of the mind. May it continue to invite everyone to celebrate the possibilities of humanity's oneness. May the spirit of Maharishi Aurobindo and the Divine Mother, continue to guide Auroville to the eventual fulfillment of its lofty founding vision."

March 2018

Chronicling Auroville, published by Auroville Today, 290 pages. Price in India Rs.1025, abroad US \$ 27 or € 23. The price includes shipping. Available from avtoday@auroville.org.in, auroville.com, most Auroville International Centres, namaste.nl in The Netherlands and www.pondi.biz in the USA and at the Auroville bookshops.

What about waste in the Auroville area?

The garbage heaps on the fields and along the roads leading into Auroville are increasing. What's being done about it?

In 2014, the newly elected government of Shri Narendra Modi made a call to clean the country and initiated the "Swachh Bharat" ["Clean India" in Hindi] programme. The move was welcomed by all, as all over the country the mountains of garbage are becoming unmanageable. New Delhi itself is repeatedly engulfed by toxic smoke from spontaneous burning landfills surrounding the city, and so are other cities and towns in India. For some years, Auroville too experienced pollution from the Pondicherry landfill [see *AVToday* # 273 March 2012], a problem that was only resolved when the landfill was closed.

These days, it is garbage along the roads and on the fields which threatens the villagers' and our well-being. In the early days, waste was essentially organic and non toxic and could be used in many constructive ways. Today, garbage contains materials such as plastics and aluminium which are potentially toxic,

polluting and, when incinerated, harmful to health.

A bit of history

The City of the Future cannot be clean and healthy without evolving clean and healthy surroundings. A polluted bioregion will affect the villagers' and Auroville's water, air and soil qualities.

Over the past 30 years, various attempts have been made to introduce solid waste management systems in the villages, but they were not sustainable. Five years ago, the Bommayarpalayam village Panchayat and the Regional Planning Department of Auroville's Town Development Council (TDC) attempted to jointly develop a Solid Waste Management programme for the surrounding villages. Financed by the Panchayat, a three-month pilot project of a house-to-house collection system was started in Kuilapalayam. The TDC Regional Planning provided technical support. Simultaneously, village cleanups were organized regularly.

Out of this KUILAI CLEAN Service was born. On a daily basis, waste collection and segregation are happening. For a monthly fee, the waste of all the shops, restaurants, and banks along the main streets is collected. The income from the sale of recyclables and the fee collected makes the unit financially viable.

However, a problem developed with the non-recyclables as there is no land available for a landfill site. KUILAI CLEAN is collaborating with the local administration to solve this. But a site which had been identified earlier, and where a beginning of a landfill was made, was closed when it was discovered that the landfill leakage could contaminate a nearby well. The dumped garbage was removed, and is now temporarily parked on Auroville land (without permission). A new site is yet to be identified.



Waste dumped in the field behind the temple in Kuilapalayam

To effectively introduce solid waste management for the villages, a new direction is necessary. Auroville's Waste Without Borders, a project of Palmyra, is taking the lead. It has formulated an integrated solid waste management plan for the bioregion, an ambitious programme to manifest a centralized regional waste collection system for all the surrounding villages.

A state-of-the-art solid waste management facility is planned in the neighbourhood of Edayanchavadi. Waste will be collected from house to house by waste collectors and transported to this facility, where it will be segregated,

recycled, sold or land-filled. At the same time, the project aims at introducing innovative solutions to reduce waste and spread awareness about composting, recycling and upcycling. The facility aims to become a self-supporting and sustainable enterprise and a model for other places in India.

The project is in line with the recommendations of India's National Green Tribunal, which in 2015 recommended the setting up of centralized regional waste collection facilities instead of small scale individual systems. However, such centralized facilities require a proper site, a waste processing plant and disposal facilities for non-recyclables.

The project is now under consideration by the local administration and has been introduced to the village Panchayat secretaries and the Women's Federation leaders. All have expressed great interest. The local administration has been requested to make a large plot of land available, and efforts have started to raise the Rs 1.3 crores (US \$ 190,000) required for building the facilities and the Rs 27 lakhs (US \$ 40,000) running expenses of its first year.

*The Waste without Borders team,
Balamurugan, Gillian, Juergen, Laure, Loes.*

For more information contact
palmyra@auroville.org.in

Waste control recommendations for Auroville residents

1. Two youth groups, *AV Cleanup* and *Let's talk trash* are organizing cleanups every Sunday morning. Please join.
2. The Kuilai creative centre has started producing bags from old clothes. Buy these bags for waste-free shopping.
3. Reduce or go zero waste. Be the change you want to see.
4. Join Laure's zero waste community on Facebook, "Going zero waste - Auroville and around" to learn and share about Zero Waste.

Waste dumped along the Djaima-Kuilapalayam road

COMMUNICATION

Presenting a different story

The way we present Auroville through films and exhibitions is overwhelmingly positive. Little or no attention is paid to the challenges, dissonances, even contradictions that we encounter every day here.

Contradictions like a community which made its name with its environmental work having so many fossil-fuelled vehicles; large sums in the bank but a struggling service sector; human unity as an ideal but inequality between the haves and have-nots; beauty in matter as an aspiration but very ordinary institutional architecture.

There are no simple explanations for these, certainly nothing that would fit neatly on a 6x4 exhibition board. And it's understandable that we would want to highlight our undeniable achievements. But there is another story to tell, and one which, if the right context is provided, may give people a much better appreciation of what is happening here.

So what kind of context does one need in order to better understand the confusing aspects of the present Auroville? Here are some suggestions.

Firstly, of course, Auroville is a place for experimentation and, like most experiments conducted in the real world rather than sterile laboratories, the outcomes can be messy, erratic, confused.

Secondly, the people are not trained researchers or yogis but a

cross-section of humanity: hot-blooded, cantankerous, generous, dogmatic, idealistic, selfish, etc. And within each of them, at some level, a conflict rages between an aspiration for a new life and the pull of the old world, between altruism and selfishness.

Thirdly, many if not most Aurovilians are strung-out, operating at the very limit of their energy reserves due to the climate, inner contradictions, lack of an adequate support structure, the need to make money to be able to stay in Auroville, etc. As a consequence, personal short-term interests often trump what is best for the larger community.

Fourthly, the Auroville 'energy year' runs roughly from August to March. During the summer, many key groups are eviscerated as their members seek refreshment in cooler climes. Promising initiatives sometimes disappear without trace into this black hole, or have to be resurrected with considerable difficulty later in the year.

Fifthly, we have no embodied source of wisdom, or one that is accepted by all of us. Rather, for guidance we have to rely upon Mother's words. However, we all refract these according to our predispositions.

Consequently, since there is no common agreement on which line we are to follow regarding decision-making, the economy, town planning, etc., the result is fragmentation and multiple contradictions. Our governance system is a bewildering mix of meritocracy, democracy and oligarchy; our town planning veers between dogmatism and pragmatism; and our economy is a patchwork of gift, command and market economies.

Finally, there is the meta-context, which is that Auroville is an experiment in consciousness development, both for individuals and the collective. The way this works is that pressure is put upon all of us to develop as fast as possible towards realizing our true Self. This involves, among other things, surfacing all the darker and less evolved aspects of ourselves for us to work upon them so that they can be eliminated or transformed. But as each one of us is an individual, with individual 'baggage' and a different back-story, what manifests as a result of this pressure differs widely from individual to individual. In one person, the fastest route to the Self may be through exploring the darkest recesses of the being or addiction, in another it may manifest as asceticism, in another

as an arrogant grasping after power, in another as high-minded idealism.

The meta-context also helps explain why there are so many apparent contradictions and counter-movements in the present Auroville: everything is still in process, the pieces have not yet fallen into place. Yet, from the Supreme's perspective, perhaps things couldn't be better arranged for individual and collective growth.

It is the best of all worlds... It is also the worst of all worlds. Because somehow, in the midst of all this turmoil, we have to function, do shopping, mend the bike, make decisions, initiate projects, draw up five-year plans. Many of the latter will fail, not just because of our individual frailties, but also because we couldn't grasp the larger picture, or we were not receiving guidance from our psychic being, or it wouldn't have been good for our or other's spiritual progress if we had succeeded.

