

President of India visits Auroville

On 8th August, the Hon'ble President of India, Smt. Droupadi Murmu, visited Auroville in commemoration of Sri Aurobindo's 150th birth anniversary. This was the fifth visit to the community by an Indian Head of State. The President visited the Matrimandir and the Auroville city exhibition, and later gave a speech at Bharat Nivas inaugurating the conclave *Aspiring for supermind in the city of evolving consciousness*. The occasion was attended by Hon'ble Governor of Tamil Nadu and Chairman of the Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation Shri R.N. Ravi, Hon'ble Lt. Governor of Pondicherry and Member of the Governing Board of the Auroville Foudation Smt. Tamilisai Soundararajan, Shri K. Ponmudi, Minister of Higher Education, Tamil Nadu, Shri K. S. Masthan, Ministry of Minorities Welfare, Non Resident Tamil Welfare, Refugees and Evacuees and WAKF, Tamil Nadu, and Dr. Jayanti S. Ravi, Secretary of the Auroville Foundation. Here is the text of the President's speech.



The Hon'ble President of India, Smt. Droupadi Murmu, in front of the Matrimandir

It is a matter of deep spiritual importance for me to be here in Auroville to inaugurate the conference on aspiring for Supermind in the city of evolving consciousness. Auroville was a vision of Sri Aurobindo which was translated into reality by The Mother. Their teachings and philosophy continue to inspire and guide millions of seekers worldwide. I consider myself to be part of a large community of those who have benefitted from the vision of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother.

I had the privilege of serving as an honorary teacher at the Sri Aurobindo Integral Education Centre at Rairangpur for about three years in the 1990s. I must acknowledge that I learned more than I taught. I remain indebted for that spirituality and teaching experience at the education centre.

Ladies and gentlemen, next week on 15th August we will all be celebrating our Independence Day. And it is a coincidence of great significance that MahaSri Aurobindo's birth anniversary also happens to be on 15th August and is celebrated widely.

In the year 1925, on his birthday Sri Aurobindo said, "the mind works on the basis of division. It always takes the truth piecemeal. We find that it is not able to solve the problems. It is possible to go beyond the mind and there is the Supermind which is the organisation of that infinite consciousness."

On India's independence Sri Aurobindo gave an important speech outlining his dreams for the country and humanity. He dreamed of passing on the spiritual gift of India to the world. He wrote that the world was turning towards India with hope. In today's world, India occupies the high table among nations. The message of India goes beyond economic and technological spheres. India's message of one earth, one family, one future, *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*, reflects the ideals propagated by Sri Aurobindo.

Today I visited the Matrimandir. That rare and unique mandir generated an experience of being connected with it. The special architecture of the Matrimandir reflects the ideals and teachings of The Mother and Sri Aurobindo. The city exhibit based on the Mother's vision of the city plan presents an innovative model for integral and sustainable urban development.

Today's world needs to deeply understand the concept of unity peace and harmony. This concept involves not only human beings but all living beings, nature and the entire universe.

I am very happy to have visited Sri Aurobindo Ashram which was established nearly 100 years ago in 1926. Under the guidance of The Mother, the Ashram grew into a large multifaceted spiritual community. In 1952, The Mother had set up the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education. Later, in 1968, this international township of Auroville was set up. As I had heard about it, I find that Auroville is indeed a unique experiment in promoting human unity and spiritual evolution. Two great souls had conceptualised and set up this

universal township where souls meet, minds attain freedom, and the supreme consciousness can be experienced.

Ladies and gentlemen, Sri Aurobindo believed that Supermind can enable human beings to transform into divine beings. He gave the philosophy that supramental consciousness is the power to make this material world divine. Divinity has a different meaning and definition for each one of us, but one thing is common: the one that is defined has to be above the material and beyond the tangible. Divine mind is a pure mind; it is above the self, it thinks about progress, unity and the development of all.

MahaSri Aurobindo gave a unique concept of freedom. During his transformative journey from being a revolutionary nationalist to becoming the spiritual master, his concept of freedom also underwent a sea change. (Just as) Sri Aurobindo himself practiced and experienced awakening, the spiritual awakening of the mind can transform a common being into a conscious being. It is this awakening that can transform the individuals, organizations, countries and the world. One who is awakened is also sensitive to the needs of those around, especially the underprivileged. When awakened minds come together and work towards common goals, unimaginable results can be achieved.

Ladies and gentlemen, Auroville is a place where human minds explore, evolve and work together to achieve the larger goal of attaining supreme consciousness. They are striving to transform not just their own minds but the minds of millions of seekers. In fact, the spiritual objectives being pursued at Auroville are for the benefit of the

entire humanity. Auroville is not just a quest for eternal freedom. It promotes the development of all human beings. It enables the seekers to transcend onto the plane of higher consciousness.

I think that the idea of a cosmic being as propounded by MahaSri Aurobindo has a great relevance to the issues the world is facing. It is my understanding that by adopting the concept of cosmic consciousness many issues being faced by the world today can be resolved with harmony. The concept of super being, supreme power and the cosmic mind, lead to the realization of the ultimate purpose of life. These ideals can help in making the world a harmonious and peaceful place to live in.

I would like to convey an important message to the residents of Auroville and all men and women of goodwill from across India and the world gathered here. The good work that you are doing attains greater significance in the context of India's onward march into the *Amrit Kaal* [*'the Era of Elixir', the Prime Minister's vision of fulfilling all aspirations of the nation by 2047, eds*].

India is first to lead the world in providing lasting solutions to global challenges. The Auroville community can make a great contribution in this endeavour.

I would like to extend my best wishes for the bright future of all of you. May the global community work on the path of truth, compassion and harmony while seeking the spiritual goal of supreme consciousness.

Thank you.

Extracts from Tamil Nadu Governor Ravi's speech to the conclave

Sri Aurobindo at the time when India became independent said now is the time for India to take up the responsibility. Because this wisdom, this truth, this knowledge (is) that the entire creation is one – humans, animals, plants – are all part of a family. None is master. This wisdom was revealed to our people several thousand years ago. Now it has to be expressed to the rest of the world.

And with that he conceived of this idea of a community of gnostic beings, (for) which Mother with her tireless enterprise and imagination and commitment to the teachings of Shri Aurobindo created the infrastructure. And what we have is Auroville today.

Here people from all over the world, irrespective of which part of the world they are from, whichever religion they follow, whichever place they belong, rising above, transcending all the barriers, they come together, live as brothers and sisters, dropping their egos, living for others.

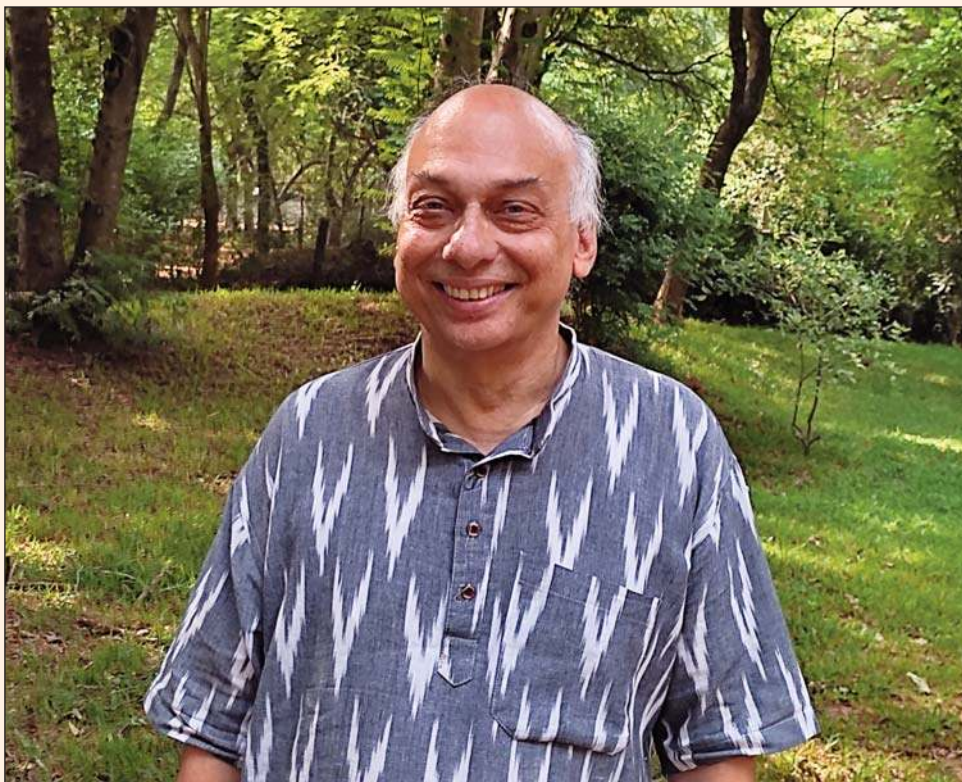
This is how many, many more such Aurovilles (should) be around the world. That would save the world, that would catalyse the evolution of humans to the fourth and final level of evolution where we see oneness in all. Now that is Auroville, the beginning of it.

In the next 24 years we have to fulfill unfinished tasks. One is making India a self-reliant country, a fully self-reliant country. But another unfinished task is the city of Auroville which was created to spread this light to the rest of the world, so that all the differing areas and ideologies drop, egos melt and we all live as one, common integral family, not only with humans alone but with the whole environment.



The Auroville situation: a view from outside

Dr. Debashish Banerji is the Haridas Chaudhuri Professor of Indian Philosophies and Cultures and the Doshi Professor of Asian Art at the California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS), San Francisco, where he also chairs the Department of East-West Psychology. The California Institute of Integral Studies was founded in the same year as Auroville by Haridas Chaudhuri, a scholar and devotee of Sri Aurobindo, to pursue, among other things, studies connecting the cultural traditions of the East and the West. A few Aurovilians have either studied or are studying there.



