

## Auroville's role in manifesting the New Creation

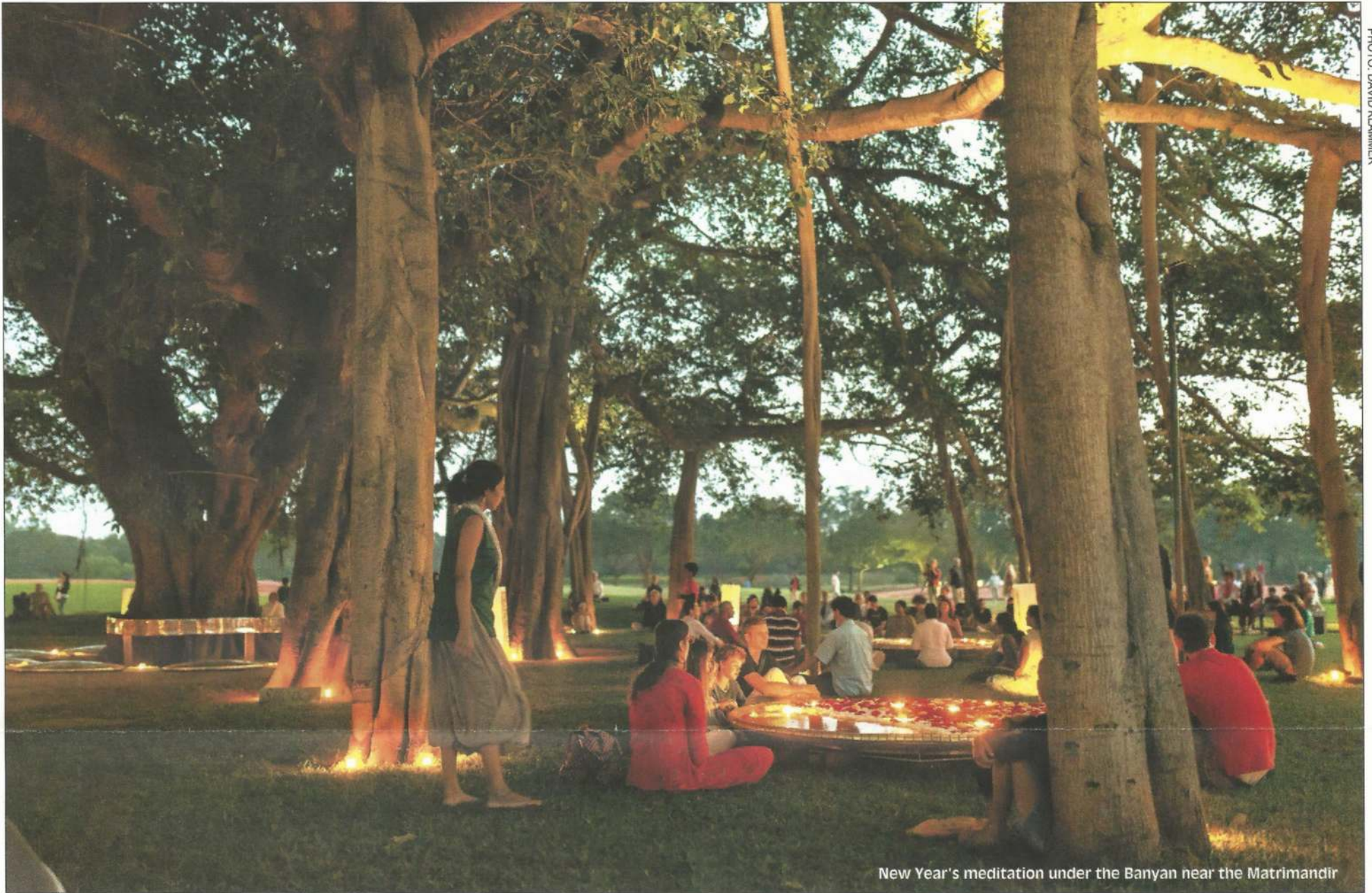


PHOTO: DAVID KLAMMER

New Year's meditation under the Banyan near the Matrimandir

**T**he manifestation of the new world is a global phenomenon and it is open for each human being to participate in its creation. Nevertheless, Mother did call Auroville the "cradle of overmen" (*intermediate, transitional beings between man and the supramental being*). And, as such, Auroville seems to have a crucial role to play in manifesting the new creation. To have a glimpse and inner feel of this role, one has to dive into the history of Auroville's manifestation.

Already in 1912, two years before she met Sri Aurobindo for the first time in the physical, the Mother wrote in a powerful mission statement, which she called "An Ideal Society": *The most useful work to be done [is] to establish an ideal society in a propitious spot for the flowering of the new race, the race of the Sons of God*. Sri Aurobindo would speak later about a divine commune or Deva Sangha. He called it also *the temple-city of God*.

In another text, 'The Supramental Realisation', the Mother wrote in 1930-1931: *Once the connection [between the supramental and the material plane] is made, it must have its effect in the outward world in the form of a new creation, beginning with a model town and ending with a perfect world*. So, it is not surprising that already in 1937-38 the Mother envisaged the creation of an 'ideal city' with Sri Aurobindo living at its centre. She even asked Antonin Raymond, a French architect who built Golconde, to prepare a plan based on her symbol. But after Sri Aurobindo's passing, she was 'no longer interested', as she said herself.

In fact, the Mother had not been interested for quite a long time. The 'old formation' of building an ideal city came back only 15 years later in 1965, after the descent of the Supramental into the earth consciousness, after the agreement from mother earth to collaborate in the new creation, after Mother's experience of a new world being built as an intermediate zone between the physical and the supramental world, and after the realization of 'overmanhood' in the cells of her body. *Suddenly I had my plan of Auroville*, she said. As if the world had become finally ready for a new attempt!

From then onwards, things unfolded in Mother's typically quick fashion. In March 1965, a big plot of farm land was bought. And on 8th September 1965 the Mother sent her first message on Auroville into the world. In March 1966, a first exhibition on Auroville was held in Pondicherry with Roger's nebula plan of the city based on Mother's symbol. At the same time, the first brochure on Auroville was printed for UNESCO, in which the Mother writes directly about Auroville's true mission: *The creation of a new world, a new humanity, a new society expressing and embodying the new consciousness (...) is a collective ideal calling for a collective effort for its realization in terms of an integral perfection of man. The Ashram founded and built up by the Mother has been the first step towards the fulfilment of that purpose. The project of Auroville is the next seeking to extend the base of this attempt to establish harmony between the soul and the body, spirit and matter, heaven and earth, in the collective life of humanity*.

In 1966 the Mother said *...I know that Auroville will be. It may be in a hundred years, it may be in a thousand years, I don't know, but Auroville will be, because it has been decreed*. And in the same revealing conversation, the Mother describes to Satprem how it was suddenly shown to her that Auroville had been created to avoid the catastrophe of a nuclear war: *It became clear like that*, she says, *This is almost the sole and last hope of avoiding the catastrophe. This is the importance of Auroville's crucial role in manifesting the New Creation*.

*Auroville (...) If nations consent to understand that it is a means of avoiding war, Auroville will have the power to prevent war. (...) That's why Auroville has been created*.

In another landmark conversation with Satprem in October 1967, the Mother gave another revelation of Auroville's importance: *I tell people*, she says, *that the creation of a city like Auroville has more weight in the earth's history than all the groupings of the world*.

Finally, the Mother launched Auroville, *the City the Earth needs and the Cradle of Overmen* to use her descriptions, on 28th February 1968. And, already in January 1969, she had a distinct experience of the Overman Consciousness searching for and permeating into the bodies of those who were ready to receive it. In other words, Mother's earlier realisation of 'overmanhood' 10 years ago had now become a living possibility for other human beings on the planet. Two years later, on 21st February 1971, the foundation stone of the Matrimandir, was laid a House for the Universal Mother, a spiritual vessel in matter for

receiving and directing Her light, force and presence to support the development of Auroville and the manifestation of the new creation on earth.

The crucial importance that Mother gave to the realisation of Auroville is captured in what Sri Aurobindo revealed to her only 25 days before Auroville's inauguration. *...Sri Aurobindo gave me a revelation... [He] said... 'India has become the symbolic representation of all the difficulties of present-day humanity. India will be the site of its resurrection, the resurrection of a higher and truer life.'* And [I had] the clear vision: *the same thing which in the history of the universe has made the earth the symbolic representation of the universe so as to be able to concentrate the work at one point, the same phenomenon is occurring now: India is the representation of all human difficulties on earth, and it is in India that there will be the... cure. And it is for that – it is FOR THAT that I had to create Auroville. It came, it was so clear and tremendously powerful!*

Whatever Auroville's reality today, it is essential to remind ourselves of the deeper significance behind the creation of Auroville. And to remain deeply aware of the responsibility the global family of devotees and friends of Auroville and Aurovilians themselves carry towards the realisation of Auroville's highest purpose and mission in manifesting the new creation.

Guy Ryckaert

[Extract from a talk given on 22nd July 2001 at the AUM Conference in Redwood City, California, USA.]

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# Alternative Economy Vikalp Sangam 2020

Straight after New Year's Eve, a four-day gathering of change-makers from across India was held at the Udavi campus in Auroville. Literally a "confluence of alternatives", Vikalp Sangam is a network of social organisations re-imagining and re-shaping Indian society. Active in various fields from environment to education to social justice, including some of India's most well-established NGOs as well as start-up social enterprises, they meet throughout the year to exchange, inspire each other, and seed new ways to collaborate in order to move the needle forward in a given area. This was their first nationwide confluence around the theme of economy, as it is increasingly clear to people engaged across sectors – be it education or health or democracy or media – that to re-imagine and work towards a more just and sustainable society we need to radically alter our economic system.

The seed for hosting this Alternative Economy Sangam in Auroville was planted during a planning session held in the community last December, hosted by a few long-time members of Vikalp Sangam that have joined the Auroville community in the last few years. This provided an occasion for members of Vikalp Sangam's core group to visit Auroville for the first time, and get introduced to the alternatives that people experiment with here. Immediately there was a proposal to host the Alternative Economy Sangam in Auroville itself, and a small team of Aurovilians and volunteers came together to help this manifest, seeing the value in supporting and creating bridges with change-makers from across India.

