

Auroville Today

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New Governing Board meets

They were busy days for the new Governing Board. On Sunday August 13th, Chairman Dr. Karan Singh, who had been re-appointed for another term of office in October last year, met with new members Dr. Prema Nandakumar, Dr. Nirima Oza, Prof. Sachindananda Mohanty and Dr. Anirban Ganguly. In the afternoon they attended presentations of Wasteless, Humanscapes, the Auroville Institute of Applied Technology, the Sustainable Livelihood Institute and the Auroville Sports Resource Centre. Later, the members received the first copies of the new biannual journal *Bhavishtyate* and of the book *The Inauguration of Auroville – Concept and Purpose* and interacted with members of the community.

On the morning of August 14th, Dr. Karan Singh inaugurated the new building of the Auroville Electrical Service and Solar Service. Then, for more than three hours, the Board interacted with the Working Committee and with other working groups on issues such as the Matrimandir, Visa, Auroville finances, the Government of India grant, fundraising, land consolidation and protection, housing needs and the suggestion that Auroville be declared an Institution of National Importance for Human Unity. Much time was given to discuss the plans for Auroville's 50th anniversary. In the afternoon of that day, the Board had its own meeting.

In this issue we present interviews with Dr. Sachidananda Mohanty, Dr. Prema Nandakumar and Dr. Anirban Ganguly. An interview with the fourth member, D. Nirima Oza, is scheduled for later.



From left: Dr. Nirima Oza, Prof. Sachindananda Mohanty, Dr. Prema Nandakumar, Chairman Dr. Karan Singh, Dr. Anirban Ganguly and Auroville Foundation Secretary Mr. Mohan Chankath

Globalization, Regional Cultures and International Living

An interview with Prof. Sachidananda Mohanty

Auroville Today: The Mother once wrote in 'The Dream': 'There should be somewhere on earth a place that no nation could claim as its sole property: A place where all human beings of goodwill sincere in their aspiration could live freely as citizens of the world, obeying one single authority, that of the Supreme Truth.' What, for you, does being a world citizen in the 21st Century imply?

Sachidananda Mohanty: The term 'citizen of the world', enjoying a wide currency today, means different things to different people: the well-heeled corporate leaders in the international jet set, the globetrotting academics, diplomats, tourists, explorers, businessmen, artists, writers and philanthropists – all of them could pride themselves as being 'citizens of the world'. However, in order to grasp the significance of the term in the sense The Mother uses it, one has to go back a little in history. The expression has its source in two Greek words – 'Kosmoi' and 'Poleis'. Diogenes, the Greek philosopher, credited with the notion of the 'citizen of the world', was confined paradoxically to his own City State. For him going beyond the boundary of the Greek City States entailed a daring move, an act of faith, indeed a leap in consciousness unimaginable in his times.

In fact, 'the 'citizen of the world' concept has passed through fascinating trajectories, encompassing the Renaissance in Europe to many utopian movements across the world stage. For example, it has acted as a symbol of liberalism, wideness of mind, and cultural emancipation. It has also entailed the transgression of political and cultural boundaries, overcoming narrow definitions of society, polity

and worldviews. Contrasting itself to all forms of exclusivism and xenophobia, the movement has advocated the freedom to go beyond national boundaries.

The term has found new meaning in the post-World War II era. In the scholarly world, it is the Foundations and Councils, such as the British, the Humboldt, and the Fulbright, which



Prof. Sachindananda Mohanty

are the cultural arms of various Governments that have spearheaded the act of international travel for mutual understanding and benefit.

However, clearly, The Mother's vision of international living is far more radical and progressive than anything conceptualized by mankind so far.

For me, it implies at the deepest level the ability to assimilate in our life and psyche the best experience of mankind as world citizenry.

Clearly, this does not mean merely achievements of the conventional kind for an international outreach. Rather, it calls for an attitude of constant openness to new ideas, a refusal to be confined to the beaten path and received wisdom. It embraces a culture of dialogue of respect and a willingness to learn across national and international boundaries. As Sri Aurobindo aptly says, we do not belong to the past dawns but to the noons of the future. To cherish and celebrate the great achievement of the past 20 centuries and to welcome the great possibilities of the 21st – that to me signifies the meaning of the term in the fullest sense. As The Mother says, Sri Aurobindo's words have Mantric power. To read Him constantly in a state of intellectual openness and peace of mind, to let His thought and vision sink into the depth of our being and consciousness, and to internalize the experience of collective living at the national and international level – that is the best way we can harmonize the warring parts of our being and help usher in the world of the future. It is indeed, as the Mother and Sri Aurobindo explain, a dynamic spirituality, and not creedal religiosity, that we should uphold in our path towards world peace and union.

Two major trends in the world today are globalization and an increasing wish to identify with one's own culture or group. Can these be reconciled? If so, how?

While the problem is recognized in the contemporary discourse on multiculturalism and identity politics, the answers seem to be elusive, for reason entails a binary approach: it is either this or that. The result is that, in many instances, scholars seem to have reached a dead end.

Professor Sachidananda Mohanty is the Vice Chancellor of the Central University of Orissa at Koraput, India. He was recently nominated as a member for India's Commission on Education for UNESCO by the President of India. He is also a new member of the Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation. Former Head of the Department of English, University of Hyderabad and former Academic Associate at the American Studies Research Center, Hyderabad, he has written many books, including *Understanding Cultural Exchange*, *Sri Aurobindo: A Contemporary Reader*, and *Cosmopolitan Modernity in Early Twentieth Century India*.

One way of looking at this problem is to posit an ongoing relationship/negotiation between society and the individual, the universal and the particular, the nation and the province, the community and the family and, finally, between the family and the individual. The drive towards multiple allegiances and multiple loyalties, Sri Aurobindo teaches us, is ingrained in the human soul. Many must coexist at the same time; the one doesn't necessarily have to give way to the other.

The end of the two devastating World Wars and the creation of the United Nations, in 1945, it was hoped, at one time, would bring about the abolition of all worldwide conflicts and conflagrations – the ideal before mankind.

However, the persistence of conflicts, minor or major, at the national and international level, the deadly ideological oppositions

continued on page 2

- **Prema Nandakumar: Savitri became my touchstone**
- **Anirban Ganguly: Coming home**

pages 2-3

- **The magic of monsoon storms**
- **Community living at Courage community**
- **The new Sanjana community**

pages 3-5

- **The proposed Line of Goodwill**
- **Le Chant des Partisans**
- **Savitri around the world**
- **News in brief**

pages 6-7

- **Passing: Karpagavalli Selvanambi**
- **An evening with Bengali film director Buddhadeb Dasgupta**

pages 7-8

Holding on to the scaffolding

An interview with Dr. Prema Nandakumar

Dr. Prema Nandakumar has written and spoken to audiences the world over about Sri Aurobindo's writings and philosophy. She is the author of many articles and books on Sri Aurobindo and on Indian culture. She is also a translator and fiction writer in Tamil and has received several awards for her contributions to Indian literature.

Auroville Today: You are well-known for your work on Sri Aurobindo, on Indian religion and spirituality and for your literary work. But many people will be surprised to learn that at one time you were also a political journalist.

Dr. Prema Nandakumar: It's an interesting story. My father, Professor Srinivasa Iyengar, the first biographer of Sri Aurobindo, loved *Savitri* and taught me the poem from an early age. My PhD thesis was the first academic thesis on *Savitri* and, on Mother's wishes, it was published in 1962 by the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. By then, I was married and had had my first child. At that point, I had to take a decision as I had offers to take up academic work at college. My father said, you cannot serve too many gods. Once you are married and have children, your family comes first.

I agreed to this: the only good thing I have done in all my life is I have never said no to what my father wanted of me! However, I had my typewriter and so, in addition to my family and household duties, I became a writer and journalist.

My journalism career began like this. My father was a very close historian of events and used to discuss many things with the family. One day we had a very hot discussion. Nehru had said something that I considered uncomplimentary about C. Rajagopalachari – the first Governor-General of India – a man who I very much respected. My father said, if you feel so passionate about it why not write a letter to the editor? I wrote a longish letter and it was published as an article. You can imagine my excitement.

My father said, your first article has been published, what about a second? So I began writing on political matters.

During the Emergency, I wrote an article for a newspaper opposing the imposition. But the editor said he couldn't publish it because of censorship. Instead, he suggested I write on art, literature, culture. This is how I began writing on other topics, like dance and drama.

So my phase of political journalism died automatically.

Of course, I knew about Sri Aurobindo's political life. I also knew that everybody thought he had retired from politics when he came to Pondicherry. Father would speak often of the *Bande Mataram* essays as great literature, though the subject was politics.

How did he come to write Sri Aurobindo's biography?

He was a teacher of English literature. Madame Sophia Wadia, editor of the Indian P.E.N., asked him to write a small book on Indian writers in English. While he was collecting material, he came across two or three poems by Sri Aurobindo. He was surprised because he had only known of him as a political activist. However, the Correspondent of the college where he was teaching, Sri Shankar Gowda Patil, who used to go to Pondicherry for *darshan*, gave him the 1942 edition of Sri Aurobindo's *Complete Poems and Plays*.

My father went home, started reading, and was stunned. My mother often used to recollect how my father did not sleep the entire night, and by the time he had to go to college the next morning, he had written a whole chapter on Sri Aurobindo. Sri Patil took it to Sri Aurobindo who read it and made some corrections, and then said it could be published.

Sri Shankar Gowda Patil now said that my father should write a biography of Sri Aurobindo and gave him enough material to do this. He also took father to Pondicherry and introduced him to several *sadhaks*, like Nolini Kanta Gupta and Dilip Kumar Roy.

But hadn't Sri Aurobindo discouraged a would-be biographer with the warning "The attempt is bound to be a failure, because neither you nor anyone else knows anything at all of my life; it has not been on the surface for men to see."

Yes, but in this case Sri Aurobindo gave permission because at the time there were wild rumours flying around that Sri Aurobindo was some kind of magician, practising levitation and so on.

In spite of the efforts of your father and yourself, Sri Aurobindo is still not well known or understood in India. Should he be taught in Indian schools?

Of course, that was my father's passion also. However, it is very difficult to get Sri Aurobindo on to the syllabus prescribed in Colleges and Universities.

Actually, I believe it is very easy to teach Mother in schools because of her simple mode of expression and ability to tell stories. As far as Sri Aurobindo is concerned, I would start with the simpler texts, like the shorter poems (*The Tree, Who?*) and brief statements as in *Thoughts and Aphorisms*.

