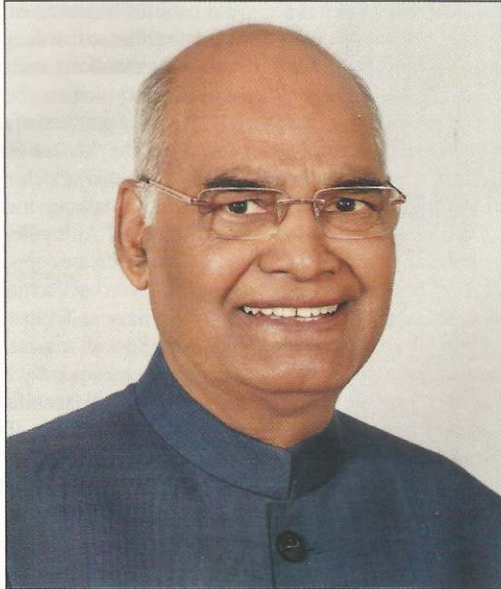


Message from the President of India



Shri Ram Nath Kovind, President of India

On the occasion of its 50th anniversary, the Hon'ble President of India Shri Ram Nath Kovind honoured Auroville with this message, which captures the essence of the vision of Auroville as reflecting "our quest for achieving oneness in diversity."

THE LANDS

Reversing the trend - land fundraising for Auroville

"The procurement of land for Auroville is the most urgent priority in order to ensure the future of the project in its original spirit," says Sauro Mezzetti, member of the Working Committee and former overall coordinator of L'Avenir d'Auroville. "In the last few years, several private real estate or commercial developments have taken place. Auroville is meant to be a very special social and physical space and if this market trend is not reversed, it may really hamper and compromise our social experiment. Accelerating land procurement, especially in critical areas, is the best way to ensure protection and is an urgent task that cannot be deferred."

The small team of land fundraisers has been working intensely to communicate awareness of this urgent need and it is through these efforts that there are now 612 worldwide land donors, the majority of whom make repeat donations. Support from Auroville's worldwide family has enabled the addition of 46 donation-financed plots (42 acres) to the Auroville land mosaic in the past three years: 17 plots in the City Area, including 2 in the Matrimandir Circle, and 29 in the Greenbelt, with 2017's new plots in critical areas – the Solar Kitchen, Shradhanjali, Fertile, Freedom, Irumbai Lake, Minati, Miracle, Sharnga, and in the International Zone.

The dedicated land website www.colaap.org is interactive, with direct access to donation and login access. It provides land and campaign information, frequent news updates, holds the growing video land library, and hosts the confidential donor pages for the campaigns that exist under the Lands for Auroville Unified (LFAU) umbrella: Acres for Auroville (for the entire Master Plan area) and GreenAcres (Greenbelt only). For greater visibility, the site's name is changing to

www.land.auroville.org but both names will co-exist until October. Among other outreach activities, the fundraisers have created its third New Year's card for 2018, commemorative of Auroville's 50 years.

The Acres for Auroville land campaign (A4A) is a collaboration of Auroville International with LFAU and provides the majority of donations thanks to the collective dynamism of the Auroville International (AVI) centres. Key contacts also come via 33 Sri Aurobindo centres and Integral Yoga groups in India and around the world. A4A is an action aimed at and carried by people who know and love Sri Aurobindo and The Mother and Auroville. In harmony with this, A4A's message is sent quarterly at the time of the Ashram's Darshan Days. The focus for 2018 is "Building a 50th birthday gift of land" as announced in the upbeat A4A fundraising clip, with music by Nadaka (on the Colaap website). "Since the Phase 4 kickoff on August 15th, the campaign has received over 170 donations, plus pledges for upcoming contributions," according to A4A co-organizer, Mandakini.

Says Vikas of AVI-UK: "Fundraising is being done with an infectious consciousness and joy, which prompts us to give and keep giving with the same spirit". Putting weight behind his words, Vikas's "50 Poems from Auroville" will be on sale in Auroville bookshops and venues with all proceeds going to A4A for land purchase.

For three years, dynamism has also been fueled by Auroville's artist community via Art for Land, a 3-way



collaboration of A4A, Unity Pavilion, and AV Arts (exhibition at Unity Pavilion until 15th February). In a cycle of reciprocal generosity, Art for Land donors receive an artwork as a gift from the works donated by 70 artists from Auroville, the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, India, and AVI centres. Donations can be made at Unity Pavilion or via the online gallery and reservation system <http://artforland.auroville.org>. Says Rema of the Unity Pavilion team, "Securing the land should be the first priority of Auroville as Mother had insisted. Without the land how can the city manifest?" And for Renu of AVArts: "There should be a place' and a place means land!"

The magical atmosphere of the exhibition and its purpose have been caught by two videos – by AV Radio and by Auroville Outreach Media (see Colaap news). As he did for the opening ceremony, Auroville Foundation Secretary Mohan Chunkath will preside over the February 15th closing event with its rare visual presentation of "The Mother – an artist and artistic influence", followed by rock and sitar concerts and a fundraising dinner for land purchase, with food contributed by Auroville eateries. Other vital support comes on the Auroville Marathon weekend from Visitors Centre boutiques, eateries, and other Auroville units which donate sales proceeds in solidarity for the land, as Maroma is doing with its special 50th candles.

"We are extremely grateful for the amazing support we have been receiving from Auroville's network of friends", says LFAU leader Aryadeep. "Let us keep it up and continue to grow the support for the land – the essential base for Auroville's existence!"

Expanding

More must be done urgently to secure the most crucial land, so while continuing to grow the dynamism of A4A and GreenAcres, a new form of outreach is being created. Sigrid explains: "The task is big. It's by seeing Auroville as a research



राष्ट्रपति
भारत गणतंत्र
PRESIDENT
REPUBLIC OF INDIA

MESSAGE

I am happy to learn that Auroville is celebrating fifty years of its foundation.

The International Township of Auroville, inspired by the vision and ideals of Sri Aurobindo, one of modern India's greatest sages, is a unique symbol of human unity, of trans-continental collaboration, of harmony and synthesis.

Auroville represents humanity's aspiration for peace and goodwill and symbolises our civilisational and age-old belief in "Vaisudhaiva Kutumbakam". Its aim of promoting international understanding, a new vision of education and harmonious collective living is inspiring. This also reflects our quest for achieving oneness in diversity.