The organisation of the event itself embodied alternative economy values, for example by exchanging knowledge for rice, by using home-made bio-enzymes for cleaning, harvesting edible weeds for lunch, and growing some of the greens for the event on campus.

Over four days, the 100 or so participants explored four key questions:

What is wealth in the new economy? What are just forms of ownership in and for society? What kind of relationships do we want an alternative economy to enable? What role do our worldviews play in facilitating or limiting how we can re-envision the economy?



The gathering of change-makers at the Udavi campus in Auroville

These themes were introduced each morning in artistic and embodied ways: for wealth, the organisers had created an eight-armed Lakshmi representing eight forms of wealth (spiritual, cultural, environmental, social, etc.); for ownership, participants were invited to co-create a mandala with leaves, flowers, and pebbles from the Udavi campus representing something they owned and wanted to offer. A group movement exercise explored how we relate to ourselves, each other, nature and the universe, and a series of picture frames dangling from the main Banyan tree on the campus, representing lenses through which we see our world, invited people to experiment with inhabiting different views.

The programme itself was co-created and emergent: any participant could propose a session around the theme of the day, curated with the help of a facilitation team. Those interested would gather and dive into an exploration together, which ranged from creative (such as drawing patterns of ownership), to reflective (questioning layers of privilege caused by gender, class, creed, age, ethnicity, wealth and education), to action-oriented problem-solving and project development.

For example, those working with farmers and tribal communities expressed the need for solidarity between consumers and producers, and the group explored how to make this happen by having both

parties enter into a joint venture as "prosumers", based on the successful demonstration by Just Change in the Nilgiris, who anchored the session.

Those with savings in mainstream banks formed a group exploring how to divest from anti-ecological activities. A practical solution proposed was to pool deposits into a bank as guarantee for a loan to local sustainable projects.

And, with many young people present at the gathering alongside seasoned activists, a proposal to develop a Vikalp Sangam Youth Fellowship emerged to support up and coming change-makers, connecting them with professional learning journeys in the alternatives sector, which is often poorly remunerated.

The general atmosphere was one of openness, and a commitment to resist the temptation of enforcing any single "ism", a tendency which has created barriers rather than bridges between activists with different approaches. Across the world, this seems to be burgeoning. Vikalp Sangam co-founder Ashish Kothari presented his latest co-edited book *Pluriverse: A Post-Development Dictionary*, a collection of essays that moves beyond locked polarities such as modern vs traditional, consumerism vs conservationism, personal vs political, patriarchal vs feminist.

For many activists used to clear campaign targets and barricades this ambiguity felt uneasy. The focus of personal reflection in many sessions, and the small-scale joint projects that emerged from the overall gathering also left some wondering if and how the dominant system of overexploitation could be stopped in its tracks, and lamenting that this had not been tackled head on. Others felt that the Auroville community had not been explored and engaged enough, and a follow-up immersion is currently being explored. Meanwhile, a contingent of participants will bring the insights and questions from this forum to the World Social Forum in Barcelona this summer, and no doubt will come back with a fresh set of questions. One thing is certain, the quest for a New Economy continues to intrigue and inspire people from far and wide, and Auroville has put itself on the map as a potential host for such explorations.

Gijs

## Launching the Aura

On 29th December a new project was launched at the Aura Fest in the Youth Center. "Time for a shift to better align with our ideals! Come join us not for discussion but an action on our economy that promises to be fun and enriching," ran the invitation.

There was an enthusiastic response. But what is this new project? And what does it set out to achieve?

The Aura project is an offshoot from an idea of a research team in South Korea. The Science Walden Center sets out to show, among other things, that what is generally considered waste can have both environmental and economic value. The team at Science Walden designed toilets where human waste can be turned into compost. The idea was this can be exchanged for a complementary currency called Faeces Standard Money, which allows everyone to have access to monetary resources.

Initially, they thought Auroville would be a very good place to experiment with this concept, but it was not technically feasible. However, two of the team felt that the idea of combining environmental and economic benefits through giving monetary value to waste or underutilised resources could be a promising path for Auroville to pursue.

"But firstly," says Dan Be, who knows the community well because she grew up here, "we wanted to discover what community members felt about Auroville's present economy. Did they feel that there was enough of everything? And was it fairly distributed? The responses were not positive. People felt the present economic system is unsustainable, that it is not equitable, and they definitely wanted to see some kind of change."

Consequently, the team decided not to strengthen the existing economy but to explore alternatives that could complement the established in-kind systems. They came up with the idea of a Circular Basic Income based upon underutilised human resources in the community.

But what were those underutilised resources? Ahilya, a young Aurovillian member of the team, takes up the story. "We wanted to know what people could offer and what the barriers are to people's participation. It emerged that one of the main barriers was people not knowing what they had to offer. So we organised a students workshop during which people realised they have an abundance of skills and offerings; it doesn't have to be something you are professionally adept at, it could just be picking up somebody's groceries or giving somebody a ride."

The students wrote down on one sheet the things they felt they could offer and on another their needs. Then all the sheets were pinned up and everybody was invited to take a look.

"If they noticed a need they could fulfill, or an offering that interested them, we invited them to go up to that person and make a 'deal'. It was beautiful to see people pulling out their phones and making appointments to do cooking classes or driving to the beach together."

"There was a lot of enthusiasm for the idea," says Tina, another young member of the team. "It took only one exercise and everybody was on board."

So how does Circular Basic Income work?

There is an online platform on which every user would receive ten 'Auras' unconditionally every day. The Aura is a stand-alone, virtual, complementary currency that cannot be converted to the rupee or any other kind of money. The idea is that users put on the platform what they can offer under four categories: activities, services, items or tangible goods, education. Then they decide individually how many Auras they wish to receive for each offering.

"We want to discourage hoarding and encourage real-time spending so that resources can flow and circulate," says Dan Be, "and the mechanism behind the Aura would ensure real-time exchange. Firstly, each user has to share three of the ten daily Auras he/she receives with another user who is part of the social sharing network. Secondly, an accumulation of Auras would not be possible as there is a 7% depreciation rate that ensures that the ten Auras received today would disappear by the end of the month."

Clearly, the students were enthusiastic about the proposal. But how was it received in the rest of the community?

Dan Be thought everybody would be open to a concept where everybody can access underutilised resources. However, when some people realised that individuals must 'price' or 'value' the resource they wanted to offer, there was a negative reaction. "People just wanted a sharing platform."

But don't they have a point? Doesn't charging Auras run against the ideal of people offering their resources and skills freely to the community?

Ahilya acknowledges that some people are able to do this. "However, I think we often overlook that some people in the community have difficulty with reaching this point without some kind of incentive. So being able to 'charge' Auras for your offering is like a stepping stone for the ones who aren't yet ready to make a full offering. And people who have already reached that mindset can charge the minimum for their offering."

"It's about shaping behaviour by giving people incentives, and setting the right cues to turn intention into action," says Dan Be. "You can't



The Aura Project Team. From left: Marie Aubry, Lucrezia Fassi, Jonas Nyamador, Quentin Vaissaire, Sudipta Mohanty, Mathilde Fanget, Ahilya Bamroo, Hye Jeong Heo, Tina Sweerin, B William Sullivan, Dan Be Kim

expect everybody to be in this offering mode if there are no incentives. The hope is that the sharing platform will become the basis for the social change we want to see, a shift in consciousness from taking to giving."

It is clearly the intention that everybody will participate. But what about those Aurovilians and Newcomers who are working hard just to make ends meet? Won't they be too busy to participate? In fact, shouldn't we begin by focussing on providing the basic needs of all before experimenting with a project like this?

Dan Be admits that at this stage this project cannot help people satisfy basic needs like food or housing. "At the moment there is no simple answer as to how these basic needs will be covered. Right now, all we can focus on is giving people the opportunity to share what they can offer. However, if this project succeeds in bringing people together, they may be able to collaborate on solving the issue of survival needs."

Collaboration, trust-building, is a vital aspect of the project. "We are young, we don't have qualifications," says Tina, "but Jonas and Dan Be trusted us. This felt really good and gave us the motivation to work even harder."

Dan Be confirms there's been a lot of trust involved in launching this project. "The young people trusted us to guide them, and the Science Walden team in Korea trusted us to potentialise this platform. And we've come a very long way because on the 29th of December, the platform was launched."

Judging from the enthusiastic response at the launch, particularly from the young, the project has already acquired a high degree of acceptance. However, Dan Be notes that challenges lie ahead. "I think right now we need to focus on the user education part. We need to ensure that people feel comfortable interacting with each other on this platform." This is why they are considering having a physical space where people can walk in and learn

more about the platform. This offline base would also serve as an exchange place where people could easily drop off or pick up items.

Then there is the question of funding. Science Walden is funding the project for the first year, but future funding is not assured. Dan Be and Jonas, who are researchers at the Science Walden Center, will be meeting with the Science Walden team in the next few months to update them about progress in Auroville. "We want to show them that this project has validity, and a real potential. Hopefully, this will lead to longer-term financial support for the team that is running it."

Is this simply an Auroville-centric experiment, or could it have a wider relevance?

Dan Be points out that they are dealing with a very complex topic – reimagining money and how it could play a role in building equitable and sustainable communities – which many other researchers also are trying to figure out. "If we have a well documented record of the process here, it is going to be very helpful not only for Auroville but also for other people around the world who are exploring this issue."

"If it works in Auroville, it might be a template for other communities," says Jonas.

Dan Be admits to another, more personal, motivation. As a young Korean growing up in Auroville, she noticed there were no youth volunteer programmes for North East Asian countries like Korea, China and Japan. "This is untapped potential. Korean youth have the highest suicide rate because they face so much societal pressure, so for them to know about and participate in an initiative like this would open up a whole new world for them."

"We need to build bridges with these countries. And what better way to do that than with the Auroville youth who are driving this project."