But the way to do it is not to begin by explaining a poem line by line. You should

relate it to a story, an experience. For example, if you want to explain his poem, *The Meditations of Mandavya*, you should first go to the *Mahabharata* story of *Mandavya*. You catch the students first with the story, then you go to the text.

This is how our culture has been kept alive in India, through story-telling.

Isn't one of the general perceptions about Sri Aurobindo that he forsook the world once he came to Pondicherry, and so his insights cannot be applied in everyday life?



Dr. Prema Nandakumar

Yes, sadly some people do feel so. But this is not the truth. My father said very strongly that you must live in the world and apply what Sri Aurobindo has said there. In this, *Savitri* became my touchstone. I like the story so much because it is a book that relates to our everyday life: it gives you the clue to solving difficult problems or to seeing things in the right perspective. Yesterday, when I was asked to say a few words on Auroville fifty years after its inauguration, I remembered looking at the photographs of the young people at Auroville's inauguration in 1968 and the words "the omnipotent's flaming pioneers" spontaneously entered my head.

As a housewife, I have not been in any big battle, but bringing up the children and looking after the household while seeking guidance from Sri Aurobindo and The Mother became my *sadhana*.

This is why, when I'm asked how can I be a conventional housewife and an Aurobindonian, I tell them I don't see any separation. In fact, I have written an article on The Mother as the supreme housewife because she had to manage so many people and problems!

Discipline is the key to success in *sadhana*. Dr. Karan Singh's close friend, Sri Krishnaprem (Ronald Nixon), had a small ashram near Almora. One day, someone who knew of his background as an English graduate from Cambridge University saw him performing rituals in a simple dhoti in the Himalayan winter. He said, "You are so talented. Why are you living like this?" Sri Krishnaprem replied: "For one thing, I believe that any self-imposed discipline, external or internal, is rather a good thing in the present age when every kind of social and individual restraint is in process of being hurled out of the window. Also, quite simply, this happens to be the path laid down by those who have gone before me and reached the goal. Who am I, just entering the path, to say, I'll do this, and not that, accept this discipline but not that? I accept the whole."

This gave me a clue to be proud of what I am doing as a housewife, attending to the religious practices of my ancestors. This is why, when I am asked how I would like to be introduced to a new audience or readership, I don't say as a writer or translator, but simply as a 'housewife'. Only one person has dared to do this so far!

I even wrote an article on the topic of discipline. I quoted Sri Aurobindo from his *Foundations of Indian Culture* where he says that just as you need scaffolding to build a spire, so you need religious discipline for spiritual attainment. Once your spiritual attainment is complete, the religious scaffolding automatically falls away.

I'm not yet spiritual, so I still want to hold on to the scaffolding!

You've had a long association with Auroville. What does becoming a member of the Governing Board mean to you?

The nomination came as a total surprise. When I was told, my first thought was they had mistaken me for someone else. Even when I knew there was no mistake, I had no idea what it meant; I come here quite often but there has never been any need for me to know about Auroville's administration. Now this great honour has been bestowed upon me, I will surely draw closer to the Auroville community. I know my life has always been shaped and guided by a maternal power, and so I'm happy to be here. It is Mother's Grace.

I have followed Auroville's growth and early struggles. But I never lost hope for Auroville because of my father's firm conviction that what Mother said about Auroville will come true. And I have always followed in his footsteps.

From an interview by Alan

Globalization, Regional Cultures and International Living

continued from page 1

between continental and regional power blocks such as the NATO, CENTO and SEATO, distracted the world from paying necessary attention to the scourge of poverty, illiteracy and destitution for the most part of the 20th century. Beginning with the eighties of the last century, the diabolical upsurge of ethnic bloodletting in zones like Ruanda and Burundi, and the rise of atavistic and regressive fundamentalist forces in Afghanistan, the Middle East and elsewhere, in our own times have been responsible for ethnic cleansing, genocide and widespread destruction, rarely seen after the holocausts in totalitarian fascist, and Bolshevik states in the first part of the 20th century. The dangerous staging of religious conflicts before which the medieval crusades pale into insignificance, and the antinomy between 'us' and 'they', threaten the long cherished goals of civilized nations.

It is here that *The Dream* of The Mother, based on the vision of Sri Aurobindo, acquires profound new meaning. The world today shows the utter inadequacy of conflict resolutions based on existing machineries, both unilateral and multilateral. New approaches, far more radical in nature, must be quickly found to address the crisis of contemporary international order. We need to turn our attention to newer world views if we are to save the world from a further slide into the abyss.

Sri Aurobindo tells us that it is not by the deployment of a formula or mechanism, however ingenious in the political sense, that we can find the answers. Rather, it has to be an approach based on the deeper psychological or spiritual kinship – an affinity of the soul, a spiritual comradeship, based on our common origin and common destiny – that could be the answer to a genuine reconciliation of the conflicts manifest today between globalization and localization. As Rabindranath Tagore aptly

remarks, one can understand world literature better if one can understand one's native literature.

What do you see as being the importance and prime function of the International Zone in Auroville?

The prime function of the International Zone to my mind is to enable us to participate in an international experience in the richest, most variegated and diverse manner. The aim here would be to enjoy and learn from the cultural legacy of the different nations of the world, as group souls that have journeyed through the ages in history. The aim would be to discover, as Sri Aurobindo puts it in *The Ideal of Human Unity*, oneness in diversity.

Mother wanted there to be pavilions of the different cultures in the International Zones, yet some people feel this concept is outmoded in the modern world where national boundaries seem to be dissolving. Your thoughts on this?

This question goes back to the globalization – localization and universal – particular debate. This issue has been debated for long in academic and/ scholarly circles as well as in the public domain without a viable answer. Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor in *Multiculturalism and Politics of Recognition* (1992) advocates the recognition of particular group identities by public institutions as part of multicultural education; others, like Steven Rockefeller, caution against favouring particularist cultural identity over the universal identity of democratic citizens. Yet others, like Susan Wolf, see the need to correlate the demand for multicultural education with the American sense of who they essentially are.

On the other hand, in his book, *Identity Against Culture:*

Understanding of Multiculturalism (1994), Kwame Anthony Appiah, one of the leading thinkers of multiculturalism, offers a close and incisive study of multicultural education. He advocates the need and possibilities of 'maintaining a pluralistic culture of many identities and subcultures while retaining the civil and political practices that sustain national life in the classic sense.'

I am inclined to agree with Taylor and Appiah's view and would like to take it forward. I do believe that The Mother and the Sri Aurobindo's ideas of national and international living, based on freedom and unity, continue to have relevance. In fact, in all of Sri Aurobindo writings on this theme, he has steadfastly maintained the importance of discovering and preserving the group souls. Of course, he cautions us against egoistic formations that are hegemonic and domineering: hyper-nationalism and jingoism must be eschewed. We need to refer to his chapter, 'True and False Subjectivism' in *The Human Cycle* to understand the fundamental distinction he had made.

However, it must be added that cultures of different nations are not static; they are constantly evolving. Great care, therefore, has to be exercised in showcasing the different cultures of the nations in the international pavilions so as to avoid mutual antipathy, antagonism, hostility and a sense of superiority among nations. The answer, in the final analysis, rests on a deeper understanding.

Practically, the pavilions of different cultures should, to my mind, avoid being museums or an archive approach to the preservation of the past, although they might have a place for artifacts that belong to the domain of museums and archives. But clearly, the approach must go beyond them: it must be creative, exploratory and open-ended of national life and world cultures. In the final analysis, it is this approach that could lend character to the international pavilions in Auroville.

Alan

Coming Home

My family's connection to Sri Aurobindo goes back more than a century. My great-great-grandfather, Upendra Nath Banerjee, was a revolutionary in the group that Sri Aurobindo led. He was one of the principal members, along with Sri Aurobindo's younger brother, Barindra Kumar Ghosh.

Upendra was arrested at the Maniktala garden house, along with the entire group of revolutionaries, including Sri Aurobindo. They all were put on trial for 'Waging war against the Emperor'. This was the famous Alipore bomb trial. But unlike Sri Aurobindo, Upendra was convicted and deported for life to the Cellular Jail in Port Blair in the Andaman Islands.

After 10 years, there was a general amnesty and he was released. Once again he became active in political work and became a journalist. He also visited Sri Aurobindo in Pondicherry. That was the time of the evening talks, as recorded by Purani, and he attended some sessions. But soon he was re-arrested. After his release he joined C.R. Das's Swarajya Party, later took charge as editor of a leading Bengali daily *Dainik Basumati* and was also a prolific columnist and also authored books. His most famous book is *Nirbasiter Atmakatha (Autobiography of an Exile, 1921)* – a classic in Bengali literature – which like Sri Aurobindo's *Tales of Prison Life* contains a vivid picture of the life lived by the revolutionaries in the Cellular Jail in Port Blair. Rabindranath Tagore had high praises for the book and made it mandatory reading in his Visvabharati at Santiniketan.

Upendra was the mentor of Nolini-da during the revolutionary period. When I was just a little over two years old, Nolini insisted that I be sent to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram for my education. That was in 1979. I joined the Centre of Education a year after. So I never had the benefit of meeting The Mother personally; but growing up in the Ashram I lived and interacted with those who had been very close to Her, in particular Nolini-da, Jugal Kishore Mukherjee, my teacher in Knowledge, and of course, Pranab, who really nurtured my life. It was Pranab who gave me insights into the life and ways of The Mother, it is from him that I imbibed my urge to work for a larger cause in life. I didn't meet Kireetbhai at the time, as he had already left the Ashram to become Special Secretary of the Ministry of Education.

So I grew up during the phase of disturbances between the Sri Aurobindo Society and the Aurovilians but I was too young to register all that. Only later did we become conscious of what had happened. Pranab, though very close, did not influence my thoughts about Auroville. He believed that Auroville had been a mistake of The Mother, and throughout his life kept a strong stand against Auroville. But though he was an imposing figure, he never imposed his views on those around him. He was a formidable leader in his own right and his doors were always open to Aurovilians who wished to meet him in their individual capacity.