This is why efforts to control this turmoil using conventional methods like rules and regulations will not succeed. They are simply not suited to the complex task of consciousness development. We may need holding structures to contain the pressure, but these can only be temporary expedients. The

only way for fragmentation to be lessened and genuine harmony to increase is for more and more of us to tune into something larger than our individual egos and to contact our truer Selves. Only then will our every action, down to the minutest detail, acquire the inevitability of truth.

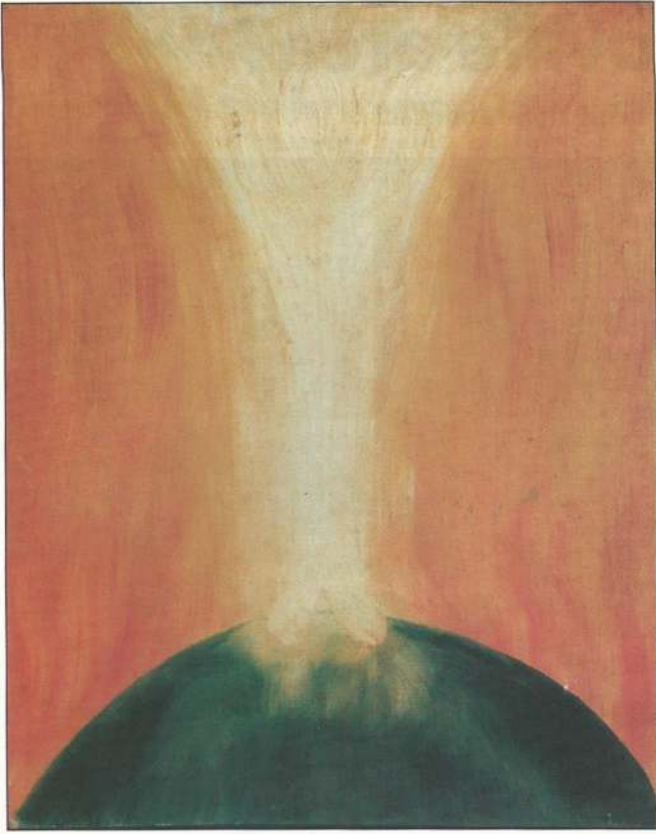
Bottom line, then: for some considerable time Auroville, in many respects, will continue to be messy, chaotic. But seen from the context of overall consciousness-raising, the chaos may be a necessary one.

Isn't this a story that is worth telling? Auroville has real achievements in many areas. But isn't it time we stopped just polishing our image when we present Auroville to the world and try to be upfront about the contradictions and turmoils that are part of our daily life here?

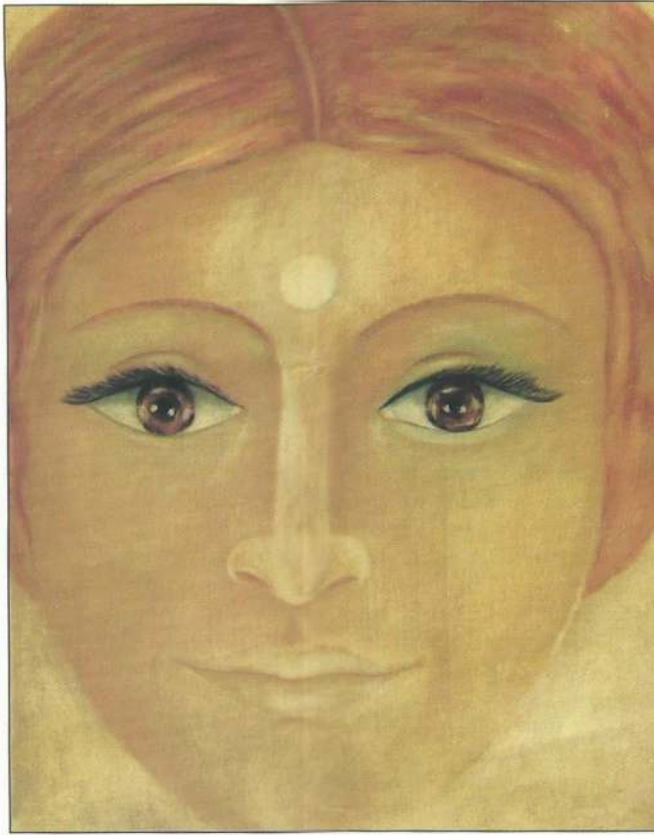
After all, in the modern world where every visitor with a cell phone has the capacity to be an investigative reporter, little can be hidden.

Risky? Perhaps. But we would probably be surprised how much fresh energy such a new perspective would attract from a world surfeited with advertising, fake news and immediate gratification.

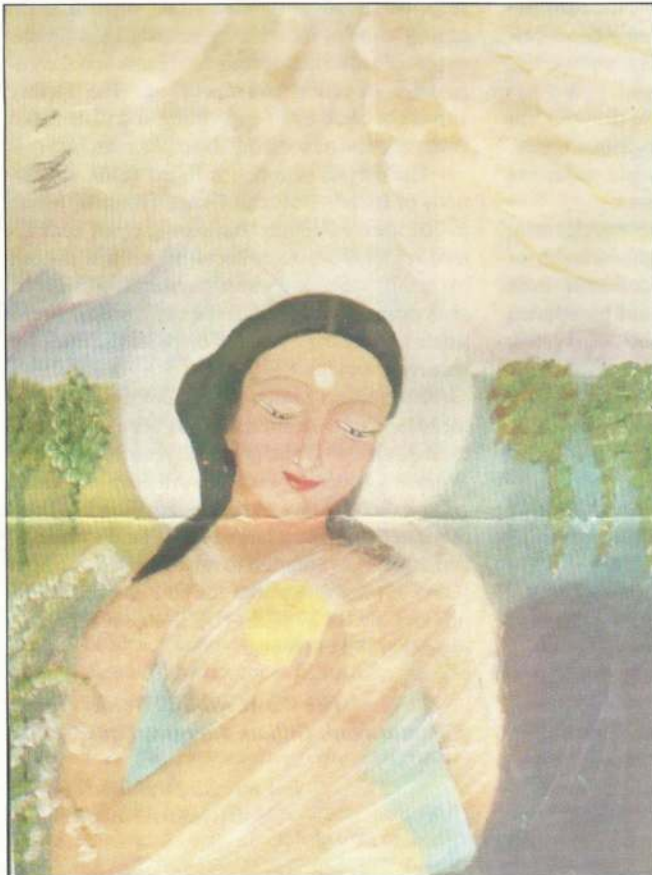
Alan



The Descent of the Divine Mother, 1961. The first painting of the *Meditations on Savitri* series.



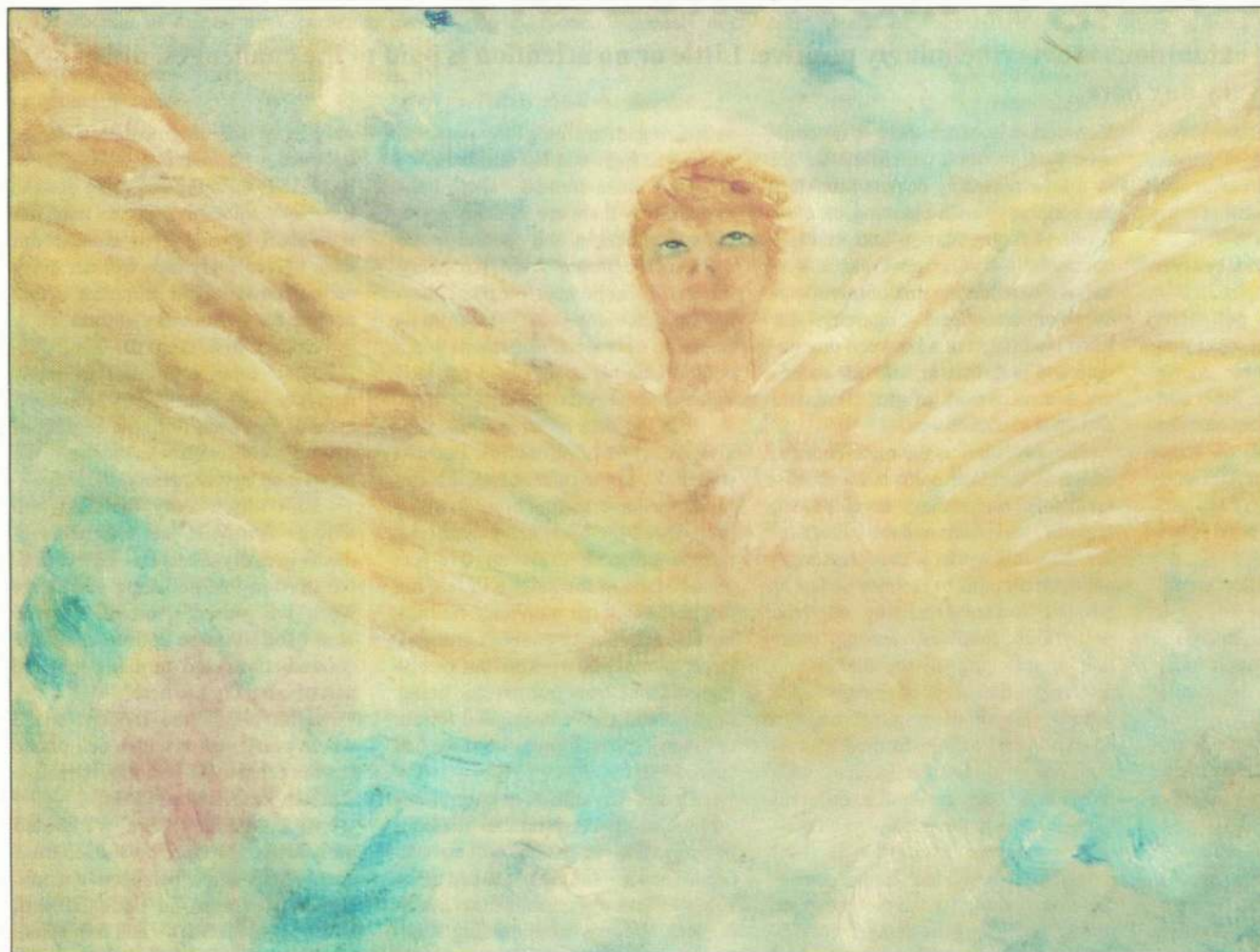
Here is 'Savitri' (1967)