Alan

The Aura Platform can be checked out on [auroville.network](http://auroville.network)



# Revolutionising the Auroville economy with hemp

Auroville's grocery outlets have begun to be stocked with an all-new collection of hemp-based products. Hempseed oil, hemp flour, and hemp hearts have hit the shelves thanks to Hemplanet, an Auroville unit that aims to promote the use of a wide array of hemp derivatives and eventually begin hemp cultivation in Auroville.

Hemp is a hearty and beneficial plant that can be used in its entirety for food, medicines, personal care, textiles, paper products, and construction materials. Its scientific name is *Cannabis sativa L.* and has minimal levels of the psychoactive component tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), therefore making it a distinct strain from the cultivar group used to produce the psychotropic drug. Although the plant originated in the Himalayan region of Asia and has featured throughout Indian history, cultivation has not become widespread and the hemp seeds and fibre that are on the market today in India are harvested primarily from wild-growing plants. However, while the Indian government made marijuana illegal in 1985, it has not included the low-THC hemp, and has put the onus of regulating cultivation and use of this variety on the individual states.

This is where Hemplanet hopes to step in. The commercial unit was officially registered in 2015 by Sasi and Tom after a long process of pitching and rationalising their concept. But both were solidly convinced of the phenomenal attributes of the plant and its derivatives, and the need to bring them to Auroville. "Any problem



Sasi and Tom at the Hemplanet stall

its durability, and has become a passionate advocate of hemp textiles. Hemp first came to Tom's attention when he was exploring alternative fuels and the practicality of used cooking oil for biodiesel. However, just as he was concluding that this was not viable on a large scale for motorbikes, he encountered hempseed oil, and his interest in hemp developed rapidly from there. "I felt that hemp was the one thing that could offer Auroville a sustainable future and bolster the economy," Tom explains. "And if we can get away from burning oil for fuel, hemp can be used to make capacitors and batteries as well."

## A well-researched start

As both Tom and Sasi had experience as filmmakers, their first major endeavour in 2018 was to create a short documentary about the developmental status of the hemp industry in India, which in turn allowed them to meet just about everyone in the fledgling hemp-processing community in India.

By the beginning of 2019, they were ready to start unveiling the benefits of hemp in a tangible form. Hemplanet had a stall at the Lively Up Your Earth eco-music festival held at Auroville's Solitude Farm where they shared information about hemp and displayed bricks, textiles, and paper all derived from hemp. A week later, the stall was set up at the Youth Center's fair. As a result of a chance encounter at the latter event, Sasi and Tom were put into contact with an Italian supplier of hemp products who was able to give them samples of 3D printed hemp plastic, hemp flour, and hemp paper.

Since April, they have put out their own range of products, with hemp procured from Uttarakhand and processed at their Hemplanet

facility in Auroville. From the seeds, they have marketed whole seeds, dehulled, ready-to-eat hemp hearts, and hempseed oil. Using the left-over cake from pressing the oil, they have ground hempseed flour. And from textiles made with 60 to 70% hemp fibre, they have also been producing small purses.

In addition, Tom and Sasi have been actively reaching out to units around Auroville to propose using hemp-based alternatives for textiles, oil, and flour. Already Eco-Femme has used some of the fabric for their sanitary pads and Colours of Nature has collaborated to dye some of the hemp fabric with natural indigo. Maroma has tried out hempseed oil for some of their soaps and shampoos. The Auroville Bakery and Bread & Chocolate have both used hemp flour for their baked goods. Even the Auroville ice cream units are considering hempseed milk as a vegan alternative. And an architecture volunteer at the Earth Institute is exploring the possibilities of using hurd (the woody inner core of a hemp stalk) mixed with lime to create "hempcrete."

"We want to get Auroville units involved, and then talk to the farmers around Auroville," Sasi says. "It's going to take a little bit of time for people to come on board."

## Getting a hemp policy in place

At this point, there is not a hemp policy for Tamil Nadu, but it is necessary for hemp to be grown locally. "We need to get a few interested groups together to lobby the government to give us the permissions to start working on a policy," says Sasi. Already, this action is underway to get all states across India to have common policies, and Tom stresses the importance they have put on streamlining presentations and standardising terminology for maximum impact. Especially when considering the possibility of export, because different countries put a cap on the

acceptable THC levels in industrial hemp at different levels ranging from 0.02 to 0.1%. "Several Indian universities are looking at hemp to find viable seeds, which will be important if we want to grow it here in Auroville, since we cannot just use the wild seed from the north," Sasi adds.

This policy is critical to wider use of hemp in Auroville. The state of Uttarakhand, where Hemplanet currently sources its hemp seeds, does not allow for hemp cultivation without a license, though it is legal to sell hemp seeds. As a result, the seeds are often collected from wild-growing hemp by rural residents and pooled together to be sold in bulk. However, without widespread cultivation, the supply can be inconsistent and Hemplanet was unable to source a new supply of hempseeds for two months recently, despite the Auroville demand for them.

Having hemp cultivated locally would help with supply issues and also dramatically cut down on the transportation. To get started, Hemplanet needs to get government support and then start looking at what variety will grow successfully in the tropical monsoon climate of Auroville. "We have thought that it might be possible in collaboration with a local university with an agriculture department to have one or two acres for hemp cultivation," Tom says.

## The future of Hemplanet

While currently, Hemplanet is active in promoting, sourcing, and processing hemp as well as producing a range of its own products, Sasi and Tom ultimately envision investing in further machinery so that their unit can concentrate on being the processing intermediary: taking raw hemp grown by farmers in the region and processing it into oil, flour, textiles, etc. to be used and distributed in final form by other Auroville units. The goal is to create a self-sustaining hemp-based economy, with Hemplanet merely supporting the circuit through its expert knowledge and processing capabilities.

"In the long term, we could actually have two outcomes," explains Sasi. "Auroville being a small community, hemp can really transform it, and not just on an economic level. But also whatever is developed here can then be replicated throughout India, and perhaps even the world."

At this phase they are still building community support and spreading knowledge through their website, video tutorials, and participation in events. This month, they hosted a workshop with YouthLink where participants made rope with hemp fibre and ate a hemp-based meal featuring hemp burgers and other delicious vegan dishes.

But with the uptake of hemp derivatives already beginning in Auroville, research underway, and the possibility of a hemp policy for Tamil Nadu, it is only a matter of time before hemp enters full force into Auroville. And, as Tom suggests, "Then perhaps even *Auroville Today* can be printed on hemp paper!"

Hilary



Some hemp products

you can think of can be solved by hemp, from climate change to water scarcity, malnutrition, and a whole range of critical medical conditions," Tom affirms. "On top of that, one hundred percent of the plant can be used. And where it is cultivated, the plant leaves the soil in better condition."

The two co-founders each had their own path toward learning about hemp and becoming convinced that it was so desperately needed for the future of Auroville. Sasi first encountered hemp twenty years ago when he was given a hemp shirt and was "smitten with the quality and the texture." He still has that shirt, a testament to

## WATER ISSUES

# Waterman of India's inspirational visit to Auroville

Dr Rajendra Singh, an award-winning environmentalist from Rajasthan, affectionately known as the "Waterman of India", visited Auroville on Dec 29 and 30, ending the year on a positive water note. Winner of the 2001 Magsaysay Award and 2015 Stockholm Water Prize (known as the Nobel Prize for water), Dr Singh has worked with over 1 300 rural communities in Rajasthan to restore seven rivers. He currently runs the NGO Tarun Bharat Sangh and travels widely to share his message of water conservation as a tool to mitigate climate change.

Dr Singh spent his first day in Auroville visiting sites actively engaged in rainwater catchment and using a variety of techniques, such as rainwater harvesting on roofs, bunding, catchment ponds and more. In the morning he toured the work of Auroville projects Nadukuppam and Pitchandikulam, accompanied by Joss. This was followed by a walking tour of the Sacred Groves site with Manu, which has 400,000 litres of water catchment storage that was completely full at the time of the visit. In the late afternoon he saw the catchment ponds of Annapurna Farm and ended the day at Sadhana Forest. There he gave an impromptu speech to the residents and volunteers, prompting the team to share on social media,

"We had an amazing visit from Dr. Rajendra Singh Ji, well known as Waterman Rajendra Singh. He walked through Sadhana Forest looking at our water conservation work, had dinner with us and then gave a presentation about his 44 years of water conservation efforts. His knowledge, experience and enthusiasm are incredible and left us all deeply inspired."

The next morning, after a visit to the Matrimandir, Dr Singh met with players from the water sector of Auroville and the bioregion and discussed some of the challenges and opportunities here. Dr Singh focused on empowering people to initiate actions on their own, and not wait for government or decision-makers. As a first step, he emphasised the necessity of creating a water-literate community through educational initiatives. As the discussion concluded, Joss held up an instrument with multiple hooks on it. He explained that women used the instrument to retrieve their water pots that sometimes fell off their ropes and into the wells. Unfortunately these tools are not used as much these days, due to the dropping of water levels. Joss made the point that we must work together to raise the water tables, in much the same way women pulled water from the well.

Dr Singh proceeded to lunch and a tour of

Solitude Farm with Krishna, whose work in promoting local foods, such as rain-fed millets, connected directly to the work of Dr Singh. The post-lunch session was organised for and by Auroville youth at the YouthLink Hall, where Dr Singh discussed the key role that both women and youth have had in all of his community-led movements on water.

In the late afternoon, he held a public presentation entitled "Community Driven Water Conservation as a Solution for Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation". Bhumi Hall was packed (despite the rains) and his talk was well received. [Find a link to his talk via AV Radio: <https://www.aurovillerradio.org/talk-with-rajendra-singh-the-waterman-of-india/>] Through a mixture of facts, anecdotes from his vast experience in the field, and striking images of desert landscapes turned into lush agricultural lands within 30 years, Dr Singh captivated the audience's attention, driving home not only the relevance and necessity of water conservation, but also how this work connects to climate change. He spoke of the need to restore water bodies which in turn cool the land, ultimately helping to mitigate climate change. Toward the end of the discussion, Toine shared a ditty that he had composed during the time of the talk, inspired by Dr Singh's

message: "For healthy bodies we need water bodies. For water bodies we need healthy people, bodies who embrace the water bodies. Climate is water. Water is climate."