Dr. Anirban Ganguly

Joining politics

Right from the beginning, it was clear to me that if I would not take up the Ashram life, I had to do something different. For me, that was doing some national service, being in public life, working for India. That ideal, which I had imbibed from being in the Ashram, was actively supported by my mentors. Added to that was, of course, the sense of dedication, of selflessness, of sacrifice as explained by Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, and at the same time the tenacity to hold on and dedicate yourself to what you have chosen to be your part in life. Those were the points that Jugal-da stressed over and again, and all this contributed to my larger understanding of what The Mother wanted. Pranab always encouraged my eagerness to be in public life, he supported my intellectual quest and to work for the country.

I have sometimes been criticised for 'going into politics', as The Mother so often said that the Ashramites should not be involved in politics. But I believe that injunction holds for those who have decided to take up the Ashram life. Mother herself was always very concerned about India and about the need to have contacts with political personalities of that period. She invited Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee, for example, to preside over the Sri Aurobindo Memorial Convention in 1950 and maintained contacts on the political level with people such as Prime Ministers Jawaharlal Nehru, Lal Bahadur Shastri and Ms. Indira Gandhi. Also Sri Aurobindo had devotees who were involved with politics, such as Surendra Mohan Ghosh, who he said was 'his man in Delhi' and to whom he gave, exceptionally, private *darshans* and political and yogic advice. And there were others, like K.M. Munshi who were deeply influenced by Sri Aurobindo from his days in Baroda and had his *darshan* of the Sage as late as July 1950.

I look at it this way. I was not suitable for the Indian Administrative Service. I chose to go into politics as a means to do that service which I always wanted to do, which is to help India regain

her rightful place in the comity of nations on which Sri Aurobindo himself has so extensively written. I aspire to be an instrument for that purpose.

Now, when one is in political life, one has to choose a platform from which to act. For me, that platform is the BJP, for I feel it to be the political formation which in terms of political articulation and understanding has a deeper understanding of Sri Aurobindo than any other. There may be individuals in other parties who are also deeply knowledgeable about Sri Aurobindo; but as a collective, this is the platform with which I feel most affinity and comfort, where I can carry out my functioning in consonance with the deeper ideals I have imbibed from the Ashram.

I am convinced that Shri Narendra Modi, the Prime Minister of India, is definitely working towards manifesting Sri Aurobindo's views on India. He not only wants to see India positioning herself in the comity of nations as a great and self-reliant power, but is also concerned about India's spiritual mission and her deeper cultural and civilisational identity and dimension. Sri Aurobindo, in his last public message to the Andhra University, (December 1948) wrote about India becoming a powerful nation but at the danger of forfeiting its *Swadharma*, losing its soul. This, I believe, is what the Prime Minister is trying to prevent: he is searching to manifest a deeper coalition, a deeper harmonisation of these two dimensions – outer prosperity and preservation of *Swadharma*. His twitter message on the occasion of August 15th, India's Independence Day and the birthday of Sri Aurobindo, shows this twofold mission: "*I pay my tributes to Sri Aurobindo on his Jayanti. His rich thoughts and grand vision for India continue to be a great source of inspiration.*"

The Mother's spoke about the need for people 'to go beyond politics'. Over the last decades, we haven't seen that. The politics of division have intensified and the fault lines between divided communities have widened. But I think that we are now seeing the emergence of the politics of aspiration, where there is no longer a differentiation on the basis of religion, caste or creed, a new India which has resolved to fight against divisive tendencies, against social challenges and generate a new narrative. As director of the Syama Mookerjee Foundation, which is often referred to as 'the think tank of the BJP', I work with the party on a large number of issues but it is precisely in these areas where I strive to develop the party and India further.

Talking about Auroville

I have heard complaints in Auroville about the lack of sufficient support from the Government of India. On the one hand, I consider it a blessing, though on the other I agree that it delays Auroville's development.

I am reminded of a speech Dr. Mookerjee gave in parliament when debating the Visva Bharati University bill. Mookerjee said that institutions like Tagore's Visva Bharati University and the Sri

Dr. Anirban Ganguly is director of the Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee Research Foundation in New Delhi. He is a member of the Central Advisory Board of Education and also a member of the Policy Research Department and co-convenor of the Library & Documentation Department of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). He has done his doctorate on Sri Aurobindo and the national education movement in India. Here he speaks about his connection with Sri Aurobindo and The Mother and his work for India.

Aurobindo Ashram (Auroville did not exist at that time) should be given a great degree of autonomy and that the Indian government should only facilitate the experiment. His words were not heeded, and the government take-over of Tagore's university initially caused a lot of distress: it went totally under the control of the government, and gradually its soul and the original vision were subdued.

But there is a change today. The present government has given Indian institutions of higher learning more autonomy than they ever had before. I think it is a very wise move, because these institutions have unique characteristics that have evolved over time following the inspiration of their specific philosophies.

So for Auroville, it is good that the Government keeps its distance and allows Auroville the freedom to grow organically; but there definitely should be more support. The government should recognize that Auroville is a unique experiment, conceived by some of the greatest minds of our era to happen on the soil of India. This soil was thought fit for such an experiment – and consequently, there should be an attempt to recognize Auroville as an Institution of National Importance so that it can be given some kind of special protection. We should also actively try to find solutions to some of the long pending problems of Auroville, in terms of land, visas, green belt, town planning etc. But all this will take time; we cannot expect the entire government machinery to immediately appreciate the importance of Auroville. There are people of goodwill in all stations and I am sure incremental progress will be made.

I am grateful to have been appointed member of the Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation, which allows me once again to be in close contact with Auroville and help manifest its ideals. I visited Auroville when I was in the Ashram kindergarten, and I often visited Auroville in my student days. Then, for a long time, I could not come; until two months ago, when I accompanied Mr. Amit Shah, national president of the BJP, on his visit to the Matrimandir.

This time, it was a longer visit. It felt like coming home.

In conversation with Carel

ENVIRONMENT

The magic of monsoon storms

In the months of July and August, Auroville benefitted from unexpected rains. In July 153 mm fell, against an average of 73.1 mm for the last 39 years. In the first three weeks of August, 195.2 mm fell, against an average of 129.7 mm for the entire month. On an annual basis, the average rainfall over the last 40 years (January 1-August 20) is 233.6 mm while in the same period in 2017, 463 mm has fallen.

This means that we are above average in spite of the drought that was prevailing so far. Our shallower wells, tapping mostly into the Cuddalore Sandstone aquifer, are responding to these rains and showing signs of recovery. However, water levels in our deeper wells, tapping mostly into the Vanur Sandstone aquifer, continue to decrease. We need much more rain if we want to recharge all of our aquifers. We hope that the northeast monsoon, beginning in mid-October, will bring those rains.

The thunder growled in the distance, its baritone rumble breaking through the dance music. We looked at each other in alarm. "Oh, it may just blow away," said the teacher airily. For, as had been the experience this summer, there were so many times when we thought it would pour down, but the clouds would just blow. So we continued with our routine, but the teacher did let us off a few minutes early so that we could reach home before the storm broke.

The thunder, the flashes of lightning that ripped open the skies, the clouds dark and pregnant with vapour chased me down the road as I sped away home on my bike. My electric scooter was no match for the storm. Urgent, fat raindrops pelted down on me, stinging my face and arms. Many other commuters had pulled to the sides of the road and were huddled under whatever little shelter they could find. But the rain breathed to life that primal instinct in me, that innate longing for water, without which we surely cannot survive.

How does one ever describe the magic of monsoon to someone who has not grown up in India? I grew up in North India, where this magic had an even stronger pull. As documented over centuries in epics, lyrics, popular songs, my heart would jump with inexplicable joy, just watching dark clouds gather over hot, dusty fields. I grew up thinking that that indescribable fragrance of freshness that the earth

releases when the rain first kisses it as being the sweetest smell I have ever known. I grew up playing with my brothers and friends for endless hours in the rain – just happy to be running in the rain, splashing in the puddles, and screaming for the sheer joy of it all. Believe it or not, our favourite game was just to race through a rain puddle trailing a long stick. Ah! As a cherished *ghazal* goes, "Take away this wealth, take away this acquired fame; snatch away from me even my youth, but give me back the monsoons of my childhood and the paper boats that I would float on rainy days."

My love for the monsoon persisted through my youth. As a student in USA, I remember being homesick and calling my mother to complain that the rain simply fell steadily from the sky. There was none of the drama of the monsoon storms that I grew up. And she, in turn, would invariably call me in excitement whenever there was a good storm, for my mother, bless her heart, remains as joyful as a kid, and even though she is in her seventies, she still runs out to get wet in a rainstorm. As one grows older though, with the repetition of an experience, one starts to take things for granted. A predictable routine, from which the novelty of the experience has long been wrung dry, dogs the life of most adults. So is it with me, and with each passing year, I feel older and grayer.

But today's storm, coming after a drought of 1.5

years, and catching me unaware as it did, rejuvenated me. Washing away the years and the responsibilities that I shoulder as an adult and filling me with the joy of the moment. I found myself singing in joy as I slipped and slid across mud roads back home. I laughed as a family of newcomers crossed me in their car, with the windows shut tight against the rain. I smiled at the developmental changes in Auroville, nostalgically remembering how in such heavy downpours, greenbelters would walk through the plateau, observing the flow of the run-off, and mentally planning where to place the contour bunds and the catchment ponds. But, above all, I was simply happy at being drenched by the rain, exulting in this unexpected change in the weather.

My mum and I would often quote to each other those lines of Wordsworth, substituting of course rain clouds for rainbows:

*My heart leaps up when I behold
A rainbow in the sky:
So was it when my life began;
So is it now I am a man;
So be it when I shall grow old,
Or let me die!*

So be it. Let me always, till my dying breath, feel the magic of monsoon storms.

Bindu

Profile of a community: Courage

While it is one of the youngest Auroville communities, Courage is one of the largest. It has 104 residents drawn from 16 different nationalities: 30 of the residents are under the age of 18. What are the joys and challenges of living in such a large and diverse community? Can it be a model for elsewhere?

Auroville Today: Give me a brief history of the construction of Courage.

Swadha: Dominic was the architect for the first phase. Prospective residents started looking at drawings with him in mid 1999, construction started around July and it was completed by June 2001, when I moved in. There were 12 apartments in five blocks in the first phase.

The second phase – three blocks of six apartments each – was constructed in 2003-4. The third phase, also comprising three blocks of six units each, was only completed last year.

The first phases were projects of the Development Group who raised the finance and heavily subsidised the cost of the apartments. In 2001, these apartments were available for less than four lakhs, including the water and electricity infrastructure, which was very good value.