'And Savitri too awoke among these tribes' (First version 1961)



'And Savitri too awoke among these tribes' (Second version 1966)



An illustration of Sri Aurobindo's poem, 'The Bird of Fire' (1967)

Huta is t

On June 21, 2018, Shri M.V. Chunkath, Secretary, Picture Gallery at Savitri Bhavan, which will perform on Savitri' by Huta. This inauguration marked the opening of the Bhavan complex, and the provision of a permanent

'M'editations on Savitri' is the title given by the Mother to a series of 472 oil paintings created from 1961 to 1966 by a young student-disciple whom she named 'Huta' (*The Offered One*), illustrating selected passages from Sri Aurobindo's epic *Savitri – A Legend and a Symbol*.

In her work with Huta, the Mother was aiming for a new kind of painting. She told her student, "We are going towards a painting that will be able to express the supramental truth of things", and said

"You must try to do the Future Painting in the New Light. There is a reason why I ask you to paint mostly on a white background. It is an attempt to express the Divine Light without shadow in the Future Painting. Do not try to adopt the technique either of modern art or of old classical art. But always try to express the true inner vision of your soul. ... You must have the psychic touch to see and feel the vibrations, the sensations and the essence of the Truth in everything and that Truth is to be expressed in the Future Painting."

The Mother has described how the paintings were made, as follows:

"Savitri, this prophetic vision of the world's history, including the announcement of the earth's future. – Who can ever dare to put it in pictures? Yet, the Mother and Huta have tried it, this way. We simply meditate together on the lines chosen, and when the image becomes clear, I describe it with the help of a few strokes, then Huta goes to her studio and brushes the painting. It is in a meditative mood that these "meditations" must be looked at, to find the feeling they contain behind their appearance."

From 1956 onwards she trained Huta in careful work and infused consciousness into her hands, as well as teaching her oil painting and other techniques. The first painting of the Savitri series was made on October 6, 1961, when the Mother had called Huta to start the new work. After a deep concentration she asked:

"Child, have you thought of painting the jacket of the book which will be published after we have finished some paintings of Savitri?"

After another long concentration she took pencil and paper and drew a sketch, saying:

"Show the descent of the Supreme Mother: a flash of white Light forming the feet which rest on the globe of the earth. Don't forget to paint the outline of a lotus, which must be mingled with the white Light."

In this way the work went on until the end of 1965. When 23 paintings illustrating passages from the first Canto had been done, the Mother arranged for them to be published in a handsome book in 1962. Similar books were published in 1963 covering Cantos 2 and 3, in 1964 Canto 4, and in 1965 Canto 5.

By that time the entire series had been completed. The Mother saw the last paintings of *Book Twelve – Epilogue* on September 1st, 1965 – Huta's birthday. She then announced her intention of exhibiting the entire series in the Ashram Exhibition Hall in February 1967, and asked Huta to bring her all the paintings again in small batches, so that she could see them one by one. Over the following months she asked Huta to retouch or repaint many of the paintings until she was satisfied with them all. The exhibition was held from February 10 – 26 1967. At the last minute Huta painted a second big portrait of Savitri with blue eyes. The Mother asked for that to be kept in the last room, matching the big portrait with golden eyes which appeared at the beginning. A few of the Mother's sketches were also displayed.

After the exhibition was over, the paintings and sketches were all taken to Golconde, where they were stored in two rooms. They remained there until January 1999. When Huta had to move from the apartment which the Mother had arranged for her in 'Huta House', all the paintings and sketches and her own writings were moved to her new flat in Ambabikshu Gardens. But the conditions there were far from suitable. When Huta came to know that the foundation stone for Savitri Bhavan had been laid by Nirodbaran on the afternoon of November 24 1995 – the same day and time of the Registration of the Havyavahana Trust, created by her as custodian of all her work – she approached us to ask whether the pictures could be accommodated there. Naturally, we agreed. Savitri Bhavan was created with the dream of accommodating all kinds of materials and activities which would assist understanding and appreciation of Sri Aurobindo's epic, but the founder members had never dared to dream that Huta's paintings would come there. At best, it was hoped that perhaps she might lend a few for temporary display. But Huta told us that after the exhibition, when everything was taken to Golconde, she had said to the Mother, "One day Savitri must have her own home." After a concentration, the Mother answered, "It will be." Huta felt sure that Savitri Bhavan would provide the 'own home' for Savitri which had been promised. In 2001, with the agreement of the Ashram Trustees, all the paintings were moved to Savitri Bhavan, where they have been stored in the special cupboards designed for them by the Mother. From time to time some of them were exhibited, first in the Square Hall, and after 2008 in the original Picture Gallery; but there only about 120 pictures could be shown at a time – about a quarter of the total series. It is only now, with the opening of the new expanded Gallery, that the entire series can be kept on permanent display according to the wish of Huta and the Mother.

the Painter

of the Auroville Foundation, opened the newly enlarged
nently display the entire series of paintings 'Meditations
fulfilment of two dreams: the completion of the Savitri
home for this unique series of paintings.

Meanwhile there were many other developments. In May 1965, the Mother had started reading the Savitri passages corresponding to the paintings. Huta recorded her readings. These recordings were passed to Sunil Bhattacharya, the Mother's musician, who composed music for almost of all of them up to the middle of Book Ten before he passed away without being able to complete the work. These recorded passages with his music were, and still are, played regularly in the Ashram Playground during meditations.



Huta

Already in 1971 Narad, (Richard Eggenberger) had photographed all the paintings. These were shown in a series of slide-shows in the Ashram Playground and in Auroville in 1972 as part of Sri Aurobindo's Centenary celebrations, accompanied by short recordings of the Mother's organ music, as Sunil-da's compositions were considered too long for the purpose. Also in 1971, Michel Klostermann of Filmaur was given permission by the Mother to make films of the entire series, with her organ music as accompaniment. Much later Huta became aware that Michel was violating her copyright and misusing her materials for his own purposes. She began urging the Savitri Bhavan team to create a new set of films.

This dream began to be realised with the arrival in Auroville of Manohar Fedele and Giorgio Molinari. They set up a photography studio in the tiny room where the paintings were stored, and managed to photograph them all within about three weeks. Manohar then started to turn the images into videos with the Mother's recorded readings and organ music as the soundtrack. When working on the images, he noticed that some of them were shadowed by dark stains. He suggested that expert conservators should be consulted about the care of the paintings. With Huta's agreement he put us in touch with experts from Italy and a sample painting was sent for analysis. One of those conservators, Signora Laura Tacelli, came here and met Huta. She gave guidelines for cleaning and future storage of the paintings under climate-controlled conditions. Special equipment was purchased and installed in Savitri Bhavan, and Huta took up the work of cleaning the paintings herself. Only one important painting remained in an unfinished condition when she left her body on November 17, 2011.