The next morning, Dr Singh made an impromptu visit to the restored water bodies of Puducherry, after an invitation from the District Collector. The last visit prompted Lt. Governor Dr Kiran Bedi to write on her social media, "Puducherry blessed to be visited by Waterman of India, Mr Rajendra Singh, a Magsaysay Awardee. He visited the recovered water bodies along with the Collector Dr T. Arun. He expressed his joy at seeing the work done in recovering water bodies and our water harvesting efforts in Puducherry and Karaikal."

More than one person also noticed a curious connection between Dr Singh's visit and the rain. December 30th saw an unusually heavy rainfall for this time of year, with Gaia's Garden recording 62 mm on Dec 30th, 84 mm in Invocation and 95 mm in Aurogreen. There were points during Dr Singh's talk at YouthLink that he had to shout over the sound of the pounding rains outside.

The organisers of Dr Singh's visit hope that his inspirational presence and talks will move Auroville toward more water-positive actions in 2020.

Ing-Marie



# Fostering a vibrant film culture in Au

Auroville recently hosted its sixth film festival, which included a heady mix of local and international films. Over five nights, the Town Hall area was abuzz with indoor and outdoor screenings, food stalls and live music, as people imbibed the opportunity to soak up films and to participate in film-related discussions. As one of the Auroville judges in the category of 'Films that develop the theme of human unity', I relished this injection of creative energy into the community's film culture.

As the largest and most professionally-executed Auroville film festival since its inception, the 2020 festival attracted hundreds of viewers, and included local and international filmmakers. "I felt it jumped up a notch from our previous film festivals," says Krishna, one of the organisers, who credited this year's success to "completely committed" and skilled volunteers, who came on board in time to do "a very good job and to lift it up."

When the film festival began in 2009, it was a modest affair that only included films made in and about Auroville. The subsequent festival introduced the category of international films that develop the theme of 'human unity'. Held biennially, the festival has grown exponentially, and this year's festival screened approximately 136 films across four categories over five days.

The external judges – who came from Delhi and Pondicherry – commented on the festival's evolution over the last decade, as well as its rather unique features. Returning judge Aanchal Kapur, from the Kriti Film Club in Delhi, proclaimed that the festival was one, "that has both arrived, and is still a work in progress." She pointed to an ongoing healthy film viewing culture in Auroville, where Aurovilians have the "luxury" of being able to watch films in their own theatre, Cinema Paradiso. "You can go out every night into a community space and watch films, for free. So there is the opportunity for a huge consumption of issue-based and cinematic content in Auroville." Suman Kittur, a filmmaker from Karnataka who now lives in Pondicherry, pointed to the diverse composition of Auroville's audiences: "Here, I see German, African, American people watching, and language is no barrier. Everyone reacts much the same. That's the beauty of cinema."

## Films relating to Auroville and the bioregion

At Auroville's first film festival in 2009, all the films in the category of films made about Auroville were made by non-Aurovilians. Over the last ten years, there's been a sizeable influx of young filmmakers joining Auroville. These days, most of the films in the 'about Auroville' category are made by community members. "It shows how a vibrant cultural atmosphere in a city can really draw in talented people who want to be part of that city and have stories to tell," says Krishna. "This culture then grows, and pushes and changes things in certain ways. We're in the process of developing a strong internal voice – we're saying what we're doing and why it's important to the world."

This trend has gone hand-in-hand with a growing film culture in Pondicherry and the bioregion. Krishna highlights the connection between the two, suggesting that the film festivals conducted by Auroville and Pondicherry, as well as the broader values that emanate from Auroville and the Ashram, have



Outdoor film screening

prompted a number of filmmakers to establish themselves in the region. "You have this force of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, which exists throughout the whole Pondy and Auroville region. These kinds of values and dreams draw a lot of people who want to live in the area and live in a certain way. So we are receiving the cinematic offerings of people around us who express that force in some way."

Two of the 2020 festival judges, Anushka Meenakshi and Suman Kittur, are filmmakers who have migrated to the region, as well as Earthling Koushalya, who won an award in the Auroville category (for the feature drama *Ashvamedha*). "There is something here that's attracting filmmakers, god bless, and they're coming in droves," says Krishna. "They have moved to this area in order to make a different kind of cinema and to live in a different kind of world."

The quality of films being made by Aurovillian filmmakers is also "a lot more sophisticated" than previously, suggests Krishna. This can perhaps be linked to Kino, a filmmaking initiative that's been taking place in Auroville for the last two years, as well as filmmaking courses and apprenticeships now offered in Auroville. "This shows how there's a culture growing," says Krishna, "not only of watching films, but people wanting to learn more about how to make them. It also makes a difference when you can show your film at a small screening [the monthly Kino screening sessions in Auroville]."

The judges of the three categories of Auroville films – Suman, Anushka, Aanchal – stressed that the films they were looking to award had to have meaning within the context of Auroville. "We were definitely not looking for films that had fantastic production values, which in some festivals get overwhelmingly favoured," said Anushka, "but because this is the Auroville film festival, we looked for what

meaning the film has." This resulted in a spread of awards across a range of topics. The student films receiving awards addressed topics such as the unsettling effects of social media, interpersonal relations, and food waste. Awarded films in the adult categories ranged from the Tamil-French community of Pondicherry (*Two Flags*), to daily life in Auroville (various films).



All three judges agreed that they instantly "jumped" to the feature-length Tamil film *Ashvamedha* as the winner of the Cinema Paradiso award, due to the strength of the script and performances, as well as its "sensitive portrayal of human relationships, care and support for mental health experiences".

Aurovillian Christoph Pohl's documentary about Auroville's forests – *Ever Slow Green* – was awarded the Wisdom Award. "I actually felt that I was going through the forest cover," says judge Aanchal, about the slow-motion film. "The way nature was actually speaking to us, it really affected us. I felt that it gave me a very, very beautiful insight into the journeys of all those pioneering individuals who have transformed Auroville. It showed that when they came to this land, they applied wisdom to make Auroville happen. Wisdom is not only what's given; it's also inherent. For me, *Ever Slow Green* had that feel to it."

## Films that develop the theme of human unity

In seeking films for the international category that foreground "oneness in consciousness", the festival aims to create awareness of human unity on a wide scale, according to Krishna. Over the last ten years, the selection of human unity films has improved dramatically, and the 35 films this year highlighted this theme in a more "concerted and directed" way.

As the 'human unity' international category also includes films from other parts of India, a key person who assisted in securing high-quality films for this category was Aanchal Kapur, from the Kriti Film Club in Delhi, who was one of this year's judges of the Auroville category of films. Aanchal's instincts, along with her knowledge of the Indian independent cinema scene, enables her to recommend and acquire films that strongly align with the theme. "She really knows what we're looking for," says Krishna, "so it's really helpful for us. Four of her suggestions won awards in our festival this year." These films were the Hindi drama *Turup* by Ektara Collective, the documentary *Abu* by Pakistani-Canadian director Arshad Khan, Shabnam Sukhdev's documentary *Earth Crusader* about architect Didi Contractor, and the documentary *Two Flags*, about the French-Tamil community in Pondicherry by Pankaj Rishi Kumar.

Also notable this year was the inclusion of high-budget arthouse films from Europe.

These films were sourced through an existing connection between festival staff and the EU delegation that holds the European film festival in India. Many of these films were "intense" according to Krishna (two being set in war-time prison camps), with high production values. Of these, the gritty feature-length documentary *#Female Pleasure* by Swiss filmmaker Barbara Miller, won the Jury Award, which was accepted at the festival by the visiting Swiss Deputy Consul-General.

Audiences also appreciated the Q&A sessions with filmmakers, such as with locally-based filmmakers Anushka Meenakshi and Iswar Srikumar, whose documentary film *Up Down & Sideways* celebrates the unique polyphonic song culture of rice cultivators in Nagaland, and which won the Cinema Paradiso award. Also appreciated was a skype interaction with Canada-based filmmaker Arshad Khan, co-winner of the Jury Award



The South Indian dinner at the food fest

for his documentary film *Abu*, a highly personal film about growing up in Pakistan and coming out as a gay man.

"I've been impressed with the quality of discussion, where there has been space for it," says Anushka. "It would be lovely to have more of these opportunities. There is a lot to talk about, and there are enough people who want to engage in the conversation." Aanchal – an experienced film discussant – agrees. "Watching a film in Cinema Paradiso is different from watching Netflix. Aurovilians are perhaps somewhat isolated from the possibility of local, national and international discourse around certain socially relevant subjects. It's important to have those conversations. Even a volunteer can open up the Q&A. The conversation doesn't need to always be from audience to the filmmakers, but the discussion can also be within the audience, among people. That's what the format of collective film watching should offer. It's important to

consider the value of public opinion, actions, change, and politics."

## Fostering a vibrant film culture in Auroville

Aurovillian judges of "connection a lunches shared l juries, to the s directors – and facilitate more and filmmakers Auroville judge experience" of the Town Hall t vibrant energy e ing the festival. combining film food festival v theme each i European, South sine.

While the sc tival has increas the shoestring b cobbled togeth manages to thri kind support an tech-savvy vol social media m municate with a visiting judges and strong reso the festival's su is the re-affirma to create collec "Because I'm i Delhi] comple Auroville, you c access to infrasi ripple is create give energy to t on zero budget like Cinema Pa the year!" "We on zero budget. good example c on an almost ze The visiting friendships at t three women ju ers present. Am



Audience skypes with director Arshad Khan



# Auroville

the you're generating, in terms of making, public discourse, in behaviours and attitudes,

rant film culture on a tiny

udge Kati pointed to the value and exchange" – from the daily by the six judges from the two type interactions with film proposed that the festival could interaction between audience in the future. Elaine, another emphasised the "positive seeing the "political hub" of turned into a "cultural hub with and culturally rich films" during. She pointed to the success of viewing with live bands and a which changed the culinary night to include African, Indian and North Indian cui-

ope of the Auroville film festival, it is somehow achieved on budget of Rs 55,000, which is from various sources. It's due to a large amount of in-volunteer labour. Thanks to volunteers, the festival utilised are actively this year to comedies and filmmakers. The point to this volunteer spirit as a key reason behind success. "One take-away for me is that volunteerism works in events," says Aanchal. running Kriti Film Club [in with volunteers. In don't have money, but there's ructure and facilities here. A l and people get excited and nat. I've been screening films for 20 years! If I had a space adiso, I'd do this 365 days of talk about how to make films," says Suman, "and this is a f how to have a film festival budget!" judges also point to the new festival, with Auroville's ges, and the various filmmak-shka points to the emergence



estival

discussed at the festival, that reations to bring to fruition. g, creating a lot of people who rk with dedication over long hings that have slow process-esses the new connections she val, and how local filmmakers "can add to the community, rily being part of it." Suman mmitment and discipline" of s, as well as the uniqueness of man unity theme. "It was fans make films together, watch io this film festival gave me a o what we can do."

