

Auroville Today

SEPTEMBER 2016, No.326

Auroville's monthly news magazine since 1988

Brexit and Human Unity

Auroville Today rarely comments on issues outside Auroville. But in this issue we carry an article on Brexit in the light of Sri Aurobindo's views on human unity.

The causes of the Brexit vote in the U.K. have been analysed exhaustively and exhaustingly. Most commentators agree that the immediate reasons included fear of mass immigration, loss of sovereignty, and a protest vote against a political establishment which was perceived to have abandoned the less well-off.

The leave campaign was also widely criticized for being mendacious and fear-mongering, led by opportunistic politicians who did not fully believe in the arguments they were advancing. But, in truth, the Prime Minister's decision to hold a referendum on Europe was also taken for short-term political gain and with very little consideration of the possible consequences.

Speculation about those consequences have so far tended to focus upon the possible break-up of the UK and of the EU, and of the potential impact upon global economic growth and stability. But what about the larger project of human unity that motivated the beginnings of the European Union experiment back in the 1950s? What lessons, if any, can be drawn, from the Brexit vote?

The original motivation for drawing the European countries closer together within a formal supranational structure was to prevent another catastrophic world war. In the early 1950s, Germany was developing its formidable industrial base once again and France, in particular, felt threatened by this. As Christine Devin's excellent monograph, *Uniting Men: Jean Monnet*, demonstrates, Jean Monnet, the French political economist and diplomat, and a small group of fellow idealists decided that the best way of avoiding another war was to get Germany and France to unite in a commercial enterprise. The so-called Schuman Plan that they drew up proposed that the two countries pool their coal and steel resources. What made this so revolutionary was that each country needed to delegate a part of its sovereignty to an autonomous High Authority.

After enormous difficulties, the Plan was adopted and it became the seed of further integration. In October, 1955, Monnet created the Action Committee for the United States of Europe, and in 1957 the Treaty of Rome was signed which instituted the Common Market. On 1 November, 1993, as a response to the fall of the Berlin Wall and the political realignment of former Soviet countries, the European Union was created, leading to a significant enlargement of the member countries.

However, Monnet was clear that European union was not, for him, an end in itself. "It is a contribution to the organization of peace in the world", and his real aim was a larger, global human unity that would guarantee this.

But how was this unity to be achieved? The approach in Europe was to begin with fostering economic integration and the free movement of peoples with the hope that this would lead, in time, to full political integration. To this end, the Single Market for member countries was created in 1993, in 1994 the Schengen Agreement was signed, and in 2002 a common currency, the Euro, was launched. The EU is now the largest trading block in the world, with 27 member states.

However, it can be argued that the European Union has made far less progress towards political union. National interest continues to be the dominant factor in deciding

community policy. In fact, its failure to create a genuine political union is one reason why today it is struggling with the biggest challenges ever to its continued existence: the financial troubles of Greece, uncontrolled immigration from the countries of the Middle East and, of course, the turmoil and uncertainty generated by Brexit.

What has gone wrong? Sri Aurobindo's writings on human unity may provide some clues. His major work on the topic, *The Ideal of Human Unity*, was written and published in monthly installments in the *Arya* between September 1915 and July 1918, and subsequently published as a book. He later made

Agreement. In truth, from the beginning the UK's motivation to join the EU was primarily economic and did not reflect any deep wish to become more 'European'.

Monnet, like Sri Aurobindo, was very aware of the dangers of national interest, egoism, trumping the interest of the larger community, which was why he was so keen on forming supranational institutions. As early as 1943 he wrote, "There will be no peace in Europe if the States are formed again on the basis of national sovereignty with all that it entails of politics of prestige and economic protection." And he wrote in his diary, "The focus of our efforts

national body would tend to interfere more and more in the life of individual nations and of the individual appears to be proving true.

That danger is not confined to supranational bodies like the EEC. Today, the most powerful supranational bodies are Multinational Corporations (MNCs) whose conception of unity is everybody purchasing their products or services. This version of economic globalization is based upon cultural uniformity and the creation of passive consumers, not the free development of cultures and individuals championed by Sri Aurobindo.

Sri Aurobindo was clear about the need for such freedom.

It is (the) energy of the individual which is the really effective agent of collective progress. The State sometimes comes in to aid it and then, if its aid does not mean undue control, it serves a positively useful end. As often it stands in the way and then serves either as a brake upon progress or supplies the necessary amount of organised opposition and friction to give greater energy and a more complete shape to the new thing which is in process of formation. But what we are now tending towards is such an increase of organised State power and such a huge, irresistible and complex State activity as will either eliminate free individual effort altogether or leave it dwarfed and cowed into helplessness.

Consequently,

The perfect society will be that which most entirely favours the perfection of the individual; the perfection of the individual will be incomplete if it does not help towards the perfect state of the social aggregate to which he belongs and eventually to that of the largest possible human aggregate, the whole of a united humanity.

Both Sri Aurobindo and Monnet were realists: they knew that such a society could not be achieved in a day. At the same time, both men believed that the progress towards a larger human unity was inevitable. In his *Memoirs*, Monnet wrote that "something has begun, something that cannot be stopped". And in the 1949 *Postscript Chapter of The Ideal of Human Unity*, Sri Aurobindo wrote:

We conclude then that in the conditions of the world at present, even taking into consideration its most disparaging features and dangerous possibilities, there is nothing that need alter the view we have taken of the necessity and inevitability of some kind of world-union; the drive of Nature, the compulsion of circumstances and the present and future need of mankind make it inevitable. A catastrophe may intervene and interrupt or destroy what is being done, but even then the final result is sure. For unification is a necessity of Nature, an inevitable movement. Its necessity for the nations is also clear, for without it the freedom of the small nations may be at any moment in peril and the life even of the large and powerful nations insecure. The unification is therefore to the interests of all, and only human imbecility and stupid selfishness can prevent it; but these cannot stand for ever against the necessity of Nature and the Divine Will.

However, both men realised that human unity could not be achieved by institutions, by external means alone. There was an even more important element. In 1956 Monnet wrote, "I worked on creating institutions, thinking that institutions brought people closer...but this is not the method because institutions for coal and steel become institutions for coal and steel and not for men. In order to go further, one must touch the life and interest of the people. One must touch the political and human motivations, not just the technical."

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revisions, most notably in 1949 when he added a *Postscript Chapter* that commented on the changed international situation. He also made a brief reference to this in his *Independence Message*, written for All India Radio on the occasion of India's independence.

Early in *The Ideal of Human Unity* he defined the core of the problem.

The problem of the unification of mankind resolves itself into two distinct difficulties. There is the doubt whether the collective egoisms already created in the natural evolution of humanity can at this time be sufficiently modified or abolished and whether even an external unity in some effective form can be securely established. And there is the doubt whether, even if any such external unity can be established, it will not be at the price of crushing both the free life of the individual and the free play of the various collective units already created in which there is a real and active life and substituting a State organisation which will mechanise human existence.

Apart from these two uncertainties there is a third doubt whether a really living unity can be achieved by a mere economic, political and administrative unification...

This analysis seems particularly relevant to Brexit and the present situation of the EU. For example, although the issue during the UK referendum was clothed in concerns about loss of sovereignty, there is little doubt that national egoism – the belief held by some that the UK is an exceptional case, different from other countries in Europe and worthy of special treatment – played an important part in the result.

In the 1950s and 1960s this sense of exceptionalism, supported as it then was by the sense of being a major player on the world stage, may have been stronger. However, even after joining, the UK sought a special status within the European Union: it has not, for example, joined the Eurozone or signed up to the Schengen

should be the development of man – not the affirmation of a motherland, whether big or small.

Another of Sri Aurobindo's great insights concerned the process by which human unity could be created and kept in being. Writing almost a century ago, he foresaw two possibilities. It could happen either through a loose federation of free peoples united by a common idea or ideal, or through the creation of an all-powerful World State that subsumed the existing nations.

Regarding the latter possibility, he noted:

At first it might confine itself to the most important questions and affairs which obviously demanded its control; but it would tend increasingly to stretch its hand to all or most matters that could be viewed as having an international effect and importance. Before long it would invade and occupy even those fields in which the nations are now jealous of their own rights and power. And eventually it would permeate the whole system of the national life and subject it to international control in the interests of the better coordination of the united life, culture, science, organisation, education, efficiency of the human race.

In other words, such a World State would inevitably tend to some form of totalitarianism and the imposition of uniformity.

The present European Union is far from being such a body. For example, the principle of 'subsidiarity' is designed to ensure that many decisions can be taken by the Member States rather than the Union.

However, there are also a vast number of EU directives which have the force of law in EU countries. While many of them guarantee basic rights or aim to protect the environment and health of its people, some of them – like the one that classifies bananas on the basis of their shape – have come in for much ridicule. In fact, Sri Aurobindo's concern that a dominant supra-

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Acres For Auroville – Greenacres – Art For Land inaugurations

August 15th – Sri Aurobindo's birthday – was the occasion for the inauguration of new phases in Auroville's three land fundraising campaigns: Phase 3 of the Acres for Auroville land campaign; the second year of the GreenAcres campaign, and the second phase of the Art for Land action.

In the presence of special guest Sri Mohan Verghese Chundath, the Secretary of the Auroville Foundation, the team of fundraising activists from the three campaigns – in close cooperation with the Land Board – spoke about the dynamic actions over the past year: the New Year's card, designed by Aravinda and distributed to thousands of friends; the "Landing Auroville" event in February which showcased the three inspiring land-awareness films made by Rakhal and the Auro-Image team of Aichal and Karen; and Miriam's series of land-related interviews broadcast on Auroville Radio. COLAAP, the website dedicated to Auroville's land, has been enriched over the year with fresh material. Now supporters can follow the latest news, films, photos and flyers. (www.colAAP.org)

Acres for Auroville (A4A) is a collaboration of Auroville International with Auroville-based Lands for Auroville Unified (LFAU) to raise resources for the purchase of the vital acres still missing from Auroville's coherent development. The project's anniversary date is Sri Aurobindo's birthday. Since its initial launch, it has twice reached its fundraising target and thus expanded its action each year. The target of A4A Phase 1 was a double one: to raise funds for the Matrimandir Area in order to safe-



Inge van Alphen addressing the audience. The Mother's message says:
The lands for Auroville are to be bought and can be bought. The money is needed. Will you help? (May 1970)

guard the area surrounding what the Mother called Auroville's "soul"; and to raise funds for the International Zone with its special relevance for incarnating human unity. Thanks to A4A donations, a vital Matrimandir Area plot was purchased, expanding the area for Deepanam School and Mahalakshmi Park.