Debashish has been a frequent visitor to Auroville, where, as a reputed scholar on the subject, he has given talks on Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy and spiritual practice. Since 2016, he has also been bringing groups from the U.S. to Auroville for short study experiences. The most recent visit was in August this year.

This is the third group you have brought to Auroville.

Yes, and this group was the best prepared. I realised from previous experience that merely studying Auroville from an ethnographic or anthropological viewpoint is very inadequate. You have to have a deeper understanding of what is going on here.

So this time I made sure that I had prepared the students. They went through a number of courses beforehand on the Integral Yoga and philosophical background to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, as well as other aspects of Indian philosophy, and they also learned about the sociological aspect: that Auroville is a communitarian experiment.

Another very important aspect I learned from my last visit is that there are powerful undercurrents in Auroville relating to its past. I realised that the group needed to understand this before coming here, so I had them read not only the Mother’s statements about Auroville but also two books on its traumatic history: Akash Kapur’s *Better to Have Gone* and Amrit’s *Children of Change*. So they got a sense not only of the teachings but of the psychological and historical forces that inhabit this place. Furthermore, the students had been reading on their own about the present situation in Auroville.

All this prior background knowledge enabled the group to see and hear things that would otherwise have slipped their attention. In fact, I am very happy with the responsiveness of the students and the way that they interacted with Auroville.

What was their programme in Auroville?

They were here for three weeks. For the first ten to twelve days they visited different units and services and spoke to a cross-section of Aurovilians, as well as visiting the Ashram. Then they conducted deeper research into an aspect of Auroville which they were interested in.

When they go back they will be writing papers about the experience and some may present their studies in two conferences which are being planned later this year in the U.S.

This is a particularly tumultuous time to be in Auroville. What were their perceptions, insights?

Given their preparation, when they started talking to people there were things they were looking for, and I think they got a good view of the present situation that is informed by facts. From the beginning, they could see there was an elephant in the room in almost every conversation. That elephant was that most Aurovilians felt they had come here to realise an ideal, but that their work of many years was in jeopardy because of external forces impinging on their lives.

This deep unease was often unexpressed. When it was stated, the students could hear deep-seated fears, and a state of helplessness that veered towards despair, and sometimes towards intense aspiration, calling to something higher, because many seemed to feel that they are at a dead-end.

Did the fact that the students had read these two books about Auroville’s history cause them to see similarities between what happened in the 1970s and what is happening now?

Absolutely. Yes. They see all the forces that were part of the earlier conflict being very much alive now.

So the sense that these problems only began two years ago is not correct?

No, the group felt these issues have a much longer duration because they were not dealt with in the 1970s but pushed beneath the surface. In particular, they felt the core issue was not dealt with then.

What do they think is the core issue?

They feel that the core issue is ownership. Many of the people who came to Auroville in the 1960s were products of the counter-culture and were looking for a new kind of life. The Mother appealed to this sense. She said that the existing world is based on wrong foundations and those who come to Auroville should have an aspiration for a new kind of life. Connected with this is what the Mother calls ‘divine anarchy’ and Sri Aurobindo calls ‘spiritual anarchism’ in his social and political texts. It involves an aspiration for a grassroots sense of oneness that has no need of ownership or governance from the top.

That’s the aspiration with which the Mother created Auroville as a social experiment in human unity founded on her and Sri Aurobindo’s vision for a future civilization. Of course, others have had such a vision, for example Marx dreamed of a future of collective self-governance, but these thinkers lacked the psychological knowledge for its achievement. The Mother based this social objective on the development of a consciousness of unity and harmony through yogic praxis. That’s why the very first article in the Charter of Auroville says that Auroville belongs to nobody in particular, it belongs to humanity as a whole. In other words, it was not intended to be a place that is ‘owned’ by any institution, individual or group, but rather a place which would provide the freedom for a collective growth of consciousness that develops the conditions for divine anarchy.

However, the Mother was very conscious that the world was not ready for this, that there are legal realities which could not be ignored, so for practical purposes, such as buying land, she arranged for the Sri Aurobindo Society to legally own Auroville, although this ownership was meant to be only in name. But the will to own and control Auroville proved too strong, and the Government of India had to step in, so to say, to protect the Mother’s dream.

When the ownership of Auroville shifted to the Government of India, the feeling was that the government would be like a benevolent Big Brother which would keep Mother’s dream alive and allow the Aurovilians to develop in the way that they needed to achieve this, while, at the same time, ensuring that no others would claim ownership. For many years, this seemed to be the case.

But then the government changed, and we now see a government that has a strong sense of ownership of the cultural identity of India, and, seemingly, also wishes to shape Auroville according to this identity. Its legal ownership of Auroville gives it the justification to mould Auroville to its larger plans.

Politically, the Auroville Foundation Act of 1988, framed at the conclusion of the conflict of the 1970s, seemed to provide a governing structure that empowered the residents of Auroville, but according to its present interpretation, the Residents’ Assembly has been sidelined in favor of non-Aurovilians who are government appointed and/or persons loyal to the government.

This clash of approaches to ownership seems to be at the core of what’s happening now. It is a return to a struggle for ownership over a community which has been envisioned to have no ownership.

And ownership of Auroville has suddenly become very attractive. Not only from the viewpoint of consumption – some of my students found themselves like happy kids in a candy store, they went about tasting coffee, gelato or cuisine from across the world, or buying products and services of the New Age world market – but Auroville is also beginning to look like an experiment that is offering solutions to larger world problems, and

this is attracting some of the brighter minds of our time. From this point of view it is a bud ready to bloom, both materially and culturally, offering an attractive prospect for ownership leading to material and ideological exploitation.

There’s also the fact that the growing middle class of India wants a sense of identity, something that is being fostered by the present government, and from this viewpoint it sees Auroville as a cultural commodity, like a crown jewel for the national identity.

So there is pressure to appropriate Auroville culturally, politically, economically. I think part of the rhetoric around making Auroville a city for fifty thousand people, bringing in roads and infrastructure, serves this intention of cultural appropriation to create a site of national identity for spiritual tourism. In fact, some of my students had visited Shantiniketan before coming here, and they fear that, in terms of the government’s ambitions, Auroville could become something similar, an empty, memorial structure or spiritual theme park.

Ownership, of course, also has its inverse aspect. Some of the students feel that a few Aurovilians they have met exhibited their own tendency towards ownership of what they have been creating over the years, a form of closure from which they are resisting change. There may be some truth in this but I don’t think it is the predominant way in which this township has been developing.

Around this central issue of ownership, there are a number of other oppositions that have associated themselves to complicate the polarization. Forces have re-emerged from those former days in the conflict with the Sri Aurobindo Society. For example, postcolonial insecurities which get translated into the feeling that, “Here are those foreigners who colonised us in the past and are now creating an enclave inside our country.” You hear this rhetoric repeatedly, that these Westerners are culturally blind towards India, are arrogant and insulting towards its culture, they’re dirty hippies who take drugs, etc. This then becomes a part of the spin through which the polarization appeals to certain people. Whatever the truth of such statements, it should be clear that a bunch of irresponsible drug-takers could not have created the flowering of Auroville that we see at this time.

In some quarters, the opposition is framed around religiosity, a sense that Auroville is a sacred space of reverence to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, and needs to be run by the rules and rituals of ‘holiness’. This is pitted in some against the Mother’s statement there should be no religion and a minimum of rules in Auroville. This also demonstrates another aspect of the conflict – what may be called quotation wars. There are those who claim to know exactly what the Mother wanted for Auroville, quoting texts that they weaponize like commandments. Several of these arguments owe their genesis to the conflict of the 1970s that remained unresolved and have re-emerged to group themselves around the central problem of national ownership and identity politics.

So it’s simplistic to think that the present turmoil can be reduced just to one binary opposition, like the narrative that says that it’s all about those who want Mother’s town and those who resist it?

Exactly. But we saw many residents who view the conflict in these partial terms, formulating it through some specific opposition, while there are many factors clustering together at the same time.

Did the students interact with those Aurovilians who welcome and support the changes taking place in Auroville at present?

Some of the students did.

And what did they hear from these people?

They heard several of the narratives I’ve mentioned. For example, that the Aurovilians have ignored the Mother’s plans for Auroville and the government is helping to enforce these; or the allegation that some Aurovilians have a myopic sense of ownership because they have created their personal utopia and don’t want anything to change, and this is retarding the building of the city; or that it’s a new form of colonialism, that Westerners look down on Indians, they don’t understand spirituality and they need to be taught a lesson.

These are some of the voices that they have heard.

Your students seem to have a dystopian view of what is happening and may happen to Auroville. Do they envisage any alternative future?

It’s a dystopian view and it is disturbing. Regarding alternative futures, the students see Auroville as fulfilling its purpose by becoming a model town that can solve the problems of humanity through its power of consciousness, for this could be the seed of something that is replicable.

Some feel this possibility could only be protected by the kind of federated world union Sri Aurobindo envisaged. But that is a seemingly impractical dream today; the hope for a world union or even a world conscience has never seemed more distant.

Otherwise, they are looking for the answers emerging from Aurovilians themselves. One of these is dependence on the courts. In our times of rampant political falsehood, many hold the judiciary as the last incorruptible institution that may vindicate humanism. We see this here, too. Despite recent legal setbacks, a number of people in Auroville are hoping that the judiciary will prove to be its saviour.

Another view they heard repeatedly is the need for faith in the Mother. I think the level of helplessness is very great at present – that’s the most tragic aspect of the present situation –

continued on page 3

Sri Aurobindo and the modern academic world

How does one make an estimate of Sri Aurobindo's place in the modern academic world on his 150th birth anniversary? What are his singular contributions to intellectual history at the national and global level?

I shall argue that while the reception of Sri Aurobindo's thought in the mainstream academia of India and the West has undergone a change after his passing, newer vistas like Global Studies, International Relations, Consciousness Studies, Cosmopolitanism, Indic Studies, and Integral Education may witness the growing influence of Sri Aurobindo in the academic world.