Lesley

n and links to film trailers:

al.auroville.org  
book.com/AurovilleFilmFestival  
gram.com/AurovilleFilmFestival  
n/AVFilmFestival

## The Auroville Film Festival awards

### Students Category

#### Cinema Paradiso Award

'DISLIKE & UNSUBSCRIBE' by YAM  
'Dislike and Unsubscribe' addresses a technological addiction that is scarily relevant to the lives of children and adults alike and finds a form that is contemporary in its visual appeal.

#### Creative Award

STEVE'S DISASTER' by ERHEL, CHANDNI, MALIK, JOSHUA, SIJMEN, AYAN  
'Steve's Disaster' uses detailed and painstaking stop animation with a confident aesthetic style. It is presented in an eclectic and new form of visual story telling.

#### Wisdom Award

'TREAT OTHERS THE WAY YOU WANT TO BE TREATED' by RAGHUL  
This film is awarded for the wisdom applied in sharing the message of how we process expectations and behaviour in inter-personal communication and relationships. We often get what we beget.

#### Jury Award

'UNNAVE MARUNTHU' by R. HARISH  
This film enables a child to see the value of food, experience hunger and understand what it means to waste food.

## About Auroville and the Bioregion

#### Cinema Paradiso Award

'TWO FLAGS' by PANKAJ RISHI KUMAR  
'Two Flags' receives the Cinema Paradiso for its deep insight into the lives of the Tamil-French community of Pondicherry and how the vagaries of politics, nations and citizenship affect them.

#### Jury Award

'SAINTS OF PONDICHERRY' by OGYNYAN ENEV  
This documentary is a sensitive portrayal of reviving the spirit of life in old age with love, sharing and caring.

## Aurovillian & Bioregion Filmmakers

#### Cinema Paradiso Award

'ASHVAMITRA' by EARTHLING Koushalya

This film is an intuitive and sensitive portrayal of human relationships, care and support in the context of mental health experiences across age and time.

#### Wisdom Award

EVER SLOW GREEN' by CHRISTOPH POHL  
This cinematic narration of how Auroville became a one-of-its-kind forest town in India journeys with a community of people who value, protect and nurture the diversity of Auroville's natural and human environment.

#### Jury Award

'FROM MY LITTLE HUT IN THE FOREST' by YORIT ROZIN  
This quirky insight into daily life and times in Auroville is an intimate portrait of harmonious being and collective spirit.

#### 'WALKING MEDITATION' by RENA

'Through the filmmaker's lens we take a journey through nature, which tells us that each of us are free to find our own paths to spiritual consciousness.

#### Mongbra Award

'HOTTER THAN HELL' by MARCO SAROLDI

This take on the diversity of voices in Auroville makes us laugh all the way into what makes Auroville a dream reality.

# The story of cashews told on film

Auroville's development has been intrinsically entwined with the complexities of local cashew cultivation over the decades, so Aurovillian filmmaker Serena Aurora decided to get to the bottom of the story.

Her 42 minute documentary, Our Cashew Story, was recently launched in Auroville. "This is my journey into discovering our cashew story, like investigative journalism, but also a personal journey," says Serena, about her efforts to tap into the "wealth of knowledge and 50 years of experience" on this favoured crop in the region. Her Tamil colleague, Aurovenkatesh from Auroville's Outreach Media, assisted her in the making of the film, and contributed his Tamil viewpoint to "balance" her opinions, so that she didn't "get lost in the western mind set".

As various articles over the years in Auroville Today have highlighted, Auroville's land is interspersed with privately-owned cashew fields, on which farmers often spray toxic pesticides. These pesticides have a detrimental effect on the health of villagers, farmers and Aurovillians, and yet the practice continues, despite Auroville's efforts to encourage farmers to switch to organic pesticides.

In her film, Serena uses the innovative narrative device of an old-fashioned TV in order to present the different voices in the cashew debate. This includes government advertisements for pesticides, as well as news reports that portray deaths, widespread mental retardation and other devastating health effects in the neighbouring state of Kerala, that were directly linked to the now-banned pesticide Endosulfan. "The TV also represents how we sit back and watch something go by, and we get stuck in a voyeur perspective," says Serena. "I put a bowl of cashews next to the TV set, to show we're playing a role as consumers. The background is moving, to suggest: Where are we? Where is our stance? Even a vegan in the UK plays a role, because veganism uses a lot of cashews, and that impacts cashew production here."

Serena and Aurovenkatesh were tenacious enough to convince farmers and pesticide sprayers to participate in the film – an inclusion of a voice that is often omitted in the debates on cashews. "Aurovenkatesh had the contacts, he knew who to speak with, so it's all thanks to him," says Serena.

Local farmers are not ignorant of the toxic effects of pesticides, says Serena. "They know it's poison. [Aurovillian] Rita describes how a local farmer's cow drank some pesticide and died. People drink it to commit suicide, so they know it's bad. The story of the Endosulfan deaths in Kerala was big, so I think they know about that."

In the film, one cashew farmer, Anandham, describes how, after spraying, "this intense burning sensation starts – the pain is indescribable. It lasts all night." Cashew sprayer Ezumalai describes how sprayers become "dizzy and faint" and "appetite decreases". The two doctors featured in the film – Auroville's Dr Lucas and Dr Kurien Thomas from PIMS Hospital – point to the serious effects of pesticide inhalation by sprayers (fluid accumulation in the lungs, paralysis etc.), as well as the chronic effects of passive inhalation in the general population, such as breathing difficulties.

Farmer Anandham states that he and other farmers are aware of the effects, but have "no choice", because the cashew yield will be smaller if they do not use pesticides, and profits will therefore be less. In general, local farmers, harvesters and sprayers do not make much profit from cashew crops.

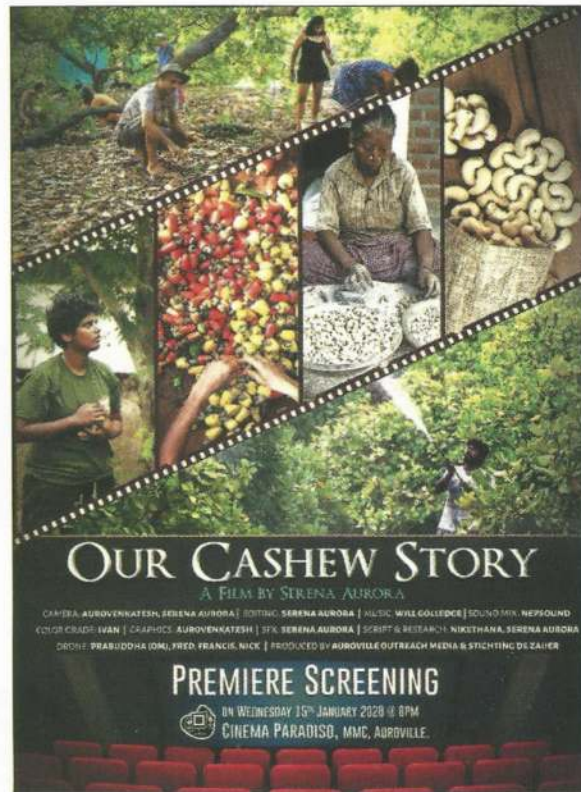
So, given the small profits and the terrible health effects, why do farmers continue to spray toxic pesticides?

"I think it's multiple things," says Serena. "Word of mouth recommendations, and easy access to pesticides. The government pushes pesticides to farmers, and because farmers hear something from a voice of authority, they believe it. So there are all these pressures. They're stuck in a system. They feel powerless, and they not able to change. If you are in that situation, what else can you do? You do what people tell you to do, to get the money, feed your family. It's just survival, compliance."

The film connects local cashew production practices to the global trade of cashews, suggesting that it's big business when it's done at scale, and contributes significantly to India's economy. But Serena points out how opaque the big business and trade is. "From the farmer to the processor to the exporter, there's huge gaps in the research. The pattern I see, with any product, is the farmer gets the worst deal. They do the hardest work and have the smallest voice."

The film highlights one local Tamil farmer who converted to organic biopesticides, and began diversifying into other crops, such as lemons and chillis. Diversity of crops is essential to ensure the abundance of insects and animals life – which has decreased significantly in the locality, because of the shift to the monoculture of cashew crops. While this farmer's yield has generally been better, he understands there is a risk factor and that some years he may get a smaller yield. "Even if he gets a bag less of cashews, he's OK because he knows his soil is doing well and he has peace of mind," says Serena. "This farmer says he doesn't like people spraying near his farm, and he wants people to see his story and convert. So this is a way to move out of the pattern, and the village can gain the benefits."

Serena's film articulates all the initiatives and efforts that Auroville has put into this issue over the decades,



including those by Dr Lucas, Rita and Nyal, and the current initiative: Auroville's Healthy Cashew Network. While she praises these initiatives, she points out that none of these efforts have been sustained over the decades. "It's like a relay race, where a Aurovillian holds the baton and fights the fight – to educate farmers, do a test plot. And then for some reason, the baton is dropped and someone else takes it up. This has happened over years in Auroville. Now the Healthy Cashew Network is holding the baton, but it's a small group and people are so busy. So I invite the audience at the end of the film to become a member of the Healthy Cashew Network so that the baton won't be dropped."

Serena points out that the north-east Indian state of Sikkim has converted fully to organic agriculture, and that Auroville should aim to assist the neighbouring farmers to do the same. She points out that Tamil farmers previously used to use neem, before "the brainwashing" began. "It's not a completely lost knowledge, but it's becoming lost. The new generations are forgetting, so we need to re-build trust."