Yet Courage did not have such a great reputation in the early days...

Swadha: During the early days of construction, there were major communication conflicts between the project holders and the construction team as well as with the architect which affected the prospective residents. At one point, the person supervising the construction stepped out and Pierre Elouard had to come in to finish it.

Also, the architect's idea of a nice apartment was something very Japanese-style, with an open kitchen, windows at different levels etc. At first I was very happy to have my own place but after one monsoon I felt the design would not work and I completely changed the interior design of my apartment. Many others did the same.

Eugen: Courage was originally called 'Rêve' but later it was changed to Courage because in those days you needed courage to stay here.

Swadha: That wasn't the reason we changed the name! We wanted to have our own identity and not be linked with the existing Rêve guest house.

Most communities only expand with a few people at a time. In Courage, there has twice been a big increase in residents when phases two and three were completed. How did the existing residents cope with this?

Lalit: I think when an influx is happening in other communities the experience is not always being positive, but I've never felt that somebody in Courage opposed this idea of development, which is remarkable. We have always welcomed new people here, and it is a very diverse mix of incomers as we have single apartments, family apartments and apartments for Newcomers and Youth.

Ayesha: I joined after phase one and two were built. Actually, I didn't know phase three was coming when I purchased my apartment. When I found out, I was horrified because I didn't want more people. I felt we were such a dense community already and I didn't come from Bombay to live in a jammed space! But my fears were not fulfilled: the influx did not upset the existing balance. The noise level didn't change and much needed improvements in our parking and wastewater infrastructure helped us absorb the new residents.

Swadha: The fact that we are so many now means we have a bit less of a community life. Us 'first phasers' were doing much more together. We were going to each other's houses, spending time outside with each other's kids, having regular pot-lucks and watching movies together. And, of course, it is a bit overpowering when you get a sudden addition of 18 apartments. On the other hand, most of us first residents were young – my parents were the



Some of the residents of Courage community

oldest people – and this definitely affected our mindset. I remember being excited about getting new people in because it would mean more energy.

How are new residents of Courage chosen?

Lalit: When somebody moves into a new youth or Newcomer place, we don't have any say in the process. However, when a new apartment becomes available or an existing apartment falls vacant we have a rather elaborate process to choose who comes in.

Swadha: Housing sends us a list of prospective people, the whole community votes on who they would like, and then the top three names are presented to the direct neighbours who are given the final choice.

How do you take other community decisions?

Ayesha: We have regular community meetings but they are not well attended. We are lucky if we get 14 from the 74 adults who live here.

Swadha: Fourteen is our quorum. We had been struggling with implementing a decision because sometimes people who were not at the meeting would object to any decision taken and then we would have to redo the whole process. So, in our last meeting we decided that if we had a quorum in the meeting and a decision was taken, there would have to be a quorum again to reverse it.

Ayesha: We send everyone a meeting agenda with a list of topics, so if something is going to impact someone, they need to make the effort to come. We have some regular attendees but not all are willing to take up community responsibilities. That's why, at times, it gets a bit frustrating.

This is where many communities that wanted a community process failed in the past: too much responsibility fell on too few people.

Ayesha: Yes, we are facing this.

Swadha: But we are lucky that we have some people who are willing to help if you get too much on your plate. So with about ten-twelve active members we are managing to get things done.

Lalit: For me, Courage is a mixture of inspiration and organisation. A natural system of organisation has come up organically in which individuals take up different responsibilities. As of now, it more or less works.

We also have a special situation here, and that is that we have someone like Eugen. In situations where major community facilities were needed – like new parking facilities or a water treatment plant – but we have lacked the financial means to carry them out, he has come forward and offered to pay for them almost unconditionally. This has helped Courage a lot. It has also made decision-making easier because if the rest of us are not in a position to pay and he is coming up with a proposal and is willing to fund it, what is there to discuss?

Eugen: I do it because I like to go in this direction. After all, my next parking is the burial place and I cannot take the money with me. People ask me why I like to stay here. It is one of the nicest things in my life to see the small children running around and the older ones looking after them.

Ayesha: Courage also has a fund that helps us make further development. Individuals make a Rs 50 monthly contribution that we set aside if we need to do things like fencing or installing water meters. The fairly substantial income from our cashews also goes into this.

What are the issues that keep coming up in your community meetings?

Ayesha: People driving right into the community rather than parking in the allocated area; wasting water. In some ways, we are spoiled here. We do not have to pay for our water or electricity and we have a very good wastewater system. But there are issues around our well drying up, and broken taps, broken pipes.

Mita: The other issue that was very challenging was that as families grow they needed more space and wanted to extend their apartments. We discussed this extensively but, in the end, we decided as a community against allowing extensions because it would bring up too many issues.

Ayesha: However, because the topic came up so strongly, we are trying to be more accommodating to families with larger needs. One family asked if they could make the necessary arrangements with

guests contribute to community expenses.

There are many types of community in Auroville, from virtual dormitories where people only come at night and live very individual lives to intentional communities where everybody is very involved in collective decision-making. What kind of community is Courage?

Swadha: We have such a mix of people, generations and lifestyles here that it's difficult to define us.

Lalit: We are not a super-intentional community like some other communities in Auroville. On the other hand, we do not live completely separate lives. I think one of the key characteristics of Courage is its friendly environment. And a possible reason for this could be the many children we have here because we are all very concerned to make the children feel safe and secure.

Swadha: I think all the parents here are super happy because we have a very safe environment.

Inge: But it's not just the children. I have been living here for two and half years in a youth apartment and, from a youth perspective, I have found it a very welcoming community and one of the only communities in Auroville where those in youth apartments are fully integrated in the larger life of the community.

If you were designing Courage from scratch with your experience today, would you do it differently? Would you try to define certain things from the beginning or let it evolve organically?

Swadha: As a general thing, and again it has something to do with the fact that we are still a young community, I think we are much more oriented towards an organic model, which is the way Courage evolved, rather than rigid planning. I wouldn't have changed the way it has happened.

Inge: I think the people who join Courage already have something of that organic mindset. They would not be looking to live in a place like Citadines.

Lalit: Our model is different from Citadines, which has quite strict conditions for living there. We have guidelines but they are common sense, and we are not forcing anybody to behave in a certain way.

Rather, you come here, you find your place,



One of the apartment blocks in Courage

Housing so that they could have the vacant apartment next door in addition to their own because their family had larger needs and people supported this.

Lalit: I think this is an example of how our understanding of what a community needs keeps developing. Whatever Courage has learned is good for now but in the future we may have to find other solutions.

Ayesha: We have guidelines that have evolved over the years. They are commonsense suggestions that help towards a more harmonious community life, like avoiding playing loud music after 9.30 at night, separating waste, asking everybody to use their assigned parking space and ensuring that

and if you are a responsible type you pick up something for the community. It's true that some of us do get frustrated at times by the lack of people coming forward, or by poor waste management: some people don't follow even a basic discipline. So, perhaps, after a time it is not a bad idea to have a more disciplined form of organisation.

Eugen: In my view, the people who come have first to feel good here and then they can start taking up community responsibilities. If they have something over them from the beginning, if they have to conform to some kind of rigid order, it won't work. People need a certain freedom. Many communities have failed because they ignored this.

continued on page 5

Courage fact file

104 residents (30 under 18 yrs)
16 nationalities
46 housing units, each of 84 sq.m
29 units occupied by families
16 units occupied by single people
2 Newcomer apartments
2 Youth apartments
Average residential area per person 37.15 sq.m
Density 83.2 persons per hectare

The new Sanjana community

Along the curve of the road towards Madhuca and Sukhavati, a new community is taking shape. Designed by architect Gundolf and built by Auroville contractor Vinayagam, Sanjana has 21 residential units for singles and families and a workshop. "The last five apartments are now in the finishing stages. In 1½ months, all will be ready," says a visibly relieved Gundolf.

The idea of Sanjana began in 2011, shortly after Gundolf had moved into one of the new apartments he had designed in the Surrender community. "Can you build us something similar?" his friends asked. Ideas became designs, designs turned into a housing project, but it took a while before the project could get materialized. "The Town Development Council (TDC) asked me to make a development plan which included not only the new community but also many of the neighbouring communities, which was not my intention," says Gundolf, who only had planned to integrate his own project into the immediate neighbourhood, as per common practice. The plan was ultimately completed by integrating the inputs of urban planner Bankim and architect Suhasini.

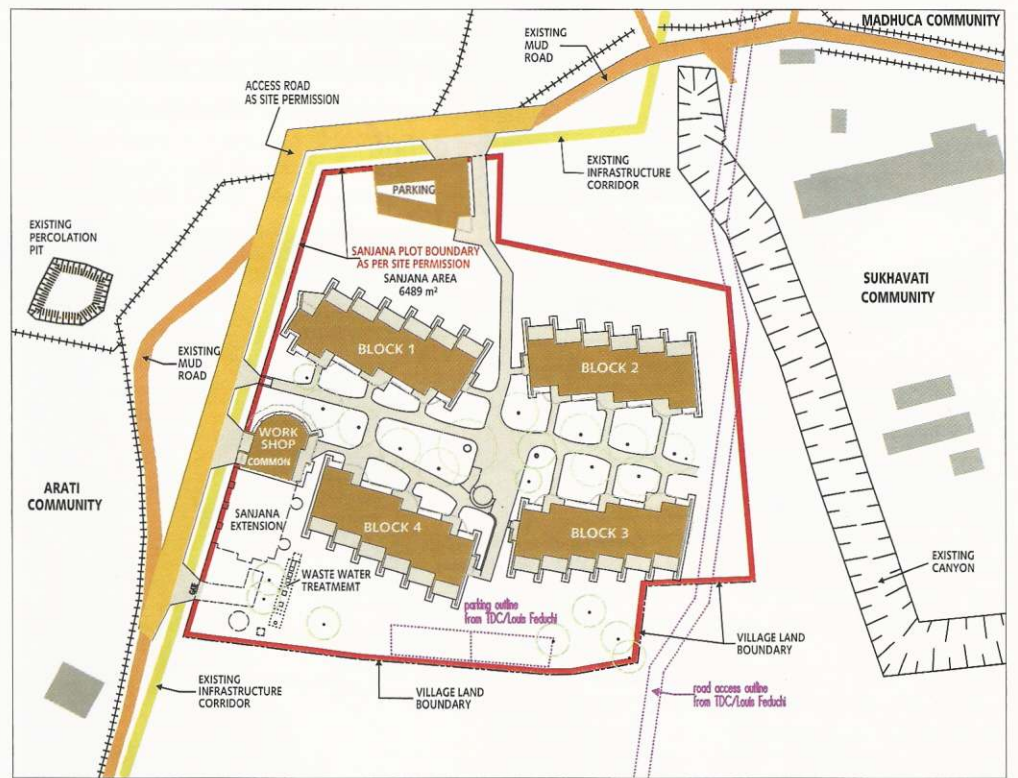
Hurdles

Construction of Sanjana finally started in 2014, six months behind schedule, as the TDC had frozen any new development awaiting the finalization of an overall Detailed Development Plan (DDP) of the Residential Zone which was

being made by Luis Feduchi. But after six months, when that plan was still not ready, Dr. B.V. Doshi, the head of the TDC, intervened and gave the green light to proceed. On the basis of the approved plans Gundolf received site permission, and started preparing for the building permission. "I made all the working drawings and the Bill of Quantities and the first clients booked their apartments. But the final No Objection Certificate (NOC) was never given," he says.