Apart from the 476 Meditations on Savitri paintings done in oils on canvas-covered board, Savitri Bhavan is also taking care of the 116 gouaches (water-colours) on heavy-weight hand-made paper which make up the 'About Savitri' series painted from 1969 to mid-1971 by Huta and inspired by the Mother's explanations of the first four cantos of *Savitri*; the 55 'Paintings of Sri Aurobindo's Poems'; 50 'Visionary Paintings'; the 'Joy of Light' drawings, and of course all the Mother's original sketches for the *Meditations on Savitri*, over 200 of them.

Huta was working hard up to only three or four weeks before her passing, on three or four books simultaneously: not only 'Joy of Light' and most importantly finalising an account of her 18-years work with the Mother from 1954 to 1973: 'My Savitri Work with the Mother', both of which have now been published by Havyavahana Trust, but also the next volume of her 'Story of a Soul' series and a planned volume on 'Occultism'. She also planned to publish all her own research on *Savitri*, but although her papers are with us it is unlikely that these three last projects will ever be fully realised.

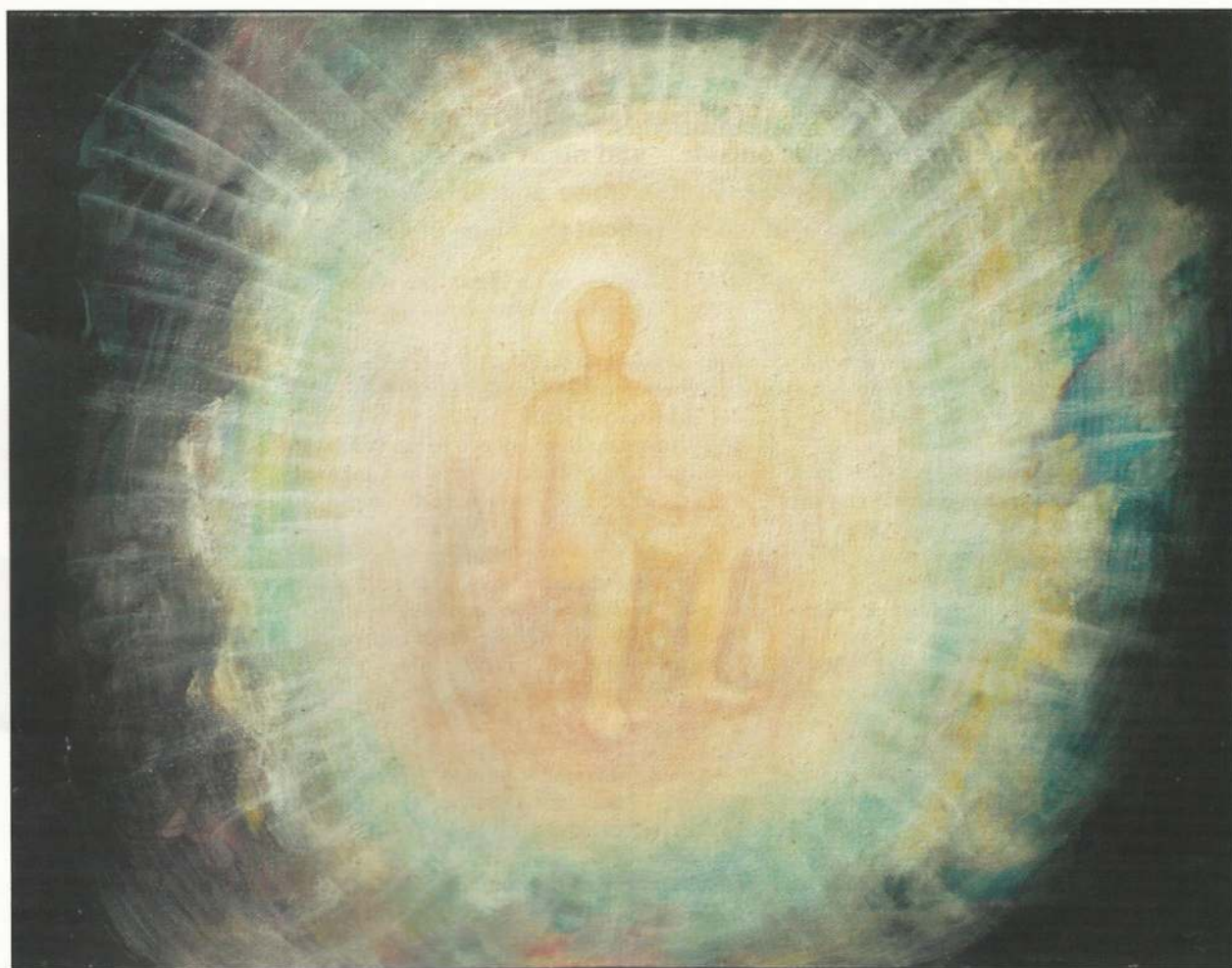
Shraddhavan
Savitri Bhavan

The book *My Savitri Work with the Mother* (276 pages) by Huta has just been published by Havyavahana Trust. It is available from SABDA and Savitri Bhavan, price Rs. 520.

In collaboration with the team at Savitri Bhavan, Havyavahana Trust has published several other books by Huta: French, Russian, Italian and German translations of *White Roses*, collections of letters to her from the Mother; *Joy of Light*: a collection of drawing with pastel crayons on tinted papers; English and Tamil versions of *Mother You Said So...* transcripts of talks by the Mother; and *Meditations on Savitri - Book One the Book of Beginnings* containing photographic reproductions of all the paintings of Book One.

Other publications are in preparation: a volume of the Mother's sketches for *Meditations on Savitri*; and a collection of Huta's *Visionary Paintings*, based on an exhibition of 50 original oil paintings created by Huta from 1956 to 1982, with comments and titles given by the Mother in her own handwriting which was held at Savitri Bhavan in February 2016. Also a new full set of *Meditations on Savitri* videos is in preparation.

In 2004 Huta gave permission for a 'pilot' video to be made with the title *The Yoga of the Earth*, based on extracts on this theme from the first volume of *About Savitri*. An excellent remake of this unique material was created by Holger Jetter in 2017; it has been shown a few times at Savitri Bhavan but as yet there has been no public release. Havyavahana Trust is the copyright holder of all Huta's work.



An illustration of Sri Aurobindo's poem, 'What Man Must Become' [1967]



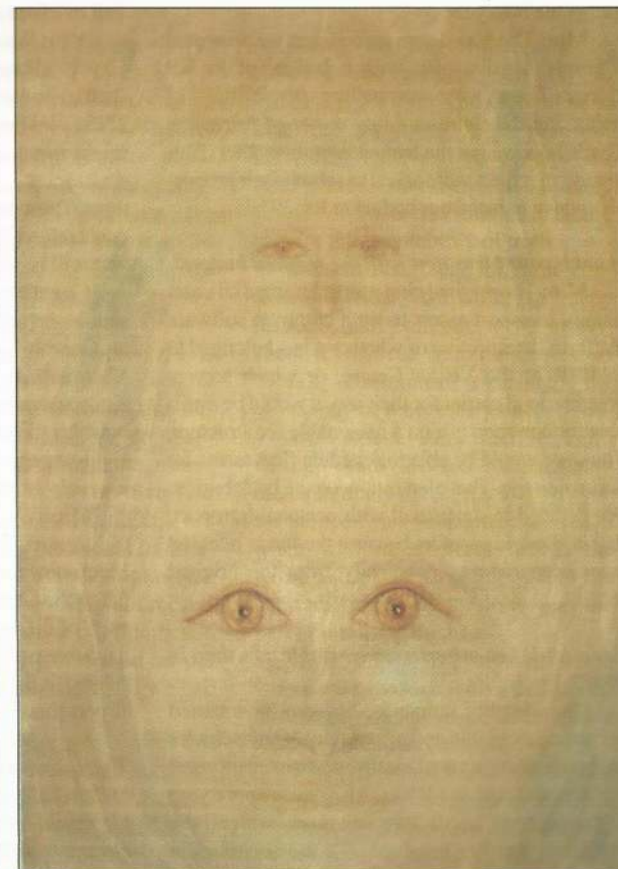
He and She are One [1962]



The Coming Down of the Mother [1968], a painting from 'About Savitri'



An illustration of Sri Aurobindo's poem, 'A God's Labour' [1967]



'Truth and Love' 'Truth alone can give to the world the power of receiving and manifesting the Divine's Love'

Mobility and the Integrated Transport Service

The Integrated Transport Service (ITS) was launched recently. A new office with several charging points outside – and many electric scooters parked inside – has been built opposite the Solar Kitchen. *Auroville Today* met with Chandresh and Min to learn about the plans of ITS.