A4A Phase 2 widened the campaign goal to the four zones of the City Area, and A4A donors contributed to a plot acquired near Rêve. Over 650 donations have been received to date. At the request of

Auroville's Land Board, A4A's new Phase 3 aims at the City Area as well as "priority plots" anywhere in the Master Plan area. Aryadeep presented co-organizer Mandakini's (AVI France) visual overview of the campaign's Phase 3 at the inauguration event.

GreenAcres is the fundraising campaign dedicated exclusively to acquiring missing plots in Auroville's Greenbelt and to expanding eco-activities and projects on the land. At the inauguration, Sigrid presented the campaign's goals, high-

lighting the Greenbelt as an internationally renowned site of environmental, forestry and agricultural research and training as well as wildlife regeneration. A unique eco-zone, it plays a vital role in Auroville's organic food production, as a provider of water resources due to its crucial placement in the Auroville watershed, and as a protective buffer for the City. GreenAcres promotes land purchase to enlarge two existing projects – organic rice cultivation and water conservation in a wildlife sanctuary – and for both of

these projects there is an urgent need for funds.

Art for Land is another fundraising action born from the momentum and optimism generated by A4A. Its first auction, held in March, showcased 80 paintings, sculptures, and photographs donated by 33 Auroville and Ashram artists. Bids were received for twenty-two works, with the proceeds donated towards purchase of Auroville's land. One of these works, *Portée de Lumière*, was offered by Bang Hi Ja, the noted Korean-French artist based in Paris. Bought by a benefactor, it was given to Auroville and now adds to the beauty of the new Farewell facilities.

A dedicated Art for Land website promoting online bidding for artworks to raise funds for land purchase is in preparation. Jasmin made a visual presentation of several of the magnificent works in the Art for Land sale inventory. The next physical auction will be held in February 2017 and will include a month-long exhibition and schedule of events at the Unity Pavilion.

The team warmly thanks Angelo, Swar, Claude, Sabine, Pascal, the Unity Pavilion team, Kumar, Alan and Inge and Guna whose work has specifically supported these actions and our ongoing work!

The third phase of Acres for Auroville aims to continue building energy and awareness for land fundraising to give the Land Board needed resources for the urgent task of remaining land purchase.

Aryadeep, Aravinda, Jasmin, Jothi, Mandakini, Sathish, Sigrid

HUMAN UNITY

Brexit and Human Unity

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More profoundly, Sri Aurobindo spoke of the need for a psychological basis to human unity.

The great necessity, then, and the great difficulty is to help this idea of humanity which is already at work upon our minds and has even begun in a very slight degree to influence from above our actions, and turn it into something more than an idea, however strong, to make it a central motive and a fixed part of our nature. Its satisfaction must become a necessity of our psychological being, just as the family idea or the national idea has become each a psychological motive with its own need of satisfaction. But how is this to be done?

Sri Aurobindo's answer was

The living idea or religion of humanity; for only so could there come the psychological modification of life and feeling and outlook which would accustom both individual and group to live in their common humanity first and most, subduing their individual and group egoism, yet losing nothing of their individual or group power to develop and express in its own way the divinity in man which, once the race was assured of its material existence, would emerge as the true object of human existence.

The EU has achieved a great deal. Wars between its constituent nations now seem unthinkable, and it has done much to promote human rights. In recognition of this, in 2012 the EU received the Nobel Peace Prize for having "contributed to the advancement of peace and reconciliation, democracy, and human rights in Europe".

But now it must go further, much further, if it is not to ossify into little more than a bureaucratic institution that seeks to regulate ever more fully the life of its peoples, crushing the life force and drying up the wells of inspiration and creativity.

Could this be the deeper reason behind Brexit? Could the Time Spirit, that larger force that works behind the scene impelling global evolution, be using the Brexit imbroglio, born out of ego, ambition and ignorance, as a means of reminding the rest of the EU, and of the world, of important truths? That unity is not uniformity; that the freedom of the individual is paramount in the evolution of society; and that, ultimately, the bedrock of unity is not institutions but a lived awareness of the essential oneness of mankind?

If these lessons are learned and acted upon, then perhaps some good may, at last, come out of the UK's recent act of political and economic hara-kiri.

Alan

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AUROVILLE FOUNDATION

The ARA tackles the housing issue

The Active Residents Assembly (ARA) is an initiative of the Organization Research Group to promote a more informed commitment in our community meetings and to experiment with different meeting techniques. So far, there have been five meetings of the ARA. The two most recent ones have been on the topic of housing.

The first such meeting began with a PowerPoint presentation describing the present housing 'crisis' – a severe lack of affordable housing in the community that makes it particularly difficult for young people with enthusiastic energy but limited means to find a place to live.

After the presentation, ARA participants split up into small groups to come up with possible solutions. These fell into three main categories: finding new accommodation and places to build; planning and construction; and financing affordable housing. In the finding places to live category, suggestions included making land available for low-cost housing (including areas liable to encroachment), and opening up existing communities for new affordable housing developments.

Under planning and construction, the need for strategic planning to tackle the present needs of those with limited means was emphasised. It was also suggested that an institute be created to research into healthy and sustainable housing, and that a central purchasing service for building materials would help bring down construction costs.

But how to finance new affordable housing? Suggestions included creating a housing fund into which individuals could make regular payments, requiring the commercial units to dedicate a percentage of their profits to housing, and encouraging co-operative housing projects.

In all, about thirty suggestions to

solve or alleviate the present housing crisis were made at this meeting. However, there was little attempt to suggest how they could be implemented. This became the focus of the second meeting.

Participants were now asked to prioritise suggestions from the first meeting and then suggest how they could be implemented. The findings were: new accommodation/places to build group-prioritised renting houses in surrounding villages; making land available for low-cost housing and experimentation; and freeing up space in existing communities. However, their top priority was the need for a survey of the land that is presently available for housing and of the density, occupancy and development possibilities in existing communities.

It was acknowledged that a number of such surveys already exist, so there is a need to collect them in one database that should be publicly available. The Housing Service should be empowered to do this work, although they may call upon other services for assistance.

The planning and construction group felt that three interlinked ideas were the most critical ones. Strategic planning for housing, based on the needs of Aurovilians and Newcomers; helping Aurovilians and Newcomers to build their own houses; and setting up a Building Service. Such a Service would facilitate the planning and construction of houses through bringing together all the relevant parties – plumbers, carpenters, architects etc. – and available expertise relating to building methods and materials.

Regarding strategic planning, this group felt the first step was to acquire information on the real needs of those seeking housing at present through a targeted survey.

They also identified two other fundamental changes needed to solve the housing problem. Firstly, converting the

present crisis into an opportunity for joyful service that should involve Aurovilians rather than commercial builders in construction. Secondly, delinking contributions to the Housing Fund from the space that someone occupies. As they put it, "If we are able to take a more collective stance towards funding houses, we might be able to move away from ownership."

The financing of housing group came up with a number of suggestions. They included promoting greater wealth in Auroville through encouraging new business ventures, including 'super-units' that would dedicate 100% of their profits to Auroville to fund housing; encouraging commercial units to dedicate a percentage of their profits to housing, as well as providing housing for their Aurovilian workforce; setting up a bulk purchase and storage unit for construction materials that would also sell to the general public (one of the participants is willing to help finance and coordinate this); and a free store for leftover building materials.

Some of these would require policy changes. Participants also felt a study group is required to properly understand the issues and true costs of these proposals.

There was also the realisation, shared by the other groups, that there is a need for a core team to take forward the key proposals from these two ARA meetings and try to ensure they are implemented. This will involve, among other things, coordinating with the relevant working groups and exploring relevant policy reforms.

Encouragingly, by the end of the meeting fifteen people had volunteered to be part of such a core/focus group. These meetings represent a new impetus and collective aspiration to tackle our housing challenge. Now the ball has to keep rolling...

Alan

Planning the town

There are two possibilities. The first is a step-by-step procedure based on the need of the day. This more or less corresponds to how we tackle the problem at present – problems are solved as they come up. This is the way in which most towns and cities around the world have developed. Over the years the intricate healing faculty of time eliminates mistakes that have happened, or integrates them in acceptable ways. Possible scars might even be appreciated later as landmarks with stories attached to them and enrich the cityscape by providing visible “history”. This approach leads to an organically grown diverse and varied urban fabric, reflecting the consciousness of the people living in the place, but its eventual outcome will remain unpredictable; it also risks causing unforeseen problems that will have to be dealt with in the future – and it will definitely not produce anything remotely resembling the Galaxy concept that Roger proposed and the Mother accepted.

That, or any other more ambitious vision, can only become reality through “planning”. Research is needed and a systematic approach, trying to foresee and harmonize all sociological, economical, technical, aesthetic and physical factors that might influence the process. Based on pre-formulated and agreed-upon aims regarding our city life, alternative scenarios will have to be developed by competent professionals and evaluated before decisions can be taken by the community. The outcome will be a “course of anchoring logic” for our city development which, in its major guidelines, would hopefully be convincing for the later generations who will have to carry its implementation on into the future. This would require a tremendous work on the part of the professionals working, unexposed to “politics” yet briefed and controlled by a “client body” representing the views of the wider community, in a specially established department. A precondition for this undertaking (as for all science and research aiming to proceed into the unknown) would be a willingness to admit areas of ignorance, and to seek the help of more knowledgeable specialists to fill in the gaps and overcome deficiencies.

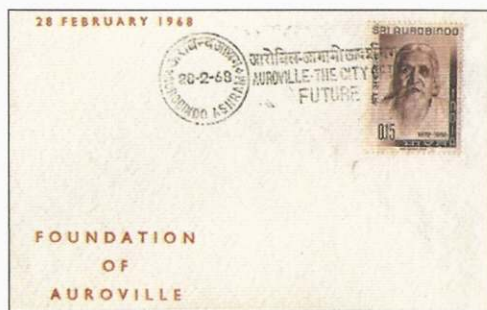
The Galaxy plan can only be realized by applying the second alternative. If the first alternative is our accepted preference, it might be time to consciously say “good-bye” to Roger’s concept.

Helmut

Published as blog on the AuroNet

An Appeal for the City

Helmut’s blog post on Planning sounds like a last minute wake up call to all of us. That between our professionals, planners and environmentalists we have arrived at this point after 50 years, instead of being well on the way towards a first phase of completion is a matter of serious concern so, despite my non-professional credentials, I share this with you.



Invitation card sent from the Ashram Post Office to mark the city on the map of the world

Why is it that after all these years there has been no real research from our architects and planners to help us see this planned city for what it is: an extraordinary invention combined in its many parts, along with a greenbelt and a living, conscious centre, the Matrimandir. It is the perfect material counterpart that “enables” the Charter to manifest the Dream. Instead, year after year, we have seen reports about how the Galaxy is a failure and not worthy of trial. That this has come from some of our architects and planners has been very disheartening.

