

# Auroville Today

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## Growing Sadhana Forests in India and abroad

On December 19th, 2013 Sadhana Forest will turn 10 years old. Auroville Today spoke with founder Aviram about the project's activities and progress.

**S**adhana Forest started after Aviram, together with his wife Yorit and their daughter Osher, came to Auroville in 2002. They went to the Forest Group in 2003 and were granted about 70 acres of largely barren, unused land to develop. Since then they have been living and working to develop the forest.

They have now covered about 55 of the 70 acres, reclaiming about five acres each year. Aviram explains that a lot of effort goes not only into planting trees, but also into water conservation. In fact, most of the manual work goes into the latter. Without first preparing the land to prevent runoff of rainwater, the trees won't do well unless a lot of effort is put into irrigating them, which is not cost-effective and not sustainable. With good water conservation, tree planting becomes less important, because there will be a lot of natural regeneration. Sadhana Forest has made hundreds of small bunds around trees, dozens of kilometers of contour bunding, and some large water catchment ponds with the help of Kireet from Gaia's Garden.

The Sadhana Forest community doing this work has now grown to about 20 long-term volunteers and from anywhere between about 10 to 140 short-term volunteers, depending on the season. Whereas various institutions are regularly sending groups of volunteers, most come through word of mouth or learn about Sadhana Forest on the internet. Aviram explains that the community works on a gift economy. "People stay for free and contribute for their food if they can, and this goes together with their work for the forest. We give this experience to people, and then they can go back and perhaps live their life with some new insights. It is a way to move



PHOTO COURTESY SADHANA FOREST

Watching an eco film in Sadhana Forest

More than 40 wooden structures have been built in the community with a team of local people. For short-term volunteers, there are two wooden dormitories, each of which can house up to 60 people, each person in their own cubicle separated from the others by curtains. Once people stay in the community for a few months and demonstrate their commitment to the forest work and have leadership skills, they may become a long-term volunteer and take on more responsibility. The long-term staff members, those who stay for more than a year or two, get their own private hut or a couple's hut.

Aviram explains that although there are many volunteers for normal tree care which takes place during the tourist season, there often aren't enough volunteers during the planting season, which begins in August in order to catch the summer monsoon and continues through September before the winter monsoon. Having few volunteers during this time, the work is challenging because of a lack of funds to hire workers. They are presently trying to find ways to create a bigger flow of volunteers during the planting season.

The growth of Sadhana Forest into a close-knit community has happened very naturally, explains Aviram. "When Yorit, my wife, and I first came it was just us. Then people started coming and asking can we volunteer and eventually we ended up with many volunteers, but it wasn't planned like this. At first it was just my family and slowly it grew with the same habits of a family, such as eating three times a day together, working together, and often spending time in the evenings together. For me it is great fun, because I feel that the diversity of people enables huge growth for each other. We enrich each other with ideas and different systems of beliefs and feelings.

"Like any diverse system that we see in

nature, diverse human systems create resilience. A monoculture of people that all think the same is not interesting and is not strong. Sadhana Forest is an extreme example of human diversity. We get volunteers from over 50 countries here every year, people of different ages and physical capabilities, eating together, working together, and living in dormitories together, in very close quarters. That has helped to create the resilience of the community, and enabled us to start the projects in Haiti, Kenya, and other places in India. All the support and energy and well-wishing that comes brings a huge force. People all over the world are thinking how to develop this and make it happen. I feel very lucky to live in a community like this; it is something very rare. It is not to say that there are no challenges, but overall the picture is one of a lot of happiness and joy."

How is Sadhana Forest connected with the rest of Auroville? Aviram explains that Sadhana Forest serves Auroville in several ways. In addition to its obvious work of regenerating a large piece of Auroville land, Sadhana Forest is attracting hundreds of volunteers each year, and they get to know about other projects in Auroville as well. They consume various services of Auroville, and then move on and tell others about their experience in Auroville. Also, many people have joined Auroville through Sadhana Forest, because joining Auroville is not cheap, and Sadhana Forest supports the people during the transition period. Another way it serves the Auroville community is that every week since June 2008 (except the week of Cyclone Thane) they have held the EcoFilm Club for the benefit of Aurovilians and guests, which includes an explanation and tour of the community, an ecological film, and a free vegan organic dinner.

### Sadhana Forests abroad

Sadhana Forest has also expanded to other countries. There is a Sadhana Forest in Haiti, which is developing an area of about 6,500 acres. The campus and the nursery is on about seven acres, where there are dormitories and private huts for volunteers, just like in Auroville. The 83 minutes documentary on the work of Sadhana Forest in Haiti, *One Day, Everything Will Be*

*Free*, just won the *Wisdom Award 2013* in the Auroville Film Festival. In the words of the Jury, "It's a wonderful film about a great attitude, that of service, or, 'Seva', as Aviram puts it. Caring for the Earth in places where it's most wounded and bringing it back to life, making it a personal cause and its own reward, making it possible for others to experience this 'giving', of themselves, to inspire the present and to work towards a future, full of wellbeing for the generations to come, this is what we see in this film about 'Sadhana Forest', Haiti."

Presently a third Sadhana Forest is being started in north Kenya, which will be built on the same model. Twenty-seven acres of land have already been purchased for the campus, and there



Sadhana Forest Haiti's two new Tetrahedron dormitories

PHOTO COURTESY SADHANA FOREST

are thousands of potential acres for development. Having established a very good relation with the Kenyan government, Aviram hopes to do the same thing there on an even larger scale.

In Kenya they are working with the Samburu people, a local tribe that lives in the north. The idea is to give every home the opportunity to develop a small food forest around them. They will train the people in irrigation techniques that are simple, affordable, and accessible, as well as in tree planting and tree care techniques. The volunteers will come to their homes with the trees and help them plant them and later follow up to help them take care of them. This is the same approach as they have been using in Haiti for the past three years, where it has been very successful.

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Aviram

out of the human-centric idea that nature is there to serve us, and to move into a more planet-centric approach that looks at the needs of other species as well. Our effort goes into expanding consciousness beyond our own immediate or even long-term needs.

"Our emphasis is on putting consciousness into matter, on increasing the consciousness in our everyday actions. For example, we try to be very conscious and conserve natural resources. We cook only organic vegan food using very efficient wood-burning 'rocket stoves,' and provide all our own electricity with solar panels and a human-powered bicycle generator. We also try to be more conscious in our relationships with others in the community."

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# Retired High Court judge appointed to probe allegations against the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust

On August 30th, 2013, Justice K.K. Sasidharan of the Madras High Court appointed Justice P.R. Raman, a retired judge of the Kerala High Court, as inquiry officer to probe whether there is any truth in four allegations levelled against the Sri Aurobindo Ashram: (1) sexual harassment of women and children; (2) violation of human rights and denial of fundamental rights to the inmates; (3) misappropriation of funds; and (4) illegal sale and lease of Ashram properties. The judge will be assisted by advocate Ms. Sathya Sri Priya Easwaran of Kochi.

The Madras High Court rejected pleas for dissolution of the Trust and the appointment of a neutral administrator to run the Ashram. Saying the inquiry should be concluded as early as possible, Justice K.K. Sasidharan adjourned the matter to November 4, 2013 for further proceedings.

## How it all started

Five years ago, in issue # 234 of August 2008, Auroville Today published an interview with author Peter Heehs and a review of his book *The Lives of Sri Aurobindo*, which had just been published in the USA by Columbia University Press. Some people lauded it as inspiring and ground-breaking and making Sri Aurobindo accessible to an entirely new readership. Others feel that the book denigrates Sri Aurobindo.

Amongst those who object to the book, a few people took action. On the basis of extracts of the book compiled by them (the book is not available in India) they managed to obtain an interim order from the High Court of Orissa in Cuttack, to the effect that the book cannot be published in India until the publisher receives a No Objection from the Home Ministry and the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting of the Government of India.

They also successfully moved the Government of Orissa to take action against the book. In April 2009, the Government of Orissa issued a Government Order that "every copy of the book ... be forfeited to the Government" on the grounds that "the book contains matters that are deliberately and maliciously intended to insult religious beliefs of millions of Indians who idolize Sri Aurobindo as a National Hero and incarnation of 'Almighty' and which promotes communal dissatisfaction affecting public peace and tranquillity."

But they were not successful in instigating criminal proceedings against Heehs in Orissa, nor in convincing the Government of India to remove the author from India. They then petitioned the High Court of Madras to direct the Managing Trustee of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, the Regional Registration Officer of Pondicherry, the Foreigners Regional Registration Officer in Chennai, and the Superintendent of Police (North), Pondicherry, to deport Heehs forthwith. This Writ was dismissed on 28 April 2010, as the power to grant or refuse stay in India to a foreigner is the exclusive privilege of the Government.

## The case against the Ashram

Having failed in these attempts, in August 2010 five persons claiming to be inmates of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram (Shraddhalu Ranade, Raman Reddy, Niranjana Naik, Sudha Sinha, and S. Ramanathan) filed a so-called 'leave application' at the Puducherry District Court against the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust and its Trustees. With this application the plaintiffs, who are claiming to be beneficiaries of the Ashram Trust, seek the leave of the court to institute a suit against the Ashram Trust and its Trustees which, they claim, have committed a gross breach of trust by "instead of promoting Sri Aurobindo's tenets and philosophy ... continue to harbour, defend and openly extend support to Mr. Peter Heehs, who authored *The Lives of Sri Aurobindo*, a sacrilegious book ...". Their views are prominently displayed at the website [www.thelivesofsriarobindo.com](http://www.thelivesofsriarobindo.com)

The stand of the Ashram trustees to the book and the proposed expulsion of Heehs has been consistently unambiguous. "The Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust does not project itself in the role of dictating to readers and followers of Sri Aurobindo as to what they should read and what they should not read. Each person is at complete liberty to decide for himself whether he finds any book to be meaningful and useful, or whether he does not find it to be so, and Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust respects and has full faith in the intellectual and

spiritual discernment of the readers. No one should or needs to force his personal opinions on any other reader in general, and more particularly on the followers of Sri Aurobindo," wrote Dr. Datta, Trustee, Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, in a statement given to the Press. And he added that the issue whether the author of the book, who has been in the Ashram since the year 1971, can stay in India or not is a matter that is entirely and exclusively within the purview of the Government of India.

The Ashram also clarified that it is not an organization promoting any kind of fundamentalism or standardized conformism. Each individual should engage himself in a personal quest for spiritual Truth and find his own path best suited for his own inner development. "It cannot be emphasized sufficiently that Sri Aurobindo Ashram is a

support to the trustees. [see also *Auroville Today* issue # 256 of October 2010.]

## The stand of the Sri Aurobindo Society

If these institutions were clear that the appreciation of the book is a personal matter and should be left to the individuals, the office bearers of the Sri Aurobindo Society decided otherwise. As early as September 2008, a member-executive of the Sri Aurobindo Society's Executive Committee had sent a letter to the Ashram Trustees in which he writes that "with a combined effort we have to block completely the printing of the Indian edition and explore what can be done to stop the distribution of the American edition". He presents *The Lives* as "a direct attack of a very hostile and evil force,

that Heehs is staying in Ashram premises cannot be brought within the ambit of breach of trust. But it then concluded that, as many persons were disturbed by the book, they are espousing not a personal but a public call, and because of this public nature of the call, the Leave should be allowed.