I extend my warm greetings and felicitations to all those associated with the Auroville Foundation. I wish the Golden Jubilee Celebrations every success.

R. Kovind
(Ram Nath Kovind)

New Delhi
January 23, 2018



centre for the future of humanity that we can reverse the current trend of commercial development spreading in our area. We must reach out for the support of like-minded people, idealistic and progressive thinkers and activists, and organizations globally. We need to stand for what Auroville is meant to be – 'The city the earth needs' – in the most progressive way."

To this end, a new website funding.auroville.org showcasing what Auroville does for the world has been developed in collaboration with a U.S. financial professional, Ken Vanosky, and support from AVI USA. Ken says: "There are many ways to describe Auroville and the community's positive accomplishments. A powerful descriptive is that Auroville is the world's foremost example of 'evolutionary regenerative culture', one that has regenerated and stands as steward of its lands, created an experimental laboratory and centre of education for systems-based regenerative design, and outreaches with projects across India and worldwide. The new website emphasizes this position and speaks to the world's environmental community, foundations and environmental organizations, making the case that Auroville deserves strong international support."

With this new site as the backbone and appealing to a new base of donors, a global crowd funding action for the land is about to kick off. Using social media connections and networks – making it easy for Aurovilians to participate – it will succeed or fail based on our ability to greatly expand the network. It needs all our support. Those who would like to participate, please send their contact data to sigrid@funding.auroville.org. Auroville belongs to humanity as a whole, but safeguarding this precious trust is in our hands. It is up to us to reverse the trend!

The Land Fundraisers

- Looking back, looking forward: Frederick, Janaka, François and Gérard
- Auroville as a social experiment

pages 2 – 3

- Auroville in 2050: the prophecies of Prof. Balakrishnan, Anu, Gijis, Alan, Manas and Charudatta.

pages 4 – 5

- The Sustainable Livelihood Institute
- Book review: Auroville Dream and Reality

pages 6 – 7

- News in brief
- Passing: Christopher Gray, K. Nishanthi
- A sharing economy in Auroville?

pages 7 – 8

Find the answer within yourself

Auroville reaching 50 signifies a turning point. The first 50 years served to consolidate the bridgehead; now the bridge is to be built – not only by manifesting the town, but also by connecting with the wider world. I have a feeling that with the Matrimandir in place, not only Auroville is becoming activated, but all over the world something is emerging. It is like in a science fiction movie where the movement in one part awakens similar movements elsewhere. There is a reception for Auroville's message – Auroville can become a saving grace for many people who are looking for an alternative.

I had an experience before the inauguration of Auroville. It was in 1967. There had been talk about the new Supramental consciousness having coming down and The Mother's saying that it wasn't clear if it would spread out all over the world or would come to one place only. While I was thinking about this, sitting at the place where Auroville's home was to be built, and looking at the gathering monsoon clouds, I had a very strong experience that actually both had happened – perhaps with the difference that in the Ashram and Auroville people had been made aware of it.

I have often been asked if Auroville has lived up to my expectations. Obviously it hasn't. If I now read what I wrote in the 1970s about what Auroville is going to be and seeing where it is now, it doesn't match. But I do not take that 'not matching' as a negative – on the contrary, it would have been rather negative if 50 years ago, I would have known

what Auroville would be in 50 years.

In fact, the word 'expectation' is out of place in the Auroville context. You have expectations when you look for results and so determine the future. But the word for Auroville is 'aspiration', where you have a drive and a thrust into the future, where you try to serve this unknown in front of you but without expectations or determinations of what might come. For Auroville means a continuous stepping into a new adventure. That's the *raison d'être* of Auroville, that sense of adventure and moving forward, never enjoying the fruits of the past but always re-inventing oneself. That's what Mother invited us for: the big adventure, and She put the urgency to manifest a new environment and that new consciousness.

That sense of urgency is not unique to Auroville; it is also felt by many people outside whose aspiration for change is as intense as here in Auroville. The world is coming to such an absurd level, to such a mockery of values and virtues, that the moment has come that Auroville's *raison d'être* has to manifest.

In the early days, Auroville was seen as a place which was to be protected, as it were with a large wall around it, with less influx of people; a kind of biosphere. But that never happened. As Kireet Joshi once told me, the Divine sometimes changes its scheme. And I feel we are watching a change of scheme for the *raison d'être* of Auroville. Auroville is not a place for a few selected people; that which Auroville aspires to manifest is working all over the world. Auroville is a place that can help people to

become conscious of that.

That's what the Mother did for me. It was not that She put something in me which was not there before. She created in Auroville an environment, a space in which I could come into myself. For me, the most important aspect of Auroville is that it is a place "to give the soul a chance". That's what you often see when people first come to Auroville: it's all smiles and honeymoon – the promise of the soul in front. But when they return to join Auroville, they experience their shadows, and have to get rid of them to bring their soul forward.

There is another aspect to Auroville which is its 'collective psychic being'. You can perhaps compare it to a football team where the players – if it is a good team – are one organism. They complement each other. My way of being, for example, is to think in utopian terms, in large contexts, expansive. Others, who think of the details of manifestation, pin me down and ask me how on earth I think my ideas can materialise – and in doing so, they get under my skin. It took me some time to realise that, just because we are together, I can be myself and so can others. I do not need to shrink and think about specifics because there are others who do that better than I can. And I have come to appreciate the contradiction, and see how my 'large panorama' gets morphed into something else.

In other words, the Aurovilians are one large composite being where the individual components complement each other, and in working together are able to manifest something which is larger than the total of their individual contributions.

Take, for example, that proposed Line of Goodwill [see *AVToday* # 338, September 2018]. Twenty years ago, I would have pursued the manifestation of the Master Plan in all its details and have battled all those against it. Today, I smile and say to myself that it would be nice to have an apartment on the 17th floor, and look at the Matrimandir with an orange-laced Campari in my hand. But it no longer matters to me if this building or that one comes up – what matters is that we all understand that with the contribution of each of us, something much better can manifest. We have to get out of the old habit of bouncing off each other. We have to work together so that the gap between our aspiration and what manifests will no longer be a cause for nihilism or cynicism.

