

# Auroville Today

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## The Matrimandir Nursery and the Matrimandir Gardens

**"Mother asked me to write you and tell you that She wants you to prepare to come and build the Gardens of the Matrimandir." From a letter from Udar to Narad (Richard Eggenberger). In this article, Narad reminiscences about his life and the starting of the Matrimandir Nursery and Gardens.**

I have always had a deep connection to flowers. My first conscious remembrance of dealing with flowers was when, 5 years old, I pulled off the hyacinths my mother had planted in the flower-beds around our house and ran to her with the bouquet. Her face was a mixture of pain and happiness, seeing her child bring her flowers and knowing that her flower-beds had been destroyed! My connection became deeper when, at about the age of eleven, my father became a partner with a landscaper. Throughout my teenage years and afterwards during the summers when I was in college I helped him in designing landscapes and maintaining gardens and estates, installing and renovating lawns, pruning trees, and running a plant nursery.

When I was 17, I was guided from within to study Raja Yoga with a Pundit in New York City. I followed him to California where I met Dr. Judith Tyberg. She had been named Jyotipriya by Sri Aurobindo when, as a young woman, she came to India to find the secret of the Veda. Jyotipriya, who founded the East-West Cultural Centre in Los Angeles in 1953, told me about The Mother and said that she would send Her my photo and a sample of my handwriting. Incredibly, within days Mother sent Her reply: "Tell him he may come and stay as long as he likes." I came in 1961 and was accepted in the Ashram, given Prosperity, joined in athletics and even formed a choir that sang to Mother on Christmas Eve.

I did not stay long in the Ashram as my vital was too restless. I returned to the U.S. in 1962. Before returning, Mother wrote to me: "Go on boldly, following your way with joy and confidence, taking great care of one thing only, never to forget the Divine." She also wrote: "Keep living in you the spirit of consecration and all will be alright." Back in the U.S., I worked at different jobs, married Anie Nunnally, and did whatever I could for the Ashram. Through all these years Mother sent me beautiful birthday cards and blessed my life continually.

### An accident

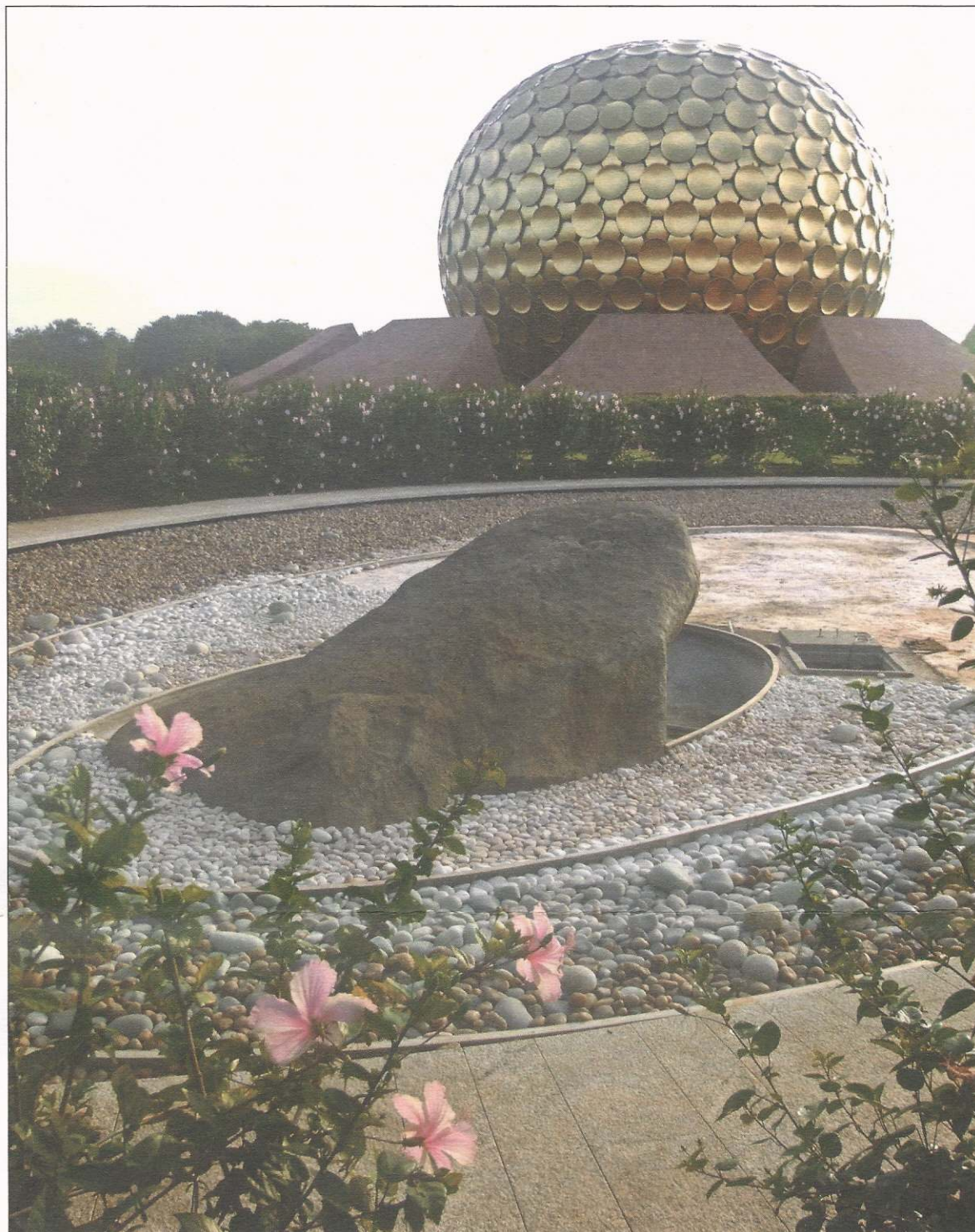
One winter during the mid 1960's, Anie and I were delivering organic bread to New York City from Connecticut. We were descending a steep hill in a blizzard and the roads were filled with ice. Two ladies had stalled their car perpendicular to traffic and were rambling around to find a flashlight. There was no way to stop or to miss them and we crashed head on into them. Anie's head went into the windshield and she required many

stitches. Mother was informed and said that she would have no scars. We recovered \$3,000.00 in damages and I wrote to Mother immediately saying that I wanted to send the money to Her. Mother replied: "Why don't you use the money to come for the inauguration of Auroville?" We purchased two tickets (exactly \$3,000.00) and came to the Ashram. We knelt at Mother's feet. When She first turned to Anie, She said: "This is not the first time we have met. You have been with me many times before, many, many times." Then Mother turned to me and said: "You don't want to come to Auroville in a few years? I feel you can do something there." I replied, "Yes, Mother, whatever is Your Will." Mother gave me permission to photograph the Inauguration, and the many rolls of slides I took are part of Auroville's collection.

We returned to the U.S. in March 1968. As I thought it would be long before Mother would call me to work for Auroville, I started work as a manager of a restaurant and became a partner in another. In this period I made a lot of money. Yet a day came when I began to hear a voice within saying, "Go to California and help Jyotipriya." I wrote to Mother but received no answer. After a month I wrote to Her again saying that the voice prompting me to go and help Jyotipriya had not stopped. Mother sent a telegram saying, "My answer to you was so positive that I thought I had written it!" I gave up my restaurant business and we left for California to assist Jyotipriya at the East-West Cultural Centre. To have some income I found employment in the finest garden centre in Beverley Hills, answering such questions from Hollywood stars as "Which end of a tuberous begonia is up?" The garden centre was a very profitable enterprise and the owner took a deep liking to me. As had no family left he called me into his office one day and said that he considered me his son and wanted to give me the business as he was getting too old to manage. Would I consider it? The business and the property were already worth millions of dollars. But Mother had other plans for me.

### Come to build the Gardens

One day, around the spring of 1969, I received a letter from Udar. He wrote: "Mother asked me to write you and tell you that She wants you to prepare to come and build the Gardens of the Matrimandir." Joy and gratitude filled my heart! I replied to Udar, asking if Mother wanted me to attend formal horticultural classes in college or engage in practical work before coming to Auroville. Mother replied that the best would be a combination of both. I quit my job at the garden centre, found a job with a large landscape design firm and took courses at the University of California, Los Angeles, in plant combination theory, toured some of the most beautifully landscaped homes in this wealthy area of California with well-



Work in the Garden of Existence is almost completed. A large rock emerges out of the earth, with a spring of water underneath. Its flowers express various aspects of 'Existence'.

known architects, and studied sub-tropical plant life, for until now all my experience had been with temperate climate species. How subtly Mother works! Moving to California introduced me to a wide range of plants closer to the climate of Auroville. I never would have been exposed to these species had we remained in New York.

Anie came first and we were given a place at Promesse. After settling all our affairs I came in December 1969 and we met Mother again. I believe it was on Anie's birthday, December 18. It was at this time that Mother spoke these words about the gardens. She said, "It must be a thing of great beauty, of such beauty that when men enter they will say, 'Ah, this is it' and they will experience physically and concretely, the significance of each garden. In the Garden of Youth they will know youth. In the Garden of Bliss they will know bliss, and so on. One must know how to move from consciousness to consciousness." As she said the last sentence Mother moved her hand in an ascending

spiral. Anie remembered one additional sentence of Mother. "It (the gardens) must manifest something of that which we are trying to bring down." Mother also said to me: "You will make some sketches and then show them to me and we will see together." At another time Mother said to me: "I would like you to begin with the Garden of Unity." I was thirty-one years old. The Matrimandir construction had not yet begun.

### The founding of the Nursery

Thus began a period of twelve years in Auroville in which I was guided to prepare a nursery to introduce, acclimatize and study hundreds of species of ornamental shrubs, trees, vines, and ground covers, to determine if they were of sufficient beauty to be introduced into the Matrimandir Gardens. The first task was to find an appropriate site for a nursery, as close as possible to the area that would be the Matrimandir, in the place called 'Peace'.

I found the best possible location, one that was protected in the west by a

canyon, on the south by a lower road and on the north by a wadi, although the whole area would require fencing. At the same time Amrit went separately and chose the same location. Mother gave Her blessings and we began. There were a number of mango trees that provided shade for delicate seedlings and helped to break the wind. You cannot know how difficult it was in those days when a month's work under the most trying conditions could be wiped out in an hour by a herd of goats or cattle. The goatherds purposely sent their animals in to graze. Around this time Mother also gave me the incomparable blessing to be the first to read *Savitri* in Auroville. I read each week for more than ten years.

### Naming the flowers

From 1970-1972, for a brief period, I sent flowers to The Mother which She would name according to their spiritual significance. She named more than 60 flowers from the Matrimandir Nursery.

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### To our readers

This 3-page issue of Auroville Today covers the months of May, June and July. The next issue will appear in August.

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AUROVILLE ARCHIVES

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## The Matrimandir Nursery and the Matrimandir Gardens

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Almost all the rare hibiscus bearing the name Auroville, which Mother later said should also be called *the New Creation* to expand the scope of the significance, came from Hawaii originally. They were acquired by the Lalbagh Gardens in Bangalore, with whom we had a wonderful collaboration, and shared with us.

In addition to the hibiscus Mother gave many luminous and powerful significances to flowers grown in the Matrimandir Nursery. Here are a few. 'Remembrance of Sri Aurobindo', 'Opening to Sri Aurobindo's Force', 'To Live Only for the Divine'. A friend recalls that the last flower I sent to Her before She said, in late 1972, "The time for naming flowers is over," is from the trees where Matrimandir workers now park their cycles and motorcycles, the flowers of *Pterospermum acerifolium*. Mother named them 'Realization of the Supramental Riches'.

During the early 1970's, Richard Pearson and I met three times a week in the Ashram laboratory and made the first botanical revision of the book of Mother's flower significances, *Flowers and Their Messages*. Then, together with Mary Helen and Mary Aldridge, we revised the text. During 2000-2001 Mary Helen and I did another complete revision of the botanical section for the two-volume edi-

responsibility, as is the care of the Banyan at the centre of Auroville which was also given into my keeping along with the Matrimandir Gardens.

### The Outer Gardens

In the early 1970s, I began planting hundreds of trees in the 'Outer Gardens', now known as 'The Park'. I did so in accordance with Roger Anger's plans. Vikas held the plans and showed me exactly where to plant. As there was much construction during the late 1970s and early 1980s, I could only plant in the west and south quadrants. My aspiration was to plant in the west trees whose flowers, foliage or bark represented the Mahasaraswati aspect of the Divine Mother, and in the south those which represented the Maheswari aspect. The species from tropical Australia and South America flourished and were the greatest successes but many others from tropical climates also adapted well. We corresponded with the Royal Botanic Garden in Scotland, the Royal Horticultural Society in England, went on collecting trips with the Chief Conservators of Forests in India and shared our seeds and our experiences with all. Today in the Park there are magnificent trees found nowhere else in India, growing alongside the many indigenous varieties we also planted. It is a great botanical collection and I pray that it will be cared for with the

nearly 400 flower significances on display. Buses were arranged from the Ashram and hundreds of Ashramites walked with Aurovilians through the Matrimandir Nursery.

Mary Helen and I made a world tour of botanical gardens in 1977 to collect the best species and hybrids of trees and shrubs for the Matrimandir Gardens. Wherever we went, all doors were open to us. No one ever refused to help with the Gardens. We reached Singapore so overloaded that the people looked at us with incredulity. Somehow we were able to contact Devan Nair, Mother's disciple, who was to become the third President of Singapore in 1981, and he had everything sent through with us having to pay any duty! During the 1970s we compiled an *Index Seminum* and thus began years of seed exchanges with more than 60 botanical gardens in 30 countries.

### Back to the USA and to Auroville again

In 1981 Mary Helen, her daughter Chali who was then of high school age, and I left Auroville and returned to the USA. This was shortly after the Government of India had promulgated the Auroville Emergency provisions Act in 1980. We had no prospect of work and only \$400.00. But Mother opened every door. I had written a thesis on *Plumeria*, which Mother had named *Psychological Perfection*, and had corresponded with the founder of the Plumeria Society of America, Elizabeth Thornton. She invited me to address their annual meeting about my experience in growing plumerias in Auroville's climate. Only a few days after arriving in Houston, Texas, to address the Society, I was offered a position where I continued my work and my studies of plants, especially sub-tropicals (as Houston is not at all unlike Auroville for five months of the year), owning and operating retail nurseries, building a major composting facility in Texas with two partners, formulating specialty soil mixes as Vice-President Marketing. During this time we also built a successful mail-order business in tropical plants, produced a major tropical plant catalogue and published two books, one on *Oleanders* and one on *Plumerias*. We moved to Georgia in 1995 where Mary Helen and I created our labour of love,

*Mother's Garden*, a garden with more than 1200 varieties, where month after month Nature reveals a breathtaking pageant of beauty. But during all these years, the contact with Auroville remained. Chali returned to live in Auroville in 1995, and in Mary Helen and I returned for a visit. This was the beginning of a renewed contact with Auroville. Many visits followed and we resumed work for the Matrimandir Gardens. Today, I spend about five to six months each year in Auroville and six months in the USA.

When I left Auroville in 1981, believing I would be gone for only a few months, I saw Nolini Kanta Gupta one last time. He blessed me and asked me only one question, "Who will take care of the Service Tree?" I promised that I would return to



Narad

see to its care. I can't describe how happy I am that the Divine has brought me back to keep my promise and to assist in building the Matrimandir Gardens once again.