The Ashram then appealed against this verdict with the Supreme Court of India, which disagreed with the position of the High Court that, because a few people feel affected, there is a public call. It ordered notice to the petitioners to give their views and in the interregnum stayed all proceedings of the lower court.

The matter is now pending with the Supreme Court of India.

## Taking their fight to the streets

The court cases left many devotees of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother disgruntled if not disgusted. However, the court cases are as nothing compared to the subsequent attacks, especially those in the last two years.

Some of those who instigated the court cases started maligning the trustees in public lectures all over India; they brought people from outside to sit in *dharnas* (street protests) in front of the administrative office of the Ashram, which even led to the physical manhandling of one of the trustees; they instigated 68 Members of the Indian Parliament to sign a letter of enquiry addressed to the Ashram; they started circulating rumours of sexual misconduct and misappropriation of funds in the Ashram; and are suspected to be behind the pasting of posters all over Pondicherry carrying defamatory and malicious allegations against and pictorial representations of the trustees and executives of the Ashram. They were also instrumental in getting a Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) of the Union Territory of Pondicherry to help convince the Pondicherry District Collector to order an enquiry into the allegations against the Ashram regarding alleged sexual harassment of women and children, the violation of human rights and the misappropriation of funds.

## Responses

These acts resulted in many responses. One was from the Working Committee of the Residents' Assembly of the Auroville Foundation, which, on February 29, 2012, made a public request to Savitri Bhavan to discontinue Shraddhalu's talks there – they have since been suspended. Shraddhalu was also not given permission to speak about *The Lives* in a public venue in Auroville a few months later. As a member of the Working Committee clarified, "It should be stressed that the decision of the Working Committee and the response of the Bharat Nivas management are not based on the subject of the announced talk or anyone's opinion about the controversial book. They are based on such facts as the following: Shraddhalu is one of those who have brought a legal case against the Ashram Trust and who in other less obvious ways have sought to undermine the Trust and so the Ashram itself. In addition, he was the spearhead of a movement to deprive a foreign member of the Ashram of the privilege of residing in India by pulling strings in Delhi. The obvious resemblances between these actions and the heavy-handedness of the Sri Aurobindo Society during the 1970s should not be lost on any Aurovillian."

In August that year, the office bearers of the Sri Aurobindo Society issued a plea that all sides call a halt and "sit down together, introspect and talk to each other to hammer out a final solution with trust and an open heart." Given the public stand and partisan stance of the Society against Heeh's book issued only two months earlier, the plea has not been well-received.

Others supporting the Ashram trustees also fought back. The Golden Chain Fraternity, the organisation of the alumni of the Sri Aurobindo International Center of Education (SAICE), issued statements of support to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in an attempt "to ensure that external interference into the internal affairs of the Ashram is brought to an end." A number of websites were created 'to expose the lies of Shraddhalu and friends' such as Auroleaks and Well-Wishers of Sri Aurobindo Ashram.

Also the parents and guardians of SAICE students took action. Aggrieved by the posters in which anti-Ashram elements had alleged that SAICE was allowing the sexual harassment of children, several of them sent letters to the



The entrance of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram

spiritual institution and not a conventional religious organisation – something that has been stated on innumerable occasions by The Mother Herself and which is also a position that has been confirmed by the Supreme Court in the famous Mittal Case [more popularly known as the case of *Auroville against the Sri Aurobindo Society*, eds.] Hence the Ashram has consciously decided neither to promote this book nor to condemn it. Each one is left free to read it and appreciate it, or not read it if the book is not to his or her taste."

## Unfounded allegations

The filing of the case against the Trust and its Trustees was resented by many members of the Ashram. The website [iyfundamentalism.info](http://iyfundamentalism.info), which deals with Integral Yoga and fundamentalism, after examining all the allegations against the book in great detail, concluded that they are completely unfounded. "The book is described in the wildest and most irresponsible terms which do not correspond to anything Heehs has written. The effect of this rhetoric is to draw attention away from the real motive of the petition. The legal action brought against the current Trustees attempts to replace the balanced and judicious men who are long-time direct disciples of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother with ambitious figures... This lawsuit is a direct attack upon the rules, structure and functioning of the Ashram itself. It is an open attempt to take over the Ashram." The website further states that the efforts to destabilize the Ashram are being openly assisted by a few other members of the Ashram.

Auroville and the Auroville International Centres also responded negatively to the filing of the affidavit against the Ashram. In September 2010, The Working Committee of the Residents' Assembly sent a letter of solidarity and support to the Ashram Trustees, and individual Aurovillians too have written to the Trustees offering their support. The decision of some Auroville International centres to dissociate themselves from one of the main petitioners, Shraddhalu Ranade, was soon followed by the other centres. In October 2010, they jointly sent an open letter to the members of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram expressing their concerns about the legal action instigated by a few members of the Ashram community and offering their

which has been able to enter because of our lack of purity and sincerity, and which is using us as its instruments to directly malign Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and to delay their great work of transformation of humanity."

This view was repeated almost four years later in an "Important note for all the Members, Branches & Centres of the Society on the book 'The Lives of Sri Aurobindo' by Peter Heehs" from the Executive Committee of the Sri Aurobindo Society, published in the June 2012 edition of its *All India* magazine. After stating that the book contains misrepresentations and distortions and puts down other biographies, it concludes that the Sri Aurobindo Society strongly disapproves of the book.

## Three court cases now pending

The attacks have been continuing on two fronts. One is the official one, in the Indian courts. While the Cuttack High Court is still to give the parties a hearing before giving its final order on the banning of the book (no Government Ministry has given any statement on it), in a separate court case Heehs has challenged the Orissa Government Order. In this case, the Court has asked for clarifications from the Government of Orissa. Both these cases are pending.

The Puducherry District Court, on February 15, 2011, allowed the Leave Petition. It overruled the objections of the Ashram that the petition was not *bona fide* as those initiating the case were not representative of the Ashram inmates, had not stated how they had been affected, and that also the views of those in favour of the book should be taken into account. The Ashram subsequently appealed the decision at the Chennai High Court, which, for technical reasons, referred the appeal back to the lower court. However, once again the lower court rejected the Ashram plea.

The Ashram then appealed to the Chennai High Court for the second time. The High Court expressed the view that it is not in a position to comment on the merits of the book as the petitioners (Shraddhalu and others) have not placed it before the Court. Further, the High Court concluded that even if the book would denigrate Sri Aurobindo, there is no breach of trust as the book has not been published nor is being sold by the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. It also affirmed that the fact



Lt. Governor, the Chief Minister and the Chief Secretary of the Government of Puducherry, stating that their children have not suffered any form of harassment or molestation. "Rather, there is a strong shared sense of safety and protection of our children in this school. Implicit in our decision to send our children to this school are our faith in The Mother and our trust in the School's management and the Ashram's Trustees." The parents urge that steps are taken to stop the defamatory accusations immediately.

The Puducherry government then agreed to order an inquiry into the posters put up against the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and assured that those responsible for it will be brought to book. However, at the time this article was written, no suspects had been apprehended.

#### The present case

Acting on the allegations of the MLA about financial mismanagement and other irregularities in the Ashram, the Puducherry Chief Minister told the assembly that his government would take a decision as regards appointing administrators to oversee the trust's functioning.

The announcement triggered protests. A group of around 120 aggrieved inmates of the Ashram and other disciples of Sri Aurobindo lodged their displeasure to the MLA who raised the issue, stating their opinion that "there is a calculated attempt being made by a few disgruntled and misguided members in the community with active help from outside to wrest power from the present board of trustees." They pointed out that the allegations are completely false and baseless, that there is not a shred of evidence to point to foul play and that, just because some people make noise, it doesn't mean something is wrong.

The Ashram challenged the inquiry by the District Collector of Puducherry at the Chennai High Court. Not because the Ashram was against an inquiry into the complaints, but because the enquiry would be conducted by the Collector, who, said the Ashram, had a pre-determined mind as was evidenced by the fact that the Collector had changed his regular counsel and, instead, had hired the same counsel who was also representing the litigants in cases against the Ashram. Then Justice K.K.Sasidharan, after getting the consent of the Ashram and the Government of Puducherry, decid-

ed that a retired High Court judge could be the inquiry officer, and a few weeks later appointed Justice Raman to conduct the investigation. This judgement was appealed by persons against the Ashram who had pleaded themselves in the case; but it was upheld by the Madras High Court.

#### The inquiry

The Ashram is happy with Justice Sasidharan's order. "We are never afraid of facing any inquiry. We were concerned with the unfair and partisan manner in which the inquiry was sought to be conducted by the District Collector," said a representative of the Trust. Moreover, in the past similar allegations have been made against the Ashram and official enquiries which probed into these allegations have found them to be utterly false. The allegations with regard to human rights violation, for example, had already been investigated by the National Human Rights' Commission, which found them baseless. Similarly, in the past the National Commission for Women, after a detailed investigation, had also dismissed complaints of sexual abuses in the Ashram and had observed "that there appeared to be a malicious design in the manner in which the complaints have been lodged."

The Golden Chain Fraternity, in a recent statement, called on all its members "to write to the enquiry officer and get registered any evidence for Ashram's well-being. This is especially addressed to the women students who have benefited so much over the years. It would be woe unto us if we don't do our best now." It appealed to the office bearers of the Sri Aurobindo Society to mobilise its branches and get a resolution passed by every branch of the society against the false charges against the Ashram trustees. It also asked Auroville's Working Committee, after calling for a General Assembly meeting, to do likewise. Lastly, it requested all devotees, admirers and well wishers of the Ashram to wake up and write to the enquiry officer and categorically state that all allegations made are evil and false.

#### What is behind

The attacks, obviously, have no longer anything to do with the book *The Lives of Sri Aurobindo*. "One can reasonably assert that it is not the controversial book of Peter Heehs, but the

move to remodel the constitution of Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust that constitutes the hostile attack on Her Work," wrote Govardhan Dave, a senior and scholarly disciple of Sri Aurobindo who was in close touch with Ambalal Purani and considered to be M.P. Pandit's right hand man in Gujarat. In his long article "*A Factual Analysis on the Present Controversy*" he concludes that the promoters and monitors of this agitation intend to replace the present management of this Ashram by what they call a broad-based and democratic organizational set-up. "They propose to involve in this set-up the participation of the devotees who are associated with the Sri Aurobindo Society and its Branches and Centres all over the world, besides the Ashramites, all Aurobindonians, mysteriously excluding the participation of Aurovilians in this venture." He then explains that "The Mother, in her mission to make even the managerial and organizational work a part of Yogic Discipline, had initiated in the Ashram a new mode of administration of its affairs oriented towards promoting inner governance that would be receptive to the guidance of Higher Consciousness. ...The immediate consequence of this apparently innocent proposal [to make the present management of the Ashram more democratic, eds.] would be to shelve arbitrarily the experiment initiated by the Mother and revert to the organizational set-up having its faith in the mode of external governance and in the well-set mechanisms. This would amount to disowning the Mother. Secondly, the prescription of broad-based democratic set-up would open the gates for the rule of the mobs under the glamorous garb of Democracy, which is at the root of the evils that we are presently suffering in

our country and even in the world at large. Finally, it would lead to institutionalizing the teachings of Sri Aurobindo, which might culminate into developing a well-knit Religion in his name and brand, a Religion that would fall in line with some of the existing Religions in the world," argued Dave, and concluded, "It is exactly what should not happen as far as Mother's work is concerned."