It is not a question of religiously or devotionally following the Master Plan or the Words of the Gurus. For too much proselytizing, too much 'heavy duty' talking, too much 'we represent the next future of Auroville', too much 'The Mother said ...' only creates opposition. When it comes to Auroville, you have to find the answer within yourself. We have to let the atmosphere of Auroville guide us. So with respect to the Line of Goodwill, I would like to support it and raise funds for it, but whether it will manifest the way the project originators now think about I don't know and, I believe, it doesn't matter. What matters is that we are open to the guidance. Then Auroville will show in what direction we have to move. And then, a quantum jump is possible.

Frederick

"We have to open ourselves"

In March, 2015, we interviewed three Aurovilians, Gérard Maréchal, Janaka and François Gautier, who had journeyed to Auroville in the first caravan in 1969, to learn more about the caravan story. On the eve of Auroville's 50th anniversary, we spoke to them again to find out what these early comers felt about Mother's passing, about the Auroville of today and future possibilities.

Auroville Today: Auroville is 50 years old. But in 1973, did you think it would survive The Mother's passing?

François: For me it was a terrible loss when Mother died: I never believed She would die. I didn't think that Auroville was finished, not at all, and the grace is still here. But when Mother died something went out the atmosphere: that very strong, solid atmosphere went away. And after She died, individually and collectively things went down. Her departure was definitely a setback for Auroville and I think it will take many more years now than She thought for the true Auroville to manifest.

Gérard: I had a different feeling, perhaps because the day She left I was working at Matrimandir and we completed the fourth pillar. Of course, it was very hard, a shock, because we felt She was immortal, but I knew the work on the Matrimandir would continue: we had to finish it. For me, She was there often, She has not gone, She is not far. So I never doubted also that Auroville would continue.

Janaka: I never thought that Auroville was finished. I left soon after Mother's passing, and when I came back after 18 years I felt that spirit, the strong atmosphere, that was there when I left. It was only when the Matrimandir was finished that I felt the special atmosphere of The Mother went away.

How do you feel about Auroville today?

Janaka: I don't understand where Auroville is going at present. I see the nice constructions and the nice roads, etc., but it is not enough. I came to build a new man, humanity, rather than to build a city but I don't think the right attitude is here at present to do this. Auroville has become so individualistic that I have withdrawn from almost everything except my work of looking after the art gallery at Citadines.

François: While I do not really agree with or understand the direction we are taking at present, it is useless to say that the past was better. We have to accept that Auroville is as it is now. Mother said that Auroville doesn't need us to be manifested, so eventually it will happen. Whether or not it is going in the wrong direction at the moment doesn't matter. But I believe that the spark is still there, that there is still a will to try something different.

But there are things that concern me today. Visitors to Auroville do not come for the right reasons. They come for the bakery, restaurants, parties, to ogle western girls or to drink in the Green Belt. So perhaps our aspiration is not strong enough to attract the right type of people.

We have given away so much important land, and all the access roads are in the hands of promoters and the wrong people. Again, many old-timers don't go to Matrimandir anymore because they feel it has become like a church: the people there tell you to be quiet and how to behave. While there is still a miraculous presence there, I don't feel welcome.

Above all, what is missing today in Auroville is the feeling of brotherhood that we had in the past. The psychic realisation would be ideal but just a feeling of brotherhood is important.

Gérard: When you look at certain things happening in Auroville, it is heartbreaking; the education system, the economy, our



From left: Janaka, François and Gérard

organisation with all these groups and the way we select them, for me it is obsolete. At a deeper level, you realise that things are like this because the old world is collapsing. It is collapsing because a New Supramental World is coming and the old has to make place.

For me it's not a problem of economy or politics, it is a problem of evolution. Auroville is meant to be the cradle of supermanhood; this is its true meaning and we can't continue with our little mind and ideas searching to improve the old story.

We're not here only to build a town but to manifest a new species. There is less and less that is collective in Auroville today, it is more about the individual. But maybe this is because the true collective is building up, a gnostic collective. In fact, I think like many other Aurovilians that something is already at work: you feel a connection with certain people, a true link from inside.

It is interesting to note that the community still gets easily polarised over certain issues, the latest example being the Line of Goodwill. The French were in the forefront of the struggle against the Sri Aurobindo Society in the 1970s, but were also very influential when the community turned against some of its own members in the 1980's. Did they help polarise the community?

François: There was already a certain cultural polarisation in 1969 because Aspiration was mainly French and the Matrimandir Camp more English and Anglo-Saxon. I think the revolutionary spirit the French brought was very important. The French got damaged in the

process, but what they did was important.

Gérard: There is something about the French. They have this very discriminatory mind as well as the spirit of revolution. That is why the fight with the Society was led mainly by the French. If the Society had won, Auroville would be a very different place today because they betrayed Mother's Auroville. It was difficult at the time: some of us were sent to jail. But it was necessary for the future of Auroville as confirmed by the Supreme Court of India.

Conflicts always create de facto a polarisation. Today, I think it is not so strong any more. Our collective step is to find the "third position" as Mother called it.

François: That polarisation is seen today more in the ecological part of Auroville against the town planners, it's not so much the French against the Anglo-Saxons.

Where do you think Auroville will be in 15 – 20 years time?

Janaka: For me there are two Aurovilles. There is the Auroville that seeks material comfort and the Auroville which aspires to manifest the consciousness of the superman. This aspiration can be felt in individuals and small groups: I feel it in Citadines where I live. So, overall, I am an optimist concerning the future.

François: Sri Aurobindo said this is the hour of the unexpected so I don't know what Auroville will be in some years time. But as long as people ask Mother what we should be doing and if we are taking

the right direction, I think we will be fine.

Gérard: I do not think we can improve the present system because it has to disappear. When Mother spoke of the true consciousness, She said it is like another geography, a completely different way of looking at things. New forms of organisation, etc., come when this other thing is there.

Maybe during the next 15 years Auroville will become even more difficult because something has to break through and Mother and Sri Aurobindo are working on it. Meanwhile, there are two parallel things here, the old and the new world. But evolution will continue and it will succeed, nobody can stop it because it is the meaning, the larger purpose, of everything.

Today, the first thing is to aspire for something else, then there will be an answer because there is always an answer. I think this is why She wanted us to build the Matrimandir: this is something that encourages that aspiration. We are all trying our best, we need to endure and, above all, we need the smile and love that are somehow always present behind everything and inside us.

Sri Aurobindo and The Mother have opened the way, now it is up to us to go ahead. Sri Aurobindo said about India that, despite of all its difficulties, thousands of years of spirituality have impregnated it and that has not gone. It is the same with Auroville. Mother has put her Force into Auroville but you have to open yourself to it to discover this new world.