Collecting plants for the Matrimandir gardens continues. On a visit to Florida in 2003 people offered more plants than I could carry. There were wonderful trees and shrubs, many exquisitely fragrant, now growing at the Lake Estate of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram to be propagated when they can be brought to the Matrimandir Gardens. I brought different varieties of the finest grass turf to Auroville. They were produced in 35 years of research by Dr. Wayne Hanna of the Agricultural Experimental Station in Tifton, Georgia, a southern area of Georgia, like Auroville known for its intense heat and humidity! In 2005 I also brought new varieties of lotuses and water lilies. They too have been planted at the Lake Estate, and as soon as the Garden of Wealth is ready we will have these beautiful plants available for the ponds. During the past four years I have concentrated on collecting warm climate bulbs which Mother has named. I felt these to be of great importance for the future of the Matrimandir Gardens and the surround Park area. I joined a 'Bulb Society' and brought with me each year dozens of varieties to acclimatize in the Nursery. Among them are *Crimum* which Mother named *Disinterested Work Done for the Divine* and *Zephyranthes* and *Habranthus*, which Mother called *Prayer* which is now one of the largest collections in the world with more than 86 species and hybrids. Lately, I have brought proper garden equipment to Auroville such as trommel screens for sieving soils, mowing machines, roto-tillers, power edgers, and proper tools for grading, digging, and numerous others.

The Matrimandir Gardens Nursery is a sacred place, blessed by the Mother. Its only purpose, however, is to introduce, acclimatize, evaluate and produce the finest plants for the Matrimandir Gardens. The work at the Nursery, the Matrimandir Gardens and the Park is a full-time labour and must be attended to as one's sadhana. It is in this spirit that I continue to be involved with the Matrimandir.

As told to Carel

*Auroville Today* published interviews with Narad on the Banyan and Outer Gardens in March 2004 (issue # 182) and in March 2007 (issue #217), when he spoke about the varieties of grasses and other plants he was bringing to the gardens.



Narad unpotting a plant with other Aurovilians

tion of the flower book that Lilo Burk from the Ashram Archives worked on for many years. [This book was published in 2000 under the title *The Spiritual Significance of Flowers*. See AVToday # 133, February 2000, eds.]

### The Service Tree

In the early 1970s, after a cyclone had broken a huge limb of the Service Tree at Sri Aurobindo's Samadhi and I had helped the young men of the Ashram make a proper cut, Mother sent me a blessings packet through Parichand, the Ashram gardener, with Her instructions to care for the Service Tree for the rest of my life. Since then, every time I have worked on the Service Tree, I have experienced *Darshan*. It is at once a supreme grace and a great

highest consciousness. Botanists such as Father Matthew (now deceased) have come at the request of Walter at Shakti and have identified many of the species, as all the original data has been lost.

Anie left Auroville to return to the U.S in 1971. Then Mary Helen and I began a collaboration of 31 years until her passing in 2002. All through the 1970's we travelled the length and breadth of India, occasionally accompanied by Alan Klass who had devoted himself to building the orchid section. Each year on Mother's birthday we held a Flower Show. Ashramites and Aurovilians all participated. Pottery sections made beautiful vases, others skilled in the art of calligraphy made cards with Mother's significance and the botanical name of the flower and everyone brought flowers. One year we had

## A pool takes shape in the Garden of Consciousness

On Feb 11th, starting at 6 am, a 14-hour concreting began to cast the curving pool in the outer part of the Garden of Consciousness. With some 60 people working together from early morning until 8 at night, the base and sides for the 60 square metre pool were cast. It was wonderful to be in one of those chetty lines again, tossing pans of concrete through the air for your neighbour to catch and pass on. For decades at Matrimandir this human chain has been a sure way to strengthen links between us. People who otherwise might not have shared a moment or worked together at all become linked immediately through the centring force of the Matrimandir – to each other and, more importantly, to the goal we are all pursuing here. This goal is something we do not often speak about, but it is always there, underlying all that we do beneath our daily activities and surface concerns. It is what we are all really working for here in Auroville.

It was a wonderful day, refreshing, binding, and accomplishing too the very practical task of making concrete the centre piece of the Garden of Consciousness. At the larger end of the pool a set of concrete pillars now rise up about a meter above the level of the pond's top rim. From these a fountain of water will flow down into the pool and then overflow the edge at one point, cascading down a series of seven steps to the lowest point in the garden. The seven steps represent the seven levels of consciousness of our being.



The innermost section of this garden has already begun to receive its plants for, as the summer approaches, it will become too hot and dry to transplant more from our nursery. The flowers that have been planted here so far include three varieties of

*Crossandra*. Mother named the orange variety *Supramental influence in the Subconscious*, the bright yellow one *Supramental Light in the Subconscious* and the pink one *Psychic light in the Subconscious*. And on the outer edge of the raised earth beyond the pool we have planted two *Champaka* shrubs – *Divine Smile* (white) and *Supramentalized Psychological Perfection* (golden yellow), as well as another small tree with the significance, *Supramental Action*.

Still to come is the flower that the Mother had selected to signify this garden, the large double golden-yellow Hibiscus which she named *Supramental Consciousness*. Her comment on this flower: "Gloriously awake and powerful, it is luminous, sure of itself, infallible in its movements". These Hibiscus shrubs will be planted in a band along one edge of the pool.

Over the next months the pool's inner surface will be clad with green stone slabs while the fountain and the seven steps leading towards the Matrimandir will feature beautiful white granite brought from Krishnagiri, near Bangalore.

From the Matrimandir Newsletter April 2011



# The Matrimandir Nursery today

“When I joined the Matrimandir Nursery six years ago, the work of manifesting the Matrimandir Gardens had not yet started,” says Tina. “That was always the difficulty for those who worked in the Nursery: that they didn’t really know what to concentrate on. Ever since Narad started the Nursery in the early seventies, an amazing collection of beautiful trees and shrubs has been collected, including many plants that may not be used in the Matrimandir Gardens, and the only thing the nursery workers could do was to maintain and expand the collection. This has made the Nursery is a horticultural treasure trove.” She points at a tree. “That is an *Amherstia nobilis*, also called the *Queen of Flowering Trees* or *Pride of Burma*. It is quite rare. It is even more special that it is flowering and growing in our climate. But this tree has not been named by The Mother.”

Ever since Tina joined Auroville in 1978, she has been involved with plants. Together with her husband Walter, she set-up the Shakti nursery; then she got involved with an international seed exchange programme, until that was prohibited by the Indian Government; she then took part in seed collection in Indian forests, till that too was forbidden by the Government; and then joined the Matrimandir Nursery.

“Right now the work of the Nursery is producing the plants we need in the Gardens,” she says. “The Matrimandir will be surrounded by 12 gardens and a Unity Garden. Mother said to Narad that those who visit a Garden should be able to experi-



*Amherstia nobilis*, Queen of Flowering trees

ence the significance of each garden. In the Garden of Existence they should experience existence, bliss in the Garden of Bliss, and so on. So we try to find those plants that correspond to the inner meaning of each of those gardens.” Does this mean that only those plants that Mother has explicitly named will be put in each garden? “Mostly so,” says Tina. “For example, the Garden of Existence has about 15 different plant varieties. The main one is a light-pink hibiscus, *Hibiscus rosa-sinensis*, which Mother named *Psychic power of Existence*. Other plants are *Ixora chinensis*, which Mother named *Psychic*

*Aspiration*; Crape jasmine (*Tabernaemontana divaricata*) which Mother called *Mental Purity*; and *Asparagus densiflorus ‘Sprengeri’* which Mother called *Spiritual Speech*. The connection of these plants to ‘Existence’ is found in the comments which Mother gave on these flowers, which we find in the book *Flowers and Their Messages*. Small unobtrusive notice boards are planned to help the visitor understand the meaning of the plants and ‘experience’ each Garden.

Like the Garden of Existence, the other Gardens too may have about 15 plant species each. “An exception is the Garden of Bliss, where we have only 5 different varieties, but we are trying to find some more,” says Tina. She explains that, as The Mother has only named about 900 plants, in some cases they have to rely on their own insights. Can she ‘feel’ the vibration of the flower? “Yes, to a certain extent,” is the hesitant answer. “There really is something with the flower where you can say, ‘Ah! Voila!’” She mentions that each garden – except the Garden of Wealth and the Garden of Perfection – will have their own specific hibiscus variety. “Mother has named many varieties of hibiscus, many of them with the name of Auroville included. There is even one hibiscus which she specifically called *Flower of Auroville*, a large salmon pink hibiscus. She also named it *Beauty of Supramental Love*.”

The Nursery has to provide each plant in the desired quantities. For example, 100 hibiscus plants were required for the Garden of Existence, and about as many of each of the other species. “Such large numbers of plants are nowhere available,” says Tina. “So we grow most plants ourselves. Many hibiscus varieties, moreover, are quite difficult to propagate. Only some plants, such as asparagus and some grasses, we get from nurseries outside.”

What about all the plants which won’t find a place in the gardens, such as the *Flower of Auroville* or the orchids (*Attachment to the Divine*) or the many *Temple Tree* (*Plumeria*) varieties which Mother named *Psychological Perfection*? “We don’t know yet,” says Tina. “They may perhaps find a place in the Unity Garden or in the Rose Garden near the amphitheatre, or even in the Park. Our concentration is now on creating the 12

Gardens; afterwards we will look into finding a place for the many other plants. No decisions are being made at present.” Tina adds that, as a side activity, the Nursery sells specific plants. “We have a collection of 220 varieties of Temple Trees, some of them quite rare. Collectors sometimes order cuttings or plants.” Plant sales, however, are limited.

Now that the building of the Gardens has started, the Nursery has a long future ahead. “Even when the Gardens have fully manifested, the Nursery will continue to grow and supply plants for replacement and for other areas around the Matrimandir,” says Tina. As a spin-off, she mentions that the Nursery has developed its own insect-repellents. “Margarita, who is specialised in probiotics, has designed ‘pucci po’ against mealy bugs



*Flower of Auroville*, also called *Beauty of Supramental Love*

and other insects. It works quite well. She has also developed two organic fertilizers.” She smiles. “We may put them on the market.” But for now, she says, more people are needed with gardening experience. “We have only 3 Aurovilians and 8 staff members working here, and some volunteers. But we could use more knowledgeable gardeners.”

The Garden of Existence has now been planted and the Nursery is concentrating on providing plants for the Gardens of Consciousness and Bliss. “We are planning ahead, and even visit nurseries outside if we think that we won’t be able to deliver all the plants on time,” says Tina. “Now the purpose for the Nursery has come into being and that gives us all great joy.”

*In conversation with Carel.*

*The spiritual significance of nearly 900 flowers given by The Mother can be found at <http://www.blossomlikeflower.com>.*

## The Flowers in the Garden of Existence

The Matrimandir Nursery has planted 10 flowering plants in the Garden of Existence. Here are their botanical names and the names and description as given by The Mother.

**Hibiscus: Psychic Power in Existence.** Manifold, imperious, irresistible in its comprehensive sweetness.

**Ixora: Aspiration in the Physical.** Manifold, simple and joyous.

**Ixora chinensis: Psychic Aspiration.** Constant, regular, organised, at the same time gentle and patient – it resists all opposition, overcomes all difficulties.

**Pentas lanceolata (pink): Psychic Light in the Physical Movements.** The first step towards the transformation of the physical.

**Pentas lanceolata (red): Psychic Light in the Material Movements.** The essential condition for transformation.

**Lantana: Emotional Beauty in the Cells.** Seeking and emanating all the emotions of beauty.

**Rhoeo spathacea: Divine Presence.** It hides from the ignorant eye its ever-present magnificence!

**Hedychium: Satchitananda.** Strong and pure, it stands erect in its creative power.

**Portulaca: Sri Aurobindo’s Compassion.** Innumerable, always present and efficacious in every instance.

**Setcreasea purpurea: The Vital Governed by the Presence.** The vital force is made peaceful and is disciplined by the Divine Presence.

# Searching for pebbles for the Garden of Existence

Several members of the Matrimandir gardens design team walk under the noon sun through a deep canyon cut into the red earth of Tamil Nadu. They are looking for pebbles for the Garden of Existence. The canyon is truly impressive, considering that it is entirely man-made. The traders in earth and gravel have carved out a huge hole in the flat plain near the village of Kurumbampet close to Ousteri Lake. The canyon is about 70 metres deep and 300 metres wide at places, and extends for almost a kilometre. Looking up at the rim, one can see the edges of a forest of cashew trees that hang, some of them precariously, over the edge of this man-made canyon; in several places the vertical walls have collapsed, resulting in fan-shaped piles of debris tumbling into the space below.

The team from Matrimandir is looking for ancient beds of river pebbles, or perhaps seashore pebbles, that now lie embedded deep

in the earth. We spot several thin layers, running like ribbons through the dense red earth on the walls of the canyon.

At one edge of the excavation, huge machines are scraping the cliff walls and pushing the loosened earth into piles, from where it will be loaded on to an almost continuous stream of lorries carrying their loads slowly up narrow tracks to the top of the canyon and away to customers all over Tamil Nadu – to be used as landfill mostly.

Where there is a pebble-rich layer, the material is kept aside and a team of workers slowly screens it by hand, carrying chetties of pebble-filled earth and throwing them against tilted metal screens. This is a tough job down here in the excavation under the hot sun.

The team from Matrimandir looks at the scene, in awe of the physical gash that man has cut into the earth, at the continual movement of the lorries and at the hard lives of the workers here.

There are beautiful touches too, for in the deepest parts of the canyon layers of finely veined and richly-colored clays are exposed. Fragile to the touch, they are captivating to see, with deep purple layers less than a centimeter thick alternating with soft browns.

Finally we climb out of the excavation and go to examine the stockpiles of cleaned pebbles stored at ground level. Dealers show off their stocks to us, like vendors in a vegetable market, with many different piles of carefully-graded sizes, ranging from the smallest (under a centimetre), to the largest (about 10 centimetres in diameter). It is the latter that we are looking for to fill a part of the flat oval shape surrounding the large rock at the center of the garden of Existence.

Actually, we have been searching most of south India by e-mail for different suppliers of pebbles for this garden work. Several companies have sent samples to us, and our design



The canyon near Kurumbampet

room itself has begun to resemble a pebble beach!

India has an endless supply of natural mineral wealth, as we are just beginning to discover. Already we have stones ranging from the most dazzling white, smooth-tumble quartz pebbles to the honey-colored naturally round stones from streams in the Himalayas, and many more. And we have recently received samples of a wonderful variety of rocks from the beaches of Bali, Indonesia. The gardens of Matrimandir will make use of the most beautiful stones we can find and will surely have a collection of pebbles gathered from all over the earth.

But for the moment we are starting locally, with these excavated pebbles from the ground of Kurumbampet. Along with them, in the garden of Existence we will use about 12 tons of beautiful off-white pebbles from the Himalayas and then, just close to the large rock itself, we will use some of the special stones from Bali.... Who knows? Over the years our selection may be changed and refreshed as new collections come to hand for, as we have said several times, these gardens will be evolutionary by design, so that they can grow more beautiful and meaningful as time goes by.

*From the Matrimandir Newsletter April 2011*



Placing the pebbles in the Garden of Existence



# Discovering the soul of one's nation

In early March, the International Zone Group invited Aurovilians to participate in a workshop entitled 'Aligning one's soul with the soul of your nation'. The facilitators were Soleil Lithman, who introduced the Hladina Method to Auroville some years ago, and Wolfgang Schmidt-Reinecke, ex-chairman of AVI and AVI Germany and presently writing a book *The Evolution of our National Identity*.