The Galaxy has been systematically lampooned – as a 1950s cake, unsustainable, against ground realities, unaffordable, Mother as hopelessly old fashioned, or that Auroville was never meant to be a city – without the least effort to understand the incredible possibilities that makes the plan wholly sustainable in ways that are far more integral and focused at realizing the aim of the Auroville Charter: Human Unity.

Sadly, the resistance has not only divided Auroville but derailed and delayed initiatives,

and opportunities lost on the charge that the plan must now evolve. But evolve to what, is the question? To Helmut’s first scenario, as we can already see? In which case it can only be called a regression to existing patterns of failed urbanism whatever the sustainable or organic branding may be.

It is perhaps time to honestly consider that it is not the plan, but we, the Aurovilians, who need to evolve and learn to be on par with it, to discover all that it offers us. The Charter and the Galaxy were a “given” when Auroville was born and each Aurovilian holds them in trust for the rest of humanity and for its future.

In no way can we grant ourselves permission to throw out the Galaxy Plan because by doing so, we throw Auroville off course and the real potential of the experiment.

I appeal to the Town Development Council, the Working Committee, the Auroville Council and all other groups and residents of Auroville, as well as members of the Governing Board and the International Advisory Council to not let this happen as we approach our 50th year.

Once we have the courage and generosity to accept the plan and work with it, it will open the way for everyone to work together,



Picture post card issued by India Post to commemorate the birth of the city named after Sri Aurobindo. This one is without the Matrimandir. The plan was finalized after that.

collaborate in many areas and in many ways which we must discover together. Only if we agree to build this city with love and hard work and not turn it into a random sprawl, can we manifest the organization, economy,

education, art, architecture, health, mobility, sustainability, society, agriculture and environment – as a real experiment at the scale of



A land map, placed near the Galaxy model at the exhibition under the Banyan Tree at the inauguration of Auroville, shows the rings of the city and green belt – not yet accurate – but all there together

a Dream, in a city that also contains a green-belt and a luminous centre.

With a prayer that Auroville will not be forced to go for a “makeover” as a sustainable town (only) because the Galaxy has failed, which some recent articles about Auroville have already begun telling us with a good bit of help from our own media.

Let the 50th year be a renewal of hope for the planned city and its manifestation.

For those who still have doubts if the Mother wanted a city and all that we need to worry about is the Charter I publish three images from 28th February, 1968.

The Auroville Charter was placed in the Urn with the soil from around the world.

I urge you not to simply react to this, but to reflect on it, visit the Inner Chamber if you like, and see how best we can take this city forward together and not write it off as a failure. That is where our collective egoism has got us so far, but such decisions are not ours, even if we have been granted a Residents’ Assembly voice in the Foundation Act. Building the city is to find the truth of our surrender and our freedom to work together with goodwill and unity. That will create a fantastic collective body and a Residents’ Assembly to dream for.

Why the Galaxy Plan?

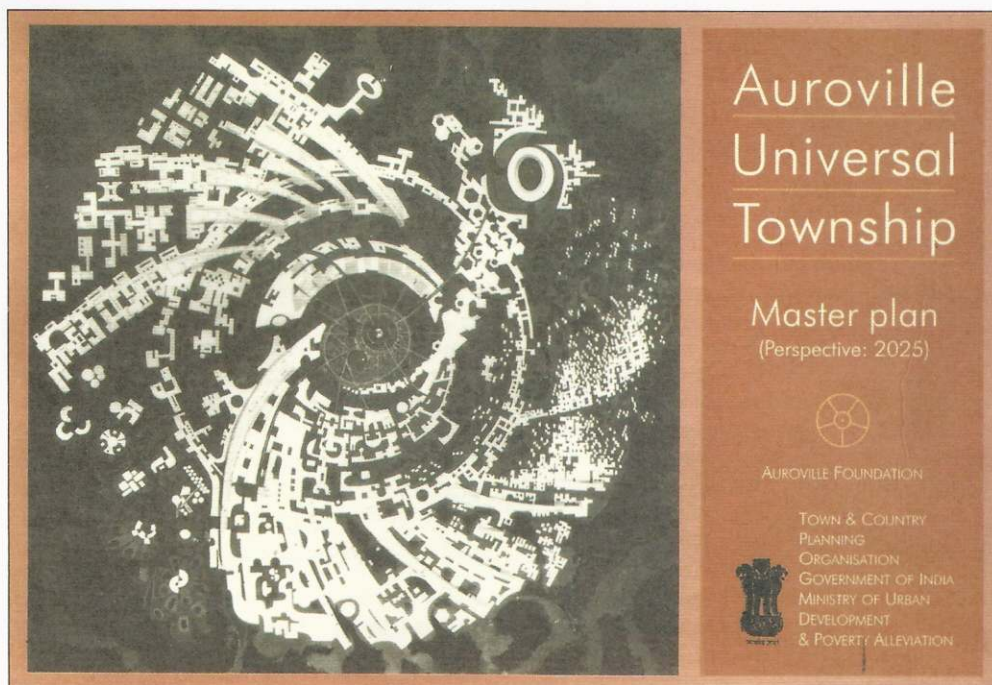
Even if Mother didn’t specifically ‘Bless’ the Galaxy Plan, she was fully aware of it, and if she had foreseen any problems would have sought changes. Yet, as Anu mentions, some Aurovilians challenge it and would like to see it substantially modified; even abandoned.

Why? Do they no longer have faith in Mother? Do they think that despite her Divine foresight she was wrong? That 50 years later we know better? Or that what she accepted then can no longer be relevant? Or do they still think that it is impractical, and won’t work according to established rules of town planning? Whatever, I feel there are important points to be made.

Firstly, there can be no doubt that the Galaxy excites the imagination. It is beautiful, inspiring, futuristic, and different to any town layout on earth. It can even be said that it was one of the first things about Auroville that attracted most of us and excited us about this city for the third millennium. Compare it to the layout of any existing town, such as Pondicherry, and there simply isn’t the same beauty or feeling of something new and exciting. Other town layouts may look practical at first glance, but they are not inspiring like the Galaxy.

Is this important? Yes, I think it is, because I suspect that the spiral shape is an embodiment of power – like a *mandala* or *chakra*. In fact I believe the Galaxy Plan is much, much more than a mere town layout, and has the ability (like the Matrimandir Inner Chamber) to attract forces beneficial to Auroville, while also radiating out similar positive forces to the surrounding world.

My second point is that the Galaxy Plan will greatly facilitate Auroville’s interaction with nature. The spiral layout makes it much easier to create wildlife corridors crossing the heart of the township from almost any point on the perimeter than would be, for example, a layout like Pondicherry’s. With the latter, and most town



The Auroville Universal Township Master Plan Perspective 2025 as approved by the Ministry of Human Resource Development on April 12, 2001

layouts, nature corridors would constantly come up against awkward changes in direction or even have to make 90-degree turns around corners. The Galaxy’s spiral shape facilitates complete crossings with minimal deviation.

My third point follows closely the previous one, namely that just as the Galaxy Plan allows free movement of species across and within the township, so also it will permit good airflow. This means that a constant flow of fresh air from the surrounding Green Belt will be able to permeate the inner township and four zones.

My fourth point is perhaps the most important of all. I referred above to the

“impracticality” of the galaxy, as claimed by some critics: it simply won’t work according to them. To this I can only say GOOD!! Because what they are unconsciously saying is that with such a layout we will be unable to create a township like other townships on Earth. We won’t be able to create another Pondicherry, Chandigarh, Paris, London, Beijing or New York. Well, that’s wonderful news, because we are not here to make just another township. To make the Galaxy Plan work we will have to set aside all existing rules, concepts and formations built up over centuries, and open ourselves to something new seeking to manifest. In other words, we can only make the

Galaxy Plan work by going beyond all established criteria for existing townships. The Galaxy, in all its power and beauty, will force us to find a new way to make a township work. And in that new way we will be able to break our established moulds, move into a new state of being, and live a collective life in a totally new way. One could even surmise that a major step towards human unity will become a necessity to live harmoniously in such a township. In other words, the Galaxy is a safeguard that we won’t be able to repeat what humanity has always done before.

That, I believe, is one of the reasons why Mother accepted the Galaxy Plan. I don’t believe she did so for practical reasons, but because she foresaw that Auroville would be obliged to find a new way, live a new life, and not just repeat what had already been done with unsatisfactory consequences elsewhere.

There is also one more point. If we were ever to abandon or modify the Galaxy Plan, what would we replace it with, or how would we change it? It is at such a point that we would descend into a nightmare of petty squabbling and ego-driven preferences. Better that we don’t all believe in the Galaxy but retain it in its purest possible form, than that we try to find agreement on anything else.

Those are my intellectual reasons and feelings on the matter. But, above all, I feel we should not abandon anything that Mother has gone along with. When divine sanction has been given to something one should not disregard it, because one can be sure that the divine’s guidance and protection will be with it at every step.

Someone said to me within an hour of my first arriving in Auroville in 1973, “It’s not so much that we are building Auroville, but rather that Auroville is building us.” I really believe that the galaxy plan has the power to do that – if we will trust Mother, accept it in its entirety, and let it do its work upon us for humanity as a whole.

Tim

Published in News&Notes 10th September 2016.

Alain Bernard first came to Auroville in 1972. Since then, he has been involved in many key areas, including the economy, education, the Press and, most recently, Village Action and the Sustainable Livelihood Institute. Through his close association with Kireet Joshi, he gained a deep understanding of the invisible but painstaking work involved in giving a strong foundation to the Auroville experiment.

Beginnings

When he was young, Alain always thought he would be a priest. However, after some years of scholastic training and preparing for the priesthood, he began to feel unwell and found it difficult to concentrate. An old doctor told him he thought he was temperamentally unsuited to be a priest. "Immediately I felt he was right," remembers Alain. However, his interest in spirituality remained. Then he met Catherine, who later took the name Supriya. "She didn't know about Mother but she kept telling me, 'I know that in the world right now there is a person who represents the Truth, and I think that person is in India'."

A little later, they met someone who had visited the Ashram in Pondicherry, and who talked about The Mother. "As soon as Supriya heard this she said, 'This is it. I am going.'"

Supriya began sending Alain aerogrammes from India, telling him he must come. She felt Alain would like Auroville. He arrived for a short visit in late July, 1972.

"At one point, we went to see The Mother. At first glance, she was an old lady, but I can still remember those eyes, so remarkable, looking at me as if to say, 'So you think I am old?' Then She gave me to quote a big tap on the head."

Alain was accepted for a probationary year in Auroville, and went back to France to settle some things. Soon afterwards, he was walking in Paris on a beautiful August day this wondering why he was planning to leave all this behind. "Then I felt as if I was hearing a voice, 'Yes, it is decided, you are going there,' and all my doubts and hesitations disappeared and never returned."