In his *New Ways in English Literature* (1917), Irish poet-critic James Cousins saw Sri Aurobindo as the harbinger of the poetry of the future. Aldous Huxley, the foremost novelist-thinker of the twentieth century and author of *The Perennial Philosophy* who had a great affinity with Indic traditions, cited the Master's magnum opus *The Life Divine* as an extraordinary work of literature. Likewise, Nobel laureates Pearl S. Buck and Gabriela Mistral nominated Sri Aurobindo in 1949 for the coveted Nobel Prize in Literature.

Similar nominations were made by a group of eminent Indian academics and men of letters. Harvard professors of philosophy in the late 1940s recognised the world vision of Sri Aurobindo in philosophical terms. Dr S. Radhakrishnan, acclaimed philosopher-statesman of modern India and former President of the Indian Republic, called Sri Aurobindo 'the greatest intellectual of our age', and the distinguished historian R. C. Majumdar noted the outstanding contributions of Sri Aurobindo in the domain of Indian historiography, in particular the latter's refutation of the so-called Aryan invasion theory that K. D. Sethna in later years would develop at considerable length in linguistic and archaeological terms.

The makers of modern India as well as leading politicians of all hues recognised Sri Aurobindo as a builder of modern India and his thought-vision worthy of study in the Indian university system. And yet Sri Aurobindo's presence in mainstream Indian and Western academia today, barring notable exceptions, is evident by its absence.

Generations of students in Indian higher education know about the philosopher K. C. Bhattacharya's idea of Swaraj, M. K. Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj*, the works of Rabindranath Tagore, Jawaharlal Nehru, B. R. Ambedkar, and others. They know about the Western and Afro-Asian contributions to the decolonisation of the mind; they have read with profit the slave narratives of the United States and the Indian Subaltern historiography, as well as the works of Raymond Williams, Jacques Derrida, Gayatri Chakrabarty Spivak, Michel Foucault, and Walter Benjamin.

But they do not hear the voice of Sri Aurobindo whose pioneering contributions in *The Foundations of Indian Culture* laid the ground for postcolonial studies.

They know about the translation theories of Susan Basnett, but not those of Sri Aurobindo, who ably translated the Vedas, the Upanishads, and the Indian epics. Surely, this must be on account of the Eurocentric bias in our knowledge system as well as the continued cultural imperialism in the so-called Third World.

Contextual factors and contested categories

One must also dispassionately look for



Dr Mohanty is former Professor and Head of the Department of English, University of Hyderabad. Winner of many national and international awards, he has published extensively in the field of British, American, gender, translation, and post-colonial studies. He served as a former Vice Chancellor of the Central University of Odisha and was a former member of the Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation. He had his early education at the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, Pondicherry (SAICE) 1966-1975. The views expressed here are personal.

discovered itself and found its own law and the law of its relation with others. Therefore the truest order is that which is founded on the greatest possible liberty; for liberty is at once the condition of vigorous variation and the condition of self-finding.

Sri Aurobindo's progressive and futuristic views on education and the aim of life have also found powerful resonance in the domain of contemporary teacher-training institutes and centres for alternative education in India. His views on the theory and practice of an integral education find reflection in India's New Education Policy 2020. Child-centred learning, the need to free students from bondages to textbooks and examinations for the sake of holistic education are now an article of faith at the National Council of Educational Research and Training [NCERT] and other centres of teacher education.

Discerning scholars in India and abroad today are also carrying out research in the field of yoga psychology and consciousness studies, following leads given by Sri Aurobindo. The pioneer in this field was clearly Professor Indra Sen from the Sri Aurobindo Ashram who shared close professional ties with his counterparts in

India and abroad. Aligned to an interest in Indic Studies and the study of indigenous knowledge systems, the subject is presently being avidly researched in institutes such as the California Institute of Integral Studies in the United States and the Indian Psychology Institute in India.

Final thoughts

The newer views of life, literature, and society that have emerged in recent years in academia may find echoes in the prophetic writings of Sri Aurobindo. For him, the matter-spirit binary, the empirical and spiritual divide, has been a great stumbling block for the betterment of the planetary world.

All the same, a fundamental question remains: Why should a yogic consciousness bother about the rational mind that is at the heart of university education?

Sri Aurobindo, we may recall, devotes an entire chapter to 'The Office and Limitations of the Reason' in *The Human Cycle*. In *The Synthesis of Yoga*, he draws our attention pointedly to the "seeking intelligence", while showing us the place of the intellect in spiritual life. In this explanation, we may discover a larger truth, namely, the *raison d'être* of the modern university.

As Sri Aurobindo says:

The intellect cannot be a sufficient guide in the search for spiritual truth and realisation and yet it has to be utilised in the integral movement of our nature. And while, therefore, we have to reject paralysing doubt or mere intellectual scepticism, the seeking intelligence has to be trained to admit a certain large questioning an intellectual rectitude not satisfied with half-truths, mixtures of error or approximation and, most positive and helpful, a perfect readiness always to move forward from truths already held and accepted to the greater corrective, completing or transcending truths which at first it was unable or, it may be, disinclined to envisage.

Sachidananda Mohanty

This is an edited version of the article that first appeared in SABDA Newsletter, August 2023 and is published courtesy of SABDA. The full article may be read at <https://www.sabda.in/pdf/news/aug2023.pdf>

deeper reasons for the relative absence of Sri Aurobindo in today's mainstream academic and intellectual culture. Post-colonial critic Leela Gandhi is correct in her assumptions in her path breaking book *Affective Communities* that fin-de-siècle Europe and the Edwardian era in England generated worldwide interest in counter-culture movements in the domains of occultism, vegetarianism, theology, and alternative living. D.H. Lawrence's search for the ideal utopian commune in the deep Southwest of the United States led him to the company of the native American Indians of Taos, New Mexico; the journey of James and Margaret Cousins took them to India at the invitation of the noted theosophist Annie Besant; the romantic-mystical poetry of AE, W.B. Yeats, Stephen Philips, Manmohan Ghose, Sri Aurobindo, Tagore, and others dealt with the subjective experience of the inner world.

The Bengal School of Art and art critics like A. C. Gangooly promised to usher in what Sri Aurobindo considered the subjective era in human civilisation, a new cosmology for the world.

However, by 1922 the publication of *The Wasteland* by T.S. Eliot and the rise of modernist imagist poetry spearheaded by Eliot and Ezra Pound began a new movement in literary modernism in the Anglo-American world. Now poetry must deal with commonplace, quotidian experience and capture the angst and anomie of modern existence, it was claimed. Eliot, Pound, William Carlos Williams, Wallace Stevens, and the "Movement Poets" in England created newer modes of poetic idiom and sensibility. D.H. Lawrence, Philip Larkin and later poets like Ted Hughes influenced the newer generation of Indian English poets. Further, the reign of secular modernity and cultural Marxism in various disciplines led to the marginalisation of the earlier era of spiritual/mystical poetry and its underlying metaphysics/view of life.

However, the dominance of literary modernism and the larger project of Western modernity were challenged by philosophies/movements beginning in the 1960s. In language studies, the postulates of Ferdinand de Saussure were challenged by structuralism and post structuralism in Western academia. The "language turn" in literary-cultural theory/criticism came through Jacques Derrida, Paul de Man, Harold

Bloom, and J. Hillis Miller. The work of Judith Butler, Julia Kristeva, Gilles Deleuze, Michel Foucault, and others paved the way for the new era of cultural materialism/criticism. Meaning, cognition effect, and symbols came centre stage in the study of literature and culture.

Continued academic relevance of Sri Aurobindo

On the surface, the new paradigms may not share much with the Aurobindonean worldview; however, we may argue that Sri Aurobindo's critique of Western modernity, anchored to the primacy of Reason and Rationality, merits the critical attention of scholars in the field. His twin essays in *The Life Divine*, 'The Methods of Vedantic Knowledge' and 'Reality and the Integral Knowledge' have much to offer Western epistemology.

Sri Aurobindo's considered views are timely reminders about the pitfalls of the present tech culture and his neglected socio-cultural and global vision could pave the way for a new academic culture. For example, Sri Aurobindo sees the seminal importance of multilingualism, of diversity and decentralisation. Scholars may fruitfully turn their attention, in this context, to his works *The Human Cycle*, *The Ideal of Human Unity*, and *War and Self-Determination*.

Sri Aurobindo's views on internationalism, in contrast to the presently dominant and hegemonic "global modern" that stands for the Americanisation of the world, would appeal to the modern academic world rooted in a liberal culture and thinking. They would be found instructive to civic planners in the domain of multicultural education, envisioned by thinkers like Charles Taylor and Anthony Appiah.

The latter advocates the need and possibilities of maintaining a pluralistic culture of many identities and sub-cultures, while retaining the civil and political practices that sustain natural life in the classic sense. Such a view finds powerful echoes in Sri Aurobindo. As he writes:

But uniformity is not the law of life. Life exists by diversity; it insists that each group, every being shall be, even while one with all the rest in its universality, yet by some principle or ordered detail of variation unique.... Order is indeed the law of life, but not an artificial regulation. The sound order is that which comes from within as the result of a nature that has

experience through creative expressions of clarity and conviction in various circumstances and to various audiences here and now.

And how do you respond personally to the present situation in Auroville?

I agree it's a very difficult time. Although many people feel powerless, I believe one has to stand up against the forces which threaten Mother's vision of freedom in Auroville, and find those avenues of power which one can utilise. But to do this while understanding the gravity and complexity of the situation, and do it strategically, because one has to be very

conscious of the fact that one can be easily eliminated. One is up against an antagonist who seems too big and powerful, a Goliath.

The other thing I feel is the need for a new language to validate as widely as possible the reality of Auroville, and why the Mother has created it. It's very important that more people in the world understand this at this moment both inside and outside Auroville, starting with Aurovilians themselves.

But perhaps the most powerful thing that can be done at this time is to gather oneself, intensify one's aspiration and call to the Mother for help.