This is also the view of a group called "The Well-Wishers of Sri Aurobindo Ashram", consisting of long-standing devotees in Pondicherry, Tamil Nadu, India and abroad. In a Notice published in the newspaper 'The Hindu' on August, 3rd, 2013, they informed the public that "over the past several months some vested interests (a handful of disgruntled inmates supported by outsiders) are trying to seize control of Sri Aurobindo Ashram by launching a vicious and malafide campaign against it ... It is our firm belief that these vested interests are trying to take control of the Ashram for their personal gain. We strongly condemn such selfish motives and actions and extend our full support to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and its office bearers."

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For more information consult the following websites:

[iyfundamentalism.info](http://iyfundamentalism.info)  
<http://wellwishersofsa.wordpress.com>  
<http://auroleaks.wordpress.com>  
[www.thelivesofsriarobindo.com](http://www.thelivesofsriarobindo.com)  
<http://integrallyogaimpostor.wordpress.com>  
<http://qted.wordpress.com> for the article of Govindhan Darve

### The Letter of 68 MPs

In July 2012, in a 14-page letter with 12 appendixes, the Sri Aurobindo Ashram responded to the letter of 68 MP's of May 22nd, 2012, seeking clarifications of what they alleged was the 'mismanagement of the Heehs affair.' The letter of the 68 MPs had been annexed to a letter to the Ashram of ex-MP Shri Kartikeshwar Patra. However, though asked to furnish the list of the names and addresses and the contact numbers of these MPs, so that the Ashram could send the MPs the required explanations directly, this list was not provided by Shri Kartikeshwar Patra. It was found later that the signatures of two MPs had been affixed twice. That, and the fact that none of the MPs has so far responded to the reply of the Ashram, has cast doubts on the authenticity of the MPs' letter. The response of the Ashram can be read at <http://auroleaks.wordpress.com/2012/10/19/ashram-responds-to-mps>

## ENVIRONMENT

### Growing Sadhana Forests in India and abroad

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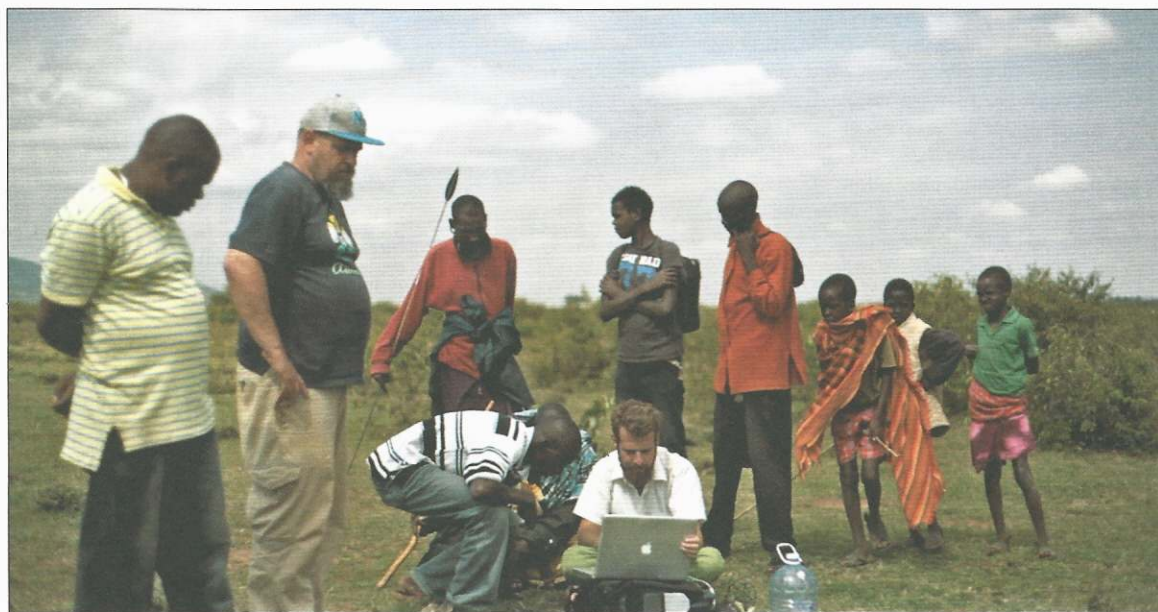
Aviram explains that when planning food forests with a local population, it is necessary to first analyze what are the nutritional needs – what they have and don't have in their diet and what should be supplemented. In Haiti, the problem is basically protein. "Our approach was to bring trees that have seeds or nuts that are very rich in protein, such as the Maya nut, an indigenous tree of Haiti that went extinct, which we have brought back to Haiti from Mexico. In Samburu County, Kenya, protein is not a problem. What they need is vitamins and minerals. So together with the Kenya Forest Service, we researched and identified 18 indigenous species which are high in vitamins and minerals which we will plant."

Are these projects in Haiti and Kenya independent of Auroville? Aviram explains that while the Sadhana Forests in Haiti and Kenya are registered as international NGOs through which donations for those projects are passed, they are tied into Auroville as much as possible. "We

feel that this is our expression of human unity. In Haiti, we are the official liaison with Auroville International. In Kenya, we have not started yet, but when we start we will find a way to tie it with Auroville as closely as we can. Auroville International has been very supportive of our work both in Haiti and in Kenya. We feel that Auroville is not just a physical place, but a perceptual place which can be expanded beyond its physical boundaries."

#### Sadhana Forest work in India

Sadhana Forest also extends to other parts of India. "In Madhya Pradesh in a place called Omkareshwar, an island in the Narmada River, we've created a beautiful piece of forest. Also in Madhya Pradesh, we are doing a water conservation project in a place called Luniyakhedi, near Ujjain. We made one big earth dam in February, and we will go back there at the end of October to do another one, and later it will be planted around. We've also



Sadhana Forest Kenya - Designing the land

trained a lot of people from India who come here and stay with us for some time and then go back to their place to do work."

#### Research

Research in Sadhana Forest is more an applied research as they have learned and experimented while working on the land. Aviram explains that they no longer plant in holes in the ground, but in heaps above the ground, which they have found is much more cost effective and gives a better survival rate. They have also experimented with wick irrigation, which consists of using reused plastic bottles with a wick that drips the water very slowly underneath the tree without any evaporation. This technique was introduced two years ago and it is working very well. The area currently being planted is very difficult terrain, full of pebbles, a very hard and dry soil. But using this technique it is now full of thousands of trees.

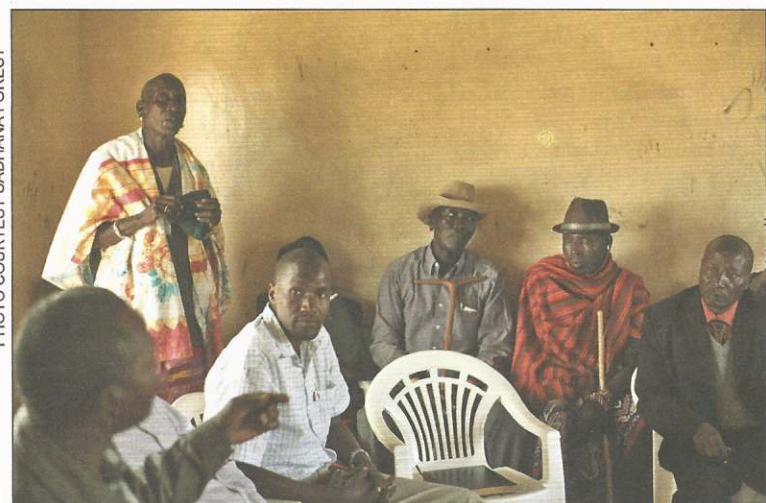
Sadhana Forest is also conducting research together with the University of Lausanne in Switzerland on oxalogenesis, which is a phenomenon in which trees take carbon from the air, and fix it into the ground as calcium carbonate, limestone. Even if you cut the tree and burn it, the carbon would stay in the ground. Aviram explains that is a very important discovery vis-a-vis global warming. Sadhana Forest in Auroville is now mainly planting four species of oxalogenic trees that are part of the Tropical Dry Forest indigenous to this area, as well as a few oxalogenic species that are indigenous to other parts of India, and will follow their growth and the soil composition for the next few years. There is also a master's student volunteer doing research on oxalogenesis in Haiti, and soon there will be a Ph.D. student doing research on this as well.

Aviram explains that indigenous reforestation is not a profit-making venture, so all the funds for Sadhana Forest come from donations, mainly

private. In terms of government money, Sadhana Forest got one grant a few years ago from the German government, through Auroville International Germany, to build the staff quarters and the training centre. For the new project in Kenya, they have just received approval of a grant request for \$50,000 from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to start the project. The project in Haiti is funded by two donors, one a French foundation and the other a French company that does processing of organic food. For Auroville, Sadhana Forest has depended mainly on private donations, which are routed through the Unity Fund. Aviram explains, "It has been a struggle all along with the money and it is still a big struggle. But we feel supported, and as we know we are doing our best, we hope that the Divine will support us. Until now it has been okay."

Larry

for more information contact <http://sadhanaforest.org>



Sadhana Forest Kenya - Community meeting



# Free electricity in a money-less society

In November 2012, Auroville Today reported about the work of Varuna. Its main aim is to create a green energy park for Auroville which will be able to meet fully Auroville's energy-consumption requirements. The second aim is to build and operate a small desalination plant which can supply drinking water to the nearby villages and Auroville, as well as provide water for the future Matrimandir Lake. The third aim is to support a money-less society in Auroville by providing electricity free of cost, first to all service units and later to individuals and other units.

Varuna has progressed well on all fronts. Its objective to create a green energy park for Auroville is nearing fulfilment now that it owns a wind park consisting of four wind generators, while a fifth one will be connected to the grid early 2014. Together, the five wind generators will produce about 88 lakhs kWh of electricity, more than double the present energy requirements of Auroville of about 35 lakhs kWh per year.

On the second aim, progress is also being made. A Detailed Project Report (DPR) has been made and work is in progress to define the exact type of installation best suited to Auroville. In 2014, Varuna will start the process of obtaining permissions from the various authorities to install and operate the plant and for pumping the water up to Auroville. As the salinization of the aquifer in various beach communities is already happening, this development will soon become urgent.

Varuna has not been successful in obtaining permission for the 'wheeling' of the energy produced by the wind generators to Auroville. 'Wheeling' means that Auroville would be able to use free in Auroville the equivalent of what has been put into the grid by the wind generators, minus an administrative fee. According to the regulations of the Tamil Nadu Electricity Board (TNEB), wheeling can only be done into High Tension networks, not into the many Low Tension connections of Auroville. For this reason, Varuna has been selling the energy its windmills produce and has been making donations to Auroville to pay for its electricity bills.

This solution, however, is costly as current is sold to the TNEB at an average price of Rs 3 per kWh while many of the Auroville services pay around 7 Rs per kWh. To solve this problem, Varuna is supporting a HT network being installed in Auroville so that wheeling will become possible. [See the article *Battling the power cuts: opportunities for sustainable energy solutions* in AVToday # 283 of February 2013.] This network would also allow Auroville to apply for a dedicated feeder, which would lead to almost uninterrupted power supply.