On his return in 1973, Roger Anger, the architect The Mother had appointed to design Auroville, told Alain he wanted him to "help reorganize Auroville". The first big meeting of Aurovilians took place in the Amphitheatre in September, 1973. One of the topics was a new organizational proposal. "At one point, Prem Malik asked if they could discuss this proposal which had been prepared by Alain Bernard. And then I heard a rather acid voice, that of Alain Grandcolas I was later told, asking, 'But WHO is Alain Bernard!'"

The proposal was not taken up, but the main message that emerged from that meeting was that henceforth the Aurovilians would have to look after themselves as now there was no money to support the work.

Early economic experiments

It was the beginning of the financial problems that would beset the community during the 1970s. Alain was in the very thick of it. He remembers, for example, Jocelyn suggesting the idea of a common fund to which people could contribute to pay for various services, like their food etc. This was the Pour Tous Fund that started on 1st January, 1976, and which, initially, Alain and Yusuf helped manage.

At that time, the relationship with the Sri Aurobindo Society (SAS) was deteriorating, but Alain remembers that the Chairman, Navajata, was conciliatory at first and agreed to pay maintenance money for Aurovilians into the new Fund.



An early meeting at Certitude

"But this never happened and soon we heard he wanted to crush the Pour Tous Fund."

But the Fund survived because quite a few Aurovilians and the Auroville centres abroad and friends donated money to support the Aurovilians in their struggle with the Society. "We became

financially independent of the Society. So it was a grace that Navajata forced us to take this step." Later, the Fund began running a deficit because they were trying to cover everybody's requests, and this was not sustainable. It was succeeded by the Envelopes system.

"This was Paul Pinton's suggestion. He said we should do what the Mother did in the Ashram. She had envelopes for different activities and people would contribute to them. 'So we open the envelopes and money will come,' said Paul. I thought to myself, I hope it will be as easy as that!"

In fact, this system ran quite successfully from 1978 to 1985. Every week a group, which often included Alain, would meet to allocate the available funds. "The spirit of these meetings was good, but they were very lean years. We were making coffee out of kumbu, pies out of old bread, and ice cream out of soya milk. I remember an Aurovilian coming into the Pour Tous stall and shouting, 'Cluster beans, nothing but cluster beans, we are not animals!'"

The conflict with the Society

From 1976, the Aurovilians were involved in a continuous guerrilla warfare with the Society, which was attempting to assert its control over Auroville. The 'Pour Tous meetings', which began as weekly meetings in the small Pour Tous building to discuss the Auroville economy, became the main tool for community decision-making during this period.

In 1979, Alain met Kireet Joshi for the first time. Kireet had been the Registrar of the Ashram Centre of Education, and then Indira Gandhi called him to Delhi to take up an important post in the Education Ministry. But Kireet continued to



From left: Shri Narasimha Rao and Mr. M'Bow, members of the first Auroville International Advisory Council, and Kireet Joshi

be deeply connected with Auroville, and was instrumental in assisting it at critical moments in its history.

The first such moment was in late 1980 when Indira Gandhi's government wished to pass the Auroville (Emergency Provisions) Act. This Act would temporarily take away from the Society the management of Auroville. Kireet's first key intervention was, at Indira Gandhi's request, to help

get the Ordinance, and later the Act, passed, by obtaining the lifting of court injunctions against the proposed Ordinance brought by the SAS.

Immediately the Society appealed again on the basis that Auroville was a religious institution and therefore the Government was not authorised to take action in such cases. The case went to the Supreme Court. The Society had a very good lawyer who made a devastating presentation of their case; the

government lawyer was not nearly as effective.

Alain recalls Kireet telling him that one evening during the case, Kireet addressed Mother. He said things were not going well and that he felt something decisive should be said about the issue of the Integral Yoga and religion, but he didn't

know what. "During the night he had a dream where he had a parchment on which was written some words, and they were so clear that in the morning he wrote them down. Then he went to the government lawyer and gave him this note. He told him that at one point in the proceedings he wanted him to say exactly what was written in the note. When he did so, Kireet saw the Chief Justice say, 'That's it', and from that moment the case turned in Auroville's favour."

For many Aurovilians, the Act came out of the blue, almost like a miracle, but Alain had had a premonition some years earlier that the power of the Society over Auroville could be broken.

"I had a dream that we, the Aurovilians, were in a kind of forest or jungle. There was a sense of menace, and at one moment, something like a flying fortress appeared and it seemed it was going to flatten everything. Then one of us had a tiny weapon and fired it. And, suddenly, this enormous machine reared up, then started to disintegrate. It was as if a drop of something else, more true, had the power to destroy something that seemed extremely powerful."

Fighting among ourselves

In many respects, the Auroville Act provided a breathing space for Auroville in its conflict with the Society. But, as Alain puts it, the 1980s were a strange period. The late 1970s had been characterised by the struggle with the Society, led by a core group that was predominantly French and centred in Aspiration community.

"Many of them had come with the second caravan in 1974 and they imported a sense of French radicalism which, I feel, was very instrumental and useful to launch the 'revolution' against the SAS. However, this seed of radicalism exploded in the 1980s when we no longer had a common enemy because we began to fight among ourselves. There was the Neutral issue [the 'Neutrals' were those Aurovilians who did not back the attempt of the dominant Auroville group to separate Auroville from the Society eds.] and some of the radicals were quite horrible to the people in this group. And then *The Agenda* became a very big thing. At one point a message came, at the time some said from Sujata, Satprem's compan-

Glimpses of Au

Long-term Aurovilian Alain Bernard reflects



Aspiration in

ion, that Aurovilians should be asked if they agreed that *Mother's Agenda* is at the core of Auroville. Whoever could not agree should not be in Auroville."

Alain was horrified by this. In fact, he and Christine had come to be looked upon somewhat askance because, in 1976, they had moved out of Aspiration into a house in Auromodèle. "I remember one of the radicals telling others not to speak to me because I was no longer 'clear enough!'"

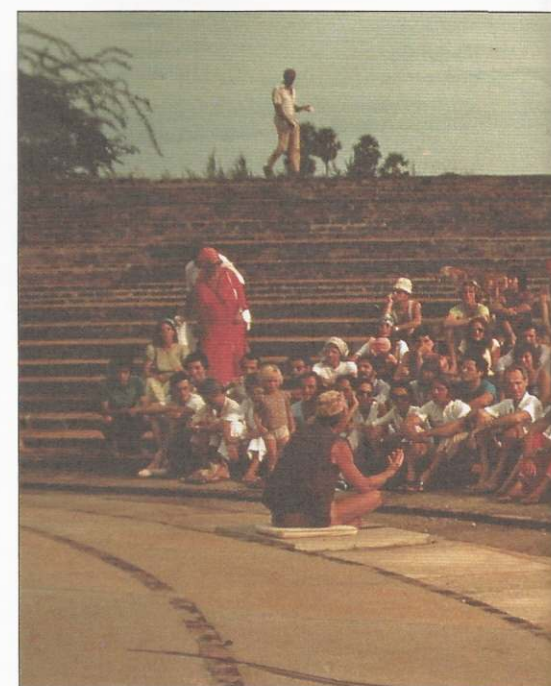
In 1985 when Luc Venet, a then close associate of Satprem, sent a letter saying that Auroville was a lost cause and may disappear into the dust of history, many in the French group took it very much to heart. A few years later, quite a number of them left.

The 'father figures'

The key figure in all this was Satprem, Mother's confidant with whom she had shared her explorations in the physical yoga documented in *The Agenda*. Although he never lived in Auroville, he was revered by quite a few Aurovilians. They considered that Satprem had been poorly treated by the Ashram which he felt, partly on the basis of some of Mother's comments, to have become fossilised. He supported the Aurovilians in their struggle with the Society.

Yet Satprem was a complex figure. "Satprem was somebody we had deep reverence for," says Alain, "but after 2000 we began to hear strange things. Because of this, the way we looked at him took quite a hit. Ultimately, I can only say that for me Satprem is an exceptional being who, because of that exceptionality, could be so close to the Mother; in fact, he was the only one, she said, who could truly understand her. He was a yogi. On the other hand, there are some aspects of his personality which are difficult to understand and don't seem consistent with his other high qualities. But who are we to pass judgement on such giants as Satprem?"

Alain remembers the time Satprem visited a number of Aurovilians when they had been put in jail in Tindivanam in 1976 for occupying Navajata's hut in Aspiration. "He came to see us



Francis addressing a meeting at

roville history

cts on some aspects of Auroville history.



the 1970s

without warning. I had been talking with another Aurovilian when he looked behind me and said, 'Oh, Satprem!' We all turned and, suddenly, it was if nothing moved any more: we were all immobile. Without a word, Satprem began to look deeply at each one of us. Then he touched the bars of the jail and said, 'We are fighting to remove all these things'.

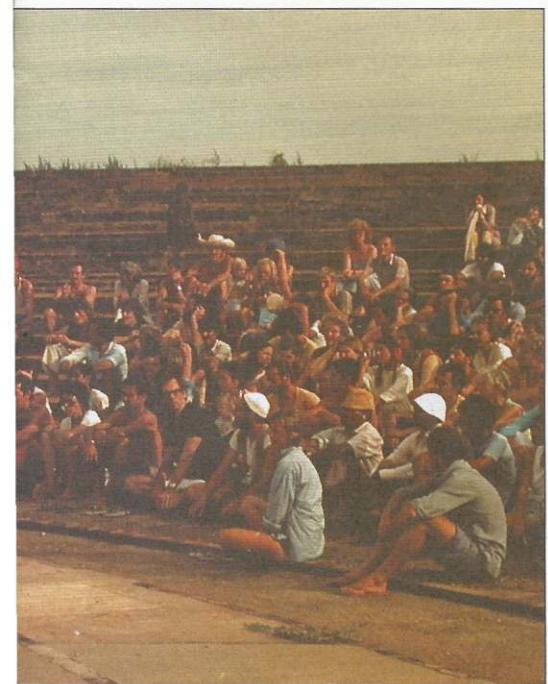
Afterwards, we were all crying..."

Alain believes that Kireet, the other great 'father figure' of Auroville in those years, was also very much a yogi. "From morning to evening he was a servant of The Mother: everything he did was for her. He understood that not everybody was like him in this, yet he believed that everything should be done from this standpoint. I think the problems he encountered are partly due to the fact that people are not really like that."

For example, when Kireet was made Chairman of the Governing Board and International Advisory Council of the Auroville Foundation in 1999, people like Alain were overjoyed. Apart from anything else, Kireet had been the chief architect of the Auroville Foundation Act [see *Alain's account in Auroville Today* # 304, November 2014]. "I could not dream of a better chairman. Now, I felt, there was a chance that a truer Auroville would come."