From an interview by Alan

The Auroville situation: a view from outside

continued from page 2

but people who were here in the 1970s when Auroville was threatened by the Sri Aurobindo Society felt that Mother acted and saved Auroville then, even though she was no longer in her body, and she will do so again. There are some who are totally confident that, whatever forces may be dominant at present, Mother's vision will manifest. According to them, there is nothing to be done but to have faith in the Mother and wait for the storm to pass. There are others who feel that it is a test of *sadhana* and if individuals were fully sincere, the situation would go away by itself.

Some people would say that another avenue that needs to be pursued vigorously at this time is education; that people around the world have to understand what this place is really about, and what is at stake here, because today Auroville is not well known even in India.

Absolutely. Many of the students, as well as myself, feel that Aurovilians have not developed the ability to express why they are here, what the place is about, and why it is important to the world. This can't be done by simply repeating the words of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo because that turns it into a mere personality cult and a religion. It has to be done from personal

Youth Day Festival 2023



PHOTO: MADHU

The vista from the entrance of the Time Boulevard

This year's Youth Day celebrations took place at the Youth Centre on Saturday, August 12th. The event, brought together by the Youth Link and Youth Centre teams, offered the community an opportunity for "celebration, empowerment, love and sharing" around the theme of "youth through generations".

The event announcement specified a dress code to encourage the community to come dressed according to the fashion trends of decades past, culminating in a vibrant array of colours, decorations and wigs on the day itself.

A leisurely stroll down the "Time Boulevard" showcased the ways "youth culture" has morphed in the decades from the 1950s to the present. Interwoven with this was the history of Auroville itself, juxtaposing images of the



PHOTO: CLAIRE

Tug-of-war gets slippery after the rain!

first caravans that were making their way from Europe to South India alongside images showing the frenzy of Beatlemania.

The obstacle course, crate-stacking challenge, face-painting booth, t-shirt mud-dyeing station, pop culture word puzzles, macramé corner, and spray painting area were buzzing throughout the afternoon with people of all ages. Whether one sought the thrill of a "the-floor-is-lava" challenge or the artistic expression found in the art corner, everyone discovered engaging activities and felt brought together by a sense of shared enjoyment.

At four in the afternoon, collective games took centre stage. Laughter echoed as participants engaged in classics like Simon Says, limbo, tug-of-war, the tail game, a sack race, Kajimba pong, and even a "dad joke" competition. "It was fun to revisit games from when we



PHOTO: CLAIRE

Showing off those limbo skills

were younger and play them again with people of all ages," said Madu, who helped with the day's preparations and took charge of the mud-dye station. The rain, although causing a few slips, only made the afternoon more memorable for everyone there.

The evening programme was kicked off with a classic Miracle Productions play, appropriately titled 'Short Notice' considering that they were



PHOTO: MADHU

It was all smiles all day

given less than a week to script it and get it up on stage. Little Beauté, a young girl cursed by her evil aunt Malfunction, pricks her finger on a *mullu* and falls into a deep sleep, only to be woken up by the kiss of a bicycle. However confusing this description may sound, the performance brought laughter and amusement to all present.

A delicious dinner of Youth Centre pizza preceded the night time musical festivities. Live band performances were accompanied by fire juggling. And for the grand finale, the travelling band The Romantikos gave a captivating performance of Spanish gypsy melodies, which had everyone dancing - a perfect ending to a beautiful day. "This is the stuff that I'll always remember and cherish about growing up as an AV kid," said Vinesh, feeling the nostalgia.

Sole

August 15th, 2023

August 15, 2023, Sri Aurobindo's 151st birthday anniversary and India's Independence day, was celebrated in Auroville with many events. The Indian flag was displayed on a recently installed flagpole in front of the Town Hall and there was the traditional dawn bonfire at the Matrimandir amphitheatre. Spiritual leader Sri M was invited to hold a morning meditation at the Town Hall and later participated in a 'Unity walk' along the Crown.

Two new commemorative films were released, the animation 'Sri Aurobindo: A new Dawn' and Olivier Barot's 'Sri Aurobindo and the Earth's Future'. The Pavilion of Tibetan Culture hosted children's activities. A unique 10-page colouring book of Sri Aurobindo's early life was created for children to colour in, which narrated the story of his youth and return to India in pictures and text. There was also storytelling, and making dream-catchers and cards of Mother's 12 qualities in the four official languages of Auroville. One could also make photo frames of Mother and Sri Aurobindo, including, as a nice touch,



PHOTO: KARINE



PHOTO: KRIPA

images of them both as children. Lastly, a snack area was set up with fruit, cake, pizza, juice and sandwiches. For the adults, peace flags were made by Meike and her team as an offering on this day.

Afterwards, at the Inuksuk, a 10 meter-wide flower mandala of Sri Aurobindo's symbol was created with candles lit by children. Music was played by Adhara on flute and Hartmut on keyboard, and later others performed. Children were running around, Johnny was making his tea, while friends gathered together and caught up. There were readings of Sri Aurobindo's writings in English and Tamil before the bonfire was lit, quickly blazing to the heavens. To conclude the festivities, a light dinner was offered to the hundreds of participants by many volunteers. The afternoon and evening community event was attended by approximately 700 residents.

Auroville-bioregion sports events July 30 - August 13, 2023

At the occasion of the closing of Sri Aurobindo's 150th anniversary, a number of sports event were held in Auroville.



PHOTOS: MARCO SARDI DI



From left: Kabaddi match in the New Creation sports hall; the Gilli Danda game played in Gaia field; Koko and other games at the Certitude sports ground.

Animating ‘Sri Aurobindo: A new Dawn’

We do not belong to the past dawns, but to the noons of the future

At 09.30 am on Sri Aurobindo’s 151st birthday, Manoj Pavithran premiered ‘Sri Aurobindo: A new Dawn’ in Bharat Nivas. Pradeep Narang, chairman of the Sri Aurobindo Society and Jayanti Ravi, the Secretary of the Auroville Foundation, welcomed the film and the work that had gone into producing it.

Youth

In his introductory comments, Manoj referred frequently to the film being aimed at youth, especially those who were unfamiliar with Sri Aurobindo’s life and work. He added that the younger generation needed a new form of receiving Sri Aurobindo’s message, that animation was that form and that the animators themselves were young and unfamiliar with Sri Aurobindo’s work. This was historically echoed by Sri Aurobindo’s words in the film when he wrote the ‘Bande Mataram’ that he too wished to reach out to the then youth of India. “It is the young who must be the builders of the new world”.

Film

The film itself is in the animated style of the movie ‘Loving Vincent’. Its 2D hand drawn animation was evidently a labour of love, with dozens of animators involved. Astonishingly for a 30-minute film, every second required between 8-12 different digitalized art pictures, coming to a total of 20,000 frames and taking over two years to produce. With every minute costing approximately ten lakhs, a total of 2.60 crores was fundraised by well-wishers.

It is an aesthetic film with a dreamlike quality, and like dreams also it is able to mix strong feelings with subtlety. The feeling conveyed by the pastel-like art allows an immersion into what the producers hoped would be a ‘deeper mode of viewing and experiencing’. There is plenty of symbolism in the film, with, for instance, the *shakti* of India literally enchained, mountains and tunnels ascended and the fire of revolution being portrayed.



A screenshot of Sri Aurobindo meeting Krishna in Alipore jail

The producers described the film as a kind of ‘visual poetry’. As an example of this, when in Alipore jail Sri Aurobindo heard the voice of God within instructing him in the ‘Sadhana of the Gita’, this is accompanied by a flowing scripture emitting initially peacock feathers and then a beautiful blue Krishna.

The first two thirds of the film focus on Sri Aurobindo’s pre-Pondicherry political life and it is noteworthy that this time period is now receiving more attention than his later yogic years. I hope that a sequel will further explore his later years collaborating with the Mother and of public withdrawal in Pondicherry.

Collaboration with the Sri Aurobindo Society

Beyond the film and its message one of the by-products is the increased connection with the Sri Aurobindo Society (SAS) and

Auroville, as in this case the film was coordinated by the SAS and some Aurovilians. Manoj, in a reference to our fractious past, mentioned “we need to collaborate to heal,” and this film’s work evidently brought those involved together. His personal role he described as a postman between the studio producers and the SAS.

After the film, the team were given a standing ovation and then in a Q&A, many of the youthful production team from Studio Eeksauros were introduced, along with the studio founders, Nimila and Suresh Eriyat. They had, as Manoj hoped, given an introduction to the remarkable life of Sri Aurobindo. We await to see what ‘noons of the future’ will emerge from this offering.

Peter

To watch this film on youtube visit: <https://www.anewdawn.in/>

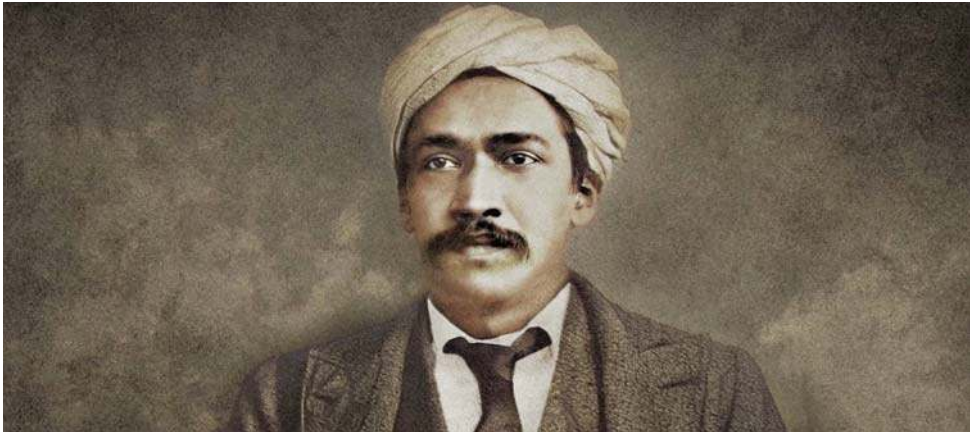
Sri Aurobindo and the Earth’s Future

There are two main challenges to be faced by anybody who wishes to present a life of Sri Aurobindo. Firstly, there is the danger of misunderstanding Sri Aurobindo for, as he put it, his life “has not been on the surface for men to see”. Secondly, there is the danger of hagiography, of presenting Sri Aurobindo as a model of perfection, a fully realised soul almost from birth, which ignores or downplays the many struggles which he underwent in his life and spiritual evolution.