"That's one reason why Auroville is here. We're trying to be a conscious community, look after ourselves, the environment and people around us, and yet we're surrounded by toxic clouds for a few months a year. It's crazy, when you think of it! We've made a forest from a desert, but we're breathing toxic air! We can have an impact, but one or two people can't do it. We need to all be in it together."

Serena proposes some other measures. The first is that Auroville should take more responsibility to consume only organic cashews. This would include stocking only organic cashews in its shops (PTPS currently sells non-organic as well as organic cashews in its store). Auroville could also create a market for farmers by buying all the cashews cultivated in the neighbouring areas, on condition that they are not sprayed. Serena concedes that this approach has been tried by Aurovillians in the past, and made a loss. "This takes manpower, policing, relationships to be built, and it comes down to hours, and everyone is too busy." Aurovillians could also join in the harvesting of cashews. Overall, she points to the need to support local farmers and to localise processing. "If everywhere in the world localises production, it will give farmers a voice."

An extensive bioregion outreach dissemination strategy is planned for the film, and Serena has created a Tamil version for local audiences, in the hope that this "very local story" will appeal to them. She plans to screen it in neighbouring villages and schools in the coming months, followed by a discussion facilitated by members of the Healthy Cashew Network. The film will not be on YouTube for the near future, as the team wants to focus on public screenings. "My purpose is to bring people to watch it in a room, and talk about it," says Serena. "The important part is the conversation after the film." She also hopes that Tamil TV stations will take it up, as well as universities and political groups.

She points to one possible breakthrough on the horizon: the KVK, a section of the agricultural ministry in India that advises farmers on spraying, are starting to promote ARKA natural insect repellent made by Faborg, an eco-business near Auroville. "This is one huge step," says Serena, pointing out that farmers listen to such voices of authority. While the KVK will possibly continue to simultaneously promote toxic pesticides, this step forward is "amazing," says Serena.

"The ball is rolling," she says. "The push is starting to gain strength again. My dream is for people to watch the film and share ideas of how we can come out of this."

Lesley



# EVER SLOW GREEN – a film about Auroville's unique re-afforestation work

Nothing happens fast in a forest. The forest is a being with its own rhythms, and those rhythms are slow. The people who work in forests – not the commercial, rip-out loggers but the real foresters – are permeated by these rhythms which are longer and larger than those of fleeting mind. Foresters tend to speak little, and when they do it is brief and to the point. They grow but seem to grow inward, toward their core, so that when you meet them you feel you are returning to something like bedrock.

All this and more is beautifully captured in Aurovilian Christoph Pohl's film, *Ever Slow Green*, which was recently screened at the 6th edition of the Auroville Film Festival and which won the 'Wisdom Award' in the category of 'Films made by Aurovilians, bioregion residents or guests of Auroville'.

The film presents itself as the story of re-afforestation in Auroville. We learn about the beginnings, the mistakes, the learnings and present threats to the work. Most of this has been done before in video and pamphlets. What makes this film different is the way the topic is presented, because this is not so much a film about forests as a film that seeks to evoke the forest experience.

This is done primarily through slow motion which allows the deeper rhythms of the forest to sink in. As a forest is a whole yet made up of innumerable details and small stories, so the gaze shifts languidly from the vast canopy surrounding the Matrimandir to the detail of a spider's web or a vine snake catching a bird.

In this film, people are subordinate to the forest. Nobody speaks directly to the camera, nothing is allowed to disturb the focus upon trees,

shrubs, lianas, insects. Yet there is clearly another story here, and that is about the people who care for it. It's about what they do, and why they do it. Above all, perhaps, although this is only hinted at, it is about what they have become or, rather, what the forest has made of them.

For here we touch upon an interesting example of symbiosis. Forests, particularly in the arid conditions of the tropics, don't spontaneously create or recreate themselves. Particularly in the early stages, they need a helping hand from humans. But once a forest begins to take off, to acquire its own being and presence, it begins to shape those who live there and care for it.

Take, for example, the Auroville Forest group as presented in this film. Here is a group which has no hierarchy, is very diverse and which has no laid-down afforestation policy ("every individual stewards the land in the way they see best"), yet

everybody contributes in their own way to the re-creation of a Tropical Dry Evergreen Forest. This process, which one forester described in this film as being "as close as you can get to divine anarchy in Auroville", is not dissimilar to the decentralized way in which everything in a forest – trees, shrubs, fauna, fungi, microbes – contributes to the maintenance and flourishing of the whole.

In other words, we are presented with a world where there is no separation; where humanity and wilderness nourish, influence, intertwine with each other rather than being in conflict. Where foresters mirror the silence and deep-rootedness of the forest, even taking on, as they age, the gnarled look of the great trees they care about so passionately.

This is a fine, sensitive film. It is hoped it will be made available for general viewing soon.

Alan

## Ever slow green: an interview with Cristoph Pohl

**Christoph Pohl grew up in Germany. He studied media technology engineering and worked in video and film postproduction in Hamburg and Berlin before moving to Auroville in 2008. He established his Auroville activity, 'brainfever media productions', in 2011. He lives with his wife in Aunusya forest and he is one of the co-stewards of Bliss forest. He has made various non-fiction short films. *Ever Slow Green* is his first feature-length documentary.**

**Auroville Today: What was the main idea and motivation behind your film?**

One of the aspects of Auroville that impressed me most when I first came was its forests. I could hardly believe when I learnt that all these forests were created from scratch and that Auroville was a barren desert plateau when it started in 1968. So I became interested in forestry, I started living in a forest community and also started to volunteer in forest work, which for me offered a great balance for my media work mostly sitting in front of a computer. Being involved in filmmaking and media on the one hand and forestry on the other, it naturally led to the idea of making a film about Auroville's forests. Making a feature-length film had also been a dream of mine for a long time, as it probably is for any filmmaker, feature-length being the king's discipline of filmmaking. And the basic concept for *Ever Slow Green* was born. I created a project proposal that I submitted to the 50th anniversary team for funding. My main ambition was to create a film with cinematic aesthetic. I didn't have a fixed script but I had specific ideas supporting my vision, for example, the constant use of slow motion emulating the slow pace of the forest.

**Was the film conceived as a way of helping protect Auroville's forest?**

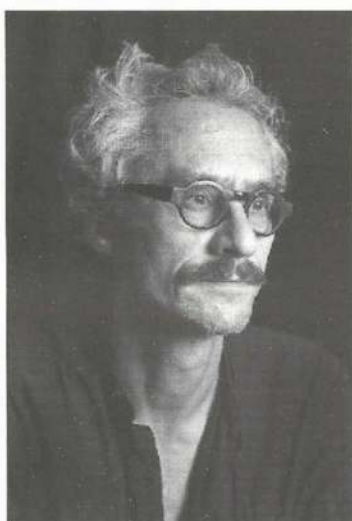
This is not a fundraising video, which would be much shorter, but a documentary film telling a story. Nonetheless, if I manage to sell the film, 30% of all income will be donated to the Forest Group.

The film aims to share with the world the story of this unique re-afforestation project. It is very difficult to replicate this experiment in any other place. It's not only about people planting trees, but the community aspect is essential. People live here and love the forest because they have grown with it. It is mentioned in the film that what makes it unique is its longevity. In other reforestation projects, people usually have a limited time to execute tasks and after the job is finished, they go, so there's no community left. That's not the case for Auroville's forest. One of the things that I wanted to get across is the forester's deep-seated passion for their creation. But even with this uniqueness, Auroville's forest is still very vulnerable to outside threats, like the proposed highway that created a lot of stress within the community. So my hope is that the film can also get to people who understand the value of the work that has been done here.

**How was the film financed?**

The project proposal to the 50th anniversary team was eventually approved but only for a quarter of the amount asked for, so I had to put in a significant amount on my own as well. Technically, this is a 'no-budget film' (less than 25,000 Euros). It has only been possible because all crew members liked the project and gave their time and energy without being paid their normal fees.

**What were the main challenges that you faced in making the film?**



Christoph Pohl

Because of the reduced budget, I had to cut down the shooting time. Originally, I planned to shoot over one year so I could capture the different looks of the forest through the seasons, but that was impossible with the new budget. Finally we shot everything within four months (from September 2018 until January 2019), five to six days per month (27 days in total), during the monsoon season and in winter, when the forest is lush and most vibrant after the rains. The weather brought up some technical difficulties: on some early mornings, the lenses would fog up from inside, so we couldn't shoot and we had to wait until they dried up. From the creative point of view, the most challenging thing was to play many different roles at the same time. I was producer, director, editor, and I also recorded the audio interviews on my own. So this game of 'wearing different hats' was very tricky. For example, as a director I couldn't always concentrate on the creative part of the film because as a producer I had to deal with the financial and organisational elements of the shooting at the same time. Also the mindset of an editor is really different. Preferably the editor watches the footage on the computer for the first time and has no attachments to particular shots or characters, like, for example, not knowing how difficult it was to get a certain shot.

Making a film about a community from within that community has advantages and disadvantages. I had access to places and people that an outside filmmaker would not have had so easily. On the other hand, I could not always make entirely creative decisions because I was also personally attached to certain footage.

**What about the editing process?**

From the beginning I was clear that I wanted the audio to lead the storytelling and not to have any 'talking heads' in the film; all interviews are off-camera. So the collage of voices is the main skeleton of the film, and then I intuitively added the visual footage on top later. I was looking for intimate personal experiences of people in relationship with the forest. My main criteria was to find in the voices that particular quality that comes when you speak from the heart. I interviewed 17 foresters which gave me 14 hours of audio interviews to sort out. My associate producer, Lesley



A still from the film: a kite flies over the dense Auroville forests

Branagan, was instrumental in helping build a structure and putting the story together. In that way the film doesn't necessarily have a traditional dramatic arc (the rising of a conflict until a climax, and then the resolution), but it's more like a book with different chapters flowing in a free way. I also wanted to break the direct correlation between what is seen and what is said, so the film has more layers of communication. I had to navigate 26 hours of video material. At some point I had the feeling that I didn't have enough action, there was too much walking, but I ended up sorting it out.