But, like many others in the community, he felt a sense of disappointment by the end of Kireet's tenure. It was during this time that Roger Anger and many other people in the community felt that the Matrimandir management team needed to be replaced. However, Kireet hesitated to do this, and Roger felt he was not being forceful enough. Finally, the decision was taken out of his hands by the Secretary of the Foundation, who replaced the management. "This was a very painful moment for Kireet. It also cast a shadow over his chairmanship."

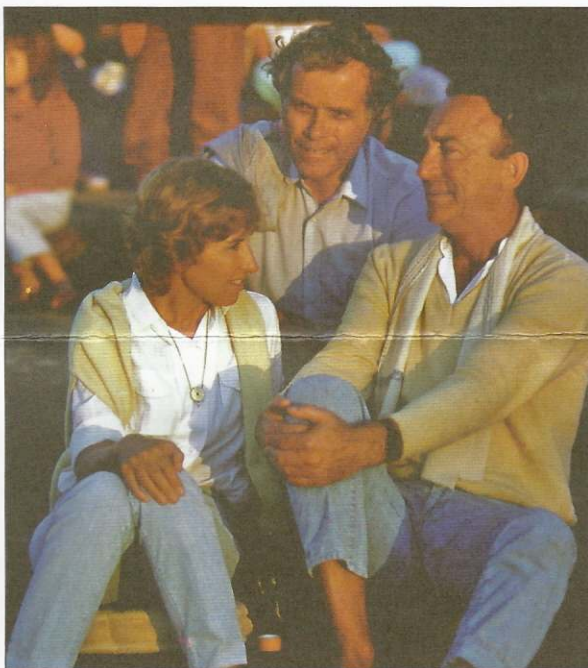
Nevertheless, Alain feels that Kireet has been an extraordinary worker for Auroville and is very grateful to have been closely associated in this work.



the Matrimandir amphitheatre

Changing perceptions

The 1990s were a difficult period for Alain. For him, it began with a community vote for members of the first Working Committee. Alain was one of the obvious candidates as he had been part of a previous Executive Council. However, when the votes were collated, Alain came last. "There had been a strong lobby against the



Jacqueline, Alain and Roger Anger

'Kireetistes', like Frederick, Patricia and myself, and I got the maximum negative votes. I think the idea of introducing negative voting was really nasty and, even today, I think this was the worst example of politics I have seen in Auroville."

The background to this vote was changing perceptions in the community regarding the Foundation Act, which was passed in 1988. "It had been drafted by Kireet, and he wondered how it would be received in Auroville. I was part of the Task Force that had been in Delhi to assist him and when we returned to Auroville, we did not know what the reaction would be. We were happily surprised by the general response. I think most people had a sense that in a certain kind of way, Auroville was free at last, although some people had strong reservations."

Among the people who were most unhappy with the Act were the managers of Aurelec, because they did not want the Auroville computer company to be part of the Foundation. "I was a trustee of Aurelec at that time and I said there was no way we could make an exception for them because then the Society would have grounds to challenge the Act. But the Aurelec management was adamant, and managed to convince many others in the community that government involvement in Auroville was a bad thing."

The negative vote, says Alain, "left an acid taste in my mouth, and I lost trust in the collective." For many years, Alain had been at the centre of community affairs, but now he withdrew. A few years later, there was another vote to choose people for the next Working Committee, and this time he came top, but he refused to serve. "Since then, I have never been part of a Working Committee because I have never wanted to."

Alain began collaborating with the Auroville Press and, later, Auroville Papers. "I remember I

was very enthusiastic when Serge, who was heading the Press at that time, said we have to start making handmade paper. Our first attempt at handmade paper produced something that looked like a pancake, but by the end of the decade we were in production, and today it is doing well."

In the meantime, Alain and Christine, his partner, were invited to visit Michel and Nicole in Kotagiri. They were working on *The Agenda* and other works, as well as taking care of the place. "We went first for three days, later two weeks during which time we met Satprem, and it became obvious they would like us to move there and help with the work. I was quite attracted, but Christine was unsure."

The Quit Notice

When they returned to Auroville, Alain discovered he had a Quit Notice. "I was told I had to leave India in 15 days. Then started for me the craziest period, which lasted for three years." The background was a meeting between some Aurovilians and Roger, during which they discussed

many things, including the future status of Auroville. When a report of the meeting was published in the News and Notes, the then Secretary of the Foundation took strong objection to the part that he interpreted as saying some people wanted to separate Auroville from India. "He said this was 'treason'. I felt this was an overreaction and published an open letter to him that was unnecessarily aggressive. As a result, the Secretary sent a damning report to the higher authorities saying that I was a very dangerous person who was trying to carve Auroville out of India."

It was a very serious charge. Normally, it would result in immediate expulsion with no possibility of return. However, after many efforts it was possible to keep it in abeyance for some time. After three years, however, the local Regional Registration Office (RRO) told him that his request to stay had finally been rejected, and he had to leave India, along with Juanita, another Aurovilian.

"Frederick, Juanita and myself decided to go to Delhi to see what could be done. Through a contact of Kireet, we managed to meet the Home Secretary. He advised me to go to France for some time, but said I would be allowed to return. I felt uneasy, and when I told Kireet about the interview, he said that it could not be left like that. A strong statement had to be made to the Minister, saying there could be no question of Auroville being taken out of India because Mother and Sri Aurobindo wanted Auroville to be at the core of India."

"In between, there was a call from the office of Mr. Advani, the Home Minister, saying he wanted a photograph of Sri Aurobindo. We got it and went to see Advani's private secretary. We told him we would like to present it to the Home Minister personally. At one point, we were allowed to go in and Advani was standing behind his desk. He made a gesture for us to sit. Then immediately I started to speak. 'Sir, I know there is a very serious case against me but I sincerely believe it was a misunderstanding. It is alleged we want to take Auroville out of India but this is just not possible because as disciples of Mother and Sri Aurobindo there is no way we could believe this: it is contrary to their teaching'."

"Advani said he would speak to the Home Secretary. In the afternoon Advani's secretary called a friend who had been helping us very much, and said, 'Your friends are free birds'. I was elated. In things like this you really feel the

protection."

Alain remembers his subsequent visit to the Pondicherry RRO. "It was very moving. They could have been annoyed that I had managed to remain in India, but everybody was smiling, happy for me. This tells you something about the Indian psyche."

Educational activities

In 1982, Kireet asked Alain to be the first Director of the Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research (SAIER), which Kireet saw both as a channel for government funding of Auroville and a vehicle for promoting Mother's educational ideas in Auroville. Alain worked for SAIER till 1992 when he resigned.

In 2000, however, Alain resumed working with Kireet on an even bigger project that he wanted the government to fund, the Centre for International Research in Human Unity (CIRHU). "We established a small group, which worked well together, and we drew up a rather ludicrous plan called CIRHU-SAIER that would cost 125 crores. When I showed it to Kireet, however, he was very happy with our work. Of course, we didn't get that money, but it did result in a sizeable upgrading of Auroville's annual grant from the government."

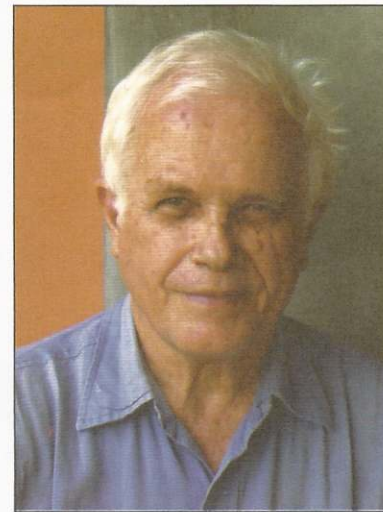
Later Alain became involved in village outreach activities. "It started immediately after the tsunami of December 2004. A group formed to help rehabilitate the affected villagers, and I was asked to look after the money, quite a lot of which we received in the form of large cash donations. So, once again, I was dealing with

money!

"Then Bhavana asked me to be a Trustee of the Auroville Village Action. I agreed because it was her, but then she played a trick on me, and passed away."

Alain is also on the present management team of the Sustainable Livelihood Institute [see *Auroville Today*, no 319, February, 2016]. "Joss and Bhavana had been discussing this project for many years, and more recently Ram Subramaniam became involved. I don't pretend that I do a lot on the ground. I see my role more as helping Ram, the present SLI Director, for whom I have great respect, in his work and in his interactions with Auroville. Joss is, of course, also a key element in this SLI adventure."

"This seems to be a pattern with me – helping people with greater capabilities in certain fields. I was a bit like the deputy of Kireethbai because I felt it was something that I had to do. In fact, I have this strong feeling that basically you have to accept what comes to you: I'm deeply convinced that the true way of living would be this deep acceptance of whatever 'life' wants you to do. It doesn't really matter what that is, for this



Alain in 2016



Distributing food from the first Pour Tous cart

Consciousness is as careful with minute things as it is with the big things.

"The real thing that I regret is that I don't have enough of this way of being, of accepting what comes to me, because sometimes I feel I have been resisting..."

"Sometimes I think people credit me with more than I can actually do but I feel I can provide some kind of ballast: despite everything, people have a certain trust in me. I consider that very precious and I am very careful to maintain it."

Alain

Preserving the week

Marco Saroldi is a Newcomer and works for Art Service. His weekly round-up of photos of Auroville activities is posted on Auronet. Here he talks about his work.

I have visited Auroville many times in the past, and then I took the decision two years ago with my wife Dominique to try to live here, starting with three months of volunteering. I work with Art Service, and at the end of the Auroville "high season" in February 2016, we realized that many events had not been photographed or recorded at all. So I thought, "Why not begin with a systematic investigation with the camera, doing what I like to do best, taking pictures of events and happenings?" Art Service suggested that I create a weekly pdf document of my pictures, and so I began to look into the events of the week and go where the instinct took me.

We now have a visual document of a community always on the move, and this helps Auroville have constant contact with all the AVI centres, who often write to tell me how happy they are leafing through the photos each week.

Sometimes I have the sensation that their nostalgic tears have wet them.

I've seen such things ...

An Indian flag rising up in the Auroville bright sky
A perfect metal workshop built in a huge beehive
People in meditation at the sound of a Russian peace bell
Kilos of pasta drained from a one hundred litre cauldron
People in meditation with their feet up in the air
8 square metres of canvas moving in the forest
2 big portraits following us wherever
12-year-old kids riding bareback
Special dolls made of offcuts and love

All those moments will be not lost in time. They will be preserved, like pictures in a frame.