**Auroville Today:** *The International Zone has been at a low ebb for many years. Some Aurovilians cannot see the relevance of national pavilions as they feel that national identities need to be surpassed in favour of a more international identity. Others would like to explore their nation's soul but have no idea about how to go about it. How would you address these blockages to the development of the International Zone?*

**Wolfgang:** Many people here cannot relate to the idea of the nation and I think that in this Auroville is mirroring a world dilemma. Nobody seems to know how to handle nations these days. Modern philosophers say they are merely political inventions, others prefer to talk about entities like the European Union. Yet many people still feel there is something true behind the concept of nations, that they represent a deeper identity.

**How would you answer those Aurovilians who say that we are here to achieve human unity and that the quickest way to do this is to discard old national identities and develop a more universal consciousness?**

**Soleil:** The first step in the integral yoga is to discover your own psychic being, to distinguish it from your ego. You are then asked to integrate the rest of your being around it, and this becomes the springboard to higher consciousness. As a therapist who has been working with people on the spiritual path for almost 30 years now, I see that people who haven't first made the contact with their inner core often get into trouble when they contact higher states because there is no place where they can integrate these very advanced states of consciousness.

You can use the same analogy for the nation. When I look at my nation, the U.S., the first thing I see is its ego and all the things that could have been done in a much more progressive and enlightened way. So, of course, I want to run away from my identity with that nation. But when we get in contact with the real psychic being of the nation, when we touch its essential nature, we find something beautiful and precious. At the same time, we realize that the souls of all nations are beautiful. This is a very powerful experience of unity.

Once the psychic being of our nation has been identified it gives a sense of gratitude because we can see how those qualities have nurtured our own evolutionary journey. We also want to help its true nature come forward and offer its gifts to the world. I think this is why Sri Aurobindo gave the nation so



Soleil and Wolfgang

much attention. He sees that it is the divine intention that one day all nations will manifest their soul essence and together they will form a bouquet where each flower will be beautiful, unique, yet the whole will be more than the sum of the parts.

**Wolfgang:** It's true that if the International Zone becomes a place for displaying national stereotypes and nationalistic fervour it would be a step back for Auroville. So it's important that we find a new way of looking at the national souls, that we no longer see them as 'mythical', fixed entities but, as Sri Aurobindo pointed out, as evolutionary beings.

Take, for example, Germany in the 1920s. Sri Aurobindo wrote that by that time Germany had undergone a certain development which had prepared it for entering what he termed the 'subjective' phase of its evolution. It had developed a capacity to handle the earth materially while, at the same time, keeping a spiritual dimension. However, the fact that a nation's soul has achieved a certain development is no guarantee that it cannot slip back, which, of course, is what happened in Germany's case.

**Most people understand the 'soul' as being something fixed, divinely ordained from birth. How can it evolve?**

**Soleil:** Sri Aurobindo says that each one of us has an unembodied soul that is unchanging and unique. It is the same for a nation. There is the soul of a nation which has basic unchanging qualities and its evolving soul or psychic being which is manifesting these qualities more and more.

**What about the people who have immigrated to a country? Do they contribute to the evolution of that nation's soul?**

**Soleil:** I think the soul of a nation is like a morphogenetic field. When you go to live in a different nation from your own, that nation will call out qualities within you and will promote your own evolutionary development. At the same time, you will be bringing something from your own culture to develop that nation's soul.

**Wolfgang:** The nation is like a support system which helps the development of the individual and the individual's development helps the nation. In this context, individual freedom matters a great deal; political liberties have an evolutionary role.

**If somebody wants to discover their nation soul, how can they do it?**

**Wolfgang:** Sri Aurobindo and Mother gave us the basic key to understanding the importance of the national soul, but they didn't provide a manual about how to access it. Fortunately, we feel that there are tools available now, like the Hladina Method and Spiral Dynamics, which can allow us to do this, both conceptually and practically.

**Soleil:** The Hladina method has been used in Auroville for six years now and over two hundred Aurovilians have experienced the 'layers of the heart' process [see *Auroville Today* of May, 2007, no. 219, for an explanation of the Hladina method. eds.]. In the workshop we used this as the starting point because, although you can experience your psychic being in thousands of ways, the layers of the heart process, which begins with the physical heart and then takes you behind it to discover the subtle energies and bodies there, is a very good way of distinguishing through the body the outer self from the individualized psychic being or essential self.

On the second day we applied a similar

approach to discovering the soul of one's nation. The participants worked in pairs to identify the core qualities of their nation's soul as well as its shadow side – every nation, like an individual, has aspects which that nation doesn't want to look at but which have to be acknowledged, purified and reintegrated. Then we brought together the essential qualities of the nation with the individual's psychic being. Most people were surprised by the profundity of this experience and by the sense of tenderness and gratitude they felt for their nation soul which they suddenly understood had supported them in their soul's evolution. It felt like meeting a soul-mate.

The final step was to take this new understanding forward. We did a walking meditation during which I asked them to decide what the very next step would be in the practical expression of their nation's essential qualities in Auroville. That's where we left it.

**The problem which has plagued attempts in the past to characterise the nation soul is the tendency to come up with stereotypes and clichés. How do you prevent this happening?**

**Wolfgang:** It's all a matter of the state of consciousness from which the person is speaking. Careful preparation is necessary, that's why the first day is devoted to the layers of the heart so participants can access the truth of the body and speak from there: the body doesn't lie. We don't claim that people came up with a comprehensive list of all the qualities and shadows of their nation, but we feel that there is a truth in this process, that what people say in that moment is real. And, certainly, there were no clichés, no stereotypes.

**So what happens next?**

**Soleil:** The participants asked us to make the materials and tools used in the workshop available since awareness of the national souls needs to be developed in the community. One of the ideas, for example, is to use these tools with Newcomers. We feel that The Mother is really supporting this work, so if anybody anywhere wants us to guide this process for them we are happy to do it. We already did a workshop in Colombia and we are now taking it to Berlin. It's not just for the Aurovilians!

At the same time, I feel that Auroville has this unique possibility to reflect back to the world the souls of the nations through the pavilions. In this way, Auroville could provide an impetus towards making the United Nations what it is meant to be: a true unity of nations based upon the understanding that every country, however small and unconsidered on the world stage, has its unique divine essence.

**Wolfgang:** This is the level at which we can find each other, at which human unity is possible. This is the work we are called to do. In fact, I think Auroville is realizing part of its own soul through the manifestation of the International Zone.

*From an interview by Alan*

*For further information contact wjsr@gmx.net*

## Thoughts on the International Zone

I feel moved to try to put into words what I feel about the development of the International Zone in the hope of finding a unified approach to the problems confronting us. Sri Aurobindo wrote, 'from thought we must leap up to sight' and as we continue to search our hearts as to whether the recent proposals truly reflect the Mother's original vision and purpose, this unified approach may begin to emerge. We in Auroville International, as well as the Aurovilians themselves, have not yet sufficiently explored possible alternatives in the light of a more profound understanding of the Mother's lifelong work for the transformation of consciousness.

The current plan, conceived in purely architectural terms, offers us a jigsaw puzzle of geometrical shapes, in the hope that 'research' will somehow reveal the possibility of expressing the soul qualities of a nation through these shapes. Architecture alone can never answer the need for a living, vibrant environment. There is real danger in expecting it to do so. Do we really want the International Zone to be a giant 'garden of remembrance' where stylised monuments enshrine the 'symbolic' remains of nation souls? I hope, I pray, that we can do better than this.

Since the emergence of a new consciousness is the primary reason for the creation of Auroville, it follows that we need to ask ourselves, at every stage of the planning process, this most important question: How will the future International Zone contribute directly to that one primary aim? Unless we find at least the glimmer of an answer, all the debates, plans, projects, will come to nothing; consensus will not be achieved; the true International Zone will remain where it is, a bright dream in the subtle dimension, and it will not manifest.

The Mother's consciousness, open at every level to the evolutionary need in nature as in humanity, received moment by moment all that could be corrected, perfected or transformed.

This was her work as she herself has described it. In every human collective where the development of a 'nation soul' has taken place over time, that too has been part of the evolutionary process and therefore a portion of her work to be reflected in Auroville. It is not for nothing that the International Zone occupies such a large proportion of the geographical area of the emerging city!

All of us are shaped by the culture in which we were born and grew up, whether we are conscious of it or not. Aurovilians bring their 'nation soul' as a potential gift to the new collective consciousness, and the more they are aware of what it is that they bring, the more they are able to refine and perfect it in the force-field of Auroville, the more valuable that gift becomes. The International Zone as conceived by the Mother was to serve as a permanent reminder to future generations of Aurovilians of the offering that they themselves are called upon to make by virtue of their individual ancestral inheritance – and this is but one aspect of the International Zone, one of the 'bright hints' left by the Mother, and it has been overlooked in the recent planning process.

In its outward-looking aspect, the International Zone wants to be the world's gateway and portal to the New City and will reflect all the values that Auroville has and will embrace. It will reflect the free exuberance and limitless creativity of evolving Nature and the playfulness, wit, inventiveness and spirit of adventure of evolving mankind. Those who come to Auroville will discover their own national spirit represented there at its highest and most typical, so from the beginning they will feel welcome and already a part of what is happening. An idealistic view – yes, but one that is achievable if Auroville wants it.

*Sonia Dyne*

*Sonia Dyne has been active in Auroville International for many years and is a frequent visitor to Auroville.*

## The participants' experience

**Jaya:** We all found the workshop very useful. The Pavilion groups have always had the discovery of their nation soul as a central theme, there has been research and glimpses through some of the cultural events, but it has always been difficult to get at.

This tool helped us get deeper. Personally, I found it difficult to align myself with the soul of Sweden, where I was born. But then I remembered that my father is Danish, that I actually carried a Danish passport till I was 21, so I felt I had to look at a wider Scandinavian identity for myself. This is not completely new to me, but it is something I am now working more consciously on.

**B:** I happened to be the volunteer for the method used to access states of the psychic. That turned out to be such a profound experience that it was clear this workshop offered a real process for the planning and development of the International Zone. To access a "nation soul" only a soul process will work and that was aptly demonstrated.

The contentious history of the International Zone, which has somewhat mirrored global politics, can hopefully now move to another level and the blocked development of the Zone be over.

**Peter A:** For me the workshop clarified my connection between my individual soul and the German soul in the sense that I have this addiction to unity and harmony and I see that for Germany this is also the case.

Germany is torn apart by its recent history and it is surrounded by ten other countries, so because it has no strong identity of its own it is always trying to unify, to bring integrity.

But first it has to discover its own soul, to unify itself: you can't jump straight into internationalism. Similarly with me, I have to find the unifying element in myself or else I will remain spaced out. This workshop was a strong hint about what I must do on my very personal journey through the labyrinth of life.



# Matagiri: Mother's Mountain

**M**atagiri is a key centre of the Integral Yoga in the U.S. Established in 1968 by Sam Spanier and Eric Hughes, it covers 42 acres of the Catskill Mountains near Woodstock, NY. Over the years, it has hosted many Aurovilians, Ashramites and other seekers for retreats and seminars. Now there are plans to extend the facilities. Julian and Wendy Lines, who have been stewards of the center for the past 15 years, talk about Matagiri past, present and future.

**Auroville Today:** For many years Matagiri has had a special place in the hearts of people doing the integral yoga in the U.S. Why is this?

**Wendy:** Like Auroville, it's sacred land. It is land that has been consecrated to The Mother and Sri Aurobindo by its founders, Sam and Eric, and many people feel their presence there. Mother blessed this project and for 40 years people have been coming here as a place of pilgrimage. It's a place for reflection, a place where people come for satsang or simply to connect with others who are involved with integral yoga. Eric is proud of his library which contains a copy of almost every book that has been written about Mother and Sri Aurobindo and there's an archival section which has letters to devotees from The Mother. We also have Sri Aurobindo's relics here, which makes it a very important place, particularly for Indian devotees.

**Julian:** Sam was a visionary. In 1962 he met Mother. They meditated together and he felt that Mother had planted a seed in him. Mother told him, "You will be a link between East and West." A few weeks later, while sitting with Maggi Liddchi Grassi, Sam had a vision – like 'watching a slide-show' – about a future centre he would establish in the U.S. He had started with a small centre in his Manhattan apartment with his friend, Eric. But after this experience, he told Eric, "Now I know what I have to do. I don't know where, I don't know how,



PHOTOS: COURTESY JULIAN

Matagiri in Fall 2010

agent hadn't even seen himself. They had just pulled into the driveway – the house could not be seen – when Sam heard Mother's voice. "This is it. Tell him you'll take it." When Sam told him, the agent was bewildered. "But Mr. Spanier, you haven't even seen it yet!" It was an inner *adesh*.

**Wendy:** It was a log cabin with 42 acres stretching up the hillside. Mother approved the name for the new centre: Matagiri, 'Mother's Mountain'. Over the years, the community there has ebbed and flowed while literally thousands of guests came to visit. At the beginning it was very Ashram-oriented. Ashram handmade paper and incense was sold and a small residential community established itself. The format followed was the Ashram one: everybody was expected to live a celibate life. However, many of the young people drawn there hadn't done yoga before and found this too difficult and left. At the end of his life, Sam said that if he had to do it again, he would allow couples. The fact that in his old age everybody had gone, that is, before Julian and I came, was a disappointment to him.

**Julian:** What interests me is to see how the Auroville work in America has moved from being outside the Sri Aurobindo centres to being inside them. Matagiri and the Lodi Ashram are both examples of this. Over the years many Aurovilians have visited, given talks and participated in work. We always

love to welcome them.

**Wendy:** We've always considered the Ashram and Auroville as spiritual family. Even when there have been tensions Matagiri has always tried to be an integrative force. Matagiri had a big outreach by publishing the newsletter, *Collaboration*, and we

still have books and DVDs available, even though Auromere and Lotus Light are distributing on a much bigger scale.

**Julian:** Now we are planning to expand the facilities here and are awaiting building permission for a new building which we've designed. It will include a multi-purpose yoga room, guest rooms, a communal kitchen and a caretaker apartment. In this building we are trying to manifest the best of the German Passiv Haus technology to ensure that the cost of heating and cooling is minimal and we have the smallest carbon footprint: we want it to be a model of ecological living. We estimate the project will cost \$900,000 with survey and engineering work and we've just begun fundraising.

**What lies behind the decision to expand?**

**Wendy:** We want Matagiri to grow and evolve to fulfill the needs of the Sri Aurobindo community in America in the future. There is an increasing need for a place of reflection and retreat in people's lives.

**Julian:** We want to fulfill Sam and Eric's dream of making Matagiri a strong centre of the yoga in the U.S. Sam was a visionary, intuitive artist and seeker and Eric has this tremendous scholarship and deep understanding of The Mother and Sri Aurobindo, so it's a wonderful foundation to grow on. We want to welcome people and allow them to understand the positive evolutionary vision of Sri Aurobindo and Mother.

Also I think there is a new wave in the integral yoga experience: the spark is in terms of things which can be directly experienced, like the Awareness through the Body workshops offered by Aloka and Joan. We would very much like Matagiri to offer these trainings.

**Wendy:** I've always wanted to draw in more young people and activities like *Awareness through the Body* are a good way of doing this.

**Would you like to re-establish a community at Matagiri?**

**Wendy:** The building we are planning is not big enough to host a permanent community. But we realize we might have guests who will stay a couple of weeks or even longer.

**Julian:** Much of our 42 acres is on the mountain and too steep to be practical for building. We are also on the New York City watershed and there are very strict zoning regulations. But there's a public camping site nearby and there are plenty of bed-and-breakfast places in the area so we will be able to host seminars and retreats.

**Wendy:** Who knows what the future might hold? People might come and buy or rent little houses in the area. It could grow into a mini-Auroville. This is just stage one.