From an interview by Alan

A tale of two cities

Bindu reflects upon Auroville as a social experiment

As we approach Auroville's 50th birthday, I can almost hear the trumpets blaring. But what exactly are we celebrating? The fact that some of us here have been here for almost 50 years? Or given the better part of our lives to this experiment? Or, shall we adulate ourselves, yet again, for the umpteenth time, for our achievements in successfully afforesting this barren plateau? Or rejoice in the ensuing economic prosperity? The successful completion of Matrimandir, and the inevitable rise of our fabled city, with paved roads replacing our mud paths?

Ah, the objective factors are easy to see, measure, and laud, but what about the invisible subjective aspects of Auroville? What about our ideals for a new form of society based on a differentiated human unity? A society that sought to embrace the eternal ideals of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity and usher in a new world? Do we even begin to talk about our achievements in this field? After all, isn't this what most of us signed up for – to experiment with the farthest reaches of human potential as a society? To try and understand our progress towards these subjective ideals, it would be useful to compare Auroville to a radically different social experiment, that of Singapore, a city that turned fifty only recently in 2009.

The founder and early citizens

What interests me about Singapore is the deliberate engineering of a society. It is a social experiment just as much as Auroville. And here the comparisons are telling. The success of Singapore is wholly due to its first prime minister, Lee Kuan Yew, regarded as the "father of the nation." LKW, as he is known in Singapore (apparently Singaporeans like acronyms as much as we do in Auroville) implemented this urban model of unbridled economic empowerment by strictly controlling personal liberties.

In contrast, Auroville was founded not by a political leader but by a spiritual teacher, The Mother, and orphaned after 5 years of its birth when she passed away in 1973. Even if The Mother had lived to govern and guide Auroville, it is debatable as to how much influence she would have had on the governance of Auroville. Recorded conversations with The Mother reveal that she too complained about the early Aurovilians not listening to her, just as much our governing groups complain about the non-compliance of current-day Aurovilians with our guidelines.

The nature of human beings

Perhaps what is telling in the radically different styles of governance of these two cities are the beliefs of the founders regarding the nature of human beings. For The Mother and her spiritual partner Sri Aurobindo, the human being was a transitional creature – half-animal and half-god – caught mid-way in the long evolutionary march of the Spirit but capable of perfecting itself through conscious growth or yoga. The key to this endeavour was the recognition of the freedom and uniqueness of the individual soul. For LKW, who states that to lead a society one must understand human nature, the human being is purely animal-like. He remained convinced that people abuse freedom and individual rights prevent the building of an orderly society. From this difference in perspective of the nature of human beings come about two radically different ideas of governance.

Governance

In order to train and discipline the recalcitrant animalistic nature of the human being, LKW created a society with a lot of rules and with strict penalties for disobedience. There are, for instance, steep fines for any form of public littering, and corporal punishment including the death penalty for possession of drugs. It is an autocratic society where the government micromanages the details of individual lives. The punitive form of justice has resulted in a compliant society, so much so, that the social rules are internalized. Singapore does not have a huge police force, for as one resident says, "the cop is inside our heads" and self-censorship is common.

Anti-authoritarian and anarchistic since its founding, Auroville is the polar opposite of Singapore. The experiment in governance that The Mother sought in Auroville is arguably unique in human history. Terming the ideal political organization of Auroville "divine anarchy," The Mother explains that "the anarchic state is the self-government of each individual, and it will be the perfect government only when each one becomes conscious of the inner Divine and will obey only him and him alone."⁽¹⁾ The inner divine to which The Mother refers is the psychic being, the power of the soul evolving itself. When people are conscious of it, they can "organize themselves spontaneously, without fixed rules and laws."⁽²⁾ Such an ideal organization, where people are conscious of their psychic beings and live according to the supramental truth, would automatically lead to a natural hierarchical harmony where everyone would find their place. It would result in an integral unity where individuality and diversity are not suppressed. Unlike Singapore, where the individual is subsumed by society, in the spiritualized society that The Mother envisioned, the individual and the society would experience a mutually beneficial relationship.

The Mother also indicated the possibility of envisaging a small group with "intuitive intelligence" (people with "an intuition that manifests intellectually")⁽³⁾ governing Auroville and spoke of a "hierarchical organization grouped around the most enlightened centre and submitting itself to a collective discipline".⁽⁴⁾ But, she also mentioned that if such a group did not naturally emerge, still the divine force would act equally on all. With none of the Aurovilians apparently having this greater spiritual authority, in recent years the governing ideal that has evolved in Auroville is that of a participatory democracy.

While the Auroville Foundation Act by the Government of India lays a legally recognized organizational structure upon Auroville, for all practical purposes Aurovilians are given freedom to organize their internal governance in any way they choose. In the early years, when



Sens dessus dessous, by Michel Granger

the Auroville community numbered about 200 people, all decisions were sought to be collectively taken in meetings of all residents. At present, Auroville is organised by a number of key working groups that have been nominated to office through a participatory process by the community. This is in keeping with evolution of human societies throughout the ages where one finds that as a society grows, there is an increasing division of labour accompanied by an increasing complexity of governing policies and institutions. In the absence of laws, however, governance is based on increasing sets of guidelines and policies that have been adopted by the community. Governance, however, depends on the goodwill and cooperation of the residents, for there are practically no collective structures to enforce decisions.

The challenges of a small community where the governed and those involved in governance often know one another personally is manifold. Other challenges include lack of full-time competent people available for serving in governing positions, insufficient institutional mechanisms to ensure continuity of work, and an increasing number of checks and balances in the system in an effort to ensure all the residents abide by the basic principles of Auroville. The working groups are mostly peer-based in their internal organizational structure. But without any effective hierarchy, group processes are often experienced as being interminably slow.

Decision-making in Auroville is a lengthy and cumbersome process as different viewpoints are sought to be included through a process of consensus. If consensus cannot be achieved, a vote by the majority (generally two-third majority) is used as a decision-making process. But even more worrying is the fact that participatory democracy, contrary to the Mother's idea of divine anarchy and a spiritual society, equalizes all citizens, irrespective of their individual knowledge and skills. The underlying assumption of a participatory democracy is that people operate from the same set of informations. But information is always unequally distributed and individuals' ability to absorb information and act upon it also varies. So instead of decisions being based on information, in Auroville opinions can often form the basis of decisions.