AVToday: How did you start working on mobility in Auroville?

Chandresh: When I joined Auroville in 2006, I wanted to do a project for the community as a whole, and community transport seemed to be a good idea. We did a comprehensive survey on mobility in terms of vehicle use, traffic patterns, entry and exit points, etc. and came up with a project proposal. Unfortunately, the estimated cost, which was over a crore, was too high. The project was shelved.

A year later, we started working on electric vehicles to reduce the carbon footprint of Auroville. It was an attempt to see if we could design our own vehicles. But the industry was not ready, especially for batteries. Vehicles need sustained power over long durations, and the lead-acid batteries that were available were of poor quality and suitable only for small loads. We stopped manufacturing the electric two-wheelers – the Humvees – after a few years, but we did set up a service centre.

During that same time, two-wheeler safety was becoming an urgent concern. Several Aurovilians met with accidents on the road to Pondicherry, so we started a bus service. We wanted to charge a small amount to shuttle persons from the Visitor Center to Matrimandir as is done at most public places across India. The community bus and van fleets would have been slowly increased based on this revenue stream. But the Matrimandir Access Group thought that this was against the spiritual nature of Matrimandir. After eight years of running the community bus service to Pondicherry, we decided to stop it because there was little interest to financially support it from the community. Meanwhile, individual transport and its convenience made it near impossible to get any working groups or residents to bother supporting a study group or provide funding for community transport.

Min: Chandresh had also experimented with an online booking system for shared taxis in 2008. When we started the Shared Transport Service in January 2017 [see *Auroville Today* issue 332, March 2017], I met him to discuss the idea. It had not worked in 2008, but we decided to give it another shot. The idea got enough traction and within six or seven months it had become financially viable. People were finding the service useful.

What led to the formation of the Integrated Transport Service?

Chandresh: The 50th Anniversary Team got in touch with me to ask if I could help with mobility during the Anniversary Week and the Prime Minister's visit. I said I would be interested only if we could build something for the future of Auroville. I was not interested in using up some limited amount of money for a particular event alone. It was an attempt to bring directional changes to our community transport possibilities at this juncture of the 50th year.

Min: The 50th Team agreed, and we presented a comprehensive plan with a budget of Rs. 1.9 crores. There were compelling possibilities of rethinking the entire mobility sector of Auroville. That's how we got the budget. But then other community members were asked to submit their proposals and we reduced our budget to Rs. 29 lakhs.

What is your focus now with the reduced budget?

Min: The original plan was to leverage all community transport assets using a common software platform. Irrespective of whether a bus belonged to SAIEM or the Visitor Centre, or which service bought a load carrier for their use, it would be available for common use on a reasonable fee structure. Thus, we would be able to schedule fleet assets for optimal usage. That plan is now on the back burner. We decided to start small with personal transport, that is, electric scooters because the funds released have been reduced drastically from the original request.

Are electric two-wheelers more viable now than in 2007?

Chandresh: Lithium-ion batteries have started becoming available and affordable. Many vehicles are being manufactured locally, so maintenance and replacement costs are lower. Also, we are not trying to design and manufacture any more, with all the regulatory hurdles involved. We are focusing on sales, service and charging. The other major change from 2007 is that all our power in Auroville is sourced from renewable sources. This means

vehicle charging using mains power is also pollution-free, affordable and sustainable.

This individual-focused strategy seems to miss the big picture of mobility in Auroville. Are you satisfied with this small start?

Chandresh: There are two things to look at here. First, it might look like a small start, but even at this scale the project can have a major impact. In the pioneer days, everyone had a bicycle. Now everyone has a petrol two-wheeler. Some people have cars and guests are coming in and renting mopeds. These mopeds are never well-maintained and are highly polluting. So, even if we can shift individual use to electric scooters, the level of pollution – both air and noise – can be reduced substantially.

The second thing to remember is that we are not going to stop with electric scooters. We are already working on plans for e-shuttles, point-to-point transport, and an integrated software platform.

Tell us a little bit more about these plans.

Min: We want to integrate different kinds of vehicles and different modes of use. Imagine that today you need an e-cycle (from Kinisi) to get to a performance, so you take that. But tomorrow you need an electric scooter because you're going to Pondy to get something. And the day after, you have family visiting, so you need an electric car. We would like all of this to be available through a single online application. We are thinking of something like transport credits that you can use across any type of vehicle.

Chandresh: And the uses might be different. Some people might need to rent or lease a vehicle for extended periods, while others might simply need a pick-and-drop service. This service would be available using electric autorickshaws. And electric shuttles might take you to Pondicherry or Chennai.

Let's come back to shuttles in a second. Where do bicycles fit into your picture?

Min: For us, bicycles are a no-brainer. They should be available either free or for an extremely low rental cost. The way I see it, bicycles are the default option that everyone has access to – residents, interns, guests. Only when they need a premium service, like an e-cycle, an e-scooter or an e-car, should they have to pay a rental. And that rental can very well be like the in-kind scheme that Kinisi has started.

Chandresh: There are three things that we can provide in kind to all residents – food, clothing and transportation. The community has the wherewithal to make this happen. We are doing this in a limited manner at the Solar Kitchen and at the Free Store. For transportation, we can make bicycles available for everyone. Especially every child should be given a bicycle.

Tell us about the shuttles ...

Min: We are already in discussion with Smart City Pondicherry to see if we can start frequent e-shuttle services between the Ashram and Auroville. These shuttles will cater to tourists as well, so it might mean identifying some destinations on the shuttle route, such as temples, beaches or restaurants. These will be hop-on, hop-off services at frequent intervals, perhaps 20 to 30 minutes, so the service will be reliable and predictable.

Chandresh: Within Auroville, we plan to start shuttle services along the most-used roads – starting at Ganesh Bakery, through CSR, Town Hall, Matrimandir, Solar Kitchen and then to Kulpalayam. We are still working on the details of how this might work. It will have to be small six or eight-seater vehicles operating at very frequent intervals for the service to be useful to residents.

Min: We are also exploring the idea of an electric shuttle to Chennai airport. With the Chennai Metro now functional, it's super easy for people to get to the Chennai Central railway station or other parts of the city from the airport. We are trying to get a free parking slot at the airport. All things considered, a Rs.700 ticket from Auroville to Chennai airport should make the service viable.

There was an idea of making Auroville car-free by building a common car-parking from where people would have to take bicycles, shuttles or other electric vehicles to come into Auroville. Is that still on the cards?

Chandresh: Very much so. But we are going to start with the guests. We will always have lots of



The new ITS workshop and charging station

visitors from Bangalore, Chennai and other cities who will come in their cars. That we cannot stop. The plan is to build a parking space for all these visitors who will have to leave their vehicles and come into Auroville on electric transport. There might be multiple options, including e-autorickshaws, e-shuttles, e-scooters and e-cycles. I have a feeling this will enhance their experience of Auroville rather than make it inconvenient. They will feel they are coming into a different and better space, unlike the cities they come from. Also, this is likely to create a substantial revenue stream for Auroville, which we might be able to use to fund other aspects of community transportation.

How has the community responded so far to your ideas and experiments?

Min: Very positively so far. What had stopped many people from moving to electric was the limited range of electric vehicles – the Humvees can go less than 25 kms on a single charge – the unreliable batteries and the difficulty in service and repairs. All this has changed. The new e-scooters can carry bigger loads, go longer distances and are easy to maintain. Going to Pondy was difficult using earlier models of electric vehicles, but now you can go to Pondy and back on the new e-scooters.