**Julian:** There has always been this America-India connection, the whole thrust of Indian spirituality which has influenced America for the past 200 years starting with Emerson and Thoreau, and we see ourselves as part of this sweep of history. Also I feel that the stronger we are at Matagiri, the more we will be able to present and connect resources with Auroville. With its proximity to New York City and to Woodstock, people who are identified with this new consciousness are naturally attracted to this area. Woodstock has been a place of pilgrimage for over a hundred years, not just since the Festival. People are looking for natural beauty and also for something new that is coming down. So I really feel it's a blessing to be at this place at this time, doing this work.

*From an interview by Alan*

For more information on Matagiri and the fundraising appeal see [www.matagiri.org](http://www.matagiri.org)



Wendy and Julian

but this is what has to be done." Some years later he started looking for a place in the Catskill mountains in the Woodstock area. One day, having been shown many houses, none of which suited, the real estate agent told him he would show him one more place which hadn't been listed yet and which the

## COMMUNITY

### "Take Back the Night" in Auroville.

**O**ver thirty five years ago in America, women started to stand up and speak out against sexual violence and harassment under the banner of 'Take Back the Night'. During those years, Take Back the Night became known internationally as a visible way to take a stand against sexual violence, specifically violence against women.

Recently, Irene, a long term guest and friend of Auroville and the Women's Safety Task Force (WSTF) of Auroville Health Services (AVHS), organized such an event for the first time in Auroville. It was a response to the increased cases of harassment and violence towards women in and around Auroville.

The original idea was a candlelight march for human rights from the

Visitor's Center to the Matrimandir, returning to the Visitor's Center for music, poetry readings, chanting, intermingled with discussions and sharing stories. Unfortunately, due to the upcoming elections in India, the Working Committee suggested cancelling the walk as it could be construed as being 'political' and this request was honoured by the organizers.

In its place, a group of women, men, and children met at the Visitor's Center. The event opened with a guided meditation to remember and send love and healing to those that have suffered and those that brought on the suffering. As the meditation was taking place, a few men from Svaram workshop tapped and stroked chimes and bells which were encircling us and this created a beautiful vibration for the beginning of an evening full of events.

After the meditation we walked over to the stage where Sangara had arranged to sing Carnatic songs about female goddesses. The songs were beautiful. Then Alice from the WSTF explained why services such as a 24/7 hotline, a website with articles and personal experiences, and a counselling service are needed – and the importance of women being available to assist other women who have been victimised as usually the last person they want to deal with is a man. Members of the WSTF are also available to fill out an incident report and take the victim to Auroville Security and the police station when filing an official report.

Alice spoke about some of the cases they have been involved with over the two years of the WSTF's existence. In one case a few members went directly to the District Superintendent

of Police in Villapuram and within two days the culprits were arrested. They also agreed to patrol the main roads in the evenings.

Rani from the WSTF then spoke about the myths surrounding the reasons why the attacks take place. She mentioned that when they studied five cases reported by women in 2009, they happened during the day and not only at night, the ages ranged from women in their twenties to women in their 50's, and all of them were dressed in a way appropriate to local Indian standards. The overall message was the need for respect. When you respect another person, regardless of the time of day, age or dress, you will not hurt them.

Then, Meenakshi, an educator and social worker, came on stage to speak about her experience. This was powerful and heartbreaking to hear. She

has been living in Auroville for over 32 years and at the beginning she would travel from village to village alone and never felt fear. Now she makes sure the girls from her evening classes are escorted back to their homes and even the village women travel in groups due to their fear that something will happen to them if they are alone. "Most of them want to go home before it gets dark." She also read a moving Tamil poem about male and female being one.

The event ended with questions and answers and Irene singing chants with her incredible voice accompanied by Sangara. Women from New York and now India are letting their voices shatter the silence, but there is much to be accomplished in the fight to end sexual violence at all levels.

*Elaine*



# Mobility management in the city

In March, Karl-Heinz Posch, an Austrian mobility planner who is Coordinator of the European Platform on Mobility Management, ran a one week workshop on traffic and mobility issues in Auroville. A few days later he summarised the process and outcome of the workshop for interested Aurovilians. Here are some of the main points.

The objectives of the workshop were to look at Auroville's long-term vision for traffic and mobility management within the city area and to see what the implications of this vision are for us today. The first day began with a practical example of how mobility patterns can be changed. A new shopping and entertainment complex in Zurich which had 2,300 employees and 19,000 visitors per day was told by the city authorities that it could only have 850 parking spaces. This meant that the centre had to find ways of discouraging people from using cars. They achieved this by improving public transport to and from the centre, by designing the centre in such a way that it was comfortable to move around on foot and by providing a home delivery service for anything purchased there.

The lesson for Auroville is that careful planning can influence mobility patterns, so any new development needs to take mobility into account. For example, a new youth hostel facility is now being planned for 150 people but this doesn't mean that it requires parking for 150 motorized vehicles. Some of the residents can be encouraged to use cycles by,

for example, ensuring cycles are provided and well-maintained and that there are well-shaded cycle paths in the vicinity.

Urban mobility planning as a discipline dates from the 1960s. At that time, many large cities were encountering major traffic problems. Pedestrians and cyclists felt unsafe on streets which were designed primarily for the car and roads were often gridlocked because of the sheer number of vehicles. The first response to this was traffic segregation: separate lanes or spaces were created for cars and pedestrians. However, a Dutch mobility planner noticed that segregation was not reducing the number of accidents. On the contrary, because cars no longer needed to worry about pedestrians and other 'hazards', they tended to travel faster, which led to more accidents.

Consequently, he and others developed the concept of a 'shared space' where streets and squares are carefully designed in such a way that the space is shared by cars, cyclists and pedestrians with a minimum of barriers, traffic lights and other restrictions. Such a space causes everybody to be more conscious of the needs of others while allowing easy, 'organic' mobility. Shared spaces, it turns out, are often safer and more efficient at easing traffic flow than highly-

regulated traffic lanes, so it's no surprise that they are being implemented in more and more cities in the West.

Karl-Heinz worked with other Aurovilians to design an area around the Solar Kitchen which could operate as a kind of shared space. In this concept, the Crown would be shared by cyclists, pedestrians and non-polluting public transport and would become a Crown Street, broken up by trees and plazas, meandering through the dense urban fabric of the city. Pedestrians would be prioritised so it would be a place where children could play, conforming to Karl-Heinz's definition of sustainable urban mobility planning – "a way of planning a city where our children and their children would like to live".

Karl-Heinz pointed out that attractive street spaces depend upon a certain density of urban development which does not yet exist in Auroville. However, in sectors one and two of the Residential Zone a beginning has been made, and day four of the workshop focussed upon redesigning these sectors with sustainable mobility in mind. Some of the ideas included removing inner fences between communities to create more of a feeling of neighbourhood and to make these areas more pedestrian-friendly; improving

pedestrian and cycle paths within these neighbourhoods; and creating collective parking spaces for motorised vehicles away from the residences.

The final day of the workshop was about monitoring present mobility trends in Auroville. A recent survey of people passing by the Solar Kitchen junction logged 5% pedestrians, 5% cars, 20% cyclists and 70% motorcyclists. The question is, do we wish this trend to continue? Karl-Heinz noted that our city is small. The length of the outer ring road is 8 kilometres, the Crown Road is 4.4 kilometres long. Walking from the Matrimandir to the Crown takes 5 minutes, and it takes about 7 minutes to walk from the Crown to the outer ring road. The whole city can be crossed by cycle in approximately 20 minutes. For Karl-Heinz, the message is clear. "If you wish to reverse present trends and make Auroville low-car and low-motorcycle intensive, you need to make this primarily a cycling and pedestrian city. But you have no time to waste. Start planning for this today."

This would mean that far more energy and resources be spent on promoting cycling and walking in the city. Suggestions for realizing this included doubling the budget for cycle paths;

extending the network of well-surfaced cycle and walking paths; fewer barriers on these paths; a central cycle repair shop; all guest houses should provide cycles for visitors; better maps of the cycle and pedestrian network; removing fences between communities; and 'densifying' development so that people do not need to travel so far between home, work, shops etc.

And what about public transport? The Billinger study of 2001 envisaged a key role for public transport in the future city. Karl-Heinz is less convinced. He notes that public transport systems generally require a population of at least 50,000 in a fairly densely urbanized area to be viable. "So my own opinion is that public transport will not reach a higher share than 5% in Auroville over the next 10 – 15 years, and it may never get a bigger share." He notes, however, that shuttle buses, like those already running between Auroville and Pondicherry, could be viable.

As for electric vehicles, he acknowledges that they are quiet and locally non-polluting, "but if everybody uses them and they are ridden as fast as they are now, you won't have a very nice city environment."

Alan

## Mobility in the township: "We need to make a hard decision"

David, Gillian and Suhasini attended the recent mobility workshop. They have all been actively engaged with mobility and related urban planning issues for many years.

**AVToday:** Over the past 10 years there have been a number of studies regarding the desired future pattern of mobility in the town. Do you feel that a consensus is emerging?

**David:** I don't think we have reached a common vision yet.

**Suhasini:** I've never seen the terms of reference upon which these mobility studies were based. Whenever someone offers a design solution, you need a defined terms of reference with a design brief so you can compare and evaluate the proposal. In this case, the brief would define the kind of town development that we want. We've never had a community debate on this. So every time we focus on mobility, we focus on symptoms – on trying to fix today's problems – rather than looking at the bigger picture of what kind of town we want to live in. Mobility planning is an outcome of this, it's not the primary driver of the process.

**Gillian:** But we've been fighting for years about clarifying the basic terms of reference and they haven't been resolved. So I don't see how the mobility issue will be resolved like this; I think there will just have to be some kind of intervention which changes the present situation. Now everybody's just wiping the dust out of their eyes and getting on with their life; we've arrived at a dangerous state of complacency.

**Let's say that you three represent a group which would like to present something to the community regarding what the town should look like and what that would mean in terms of mobility. What are your suggestions?**

**Gillian:** In terms of models for future development, I think Crownways is the most obvious one which embraces all the elements town planning. It's an example of a highly developed urban space, a small hub that contains everything.

**Suhasini:** I think right now we should forget about buildings having specific functions and we should forget about constructing certain buildings only in specific zones. This results in strung-out development and a need for increased mobility. Instead, we should concentrate everything in the next ten years on building up a mixed-use 20 acre neighbourhood for 2000 people with residences, offices, shops, hang-out places and performance arenas all clustered together, so people can walk or cycle to work, be home for lunch and pick up their shopping without having dust thrown in their faces. In such a multi-layered neighbourhood, mobility won't be a big issue. You'll have a few paved roads; the rest will be pathways for pedestrians and cyclists.

**But what about the construction and delivery vehicles? What about the workers who will be travelling in daily from the local villages?**

**Suhasini:** For a neighbourhood the size I mentioned, it would need a dozen delivery vehicle trips intermittently during the day. The construction traffic is not a big deal; if you look at the quantity of bricks, sand and cement you need to construct more buildings between, say, the new library and the Solar Kitchen, it's not a lot and it would take no more than three years to put up the main buildings. As for the workers in this new development, they would all be coming to one destination so you could have buses bringing them in the morning and taking them back at the end of the day. A lot of them would prefer this option because it would be less hot, less dusty.

**David:** As Karl-Heinz pointed out the more roads we build, the more traffic we will attract. So we should stop building more roads and go for a denser environment where we put all our energy into making walking and cycling more attractive.

**Suhasini:** But you can't force people to walk or cycle. Once people get used to having cars and motorcycles, you can't take them away unless you offer them something better and this will only happen when you cluster the primary and social amenities together within pedestrian reach. Then the motorcycles and SUVs will be marginalised, not because you legislate against them but because they won't be catered for and there won't be a need for them in this environment.

**What about trips to Pondicherry or other parts of Auroville?**

**David:** Beyond the social and planning benefits of finally creating an urban centre for Auroville, increased densification will simply help to reduce the overall number of trips required. For the foreseeable future everyone can and will still travel to wherever they need to go in and around Auroville by whatever means they choose, only hopefully less often and preferably walking and cycling wherever possible. As Karl-Heinz made clear in his presentation, we need to be pro-active in encouraging as many alternatives as possible simply to keep car and bike use to a minimum. As far as Pondicherry is concerned, he also pointed out that the existing bus service is and will remain a perfectly viable option.

**What role will electric motorbikes and other non-polluting vehicles play in this vision?**

**Gillian:** We should break this hypothesis about 'non-polluting' vehicles like electric cars and bikes being good. People want to drive these bikes at speed on the cycle paths because they are 'non-polluting'. But a vehicle is a vehicle; whatever energy it's running on, it's traffic.

**Suhasini:** 'Non-polluting' is a misnomer. If you look at how the energy is provided for these vehicles in Auroville – from a local lignite plant which is pol-



From left: Suhasini, Gillian and David

luting the air and depleting the ground water table – these vehicles are definitely not non-polluting. The key to a less polluted environment is to reduce the need for mobility with intelligent urban planning.

**Even if your vision is adopted it will take time to realize and the present trend towards the mass motorization of Auroville will continue apace. What can be done in the interim to check or reverse this trend?**

**David:** There's a need for a working example so people can experience what we are talking about. That's why now, as a first step, we are finding ways of linking existing communities to create neighbourhoods. We've made a start on this in the Luminosity, Creativity and Progress area by taking down the inner fences between these communities and laying new paths for cycles and walkers.

**But don't some people prefer their communities to be like fortresses and not want people to pass through them on their way to somewhere else?**

**Gillian:** We worked upon this in the recent workshop and came up with one possible way of linking well-established communities. We showed that connecting paths can pass very close to someone's house without the world collapsing.

**What about making cycling more attractive in the short-term? How can you do this?**

**Gillian:** You have to make cycling more convenient for people. Right now it's a struggle because people are totally defeated by, among other things, having to repair their cycle. That's

why we are proposing a central cycle repair workshop where people can also be taught how to maintain their own cycle. Also, we have to improve the condition of the existing cycle paths. Here we are grossly underfunded. I have only one worker for three days a week to keep 25 kilometres of cycle paths in a decent condition.

**Imagine that we are sitting here in five years' time. Are you optimistic that the mobility situation will have changed?**

**Gillian:** I'm always optimistic. We have to be strong enough to carry a vision and imagine that is going to happen, otherwise there's no hope.

**Suhasini:** I see more of the same if there is no re-structuring of our political system to allow for change in the way we approach urban planning and development. We'll have more roads, more motorised traffic and more development. But to bring about change, we would need to make some hard decisions. Otherwise we will continue down the present road which will lead to failure in terms of a planned urban and mobility development which will allow us to function better at all levels.

**David:** I'd like to feel that very soon we will have a cycle workshop on the Crown, better cycle paths and many more communities which are linked together. I also hope we can come up with plans for the greater densification of the Crown area. As for our larger goal, Karl-Heinz pointed out something that really touched me. He said that a sign of a healthy urban ecosystem is when children are playing on the streets. That's what we should be aiming at.

From an interview by Alan



## Extending Surrender

One of the first settlers in Auroville is André Hababou, who came in 1968 at the age of 26. "Mother asked me to work with Roger Anger in the Office of Architecture which I did for many years," he says. "It was a very creative period for me, thanks to the talents of Roger. It was a time of grace, living in the direct atmosphere of The Mother." Ever since, André has been working as an architect for many Auroville projects. One of his major achievements was designing the community of Surrender, the first phase of which was completed in 1998. It consists of 17 houses arranged along a crescent road, and a number of staggered apartments with a higher density. Today, André, together with French Aurovilian Bertrand and Indian newcomer Sindhuja, is busy building the last apartment houses in this community. "Bertrand and Sindhuja have a more practical mind than I," he says. "They interact with the clients and work on the detailing. I mainly do conceptual work."