In August this year, Varuna decided to extend the benefits of free electricity to those communities (residential connections, pumps and other joint community installations) that would be the first to be connected to the HT network so that, when the conversion to HT would take place, the residents would not be financially affected as the HT tariffs are substantially higher than LT tariffs. As a next step, from October onwards, Varuna will cover the full electricity bill of all Aurovilians currently receiving a maintenance from City Services. Ultimately, Varuna intends to provide free electricity to residential connections all over Auroville so that disparities between those who are and those who are not supported will disappear. It is also the intention that, in due time, those who are not connected to the grid and rely on solar energy will be supported, for example by a free replacement of solar panels or batteries.

## Objections to free electricity

Varuna's decision to provide free electricity to residential communities has not gone unchallenged. In a letter to the BCC, residents of Grace community wrote, "While most of us felt grateful to the generosity of Varuna, many of us felt a tinge of discomfort, knowing the possibilities of disastrous effects which energy subsidies are prone to bring." They added that electrical or energy subsidies are considered by economists and environmental experts as the worst incentive for the welfare of humanity. "From the electrical subsidy to farmers in Tamil Nadu to petrol subsidy in gulf countries, these subsidies have contributed towards abusive use of resources affecting adversely well-being, economy and environment. In an evolving humanity living in Auroville, a subsidy on electricity can push us back by encouraging conspicuous consumption unhindered by any restraint."

A second argument against the electricity subsidy is "the growing trend to view people as users rather than beneficiaries. A relationship as a user trusts the wisdom of people to decide what is good for them. In a system of beneficiaries, the state or a few people decide what is good for people. In our case, the Varuna management has decided what is good for all of us. Along with the welcome sweetener of generosity there is a concern for settling in a collective obesity," wrote the residents. They proposed that electrical subsidy for all services, units and individuals be discontinued as soon as possible, and instead, an additional maintenance be made available to all residents to decide for themselves what to spend it on. Stating that the Auroville maintenance, which at present amounts to an average Rs 8,000 a month, is "miniscule in comparison to current remunerations prevailing in India – a peon in Auroville Foundation office is paid nearly Rs.15,000 per month, and the lowest income tax limit is Rs.16,500 per month", they propose that the maintenance is increased by about Rs.2,000 per month, to be funded from the pool of resources created by Varuna. "With this daily needs package, each of us will get a freedom to choose our most needed item. A flexibility to choose will empower us to make a conscious choice as per our needs."

## Counter arguments

"The views expressed by the Grace community deserve close scrutiny," says Michael Bonke, one of the executives of Varuna. "For they touch upon one of the basic tenets of Auroville, that of a money-less society. That tenet was put by The Mother herself when she said that 'There won't be any exchange of money in Auroville. It is only with the outside world that Auroville will have money relations. Money will be no more the Sovereign Lord; individual value will have a greater importance than the value due to material wealth and social position.' It is for this reason that Auroville has decided to supply maintenance in a cash and a kind component, and has been bearing the costs of many Auroville service units so that each of them could provide their services to the Aurovilians free of charge or at lower rates. It is also for this reason that the BCC decided to pay – up to a certain maximum – the electricity bills of those who are working for services, which means that most of these people don't pay any longer for electricity. Varuna is simply following and extending this scheme. So the argument that 'the state or few people decide what is good for people' has in my view no validity. The BCC and Varuna are simply trying to implement the directives of The Mother, the founder of Auroville. This is not a 'big brother' attitude."

"I also do not agree with the argument that providing free electricity is tantamount to promoting waste. The example has been given of the abuse of free electricity by farmers in Tamil Nadu. Here, a money-less approach was planted in a money-driven society. This cannot work. As long as the basic thought and behaviour patterns are dominantly money-based, one cannot expect a consciousness or subtle behaviour pattern to come up, as it would in a money-less society. In a money-driven society, money is indeed the only effective regulating force which can prevent wastage."

"But in a money-less society, the rules of a money-driven society should no longer apply. Once it is clear that electricity, water and food are common commodities, free for all but at a cost for the community, the justification for a non-caring attitude is gone. For each Aurovilian uses a collective value and is forced to cherish it. It is no longer 'his electricity', 'his water', 'his food', which he pays for and uses or abuses as he deems fit. A responsibility for the collective is intrinsically linked to a collective-based economy."

"The 'promoting waste' argument also does not hold if we look at Auroville's experience of providing free electricity to many Auroville services over the last two years. We have seen no noticeable increase in the electricity consumption by any of the services. This shows a very responsible attitude and we may assume that the individual Aurovilians too will not start wasting common commodities once there is no personal financial disadvantage in doing so. Some people may fear that Aurovilians will leave their lights on when they leave the house and their windows open while running air conditioners once electricity is free. They evidently believe the average Aurovilian to be a careless, unconscious person. But I do not think that this is a true reflection of the state of the Aurovilians."

"The second argument, that electrical or energy subsidies are considered by economists and environmentalists as the worst incentive for welfare of humanity, is a generalisation. There are many examples where electricity subsidy has created a booming industry. Silicon Valley in California, for example, came into existence due to the immense volumes of electricity generated by the big waterfalls near San Francisco and the decision of the municipality of San Francisco to provide electricity at low costs. Today, the income of this area from the computer and software industry must be more than a million times higher than the total subsidy."

## The boons of free electricity

"I expect that in Auroville, free electricity will lead to an increase of electricity consumption. For commercial and service units, it would be an opportunity to mechanise and increase their productivity, and so benefit the development of Auroville. For the individual Aurovilians too it will be a boon. For the consumption of electricity in today's Auroville is suppressed due to the poverty of Aurovilians. There are many Aurovilians who suffer from the heat and for whom dealing with the heat is one of the main challenges of every day life. Yet, they cannot afford an air conditioner – the rich Aurovilians can – as their maintenance does not allow for the purchase and for paying the running costs. But this is an unfair situation. If these Aurovilians would be able to find the funds to install an air conditioner, the electricity to run them should also be supplied free of charge so that they can lead a more productive life and can better focus on the main reasons for being in Auroville. It would be perverse to use the poverty in Auroville to justify high principles like simple living and caring for our environment. This is the more so as Varuna's wind generators are generating already more than double the energy required by Auroville and the energy supplied is green, being generated by wind-power."

"To monitor consumption, I propose that a monitoring system is created, where each Aurovilian will get a graph of the development of his electricity consumption along with his bi-monthly consumption statement. A computer programme will indicate excessive consumption or fraud. I would be against installing a bureaucracy with rules and regulations, substituting the money-pressure."

## Developing a money-less society

"The basic idea of a money-less economy in Auroville is that the motivation to work, to care, to make an effort, is not originated from the desire for money. If we want to install a money-less economy on a money-based consciousness, we will fail. Either we manage to change the economy along with our consciousness, or Auroville will remain a society like any other."

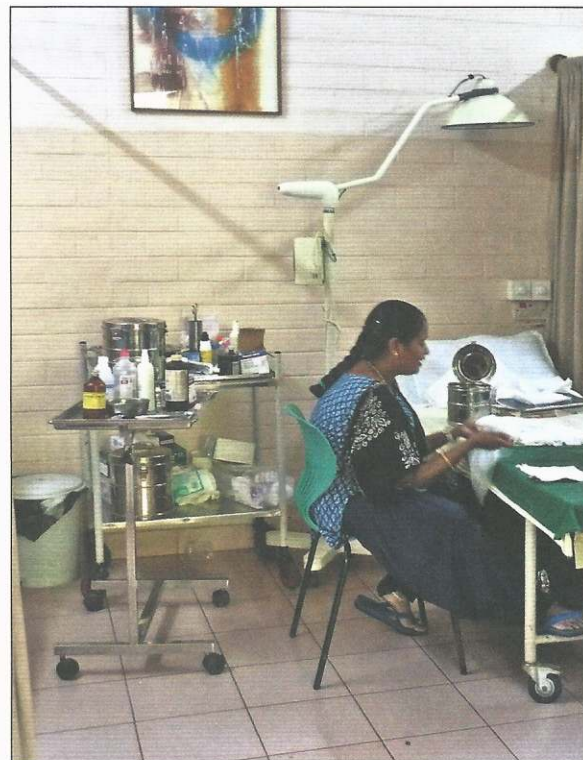
"Today, Auroville's economy is still based on a monetary system. In fact the influence money has on the individual life in Auroville is the same as in the outside world. Their monetary situation governs people's living standard, their work, their children's education, their type of holidays etc. The maintenance system, moreover, does not even provide for many Aurovilians the possibility to live a decent life. Aurovilians are often forced to leave Auroville for some time, in order to earn money outside of Auroville, to make ends meet."

"Auroville will need to replace the money-based social system by something else. It will depend on this 'something else' whether the new society will be superior to the money-based society, and then the new system will spread, or whether the new form of society will not be fit for life in the global competition of micro- and macro-societies."

"The main question now is: What is the 'something else' which will replace the regulatory and organising power of money? The Mother had given the answer in very clear terms: All rules in Auroville should finally be replaced by a higher consciousness. It is the direct contact with the higher consciousness which will bring the change. Once the higher consciousness takes over, the regulating and organising force of money will no more be needed."

"One may argue that this direct contact with a higher consciousness is still not there, so if we try to abolish money in Auroville as the main regulating agency, then wastage and chaos will be the result. But that is not a good argument for a society which aims at creating a new form of collective life. A courageous approach, ready to face setbacks and defeats is called for."

Michael Bonke, in conversation with Carel



Auroville services. From top: The Kailash healing Center; Distribution Center; The Nandini outlet; and



# "Encouraging the spirit of service"

Isha has a long experience of administration in Auroville. At present, she is the coordinator of the Auroville Board of Services.

**Auroville Today: What is the function of the Auroville Board of Services (ABS)?**

**Isha:** The ABS was created in 2008. The FAMC realized that there was an administrative body for the commercial units – the ABC (Auroville Board of Commerce) – but that we did not have a comparable body for the services. Basically, the ABS provides a platform for the needs of the services and the users of the services to be expressed and coordinated. It also has a vision, and that is to promote the in-kind economy of Auroville.

**Which services are covered by the ABS?**

When we set up ABS for our own clarity we defined, by type of activity, four major categories of services: prosperity services, municipal services, administrative services and education and research (which include the arts). Later we added a fifth category, which is outreach services. This is just a convenient tool because we know that almost all these activities have aspects which could put them in more than one category and there are other ways to categorize services, such as what form of income makes it possible for them to run.

The prosperity services are our prime focus. The income they rely upon is often provided from the community, and in some cases the service is provided to individuals in such a way that they don't even see that they have access to it – it is received as part of the in-kind package, their monthly maintenance. The in-kind services include, for an adult on full maintenance, the Health Fund and Solar Kitchen meals. The ABS supports the expansion of the in-kind economy, so if there are funds available in the collective budget we would always like to see them used to provide more in-kind services to people rather than increasing the cash in hand component of their maintenance. But there is always pressure to also increase the total that people see on their account.

**Some people want more cash in hand rather than more in-kind services because they want to have a choice of how they use that money.**

We don't see it that way, but rather that promoting the in-kind economy is a win-win situation because, if it is done intelligently, funds are invested in something you really need and which improves the quality of our collective life. At the same time, if you widen the base of non-cash components in people's lives it increases the sense of community and true sharing. Moreover, from an economic point of view, you are ploughing funds into our internal economy rather than encouraging people to purchase goods and services outside Auroville.