The reason was a change of plans. When finally the new Detailed Development Plan was published, it showed a new road along the canyon behind Sanjana. "The TDC wanted to shift the Sanjana buildings to make place for that road. But that met with objections from future residents, who had already paid for their apartments along the canyon and were not enamoured of the new road proposal. The new DDP also changed the parking location, which was moved to the southern part of Sanjana just in front of individual terraces. This too met with objections." Finally, the construction of Sanjana went ahead without the NOC, while the location of the parking area is still to be agreed upon.

In Auroville, permission for the building of new projects is not only given by the TDC, but also by the Funds and Assets Management Committee (FAMC). Here too, Gundolf ran into problems. "For this size of project it is obligatory to have a project manager or a man-



The Sanjana community layout

agement team, which takes care of finding clients, ensuring the timely financing of the work, preparing a time schedule and carrying out the daily site supervision under the guidance of the architect. But it wasn't possible to find a professional project manager," he recalls. "After I showed the expense statements for my architectural work, the FAMC agreed that I could charge 5% of the building costs. But they disagreed that an additional 2% of the building costs would be charged for the work of the project manager, even though this had already been agreed upon in the contract prepared by TDC and signed by the project management, the architect and the contractor. The FAMC felt that this work should be carried out by an Aurovilian who would only receive the regular Auroville maintenance. But experienced project managers do not work for a maintenance. So this fell through." Instead, a few clients of Sanjana came together and became the Project Management Team themselves.

Affordability

The project aimed at being affordable, sustainable and fast to build. "The speed of the project was compromised as construction could only proceed after receiving payments from clients. The Housing Service could not advance the funding of more than one apartment at the time," says Gundolf. To make the apartments affordable, he designed a modular system based on the size of one bedroom, which allowed for several different apartment types. "The repetition of standardized rooms kept the costs down, but this benefit was reduced by many requested 'extras' which created delays," he says. Also, Gundolf's very detailed drawings and extensive bill of quantities and his working closely with the contractor helped to make the apartments

affordable. It led to a price of Rs 10 lakhs (US \$ 15,500) for a 35 square metre studio (carpet area) and Rs 36 lakhs for a 125 square metres, 3-bedroom family home, including costs of shared infrastructure, but excluding extra work for changes requested by clients.

"The price also excluded the community hall," says Gundolf. "I had planned for it, but it was too expensive for my clients." That space was bought by Matrigold, an Auroville commercial unit, on the condition that if it moves out of Sanjana, the community has the first right of purchase.

Sanjana fact file

- 27 residents
- 9 nationalities
- 21 housing units
- 1 workshop
- 2 units occupied by families
- 13 units occupied by single people

Sanjana in Sanskrit means 'Harmony', but for Gundolf it has been an uphill battle to find it. "The kinds of problems I had to face to manifest Sanjana should never happen again," he says. "Our Auroville administration has to show a more cooperative attitude in the giving of site and building permissions and in helping with financing. Then we architects will be encouraged and can manifest new projects in a more efficient way."

Despite these challenges, Gundolf is satisfied with Sanjana, for it is beautiful and has a freshness and intimacy about it. It is a great addition to the manifestation of Auroville.

Carel



Interior of one of the Sanjana apartments



Some of the apartments in Sanjana community

Profile of a community: Courage

continued from page 4

One thing Courage doesn't have that was once considered essential to building community is a common eating place. Was this a conscious decision?

Swadha: The original plan of Courage had a community kitchen but we never got it. When I first came I missed it because I grew up in Aspiration which had a common kitchen, and I really enjoyed cooking for everyone once a week. When I came to Courage I was looking forward to eating together for at least one meal a day. But once you have a family and children you have different needs. So as most of us eventually got into a family rhythm, I don't think the community kitchen would have worked out.

I think it is more sustainable to have a community space available for pot-lucks but still have your own kitchen at home.

Ayesha: I don't cook, I come from a very nuclear family and I'm not really interested in food, so it would terrify me to have to cook a community dinner once a week.

Lalit: My parents lived in an officers' colony so we had a good community life. What I miss here is some simple seats, benches, where we can all sit around and chat. We would get a chance to know what is happening in each other's lives which, for me, is the foundation of collectivity. Otherwise, we end up meeting in community meetings where the agenda is

overloaded and we don't have time to express ourselves properly. This may be good for organisation, but not for life.

The good news is that we have a new dedicated space for community meetings. Courage had a beautiful history of collective pot-lucks, movies etc. in the early days. Perhaps now we are ready for the next phase of collective living.

What can other communities learn from the Courage experience?

Swadha: Start with a young community.

Ayesha: And children. Offer a safe space for children within the community, because then the parents can relax.

Suresh: The cultural exchange we have here is very healthy. We celebrate, or used to celebrate, all the festivals, Deepavali, Christmas etc. and our children were always in and out of each other's houses. In this sense, culturally this is a very enriching community.

Ayesha: The children break the ice. Otherwise, we would all be adults hiding away from each other.

Mita: I think that Courage has a good balance between individual and community spaces and needs. Every apartment is designed by the person living in it, so you have your individual space and this helps you to be comfortable with the more social aspects of the community.

From an interview by Alan

The Courage waste water recycling system

The Courage waste water recycling project, which recycles the entire waste water of the community so it can be used for irrigation, has been running successfully for a year now. It is estimated that this system results in fresh water consumption being cut by 40%.

The treatment process for the water is based on the low rate trickling filter technology. This has been known about for a century, but this is the first time it has been used in Auroville. It is simple and efficient and with basic maintenance and care this system should run well for many years.

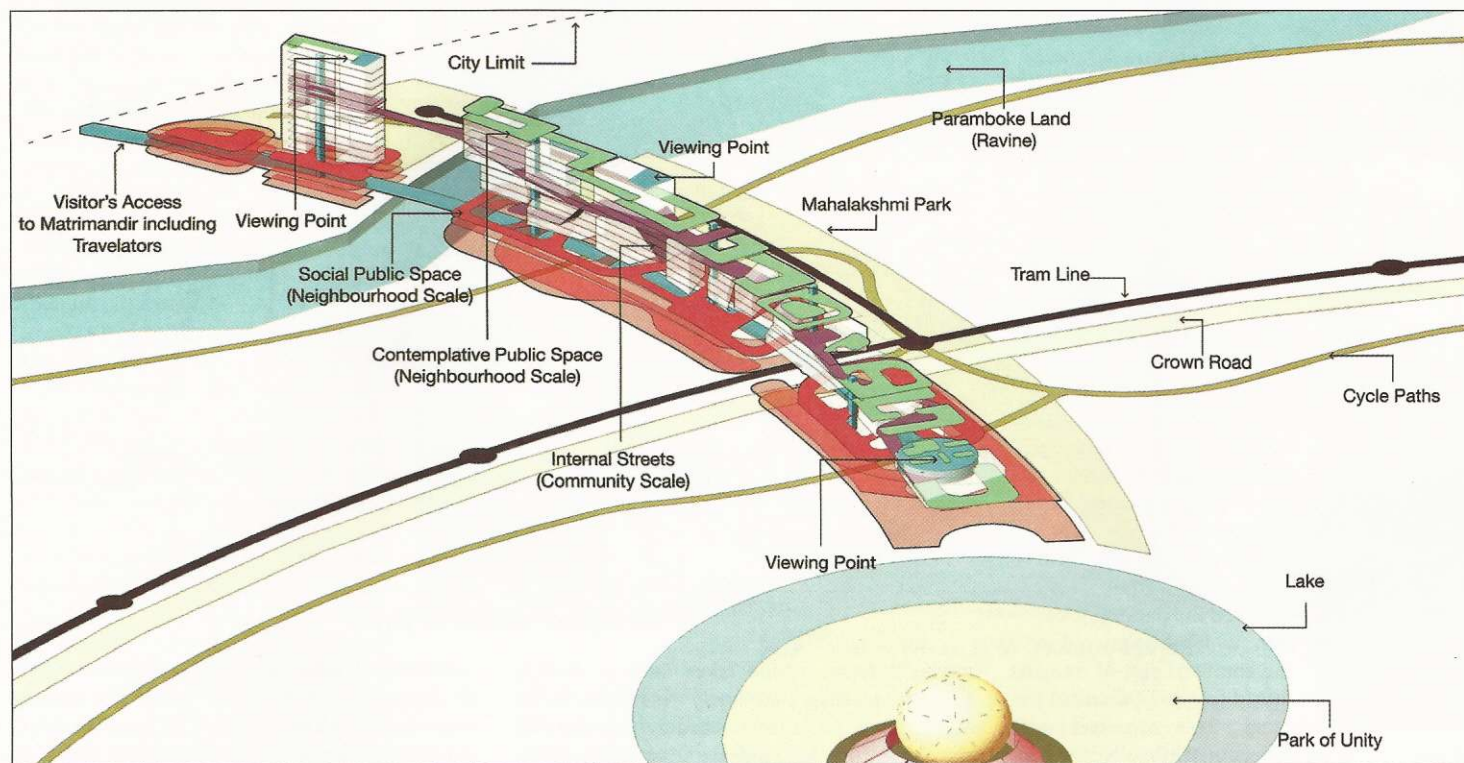
In brief, a small pump pumps pre-treated waste water up to a sprinkler. The water is sprinkled evenly over the filter media and slowly trickles down through layers of granite rocks. The filter media is covered with algae, bacteria and other micro-

organisms. These develop naturally if they are sprayed with water at regular intervals and kept moist. The microorganisms feed on the pollutants and remove them from the water. In the process of trickling through the filter, the water is aerated. This removes the odours that it carries.