Chandresh: Many units are interested. *News&Notes* has already bought two e-scooters for their delivery. The Gas Service is interested because the new e-scooters can easily take two LPG cylinders – one in front and another at the back. Restaurants like Tanto can also modify the e-scooters for their specific needs. Ultimately, for a unit, operating costs are really important, so electric vehicles make a lot of sense. In Auroville, electricity is offered in-kind, which is essentially free. The other big advantage that unit stewards see is that they don't have to worry about petrol quality, stolen fuel, incorrect bills and other such distractions from their core operations. It is also possible to place GPS trackers on the vehicles. A Rs. 300 SIM card and a Rs. 1700 tracker will let a unit holder see the route, position and speed of every vehicle during its routine operations.

Min: For commercial units, we would like them to subsidise the rental of e-scooters for their interns and volunteers, so that they don't rent low-cost mopeds. We have had some good conversations with some of the units.

What are some of the challenges you are facing?

Chandresh: The biggest challenge is finding alignment among all the different players in the mobility sector of Auroville. We had come up with a concept paper on a "Mobility Trust." The idea was to create a sector-based grouping of units to promote collaboration specific to the mobility segment. Anyone who operates or offers some kind of a transport vehicle or service would be a part of the new trust, and the unit holders would jointly be trustees of the new "Mobility Trust." Any new initiative would be taken up with the joint decision of the trustees. We shared this concept with the FAMC and others, but unfortunately it was not well received.

Why?

Min: Well, the requirement of being a part of a unified trust is that everyone would have to be financially transparent. We want the surplus from some units to cross-subsidise other transport services. For example, we could run a free drop-and-

pickup service for children to go to the swimming pool. I think this need for transparency is probably the reason why the idea is not being accepted. We are forgetting that transportation is a service, not a commercial activity.

Many people are curious about the MOU with Mahindra Electric. Some are sceptical about collaborating with a corporation. Can you tell us what the MOU is about?

Chandresh: It's the usual suspicion of selling out to a corporation. Actually, this is an attempt at a four-way collaboration between Auroville, the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Mahindra Electric and Smart City Pondicherry. IISc will help with smart chargers and sensors, Mahindra will provide access to vehicles for research and pilot testing, and Smart City Pondicherry will provide the context for mass transit experiments. As for ITS, we want to create an integrated mobility platform that combines different modes of transport and different models of usage and adoption.

What are your concrete plans for the next year?

Chandresh: Three things – facilitate the transition to personal electric vehicles, start the point-to-services with e-autorickshaws and start the shuttle services to Pondicherry. For personal vehicles, we already have our first charging station and service centre opposite the Solar Kitchen. We will expand the network of charging centres to cover more parts of Auroville, especially those frequented by guests. Kinisi is a part of this movement and we consider them as our partners in this transition.

The next visible thing you will see will probably be the e-autorickshaws. This is interesting not only because of the service they will provide, but also because of the jobs they will create. Our first priority is to try to employ women drivers from the bioregion, most likely through women's self-help groups. Perhaps we can also provide jobs to existing taxi drivers whose jobs might be affected.

Min: The taxi sector is changing very rapidly. Ola and Uber are coming in. And you can now share a ride to Chennai on BlaBlaCar for just Rs. 300. I don't think the Rs. 2500 taxi trip to Chennai will last very long.

Do you have the people to make all this happen?

Min: We have a good team. Laxman is great with two-wheelers and has a lot of on-ground experience. Vijay is an excellent project manager and Krishna has extensive taxi service experience. Also, we are slowly expanding the team.

When you think about mobility, what is your larger vision?

Chandresh: We have to move from the individual to the collective. That's why it's so important to work on the idea of the e-shuttles, the e-autos and other sustainable means of collective transportation. The other idea that really drives me is the research possibility. For example, Auroville can create the platform and systems to track real-time vehicle pollution data and make the solution available to other urban centres of the world. In other words, we would also like to see mobility become a recognised priority area for funding, grants and research in Auroville.

Min: Worldwide, the trend is to move from individual ownership to shared services. I hope we will see that shift in Auroville.

From an interview with Manas

The yogasana project in Auroville's bioregion

Ever since UNESCO declared 21st June as International Yoga Day, momentum on *yogasana* keeps gathering.

With a much needed fillip coming from the government of India, Auroville took the initiative last year to introduce ten simple *yogasanas* for daily practice for children and adults in the region.

Teaching *yogasana* to village children dates back a few decades when Varadharajan – a senior Aurovilian who sought the Mother's blessing on doing service for the villages – started Arulvazhi School in Morattandi village where he had been teaching *yogasana* among other topics.

A team of senior Aurovilians – Ashoke Chatterjee, Varadharajan and Thillai Ganapathi – guided this project which consisted of two components. One was the propagation of *yogasana* through three short films made by Yatra Srinivassan of Yatra



Arts Media depicting real world problems and their possible solutions by *yogasana* practice. These films were broadcast by the local Doordarshan (Pondicherry TV Station) and made available on social media websites.

The second component was a demonstration of *yogasanas* by

Arulvazhi School students in ten villages. Yoga teachers Anandou, Muthukumari and Velmurugan were sources of inspiration and awe. This year, Muthukumari brought girls to villages for the *yogasana* demonstration which is unusual – a girl practicing *yogasana*!

We also conducted *yogasana* programmes in two government-run schools nearby in an effort to plant a seed to revive an ancient Indian mind-body programme which may be a panacea for modern-day maladies.

The reception of this initiative in the villages has been overwhelming and efforts are now continuing to

reach out to adults through TV channels and social media. We enjoy support from the community for this useful and purposeful project. We also hope for the community's support in the future.

Thambidurai, Project Coordinator on behalf of Project Team.



PASSINGS

André Tardeil

In the early morning of 27 June, André Tardeil, founder and father of New Creation, left his body at his house in New Creation after an extended struggle with cancer. André had just turned 77.

André came to Pondicherry in 1972, having worked with the Auroville Association in Paris for two years before that. Recently, recalling his experience of the first darshan on 21st February, 1972 he said, "You know, you can never tire of the possibilities of seeing The Mother, you were transformed. She infused in everyone who was there the will for change".

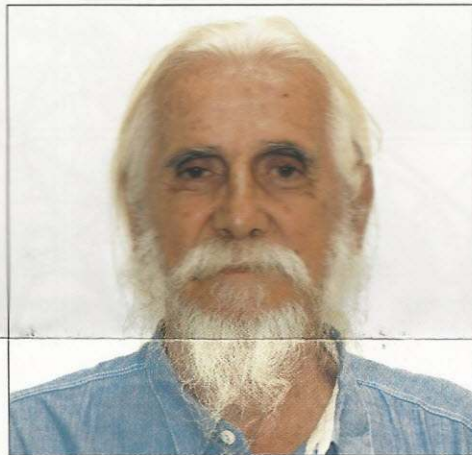
André spent five years in Pondicherry working at Auroshikha, the Ashram incense-making department. During that time he helped provide financial support to Auroville in its newly achieved economic independence from the SAS.

In 1977, he moved to Auroville where his prime focus has always been to create better conditions for the villagers and their children. As he put it, "We should stop considering our neighbours as a separate entity from Auroville. As soon as we will consider them as part of

Auroville's future and give them all the support we can to help to manifest themselves as part of Auroville's development, we will have all their reciprocal support. We have to build real fraternity, this is the primary work we have in front of us."

To help manifest this vision, in 1978 he started a school in Fraternity for village children, which in 1983 shifted to New Creation. Over the years, supported by his wife, Babu, and a network of friends and funders abroad, New Creation grew to include schools, a boarding facility for disadvantaged children, vocational training workshops and small commercial units, for André always stressed the need for practical training rather than just book learning: as he put it, "children learn what they live".

André's main aim in all this was to help the students, as well as the villagers, become self-reliant individuals. "Through training programmes and through helping them create their own handicraft enterprises, these people have the chance to grow and reach their fuller potential."



In this, he was very successful. As Alain Bernard put it, "His love for the local people translated into many lives being transformed, particularly those of young girls and boys, through education, a cause into which he poured his energy, endlessly creating classes and boarding facilities. Today, I am sure, so many would say that what they have been

able to become owes a lot to André's ceaseless efforts to sustain them."

All this, however, was not achieved without considerable struggle and some controversy. André felt largely unsupported by the Auroville community, which did not always appreciate his independent financial ways, causing him to rely heavily upon friends and donors abroad, as well as the guest houses and businesses he had set up to sustain his many initiatives.

But his dedication to his work, to his children and to a transformed future for all was never in doubt. Last year he wrote, "In fact we should be ready, to search, to fight, to keep faith in spite of all and to rediscover, now in this life, this enchanting smile, containing the secret of life... Difficult surely, but one day we will leave this world and all we did will not exist. Only will follow that second of true luminous Self; like a small light guiding us towards Eternity."