Divine anarchy or self-organization in Auroville

The ideal of "divine anarchy" is often confused by many with anarchy, and the current tendency towards centralized structures is lamented by many. Divine anarchy is best translated as "self-organization," for, as The Mother elucidates, when people act from their psychic beings, they organize themselves spontaneously.

Monica Sharma, an internationally renowned expert on facilitating leadership, appreciates the self-organizing capacities of Auroville as a society. She finds Auroville fairly unique in that it is not led by an institutional head, but the activities, such as businesses, municipal services, agriculture and education, are largely self-organized. As Monica explains, the glue that holds the manifold activities of Auroville together is our adherence to a common set of values based on our ideals. In her recent book, *Radical Transformative Leadership*, she terms the organizational structure of Auroville a constellation where, as in a constellation of stars, every entity in Auroville operates

independently and is yet "resonant and interdependent with other entities." For Monica, a constellation as an organizational structure that is based on universal human values is inherently capable of the paradigmatic shifts that are needed in the world. Viewed in these terms, Auroville's governing structure perhaps is an experimental model for the future.

The capacity for self-organization in Auroville was perhaps best exemplified in the early years in the small communities of Aurovilians, dispersed over the barren plateau. Since the eighties, however, there has been increasing centralization of both economic and governing structures and, contrary to our ideals, Auroville now monetizes most, if not all, of its internal transactions.

The self-organizing capacity of Auroville is best seen today in moments of crisis, as in the immediate responses of Aurovilians to environmental calamities like the tsunami of 2004 and the cyclone of 2011. But, as elsewhere in the world, there are some social enterprises in Auroville which, instead of following the hierarchical top-down corporate model, have successfully adopted more self-organizing principles in their operational processes.

The nature of society: Creativity

Even though there are some who decry the loss of creativity and individual expression in Auroville, especially in some of our schools, one of the hallmarks of our young society has been innovation in every sector. Innovation, as the government of Singapore is realizing, is not something that can be dictated from the top. The innovative spirit, as exemplified in Auroville, is born within the creative minds of individuals working together to resolve a common challenge and generate the best possible results. It is here that Auroville is at its most inspiring. While research studies in this field are lacking, I would venture to say that for its population, Auroville has a high percentage of creative innovators. Consequently, at least in India, Auroville is regarded as a pioneer in its afforestation work, organic farming, appropriate building technology, and in originating quality products. Moreover as in a constellation, Aurovilians, regardless of their field of work, inspire each other when they strive to do their best at work. And as in a natural ecosystem, the potential for collaboration among different Auroville units for a larger purpose is huge.

Societies in transition

Regardless of how societies are structured, there are evolutionary dynamics at play shaping pioneering human societies through the history of time. In Auroville, the pioneers who first settled in this barren plateau were in the age group of 20-29, but today, in terms of population numbers, this is one of our smallest demographic sectors (see AVT No. 341). Auroville is an ageing population with the majority of us being over 40, and given the fact that the once young pioneers have become old, there is a sizeable proportion of the population who are over 60 years of age. Unlike Singapore, however, where the government, by and large welcomes immigrants, Auroville is not able to attract more people, especially young people, to join this experiment. Over the last fifty years, Auroville has created sufficient infrastructure with accommodation for its residents and basic services for food, electricity and water supply, communication, waste management, education, health care, economic transactions and town planning have been established.

However, the growing institutionalization and monetization of our society has also meant that these days it is easy, if one has the means, to come and retire in Auroville as opposed to dynamically engaging through one's work in the utopian task of a different form of society. This observation leads one to ask a basic question about human psychological evolution which is, if the basic needs of human beings are met, will individuals still strive to grow?

The increasing reliance on institutions can also be detrimental to the ideal of self-organization in that individuals instead of choosing to deepen their relationships by resolving issues amongst themselves rely on the institution to solve their problems. And this too, I fear, is detrimental to the experimentation of a new form of society. Again, in the natural order of the universe, the part and the whole, the individual and the collective, need to establish a symbiotic association, and in human beings this can be achieved only by cultivating conscious relationships with others. There is a danger of bypassing this collective yoga if we excessively rely on third-party institutions to mediate our relationships.

Quo vadis?

As societies in transition, it is hard to foretell where both Singapore and Auroville are headed, and both cities are, of course, not isolated experiments, but subject to the capitalistic trends of the globalizing world. The challenge of Auroville, given its ideals, of building a new hitherto un-established form of society, is greater than that of Singapore with its founding ideal being limited to economic prosperity. Will Auroville live up to its ideals, or will it sink back to being an "inferior creation" and just become, as some Aurovilians fear, another exotic tourist destination in South India? Some Aurovilians romanticize the past, but going back to "past dawns" is not an option – whether we participate or not, the relentless evolutionary march will continue.

Bindu

(1) *Mother's Agenda* Vol. 11: 76.

(2) *Collected Works The Mother* Vol. 13: 224.

(3) *Mother's Agenda* Vol. 9: 101.

(4) *Collected Works The Mother* Vol. 13: 204.

Auroville 2018-2058: A Brief Survey by Professor R. Balakrishnan, Dept. of History, Auroville University

In 2018 Auroville had come to a moment of decision: the income of many residents only allowed them a very basic of standard of living; city planning was bureaucratic; public transportation did not exist and the road system still mostly dirt; building individual houses in the city area was virtually prohibited; it had no internal police force nor the legal authority to resolve disputes; and it had no effective body of representatives to make and enforce decisions. Most of all, it did not have the shared vision to complete its environmental mission begun by some of the early settlers.

Many who were there at that time will think that I have overstated Auroville's problems, and perhaps I have. After all, it was still a developing township with a thriving though small creative economy. Besides, the stated purpose of Auroville was to achieve human unity through serving the divine consciousness and produce residents of a higher order of humanity.

This 2018 Auroville, under the control of the first generation of settlers and the original galaxy town plan, was guided not so much by the quest for the material welfare of its residents but by the spiritual legacy of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo who, they thought, continued to watch over and guide it.

Aurovilians at that time could be divided into three broad categories. There were residents who did not live a life much different from what they would have in any expat community. The second group was primarily religious,* with overt faith that The Mother could and did intervene in their lives and in Auroville as a whole. The third was a group of dedicated *sadhaks* who were trying to actually attain the divine consciousness that The Mother and Sri Aurobindo personified. The thread of The Mother's utopian dream held all three loosely together.