Olivier Barot’s new film, ‘Sri Aurobindo and the Earth’s Future’, which was premiered in Auroville on 15th August, avoids both these pitfalls by, on the one hand, quoting liberally from Sri Aurobindo’s words about himself, and, on the other, adopting a factual rather than a hagiographic approach to the events of his early life. For this film only depicts the period from Sri Aurobindo’s birth until his arrival in Pondicherry. Part 2, ‘From Death to Immortality’, which will depict his subsequent life, has yet to be made.

The film is beautifully presented. The images, which include contemporary photographs as well as modern illustrations by Aurovilians, allow us to immerse ourselves in the different periods of Sri Aurobindo’s early life. I was particularly struck, for example, by the contrast between the Himalayan vastnesses of Darjeeling and the mean streets of smoky, cotton mill Manchester, which was such a shock for a young Aravinda Ghosh newly transplanted to England for his education by his anglophile father. (“I saw a world stripped of beauty.”)

The contexts and textures of Sri Aurobindo’s early life are further enhanced by the pacing of the



WATERCOLOUR BY INDIA LETIZIA

film, which does not hurry us through the significant moments in his early life but allows us to fully enter into them. In this context, one of the highlights of the film is the extended section on his experience in Alipore jail, which allows us, almost moment by moment, to experience both the initial shock and despair of his solitary confinement in a 9 foot by 5 foot cell, and the subsequent inner education and spiritual liberation which caused him to rename his prison the ‘Alipore Ashram’.

Olivier’s film was over three years in preparation [see more on this in AV Today no. 409 eds.] and involved a great deal of research, so even the most knowledgeable students are liable to encounter new information. I was surprised, for

example, by the influence of Ramakrishna upon the young Aurobindo. The film also clarifies very well how Aurobindo developed his interest in yoga and how this fed into his revolutionary activities.

This is a fine film, by far the finest I have yet seen on Sri Aurobindo’s life. Olivier now has the even greater challenge of illuminating the silent yet cosmically important work of Sri Aurobindo’s Pondicherry years. For while his active involvement in politics may have ended with his departure to Chandernagore, Sri Aurobindo continued to work upon world problems behind the scenes, particularly during the Second World War when he exerted his spiritual force in support of “a Truth that has yet to realise itself fully against a darkness and falsehood that are trying to overwhelm the earth”.

Alan

To see the film visit <https://youtu.be/47yhMAAjRyM>

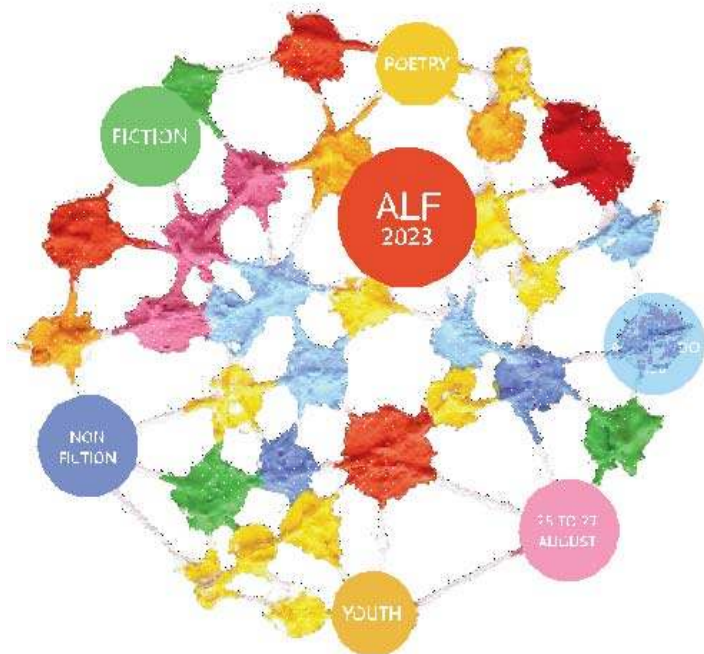
The Auroville Literature Festival

The first Auroville Literature Festival took place on 25 to 27 August in the Sri Aurobindo auditorium of Bharat Nivas, Savitri Bhavan and the Unity Pavilion of the International Zone. It not only brought together some of the best writers, thinkers and poets from India and the abroad on Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, but also addressed issues of Auroville’s town development. The festival, which was announced as the culminating event of Sri Aurobindo’s 150th anniversary commemoration, was made possible with the collaboration of the Chennai International Centre, a not-for-profit organization whose objective it is to foster the exchange of knowledge and ideas across various disciplines including the arts, education, business, finance, science and technology; and the Valley of Words International Literature and Arts International Festival Shabdavali, a notfor-profit and volunteer driven initiative of the Valley of Words Foundation Trust. Funding was provided by the Ministry of Culture and the Auroville Foundation.

The festival partners, speakers and moderators participated in forum discussions – a few of which were online – on a wide range of issues such as Understanding History And Historical Perspectives; Reading Sri Aurobindo; Exploring Sustainability And Auroville As A Model Town; The Landscape Of Heroism; Real Life And The Logic Of Fiction; The Mountain And The Artist; Writing For Operas / Writing For A City; Perceptions Of Reality; The Magic Of The Soul In Writing; and Making Change Happen. Specific books of Sri Aurobindo were also discussed, such as *Savitri*, *The Future Poetry*, *The Life Divine* and *The Secret of the Vedas*. The book *The Deliverance* by Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyaya, translated by Dilip Kumar Roy and revised by Sri Aurobindo with a preface of Rabindrath Tagore, was launched by Governing Board member Dr. Goutam Ghosal.

There was also an evening offering of *JAVA, I want life!*, a dance theatre performance by artists from the Surya Performance Lab, Auroville.

Picture right: The logo of the first Auroville Literature Festival, designed by artist Pierre Legrand. “A free evolving unity that is conscious yet structured, in which everything, every one, all colours, live together in a connected whole, just like Auroville must be one day.”



A proposal for social transformations

In the General Meeting of 1st April, the Dreamweaving Core Team (David, Mona and Omar) committed themselves to making further proposals to the community. On 30th July, they presented their new proposal.

When it became clear the complexity of the current conditions in Auroville would not allow the Vastu Shilpa Consultants to be on board to make the Detailed Development Plan for Auroville – which may change if conditions permit – the core team reached out to people holding a wide range of different perspectives to find out what the next step could be. “The positives that emerged from these interactions,” said Mona, “is that there are signs of critical shifts. People are starting to question themselves regarding where things went wrong in the past, and what their role was in this. They did not want to go back to how things were before and there was a movement towards the central ground, for a more collective process, rather than hanging onto radical ideas: people want something more integral.”

She said that while people agreed this is a challenging time because collaborative processes are difficult now, several Aurovilians stated that something should be tried.

Omar remarked that one of the aims of the Dreamweaving experiment was to provide an alternative narrative to the one which was being propagated in some quarters at that time, namely that Aurovilians could not collaborate on a bigger project for the good of Auroville. “We demonstrated that we actually can collaborate on a larger scale and achieve some results. But I don’t think you can convince anybody of our side of the story if they don’t want to be convinced, and I never believed that there is one narrative that has all the truth. Therefore we shifted away from this loop of competing narratives to focus upon possible needed social transformations. We want to propose a new method or process with a different aim, to push for something more significant.”

Different value systems

As background to their proposal, David explained how they perceive the different dynamics functioning in the community. Basically, they believe that there are three different conflicting value systems. One is the classic governance framework which provides law and order and imposed hierarchy. This corresponds to what Sri Aurobindo described as the ‘conventional age’ of human progress.

Another value system represents rationality, such as scientific development (Sri Aurobindo’s ‘age of reason’), while a third is much more egalitarian, in which people get more in touch with their inner lives and where there is a greater focus upon the environment etc. (the ‘subjective age’).

Each of these systems, which have operated from the beginning of Auroville, has advantages and disadvantages. But the way they are coexisting at present is what is causing many of the problems because in each value system people who feel passionately about it do not allow dialogue, and so are pulling the community away from the central ground.

David’s thesis is that any activity that tries to integrate these different value systems happens at the centre, and the historical examples he provided of this, the moments when the community came together beyond ideology, were the construction of the main structure of the Matrimandir, as well as the response of the community to both Cyclone Thane and the COVID lockdowns.

However, he noted that we only managed the latter two as responses to crises. Now, however, our challenge is to choose to inhabit the centre-ground consciously and actively in order to plan our future, even in the midst of the present chaos. As an example, he instanced what happened in World War II when members of the British government came together to plan what would happen after the war ended (as detailed in ‘The Beveridge Report’). “It led to a radical transformation of society after the war, but it had been put in place during the war itself. We are suggesting we could do something similar now in Auroville.”

The idea, he explained, is to create such an energy field in the centre that it will grow and create a dynamic of its own which cannot be ignored by those who are at present pulling the community apart.