**Do we need to redefine what we mean by 'service'?**

When we talk about a 'service' are we talking about something that we 'get', or are we talking about the act of service which, even if I'm on the receiving end, I am also a participant in? This is a crucial point in how we define services. If we see 'service' simply as a commodity, as something I provide and you get, we forget the deeper aspect, which is that each interaction we participate in is an exchange of energy. In Auroville, each exchange can be informed by meaning and purpose. If not, what is the difference between Auroville and anywhere else? So what is really required is awareness about this – a change of consciousness to strengthen our sense of community and the role of the collective.

**How will this happen? Can the ABS play a role in this?**

I think this can happen through a kind of intelligent promotion, and this is where the role of the Board of Services is crucial.

One of my favorite examples of intelligent promotion happened in Curitiba, Brazil, when Jaime Lerner became the mayor and set about transforming that city. He saw where he could best invest taxpayers' money – in infrastructure that would change the quality of life, and he backed this up with intelligent promotion of services because often, unlike commercial marketing, the services are not promoted as well. That is the proper role of administration – you need people with a vision to maximize the effective use of the resources

at hand, and encourage people to make good choices in daily life because they want to, not because they're forced to.

**Some Aurovilians unfavourably compare the functioning of our services to our commercial units. They say that some services are inefficient because, unlike the commercial units, they don't have to compete in the marketplace.**

I don't agree with this generalization. It's true that there may be things we can do to improve the service sector but you can say the same of the commercial units. A big difference is, we don't subject our commercial activities to the same economic scrutiny. As long as they provide funds for their own functioning, we allow them to use their excess income how they wish. So there is a lot of room for misunderstanding here.

Actually, I think it would help a lot to break down this divisive view of 'services' and 'commercial activities', which is just a mindset. To begin with, there are no 'commercial' units in Auroville, per se. Rather, as one of our chartered accountants defined them recently, they are 'furtherance' activities because their purpose is to further the development of Auroville by generating income. That is the service they provide.

Again, every activity in Auroville needs income, whether it is a 'furtherance' activity or an in-kind activity, and there are different ways to get income. Some of the activities create that income themselves; some receive it from a central fund. There is no 'right' or 'wrong' way here. What would help us a lot, and what we keep asking the BCC for, is an all-inclusive overview of the whole financial and economic picture of Auroville. Because then you would see that the income-generating activities (including some services) are just the other hand of the centrally-funded activities.

Another way of looking at our economy would be to contrast the individualistic, isolationist approach to life to an empathetic approach. This is a global dichotomy; it is not peculiar to Auroville. It contrasts the "I must make it myself" attitude with an awareness that empathy and concern for others is crucial to human unity, that this

**Auroville Prosperity Services: a selection**

AV Dental Centre  
AV Farms  
AV Health Services  
Freestore  
Gas Bottle Service  
Health Fund  
Housing Repair Fund  
Integral Health Service  
Nandini  
Pour Tous Distribution Center  
Solar Kitchen

creates community and quality of life.

However, if your circumstances push you in a certain direction then your sense of isolationism may be reinforced. This is what happens, to a certain extent, in Auroville. We ask people to come and give everything, their time and energy and lives, and the implicit understanding is that the collective (and the Divine) will look after them in all ways. But the collective can't make this promise yet. This is why some people feel that Auroville is not working and they have to do everything and get everything for themselves.

**How do you change this?**

By strengthening our service economy. On the administrative side of things, the one thing that would make the biggest difference in Auroville would be a more conscious collaboration from people in working groups to promote the service economy. This is where, as individuals very committed to manifesting the services, we can feel frustrated, because we often interact with people in the administration who are caught up in expediency and practical issues without them seeing how great is the need to nurture this empathy thing.

As a community, we could be doing much more to encourage this spirit of service. It's a challenge, but we can make the subtler aspects of community-building accessible and help everyone participate. Each one of us is making Auroville every moment; every time we meet together there is an exchange of energy, and every exchange is an opportunity to build community when we can hold that awareness.

*From an interview by Alan*

## Auroville, Social Banking and The Commons

In July, Lyle participated in a seminar in Switzerland on 'Social Banking and The Commons'. Here he talks about the insights that he gained and the possible relevance to Auroville.

**S**ocial Banks, which are also known as 'alternative banks', are generally small and focused in a specific community or area for which they feel some responsibility. Social Banks, while being concerned with profit, have a clear set of ethical criteria which determines where they invest money and to whom they lend money. These criteria are based, among other things, upon strengthening society and protecting the environment. So they would not provide a loan to someone whose activities would devastate the environment. Also, Social Banks do not make speculative investments; they invest in what they call the 'real' economy. This means they invest in a business because they want that particular business to grow and benefit the community.

During the seminar, 'the commons' was defined as a space between government and private ownership in which a group of people who have an interest in finding equitable and sustainable ways of sharing one or more resources are given decision-making powers to manage that resource. The resources held in common can include everything from natural resources and common grazing land to open-sourced software.

The modern commons movement is a search for an alternative to profit maximization; it is a recognition that communism has not worked, that capitalism as practiced is not working, but that people sharing certain resources and regulating those resources at a local level can be a promising alternative.

So the conference brought together two groups of people – social bankers and those interested in developing commons – who both held alternative views to how society could develop. The main question posed was, how could Social Banks support the development of healthy commons? As yet, the answer is unclear. However, they are developing a manifesto (see <http://titanpad.com/SocialBankingandCommonsManifesto>).

The relevance of all this to Auroville is that Auroville could be considered a commons because, as stated in our Charter, "Auroville belongs to no one in particular". It is a resource shared among its members and it is envisaged to evolve in a self-organizing manner. This was a particularly interesting insight for me because it places us in the midst of a global movement to better sustain and share the Earth's resources. Also one of the presenters stated that a healthy commons "decouples the link between giving and taking", which is very much the spirit of Mother's 'Dream'. There again, Auroville's Financial Services can be seen, in certain respects, to be similar to a Social Bank as it has similar aims and provides some of the same services. For example, it supports Auroville's real economy, it does not use any funds for speculation, and it is concerned with the social and cultural impact of what it helps finance, which is largely City Services.

During the seminar, Ellen Ostrom's eight design principles of successful commons were mentioned and I found these interesting and potentially relevant for

Auroville. These principles included the need for clear and locally-understood boundaries between legitimate users and non-users; individuals affected by a resource regime are authorized to participate in making and modifying its rules; the need to monitor individuals who use or regulate the common resource; the need to monitor the conditions of the resource; sanctions for rule violations that start very low but become stronger if a user repeatedly violates a rule; and rapid, low-cost, local arenas for resolving conflicts among users.

In subsequent sessions we identified additional elements that we thought are required for a healthy commons. These include the need for members to have equal access which is not dependent upon financial status or power relations, and that responsibilities should be allocated according to capacities. However, it was agreed that the most critical quality in maintaining a healthy commons is trust among its members, and this is created and strengthened through transparency, the sharing of knowledge, and through there being consistency between what the members say and what they do.

These criteria could be used to assess all aspects of our life in Auroville. But I think it would be particularly interesting to develop ethical criteria on these lines for our business units and services. The units and services belong to Auroville, they are part of the Auroville commons, but the way they operate is not transparent and our monitoring of them is weak. Now we tend to judge a unit on the basis of how much it

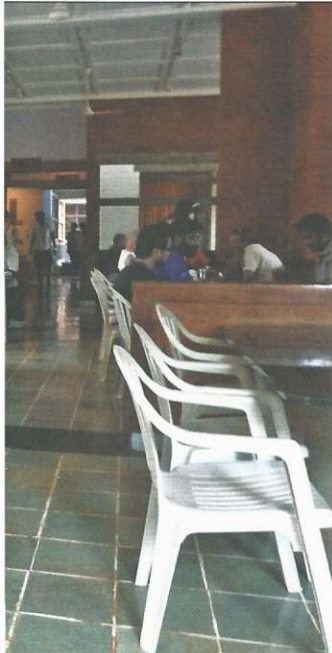
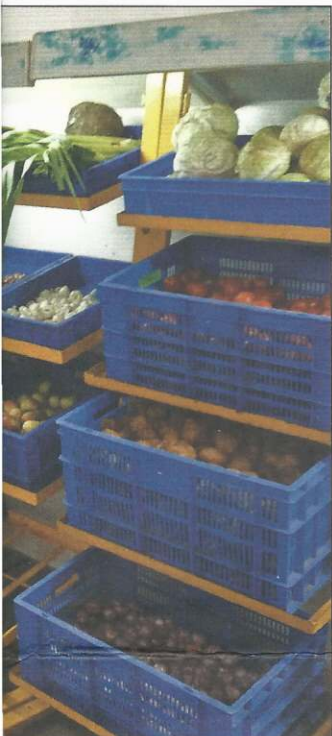
contributes to Auroville, but this is a very crude way of looking at its participation in the whole. It doesn't look at whether they are keeping their vast reserves 'offshore', out of the Auroville Financial Services, or if they are pursuing ethical business and employment practices, or how much they contribute to social harmony and a sustainable environment, or, most importantly, how effectively they contribute to what Auroville hopes to become as elucidated in *The Charter and The Dream*.

Our services should be scrutinised in a similar manner. We should forget the present misleading distinction between 'services' and 'commercial units'. Instead, we could rank all our services and businesses on the basis of ethical criteria designed by us.

If a service or commercial unit doesn't abide by the criteria, there could be graduated sanctions. We would have to sit down as a community to discuss all these issues, but the first thing we need to recognize is that there is much we can do to improve the present Auroville economy, both in terms of transparency (most Social Banks are very transparent about their investments and their loans: everybody can see what they are doing) and the ethical basis upon which it operates.

Of course, all this talk about ethical criteria and sanctions sounds a little abstract until we can come up with clear practical proposals relevant to our situation in Auroville. I am prepared to be part of a group that works on this and hope that others will also be willing to join.

*Lyle in discussion with Alan*



er; shopping at the Pour Tous  
d the Solar Kitchen



# The third Auroville film festival

Over a span of six days, 125 films were screened during the third Auroville Film Festival held from September 17-22 at the Town Hall. Auroville Today talked to three of the organizers, Marco, Krishna and Tom.

“Our work started about one and a half years ago, when we announced the third biennial. The response has been overwhelming,” says Krishna. “As with the two previous festivals in 2009 and 2011, we issued invitations for films in four categories: films made by residents of Auroville and its neighbourhood; films made about Auroville or the Auroville neighbourhood; films made by students of Auroville schools, Auroville Outreach Schools or of other schools around Auroville; and films that develop the theme of Human Unity. Films in the first three categories had to be made after July 2011, films in the last category after December 2008.”

“We received far more films than for the previous festivals,” says Marco. “Each of the seven participating schools sent three or four films. There were over 50 films made by Aurovilians and people in the bioregion, and there were ten films about Auroville.”