The main soundtrack is taken from the album "*Curling Pond Woods*" (2004) by North American musician Greg Davis. I really like the slow pace of the music and it came to my mind when I decided on the rhythm of the film. Not knowing him personally, I contacted Greg by email and he liked the concept of the film and agreed to a minimal fee and royalty contract. Additional music was composed by Aurovilian friend and sound artist Chloé Sanchez especially for the film. She is also responsible for all the bird sound recordings, which she recorded in Auroville.

**What would you say is the best thing about the film?**

I think you can really feel each forester's love for the forest. There is also a quality of 'things that can be read between the lines', what is being said is not all that is being communicated.

**What are the future plans for the film?**

I have just started submitting the film to various film festivals worldwide. One purpose of sending a film to festivals is to find a distributor who can help to sell it. This is the world of film industry which I'm not familiar with. I am currently looking for some additional funds to have a professional colour correction done, as I did what I could with help from photographer Marco Saroldi, but it needs improvement. Also some funds are needed to make a DCP (Digital Cinema Package), which is the format that is required for screenings at many film festivals and in cinema theatres.

Festivals require submitted films not to be published yet, so it will take at least another year before it becomes available on the internet. After the festival rotation, the film will surely be distributed to all AVI centres, schools and institutions for environmental education inside India and abroad.

From an interview with Valentina

For more information visit [www.brainfever.in/ever-slow-green](http://www.brainfever.in/ever-slow-green)



## Governing Board meets

Members of the Governing Board visited Auroville on 23rd – 25th January to attend their 55th meeting. In an open session with the residents on Thursday, 23rd, the Chairman, Dr Karan Singh, admitted that the Board could have acted differently in relationship to accusations they had received concerning certain Aurovilians [see *Auroville Today* # 366, January, 2020]. Instead of immediately forwarding these accusations to the Ministry of Human Resource Development for further action, Aurovilians who were explicitly named should have been given the opportunity to defend themselves. He also noted that the term of office of the present Governing Board would end in November, 2020. In reply to a request that he consider staying on as Chairman, he emphasized this is not in his hands but up to the Government of India. However, he would not seek a further term as he felt a younger person should now take up the task.

## Republic Day celebrations in Bharat Nivas

Various events were held to celebrate Republic Day, 26th January. In addition to the traditional flag hoisting ceremony, there was an interactive session with Governing Board member Dr Parmeshwaran and his wife Mrs Ojasi on the role of Sanskrit in education and in law, and a two hour 'Super-hit' Tamil theatrical extravaganza combining drama, song, dance and film.

## 2019 rainfall

Exceptionally, this year's north east monsoon began on time and extended into early January, 2020. Nevertheless, Charlie's measurements in Aurogreen showed a 5.88% deficit in comparison with the average north east monsoon rainfall. The first five months of 2019 were exceptionally dry, registering a deficit of 93% of the average, while the south west monsoon summer rainfall was slightly above average. He recorded a total rainfall for the year of 1 201.8 mm, which represents a deficit of 9.16% compared with the average rainfall for the past 42 years (1 322 mm).

Meanwhile, to the west in Auroshilpam, Satprem recorded 1 097 mm, while a few kilometres south in Ravenna, Jaap recorded a total rainfall of 1 300 mm for the year. This indicates that the rain falling on the Auroville plateau can be quite localised at times.

## Silver Fund

There is a proposal to establish a 'Silver Fund'. Anybody who is 70 + years old and has been on the Auroville Master list for a minimum of 25 years can request financial support from the Silver Fund. The support provided will be irrespective of any other income. The Silver Fund will be managed jointly by the Working Committee and the Auroville Council. The details of the policy are still being worked out, but the final version will go to the Residents Assembly for approval.

## Income tax issues

The FAMC reported that the Auroville Foundation received an Income Tax order for the assessment year 2017-18 (financial year 2016-17) of Rs 14.5 crores, computed on the

consolidated balance sheet, and another notice has been issued for the financial year 2017-2018. This challenges the validity of the income tax exemption that has been enjoyed by the Auroville Foundation for some years. The Auroville Foundation has engaged a Chartered Accountant to appeal the order and ensure that the notice for the assessment year 2018-2019 will be modified.

## News and Notes resumes

After an absence of over five months, the *News and Notes* has resumed with a new team. It was sorely missed. In the interim, the AuroNet team had been putting out a weekly news summary based on what has been published on AuroNet.

## Orchid exhibition at Botanical Gardens

The annual orchid exhibition was held over



two days in Botanical Gardens in mid January. It was a great success as almost all the orchids on display, including some rare ones, were purchased.

## L'Avenir d'Auroville/Town Development Council crisis

L'Avenir d'Auroville/TDC reported that due to a drastic cut in Government funding they may have to suspend all work and activities unless additional funding is secured. The matter was discussed in depth with the Governing Board.

## Green Architecture Award

Suhasini has won the Green Architecture Award organised by J.K.Cement Limited for architects from eleven countries. It was awarded for the Humanscapes Habitat youth housing project. [see *AVToday* # 340 of November 2017]

## New approach to land protection

Until now the approach proposed by the Tamil Nadu Govt to Auroville has been to constitute first of all an authority (NTDA), make a development plan, and then carry out a public consultation. The Secretary of Housing and Urban Development of Tamil Nadu has now proposed that, as a first step, there should be a land use map for the Master Plan area, followed by a public consultation. The process could culminate with the local authority, in collaboration with the Auroville Foundation, having the power to issue No Objection Certificates within the Master Plan. The legal and administrative implications of the new proposal as well as the NTDA are being studied.

## AVI meeting in Auroville

The Auroville International annual meeting will take place in Auroville between 13th – 20th February. Working groups and individu-

als are invited to present their work and projects. The AVI centres will also give an update on their activities.

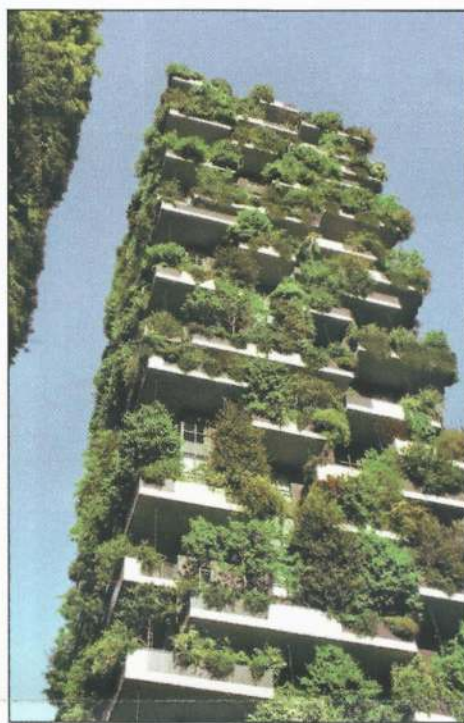
## Presentation by Dr. Amit Goswami

On 20th January, the eminent quantum physicist, Dr Goswami, made a presentation of his work at a packed Unity Pavilion. Dr Goswami is a pioneer of the new paradigm of science called "science within consciousness," which demonstrates how science and spirituality can be integrated.

## The Contemplative Art of Jyoti Naoki Eri

The Centre d'Art, Citadines, put on an exhibition by Jyoti of a series of works entitled 'Anima' in which he explored the material and immaterial dimensions of a simple water pot, culminating in images of lotuses. As one enthusiastic reviewer put it, "Here the art works are practically a series of records of his inner transformation".

## Architecture exhibition



The vertical forest in Milano

Between 20th January and 1st March, Paulette put on a photographic exhibition at the Town Hall on the theme of 'Milano's futuristic architecture: regeneration of the Porta Nuova district.

## Kala Kendra exhibitions

In December, the 2nd National Painting exhibition took place in Kala Kendra Art Gallery, Bharat Nivas. Organized by the Pondicherry Art Academy, 70 artists from all over India exhibited their work which represented a wide palette of styles. The organizers were pleased by the response. "Here everybody who comes is an art lover."

On January 4th, there was the opening of the Kolam Yoga exhibition, at which Grace exhibited some of her beautiful kolams, along with detailed explanations of their significance as well as kolam workshops. Grace has researched extensively the kolam and developed an integral and pedagogical method of teaching it. The KolamYoga training syllabus

enables the participants after completion to be certified in understanding, implementing and practicing the art of kolam as an integral tool of living life.

## Tribal art and craft exhibition

In collaboration with the Pavilion of India, a small collection of tribal and folk handcrafted artisanal work was showcased in January in the New Art & Craft building in Bharat Nivas. It was organised by AadiKala, an organisation which promotes their art, craft and culture through exhibitions and documentary films.

## Sufi dance



Last year, a 'Sufi Way' meditation retreat took place in Bharat Nivas. Led by Nirupam Gyan, it involved Gurdjeff movements, active meditations, breath work and Sufi whirling, which is a state of inner stillness and outer movement. On Christmas Day, there was a live concert in SAWCHU at which everybody was invited to join the Sufi whirling. (Photo on AVT computer if needed.)

## Ultimate Frisbee

Ultimate Frisbee will be hosting its annual Auroville Hat tournament on the 1st and 2nd of February. It will be the 10th year they are organising and hosting this tournament and they expect approximately 250 players to come from all over India.

## 13th Auroville Marathon

The annual marathon will take place on Sunday, 9th February. A marathon market will be held on the previous day and on the morning of the run.

## The Forest Moot

On Saturday the 15th of February a gathering will be held at the Botanical Gardens to show the new movie *Ever Slow Green*. Prior to the screening there will be a chance to connect with other people involved in planting trees around the region through an interactive poster session of afforestation projects in South India. The idea is to set the work in Auroville in the wider context of efforts around the region to protect the native vegetation. ('Moot' is ancient Anglo-Saxon for a 'gathering'.)

## Sunday walks

The popular Sunday walks in Auroville farms and forests have resumed. A series of 15 walks will be led by Auroville stewards of farms and forests on successive Sundays until mid April.