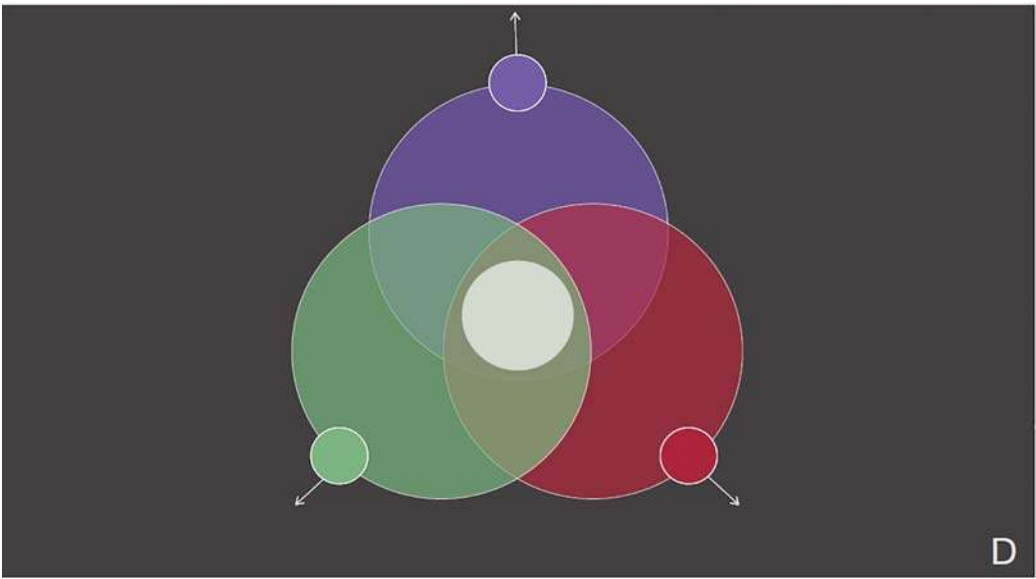
How to do this? David pointed out that because the Dreamweaving Core Team is comprised of architects, their proposal is understandably focused upon planning. “Holistic planning never happened in Auroville, so on one level this is a trial to create the conditions for genuine holistic planning. On a deeper level, however, it is social. We are using planning as a tool to make a social change. The goal is social transformation.”

Reflections on Auroville planning

Omar explained how the three different value systems mentioned by David can be reflected in three different emphases in planning in Auroville. There are those who emphasise the value of spiritual symbolism and the occult significance of geometry, those who advocate a very rational planning process, those who value most the relationship between the ecosystem and the built environment, and those investigating the relationships between two or three of these approaches. “The best built environment we can imagine is somewhere in the middle and has the qualities of all of them. To achieve this can be difficult yet it is a

challenge we need to accept.”

Omar identified the present divide in planning in Auroville as one side says ‘just build the city’ and the other side says ‘there needs to be proper planning’. This looks like an easy problem to solve; build the city through proper planning. However, he pointed out that some of those representing the side which says ‘build the city’ have practically shown – through decades – sentiments against urban planning processes and methods, possibly because they are concerned that the purity of the original concept could be diluted. On the other hand, some of those representing the side which says ‘we need proper planning’ have practically shown – through decades – sentiments against urbanism in their constructions, through practicing and supporting models which work against develop-



Highlighting the interactions and overlaps of the ‘Conventional Age’ (blue), the ‘Rational Age’ (orange) and the ‘Subjective Age’ (green). The space at the centre expresses the opportunity for our collective to come together in our search for more holistic solutions.

ing any connected urban fabric, possibly because their experiences of modern cities have been negative.

“What would be an inspiring model,” said Omar, “would be if you could gradually create an urban environment of spiritual symbolism and of varied densities while accepting the challenge of sensibly working with the natural systems. But for this another model of development is needed which challenges both sides.”

Omar concluded by calling for an end to polarity in regards to Auroville’s urban development, asking the different sides to collaborate on gradually developing the city towards its intended diverse urban densities, textures, woven urban fabrics and ecological system through holistic planning.

In fact, as David pointed out, the conceptual Galaxy model suggests integrating these approaches, as well as integrating the symbolic, rational and ecological value systems which are dividing us at present. However, “If people try to build this city without proper investigation of how to achieve its complexity, which is happening at present, this will result in them losing the very thing they claim they want to build.”

Mona added that “Acting from a place of fear, they have now taken decisions that are not congruent with what they themselves wanted.”

Omar believes that in order to take a step towards holistic planning we have to expand the area of investigation when it comes to planning our city. “Some of the topics I don’t hear discussed are, What is the meaning of the concept of the city in human civilisation? What does spatial justice mean? What is the relation between values and urban form? What is the relation between urban fabric and experience, and between incremental development and an organic urban model?”

“You have to try to understand these things and then take the right steps to achieve a situation in which natural urban development would happen. Anything imposed doesn’t normally work.”

The method

In fact, as the aim is larger social transformations, the method the team is suggesting no longer focuses just upon architects and professionals.

To achieve this, they propose four interconnected projects to begin with which could happen almost simultaneously and which already have people who are willing to anchor them.

One is Dreamcatching [defined by its organizers as “an open forum for furthering the manifestation of Mother’s Dream through the merging of the Galaxy Plan with the ground reality” eds.] This would be open to everyone and the question would be, as a resident of this place what are the values you hold, and how would you like to see them reflected in your experience of the city? The Dreamcatching will have two main aims: Firstly, to broadly align our interpretation of the vision, specifically the experiential aspect of the intended built environment. Secondly, to compose a vital missing chapter in the present planning brief, clarifying how the planned built environment would fit the way of life, the perceptions, ideals etc. of its main intended users, the residents.

Another project aims to create a representative community feedback body that can receive and comment upon planning

proposals. It is initially suggested that they be around thirty randomly selected people who would go through an educational process, and who could, if the anchoring team so chooses, be supported by focus groups selected to present different directions in Auroville and/or a panel of experts whose advice would be needed in discussions.

A third group would engage in Dreamweaving. This would be held by and involve the next generation of Auroville architects. The anchors of the team would decide what the focus will be, but David, Mona and Omar have suggested different possibilities to them: to find creative solutions for all or part of Auroville’s boundary conditions capable of responding to exponentially growing outside pressures, or find ways to transform the Crown into a humane, liveable, walkable street.

The final project would involve individuals participating in self-education about planning issues. This is for anyone interested in investigating certain topics which are unexplored at present, like what is spatial justice, or what is the meaning of the city? What is the relation between values and forms of urban fabric? What are the advantages and challenges of density and diversity? What is the value of access and connectivity in a built environment? Or, how can a street or a neighborhood fit its users?

The idea is to create small groups, each of which would take up one topic. They would be given some resources, and after a few months they could present what they have learned to the larger community. In this way, the community could become very much part of an informed planning process.

The four projects would be interconnected by a group which would go from team to team, keeping each one informed of the most interesting ideas which have emerged. “The connecting tissue,” says David, “is where the magic can happen”.

Each of the four projects plus the ‘interconnection group’ would choose someone either from their own group or beyond, to form another group. Described by Omar as “a centre which is not so central”, these would be people of certain qualities: like someone with the capacity to listen and absorb, or to bring interesting ideas, or bring peace and good vibes or a sense of wisdom.

Above all, people who do not want to be in this position and who will have to be convinced to come forward!”

This group would ultimately help the groups move together towards larger solutions pertaining to the overall organisation.

The team which is proposing this method emphasizes that they are not fixed upon just four projects because there are so many other interesting things happening in Auroville at present which could contribute to social transformation. This is why they say it’s important to keep it very open and very flexible and listen to what people feel about this.

They are also under no illusion as to the magnitude of the challenge. Mona identified one of these challenges as the inability to get the Tamil population to join our collective explorations. Even at that day’s meeting, she observed, there were very few of them present. “Why is that? Is it because these are not the right forums for them to feel comfortable to speak up? Do we need to develop different methods to get them on board?”

“Also, we have no executive power, so we cannot stop what is happening at present in Auroville,” says David. “But we are trying to increase our proactive power and critical mass so that nobody will be able to stop it. However, we acknowledge that a huge amount of magic and grace is required to make it work.”

If it does ‘work’, however, if the community comes together to agree upon its values and what it wants to achieve, the next step would be to pair this multifaceted participatory process with an external multidisciplinary consultancy of the highest qualifications, “because,” as David put it, “we need these experts also to give their professional inputs and eventually draw up the plans”.

Meanwhile, the Dreamweaving Core Team, which has held this process for more than a year, announced that, while they will remain connected, they are dissolving into this larger process that will generate its own core team, its centre. “This proposal is our best shot,” said David. “If it works it’s fantastic. If it doesn’t, we are out of ideas and someone else can pick it up.”

In conclusion, and as a summary of what they are trying to do, David quoted Roger Anger from a 1972 TV interview. Roger clarified that Auroville will not follow the example of Brasilia, where the city was constructed first and only then people were invited to come and live in it.

“If the people who come for this profession of faith are not able to build their own environment, this would mean that Auroville is a failure. It is essential that it is built on the basis of individual experience... Here people live the experience and it is starting from this experience that their conditions, their environment, their lifestyle, will be established and created.”

Notes by Alan

Mother is not dead

I do not believe that Mother is dead. I feel constrained to write this because some people seem to think that Mother stopped communicating with us in 1973, and all we can do when we seek guidance now is to read what she wrote or said before that time. It gives rise to the plaintive refrain increasingly heard today – “If only Mother was here...”

But Mother made it very clear that physical death is not a terminus, merely a change of state, (a ‘change of rooms’, she once called it) and she often spoke of meeting Sri Aurobindo and conversing with him in the subtle physical after his ‘passing’ in 1950. Why should it be any different with Mother? Why should she not be there for us now? Not just as a presence – which is something a number of people experience – but as a specific guide to what we need to do at this moment?

Moreover, when we freeze, enshrine, her words from the distant past, we neglect the fact that, particularly in her final years in the body, she was moving at light speed in terms of inner discoveries: discoveries which, she often remarked, sometimes made what she had previously understood to be true no more than partially valid, or even wrong. Why do we believe that her physical dissolution should stop this ongoing process of discovery? Why, in other words, should we believe that she had said everything she needed to say about Auroville before

November 1973? (And it’s worth remembering that even during her lifetime her view of the kind of town Auroville would be and its importance to the world changed radically.)

I believe that she keeps moving, just like the universe which, she once remarked, is created new every single moment. And I believe it is her ability to identify with the Becoming, which means refusing to stand still and cling to old verities, which is one of the greatest gifts she is offering, communicating, to us today in various ways. If only we can fall silent and listen.