Bertrand is an architect and project manager from France. When he joined Auroville in 2007 he first worked for L'Avenir d'Auroville, Auroville's town planning department. "André was looking for a project holder for this phase of Surrender and I joined him. He had already designed the buildings; what needed to be done was finding the clients and doing the construction. Sindhuja joined shortly afterwards." The job, he admits, wasn't easy. "We were like salespersons trying to find clients for the apartments. As Aurovilians are very particular, we had to design numerous interiors for each apartment. It took a good year and a half before we had agreed on the design with all the clients; we started building only in August last year." Did it make sense to individually tailor the apartments? "We fought against it but we had to give in and abide by the wishes of the clients who otherwise might have gone to another project," says Sindhuja. "Often, after doing a large amount of work on the specific requests of a prospective client, we were faced with the client walking out. We must have a 10 GB folder in our computer called 'archives'!"

"The Auroville administration was another hurdle," says André. "To get the No Objection Certificate from L'Avenir and the cooperation



A finished house in Surrender

from the other Auroville services took a long time." "It also guaranteed, because of all the delays, that construction in Auroville is not an economically-gainful activity," adds Bertrand. "We charge architecture fees, but we do not charge for project holding, e.g. site-supervision, accounting and the administrative follow-up with the Auroville working groups. The client is kept free of all this."

The apartments, which are expected to be finished by the end of this year, will cost between Rs 14,000 – 19,000 per square metre (carpet area), depending on the desired interior finishing. The price includes connections to water and electricity and 'green' roofs to reduce the impact of the summer heat. "We were faced with some unexpected expenses," says Bertrand. "We had to bring a new cable from the Sukhavati transformer and also had to share the expense of the transformer room which Sukhavati had built about 10 years ago. Then we found a main electrical cable underneath one of the buildings, which had to be removed. Lastly we had to build a new waste water treatment as the community one planned by L'Avenir never took off."

A new development is the desire of many clients to have an air-conditioner in their houses. "We have made provision for a/c in most apart-

ments, with glass and mesh windows," says Sindhuja. "When people are paying Rs 15-20 lakhs per apartment, an air-conditioner is no longer a big expense." "But it means that Auroville's electricity consumption is on the rise," says Bertrand. "About 10 years ago, Auroville was calculating a 1.5 kW connection per apartment. We initially applied for 3 kW connections. But now we are talking about 5-6 kW per apartment, which includes the a/c, the washing machine, better lights and bigger fridges and an electric water heater. It is nice to be energy conscious and use low-energy light bulbs or LED. But if you run a a/c at the same time..."

Would solar hot water heaters not be an energy-conscious choice? "Sure, but if the hot water tank is on the roof and the tap on the ground floor, you waste a lot of water before you get hot water. Putting the tank closer to the tap seems to be a technically difficult option. That's why we have opted for electric heaters which use little energy and work regardless of weather conditions," says Bertrand.

Looking back on their experience, André says, "It would be a great help if there would be a fund for construction from which standard houses could be built. If Auroville would say, 'Here is Rs 10 crores, there is the plot, construct 50 apartments',

then we could design standard apartments for future Aurovilians."

Bertrand and Sindhuja are also part of a larger group of architects who are working with L'Avenir on the densification and further development of sectors I and II of the Residential Zone. "L'Avenir is under pressure to open up more space for building houses," says Bertrand. "Their idea is to increase the population density of sector I from the existing 250 to 600 people, and of sector II from 550 to 900 people. This implies opening up some land for development and reserving the remaining land in these sectors for future developments. Ultimately, sector I should house 1500, and sector II, 3500 people, the present population included. This is a quite interesting work. Hopefully we will be able to present something to L'Avenir and the community soon."

"We were also asked to harmonize the wide variety of architectural designs by introducing building guidelines," says Sindhuja. "The various projects that have been manifested do not add up to a common neighbourhood in architectural language. In fact, there is no common language, it is all rather chaotic. L'Avenir d'Auroville is asking that new projects be built according to some urban design guidelines – a common density, height, and so on. For the existing communities we are hoping to create an urban feel by proposing a streetscape design that will bring more homogeneity and create a city-like neighbourhood. This implies removing fences between the communities and creating walkways, cycle paths and streets."

*In conversation with Carel*

A number of architects have been involved in extending Surrender. Gundolf built three apartments, which in outer appearance are similar to the staggered apartments designed by André for the first phase. Pino and Sheril designed the youth project 'Muyerchi', which houses 7 students. Auromodelle Atelier Architects designed two buildings of ground + 2 floors, in total 6 apartments ranging from 34 to 220 square metre carpet areas, and an individual house of 90 square metres carpet area.

## Mid-way in Realization

Satprem is just back from Nigeria where, at the invitation of the Chife Foundation, he has been doing research and conducting a training course in Compressed Stabilized Earth Blocks (CSEB) making. "They want to create Anam New City, a new sustainable development in Anambra State, starting with a population of 1,000 and gradually expanding to over 100,000 people," he says. "They are very interested in earth technologies as these create job opportunities and minimize the energy demand. But it was a challenge. The local soil is too clayey and has a too high silt content to be suitable for CSEBs. I had to develop a totally different process, which is to dilute clay in water and mix the slurry with sand, granite dust and cement. We made a number of test blocks and then found the ideal mix. Simultaneously, I conducted a two-day course for architects, supervisors and project managers, and an eight-day practical course for 24 workers." The Chife Foundation has meanwhile ordered 13 Auram earth block machines, which are manufactured in Auroville. "It was an interesting time," says Satprem. "I had two bodyguards staying with me day and night, and was practically locked-up in my room for safety-reasons. But the people were extremely friendly."

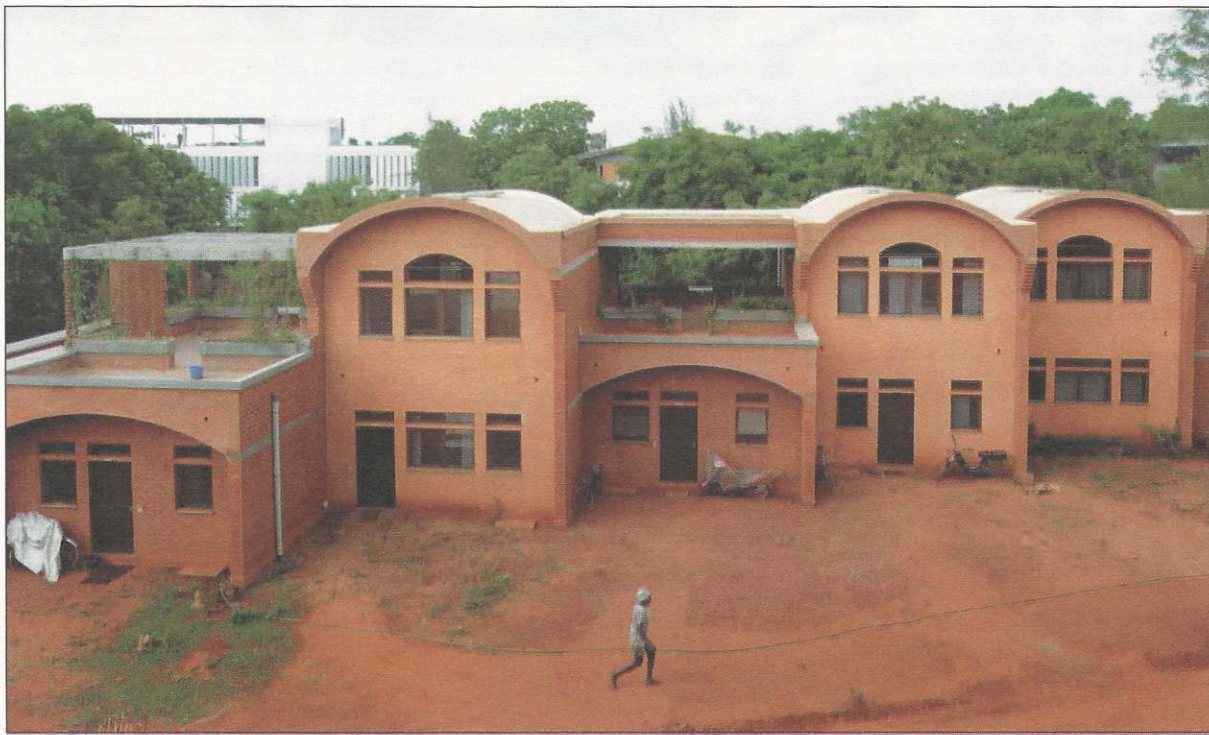
Meanwhile, work in Auroville's Realization community continued. "For almost one year, five apartments have been occupied. Eight apartments are still under construction and should be finished by November-December this year. Four apartments in the south-east block have just started; they should be ready by February 2012."

Realization's technical innovation, its earth tunnel [see AVToday

# 243, May 2009] is almost finished and will soon start providing cool air to the five houses that have been connected. "But the costs have by far exceeded our calculations," admits Satprem. "We received a grant of Rs 10.5 lakhs from Auroville International France for the earth tunnel and the rainwater tank. We have to see how the system works. This system was designed only for the south-east block and will not be replicated for the other blocks of apartments as its cost is too high."

Asked about his experience, Satprem says it has been a tough job. "In the beginning we were faced with insufficient site-supervision which increased the prices of the south-east block," he says. "Then there was the request to tailor-make apartments, which led to a lot of extra work and cost increase for this block." Regarding the present construction, things are now under control as there is a better supervision and management team, but, he says, he wants to do something completely different for the rest of Realization.

"We have the site permission to



The first cluster of five housing units in Realization

start another 70 apartments on the east side, opposite the water tower and the Prayathna community. There I would like to create a modern-day equivalent of a kasbah, one building or several integrated buildings of four storeys

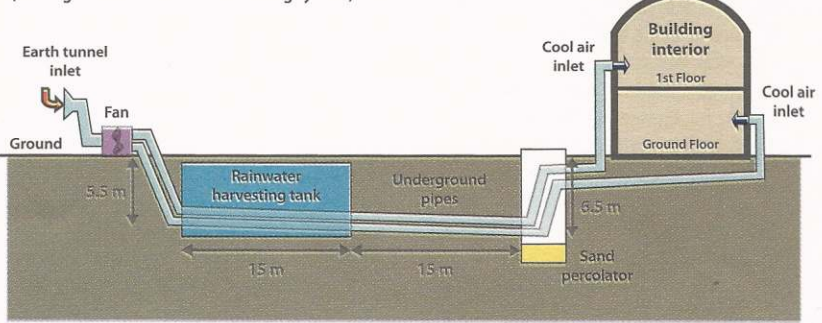
high, connected by covered pathways, with small passages, and with lots of vegetation. This kasbah should have comfortable nooks, water bodies and greenery. The apartments could be partly on stilts with common spaces underneath. The design should be resource-efficient with a minimal ecological footprint and be environmentally friendly, incorporating green technologies."

There is a long way to go, but Satprem is confident the idea will manifest. "I'm sure Auroville will find the finances and the people to help manifest it. For architects and engineers such a building will be a tremendous challenge, but it would be a good step towards creating a town atmosphere."

*In conversation with Carel*

When finished, the present phase of Realization will have in total 17 apartments, ranging from 38 to 76 square metre carpet area. The cost of the apartments of the south-east block increased because of various difficulties to about Rs. 23,000 per square metre carpet area. This price includes connection to the grid, telephone, rainwater conservation and a share in the cost of the wastewater treatment plant and common storeroom and vehicle shed. The cost of the apartments presently being built is expected to be Rs. 19-20,000 per square metre carpet area, as things are more under control.

Earth Tunnel in Realization (Underground ventilation and cooling system)





## Working at Vanaville

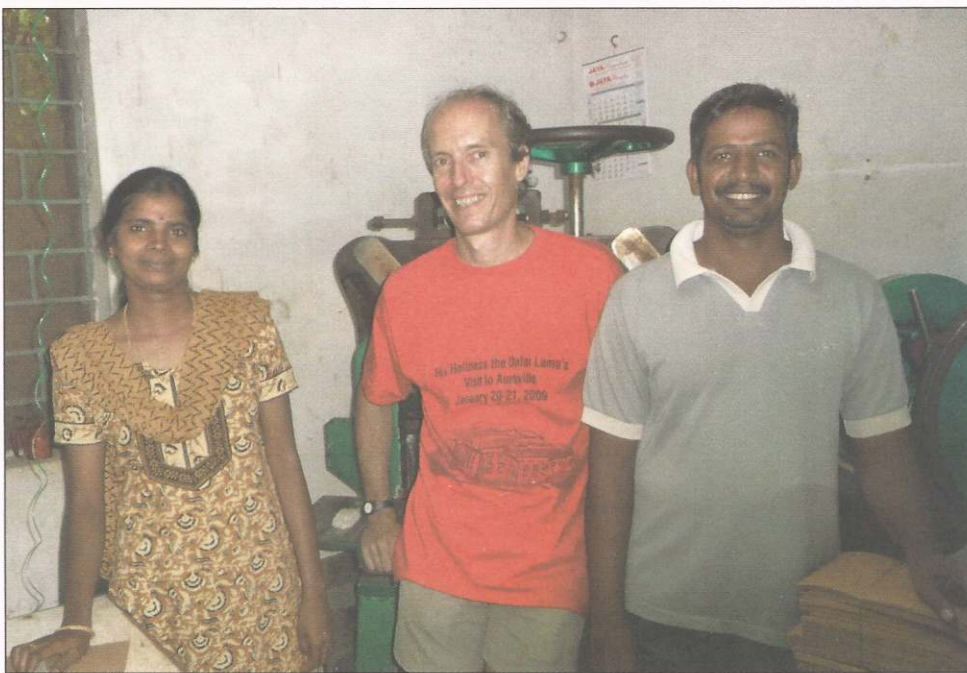
The unit 'Vanaville' produces boxes and packaging materials. It also specialises in bookbinding, particularly using leather and silk.

"My working life in Auroville started at Auroville Press," says Arun Arumugam. "It was 1990, I was 16 years old. I studied at Last School, and afterwards at After School, and worked the rest of the day at the Press. When I was 19, it became full-time employment. I looked after the offset section and was responsible for plate-making, mounting and printing." He smiles. "I was part of the team that printed Auroville Today in those early years." Arun subsequently learned bookbinding at Auroville Press.

"I worked at the Press for 10 years. Then I came to know that a lot of packaging work was done by outside companies. I asked Serge if we shouldn't have an Auroville unit producing packaging? He supported the idea. But we did not know how to get the money to buy the necessary machinery and find a place.

"Meanwhile, I got into contact with Alok who had started 'Vardan', a bookbinding unit, which was operating from a keet hut in Auroshilpam. He was also involved in work for another unit. As he couldn't cope with two units, he asked me to be co-executive of Vardan. We worked together for 4 years, making leather-bound diaries for a client in Australia. Then Alok left Vardan and I was on my own. Vardan was asked to move elsewhere. As I was not able to get a place in the Industrial Zone, I found a small place in the Arc en Ciel community. Meanwhile, I and my wife Renuka joined the unit. We decided to also start making boxes and packaging materials along with stationery items. I bought the equipment with money borrowed from friends - there were no loans available from Auroville at the time - and we changed the name of the unit from Vardan to Vanaville, the Tamil word for 'rainbow'. (Arc en Ciel means 'rainbow' in French)

"It was a bit tough," says Renuka. "For two



From left, Renuka, Michel and Arun

years we lived and worked in an old 3 x 6 metres generator room, which effectively meant that we had a living and kitchen space of 3 x 3 metres." Renuka is an Auroville child who studied and lived in New Creation and later at Transition School. "I and nine other students were accepted to study at Transition on condition that we would live in a boarding school in New Creation," she recalls. "I have very happy memories of that period. We used to sleep in one hut, boys and girls mixed together, all about 13 years old. At that time, there were fewer students and teachers at Transition School, and we joined as teenagers, not as young 7-year olds as today. From there I went to Last School, and later to

After School. At that time I also worked part-time at Pour Tous in Aspiration. Otto would give me Rs 250 pocket money a month (giggling) and with that money I even managed to buy myself a bicycle! Those were happy times."