## The Human Unity category

But it was the Human Unity category that exceeded expectations. “We received suggestions from Auroville International Centres, from Aurovilians, and from other individuals as well as from the Festival Très Courts in Aix-en-Provence and from the Kriti Film Club in New Delhi,” says Marco. “In this way, 120 deeply-inspiring feature films from all over the world came to Auroville. The Consulate of the Federal Republic of Germany in Chennai sent *Pina*, a feature-length dance film on Pina Bausch by German film maker Wim Wenders; Warner Bros Pictures (India) Pvt. Ltd sent *Invictus*, a film directed by Clint Eastwood about how Nelson Mandela and the captain of South Africa’s rugby team worked together to unite their country. Their screening fee was generously paid by AVI USA. From Germany we got *Mama Africa*, a film by Mika Kaurismäki on Miriam Makeba, who devoted her entire life to unifying people around the world. From Israel we received *One Day after Peace*, about whether the Truth and Reconciliation approach used in South Africa could be applied to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

“We gave all the films to a secret selection panel of three Aurovilians – we kept the names secret – none of whom are otherwise involved in the film festival. They spent the last year selecting 34 films. After we received their selection, we approached, where necessary, the filmmakers, producers or distributors to get their permission that we use the film in the festival.”

## The judges

“For the awards, these films were then once again ‘judged’ by a panel of three jurors, who all have film experience and who are familiar with Auroville’s ideal of human unity,” says Krishna. “They were Daniel Wachsmann, a producer of feature films, documentaries and television dramas; Kaarthikeyan, who is a camera man, a director, a producer, and is well known as the Indian executive producer of the film *Hamuman*; and Aurovillian Surya, who has been working with Aurofilm.

“But while the jurors for the films on the theme of Human Unity were people who are well-aware of Auroville, we wanted the jurors for the three other categories to be complete outsiders. We asked people who did not know Auroville or just had some superficial acquaintance with it. Ms. Aanchal Kapur, who started the Kriti Film Club in New Delhi and who has also been nominating films for national and international film festivals,

had never been in Auroville. Dr. Balasaravanan, a film-maker and Assistant Professor in the department of Electronic Media and Mass Communication of Pondicherry University, knew Auroville a little bit. And so did Franck Apprederis, a French film director who lives in Paris and also has a house in neighbouring Bommayarpalayam.”

## How to judge

“For all jurors the conditions were the same,” says Marco. “We told them we did not want a selection along the usual lines such as ‘best actor,’ ‘best actress,’ ‘best director,’ ‘best this’ or ‘best that’. We asked them to judge a film by how they had been affected by it, by what they experienced. In the first three categories, this was, of course, the Auroville impact the film had on them. In the last category, it was the aspect of human unity.”

“The judges knew that we were presenting them with a soup of movies and that it would be impossible to judge and compare,” says Krishna. “We left them free to decide how they wanted to proceed. They discussed it amongst themselves and came up with a very interesting solution: instead of giving first, second and third prizes, they created three award categories, the ‘Wisdom’ award, the ‘Cinema Paradiso’ award and the ‘Jury’ award, and

their holes!” grins Marco. “And, what’s more, they enjoyed it! But most filmgoers were the younger generation, in the age group of 20-30, and, of course, there were lots of children. On average, each evening had 200+ people attending although, most probably, a lot of them came from outside.”

## The kids’ films

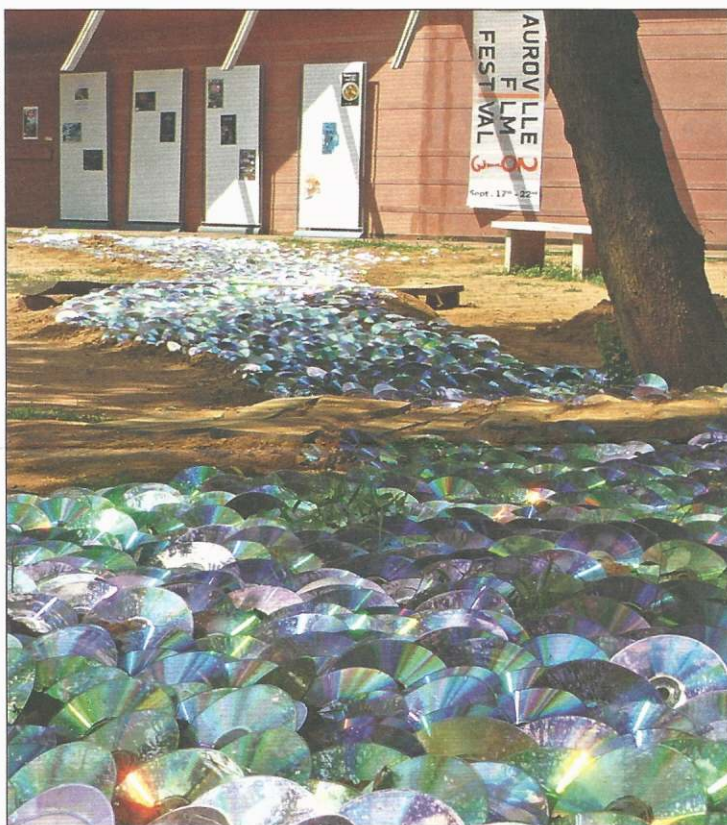
“What was particularly pleasing was the quality and creativity of some of the films made by the children,” says Tom. “Since 2009, the Auroville Film Festival has been organizing film workshops throughout the year in schools in and around Auroville. This educational outreach programme, called Auroville Film Festival Educational Outreach Programme (AVFF-EOP), has matured, and now film-making is being taught at many Auroville schools. In Last School it has become part of the curriculum, at the request of children who had been exposed to our programme in their previous school. The course is taught by Claire. In Future School, AVFF-EOP is teaching traditional stop-motion animation while Uriel, another teacher, is teaching computer animation. The stop-motion animation film *A Brief*

*History of Auroville* made by six 5th Grade children from Transition School even won the Jury Award, and that is the best feedback you can get. There are also many positive side-effects to film making, such as mastery of English, teaching life skills, learning how to organize the pre-production, acting, screening, and the public audience.”

“Here we have to express our thanks to the two foundations that have been consistently helping Auroville through the years,” says Krishna. “Both the American Foundation for World Education and the Dutch Stichting de Zaaier have sponsored the purchase of film equipment, without which teaching film-making would have been impossible.” Tom concurs, but mentions that now much of the equipment needs to be replaced. “Hundreds of children have been using it, and some of it is literally falling apart. We need new cameras, a new projector, and a good set of lighting equipment. Those who can help, please contact us.”

## The next festival

Contrary to the previous festivals, this time there was a lack of money. “We only managed to raise Rs 2 lakhs,” says Krishna. “It forced us to be really creative. We concentrated the festival on one location instead of several as before – which proved to be an excellent decision; we decided against printing a catalogue and made it only available online; and we asked each Aurovillian producer to make their own poster – again a good decision as it showed a wealth of creative talent. What was most important was the goodwill and hard work of the AVFF’13 Team who made this festival a reality, and of the Town Hall management which helped us throughout in a



‘Rainbow Stream’, by Atul, Minsun, Sunmi, Shine, Patricia, Hu, and Ok

gave the award to one film in each category. They did not declare one film to be the ultimate winner, as they couldn’t really be compared.”

Apart from these awards, there was the traditional ‘Auroville Mongbra’ award, an award created in 2011 by Johnny. “At the 2011 Film Festival, the Mongbra went to Ireno, the Aurovillian who was most appreciated by the audience. This year the audience voted the award to the 5th grade children from Deepanam School for their film *Grounded*,” says Krishna.

## Experiencing Auroville

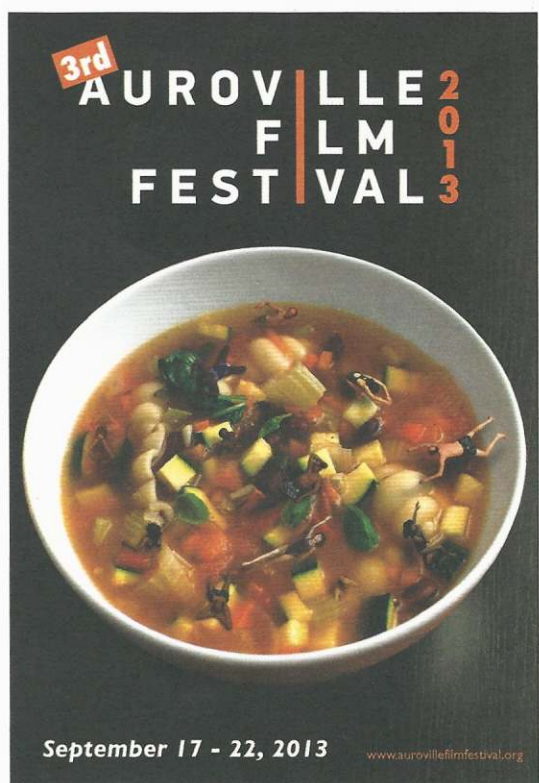
“What was most interesting for us was the impact these films had on the judges themselves,” says Marco. “Aanchal Kapur worded it very well, when she said, ‘Through the films we have met many people and had an ‘organic experience’ of Auroville. This place pulled me. And I will come back.”

The judges were not alone in ‘experiencing’ Auroville. “Through the films on Auroville many Aurovilians came to know about other Aurovilians and about new ideas, new projects, new happenings in Auroville which none of them were aware of,” says Krishna. “The festival was a place for social interaction, for people to get to know each other. There was food and drinks at cost price; there was live music by Auroville musicians and there were art installations all over the place. It was so pleasant to be with Aurovilians, to see new faces, to talk to people you see on the road but actually never meet. Auroville needs more such places to just hang out.”

“This time the festival also drew people who hadn’t attended any of the previous festivals, especially Aurovilians who have been living in Auroville for 20 years and more. They came out of

“I’m very happy that *Mama Africa* was selected for the Human Unity section of Auroville Film Festival. Miriam Makeba, who herself was a victim of segregation and forced to live in exile, devoted her entire life to unifying people around the world. In a unique way she was able to combine her art with an important message: ‘Unify us, don’t divide us!’”

Mika Kaurismäki, Director



September 17 - 22, 2013

www.aurovillefilmfestival.org

POSTER BY IRENO

fantastic way. This all created a very special ambience.”

“But for the 2015 festival we need a different approach,” says Marco. “The festival is becoming a regular event, which is not only well-appreciated by the Aurovilians but also by the outside world, for whom it is an opportunity to discover Auroville and what it stands for. The next step is to widen out, invite, say, ten Indian and a number of foreign directors to present their movies, and give it wide publicity.

This was a community film festival. What struck me is that Auroville is nurturing a kind of community space and being which doesn’t exist anywhere else ...

Aanchal Kapur

“We are looking into requests to also have an Auroville Film Festival in New Delhi or Chennai, with or without the Human Unity category. There is also an idea to organize an Auroville Festival in Chennai in which films on Auroville could be a part. We are working on these ideas. Showing films on Auroville, we noticed, has a powerful effect on people – far more than lectures about the ideals of Auroville. It is fantastic to show some of the reality of Auroville.”

“We have also been asked to look into the possibility of organizing a children’s film festival and a disabilities film festival,” says Tom. “The possibilities are endless. But what we plan to take up immediately is organizing open-air film screenings in a different Auroville community every month. There are beautiful places in Auroville that are very suitable for showing films. It would tremendously improve the social interaction amongst Aurovilians.”

In conversation with Carel.