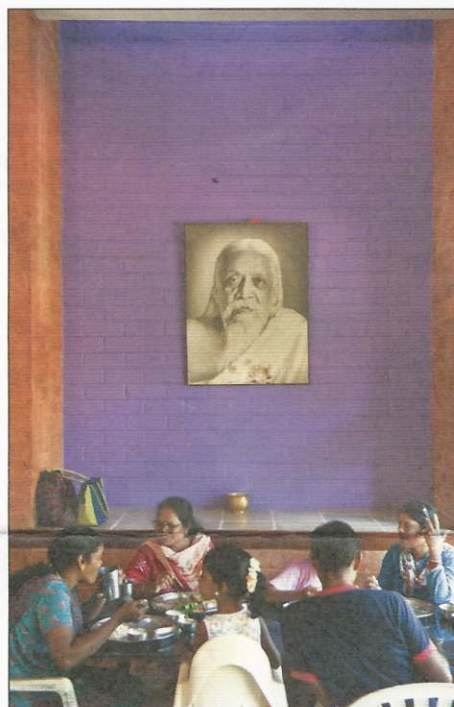
Marco



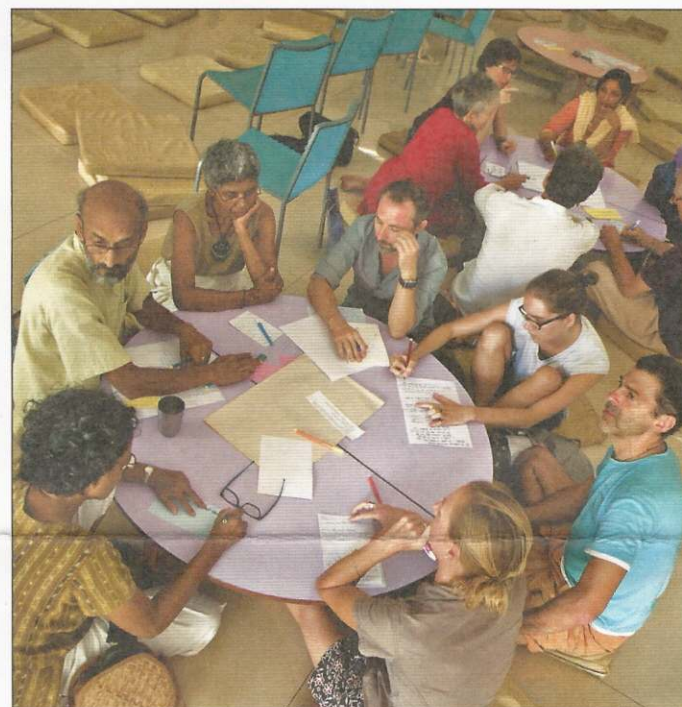
Well Café kitchen worker



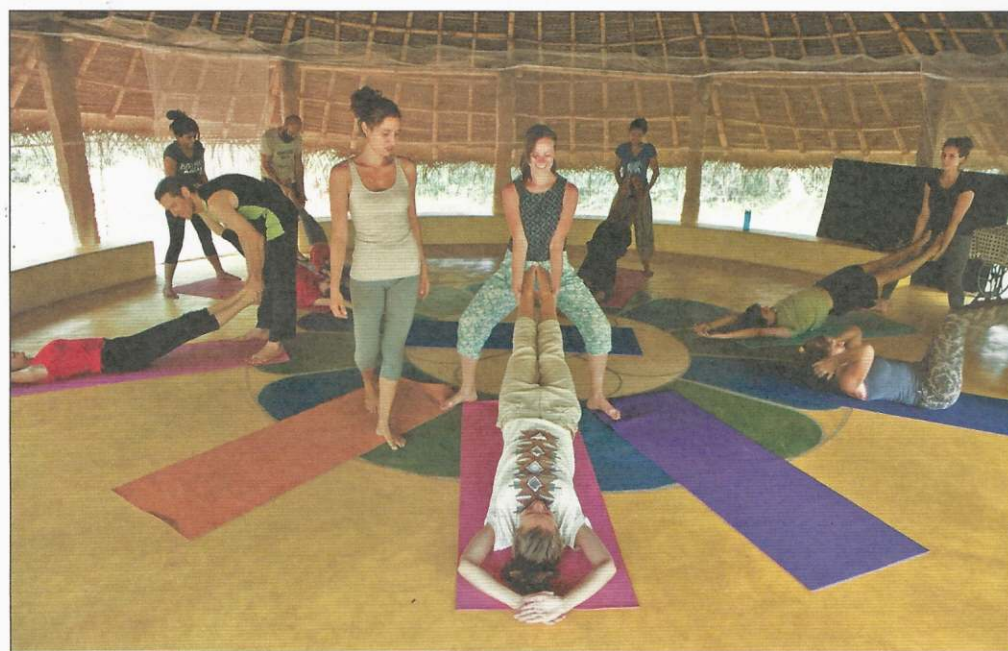
Affirmation doll workshop at Sankalpa



Solar kitchen dining room



Unity Pavilion housing meeting



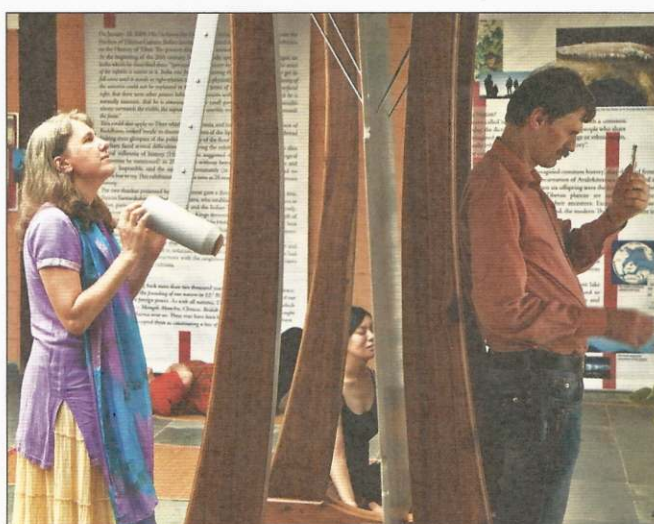
Acroyoga in Joy community



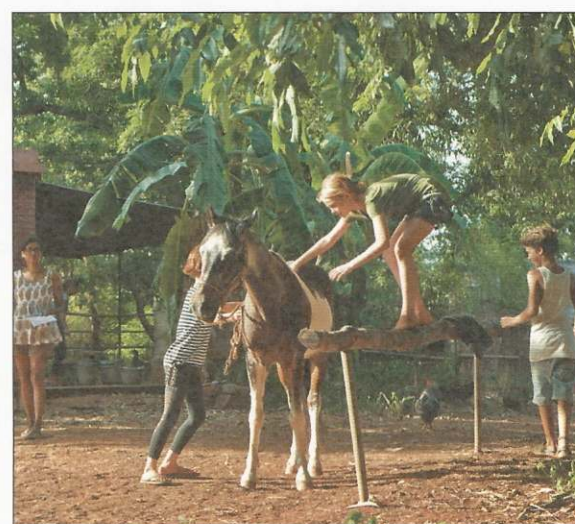
Youth Day in Unity Pavilion



Watching horses at Baraka



Around the Peace Bell



Riding ponies at Baraka

Climate change, climate justice, and the need for resilience

I remember when the onslaught of globalization hit Auroville: I was living in Pitchandikulam, and Joss (though I doubt if he still remembers this), disgusted by the fact that one could choose between six varieties of toothbrushes at Pour Tous (there was only store in Kuyilapalayam back then), said that he will put out some neem twigs for free distribution among the toothbrushes.

Even though the philosophy of Integral Yoga with its focus on individual freedom does not espouse this, voluntary simplicity is an ethos that I and many Aurovilians subscribe to. Not out of a moral stance, but simply out of the realization that "no man [woman] is an island." Evolution is not so much about individual growth, but about individual growth in connection to human society and nature. And, notwithstanding the futuristic promise of the transformation of matter, our integral connection to and dependence on nature, enjoins us to cultivate a lifestyle that is in harmony with the limits and patterns of nature. And after decades of unbridled industrialization and globalized capitalism, humankind is being forced to realise that the price of our economic growth and the plethora of goods that we enjoy is climate change.

It would be too optimistic to say that humankind is coming to terms with the threat of climate change. For the truth is, much to the frustration of climate-change activists and scientists, politicians and mainstream society are still largely indifferent to this single greatest threat that humanity has ever faced: climate change with its attendant loss of life and food insecurity. As the eminent novelist and occasional social commentator, Amitav Ghosh points out:

"There is no threat to any society, anywhere, that is remotely comparable to that of climate

change. How can people summon so much indignation on so many matters and yet remain indifferent to a process that threatens their very existence?

Nowhere is the disjunction more confounding than in India, which is likely to be one of the worst-affected countries in the world. Over the last couple of decades, as television has penetrated into once-remote areas, India's population has become highly politicized. Millions of people regularly take to the streets on account of matters ranging from religious outrage to corruption. Yet climate change does not seem to have sparked mass outrage in the country. This despite the fact that India has many eminent climate scientists, some fine environmental reporters and several excellent environmental organizations. Nor is 'denial' an issue in India as it is in the Anglosphere: the majority of the population is aware that the climate is changing – yet that awareness does not seem to translate into a major political concern. . . . When crops fail the focus is usually on political and human stories, not on changes in climate."⁽¹⁾

Auroville, embedded in India embedded in the world, is a microcosm that often mirrors global trends in humanity. The lack of productivity in our farms is often viewed as the failure of individual farmers to manage their farms, when in reality, there is a host of other contributing factors-poor soil, lack of investments, and yes, changing weather patterns.

Cyclone Thane in 2011 resulted in losses for most farms. Last year, the unprecedented rainfall in December destroyed huge swathes of the millet crops: Annapurna estimates that it lost half of its varagu crop and so did Kalpavruksha, a relatively new farm. Currently, we are experiencing an unusual summer monsoon. In the summer, the rain

comes in short spells followed by bright intense sunlight. This month, there were days on end when the skies were overcast, as with the winter monsoon. For most of us extra rain and cloudy skies are a welcome break from the unrelenting heat. But, for vegetable farmers, the lack of sunlight has disrupted the rhythms of plant-growth and production. In Buddha Garden, pumpkin seedlings were attacked and destroyed by an infestation of a red bug. Normally, sunlight would have kept this pest in check (the heat would have destroyed the eggs, if not the insect itself), but this season, the duration and intensity of sunlight was simply inadequate. The result: a marked decline in the pumpkin harvest in the coming months.