This reliance on The Mother's force (and on the original Galaxy design, impractical though it was) helped to keep the town in suspension while its residents figured out how to govern themselves and how to deal with the impact of a surging south Indian economy. Because Auroville had grown from a small community into a 2,500 person town, this governance issue had become more complicated. At that time, before the imposition of the ARA (Auroville Reorganization Act) by the Indian government, it was done by committee, resulting in a lack of decisive implementation, especially since many Aurovilians only recognized the

authority of The Mother as interpreted by themselves. Auroville was an introverted community, just beginning to realize its connection to and dependence on the surrounding region.

But there were many in Auroville who recognized that the real purpose of this reforested town was to become an incubator for green practices and planning that could transform not just the bioregion but further beyond. The GBR (Green Building Requirement), passed in 2030, made certain that no Auroville building could be henceforth constructed without using the latest techniques for sustainable structures.

Around this time, as Auroville became increasingly surrounded by random development, this impasse began to change. Auroville had around 3,500 residents then, and many had come recently from the professional Indian middle classes. While the old guard decried this influx as not international, these newcomers were providing the economic and inventive impetus for change. Besides, the old guard was indeed old and tired, unable to fight the conflicts of the past. The newcomers wanted a town that responded to their material needs while also offering arts, culture, education (the Auroville International School had begun in 2025, the University 10 years later), and the chance to live a life free from the rigidity of Indian society in a pollution-free environment. As the religious impulse faded, the spiritual practice of Integral Yoga became concentrated in small, intense groups who formed the Sadhak Circles we recognize now.

Today, as we know, the new generation of pioneers sees Auroville as the city that India and the overheated earth needs to demonstrate green, sustainable living. Although the population seems to have leveled off at 15,000, the number of visitors who come here to ride our solar buses on the Green Tour increases by the day, along with the volunteers who come to learn about the latest ecological practices.

Though Auroville has changed much in the past 40 years, its environmental mission has only begun. Taking advantage of all discoveries from within and without, Auroville wants to move forward with the quest to live in harmony with our transformed red green earth.

*I use Vergowski's definition of an historical religion: "A group who believes that they are under the special care and guidance of a supernatural being or the charismatic founder(s)' occult powers."

Through the Looking Glass by Anu

Auroville in 2050 offers two distinct possibilities. One, that I, now ninety-three, enjoy sailing across the lake on a Matrimandir gondola to the Park of Unity, with or without my dentures. The other is that thirty-two years from now I've absconded to the lighter side of the universe yet not averse to visiting incognito as wonderful changes are afoot. The dream that was at least a hundred years ahead of its time has deepened. Eighty two years have gone by, the population has grown to almost twenty thousand. The city buzzes with peace.

A new generation has completely overhauled Auroville's organisation, as well as its society. Negativity has sunk to an all-time low as the cottage industry of conflict and controversy has finally decided to call it a day while bureaucracy is now only left to the bores. Professionals are no longer those with overburdened official knowledge but those who have the deepest understanding of Auroville together with a practical capacity to make it manifest. As a result, all parts of the city are now able to grow together. The International and Cultural zones are real happening places, creative in its research and of great innovative beauty. The universal town is ripening at last.

Auroville just won an award for enhanced sustainable mobility as the Crown monorail was flagged off and the inner city up to the Crown was declared almost wholly pedestrian, with the exception of collective electric transport.

People have actually begun enjoying working together, making sure that the city steadily takes shape in all its parts. There is great empathy amongst this new population. About five Lines of Force, big and small, are now inhabited, even as twenty new farms dot the Greenbelt which is almost all there, and the forests are growing well. There is no longer that old separation and hostility between Green belt and city dwellers. Green belt often take a week's break, reserve a room in a Line of Force to catch up with city friends and events and take a look how the hydroponic farms on rooftops are doing and note the increasing variety of bird population that comes to nest in the spring. People from the Residential Zone often go off for quiet retreats in the forest or go work on a farm for a month. Mongoose and porcupines cross the city at ease along paths and green corridors and the radials. No, they are not allowed to ride the monorail. There was an incident which I cannot divulge on *Auroville Today*.

Of course, all this begs a question. How did such things happen? What about ground reality, the villages and topsoil?

Well, something happened to people between Sri Aurobindo's 150th birth anniversary in 2022 and the Mother's in 2028. The carbon footprints in our minds and hearts were the first to fade. It helped the city and society enormously as the atmosphere went through a massive change. Six sustained years of great inner

transformation carried Auroville to a new place even as the world went through turmoil and change as it tried to find a new equilibrium. People came to Auroville, from the bioregion and everywhere else from the known galaxy seeking another life, another kind of humanity.

Did Auroville have it in itself to offer something of greater worth? Did it have place for these seekers of a new life from here or from there? The light that had been growing inside was starting to become visible. 'She' had once asked for our sincerity. And She wanted new forms for the new force to anchor. Form, not as flat shapes and structures but as a living, organic momentum. A new education was in the air.