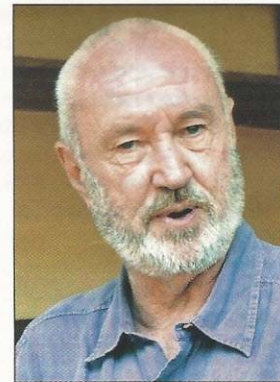
André's remains were laid to rest in Adventure's burial ground in the late afternoon of the 28th of June, with family and many of his friends attending.

Sakthivel



On June 14 Sakthivel passed away at AUM Hospital. He was just 41 years old. Hailing from Kottakarai, Sakthivel came to work in Auroville in 1996 and officially joined in 2003. Having first worked at Solar Service, he soon started working as technician at the Solar Kitchen, taking care of the building's machinery. His pleasant nature and willingness to help out, even though every other day he had to undergo a kidney dialysis treatment, made him a much appreciated and loved member of the Solar Kitchen team. Sakthivel's body was buried in Auroville's burial ground at Adventure.

Ross Elliot



Ross A. Elliott left his body on June 23rd in PIMS at the age of 73, after a struggle with bladder cancer that took him through several hospitals since March this year. His close friends were with him.

Australian Ross joined Auroville in December 1995 and has been active ever since, widely and lightly sharing his communication skills with Auroville and its residents.

Starting at Matrimandir where he

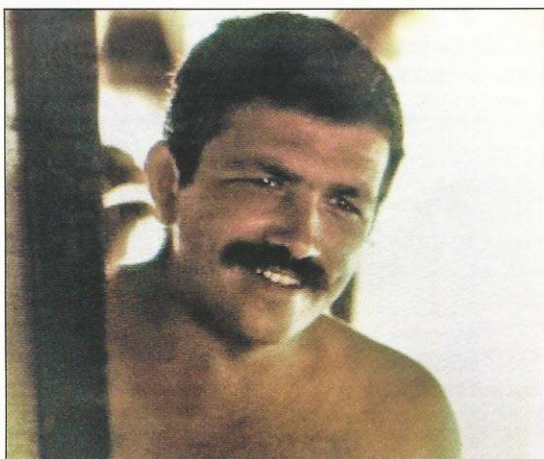
gave introduction talks to visitors, he soon entered the world of newcomers and students to Auroville whom he guided around in a light-hearted, animated and highly informative way. Also his improvisation theatre sessions were much appreciated.

Ross's body was buried at the Adventure's burial ground on June 27th.

Subir

Subir (Olivier Caracostea) passed away on 30 April of this year in Orléans (France) due to cancer. He was 68 years old.

Subir had a Romanian grandfather and came from a family linked to the Theosophical Society in Paris. On coming to India, he became a sannyasin and lived in a cave for one year. Afterwards, he went to the Theosophical Society in Chennai before coming to Pondicherry, where he met Mother and stayed for some time in the Ashram.



Subir joined Auroville in 1971. He worked on the Matrimandir and cycled all over Auroville, delivering

mail to various communities. In 1975 he left, returning after a few years to start Djaima with friends like Jean Legrand, Jean Pougault, Diane, Joy, Gilles Guigan and Goupi. Joy recalls that he and Goupi were always ready for fun and laughter and made the community kitchen a lively place.

From 1981 to 1989 he lived in Fraternity. During that time, he managed the Boutique d'Auroville in Pondicherry where his imposing kurta-clad figure, leaning against the railings and engaging people in deep conversation, became one of the sights of

Nehru Street.

In 1989 he married Neeta from Mumbai. They moved to Lucknow where he worked for Mira Aditi, the publisher of books by Sri Aurobindo, The Mother and Satprem, and opened a boutique. Shortly after that, the couple moved to Paris, where their daughter Saatchi was born and where Subir started a traditional French pancake restaurant in, of course, Pondicherry Street.

Some years later, he divorced and came back to Auroville on his own. He lived in Invocation from 2001 to 2004 and worked at Freeland Bookshop and La Boutique d'Auroville at the Visitors' Centre. After this he started working for

Mira Aditi in Mysore, where he moved in 2007. For many years he did a lot of touring all over India for Mira Aditi until poor health caused him to stop.

Around this time his mother died and he went back to his family house in France. He stayed there till his passing.

Subir had a wonderfully kind and warm nature, allied to very deep devotion. As Michel from Darkali puts it, "Subir will be remembered as a very dear friend to so many of the older generation of Aurovilians, someone who was very sincere and on whom you could rely fully, and who had a great sense of humour. His devotion to the Mother was entire and very sincere."

Designing the Garden of the Unexpected

An innovative process to design a new garden close to the Matrimandir is underway. What is it trying to achieve? What does it involve?

Mother once mentioned that the Matrimandir gardens were as important as the Matrimandir itself. However, work on the gardens has proceeded much more slowly than work on the structure, which is now almost complete.

In the early days, Mother invited Narad to design the twelve gardens surrounding the Matrimandir. Ultimately, he felt unable to do this and, for many years, little was done in the inner gardens area except contouring and basic landscaping. New energy started to flow into the gardens when, some years ago, Roger Anger designed the Unity Garden beside the Matrimandir and invited submissions for designs of the twelve gardens.

When none of the submissions were found acceptable, a Matrimandir garden design team formed to research what Sri Aurobindo and The Mother had said about the qualities represented by the twelve gardens and, in collaboration with Roger, to come up with new designs.

Some years ago, they submitted the designs for the first three gardens – Existence, Consciousness, Bliss – to the community and were given the go-ahead to construct them. Today, these gardens have materialised and a fourth, the garden of Progress, is almost ready. However, work has been suspended on the implementation of the other eight gardens as questions have arisen about the proposed designs.

"When we decided to pause everything in these gardens, the natural energy around here to go on developing spontaneously transferred itself to the Garden of the Unexpected," explains John Harper, one of the present executives of the Matrimandir. "One motivation," says Hemant Shekar, a member of the team who will steer the design process, "is to bring in some fresh energy. Another is to create something slightly less stressful because in the main gardens there seems to be a lot of expectation and we want to remove that pressure so people are more willing to work together. We also want to experiment with different methods of gardening."

The Garden of the Unexpected

This garden was conceived of by Roger. Jacqueline, his long-time partner and collaborator, explains it was in response to Aurovilians who wished to visit the chamber not knowing what to do with their children during this time. "Roger wanted to create a space at the entrance to the Matrimandir gardens where there would be an atmosphere that would bring the children to inner quietness, where they would 'catch' something and become silent, go within."

While Roger didn't give a detailed description, the following indications emerged from his conversations with Aurovilians. It would be an "initiator place" for children; not an ordinary playground, but a place of wonder and for discovering the unexpected; and a place of 'reversed reality', for example, a place where one can feel the sky on the ground and the ground in the sky.

While Roger specified the location, to the north-west of the Matrimandir behind the Garden of Unity and mini-amphitheatre – he did not provide or supervise any design proposals before he passed away in 2008.

So how to develop and choose a design for this garden? The Matrimandir executives decided a new process was needed and invited Aurovilian Natasha Jain, who has a background in systems design, to suggest one. After researching other design processes around the world, she came up with a proposal which was further shaped in discussions with the executives, the Working Committee, Council, Residents Assembly Service and Elvira from Koodam.

The process

At the end of May, the Matrimandir executives put out a call for people to register if they wished to submit designs for the Garden of the Unexpected, along with the design brief. The design brief included Roger's indications concerning the purpose and atmosphere of this garden, along with the need to consider factors like safety, sustainabil-

ity, the need to include indigenous flora and fauna and to emphasise natural rather than 'hard' landscaping to allow for future evolution. The total budget for the garden was fixed at 60 lakhs rupees.

The registration period is now over. Fourteen people have registered (a further three are in process), twelve of whom are Aurovilians. (The others, all of whom know Auroville well, are a landscape designer from Chandigarh and a local team of architects who have been interns in Auroville). The designers are given one month to come up with their initial proposals, after which Aurovilian architect, Sonali, will make a detailed quantity survey of each design, as well as ascertaining if it conforms to the design brief.