For more information visit [www.aurovillefilmfestival.org](http://www.aurovillefilmfestival.org) or contact [aurovillefilmfestival@auroville.org.in](mailto:aurovillefilmfestival@auroville.org.in)



PHOTO GIORGIO

Evening entertainment at the Town Hall



# Collective Yoga and the Group-Soul

It's a cliché to say there is a crisis in our decision-making process. Today, either small groups try to push through their own proposals by circumventing the collective process, or else one group makes a decision which is ignored or overturned by other groups. Or, more commonly, the community stands stymied, unable to make decisions because it is unable to achieve consensus.

Why are the present Aurovilians not good at collective decision-making? Theories abound. We are too diverse in background, culture and education; some of us are too much attached to dogma, special interests and our 'clans'; we are too diffuse, spread out, and can no longer 'feel' the larger community; we lack the correct meeting technology etc.

To some extent, all of this may be true. But there is another possibility, and that is that we are not practising collective yoga.

What is collective yoga? The late Edith Schnapper, author of several books on spirituality and member of Auroville International UK, tried to define it in an early article in Auroville Today. "The Mother realized at an early stage that the transformatory work on the parts of the being, as well as on the cellular level, cannot stand alone; it has to be supplemented by a communally-oriented view so as to make a universal change possible...With this end in view, the Mother created a new concept which she called Collective Yoga. It refers to a spiritual discipline that has not been attempted before and, for Auroville, it is important to understand what it is and in what way it differs from other Yogas. One thing is evident. Collective Yoga does not refer to an assembly of people – groups, Ashrams, monasteries – who pursue an individual yogic path together."

Edith points out that the key realization is that we are totally interconnected at all levels, so that any advance made in one part will influence the greater whole. The aim of collective yoga is that the community should arrive at a point of collective realization and manifestation which will usher in a new world. In Mother's words:

*It is the unity of all in the solidarity of a common manifestation that will allow the creation of the new and divine world upon the Earth. Each will bring his part, but no part will be complete except as a power in the solidarity of the whole.*

Edith went on to point out that a collective yoga would have its own 'laws', "and these laws

are likely to run counter to personal achievements, however, exalted, because of the latter's incompleteness. Thus an individual might have to relinquish certain realisations to allow the 'imprint of the whole' to take root in him and change his outlook."

Yet another approach to collective yoga involves the concept of the 'group-soul'. This sounds suspiciously 'New Age', but it's worth recalling that Sri Aurobindo wrote very precisely about it:

*The nation or society, like the individual, has a body, an organic life, a moral and aesthetic temperament, a developing mind and a soul behind all these signs and powers for the sake of which they exist. One may even say that, like the individual, it is essentially a soul rather than has one; it is a group-soul that, once having attained to a separate distinctness, must become more and more self-conscious and find itself more and more fully as it develops its corporate action and mentality and its organic self-expressive life.*

The late Ruud Lohman, one of Auroville's pioneers, contemplated the concept of the group-soul in relationship to Auroville in his exploratory essay *The Sadhana of the Group-Soul*, written in early 1972. As befits the challenge of describing something about which not much has been written, the essay contains far more questions than answers. But his conclusion is clear. "Only the group-soul will build Auroville, and create, step by step, its own body." And he explained, "...the problems posed to Auroville such as the interrelations of the various technical disciplines, the necessary actions to absorb new people, the ways to divide the population over the various sections of the City...all that will be decided and settled perfectly by the emerging group-soul, which, in so far as it emerges, cannot but act according to the Truth."

In other words, Ruud is suggesting that the group-soul is akin to the psychic being of the community.

If this is so, it opens up an entirely new perspective on our present problems. It suggests that one of the reasons we find it so difficult to come to collective decisions is that we are missing our contact with the group-soul of Auroville. And perhaps this is why, in spite of all our other achievements, there remains something fundamentally uncentred, incoherent, about the present community of Auroville; an incoherence reflected not only in our meeting and decision-

making processes but also in our planning, economy, architecture, etc.

But how can we contact this group-soul, how can we bring it to the front? What would such a collective *sadhana* look like?

Ruud suggested a number of possibilities, including researching and disseminating what Sri Aurobindo and Mother have written related to this topic; working together at Matrimandir to discover "the soul of Auroville"; and forming groups to experiment with various methods to find the group-soul. One such method was suggested by Mother in 1963 when she said that "...I believe it is useful for us to have some common meditation sometimes: to work for the creation of a common atmosphere".

Edith observes that the collective yoga requires "a shift in our attention. If it is, as is habitually the case, riveted to a predominantly self-centred attitude, then divisions and clashes of personalities within the group are inevitable. But if our attention in daily life can be directed, again habitually, towards the group as a whole, then identification of the individual and group becomes a possibility and, maybe with it, we are afforded a first glimpse of what the Mother meant when she speaks of the need for a new centre of action in us."

There may be other clues to what a collective *sadhana* would look like. Sri Aurobindo pointed out in *The Human Cycle* that there is "a real identity between the individual soul and the group-soul". Consequently, it seems logical that certain elements of the individual *sadhana* can also be applied to finding the group-soul. So the first step in a collective *sadhana* would be understanding, as a living reality, that we are all part of one collective body and that this body has a group-soul, however subliminal it may be at present. The next step would be to observe the many different parts and planes of the collective – physical, vital, mental – which are in play at any moment and then to start disidentifying ourselves from them. Then the challenge would be to cultivate a true mental silence and in that silence to try to contact the deeper truth of the collective which is trying to manifest.

This is very new territory, so it would make sense to begin with baby steps. For example, we could begin by experimenting in small groups. There could be a first round in which everybody expresses themselves on a non-controversial topic from an individual perspective, and another

round where participants try to express themselves on the same topic from the perspective of the larger collective.

At a more advanced level, once all the information about a topic has been given and different arguments put forward, a group could be asked to try to achieve mental silence and wait upon the 'still small voice' of the group-soul.

Of course, in the early stages often nothing would happen, or we would get wildly inaccurate readings. We would still be too plunged in the old consciousness, too ambitious to get our own way, too reliant upon our minds; we wouldn't have sufficient faith in 'another way'. But my intuition is that if we don't give up too easily, and if we practised this with regularity, faith and integrity, something else would begin to come through.

Contacting the group-soul could also be put forward more often and prominently as one of the objectives of meetings and decision-making processes, perhaps along with some simple guidelines, like reflecting before speaking, and considering how a proposed course of action relates to or expresses the broader collective and its group-soul.

In fact, once we accept that the group can also be a proper vehicle for *sadhana*, for the *sadhana* of discovering the group-soul, then I think the whole nature of our meetings would change. Rather than being opportunities for us to force our views upon others or dumping grounds for our individual frustrations and projections, we would begin to treat them as places for profound collective discovery, and as sacred spaces to which only the highest part of ourselves should be brought.

Today, as far as I know, there are no experiments going on to contact the group-soul of Auroville, although one or two communities over the years have worked consciously on building some form of group consciousness. But if, as Ruud and Edith point out, for an experiment like Auroville the collective *sadhana* is an indispensable complement to the personal one, isn't it time we made a beginning?

Alan

## References:

Ruud Lohman *The Sadhana of the Group-Soul. Towards a spiritual sociology and planning, 1972. (In manuscript, unpublished)*  
Edith Schnapper. *Collective Yoga. Auroville Today no. 11, November, 1989*

## PASSING

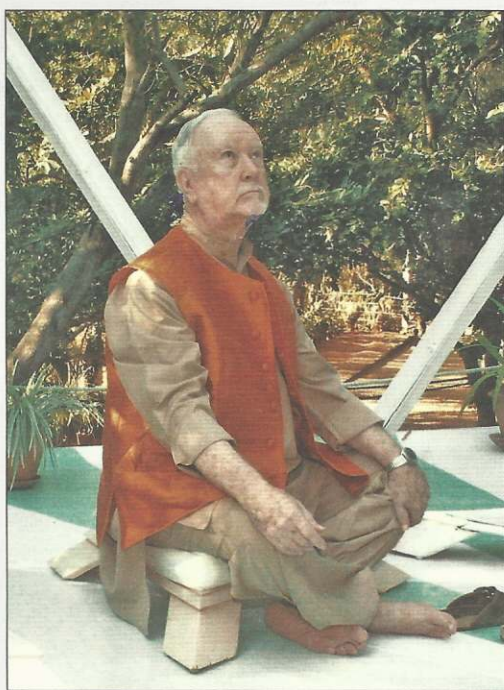
### William Netter

William T. Netter, one of Auroville's more eccentric pioneers who originally hailed from Boston, USA, left his body on September 6th in his 'trilon' house at Samasti. After a fall in 2010, his health had deteriorated and during the last three years he had been gradually withdrawing from life. He would have been 87 at the end of this year.

William graduated from Georgetown University, joined a Jesuit Order for some time, was involved with CBS Television, New York, and taught literature. He was running a steakhouse in Greenwich Village, New York City, while attending New York's School of Interior Design at night.

At the end of the sixties he went for a 6-weeks tour to India together with some humanity professors from the New York area. During that time, he attended the 1968 New Year's Day meditation at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry, which changed the direction of his life. The professors travelled on, but he returned and participated in the inauguration of Auroville before going back to the USA, where he started reading Sri Aurobindo's works.

In the 1980's he came to India, built a house in Certitude, gave it away after six weeks and went to stay in Pondicherry, where he worked in the Auroville Information office. Living and working in Pondicherry and Auroville for years, William settled in Samasti in 1990 in what he called 'the non-house', consisting of two hexagonal closed structures and an open pyramid with a ship's

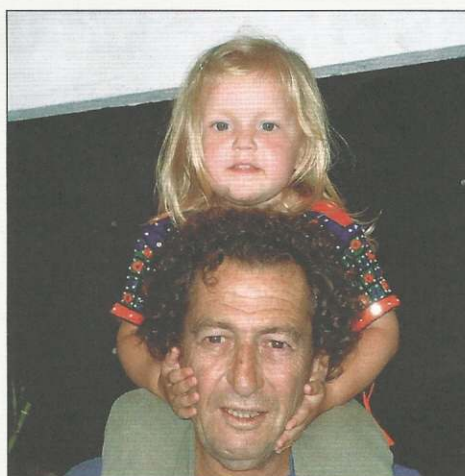


deck and a spiral staircase, all in white – a structure, he said, that was designed to express a quality of 'presence' found through the harmony of inner and outer spaces.

From there he did his writing and design work, while intensively studying Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*. This resulted in three guides for the reading of the poem, published by his Aurovilly Designs. The fourth work, his *Log of a journey through Sri Aurobindo's Savitri*, depicts through strongly visual imagery, his unique way of seeing the poem, and his great love for the Mother.

His body was buried at Adventure's burial ground on September 8th.

### Yoshi



Yoshi with his grand-daughter Samira

Yoshi (Jehoshua Friedländer), an Aurovillian of German/Israeli nationality, peacefully passed away on Monday, September 17th, in Germany at the age of 74. He began feeling weak in Auroville at the end of last year and talked about soon leaving his body. In May cancer was suspected in Germany upon which he refused all further investigation or classical cancer treatment. He spent the last weeks of his life in the loving care of his family, his wife Anando, daughter Bettina and his grandchildren Jashan and Samira, in the home of loving relatives.