To mitigate the loss in production and subsequent income loss, Buddha Garden farmers, Priya and Vivek acted quickly and planted rucola and lettuce. These crops, which would have been generally planted later in the year, like cool wet weather and with luck (that is, if the climate does not hold any more nasty surprises) they will thrive and prove the resilience of Buddha Garden as a farm. But ideally, Auroville should be coming to terms with the fact that if we want to secure healthy food for the community and others in the bioregion, we should be looking at promoting resilience in various ways, such as increasing crop diversity, increasing cultivation area by creating vegetable gardens in all communities of Auroville, and learning how to create compost and best utilize our biomass and to change our food-habits.

The crop losses that our farmers are facing highlight another issue related to climate change: the need for climate justice. The recent Paris conference on climate change brought, for the first time, the concept of climate justice to international political attention. Climate justice simply means that vulnerable communities and nations that will

be hit hardest by climate change are generally the least responsible for causing it and have the least capacity to adapt and so should be compensated for this. Bringing this concept of climate justice home to Auroville would mean ensuring that the burden of crop losses due to changes in weather should not be faced by our farmers alone: Food is a basic human need, and food security should be a community responsibility. What we need is a paradigm-shift that would forge closer relationships between farmers and community members, so that the latter actually understand and help mitigate the problems faced by the farmers.

Annapurna has taken a small step in this direction by starting a Support Group of Aurovillian volunteers. It hopes to expand the group in the coming months and create opportunities for community-members to actively help in the farm. Such experiments can easily be replicated in other farms in a far-reaching initiative for community-supported-agriculture.

If there is a silver lining to the problem of climate change, it is this, "There is no such thing as a problem without a gift . . . in its hands,"⁽²⁾ and the gift of this global problem of climate change is that it calls for an unprecedented unified action by all nations and peoples. Even though most national leaders are dithering in the face of disaster, all over the world thousands of cities and communities are joining hands to mitigate the effects of climate change by creating strong social bonds and resilient communities that can survive in the face of adversity. It is time Auroville joins this growing movement of an actual human unity.

Bindu

(1) "Sleepwalking Towards Disaster," 2015. (<http://thewire.in/1363/sleepwalking-towards-disaster/>)

(2) Richard Bach. "Illusions". Pan Books, 1977.

News in brief

Rotation of WC and AVC members and new FAMC

The process of finding replacements for some outgoing members of the Working Committee and the Auroville Council, and for finding new members of the Funds and Assets Management Committee, has started with community members nominating 680 candidates. The profiles of those who have accepted their nomination and of the community members who want to participate in the 3-day selection process will be published for community feedback. All feedback will be evaluated by a Temporary Feedback Review Committee whose members have been nominated by the Auroville Council from the list of nominees received from the community at large. The 3-day selection process will happen from October 21st–23rd.

Commercial units defaulting on mandatory contributions

The Budget Coordination Committee has informed that it no longer has enough resources to cover the present level of expenses and still maintain a buffer in case of emergencies. A shortfall of Rs.1.2 crores of income for the current 2016-17 budget is faced, as a result of which the City Services will be in deficit from October 2016 to March 2017. The reason for the shortfall is the unpaid contribution from a number of commercial units who have not fulfilled in the period 2010 to 2015 their commitment to contribute at least 33% of their profits to the community. Emails sent to and personal communication with the executives of the defaulting units have given little or no results. The BCC considers this as a misuse of Auroville's fiscal governmental support and has asked the major working groups to take

appropriate action. In view of the present financial situation, the BCC has frozen the allocation of community maintenances. This means that no new maintenances will be allocated for the time being and that Auroville services which have unused maintenances in their approved budget will not be allowed to start using them.

Homes for those in need of assisted living

The FAMC and the community of Samasti have agreed that the house and garden of a recently deceased community member is transformed into a house for Aurovilians who require assisted living. Also, on Sri Aurobindo's birthday, August 15th, the Auroville Health Services have started building the Mahalakshmi Home, a home for senior Aurovilians who are "mostly fit enough to organize their daily lives and need only special help for things such as dressing, laundry, and for seniors who wish to live together with other seniors in order to be in an environment of peers and mutual understanding and support." The Foundation Stone for this building was laid on 3rd October 2015 in the presence of Dr. Karan Singh (Chairman of the Governing Board) and Sir Mark Tully (International Advisory Council).

Fair feedback on Newcomers

The Auroville Council and Working Committee, concerned that feedback on those who wish to join the community cannot be based on personal feelings of likes and dislikes, and only on truth and accuracy of experience, have decided to henceforth use a "feedback form". The option to ask for confidentiality will only be considered for good reasons. If the Entry Service and/or the Auroville Council find the reasons valid, then confidentiality will be assured. If not, the person giving the feedback will be informed that the

feedback cannot be considered confidential, and that s/he can choose to either withdraw the feedback or agree to non-confidentiality. All non-confidential feedback will be shared with the Newcomer and an opportunity will be given for clarification before a decision is taken.

Change of deadline for the News&Notes

Though most Aurovilians have an internet connection at home, the News&Notes are still being printed and brought to the doorsteps of all those who require hard copies. To ensure that paper copies reach all communities by Saturday lunchtime, the deadline for the submissions has been preponed to Tuesday 5 pm, so that printing can start at 2pm on Wednesdays. The process requires two full days for the long chain of events. It includes printing of a master copy on special paper that needs 15 minutes 'cooking' on each side of each page; offset printing in English; translation; offset printing in French; in Tamil; stacking by hand all pages of each copy; stapling of all pages in order; hand-writing of each of your names on the cover and then delivery to each community by bike. Switching to a soft copy is still an option.

Circulating reports by email

The Working Committee has successfully initiated the circulation of its monthly report by email, in addition to publishing it in the News&Notes and on Auronet. This gives everyone an opportunity to respond, ask questions, and receive feedback without necessarily needing to attend a General Meeting. The response to the experiment has been overwhelmingly positive and a request has been made to translate the report into more languages, such as Tamil, French and Hindi. Regular General Meetings will continue to be held to interact with community members and provide information on topics that cannot be published in a public forum.

Building Bridges

Building Bridges is a project that aims at building cross-cultural friendships. In September, 19 children from four Auroville schools accompanied by 6 adults will travel to Dharamsala to meet with children of the Tibetan Children's Village school. They will be hosted by a Tibetan community for 3 weeks. Building Bridges intends to do this every year.

Auroville Triathlon 2016

The Auroville Triathlon 2016 is open for registration for Newcomers and Aurovilians. The Olympic style event includes 1,500 meter swim, 40 kilometres bicycle and 10 kilometres run, the Sprint event 750 meter swim, 20 kilometres bicycle, and 5 kilometres run. The events will take place on November 20, 2016, starting and ending at La Piscine in New Creation.

Use of name of Auroville

The Funds and Assets Management Committee (FAMC) has decided that the word "Auroville" should not be used at the beginning of the name of a unit, activity, project, or course unless it is a unique activity supposed to represent Auroville officially. A guideline has been published.

Abandoned pets

The Working Committee has warned of a growing culture of people from outside abandoning their pets at the doorstep of Integrated Animal Care Centre (IACC) and also within other Auroville premises, such as the Town Hall. The IACC ends up taking these pets in, some of which are sick and/or wounded, and providing them with shelter, food, cure and care. But it is becoming exceedingly difficult to care for such animals without available funds and infrastructure. The IACC is already handling more than 70 dogs and does not have the ability to shelter animals for long-term.

Vocational Training at AIAT

The Auroville Institute of Applied Technology (AIAT) is now taking admissions for one and two year vocational training courses affiliated to the Central Government National Council of Vocational Training (NCVT). AIAT is well-known for project-oriented learning through doing and for its holistic approach in education, which includes personality building, interview techniques and other extra-curricular activities. To take up a course, a 10th standard qualification is mandatory. After the course completion, all candidates are eligible for a 1-year apprenticeship training in any subject-related company in Pondicherry or Tamil Nadu. Students who have completed a 2 years NCVT course are eligible to join an undergraduate course at a college.

Passing: Elvira Salamanca



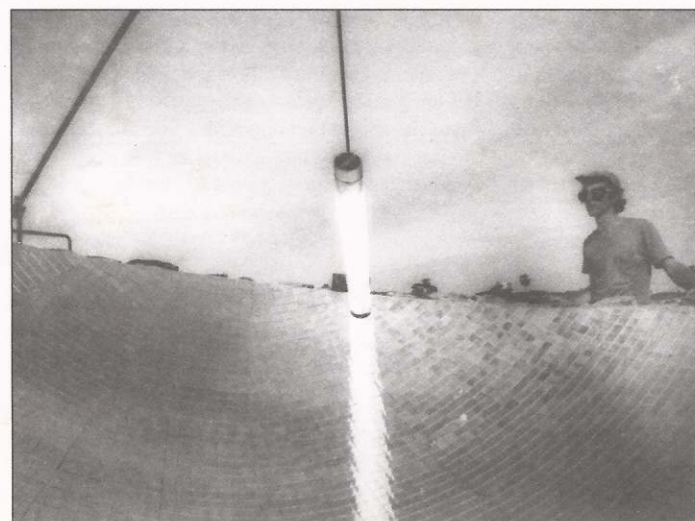
Elvira, a Spanish Aurovillian from Catalonia, who lived with her partner Jean-François Audic in Pitchandikulam, passed away in Spain in the morning of Tuesday 9 August after a struggle with cancer. She was 71 years old. Elvira had joined Auroville in 2001. She was known as a sweet and lovable person, whose deep and often poignant portraits of people from all over the world, and particularly of Native Indians, were remarkable. She also gave classes in Spanish and flamenco dance, and worked as a researcher in Pitchandikulam. Due to family reasons she had to share her time between Auroville and Spain. Sri Aurobindo's poem "Is this the end?" was shared by Jean-François.

Auroville gives me everything

John Harper talks about how he came to Auroville and the challenges and pleasures of living here.

In 1969, I was attending the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada, studying engineering physics. It was through a librarian there that I was put in touch with Sri Aurobindo's writings. His writings answered a long-felt need I had, so I started to read a lot. A couple of years later, I began to correspond with the Ashram and The Mother. She wrote back once, otherwise she would reply through a secretary. In the summer of 1974, I joined a trip to June Mayer's house in California for the first meeting of returned Aurovilians. People who had first-hand experience of life in Auroville during its first six years were there, such as Savitri. The experience of staying with these people felt right. I thought, "That's my family, I'm going to go to Auroville." So I made the arrangements and came in October 1974. I came to stay. I was very sure of the feeling. India was very far away in those days, with the image of dust and poverty, but the need to come and be a part of this adventure was stronger than all of that.