The designs, without the designers' names attached, will then be sent to an expert panel for assessment. The panel consists of Piero and Gloria from Auroville, the architect, B.V. Doshi, a Japanese landscape designer and gardener, Kei Ishikawa, Narad Eggenberger and two ex-Governing Board members, Mallika Sarabhai and Ameeta Mehra. The experts will give very detailed feedback on each design under four main headings – concept and aesthetic (i.e. how much does this proposal resonate with the ideals of Auroville); interactive and engagement (does it create a sense of wonder, discovery?); sustainability; and practicality of implementation.

Each designer will receive the experts' feedback on their design and then will have a further two weeks to finalise their design if they wish to remain part of the process. The designs then go back to the experts who will give a final rating.

gives imagination and creativity a free rein away from the pressure of designing one of the twelve 'sacred' gardens. However, the initial brief would seem a bit daunting for an inexperienced landscaper. The fact, for example, that the existing contours have to be respected and the layout of the 12 radial pathways from the Matrimandir up to the Oval road, as well as the width of the paths, cannot be modified in this garden may be a dampener upon allowing the imagination to run wild. And would-be designers may be scared off not only by the reference to the 'initiator' quality of this garden but also by the need to provide a Bill of Quantities as well as a site study, including analysis of the microclimate, geographical features, drainage pattern, etc.

Although the team point out that this is a standard requirement for all the gardens at Matrimandir and that they have already provided most of the data required for the design work, it does seem as if non-specialist architects or landscapers need not apply. And certainly not children....

However, an attempt was made to remedy this. Before the registration was announced, two invitations were extended in the *News and Notes* for people to host an evening or a morning of activities where people, including children, could share ideas about this garden.

"Unfortunately," says Natasha, "even though people shared ideas via email, no one went ahead with hosting the activities, so we had to take their ideas in written form. We compiled it into a document called the inspiration material and put it in the application kit for all those who

registered to submit a design proposal. All designers could use it as inspiration for their designs.

"We did not see a very involved participation from the community in the ideas stage, but we are quite satisfied with the number of people who have registered for submitting a design proposal."

Other questions relate to how the garden design will be chosen. Will the expert panel, however experienced they may be in their respective fields, truly understand what Roger was envisaging for this garden? And what about the Aurovilian panel? Clearly, the decision to allow them to make the final decision reflects a wish to improve community involvement in the gardens, something that the Matrimandir executives feel has been lacking over the past years. But will it necessarily result in a better decision being made?

Much will depend upon the guidance provided and upon the intuitive capacity of the panellists as well as how seriously they approach this task. The danger of lobbying for a particular design seems largely taken care of by ensuring the anonymity of the designers and by the presence of an Observing Committee. Natasha points out there will be sketches and good visuals of the concepts. But even so, how many non-experts can look at a concept on paper and envisage how it will look on the ground?

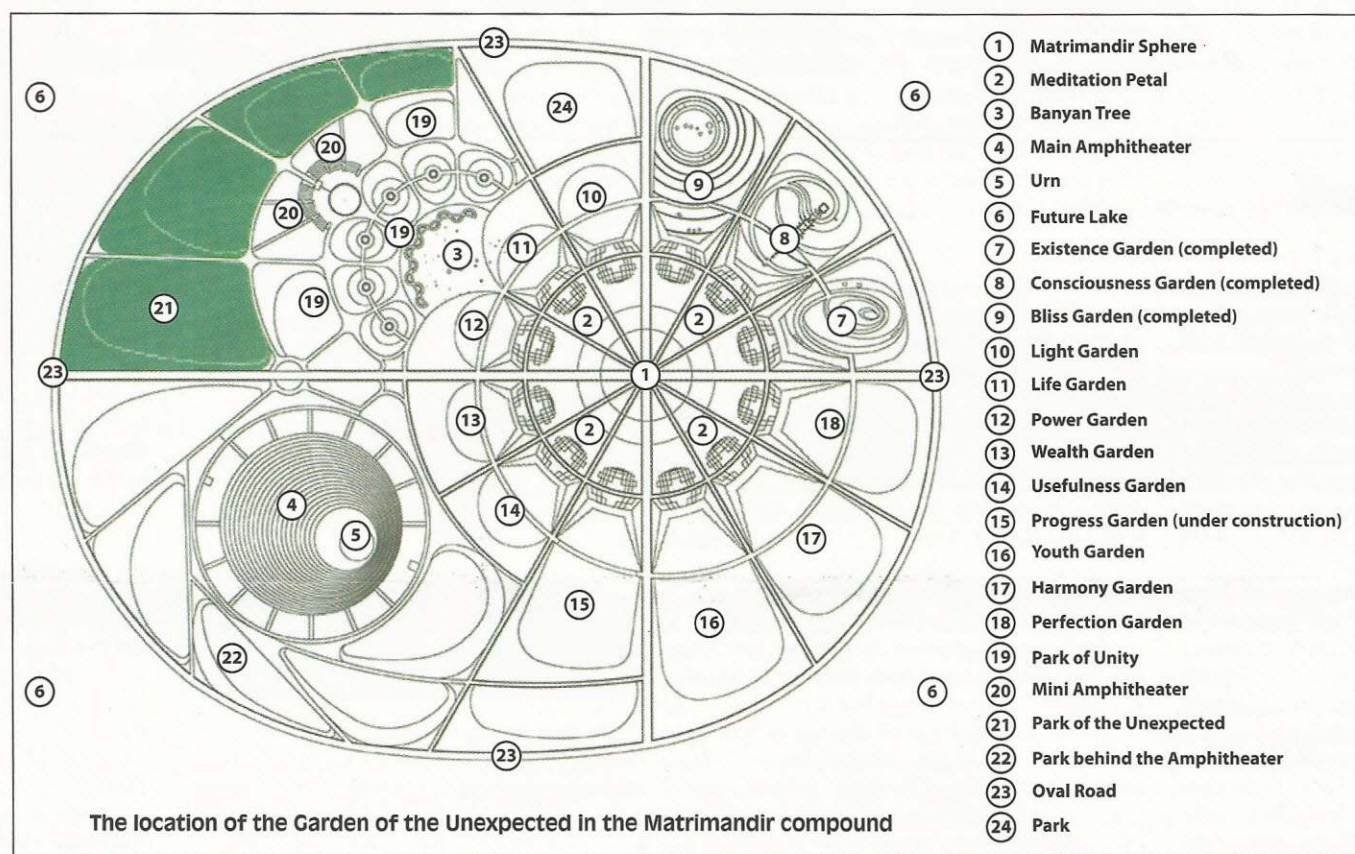
And how many us, whether experts or non-experts, can assess, let alone understand, the 'initiator' quality of a garden or truly comprehend the world of a child (which, presumably, is why the Aurovilian panellists are encouraged to ask children, or the child within, to answer the question on how well the design creates a sense of wonder, discovery and 'inverted reality').

Books written by adults for children are rarely successful because they reflect an adult's sense of a child's world. Will gardens designed by adults for children be any more so?

Having said this, the proposed process for arriving at a design decision is a thoughtful one that aims at balancing expert input with community participation. If it works, say members of the process core group, it may be used for making future design decisions on the remaining Matrimandir gardens.

Who knows, it could even become a model for community decision-making in other areas of our lives here.

Alan



The location of the Garden of the Unexpected in the Matrimandir compound

At this stage the highest rated designs (three if there are twelve or less submissions, five if there are more than twelve) will be forwarded to a panel of Aurovilians for the final decision on which one is to be chosen.

Anybody on the Master List can register to be on this panel. Panellists are required to register by mid September and to study all the designs carefully (the designers' names will not be revealed). They are strongly encouraged to participate in an information meeting where architects will explain the parameters the designs must satisfy and how to evaluate them. "The views of the experts will be presented and explained," says Natasha, "and then the panellists can make their decision right away or go home and consider it. What we are trying to do is to inform people who have no background on such topics, to help them make an informed choice."

Panellists will score each of the four main design parameters of each design. The design with the highest overall score will be chosen.

To ensure it happens in an impartial manner, the whole process will be overseen by an Observing Committee, consisting of one member of the Working Committee, one from the Council and the Matrimandir executives. Members of this committee will not participate in selecting the design to be implemented.

Will it work?

Clearly, the organisers want to encourage a very different approach to garden design to the one we have seen so far, one that

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Editorial team:

Alan, Carel, Manas. 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.
Contact: Auroville Today, Surrender, Auroville 605101, Tamil Nadu, India. Phone: +91.413.2622572. Email: avtoday@auroville.org.in

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