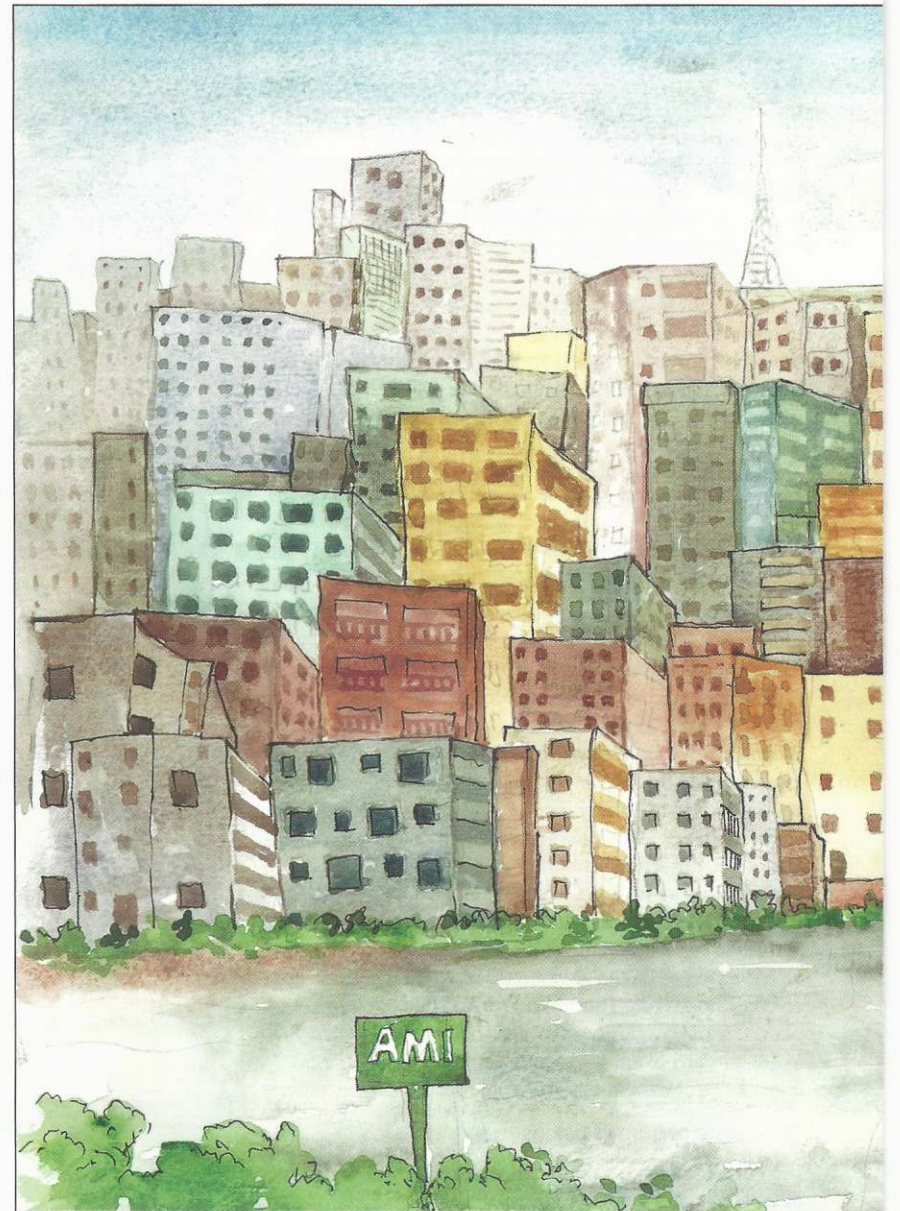
When I looked in, in 2050, Auroville was steadily reaching a new equilibrium of consciousness. Tourists were still coming of course, but Auroville had changed because the Aurovilians were changing, opening to the new consciousness that inhabits the air like a miracle. Tourists don't just rush to shopping arcades or the golden ball, they are first given space and time to discover Auroville and enter an atmosphere that is different.

One day, while I was still around, I saw a group of young friends get off at the monorail stop in the Cultural Zone and walk to a café. They were young architect students coming out of a workshop and they had been given an assignment. They had to find the planning principles for Auroville's growth. Was form everything? Why were new forms needed to manifest a new force? What did that imply for the Auroville? The standard criteria of building and planning is that Form follows Function. This includes basic positioning, utilities and facilities and is worked together with sustainability principles, said one participant. But what of the people, asked another. So they added another level: Form follows Fiction, imagining the city and the Greenbelt where people live, work, grow and interact, following their needs, trajectories and responses to humanize circulations within the form. But still, another participant mused, what of the dream, its poetry and its intention? So they added another level: Form follows Vision and began exploring how all these levels would percolate: function, imagination and vision, so that the city could co-exist at those levels. The owl that lived on top of the bookshelf beside their table gave a hoot and flew out of the window, satisfied.

In 2050 two young people stepped off the Lake Promenade and into my gondola. Suddenly one of them turned to me with a smile. "Building Auroville together is the most spiritual thing we've done. It is the beginning of harmony. We have crossed massive egos and entrenched positions, people have let go of fears and prejudices so we can ride this gondola together. We are on the bridge to the future!" Truly, Auroville at 2050 is an amazing place to be in. Check it out.

Auroville

We asked some Aurovilians to imagine what Auroville would



Auroville 2050

"It's the latest in Oracle technology" says Aurelia, while she presses a button on a transparent panel, revealing a hologram in the form of Sri Aurobindo hovering in mid air. "Together with the Augmented Collective Intelligence team at Auroville University we worked hard to have it ready in time for deployment during the Auroville 80th anniversary celebrations. Who wants to give it a spin and ask a question?" She looks around as silence envelopes the select group of residents who have been invited to this pre-launch event in the penthouse office of Aurelia's research unit, situated at the highest end of the Line of Goodwill building, overlooking the township.

Then one of the delegates, a middle-aged man in an official looking uniform asks, "How do we address him - I mean it? Does the Oracle Protocol apply here?" Aurelia smiles a little mischievously, and replies "I like to call him Satchi, but it doesn't matter - the neural network synchroniser responds to your intentions, rather than the words you speak."

Again, silence. Some delegates exchange glances full of apprehension, as if they are hoping to escape the all-seeing eyes of Aurelia's invention. One lady in the outer circle carefully makes her way to the exit, when suddenly the hologram speaks. "Don't worry Auromina!" it says with a deep, compelling voice and a strong Bengali accent, "I can't actually read your mind. All I do is accelerate your group's collective thought process."

"Thanks Satchi", Aurelia interrupts, and pressing another button she makes the hologram dissolve. "The system will be moved to the Control Room and handed over to the Auracle Council shortly." With a sigh of relief the delegates leave the room and gather at the Viewing Point outside of Aurelia's office, where they are served drinks and snacks by vintage waiters.

The Auracle Council that Aurelia was referring to is a group of elders who convene daily in the Control Room, a radiation-free glass dome at the bottom of the Matrimandir Lake. Through a strictly guarded airlock, seekers access the Atlantis-like space where the elders meditate in a circle and respond to questions about everything from marriage and building permissions to strategic investments and government relations.