I grew up in the Pacific Northwest, which is full of totally beautiful nature. I spent many years canoeing on lakes and rivers, climbing mountains, hiking in the forest, and camping in the wild. I was trained in living in the rugged outdoors, and this was very useful when I came to Auroville! I realised afterwards – when I had heard other people's stories about the situations they came out of to join Auroville – that I had had a very privileged upbringing, not in the sense that I came from a rich family, but that I had experienced a life situation where there was zero conflict around: everything was peaceful, the country wasn't at war, it was all fine.



John at the experimental first solar bowl near the Center Guest House

But even in those most beautiful spaces – sitting by a pristine lake or hiking in the deep forest – eventually I felt there was something essential missing, something hidden. And that "missing Something" was the thing that fuelled my search.

My close friends in Canada understood my sudden decision to go to India in 1974 because I was in a circle of people seeking for something, but my family didn't. An amusing follow-up was that one of my sisters was sent by my father to "rescue" me in 1986, when I'd been here for 12 years. After an epic journey by sailboat and airplane, she arrived to find me well and happy, and she was so struck by Auroville that she got happily stuck here for 14 years! That is Susan, who is well known to many people here. Finally my mother came twice, and she understood.

It just felt like this was the right place, and it still feels like this. It's that layer underneath: India has a deeper aspect that is not at all apparent in the West. But this place in particular has it, and Auroville was so glowing with that start-up energy in those days. The enthusiasm of everybody was quite palpable.

Right away, I came to Matrimandir and started working here. After a few months, I got hugely ill, so I was in hospital and then I recovered in the Ashram Nursing Home. I lived in the Ashram for two years to build up my strength, which was great – I had a whole other experience there. I worked with Dr. Chamanlal Gupta in the Knowledge section of the Ashram School on a solar energy project. During that time, I often came out to Auroville to help with the Matrimandir concreting.

In 1978, I came back to Auroville and began living at the Matrimandir workers' camp, twenty rambling rooms joined together under a keel roof. At that time, there was a wave of people coming from the Ashram to Auroville. For example, the people who started Djaima, Jean L., Goupri, Joy and Lakshminarayan, who is still here at Matrimandir. At that time, Auroville was going through a very tough period. The most difficult memories for me are the conflicts that happened at Matrimandir. These had a big impact on me, probably

because I had grown up with zero conflict, so when there was violence, especially physical violence, it was tough, and those bits are burned into my memory. Forty years later, when there's conflict, it still stands out starkly as being not appropriate here.

It was quite amazing to be part of the team building Matrimandir. It was always challenging, with difficult and beautiful moments and lots of laughter. The completion of the Inner Chamber was a miracle. To have built this space, so beautiful and strong, even while the exterior of the Matrimandir was completely unfinished and open to the weather, was really like a miracle. Overall, I don't have this feeling of satisfaction like, "Oh now we've done it, that's great". The satisfaction was, and still is, in the moments of doing it, of being with all those people lined up together during a concreting, passing chetties of concrete, or with a team building scaffolding high on the Matrimandir. It was very satisfying to be involved with things like that from day to day.

I have been working at Matrimandir all this time. It just feels like the right place. I have no impulse to try something else. Over the years, I have done so many different things here, from cooking breakfast to building high scaffoldings – it's all been great fun. I'm one of the four executives, and my responsibility is the financial section. I coordinate with the rest of the team, purchase materials, maintain the machines, plan work for the ongoing and future projects.

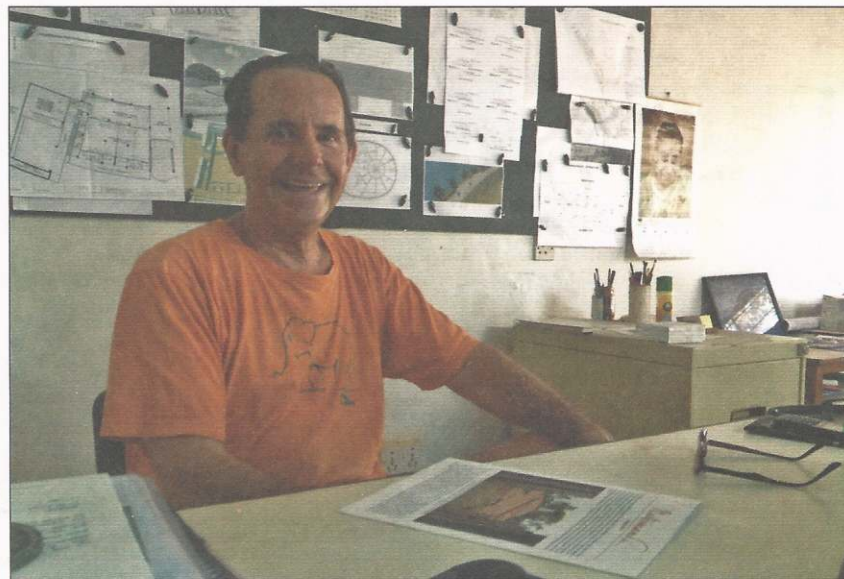
We're concentrating on finishing the gardens' oval right now. The work has three parts: the first work is the nine gardens, which are moving ahead; the second is the finishing of the two large rooms under the amphitheatre, one for the garden tools for the 50-100 people who will maintain the future gardens, and the other a green room for the amphitheatre performers; the third is the ring road that runs around all the gardens, which will be laid with granite cobblestone and will be integrated with a rainwater harvesting system, so we can collect all the monsoon run-off from the entire 22 acre gardens oval. These are the three things that will complete the Park of Unity. All the old maintenance and administrative buildings will have to go, so that the isolating Zone and the lake that the Mother wished to have around the Park of Unity can be created. This is a big project ahead of us. The other future task is to build the Reception Pavilion, which Roger Anger had envisioned to receive all Aurovilians and visitors coming to Matrimandir.

Every Sunday morning, I meet a group of 76 visitors and I give them an introductory talk and take them to the Chamber. They have all sorts of questions, and I try to do my best and answer those. I enjoy doing that. For some, it's a life-changing experience.

I also write the Matrimandir newsletter, providing an update on the progress of the work and sometimes looking back on Matrimandir in the early years. If you look at the photos of Matrimandir in 1986, the majority of people working on it were Aurovilians, a mix of westerners and Indians. There were hardly any paid workers, and specialist paid workers were only called in when we needed them. That was how it was up until the beginning of the 90s. However, by 2006, we had 300 paid workers and 40 Aurovilians, as the push was on to complete the building in all its aspects. Now we're down to 90 paid workers and 60 Aurovilians, so the balance is shifting again, and we hope that it shifts more as we get increased participation from Aurovillian volunteers.

For the last 20 years, I've lived in the Nursery. In my spare time, I go to the swimming pool, I go cycling, I spend some time with my friends and I play with kids. I grow vegetables for my neighbours. I come back to Matrimandir in the evening to check everything, and then I sit quietly in the gardens and simply enjoy the silence of the night.

I have an active "hobby" maintaining the solar bowl at the Solar Kitchen. I was trained in engineering and physics, so from 1974 onwards I helped with the search to find a way to focus a sunray on to the crystal in the Matrimandir. I was involved in creating the first solar bowl in Centre Field between 1979-1981, which led to the building of the large Solar Kitchen bowl in 1998.



The real challenges of being in Auroville are very much on the human side. It's this whole challenge of getting people to listen to each other during conversations, and gaining some understanding of issues. Of course, we've made things overly complicated and bureaucratic. The pendulum has swung to the extreme in that direction. Hopefully it will swing back.

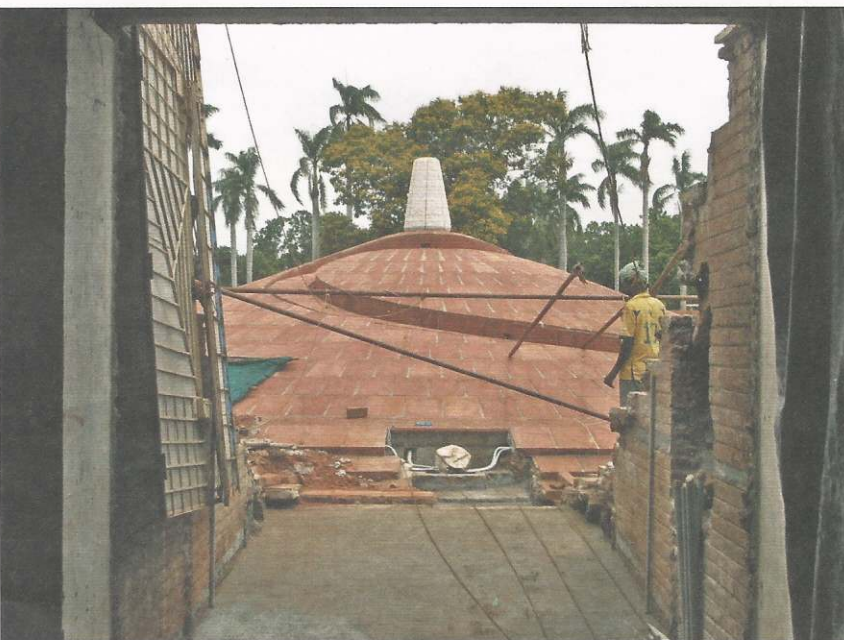
In terms of the conflicts at Matrimandir, I have generally not taken a public stance because most incidents of conflict concerned issues of design, where it was not my place, as a builder, to comment. The one time I spoke out (in the News & Notes) was about the poor quality of the material being created for the inner skin – an issue that polarised people. The panels of reddish polyester then installed were fading and warping, and perhaps not sufficiently fire-resistant, so in that case it was easy and important enough for me to speak out about them.

This perhaps is my key concern, or rather my fundamental perception: that we are One here, and on the surface take the appearance of so many contending views, positions. We do not have the ability to hold onto our Unity, so we get lost and caught in all this turmoil. There are positions which have more of a dose of truth than others, yes, but they do not hold the whole truth... We get so easily caught in all of this... so it is difficult, and often painful.

On the surface we seem to be way short on almost every level, but I think the aspiration to change is there, collectively. I have a positive outlook as I feel there is a slowly growing awareness of our togetherness on a very deep level. For me, that growing need to exist together in a different way needs to be more manifested. But the process of this collective inner growth is very complicated, as we have a big influx of people joining Auroville, bringing their own ideas. So it's amusing, to try to understand how it will all work out. Finally, Mother did say one can laugh because it's all being carried forward by forces quite beyond us: Auroville is being built in spite of us!

Auroville – the Forces sustaining it – gives me everything. I never felt the need for anything. All material and inner needs have been spontaneously met over the years. In one letter I wrote to The Mother in '72, I asked her to accept me as "a most humble and loving child". She wrote back, "YES, with love and blessings". And it has been like that. Everything has been given. And I can only be grateful.

Lesley



Finalizing the passageway from the dressing rooms beneath the Amphitheatre

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