The water runs out at the base of the trickling filter and is channeled into a secondary clarifier. Here suspended particles are removed. Then the recycled water flows into a storage pond with water lilies and fish. From here it can be used for gardening. Specially marked taps from which the water can be drawn are located throughout the community. The recycled water has been tested and the results are very good. Jan Imhoff, who designed this system, is grateful for the support he received from Eugen.

The proposed Line of Goodwill

Auroville's Galaxy Plan is marked by so-called 'Lines of Force', long curving structures. The Line of Goodwill is a project to build the longest Line of Force, from the outer ring road near the Visitors Centre parking to the edge of the planned lake around the Matrimandir. The profile of the Line of Goodwill is low and wide at the Matrimandir end and tall and narrow at the outer end. It looks a little bit like a hill rising across the landscape. Over the last two years, the project has gained momentum and attracted several team members. *Auroville Today* met some of them to understand the idea behind the Line of Goodwill in some more detail.



Auroville Today: Let's start with a question that keeps coming up. This is a very large project - are we ready for such a project in Auroville at this time?

Judith: I think there's a kind of question with the 50th anniversary coming up about what are we celebrating? Personally, I believe that gradual development over the last 50 years has not built the city The Mother envisaged. We must stay true to the Charter and get serious about manifesting what Auroville has been telling the world. We've had 50 years of the preparatory stage, and it is imperative that we act now. We came here as workers for a dream that was advertised in 1968 and the dream hasn't changed. We are responsible for getting on with the job. Succeed or fail, we must do it.

Torkil: That's why the challenges and all those things are minor to us. The main thing is to get out of the situation we are in now. Some people want to keep Auroville as it is. They say, "Why should we take bigger steps, because that can be risky." A collective is always risk-averse. But I think the riskiest thing we can do in Auroville is to keep the status quo. There are many eco-villages that were set up in the world and which have collapsed. Auroville continues because it has a higher ideal.

Judith: It's risky at many levels, not just in a practical way. If you come to Auroville and do not follow The Mother's dream, not do your *dharma*, that's also a kind of a risk.

How did the project start and how has it reached its current form?

Torkil: There are three parts of the origin story. Matrimandir access, economy and habitat.

Judith: At the Matrimandir end, it started with the Matrimandir Access Planning Group some years ago. The lake around the Matrimandir was planned to appear soon and within five years all the offices would have to go. So, we had to come up with a plan for a Reception Pavilion near the West entrance. At the same time, the main place to receive visitors would continue to be the Visitors Centre. That's where we receive people, do bookings, and sort people between those who go to the viewing point and those who go for concentration. But then we have the problem of people moving between the Visitors Centre and Matrimandir. Somebody said we can build some sort of tramway. We sat with a map to figure out what route the tramway should take and we were told, "You can't go there because that's the Line of Force." Then we realised that Roger Anger, who had conceived of the Galaxy, had drawn a radial down the middle of the Line of Force. That's where the tramway or monorail or moving sidewalk must come. So, we came to the conclusion that we have to build the Line of Force. We soon lost momentum, but I could not forget about it. I wrote it all down and somehow that paper started to circulate.

Uma: During the Retreat in 2015, there were five or six of us in the economy group who started thinking about what could be done to create a

radical shift in our economy. Not a 10% change, but a 110% change. The way in which we are going is not going to work. Today we are primarily a cottage economy. We make clothes, incense, pottery and take it to the Visitors Centre to sell it. We need a platform to showcase and exchange ideas in everything we do - sustainability, farming, research, education, healing, hospitality. There must be infrastructure created for this new economy to be born. While we were brewing this idea, there was an email from Anu which talked about "the city that we forgot." The whole idea came together and the project became much bigger. So much has happened in the last three months.

Torkil: It is a paradox in Auroville that we have so much land, but if you want to build anything it's very hard to get permission. On the other hand, if you walk this Line of Force, you will see that all the land is reserved for building. There's no existing building within 800 metres. Somehow, town planning has worked. So, when we were thinking of building for the new economy it had to be in one of the Lines of Force, because you can't build these things outside, they were never meant to be outside.

Anu: One thing that has fascinated me is that Auroville's Charter was written after the city plan was finalised. The city plan is a map for human unity. And one of the key elements of that plan are the Lines of Force. As the population increases, the "face of the city" has to emerge. And the face, or form, is defined by the Lines of Force. We've had this tendency to look at Lines of Force negatively, whereas much of this experimentation, whether environmental and otherwise, is embedded in that plan. It's time to look at it differently. So, if you look at this big Line of Force, you will see all of the different elements - economy, ecology, habitat, Matrimandir - flowing with a sense of collaboration. This space for collaboration is the brief we gave to Anupama Kundoo. When she started meeting people, there were many who became interested and wanted to be a part of the project. Bit by bit, all the elements came together.

In your presentation to the community you talked about housing for 8,000 people. Is it feasible to grow so quickly?

Anu: If we don't grow now in terms of human resources, we are going to stagnate. We have come 50 years and reached 2,500 people - fewer if you count only adults. We need to make a leap to at least ten thousand residents. Once you have a critical mass, it opens up many possibilities. I remember an interview with Henk Thomas, where he told us that we want everything but we are not willing to take the next step. If we want a money-less economy, we need 30,000 to 40,000 people to enable the self-generative cycle.

Judith: For me, the Galaxy has always been there. And with this big Line of Force, it is going to be an adventure trying to build it. Let us throw ourselves into the impossible, because that's what we are here to do. Also, we need to build this to

address the need for high-density housing, but in a new and innovative way.

Torkil: The main thing that blocks Auroville's progress is not money. It's not land. It's human resources. We simply do not have enough people to make Auroville self-sustaining. Also, a lot of people would like to join Auroville, but they don't have the financial means to do that. We must find a way.

Some people are apprehensive about such a large residential block with people living in close proximity. How do you respond to them? There have also been some questions about sustainability and noise pollution.

Anu: It's not just about parking people in apartments. This is not a high-rise apartment block, but a porous structure with many open pathways. There's a very large amount of green space. This is about creating a certain context for an experiment, for a circulation of energies. We must take a leap by doing this and give a fillip to the manifestation of culture. After all, this is a human experiment. Also, we must not forget that if we don't build the city, we don't fulfil the experiment. We have done the first part - protected the land and created the forests. Now we must take the next step.

Judith: I feel there's an urgency to create this "hillscape" environment for social living. People will be living in intentional families using collective spaces; spaces for living, working, learning, shopping, hospitality, research and education; a place for commercial units to exchange knowledge, contacts and connections. This will be Auroville's gift to the world - how we can live in dense urban environments that are beautiful, green and socially vibrant. An urban design that enhances and protects the environment.

Anu: We must also remember that we are in the initial phase of the project, in which Anupama is doing an Urban Design Study. We are nowhere near an architectural design, so a lot of the questions about building material and noise are premature.

What about visitors? How will they interact with the Line of Goodwill?

Judith: A new conception of a gateway is needed, a gateway to Auroville. We need to make sure that visitors don't show up just to see 'the golden globe'. We want people to know they have arrived in Auroville. We want to change the flavour of tourism. We don't want people doing the conventional things - a bit of shopping, a bit of eating, an exhibition that they don't pay much attention to, and take some photos. Right now, we don't know who any of these visitors are, how they feel about Auroville, what they could plug into and be interested in. Auroville should be connecting with these 700,000 people who visit annually. We must rethink the whole thing and create a designed experience.

Uma: Even if visitors come for a few hours, they should be able to experience Auroville - what

it is, what it dreamed to be. We have a lot to offer, but our visitors get no experience of it.

Torkil: We will soon have one million tourists. If we use these resources in a much more conscious way, it will benefit both Auroville and the visitors. A few people might be coming just to see the golden globe, but a lot of people are coming who want to be touched, who are ready to be touched. Why are we not able to engage with them? We need a gateway to Auroville, where you come to participate and engage in a two-way communication.

In what ways do you think this project will make an impact on Auroville?

Uma: Inside Auroville it will create a lot of possibilities at three different levels. Firstly, it will be possible to live and work without any exchange of money because all the different aspects of life are integrated within the Line of Goodwill. Secondly, there will be a shift in collective prosperity. Currently, our individual economy is rich, but our collective economy is poor. This will change because we will be able to move to a thriving knowledge economy. And finally, our youth will have the possibility to stay here rather than go out. In the current cottage economy, they can only become a supervisor. Who is interested in that? There must be more meaning and challenge in work. In addition, Auroville will create a meaningful experience for visitors, instead of them driving round everywhere trying to make sense of the place.

Jaya: The first thing is that doing more of the same thing will not make a difference. But I want to talk about two other groups of people who will be impacted - volunteers and youth from the bio-region. A lot of volunteers come to Auroville. It is amazing how people give up well-paying jobs to work with us, but we can't even give them a free lunch. Volunteers can be engaged in a meaningful way to build this project. In the bio-region, more and more youth are well educated with professional skills. India has shifted and Auroville must respond to this shift to provide jobs.

Judith: I think we will become more connected with people of goodwill. Auroville will have a bigger resource pool in terms of all aspects of research. If we are going to be doing something extraordinary, there will be people who will be delighted to participate. If we do something mediocre, we will not catch their interest. We need to open that door. There's going to be a big shift.

What about financing? How are you thinking of raising money?

Anu: On 17th May, 1968, The Mother answered two questions about money. The first question was, "Firstly, is there something specific being done which is impeding the flow of money to Auroville?" to which she replied, "It is the lack of push towards the future that impedes the flow of money." The second question was, "Secondly, is there something specific which should be done to increase the flow of money to Auroville?" to which she replied, "A confident certitude in the inevitable future can break this resistance."

Torkil: The Line of Goodwill has to be something remarkable - it has to show the best that is possible. And when you do something extraordinary, people are willing to be a part of it and finance it. I don't think finance is the one of the biggest challenges in this project.

What are your next steps? Any other challenges that you anticipate?