Asked about the difference between box making and packaging, Renuka explains that for making packaging a die-machine is used. "Maroma incense packets, pizza-delivery boxes, corrugated boxes, they are all made using specific metals dies. We make the dies ourselves on a die-making machine. Using those dies, the cardboard is punched out by another machine, and then folded. But our boxes with their beautiful outer finishing are all made by

hand." "Recently we produced 12,000 boxes for Upasana's and Varanasi Weaver projects," says Arun. "That was the largest order we ever did. They gave us two and a half months and we worked day and night." The Vanaville team consists of 7 women and two men. "We prefer to work with ladies," says Renuka. "They work as well, and often even better, than men. Even the die-cutting and the bookbinding work can be done by them. One of our goals is giving job opportunities to ladies."

Vanaville's bookbinding work is overseen by another Aurovillian, Michel. He first lived in Auroville from 1981 - 1989, and came back in 2003. "By that time I had learned bookbinding in France, taking evening classes for a few years," he says. "I was taught to work with leather, which keeps the books very well in a temperate climate. But in the tropics you have to wax the leather to keep it well and protect it from the light." Vanaville has its own leather-skiving machine to thin the leather. "We just bound the 13 volumes of Mother's Agenda in red leather," he says. Vanaville hopes to get orders from abroad. "Individuals and organisations in Europe and the USA could send us their books for binding," he says. "This is a very labour-intensive work, and it is much cheaper doing it over here." Vanaville recently produced 1500 dairies bound in leather and cloth for a client in Puducherry.

"But Vanaville is not all our life," says Renuka. "I am working at Nandaman Kindergarten but will soon stop and then start looking after a farm we started on a newly-purchased plot in the Auroville greenbelt. Arun is also an active as a member of the Auroville Land Resource Team. Arun laughs. "It's just to show that we all are fully involved here in Auroville."

*In conversation with Carel*

For more info visit <http://vanaville.com>

### PROFILE

## Manickam's story

From a peaceful life in the Solar Service to the rigours of the Road Service.

I have lived here all my 39 years. I was born in Kuilapalayam and my family was not too poor as they had 20 cows and 7 acres of land. But after my mother passed away all the land was lost in family disputes. I remember that at that time a French family wanted to adopt me, my brother and my sister, but my father thought he would never see us again so he said no.

When I was 9 years old I went to stay with my older brother and sister who worked and lived at Pitchandikulam as gardeners. They were planting the trees you now see by the

road which leads from Certitude to Kuilapalayam. Joss took me to Udavi School. The school would take us to the Ashram for Darshan and special days and I used to love going there. I also loved doing sports at Certitude and lived a full Auroville life. It was a 'golden life', so beautiful.

After 15 years of living in Pitchandikulam I got married. We lived for 6 months in Darkali with Krishna, who wanted me to work in the Forest Group and take care of the community. However, I had always been interested in electronics and electrical items and wanted to learn about them, so I joined

the Solar Service at Abri instead. I learned about solar power and installing solar equipment. I loved the job, as part of my work was to visit people's houses and check their batteries and solar panels and I got to know almost everyone. It felt like a real service for Auroville. It was a very happy and calm job.

However, things changed in 2008 when Martanda resigned from the Road Service and there was a vacancy for an executive. I thought I would try something different and challenging. Little did I know how challenging it would be!

I knew Alain Grandcolas, the other Road Service executive, as we used to play tennis together and he was my friend, so it felt O.K. that we would work together. He said he would focus on constructing the new roads while I could take care of the maintenance of the existing dirt roads. So now I am responsible for a tractor, trailer, water tank and the team of workers who operate them.

Road service work is very different from my regular job in the Solar Service. That was a 9 to 4.30 job but now I can be called out at all hours to help with people's problems. Everyone gives different advice on how to improve the roads or has a different problem! Some are appreciative but others give negative feedback, again and again. They do not understand our difficulties.

For example, it is extremely difficult to make a new road in Auroville. You need the money, then you need to get the permission. It is very complicated. For example, regarding the paving of a new stretch of the Crown Road that will now extend to Surrender, we had three weeks of meetings with the Surrender residents who objected to some trees being cut down and the increased noise level which the heavier traffic would bring. Alain had to explain, again and again, that we are living in a new city that is being built around us and this process will go on for the next 50 years. Mother's dream has got to come and, yes, it will involve noise and lots of dust. Actually, solving the dust problem



Manickam on the new radial road to Arati (under construction)

on our dirt roads (and most of our roads are dirt roads) is a big challenge for us. We have experimented with stone powder which is metal-based but this is more harmful than the dust. One expert suggested magnesium chloride and we tried this but it was too costly and only lasted three months. People are still trying to find a solution. If somebody succeeds, they will become a millionaire as there are lots of dusty roads in India!

We are now making paved roads using paving blocks which can be removed, re-arranged and replaced. We cannot make cement or tar roads in Auroville as they are permanent and things are always changing here and new ideas coming. People are always asking me: "Why don't you pave the Certitude to Solar Kitchen road? It is terribly dusty and very unhealthy." They do not understand that right now we cannot pave the road as pieces of the land on

either side are owned by village people and they won't sell to us.

For relaxation I love to play tennis and Alain tells me I am one of ten best players in Auroville, which makes me very proud. I also love to play Kabadi and am now the Secretary of the Pondicherry Association Kabadi Club. I have a very happy family life with my two boys and my wife who works in the Solar Kitchen.

Before I joined the Road Service the only time I went to Matrimandir was to check the six different battery locations. Now I do Matrimandir duty once a week and I love it. The atmosphere is so calm and beautiful. Once a month I also do nightwatch at Matrimandir with a friend. We stay awake the whole night and walk around the grounds and the night seems very short. I feel I am a very blessed man with my life.

*Dianna*

### Making paver blocks



The paver block-making unit at Rêve

For the last 4 months the Auroville Road Service has been producing interlocking concrete paver blocks and concrete kerbs, engineered by Eric, for making the Auroville roads. Using a hydraulic press, the production unit at Rêve produces 500 blocks a day, enough for a 4-metre stretch of a 4.5 metre wide road. The blocks will be used to pave the extension of the Crown Road past Surrender up to the Grace junction. Manufactured at competitive costs, regular tests done in a Chennai laboratory show that the pavers are three times stronger than the pavers available in the Pondicherry area.

As the production capacity is still insufficient, compressed stabilised earth blocks, manufactured by Satprem's Earth Institute, will be used on a 100-metres stretch of the radial road towards Arati; another stretch will use lesser-quality pavers bought in Pondicherry.

Another new development is that the Road Service now owns its own double-drum vibratory road roller, which is used to compact the various layers of blue metal (crushed granite) and sand before the paver blocks are placed.



## The Auroville Transit Lounge

On Friday April 15th, Auroville architects and developers presented their ideas for dismantlable houses for Auroville.

**T**hough many apartment buildings are getting ready, the housing crisis is far from being over. A housing survey showed that apartments are required for 130 people: 42 families, 36 couples, 5 single parents with children, and 47 singles. To provide immediate relief, a number of architects are developing ideas for temporary dismantlable housing which could be located on a site near Courage. The name for this new community has already been decided upon: the Auroville Transit Lounge.

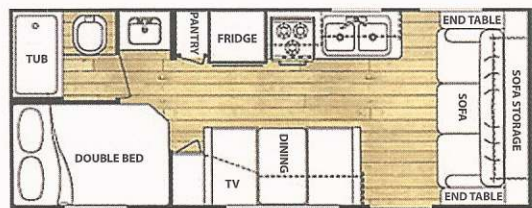
With an estimated lifetime of 10 years, the Transit Lounge would provide housing for all Newcomers or Aurovilians who are waiting for permanent housing. The Auroville Transit Lounge will have a minimum of 15 units. Residents will share a common building with kitchen, a dining space and a recreational area with internet access, lounge spaces and other facilities. Another building will house the bathrooms and composting toilets. The project includes a grey-water treatment facility with resource recovery station. There is a possibility of using wind or solar for electricity generation.

The financing of this project is being worked out. One idea is that the houses would be paid for by the occupants, while Auroville would bear the infrastructure costs for the common facilities. The residents would pay a monthly contribution towards expenses/maintenance of the common infrastructure. When a resident moved to a permanent location elsewhere in Auroville, the investment in the temporary house less the standard depreciation rate of 0.4% per month would be refunded and used for the permanent house.

Interested newcomers and Aurovilians have been requested to give their feedback on the ideas and the models shown. If a sufficient number of people express interest, the layout and facilities of each living unit will be fine-tuned in a one-day co-design workshop and a group design session will detail the site plan and the common infrastructure facilities.

*L'Avenir Communication Platform*

For more info contact  
avenircp@auroville.org.in



Container homes, designed by several Chennai based companies and EarthHauz, Auroville. Materials used: Shipping container. Interior size: modular, 6 or 12 metre long, 2.50 - 2.70 metre high and 2.40 metre wide. Cost of a 12 metre container: Rs 2.6 to Rs 3.8 lakhs. The price includes six windows and grills, one door, styrofoam concrete or pvc inner skin, flooring, fans, lights, plug & phone points. The container is fully painted. Construction time: 2 weeks.

Advantages: Very versatile secure multiple floors, can be stacked 10 high and take 28 tonnes of weight; Corten steel is non-corrosive and 75% stronger than normal steel; earth-quake resistant. Disadvantage: Needs added insulation (styrofoam concrete) and a heat barrier (creeper wall) because of its potential to heat up. Container homes have been successfully implemented in many cities, such as London and Amsterdam.



House designed by Rolf, Kalabhami, and Balu, Auroville Bamboo Centre. Interior size: 12 square metres. Costs: 1.2 lakhs. Time Frame to complete: 3 weeks (two units can be completed in one month). Materials used: bamboo, bolts, and nylon canvas for the roofing. Bamboo is treated so that it will not deteriorate. A model exists in Vérité community. The designer states that the feeling of the space is wonderful and light and that bamboo is highly sustainable. The model can also be executed in mud brick and bamboo.

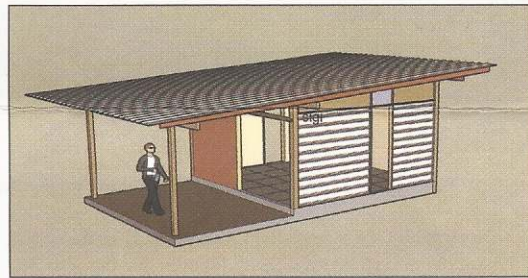


House designed by Johnny. Fertile. Interior size: 12 sq metres. Amenities: one room with terrace. Costs: Rs 1 lakh. Time frame for completion: one day once all materials are present on site. Materials used: galvanised iron pipes, wood, bison board for structure, wood louveres and mosquito mesh on sides. The structure stands off the ground on concrete pillars and plates.



Earth house designed by Satprem Mañni and Tesia of the Auroville Earth Institute.

Interior size: 30m2. Materials used: compressed stabilised earth blocks for the walls and ferrocement for the roof. Amenities: toilet and bathroom, bedroom, platform in a corner for a kitchenette wastewater system. Costs: Rs 3.5 lakhs including a solar system and wastewater system. Time frame to complete: 3-4 weeks for precasting the earth blocks and 64 hours to build with about 6 masons.



Concept house designed by Sigi. Interior size: 24 square metres, which includes a 10 square metres terrace. Materials used: timber, reapers, roof/wall sheets, Gipson board, brick floor, glass, mesh. Base: concrete beams screwed together filled with sand and kadapa stone on top. Walls: bison board inside, sheet metal or mud panels outside. Alternative: wall panels of reinforced red soil. Roof: sheet metal plus insulation - false ceiling, therefore no need for ventilation.



House designed by Eric, Auzolan Constructions. Interior size: variable. Amenities: As the house is modular, the size and amenities can be added according to the resident's choice. Costs: Rs 2.7 to Rs 7 lakhs. Time frame to complete: one house of three modules for a couple, with bathroom and kitchen, can be built in 2 to 3 weeks, a family unit will take one month. Auzolan can produce 15 family units in a year.

Materials used: Durable, dismantlable, lightweight, thermal-exposed precast concrete frame and foundations. Floor: Kadapa stones (dry fixed). Walls: ready-made interlocking insulated panels. Ceiling and overhang panels: calcium silicate board (lightweight panels, waterproof). Mounting parts, clamps, lintels: Galvanized steel. Roofs: White corrugated steel sheet (zinc aluminium coated). Innovation: Auzalan is about to introduce a first floor, which will give more dynamics to the architecture, increase the density and reduce the costs.



Concept house 'Maha Capsule' by Peter A. Size interior: 15 square metre. Costs: Rs 1 lakh. Materials used: this is a structural system which allows for many materials to be used. Frame: steel or timber frame. Walls: Bison board or light weight mud. Roof: metal sheet or fibre glass. Floor: bison board, bamboo. Extras: mesh and glass louveres. Time Frame to complete: one month once prototype is established. Also: lightweight, prefab, modular structure, allows for many applications.

## COMMUNITY

### The Auromodèle experiment

**N**ew houses are coming up in Auromodèle community on private land. The trend seems unstoppable as Auroville is focussed on acquiring the lands for the city and green-belt and no money is available for the purchase of land in the outlying areas. Recently, house construction started on a piece of land adjacent to the cluster of houses designed in the style of Roger Anger. More constructions are rumoured to be taking off there soon and there are fears that the design of the new structures may not be in harmony with the Roger's concepts. But how did Auromodèle come into existence, and what was its purpose?

Shortly after Roger Anger was selected by The Mother as the architect of Auroville, the idea of designing and planning a settlement outside the city centre was agreed upon. It was called Auromodèle. In the words of The Mother "Auromodèle is being built to make a concrete experiment and to learn how to live in Auroville" (18.8.1969) and "Auromodèle will be developed as a first attempt at community life in Auroville". (10.4.1971)

In her book *Roger Anger, Research on beauty*, Anupama Kundoo describes the beginning and evolution of the Auromodèle community.