## PASSINGS

### Ingo Torp

On January 7th, Ingo H.W. Torp left his body at the age of 77 in Santé, after staying two days in the ICU in the Pondicherry Institute of Medical Sciences. Ingo had a weakened body due to a chronic heart condition; he succumbed to septic pneumonia.

Born in Riga, Latvia, Ingo grew up Germany. Being a teacher, and hearing about Auroville's educational system, he came first to Auroville in 1976. As there were no schools functioning yet at the time, he stayed and worked in Forecomers and Success and got interested in homeopathy. During the turmoil that plagued Auroville those days, Ingo moved to New Community in Certitude to eventually leave in 1984. He got married and worked in Hamburg as a school teacher while becoming a Heilpraktiker and deepening his knowledge of homeopathy. In 1996 he founded, along with others, the SdH-Hamburg, a school of homeopathy, where he worked as lecturer and teacher. He also worked as archivist at the Norddeutscher Rundfunk (NDR). In 2009 he returned to Auroville where he lived in the Needam premises in Certitude.

Aurovilians got to know him as a concerned and skilful homeopath, as a member of the Residents' Service team, as a mouth organ player ready to jive with groups in concerts, and as an actor in various theatre plays. Last month, already in a weakened condition, he insisted on playing the burglar role in *Noises on, Noises off*.

Ingo's body was buried on January 12th at the Adventure cremation and burial grounds.

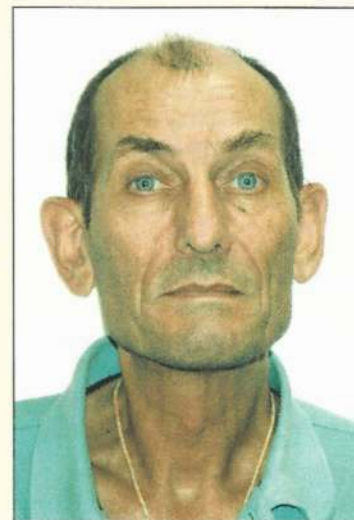


### Christian Koradi

On January 17, Christian Koradi left his body at his home in Parthana, at the age of 69. Suffering from severe back pain, he had been treated in Santé since June last year for Arteritis Temporalis (Giant Cell Arteritis), a rare auto-immune vasculitis. In his last days, his condition was aggravated and he may have succumbed to an acute flare up of the same.

Born in Zurich, Switzerland, Christian came first to Auroville in 2003. He became Aurovillian in 2006 while working at Matrimandir Nursery, where he was in charge of the hibiscus section for several years. Later he mainly stayed at his home in Parthana, living a rather solitary life, maintaining his garden with great love and care, meditating and studying Sri Aurobindo's and Mother's works, and often visiting the Chamber.

Christian's remains were cremated on January 21st at the Adventure cremation and burial grounds.





# A Generous Picture

The 2020 fifth Art for Land exhibition and fundraisers has started with an extraordinary varied programme and offerings. Thirty-one (and counting) events are part of this bounty with a plethora of art pieces for sale. There are eight art exhibitions, including the main exhibition in Unity Pavilion, where the Lt. Gov. of Puducherry, Dr Kiran Bedi, inaugurated the programme on 11 January. There are plentiful contributions by Auroville musicians; ten concerts, live music events and chant evenings. Adding to that are world cafes with documentary films on Auroville, creativity days, a generosity fair with afternoon tea, dance performances, a fundraising dinner with live music, talks by Loretta on 'The Journey to the Soul', and even a Bollywood workshop. It is a varied, rich and bountiful offering from hundreds of Aurovilians and well-wishers back to Auroville.

This abundant giving reflects the Auroville spirit, as Jaya one of the promoters of Art for Land from the Unity Pavilion put it; generosity is one of the key attributes of Auroville and one of twelve aspects of the Mother. In the inauguration, Jaya encouraged us all to give what we are comfortable offering even if it is 10 rupees a month. Mother is quoted as saying she would rather receive a million donations of one rupee each than one gift of one million rupees.

The subtitle of the inauguration was 'Land of Auroville: a Collective Commitment' and this desire to work as a unified whole on one of the most urgent and outstanding tasks of the community reflects the considerable effort put into these events. The long-term work for the lands by Aryadeep, Mandakini and Sigrid inspired Jaya and the Unity Pavilion team to support their endeavours. As one of the old timers here, she wants to "finish this task" (of buying the land for the Master Plan) as she put it and "not leave it behind to our children to complete". It is this collective effort to meet the task of our times that this campaign demonstrates. We are all invited to work on this task, as well wishers from afar or as Aurovilians. This huge challenge – one estimate puts the need at many millions of US\$ – is achievable with the same faith that the pioneers showed in their work.

One of the aims of the Art for Land campaign states: 'We are here to build a city but not just any city, a collective enterprise: for a shift in consciousness, a cradle for the new humanity, a next step in evolution, manifesting peace, harmony, beauty and striving for perfection.' The funding is then not just for land per se, but what the land itself is for, the attempts at human unity and evolutionary leaps which need a physical location to take place on.

One of the artists, Marie-Claire, says she is "very motivated to give for Art for Land. I always give even when I have no money. I'm happy to give and have done so since the beginning. It's a grace and my gift to the Mother, there is a joy in giving." Adil Writer has contributed many items both of sculpture as well as paintings on canvas and mixed media. He adds that his pieces at the exhibition are a "proper body of my work, nice to see it all in the setting of so much Auroville art. We are a small community of 3 000 people producing such diverse and good art". Nadaka, who is offering several concerts as part of the Art for Land campaign, mentions that the event is inspired by "community spirit above all" and he felt honoured to be called to contribute. He added that whilst normally in Auroville we do projects on our own, as soon as it becomes our community offering it starts working like magic. The visiting Australian soprano, Heather Lee, offered a programme of chants by St Hildegard of Bingen and from *Savitri*, added her support for buying the land as "we need to ground with nature in a world where land is being lost".

At the inauguration, Deepti mentioned a quote from Mother that 'what is needed is a handful of earth' and proceeded to expand on Auroville's purpose as a place of consecration for the future. Whilst more than a handful is needed, behind the efforts to buy the land is a consecration to further the Dream and Charter of Auroville. It is a big challenge but if we can collectively focus on generosity, possibility and consecration, then we shall have taken a big step on the journey.

Peter

visit: <https://www.artforland.in/>



Untitled, painting by Marie-Claire Barsotti, acrylic on paper, 120 x 91 cm



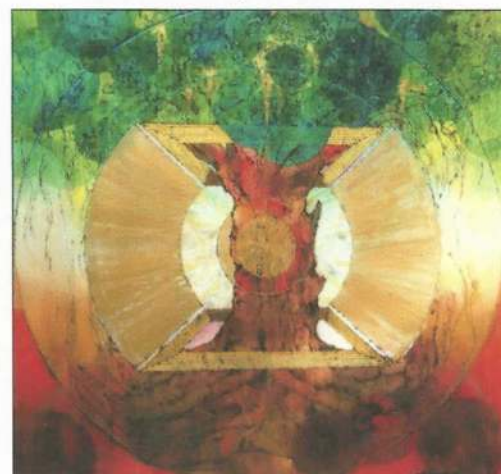
Indian Shrine, painting by Harsheill Patel, mixed media on canvas, 81 x 104 cm



Women Head, terracotta sculpture by Kratu, 37 x 20 cm



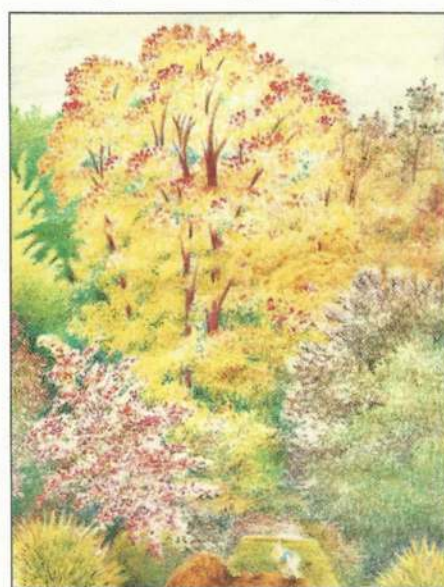
Pathway to Glory, stained glass work by Robert l'Heureux, dia - 60.5cm



The heart of the tree, by Crystal, pyrography, ink, goldpaint, goldpowder, 41 x 41 cm



Flight of Swans, painting by Priti Ghosh, oil on canvas, 60 x 80 cm



Colourful Trees, by Usha Patel, water-colour on paper, 36 x 28 cm

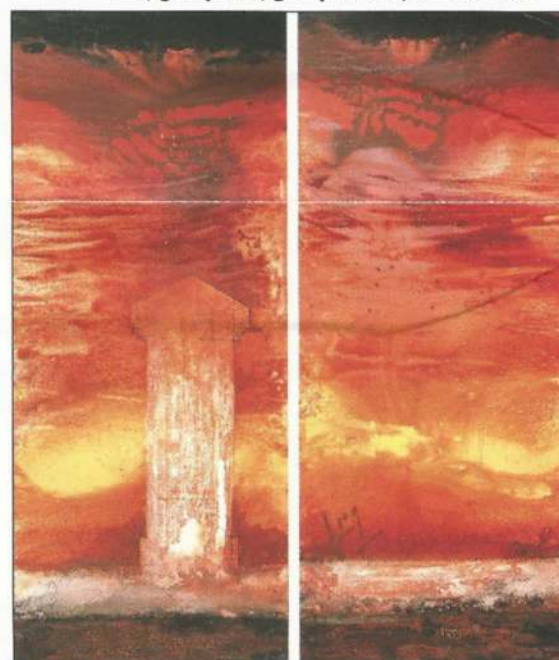


Shell Flare, stoneware and platinum artwork by Priya Sundaravalli, 21 x 9 x 5.5 cm



Stone Beauty, sculpture by Henk Van Putten, granite 23 x 23 x 20 cm

Left: Child's imagination, by Saraswati, ceramic stoneware 30 x 34 x 10 cm



Sentinel Vermillion, by Adil Writer, clay and acrylic on canvas, 70 x 168 x 5 cm



Sleeping Buddha Sandakphu, photograph by Taarak Parasher, print, 29 x 18 cm

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