Ah, there’s the rub. For, at present, our conflicting attempts to persuade others of what should happen in Auroville are generating so much noise that we cannot hear that “still, small voice”.

The implication is obvious: if we really want to hear her, we need to quieten the noise to help create the best conditions for receiving her. Which means, among other things, that all of us, whatever our orientation, need to abandon our preconceptions about how things should be in order to make room for the Mother of today; for That which is continually new, continually unfolding. And, maybe, hopefully, utterly surprising. For I sense that, in spite of our best intentions, many of us – and I certainly include myself in this – seem stuck in old frameworks of thought and action.

This certainly doesn’t mean that we should ignore or down-

grade everything she has already expressed. Clearly, her explanations of the divine provenance of Auroville, and the indispensable conditions for receiving the New Consciousness or becoming a ‘true’ Aurovilian are not up for discussion. But it does suggest that some of her other statements can be viewed as doorways rather than final destinations, to be explored further in the light of what she is revealing moment by moment of the eternal Unfolding.

In this context, clearly the psychic guidance is indispensable. But even before the full psychic contact is made I believe that Mother provides indications, in many subtle ways, of what should or should not be done. Having said that, I find it hard, very hard to listen for that guidance – I, too, have many preferences about what should happen which get in the way – but I believe, I absolutely believe, that that guidance is there, waiting to be heard. And then – even harder – acted upon.

Of course, we need to be wary of those who too readily claim to be hearing the voice of Mother. We know this has been misused. But this should not prevent us from making the attempt, and encouraging others to do so. For if we don’t make the attempt, I feel we consign her to the grave... Along, of course, with ourselves.

Alan

PASSINGS

Audrey Langworthy Wallace-Taylor

Audrey Wallace Taylor, one of Auroville’s eminent artists, left her body on August 18th during a family visit in the USA. She had just become 90. Audrey discovered she had pancreatic cancer on the eve of her intended return to Auroville. After the excellent care provided by a hospice organization in Portland, Oregon, where her son lives, she left her body with grace, seemingly in meditation.

Audrey’s life as an artist began very young. She attended the San Francisco Art Institute studying with Richard Deibencorn, Jack Jefferson and Bruce McGaw. She assisted many prominent artists such as Francois Gilot and Harry Sternberg, and she worked for seven months with Judy Chicago on “The Dinner Party.” All along she taught and maintained a

fulltime studio practice.

In the mid-90s Audrey sold most everything she had and travelled to India, Russia, Finland, England and Ireland. After returning to the U.S. she was drawn back to Southern India, to Auroville, where she had first landed on her round-the-world adventure. After a few years of going back and forth, she became an Aurovilian in 2006, and Auroville has been her home since.

From the moment she joined, Audrey was an active, generous Aurovilian who persistently endeavoured to bring art in Auroville to the forefront by her classes and exhibitions. She maintained an atelier for the community to facilitate people’s own sense of self expression, painting full time in between teaching and being active in the community. She and others finally started

CREEVA, a kind of artist’s cooperative, which is still running.

On Sunday August 20th, Auroville friends gathered under the Matrimandir Banyan tree in honour of this remarkable artist and person. Dharmesh Jadeja wrote a tribute (excerpts)

Audrey’s presence in Auroville over last several years has been inspiring and rejuvenating for many of us who have been struggling with our artistic instincts and peripheral engagement with arts, especially for me, who has been running an architectural practice as my mainstay of work life in Auroville, but have always had close interactions with many artists through my work at Kala Kendra over the last two decades.

Audrey and I hit it off very early after she moved to Auroville, often meeting over a cup of tea at the gallery or casually, discussing the future of art, how life is enriched through the arts, and collective ways of working, exhibiting, contributing to the public art of Auroville and engaging with all other artists. Non judgmental, soft and straightforward was her way. Her art was delightful, be it her paintings of landscapes, water colours or sketches. Experimenting with colours, textures and techniques, Audrey reinvented herself almost every few years. My favourite was her phase when she was painting cows. Her presence in almost all the exhibitions that we did together or with other artists was always enriching and enlivening. In the midst of Auroville’s complex community life, with its diversity of views and aesthetics of arts, Audrey made her point with clarity.



Audrey created her own niche in Auroville. She was a constant support to anyone who wanted to take the first steps in the art world, by sketching, painting, or learning techniques. Seldom have I seen an artist so fully devoted and dedicated to their art as Audrey. Her art classes were a playground for experimental works, a therapeutic practice for many young and old, and so were an immense contribution to making art accessible to all. She made many friends by her dedication, consistency and appreciation of art as a life in Auroville. She was an epitome of an ever youthful, never aging youth of Auroville, where she lived a life full of creativity, beauty and pure joy of being.

Adieu, Audrey Wallace Taylor. Our gratitude for making all our lives so special through your presence and works.

One of her exhibitions can be seen at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fiTIVCxMK2g>



A water colour by Audrey Wallace Taylor, gifted to Dustudio, 2012

Sumitra Manou

Sumitra passed away in the morning of Saturday 12 August at Jipmer hospital due to chronic health issues. She was 54.

Sumitra hailed from a Gandhian family of Thengampudur, Nagercoil district. She came to Auroville in 1990 as a trainee of a leadership camp and stayed at the old Ilaignarkal campus at Matrimandir Nursery. She became Aurovilian and married J. Manou, the then executive of Auroville Electrical Service, who passed away in 2006. After working at Aikiyam’s Kindergarten in New Creation, she joined Ilaignarkal Education Centre as a teacher for neo-literates and caretaker of Library and Assets. She became co-executive of Ilaignarkal Education Centre from 2010.

Sumitra’s remains were buried at the Auroville cremation grounds on August 13th.



Jürgen Klein

German-born Aurovilian Jürgen Klein left his body on August 14th in his room at Mahalakshmi Home at the age of 78. He had suffered a stroke a week earlier.

Jürgen first came to Auroville in 1968, following The Mother’s invitation to all men of goodwill to join the building of Auroville. Even though he had to spend many successive years in Germany, so that his daughter could complete her education there, Auroville was his true home and he finally settled here for good in 1993.

Jürgen is remembered for his undaunted work of building up and managing the Auroville Library in the early years, which he started in 1998. At that time, the library was located in the rather dingy basement of one of the unfinished pavilions of Bharat Nivas. Jürgen improved the setup of the library with more books, more shelves, a study section, better lights and cushions that invited one to plop down on the floor for relaxed reading. But the space was prone to flooding as the floor level was below the surrounding ground level. A pump was installed but often couldn’t work as, during flooding, electricity was switched off. On at least three occasions, he had to carry wet books to another building, many of which were unsalvageable.

Jürgen’s major achievements were cataloguing all the books according to the Dewey Decimal System and being the driving force behind the building of the new library. But notwithstanding all of his pushing and the obvious unsuitability of the Bharat Nivas basement, it was years before the community accepted the idea that a new library was necessary. When this finally materialised in November 2011, Jürgen resigned, leaving Auroville, as his successor said, “an incredible gift.”

Jürgen’s remains were buried at the Auroville Cremation and Burial Grounds on August 17th.



Mr. Srinivasmurty retires

On July 31st, Mr. Srinivasmurty, the former Under Secretary and a few times Acting Secretary of the Auroville Foundation, retired as an officer of Auroville Foundation. In an open letter to the community he expressed that his time in Auroville has been the most valuable phase of his life, “having met many a great sadhak from the Ashram and quite a few silent, unassuming beings though very much evolved, in Auroville”. He requested forgiveness from those he might have hurt, in thought, word or action and announced that as his and his family’s lives “are anchored in and interwoven with Auroville”, he will remain around. His service to the community over so many years is deeply appreciated.

New Deputy Secretary appointed

The Ministry of Home Affairs has appointed Ms. K. Swarnambika, IPS, as Deputy Secretary / Director of the Auroville Foundation. No information has been shared by the AVFO as to the nature of Ms Swarnambika’s new role. On 11th August 2023, just prior to the 15th August birth anniversary of Sri Aurobindo and the Indian Independence day, a circular from Mrs Swarnambika was sent to the community via the AVFO massbulletin service. The notice gave Aurovilians an ‘action plan’ to celebrate Independence Day – by hoisting the national flag, sharing selfies with the flag and changing their profile pictures on social media to include it.

Legal update

On August 11, Justice N. Seshasayee of the Madras High Court pronounced judgement in a case started by an Aurovilian challenging the decision of the Officer on Special Duty of the Auroville Foundation to reconstitute as many as 14 Committees or Units of the Foundation by a unilateral Office-Order, dated 12.04.2023. The hon’ble judge disagreed with the petitioner’s contention that the Governing Board does not have any independent power to make changes without taking the Resident Assembly into confidence. He stated that the constitution of various committees for efficient discharge of duties and functions of Act is left exclusively to the Governing Board and therefore judged that the contention of the petitioner that the Governing Board ought to have consulted the Residents’ Assembly before reconstituting the various committees is untenable.

Entry Service annual report

The Entry Service reported that in the period April 2022 to May 2023, 49 new Aurovilians joined, 10 Auroville youth turned 18, 113 Newcomers were admitted, as well as 3 Friends of Auroville and 2 relatives/spouses of Aurovilians. Throughout the year, the Entry Board interacted with applicants from all categories interested in joining the Auroville experiment. The Board conducted more than 250 sharings/interviews in collaboration with respective mentors. Several people in Savitri Bhavan and in Brahmanaspati Kshetram extended their assistance in helping local applicants understand the aims and objectives of Auroville and gain knowledge about the founders, the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. Non-Indian applicants were met individually to assist them in obtaining a Letter of Recommendation for their visa from the Auroville Foundation office. Despite the challenges posed by the post Covid-19 restrictions, the Aspiration Team provided valuable support to potential applicants, offering up-to-date information and resources to aid their integration into Auroville. The Welcome Talk and Yucca programme resumed monthly sessions from April 2022 onwards. In May 2023 the Youth Link prepared a programme for the Auroville youth who want to join Auroville as adults and conscious individuals. The programme was a successful venture for the participants

as well as for the facilitators. The Entry Board listed as one of its major challenges that in August 2022 it was removed from the 'auroville.org.in' domain without being given any explanation and had to create two new email addresses, e.g. auroville.entryservice@gmail.com and entry-service@auroville.services. The Board also observed that there are delays in obtaining Recommendation Letters for visa from the office of the Auroville Foundation for aspiring Newcomers of foreign origin; that there is a lack of passionate and qualified mentors from diverse backgrounds to support applicants and aid the Board's decision-making process; and that housing remains a major issue for applicants, as they must secure a long-term contract in Auroville to complete their newcomer process and become Aurovilians.