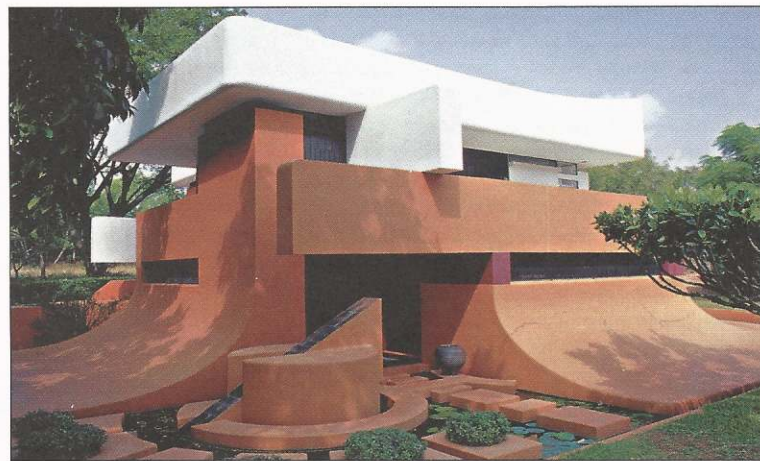
"Auromodèle was conceived as a settlement of 2,000 inhabitants. It was planned in the early stages of Auroville's development, deliberately outside the city area towards the Bay of Bengal, as the first living experiment to be undertaken in

the creation of the city. As the name implies, this settlement was to serve as a model of the city and to be a playing field, a laboratory for trial and error and concrete experimentation towards discovering the nature of the collective life that could be expected within the ideal city. It was to facilitate the necessary mistakes and allow their evaluation in an area outside the planned city where lands had yet to be consolidated. Data about the emerging international community life could be procured from here and used to detail the city proper. This approach would relieve the pressure to develop the final city infrastructure immediately and allow life in Auroville to emerge while providing the residents who were already arriving there with housing on Auroville land before the city was ready. Auromodèle was planned adjacent to another temporary housing cluster for fresh arrivals called Aspiration, and various related facilities for everyday life were located there such as a school campus, a grocery store, the State Bank of India... Above all it was to be an experiment in a new form of collective life.

"The plan was to build integrated houses and gardens in a collective environment. A small cluster of houses was proposed there to accommodate the earliest members of the community. However, the larger plan was subsequently abandoned, and only the initial cluster remains in Auromodèle, with a few new structures added in different styles in recent years... This group of houses is unified by a consistent vocabulary of design elements and

construction techniques. They smoothly rise out of the ground through earth-red coloured berms in low-scale and flowing forms."

So what happened and why was the plan aborted? "From the beginning people were opposed to Auromodèle, as it was a futuristic project with pucca houses and infrastructure. Many wanted a basic life and they began to build elsewhere and founded their own settlements. Auroville is a play of forces - for some people The Mother's vision wasn't important - people were forgetting the idea of the city. But this was not a drawing or vision of Roger - it was a vision of the Mother transferred to Roger," says one of the residents. "We are very individualistic," says another resident. "Because of that, eventually the whole concept of community living started to break down, the settlement took a different shape and the plan never manifested." Roger stated, "How far can a planner create collectively? He can help, but finally without a change in the consciousness of the inhabitants there can be no collectively, however well-planned a city may be."



Residence in Auromodèle

Today, the cluster designed in the unique language of Roger Anger, consists of only nine houses. This design language was not followed by later Auroville architects. One reason might be that some of these houses are not so suitable to South-Indian climate; another one that ecological concepts began to get precedence. Today, Auromodèle draws many architectural students wanting to learn more about the history of the Auroville and the architectural language of its chief architect, Roger Anger. But 'the experiment within the experiment' has never taken off.

*Elaine and Carel*

The book 'Roger Anger, Research on beauty' was published by Jovis Verlag GmbH in 2009, ISBN 978-3-86859-006-7



# The Auroville Foundation – a review

This review is being made so that a dialogue is initiated amongst the various bodies of the Auroville Foundation about the strengths and weaknesses of its functioning with a view to improvement. I present here my view which is necessarily limited and needs the superimposition of other views to bring a sharper and wider focus. In my view the key to the evaluation of the administration of Auroville is to be found in the sensitivity with which Auroville is dealt with – the sensitivity about where Auroville needs to be left to itself to decide matters and where an intervention by the Government-appointed bodies is needed and what is the type and extent of the intervention needed. The borderline between these is very thin and not visible to all. I believe this is a difficult task – almost superhuman – yet one which needs to be performed to the best of our abilities. It is to this area that I offer my viewpoint and hope it will lead to an effort to self-improvement by the Auroville administration.

It is necessary to point out the unique features of the Auroville project. Auroville is a project which has as its basis a spiritual endeavour. All participants are expected to be “willing servitors of the Divine Consciousness.” One of the aims of the Auroville project is to live an “actual human unity.” The basis of such a unity would be a progressive spiritualizing of all aspects of life along the lines of Sri Aurobindo and Mother’s vision of a Supramental evolution of mankind. This spiritual effort would require certain basic conditions of freedom (not to be confused with lack of discipline or license) for all Aurovilians. The spiritual effort would be both collective and individual.

It is the role of the various bodies of the Auroville Foundation to create the necessary conditions and give the necessary support so that the participants in the project are able to find their path of spiritual endeavour and make their contribution to the manifestation of the larger aims of Auroville.

It should be evident that the scheme of administration of Auroville contains an inbuilt challenge as persons not necessarily dedicated to the aims of Auroville are invested with power to run the Auroville administration.

Let us see how this has been dealt with over the years.

## The Governing Board and its Chairman

All members of the Governing Board of Auroville Foundation have been very eminent persons, each one extremely busy and playing an important role in their field of work. I am always amazed that such people offer their time and energy to the Auroville project. They have all been of service to the Auroville project by giving liberally of their expertise, knowledge and also through their connections in important places.

The Auroville Foundation has had highly respected public figures as Chairman of the Governing Board. It is to be noted that the style of the Governing Board is strongly coloured by the style of its Chairman. We have had Chairmen of different hues – those leaving final decisions to Aurovilians but making suggestions, or taking decisions on the basis of one or the other opinions strongly held by the Aurovilians and those taking decisions with a sense that they know what is necessary and good for Auroville. Each of these styles and also others have their place and may be needed in a particular situation. An ideal Chairman would be one with a many-faceted style of functioning.

The Auroville Foundation and its Governing Board has played a positive role in the growth and development of Auroville. Generally speaking, the Chairman and the Board have preferred not to be proactive in the management of Auroville and have played a supportive role in proposals brought by Aurovilians. I believe that this is good as it encourages the building of institutions of self-governance within Auroville. The possibility of undermining Auroville’s own institutions of self-governance is one of the greatest dangers of the Auroville Foundation Act as the Act does give many powers to the officers of the Foundation and the temptation to exercise it, very often under pressure from Aurovilians themselves, is great. The fact that there has been much self-restraint in this regard is to be welcomed. Officers of the Foundation should avoid taking sides in Auroville. There are many differences of opinion in Auroville and each opinion

tries to get the support of the Governing Board / Chairman. It is important the Governing Board / Chairman nurture processes which encourage the Aurovilians to go beyond their differences by themselves. In rare cases it may be necessary for the Governing Board / Chairman to intervene, particularly when an individual or group is imposing his viewpoint on Auroville by reason of a position of power held by him. This should be the rarest of rare cases. The Governing Board / Chairman or individual members of the Governing Board should not as a rule put their power behind projects that are seeking funds – particularly Government grants-in-aid. Such an action undermines the Auroville collective process. In rare cases if the Governing Board / Chairman feel strongly that a project needs to be supported, they should discuss it with the Working Committee and FAMC, who prioritize projects for Government funding.



The Auroville Foundation Bhavan in Auroville

Now let us see where the Governing Board / Chairman need to be proactive. Here is my list:

1. All cases where Auroville is dealing with the local administrations, State and Central Government or even international agencies and Governments of other countries. For example, there is the case of the college in the middle of the Greenbelt. The Auroville administration needs to be proactive in changing this situation. Another area of work that comes to mind is the promotion of the International Zone. It is important to see pavilions of other countries come up and the International Advisory Council with the Governing Board and Chairman can play a key role there.
2. To ensure that there is fairness in the Auroville administration. In my view an appeal process needs to be instituted for decisions of Auroville administrative bodies like the Entry Group, L'Avenir d'Auroville, the Auroville Council, the Working Committee, the Funds and Assets Management Committee and the Budget Coordination Committee.
3. To ensure that the growth and development of Auroville is moving along the right lines and at the right speed. The encouragement of the preparation of a SAIIR Development Plan and then the presentation of it to the Government for funding by a previous Board has helped in a great way the needed development of Auroville. A fresh initiative along similar lines for the whole of Auroville needs to be taken up.
4. To ensure that there is a progressive movement of policies in Auroville towards the ideals set forth in the Auroville Charter and the guidelines given by Mother for Auroville. An obvious example is the Auroville economy. The large-scale conversion of Auroville Residences into guest houses needs to be looked at. The policies guiding commercial units, their functioning, the remuneration taken by executives and contributions made to Auroville need to be overhauled. I do not propose that the Governing Board / Chairman impose their view in the matter on Auroville but that they initiate processes that look for the next step in progress towards the ideal, as it would seem that the Aurovilians themselves are unable to make the necessary changes.

## The Secretary

The Secretary is a senior member of the Indian Administrative Service. He is used to functioning in a hierarchical way and does not want to see anyone above him except the Chairman of the Governing Board. Most of the Secretaries to the Auroville Foundation have seen themselves as the Chief Executive Officers reporting to the Chairman. This has naturally created a conflict, as Auroville functions in a non-hierarchical way. Aurovilians at all levels of work expect to be consulted in what concerns them and their work. Aurovilians have been living with this basic conflict with the office of the Secretary since the implementation of the Auroville Foundation Act.

A strong Secretary has the advantage of being able to harness the support of the local administration, to control the local village strongmen, as well as to promote effectively Auroville issues in State and Central

present their projects to these meetings. Those who come forward to make presentations are able to communicate well about their work. Auroville, though, has also a large number of very creative people who are not temperamentally good at making presentations and both the Governing Board and the International Advisory Council sadly miss knowing about these projects. It is for the Working Committee to find ways to make the necessary corrections.

I believe that International Advisory Council members could play a proactive role in promoting the development of the International Zone in Auroville.

## The Working Committee

The Working Committee of the Residents Assembly is the most important group in the Auroville Foundation. Formally the Executive arm of the Residents Assembly, it in fact does (or rather, is supposed to do) much more. The Working Committee articulates the principal concerns of the Auroville community and chalks out a strategy to address them as well as communicate them to the Governing Board, Chairman, International Advisory Council, Secretary etc. The Working Committee is also Auroville’s interface with all levels of the Indian Government. It assists Aurovilians in dealing with any problems they may have with the Government (local, State and Central).

There are many difficulties in the actual functioning of the Working Committee. Firstly, as this is a temporary job for two years, most people on the Working Committee have another job which is their main work. This puts many limitations on the quality of people available for this work. Secondly, the Working Committee is bombarded with small problems and spends its time fire-fighting. It should have a well-defined plan of action and priorities for Auroville and a clear strategy for implementing them. This is actually far from being the case. Thirdly, as the Working Committee is the nodal point of the collective life of Auroville it faces the many pulls and pushes of different groups of people. It therefore needs to institute processes that deal with these differences harmoniously. This is a time-consuming affair and most Working Committees avoid it. This leads to frustrations which lead to politics which, in turn, lead to division which is the contrary to the Charter of Auroville. The most important work of the Working Committee in my view is to initiate programmes that unify Auroville.

There is an urgent need to re-think how to organise the work of the Working Committee so that some of these concerns can be met.

## The Residents Assembly

The Residents Assembly is defined in the Auroville Foundation Act as consisting of “all the residents of Auroville who are for the time being entered in the Register of Residents maintained under this section,” which means all Aurovilians of 18 years and older. It excludes newcomers, long-term guests and friends of Auroville.

The word ‘Assembly’ implies a meeting. However, the Residents’ Assembly has failed to work effectively as a meeting and this can only be expected when over 1500 adults are now registered as residents. This is a flaw in the drafting of the Act.

To solve the problem, an Auroville referendum made in August 2007 laid down a method by which the Residents’ Assembly could make decisions if consensus cannot be found. It agreed that each resident has the right and privilege to participate in decision-making, but that there is no compulsion to exercise this right. It also stipulated that each resident can vote on an issue either from their home through email or by sending a signed note or by attending a meeting in person. Proposals are passed when the total number of the votes cast is at least 10% of the number of residents as recorded in the Register of Residents at the time of the meeting; and a minimum of 50% of the votes cast is in favour of the proposal.

As yet, this process has been little used and the Residents Assembly continues to languish and feel disempowered. The Auroville Charter enjoins us to “be willing servitors of the Divine Consciousness” – can we discover a way in which the Residents Assembly and, indeed, all our other Working Groups, can function in a way to articulate the Divine Consciousness?

Sanjeev



# Self-appraisals by the Working Committee and Auroville Council

The term of office of the members of the Working Committee and Auroville Council ends on June 22nd. Both groups have published an appraisal of their functioning over the past two years. Here we share excerpts from these self-appraisals.

## The Working Committee's self-appraisal

**T**he mandate of the Working Committee is to represent the Resident's Assembly in interactions with Governing Board, International Advisory Council and the Secretary of the Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation, in collaboration with relevant working groups.

Our first and foremost guidance in executing our mandate is not only the Auroville Charter but also the Auroville Foundation Act. The Act is primarily to support and help the development of Auroville in accordance with the Charter. We believe one of the main responsibilities of the Working Committee is to assist the Residents' Assembly to express the inherent strength of the Residents' Assembly and its decision-making bodies to such an extent that it can function and sustain itself independently from any outside decision-making functionaries, however well-intentioned they may be.

The Governing Board and the Human Resource Development Ministry have confirmed that Auroville is an autonomous body. This opinion has also been given by two senior lawyers of the country. Although the legal interpretation has been clarified, there is much work to be done to ensure this is reflected in actual practice on the ground.

Auroville eventually can only be governed by its own strength and wisdom while incorporating all that is of inherent value from any part of the world. But the final decision has to be ours.

One of the tasks in this regard is to cultivate and maintain a mutually-constructive and respectful relationship with the Governing Board, International Advisory Council and Foundation Office. This has been particularly challenging with the present Secretary of the Governing Board. The Foundation Office has a potentially positive role to play in Auroville's development and growth but it certainly is not currently acting as a catalyst to achieve the independence which we understand to be the underlying principle of the Act. In fact it almost appears to be the opposite of what it is supposed to be. This then becomes a contentious situation in which it is difficult to navigate and guide the community to be more self-sustaining and independently functioning. In addition, there are times when we, in Auroville, undermine this principle ourselves, as when some Aurovilians try and influence their project initiatives directly with the Secretary, and/or members of the Governing Board and its Finance Committee.

A second aspect of the mandate is to maintain cordial relations with the Central and State Government. While we have maintained and strengthened contacts, especially at the Central Government level, more work needs to be done on the level of State government. Recognition of the Master Plan at the Central Government level has been achieved by its gazetting by the Governing Board. At the State level there is a move by the government to change the Town and Country Planning Act which could be favorable for 'institutions' like Auroville.

Another task is the coordination of the relations with the surrounding villages and improving the contacts with

the local authorities. We have tried to do so by initiating a process whereby regular meetings are held with the local authorities, also involving the Tahsildar and the Collector, and three meetings have been called in two years. These meetings are very important for Auroville and we hope they will be followed up further.

We have also have established and maintained a good working relationship with the local police, in collaboration with the Security Service. We are particularly appreciative of the interactions and support we have had with the Director General and Assistant Director General of Police, Chennai, and the District Superintendent of Police, Koot Road.

Yet another important aspect of our work is to strengthen the role of the Residents' Assembly. We have been working towards this goal by improving communication. We provided an open door hour three times a week for any resident to present their issues or topics for our deliberation and follow-up. We tried our best to ensure that written communications received at least an acknowledgment, and that all those who requested an interaction with us received one. There was a conscious effort to write our reports in an informative, open and friendly manner, while still respecting privacy and other concerns. The team has had regular interactions with the other working groups of the Resident's Assembly. Lastly, the way we, with the help of the Council and RAS, facilitated the selection of the new team for L'Avenir d'Auroville, was done with the intention of involving the Residents' Assembly.

Although we may not have made as much progress in this goal as we would have liked and is needed, we believe there is some positive change in the air.