Uma: We have commissioned the Urban Design Study to come up with definitions and materials needed for a Site Permission by Auroville's 50th birthday. During those celebrations, we would also like to lay the foundation stone of the Line of Goodwill. In the next five years, we would like to complete the Gateway, which will be the entry to Auroville, complete the mobility link from the Gateway to the Matrimandir, and complete the housing part for about 2 500 people. This is not just another building project, so to talk of challenges will be to make things petty. We would rather send out an invitation to collaborate.

From an interview by Manas

Le Chant des Partisans

Interestingly, when the French soldiers of the "Garde Républicaine" carried away the coffin bearing the mortal remains of Mrs. Simone Veil, the Holocaust survivor, they chanted a German song: *Das Lied der Moorsoldaten*. (Peat Bog Soldiers). This hymn was composed in 1933 by Johann Esser and Wolfgang Langhoff, two German deportees in the concentration camp of Börgermoor, in Lower Saxony.

Das Lied der Moorsoldaten is so powerfully evocative and poignant that it soon was adopted by all deportees condemned to suffer hardship and death in the Nazi's concentration camps. French, Dutch, Polish, Russian, Czech, Danish, Latvian versions were made, whispered, hummed, whistled, sometimes – but rarely – sung by deportees.

It was the French version, *Le Chant des Marais*, that was chosen to honor the Great Lady.

The last refrain expresses hope and aspiration for a new land of freedom, light and beauty:

"Ô terre enfin libre
Où nous pourrions revivre
Et aimer, aimer, aimer..."

(Oh land finally free, where we can live again, and love, love, love)

Had Mrs. Simone Veil served in the French Resistance, another song would have been chosen instead, *Le Chant des Partisans* (in English *The Guerilla Song*)

"ami, entends-tu le vol noir des corbeaux sur nos plaines..."

(Mate, do you hear the dark flight of the crows over our plains?)

This popular hymn is somewhat connected to Sri Aurobindo, Pondicherry and Auroville.

Spring 1943, London. Two young French artists, soldiering in the Free French Forces of General de Gaulle, were looking for an inspiring song for the underground fighters [*les combattants de l'ombre*] of the French resistance. The older one, Joseph Kessel, was already an author of repute. His nephew, Maurice Druon, was destined to become a famous novelist and "Immortel" (member of the "Académie française"). With them was a young and pretty singer, Anna Marly, the "troubadour de la Résistance" as General de Gaulle called her.

Anna was born in Russia. Feeling deeply concerned by the fate of her compatriots, the Russian "Partisans" (who were hiding in the forest and bravely challenging the German army), Anna was playing the guitar while whistling a tune of her invention. Hearing this, Kessel cried out "That's it Anna, you found it! It's what the French need. Let's get the wording now." He and Druon started to work on the text. After a few trials, the "Chant des

Partisans" was born. A few days later, Anna sang it into the mike of the BBC. It was heard all over France and was adopted by the French underground forces to become "Le Chant de la Libération".

But where is the connection with Sri Aurobindo, Pondicherry and Auroville?

There is a "third musketeer" in the story. In London, Kessel and Druon were training with a close friend of theirs, François Baron [full name: Charles François Marie Baron], who was destined to reside in Pondicherry from March 1946 to May 1949 in his official capacity as the last Governor cum Commissioner of French India.

In Pondicherry, François Baron met Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, to become a faithful supporter and disciple. In those days, "Free French" (and all the others from various countries who had fought "the Mother's War" in the Allied Forces, amongst them the American sergeant John Kelly) were welcome in the Ashram. Two other friends and brothers in arms of François were also there: Colonel Paul Repiton-Préneuf, who was second to the General Leclerc (the famous 2^e DB – French 2nd Armored Division – liberated Paris in August 1944) and Doctor of Science Gabriel Monod-Herzen who, in 1942, was in French Indochina assisting Baron, who acted as De Gaulle's representative. Later, Gabriel Monod-Herzen would become Sri Aurobindo's first biographer in the French language. Published by the Ashram in 1957, his "Sri Aurobindo" has been in most part read and corrected by the Master Himself [whose French was flawless].

The nature of François Baron's *sadhana* was a bit special. As he liked to put it in his stentorian voice: "In the Ashram, the devotees' evolution goes up vertically. Mine is a spiraling evolution, going upward, but taking its own sweet time"...

In 1950, François Baron met a lively and attractive widow, Carmen Colle. She was born in 1911 in Mexico as Carmen Loizaga Corcuera y de Mier. Her parents were Mexican aristocrats, owners of a hacienda. Carmen had lost her first husband, an art gallery manager, Pierre Colle, two years before her encounter with François. She succumbed to the charm of this "solide Breton" and they got married. François introduced Carmen to his close friends and brothers in arms from the Résistance, Kessel and Druon.

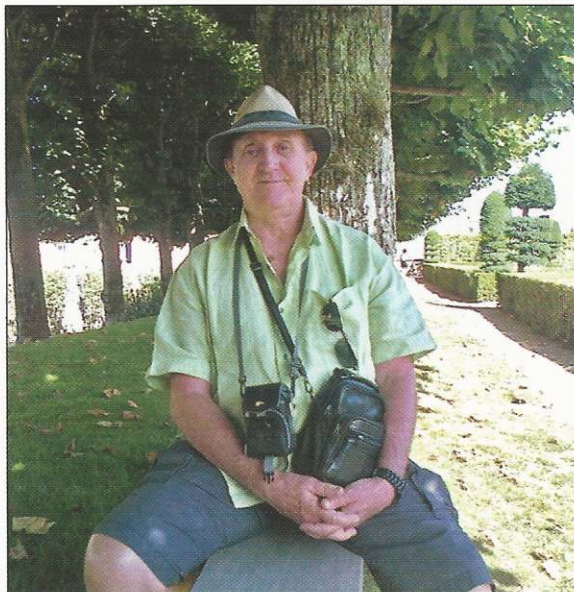
Later, François introduced Carmen to India, Pondicherry, the Mother/Sri Aurobindo, and Satprem, whom she first met in Almora in 1952.

But what about Auroville?

From the 1970s to the 80s, first with François, then with her son Jean-Marie, Carmen made regular visits to India, Pondicherry and Auroville. In Aspiration,

Carmen used to stay in a small hut, happily eating the insipid menu of the "Kitchen". Carmen felt at home in Aspiration. Old timers remember her lively presence and joyful laughter.

None of us was aware that this "chic" white haired lady belonged to the "Tout Paris": the likes of André Breton, Max Jacob, Paul Eluard, Louis Jouvet, Marie-Laure de



Shankar G., who lived in Auroville from 1975 to 1989

Noailles, Christian Bérard, Derain, Christian Dior, Jean Cocteau, Max Ernst, Raymond Mason, George Auric, and many others, in addition to the Kessels and the Druons, were regularly calling upon her and were being invited to her various residences, in Biarritz, Garches, Maurely, Paris.

Carmen's three daughters, Béatrice, Marie-Pierre and Sylvia, served as models for one of Balthus' most famous paintings, "Les Trois Sœurs – The Three Sisters".

It was in Carmen's apartment, rue de Varenne, that Maurice Druon started writing his sequence of six historical novels entitled "The Accursed Kings – Les Rois maudits". The American novelist, R.R. Martin, recognizes "Les Rois maudits" as the original "Game of Thrones" on the basis of which he wrote in turn his own famous series "A Song of Ice and Fire".

Somewhere, The Mother wrote or said something to the effect that "the highest spirituality goes along with the greatest simplicity". Carmen's utter simplicity must have been a reflection of her most beautiful soul....

Carmen was in India when (26th March 1980) François passed away in Paris.

On October 9th, 1983, in Paris, it was Carmen's turn to cross over.

Soon after, Satprem wrote:

"S'il y avait une poste céleste, j'écrirais bien un mot à Carmen ! Mais après tout, le 'ciel' n'est peut-être pas si loin. "Et Auroville, raconte !" Bon..."

("If there was a post office in heaven, I would willingly write a few words to Carmen. But 'heaven' may not be that far after all. "And Auroville, tell me!" Well...")

Shankar G.

In brief

Water Ceremony for Auroville's 50th Anniversary



On the morning of 28 February 2018, on the occasion of Auroville's 50th anniversary, a water ceremony will take place in the Matrimandir Amphitheatre. Everybody is invited to bring to Auroville in their checked-in luggage a bottle of water from a lake, river, spring or other water source from their part of the world. The volume can be 500-1000 ml from each water source, or a smaller quantity. Each bottle must be labelled with the name of the country, the name and place of the water source, and if possible the GPS location of the area from where the water was collected. Participants are also asked to take a few photographs of the water source so that they can be posted. The water donations can be made up to 18 February 2018. For more information contact worldwater@auroville.org.in

Large Matrimandir test pond to be started

The Matrimandir Lake team has decided to start work on a large test pond of 100 x 100 metres wide and 10 metres at its deepest point. The new test pond will be located at the site of the present test ponds, and be lined with HDPE foil. The total volume of earth to be excavated is about 79,000 cubic metres, which, if stored in an area of 100 metres diameter, will result in a hill 16 metres high with a diameter of 40 metres at the top.

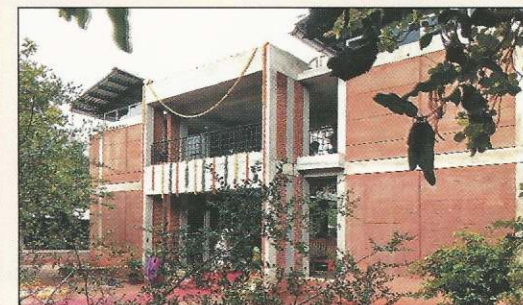
Seed festival

On July 26th, the Sustainable Livelihood Institute, a joint venture of the Tamil Nadu Government and the Auroville Foundation, celebrated the Tamil month of Aadi by a Seed Festival in Auroville. It brought together traditional seed savers from across the state to celebrate seed diversity and to create awareness about local indigenous seed varieties and establish a network for the exchange of traditional seeds. Seed savers from Cuddalore, Villupuram, Trichy and Auroville displayed and sold over 300 varieties of traditional seeds. The seed varieties included paddy, vegetables, millets and indigenous trees. The event included knowledge-exchange sessions, talks and an exhibition of seeds.

Ecofemme certified

Ecofemme continues to lead in sustainable menstrual hygiene by being the first certified organic sanitary napkin company in India. Ecofemme meets the Global Organic Textile Standard (GOTS), a worldwide leading textile processing standard for organic fibres which includes ecological and social criteria and involves independent certification of the entire textile supply chain. All of Ecofemme's pads are now made of organic certified cotton. Check out #BleedOrganic on Twitter.