Originally hailing from Tel Aviv, Israel, already as a child in the kibbutz Yoshi discovered the joy of carving and polishing stones. This passion stayed with him throughout his life and he became a diamond cutter. Yoshi settled later in Germany where he met his wife, after which they lived for many years in the South Pacific carving black coral and mother-of-pearl. He joined Auroville with his wife and daughter in 1989, where he soon started a small carving workshop in the old bakery in Kottakarai. His aim was to

provide a space where people could experience the art of contemplation through carving and creativity. Many young Aurovilians learned there the joy of carving dolphins out of various natural materials like mother-of-pearl, coconut shell, amber and soft stones. In later years, he started the Celebration Community and Guest House in Kottakarai which he later turned into a Newcomer facility.

### Ester



Ester Levit Mahapatra from Israel left her body on Sunday, 29 September in Jipmer hospital at the age of 54. She had been struggling with cancer. Her remains were cremated the same day at Adventure's funeral grounds, with her friends attending.

Ester had been living in India for 18 years and came to be close to Auroville since 2004. She was in the process of becoming a Newcomer, lived in Celebration and worked at Well Paper. She touched the lives and hearts of many through her strong sense of truth and her outreaching nature and love.



# Embracing my path

Setting foot on Indian soil for our 6-month stay I was blown away by the extreme heat and humidity, which only served to add a thick haze to my already foggy brain, the result of an 11-hour flight from Australia with two teens and a toddler. The less said about the flight the better, unless you want to hear about being stuck underneath the flight seats after making a bed there, because my three-year old had evicted me, falling asleep over three seats including mine.

Leaving behind the echoes of the words 'cult' and 'brainwashing' which I had heard prominently when announcing my intention to join Auroville, I stepped forward towards my taxi, the energy of India already flowing through the bottom of my feet, with my two sons, both taller than me, standing on either side and my small, bemused and slightly cross red-haired girl between us. This indeed felt right.

I thought I could catch up on my sleep in the taxi from Chennai to Auroville but this was not the case. I spent most of the journey with my mouth open, a crick in my neck forming and my eyes glued to the world outside. I had been told about driving in India but there is nothing that can prepare you for sights such as these. Cows in the street! The rich-poor divide with small huts with barely visible doors squeezed up closely to magnificent buildings tucked away behind massive gates! Truly, I was in awe of this magnificent country, the complications, the mystery and even, in spite of the garbage and poverty, the inherent beauty.

Our arrival at Sharmga Guest House came after three hours, yet to me it felt like minutes. The taxi pulled into the driveway and as I stepped out of the car, followed by three very disorientated children, I was enveloped by a sense of great peace. The sun filtered through the massive canopy of trees, causing a dappled effect on the damp, brick pathway and as the sound of bird song reached my eyes, I smiled.

My children, my sons in particular, did not smile, however. In fact they were absolutely miserable, and I could almost hear their thoughts about the limited Internet, lack of television and basic living conditions. They desperately wanted to return to the UK, our native country. Exhausted and emotional, I found myself questioning "Have I done the right thing bringing them here for 6 months? Am I a

bad parent?" Forgetting the sense of peace I had felt, in a moment of quiet whilst they lay on their beds, I cried – tears of being overwhelmed, tears of joy, tears of years and years of repressed anguish, the torment of the dark days of my life.

But, even as I cried, there was a knowing, a

keep them busy, opening them to life in Auroville away from the computer!

The reality of selling all of our belongings and making our second country move within a year began to dawn on me as well. All of these emotions joined to cause great weariness. In the first month we just spent time 'being', absorbing all that Auroville was and integrating the new energies; not only of the new city and its people but of India itself.

But after a month of being here I decided that it was time for work, time

for the boys to return to their studies and for my daughter to join a kindergarten. My eldest son decided he didn't wish to return to formal education and took up studying 3 A' Levels at home as a correspondence course. I was pleasantly surprised at his commitment and dedication. My youngest son has joined Future School and due to the fantastic assistance and care of his mentor, has also joined a local carpenter, taking on an apprenticeship for two mornings a week. He seems very happy. His initial fears that the others would ostracize him because they had already formed their groups, proved to be unfounded. He

was welcomed as openly as we were into the guest-house. From my interpretation of his teenage descriptions (mainly consisting of a series of grunts and one syllable words) the other kids are great, he has made friends and although 'It's still just boring school' he is very happy there.

My daughter has taken some more time to settle. She is a sensitive and shy child and although AHA Kindergarten is small and intimate with caring teachers who have exceeded my wildest expectations, she is still finding the transition from mummy to school difficult. She has also developed some health problems, and often has to stay home, which hasn't helped the integration. It also didn't help that I have started working 35 hours a week so that the Entry Service is aware that I follow the rules already before joining Auroville as a Newcomer.

But I noticed that it is difficult for a single parent and I have found myself worrying whether I will have enough hours 'under my belt' in time before we leave.

I have found that people decide to join Auroville for many different reasons. Mine is purely spiritual. My heart, soul, mind and body are driven by one force and one force only and that is the Divine. I have the need to realize the Divine within myself and create a life for myself and my children that embraces this in all areas, including other people. My complete surrender to The Essence is what led me along this path and as I close my eyes at night and raise my head in the morning I have full and absolute faith in that.

Though there has been a lot of suffering with many periods of feeling isolated, abandoned, alone and confused, my own spiritual path has been blessed with me experiencing something of the infinite bliss of understanding and pure love. Since my early childhood I have received messages and insights that, for a very long time, I denied and did not understand but as I have progressed along my path and have grown in spiritual maturity, I now start understanding why my path has been what it was and now totally embrace the path that I am on and the guidance that I receive.

Journal entry of April 2013

".....And it asks us to open our eyes yet we do not see, open our spirits but we do not feel, open our ears but we only hear what we want to hear. I sit here with my heart wide open, expanded beyond reasonable measure never knowing limitation or restriction, understanding everything yet knowing nothing. The purest love in its purest form flowing through with no beginning and no end,....my body is...my body is not. My body is God as God is my body, there is no distinction, there is no explanation, there is no answer because I am the answer.....(The Divine within)"

Despite the difficulties, the mosquitoes, the cold showers, the humidity, unanswered emails, telephone numbers that seem to lead to nowhere, my clothes turning orange by the red soil and the uphill battle to get correct information, I feel committed to Auroville, my own personal path and The Mother's vision with passion and intensity and the trust that as the Divine decreed that I should be here, then so it shall be.

Shelley



Shelley with daughter Elora at the Certitude playground

knowing so great that it lifted my spirit. I had done the right thing. The strength of this knowing had got us here and this lifted me off the seat and out of the house into the garden to look around; away from the moans and groans of the children, away from the memories of Australia, away from my own fatigue and feelings of guilt. I stepped out of the door, into the beginning of what I hoped was going to be my new life.

There have been tough times since we have been here. Even after my sons cheered up because of the amazing open heartedness of our host's daughter, who blew them away with her kindness, inviting them to join her at the Youth Centre night after night, introducing and accepting them into her group of friends as well as including them in the tasks that needed doing in Sharmga every day to

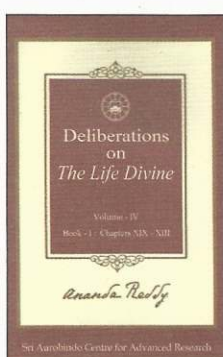
## NEW PUBLICATIONS

## Deliberations on The Life Divine Vol. IV

"I have looked upon *The Life Divine* as the harbinger of a new age, the declaration which ushers in a new age for humanity," said Sri Ambalal Purani, when he was touring the USA in 1962, delivering his lectures on Book One of Sri Aurobindo's philosophical magnum opus. "But," he said, "the book is a very complex structure – very rich, very detailed and the arguments and the logic with which it deals are so subtle, so wide and radical that one is required to readjust, sometimes, one's mind in order to catch fully all that *The Life Divine* wants to say." Purani's 82 lectures were recorded and have been compiled in his book *Sri Aurobindo's Life Divine – lectures delivered in the U.S.A.*

But apart from this book and the books by M.P. Pandit and by V. Madhusudan Reddy on *The Life Divine* that are still sold by SABDA, little else is available in print for those who want to understand its often dense chapters. [The *Analysis of Sri Aurobindo's The Life Divine* by Roy Posner can be downloaded from <http://www.gurusoftware.com>]

This changed somewhat in January 2007, when Ananda Reddy published his book *Deliberations on the Life Divine, Volume I*, which contains the summaries of his talks on the first six chapters of *The Life Divine*, given at the Sri Aurobindo



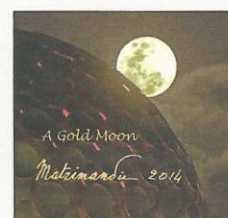
Centre of Advanced Research, SACAR, in Pondicherry and at Savitri Bhavan in Auroville. The second and third volumes of the *Deliberations* appeared four years later, in 2011, while recently the fourth volume has become available dealing with chapters 19-23 (XIX-XXIII and not XIII as is mentioned on the cover).

Ananda's approach is conversational, often endeavouring to explain concepts using issues from everyday life or excerpts from The Mother's talks or sometimes from other works of Sri Aurobindo, such as *Savitri*. All five deliberations in Volume IV end with Lecture Notes with questions and observations which, in a nutshell, provide the gist of the chapter and make the book valuable for any student and aspiring student of *The Life Divine*. However, the references to *The Life Divine* at the end of each chapter are to the *Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library* (SABCL) edition of 1972, which is no longer available, and not to *The Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo*. It would have been better if the book had carried references to both editions.

We are looking forward to the next *Deliberations* which will conclude Book I of *The Life Divine*.

Carel

*Deliberations on The Life Divine vol. IV is available from SACAR and Savitri Bhavan. Price in India Rs 250.*



The theme of the Matrimandir 2014 desk calendar (size 20 cm x 21 cm) is the moon: all photos by Giorgio and Tine have been taken in full moonlight. On the calendar page, the months and days are printed in 4 languages: English, French, (spoken) Sanskrit, and Tamil. Darshan days and other important days as well as moon days (full and new) are indicated. Quotations from Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* are on each photo page. Price in India: Rs. 160

excluding packing and postage. The proceeds from the sale of the calendar will be donated to the Matrimandir. For orders email [tine@auroville.org.in](mailto:tine@auroville.org.in)



Also available is the Auroville Planner 2014, a lightweight agenda of 16 cm x 16 cm with 172 thin pages and 24 full page colour photos depicting aspects of 'Auroville life', taken by Giorgio and Tine. Quotations from the Mother on Auroville accompany each photo page. Price in India Rs. 190 excluding packing and postage. The proceeds from the sale of the planner will be donated to an Auroville project. For orders email [tine@auroville.org.in](mailto:tine@auroville.org.in)



A Flower calendar on the theme *The Twelve Virtues of the Mother* is now available. Each 'virtue' corresponds to one of the petals of the Mother's symbol, for which a flower with relevant spiritual name has been selected. The photos are accompanied by quotations from Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Available at outlets in Auroville and Pondicherry and at <http://wisdomsplendour.in/en/>. Price in India Rs 230.

### Subscription rates (including postage):

- ◆ One year subscription rates: India Rs. 450; other countries Rs. 2,000 equivalent.
  - ◆ Two year subscription rate: India Rs. 800; other countries Rs. 3,700 equivalent.
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2. **By sending your contribution directly to Auroville Today:** Surrender, Auroville - 605101, Tamil Nadu, India. Cheques sent directly to *Auroville Today* should be made payable to Auroville Unity Fund, specifying: 'Contribution for *Auroville Today*'. Personal cheques are preferred to bank cheques. Please do not send postal money orders or cash.

### 3. By sending your contribution to:

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