Residents’ Assembly decisions

The Residents’ Assembly Service (RAS) announced that the Residents’ Assembly of Auroville had approved two proposals with majority vote. The proposal that the RA can make an emergency Residents’ Assembly Decision (RAD) at a petition signed by at least 300 residents was approved by 402 participants (98% of all votes cast). The proposal that for a period of six months the Working Committee selected by the Residents’ Assembly (RA-WCom) can appoint, replace, or add members or constitute groups as needed to fulfil Auroville’s organizational needs and/or statutory functions as required by the Auroville Foundation Act (1988) in a speedy manner, was approved by 93% of the votes cast. This applies to the Funds and Assets Management Committee of the Residents’ Assembly, the Town Development Council of the Residents’ Assembly, the Land Board, the Entry Board (aka Admissions Committee), the Housing Board, the Budget Coordination Committee, Entry and Exit committee and any other group that is performing functions for the collective organization of Auroville. The RA-WCom will also have the power to constitute new groups as needed (e.g. an Exit Committee). The time frame of these interim appointments could be anywhere from 2 or 3 months (till the next selection process tentatively planned for end of Sept.) to 18 months, as specified in the RAD proposal. The RA-WCom later clarified that it equates the term 'Emergency Functions' at this time to be 'Crisis Management Functions' and that its first aim is to have a fully functional RA-FAMC for which it is reaching out to people about being appointed as interim members. It also clarified that these interim appointments are not intended to replace or reduce the importance of the Selection Process and the role of the Residents’ Assembly as a whole in selecting members for its working groups.

Food security work plan

After interactions with the farmers and directives from the Governing Board, The FO Farm Service and FO FAMC announced they have come up with a work plan for farming and food security in Auroville. They write that to enhance food production to meet the needs of Auroville we need a different approach to farming since a lot of the crops are not consumed in the community, which, meanwhile, purchases much food from outside. While education and awareness will play a role in prioritizing local food, there are also challenges of pricing, consistency and production planning which need to be looked at. At the same time, we must open our Auroville produce availability to nearby markets like in Pondicherry and Chennai, so that any excess can be distributed and the farms can start planning for higher production without the limitation of Auroville consumption or distribution. They are also working on a food processing service which can create more value for the farm produce and help support the farms to grow. Everybody with goodwill and interest is invited to join.

VIP Road: removal of farms.

In an open letter to the Farm Service, the FO FAMC and the Secretary of the Auroville Foundation, Auroville farmers raised their concern as to the announcement that three farm areas (Buddha Garden, Siddhartha and Shambala) are to be removed to make place for a road, parking lots and convenience facilities for a planned VIP road, a road which is not mentioned in the gazetted Master Plan. The farmers, while acknowledging that a bypass road around the village of Edayanchavadi may be needed, observed that the removal of the farms will be a loss for Auroville’s agricultural sustainability and productivity and so be in direct contradiction to statements made about wanting to increase agricultural production in Auroville. While not objecting to the road in principle, the farmers said that the proposal should have been discussed with the farm group, and that a proper plan for relocating these farms should be made so that their activities are not lost for the community.

VIP road: removal of dog shelter

The planned VIP road will also pass through the existing Auroville dog shelter. The dog shelter team were happy to inform the community that after productive discussions, a compromise could be worked out in which the new access road will be built without destroying any dog enclosures or important infrastructure of the shelter. By working together with the Auroville Foundation, Animal Husbandry, and Animal Welfare Board of India, they will start construction of a new Auroville dog shelter in a different location very soon. They also want to restart their 24-hour rabies rescue again, but in order to do so need to build a quarantine facility, as the Animal Welfare Board mandates that every shelter must be equipped with one. At present they are fundraising for this.

Matrimandir Lake tree removal

The RA TDC shared a report on the second phase of the Matrimandir Lake excavation and tree cutting. The excavation is taking place over approximately 4 acres of land and endangers around 125 trees including “a large number of very old Neem trees”. These actions, the report states, go against the National Green Tribunal (Southern Zone) judgement as well as stray from the recent practice whereby “the [Matrimandir] gardens have been designed through collaborative community participation”. A number of the old trees have been cut, and Aurovilians gathered to protect an old neem which had been standing by the Visitors viewing point. Its fate is not known but discussions concerning preserving some of the old trees are continuing. Jan, the engineer who designed the MM test lake , gave Aurovilians a tour of the site and stressed that for something as important as the Matrimandir Lake proper planning approval is necessary which studies all the factors. A document is being prepared that presents the concerns regarding the planned Matrimandir lake as discussed during the recent visits to the site, and proposes steps towards working out technically sound and harmonious solutions. Meanwhile Narad, who was entrusted by the Mother with the task of building the Matrimandir Gardens, has resigned from his work in the gardens, partly in protest against the planned removal of the Neem trees.

Thirukkural study group

Sri Aurobindo wrote that the Thirukkural, the most revered Tamizh text of the last 2000 years, “is gnostic poetry, the greatest in planned conception and force of execution ever written in this kind”. A study group will engage with the text as it is felt that such study can be very beneficial to Auroville. The sessions will be bilingual, a combination of Tamizh and English to make them more inclusive.

New planning programmes

Residents are invited to participate in a self-education programme designed to improve the community’s understanding of planning issues. This is part of a new initiative launched by the Dreamweaving core team (see page 6). Meanwhile, another of their initiatives, Dreamcatching, has begun on rooftops on Monday mornings, “to explore a more unifying action-oriented planning process for the development of Auroville.”

Art for Land 2023

On August 13, the Art for Land exhibition cum sale 2023 was inaugurated at the Unity Pavilion. Art for Land is a collaborative action of Aurovilians and friends of Auroville to raise funds for the purchase of the still-missing lands to consolidate Auroville’s Master Plan area. More than 120 Artists from Auroville, the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, the worldwide centers of Auroville International, and from all over India, generously donate their works in a wide range of media- painting, sculpture, ceramic, glassware, jewelry, prints and photographs . Pieces for sale can be seen at www.artforland.in

Auroville News podcasts

On August 5, 2023, Auroville Media Liaison, an activity approved by the Working Committee selected by the Residents’ Assembly, has launched the first episode of the new "Auroville News Podcast". Its purpose is to present the community and well wishers with regular updates about the unfolding of events in Auroville, and other important news related to Auroville’s current reality. It can be found on Spotify, Apple Music and YouTube. For more information visit <https://auroville.media/podcasts> or follow Auroville podcasts on Instagram, Facebook and Twitter.

Dog shelter limitations

The Auroville dog shelter team issued a warning that it is only dedicated to rescuing dogs that can no longer survive on the streets due to illness, age, or accidents and that the shelter’s current capacity does not allow it to accommodate healthy puppies which people find on the streets. The team warns moreover that most healthy puppies found on the streets have nurturing mothers, even if they look like being on their own, and that the mother’s milk is essential for their development. The dog shelter team has initiated a street treatment program despite the many challenging circumstances at the moment. When informed about healthy puppies living on the streets, it establishes schedules for visits to provide food and water on the spot, conduct health checks, and administer vaccinations to those of appropriate age. To ensure their survival, the team encourages Auroville residents and dog lovers capable of caring for these little ones to foster them for periods ranging from a few days to three months, offering them a brighter future. Once the new Auroville Dog Shelter has been built, the team will be able to house and care for puppies, providing a safe and nurturing space. An adoption program will also be developed to find them permanent homes. The dog shelter team is also actively pursuing a sterilization program for street dogs, which is the only long-term solution to controlling the canine population in the whole area. While awaiting approval from the Animal Welfare Board of India, a legal requirement for sterilizations of street dogs, it is fundraising to sterilize 1,000 street dogs in Auroville and the bioregion within a year. This requires an estimated Rs. 25 lakhs, or € 28,000.



| | | | | |
|--|--|---|---|--|
| About Auroville Today Auroville Today is an activity of the Kattidakalai Trust of the Auroville Foundation. The GST number is 33AAATA0037BXZV Contact: Auroville Today, Surrender, Auroville 605101, Tamil Nadu, India, Phone: +91.413.2622572. Email: avtoday@auroville.org.in . | Subscription information Subscription rates for 12 issues : India: Print + digital edition: Rs 710 Other countries: Print + digital edition: Rs 3,540 equivalent. Other countries: digital only edition: Rs 2,480 equivalent. | How to subscribe: 1. Through our website . Subscriptions can be ordered and paid on-line through https://avtoday.auroville.org http://www.auroville.com . 2. By cheque. Cheques must be payable to <i>Auroville Maintenance</i> , reference <i>Contribution</i> | <i>Auroville Today</i> , and need to be sent to Auroville Today, Surrender community, Auroville 605101, TamilNadu, India. 3. By bank transfer. Bank transfer are to be made to account # 163101000118 of Auroville Maintenance at ICICI Bank, Auroville Branch, IFSC Code ICIC0001631, Swift Code ICICINBBCTS, reference, reference: Contribution Auroville Today. | Editorial team: Alan, Carel, Chandra, Gita, Peter. Proofreading: Alan. DTP: Carel. Print Editing: Jean-Denis. Digital Editing: Krishna V Published by Carel Thieme on behalf of the Auroville Foundation. Printed by the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press, Pondicherry, and published at Surrender, Auroville 605101,Tamil Nadu. |
|--|--|---|---|--|

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