The issue of transparency needs special mentioning. The bulk of our work is related to issues involving Auroville and external entities (individuals, organizations, government offices, etc.). However, there are instances where issues of an internal nature are also brought to our table, and these often require collaboration with other working groups, services, and individuals.

Ideally, all community processes would be totally transparent, and we firmly believe in the necessity of achieving this goal. Unfortunately, the current reality makes this difficult because untimely information can undermine certain processes that are still ongoing, and some individuals take things out of context and confuse matters. Many situations and processes are very complex and sensitive, so we weigh how much and when to share information and decisions with the community. However, we do try to regularly remind residents that if they are sincerely interested in a particular topic they can come to our office and get more details than we feel comfortable of sharing in an open forum.

Our time in the Working Committee has been extremely challenging on many levels, exhilarating at certain times and discouraging at others. But it has also been a very interesting and eye-opening experience, a prime example of unending education through the yoga of work.

## The Auroville Council's self-appraisal

**S**ince the beginning of our tenure, the team has worked reasonably well. It was possible to find mutual agreement between us and work through consensus, however long it may have taken at times to arrive at it. None of us had any particular agenda in mind and that is probably an important condition for a consensus.

Most of the members of the present Council were quite new to this type of task and it took us a long time to understand the complexity of the job and the full nature of the problems and how to address them effectively. We felt as if we were thrown in at the deep end, with no continuity with the previous group except for the saving grace of our secretary Sathya's presence as Council secretary.

Therefore, keeping in mind that it takes members quite some time before they can be pro-active within the group and contribute significantly, we think it would be advisable to renew some of the members every year, in order to allow new members time to get acquainted with the work, or to allow some members of the previous group to stay on with the new group for a period of a few months to ensure continuity in the work. Having a totally new group, new to its job every two years, is not a good working formula. The members spend half their time reinventing the wheel.

The mandate of the Council is very wide and diverse, but more than 90% of our time was taken up by conflict resolution. The most essential part of our mandate, which concerns finding living ways to manifest the ideal of Auroville, is thus continually put on hold as our time is consumed by conflict resolutions. To avoid this overburdening of the Council, we propose that a Conflict Resolution cell be created under the Council with permanent members having the required profile to assist the Council in this aspect of the work.

Most of these conflicts are irrelevant to Auroville's aims and ideals. Most of the people involved just want recognition that they are right and that the other party is wrong. We have therefore come up with a set of requirements for bringing issues to us that puts the emphasis on the individuals involved working towards a true solution.

We are convinced of the impossibility of arriving at a true solution if the parties in a

conflict do not want to make the necessary efforts to arrive at a mutual understanding. It is a progress that we cannot do for them and any decision taken then is a decision by default, not the truest one. It is far below what The Mother expected of us, when she mentioned several times the need to arrive at a point where what is antagonistic becomes complementary. As long as this effort is not made, we are not in the context of a society of unending education and constant progress.

Most of the Council members already have a full-time job and therefore cannot offer the needed time to follow-up on all of the issues which are generally brought to us when all else has failed and the situation has reached crisis point. This is hardly a way to function serenely. Help is needed to assist the Council members in their task by preparing and following up on the issues, as well in keeping a channel of communication open with the community and with the other working groups.

One of the areas where attention is needed is the communication/information aspect. The Residents Assembly Service needs to emerge as the group responsible for seeing to it that a living communication between the community at large and the working groups is maintained, perhaps through a certain minimum number of general meetings a year. A culture of consultation on key topics through forums with concerned community members who are determined to seek a comprehensive way forward and to stay with the process, also needs to be nurtured.

The Council mandate is obsolete in its wording. It is too vast and vague. It deserves to be more accurately formulated. There is a confusion of functions because the Council is asked to act as an executive body implementing decisions, as a judiciary in conflict resolution and as a supreme court of appeal in deciding conflicts between individuals or between individuals and working groups. We need to separate these functions because they have to be independent of each other and because they require people with different profiles and abilities.

To summarise, what is needed is to take organisational steps to allow more availability of the Council, more facilitated transition between two Councils, more coordination with other groups and more communication with the Community.

## Challenges, recommendations and reflections of the Working Committee

### Challenges

- ◆ The WC tends to do a lot of firefighting, which doesn't leave much time and energy for process/policy work that could benefit Auroville over a longer period.
- ◆ Too much time and energy is spent on dealing with lack of cooperation by the Secretary.
- ◆ There are fears in the Community: threats have been made, resulting in people unwilling to speak out openly at meetings or to the Working Committee for fear of visa or other security concerns.
- ◆ Residents sometimes bypassing the community processes and going to the Secretary or other non-resident individuals and bodies, which creates unnecessary confusion, misunderstandings and bad will.
- ◆ Fragmentation: different groups wanting to go ahead in different directions; lack of trust and real unity.

### Reflections about our Community that add to the challenges of working groups

- ◆ Some feel that once being announced as an 'Aurovillian', they are free to do as they wish. We believe our community would do well to consider a change in the terminology we use in this regard: when someone completes their Newcomer period, they could be announced as Resident of Auroville, rather than Aurovillian. In our view, becoming Aurovillian is a lifelong process and cannot be achieved in any fixed period of time — we are all aspiring Aurovilians.

- ◆ There are those who seem to have forgotten what it means to be an Aurovillian; the basic aims and values are not so strongly shared anymore. How to pragmatically strengthen our spiritual cohesiveness?
- ◆ Although coming together is part of Auroville's ideals, we often don't: What can be done?
- ◆ We in Auroville are often very hard on each other, and focus too much on the negative rather than the positive aspects of people and situations.

### Recommendations for the future team

- ◆ It would be very useful to have a member of the WC, or a person who would be assigned by the WC as its representative, as a member of the Finance Committee of the Governing Board. This would be more fruitful and adequate to the situation rather than engaging in a continuous tug-of-war with the office of the Secretary.
- ◆ There could be one 'Village Relations' office so that the present confusion of different Auroville dealings with the villages would stop. Strengthening of the Village Development Councils could also help in this direction.
- ◆ Ensure the presence and involvement of people who are part of the processes and yet can focus on concise, clear communication and coordination, including follow-up on decisions actions, issues, etc.
- ◆ Make use of resource persons with different views to help find acceptable solutions, either informally or by forming subgroups / task-forces.

## Principles guiding the decisions of the Auroville Council

- ◆ There is no personal private possession of Auroville assets, whether of land, building or economic activities. Buying or possessing private land belonging to the Master plan is in direct contradiction with this principle.
- ◆ People who have stopped living or working in Auroville for more than 5 years are not considered Aurovilians anymore (with the exception of children studying abroad). Their housing unit will be managed by the Housing Service.
- ◆ An Aurovillian cannot have the usage nor the stewardship of more than one housing asset. Privately renting an Auroville housing asset is not allowed.
- ◆ People who live in Auroville are expected to contribute either in work, kind or money.
- ◆ The use of physical violence or threat of physical violence is forbidden in Auroville.
- ◆ There is no exchange of money or as little as possible. Work is not performed for earning one's living but to serve and to progress. The Auroville economy is based on the act of mutual giving and not on commercial exchange.
- ◆ Aurovilians do not belong to any ideology, race, group, religion or nationality but to humanity as a whole, and therefore cannot represent the interests of any ideology, race, group, religion or nationality within Auroville.
- ◆ Aurovilians do not engage in illegal activities in regard to the laws of India.
- ◆ To become an Aurovillian is an individual choice. One does not become Aurovillian by birth or marriage. Children who have grown up in Auroville will make the choice at the age of 18 to commit or not to Auroville ideals.
- ◆ To be Aurovillian doesn't guarantee any right to free housing or a job. Each one has to find his/her place according to his own internal truth. The basic principle is that the more one is in contact with one's soul, the more the material conditions are gathered around his/her true needs. (See: Mother — To Be a True Aurovillian)
- ◆ Maintenance, health care, food allowance and other collective services are provided only to those who contribute to Auroville's development in work, kind or money.
- ◆ To be an Aurovillian is to accept Mother's invitation to collaboration and being of goodwill. Conflicts have to be solved through common understanding aiming at a reconciling harmony.
- ◆ Although Sri Aurobindo and the Mother are considered as the living inspiration behind the creation and development of Auroville, no religious dogma or set of orthodox beliefs can be founded in their name or in the name of their disciples, nor any authority be derived from them.



## PRISMA: filling an information gap

PRISMA is a commercial unit located in a small office in the Aurelec compound. It does graphic design, photography, text editing and Desk Top Publishing (DTP) work, as well as the printing of books and brochures. Recently it has begun to branch out into other ventures.

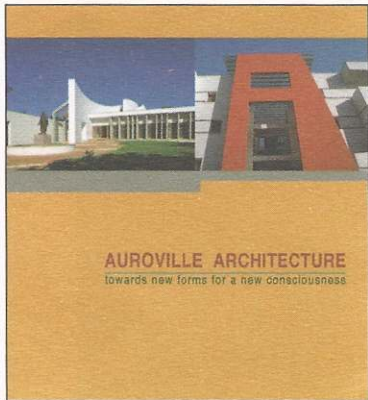
While PRISMA dates from the late 1980s, the core team has been working together for more than 25 years. Franz, a graphic designer, Tim, the 'text man', both of whom have a background in advertising in the West, and John the photographer first worked together for Aurelec, Auroville's computer manufacturing unit. Franz and John were doing the design and advertising work, Tim was running the company's in-house journal. "I call us the dream team," says Tim, "because we have so many different skills which complement each other. The team has grown even stronger in recent years because now we've been joined by Janarthanan who looks very capably after all the DTP work."

However, it has not all been smooth sailing. When Aurelec broke up in the late 1980s, the original team suddenly lost their main source of work and income and had to decide if they would continue. "In the end we decided to carry on," says Franz, "because it's something we like doing and we were almost the only people in Auroville doing this kind of work. However, we very quickly realized that we could not generate enough income by just doing letterheads and other one-off jobs for Aurovilians. We had to start generating our own publications."

transparent about what is happening here and not to project some kind of image," explains Franz who, along with John, put the exhibition together.

But for a creative photographer, isn't this kind of documentary work rather uninspiring? "No," says John, "I have more freedom here than I have in some of my other work. Besides, it's something I do for Auroville, it's my contribution. And I like meeting the Aurovilians."

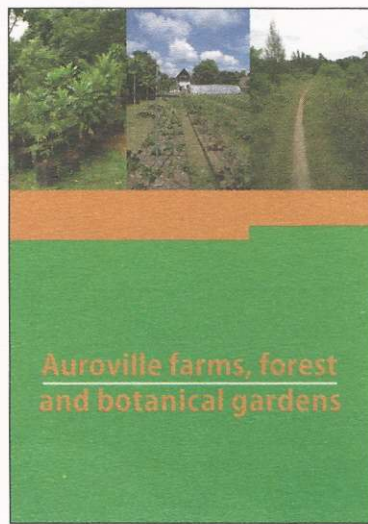
Documenting Auroville has become an important part of PRISMA's work. The latest, very successful, venture is a book which documents the history and variety of Auroville's architecture. "Nobody else in Auroville is trying to do this," says Franz. "When you put something together like this, you're amazed by what has been done here. Normally



we're all so much involved in other tasks we don't see the bigger picture. But it's really impressive." But, for Franz, there's more to this than simple recording. "For me, it becomes more and more urgent that people change their way of seeing things if India is not to be turned into a wastebin. Mother created Auroville to work on many levels, but on the physical level she wanted it to be beautiful. If we can show something of what we have achieved here in terms of beauty, its effect can radiate out. We show that things can be different."

"When you look around India most of the buildings are functional," adds Tim. "At its best, Auroville shows that you can go beyond functionality into another dimension of beauty."

Other projects on the drawing-board include a book on Auroville's farms, forests and Botanical Gardens and one on the style and design details of the



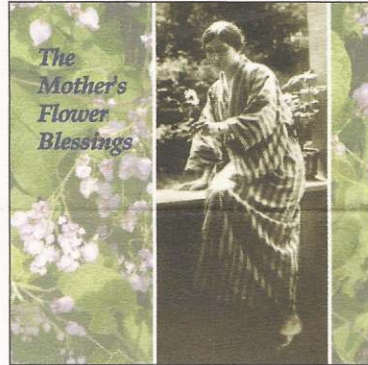
buildings, gardens and products of this community. So is there an identifiable Auroville style? Franz pauses. "A little bit, yes, there are certainly things you find here that you don't find anywhere else." John is less sure. "I don't think



From left, John, Tim, Janarthanan and Franz

there is an Auroville style. Rather, there are a lot of different styles here, which is what you would expect in such a creative community. I think what is most characteristic of Auroville is the high quality of the work." "That's also what we're striving for in PRISMA," adds Tim, "perfection in every detail. And that's not easy in this environment."

But PRISMA is not only producing books, pamphlets and exhibitions. Recently it broke new ground by coming out with *The Mother's Flower Blessings*, the proceeds from which go to Matrimandir Gardens. These are two sets of 64 flower cards with Mother's com-



ments upon their significances. "The cards can be used as an invocation or a blessing for the day or even as a memory game," explains Franz, whose brainchild

this is. "I'm fascinated by the whole of Mother's work with flowers; it's something unique to this yoga and there's so much still to be discovered. I'm also working on putting selected Savitri quotes on cards which can be used for exploration and meditation. Approaches like this are simpler, more playful. They give another doorway into the yoga."

PRISMA projects like this come out of the personal interests, growth and enthusiasms of the team. "We're fortunate," says Franz. "If we have an idea we can easily transform it into something and make it widely available assuming, that is, we have the financial resources. We have never received grants, so the proceeds from our existing publications have to finance new projects."

The indispensable link in this chain is Janarthanan, an oasis of calm in the busy office, who looks after the DTP work for PRISMA projects and deals with the countless Aurovilians who drop in with pleas that he do 'small jobs' for them as soon as possible. Doesn't the pressure get too much for him sometimes? Jana laughs. "Wherever you work there is pressure. But here it's good pressure because Tim and Franz try to make sure I have the time to do everything." But how does he keep so calm when other Aurovilians are hassling him to finish their work? "I'm not naturally a calm

person. But in this office I make myself concentrate fully on the work, otherwise I couldn't get it done. Besides, the work is always interesting. I'm always learning something different."

It's a feeling that Franz shares. "In PRISMA we've experienced the whole history of printing in a few years. When I



started, we were working with printers using letterpress and block-making, then came offset presses and today everything is computerised. As a graphic designer, for each new step I had to learn a whole new process. The same is true for John with his photography. But that's also the story of Auroville. This is a place where you can never stand still."

From an interview by Alan

For more information contact  
prisma@auroville.org.in

## AUROVILLE HISTORY

### Erratum



Early Aurovilians starting the excavation.

A mistake was made in the composition of the front page of the March issue of Auroville Today. The bottom photo, with the caption *Early Aurovilians starting the excavation* was accidentally switched with another photo of the excavation.

We apologize for the mistake and publish here the correct photo. The correction has meanwhile been made in the pdf file of the page, which can be downloaded from Auroville.org.

Editors

## PASSING

### Tenzin Dolkar

Tenzin Dolkar, who met with a road accident on April 22nd, passed away on April 27th in a hospital in Pondicherry after suffering a cardiac arrest following brain surgery. She was 31 years old and mother of two young sons, Ragdol and Samsone.

Tenzin, born in Nepal and of Tibetan origin, came to Auroville in 2003. Many will remember her from the Deja Vu restaurant which offered a Tibetan take-away and momo-delivery service. Her body was cremated on April 29th, at Adventure's Farewell grounds.



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