Inaugurations



On August 14th, the new building of the Auroville Electrical Service and the Auroville Solar Service in the Service Area was inaugurated by Dr. Karan Singh. On Tuesday, 15th August, the foundation laying ceremony of the future building of the Temporary European House was held in the International Zone.

Monkey menace

More monkeys are visiting Auroville than before. While this is a welcome sign for the environment, people are warned of the consequences of an increasing monkey population in the area. These include damage to temporary roofing and solar panels. Houses without grills and wire mesh will also have to be protected from their curiosity and food foraging activities.

SAVITRI INTERNATIONAL

Savitri Around the World

Some time ago, Auroville International announced a project to undertake a live reading of *Savitri* to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Auroville. The idea was to create a chain of readers around the world, starting in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and culminating in Auroville. The reading would take place between the 25th – 27th February, 2018.

Recently, however, the technical team working at Savitri Bhavan on ways to implement the project has concluded that the original concept of "a live reading through internet around the world" is beyond their organisational and technical capacities. The new idea is to use recordings prepared in advance and supplied by the participants. The technical team will edit all these individual recordings into a film of about 48 hours duration.

It is intended that the film will be broadcast on YouTube for viewing worldwide

on February 25-26th 2018, as well as being displayed on the big screen at Savitri Bhavan.

The full text of *Savitri* has been divided up into 325 passages of around two pages each, so, ideally, 325 readers are needed. In order to assign the passages, the organizing team needs to know how many people are willing to participate, and which countries they will be representing.

Once the passages are assigned, each participant will be asked to send a video-recording of themselves reading their passage, or an audio recording along with a photo. Those who feel reluctant to appear on YouTube can send an image of their choice instead.

So far readers in 42 countries as well as in Auroville have agreed to participate. The aim is to have 5 readers from each country. If you know of *Savitri*-lovers, please inform them about this project and invite them to join it.

For further information, contact: savitri-worldreading@auroville.org.in

PASSING

Karpagavalli Selvanambi

On August 22nd, Aurovilian Karpagavalli Selvanambi left her body in a Madurai nursing home to which she had been taken after a stroke in 2013. She was 72 years old.

Karpagavalli was a lively and capable teacher in the Tamil language who had joined Auroville in 1992. She worked in Isaiambalam school, Ilaignarkal Education Centre, Transformation school and Arulvazhi Education Centre, and will be remembered by many of her pupils and colleagues. Her remains were cremated in her home town, Madurai.



Sights and sounds of Bengal

From August 12 to 22, 2017, Bharat Nivas hosted Alpona, a festival of Bengal. The festival included an exhibition of paintings by ten women artists from Kolkata, an exhibition of textiles from Bengal, two musical evenings and screenings of Bengali films, including four by the internationally renowned director Buddhadeb Dasgupta who visited during the festival.

The best things that grace one's life often drop in unexpectedly, without a hue and cry. One day, I got a personal email invite from Penelope Fowler-Smith, an Australian filmmaker and Aurovillian that stated "If you love cinema, theatre, poetry, music, photography, lyricism, beauty... please do not miss these films of Buddhadeb Dasgupta, Bengali poet and filmmaker." It included a clincher last line informing me that an informal discussion with this auteur was also scheduled for the very next day. I immediately freed up my schedule to accept the invitation, delighted by this rare privilege of meeting one of India's most acclaimed film directors of all times.

It was a small gathering – a spattering of film aficionados, peddlers of Indian culture, an odd tourist or two, and lay people like myself. Buddhadeb smilingly commented that it was the smallest gathering that he had ever addressed at a venue where his films were screened to which I embarrassedly responded that as a self-professed spiritual community, we were culturally ignorant. As the discussion progressed, this ignorance was revealed by people comparing his work repeatedly to Satyajit Ray, till Sohini, Buddhadeb's wife and a filmmaker herself, bluntly pointed out that Buddhadeb with his minimalistic plots and surreal imagery was the polar opposite of Ray who favoured realism and leaned on strong narratives.

Better described as a "Merchant of Dreams", Buddhadeb inimitably fuses flawlessly composed visual shots with carefully chosen music and sound to create an experience that like life itself embraces reality, fantasy, and even a surreal madness. Elsewhere, Buddhadeb describes his work as "extended realism." A term, which to me implies, that Buddhadeb's work exposes the limitations of the rational reality of our own lives: At one level, reality is inherently boring – "same home, same wife, same village" as Goja, a character in the film *Tope (The Bait)*, points out; at another level, the personal reality of our lives blinds us to the madness of prevailing social reality – in the film *Uttara*, I was reminded how like the wrestlers, I too get obsessed and stuck in the mundane routine of my own life, turning my back on pressing social issues; and finally at a metaphysical level, in the movie *Tope* when the audience reels with shock at the action of the degenerate king, a deeper reflection leads to the realization that all the characters were being baited or using others as bait to get their needs met. Extended realism can also denote the fact that socially accepted reality is different from the individual lived reality of his characters, as exemplified by Goja in *Tope* and by Sumanto in *Kaalpurush*.

Buddhadeb forces viewers to pause, reflect, and draw their own meaning from his films. As he said at our gathering, he is "not interested in spoon-feeding the audience." And given our consumerist culture where we are used to being passively entertained with strong story lines and fast-paced narratives, this aspect of Buddhadeb's work puts him in a class of his own. Buddhadeb has a unique talent of "suggesting" rather than "telling" through multiple story-lines that are woven together around one or two themes by intersecting lives of the characters and through evocative images. When Buddhadeb is at his best, the images depicting reality or illusions are skillfully blended with a surreal logic. However, surrealism is a challenging narrative mode, for when the "surreal logic" does not hold, then the montage of images jars the audience as occasionally happened to me, and one is unforgiving of the smallest incident that does not fit into the logical sequence.

Of all the skills of this audio-visual medium that Buddhadeb has in his repertoire, I was most taken by the images – long landscape shots, haunting silhouettes and lyrical compositions of colour and light. I was



Buddhadeb Dasgupta (left) in conversation with Penelope Fowler-Smith, Nanda Das, Madhabi Sarkar, Priya Sundaravalli and Aster Patel

A distinguished director

Buddhadeb is the only Indian director who has had seven films screened in the Masters Section of the Toronto International Film Festival, which, each year, features the latest films of the top ten filmmakers of the world. He won the special director award for *Uttara* at the Venice Film Festival, is the first Indian filmmaker to get the Golden Athena Award at the Athena International Film Festival in 2007, and was honoured with a lifetime achievement award at the Spain International Film Festival in 2008. Most of his films such as *LalDarja*, *Mondo Meyer Upakhyam*, *Swapner Din* and *Kaalpurush* have won the National Film Awards in India.

not too surprised, therefore, when Buddhadeb revealed, in the course of our conversation, that making films was a natural offshoot of his love for poetry, painting and his childhood fascination with still photography. He is a modern "Renaissance man," for he is also an accomplished, published poet in Bengali, a prose-writer, a former economics professor and well-versed in the arts of music and painting.

A part of our discussion naturally focussed on seeking to understand Buddhadeb's creative process and the source of his inspirations. But more importantly, we did not just get insights into Buddhadeb the filmmaker but also Buddhadeb the man. He was disarmingly honest in expressing his reluctance to use the word "spiritual" or have his work be described as "a quest for perfection." Instead he spoke to us about the need of exposing our children to experiences that cultivate their humanity as his parents had done for him. Saying that while he has

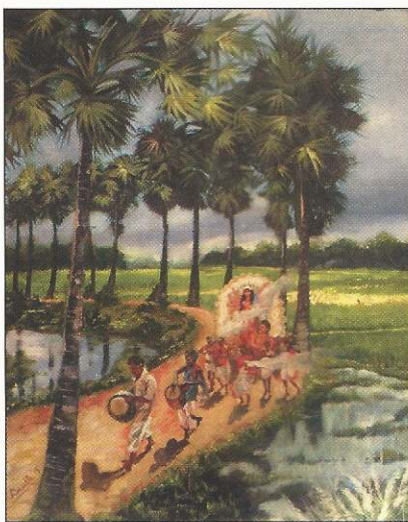
been inspired by some filmmakers, he has not been influenced by any of them, Buddhadeb attributed the rich cultural diversity of India (something that he had experienced as a child travelling with his family), his small-town upbringing, and the magical bed-time stories that were narrated to him as a child as persevering influences. Like all great artists, Buddhadeb transcends socio-cultural categories to recreate universal human experiences, values, and desires in his work. His films are all based in India and can be interpreted as commentaries on social issues in India. Yet, because he accesses the universal through the personal and the social, his films are widely appreciated all over the world, as is evident from the numerous awards he has won in the international arena. In that context, in our small gathering also The Mother's abiding interest in films as a singularly creative medium that could help in fostering personal development was pointed out. Aster related how The Mother would not only have chosen films screened for the Ashramites and school children, but also engaged them in discussions about the movie.

Buddhadeb's films do not always have a happy ending: The audience of *Tope* and *Uttara* decried that the horrific fate of key characters did not leave us with any hope for humanity. But I actually found his films to be realistic in that sense – I saw them as depicting life, where perforce one is confronted with both good and evil. As Sohini related to us, in a recent article in Bengali, Buddhadeb had commented that people lament when they lose hope in other human beings, but the pain is even greater when people lose hope in life itself. To me, the movies of Buddhadeb all have a sliver of hope running through them, for despite the evil that often befalls the principal characters, the actions of other minor characters give us hope that some goodness will prevail.

Bindu



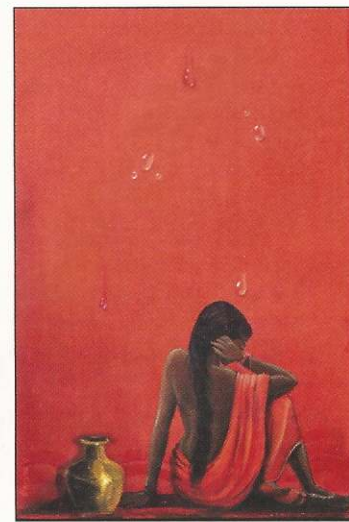
Mother and child by Indrani Chowdhury



Aagamoni by Anukta Ghosh



Hum dono by Anukta Ghosh



Abhisarika by Barsha Bagchi

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