Leaving her guests behind, Aurelia descends to the Ground Level Auditorium where she is invited as keynote speaker to this year's Newcomer Conference. She addresses the crowd of two hundred fresh applicants aged between 20 and 40 from a hovering platform in front of an aircreeen that displays illustrations supporting her presentation. "We all know China is world leader in Artificial Intelligence and data tech, and as such the China Pavilion has become a major partner for the Government of India's 'predictive progress' programme which replaced the Planning Commission as the main source of advise and guidance on public policy." She sees the audience is mesmerised and confidently continues, "After two decades of tourism as the main

sou
fun
tion
and
Ou
ing
fol
roc
Ind

cor
the
lin
yet
era
pie
it t

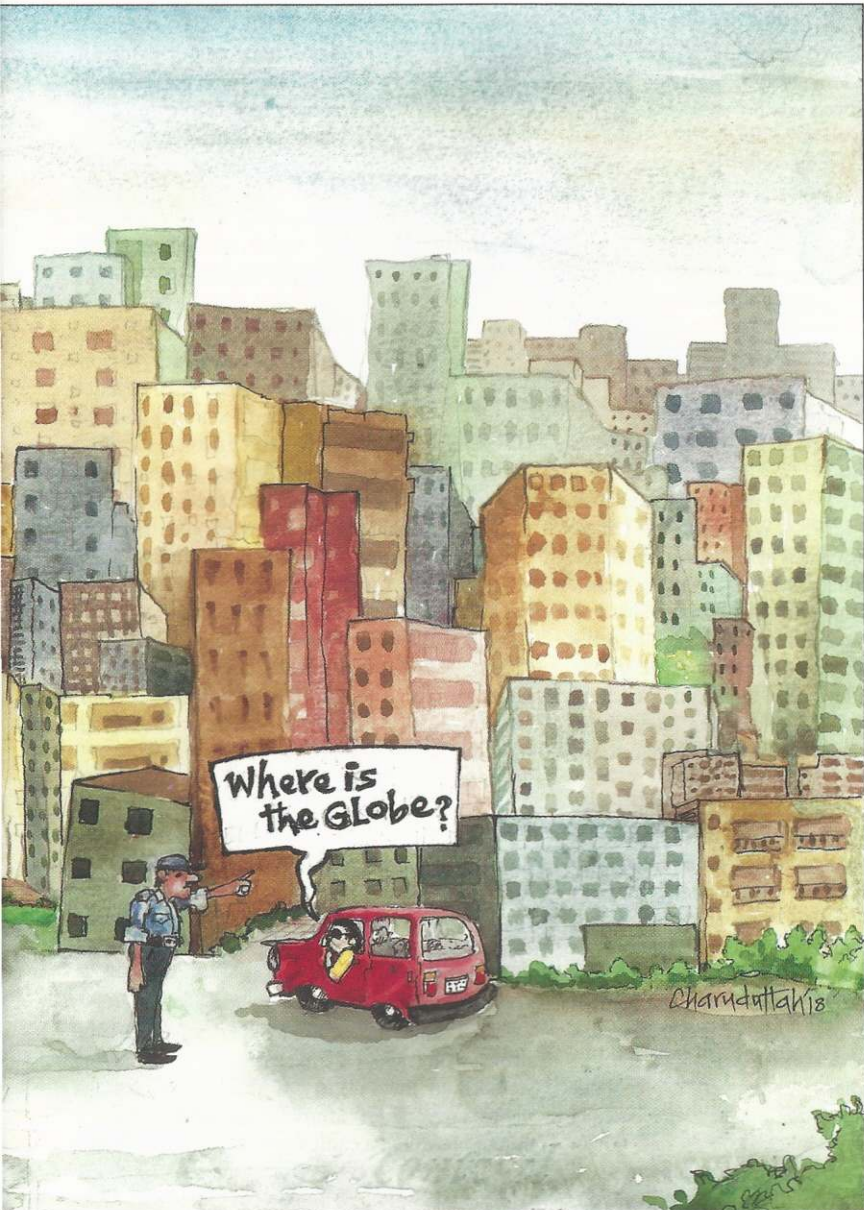
sor
shi
sen
kno
you
Spi
of l
ing
to l
sch
all
arti
est
Co
vis
to a
sin
spr
the

slo
the
ent
Bo
car
the

you
the
tur
pie
the
"T

e in 2050

look like in 2050 or in 50 years time. Here are the responses.



Charudatta's take on Auroville in 2050

50 by Gijs

orce of income generation, Auroville now depends for its ding on royalties paid for the use of its indigenous informa- and communication technology, licensed to governments corporations worldwide under the brand Supramental-IT. colleges are famous for their weeklong hackathons, attract- the best and brightest programmers and engineers, eagerly owed by wealthy investors and influential politicians." The m responds with yells of appreciation. A group of North ians shouts "Supramental-IT ki jai ho!"

Aurelia poses for a group photo, taken by one of the new- er's pet dragonfly drones and as the audience files out into Central City Plaza she notices a scruffy looking young man ering behind. "What's the matter?" she asks, "not a believer ?" The man looks around him and points at the security cam- in the ceiling above them. "Do you mind?" Aurelia takes a e of paper from her bag scribbles something on it and passes him. He pulls his hood over his head and walks off...

That evening they meet at the beach, away from all the sen- s and devices that have been installed throughout the town- . "I could tell by the way you looked at me during the pre- tation that you're not a normal devotee. I guess you want o w the other side of the story?" The man nods. "Well, I guess . know that after the revolution in 2036, when India became a ritual Republic, control over Auroville shifted to the Ministry Religious Affairs. This has lead to special treatment and fund- in the form of the large ashrams we have, each housing 5,000 0,000 members, complete with community kitchens, hostels, ools, medical centres and dispensaries. The price we paid for his is the loss of pluriformity. Long gone are the days when sts were allowed to perform spoof plays, and make fun of the blishment. Since the Governing Board installed the Quality trol Cell at the Town Hall, with powers to cancel people's as, the renegade fringe elements have left one by one. Some lternative settlements in Africa and South America, but most ply got absorbed by their children's extended families, ad across Europe, Australia and the USA: what we now call Old World."

The man nods again, picks up a handful of sand and lets it vly slip through his fingers. "I know" he says, "my grandfa- : was a greenbelter. He was exiled and moved in with my par- s when I was six. I had to hack my own UID to pass the Entry ard test." Aurelia stares at him with wide eyes, in which he 't help but notice the reflection of the moon. "Do you think y realised?" he asks.

"Why?!" Aurelia exclaims as she jumps up. "Why would i risk everything to get back in? Why now?! Can't you see e is no space for free thinkers anymore?" Now it's the man's i to smile mischievously. "Perhaps." He pulls a crumpled up e of paper from his pocket. On one side it says "meet me at beach at sunset", on the other side, in fading print letters, ie Auroville Charter".

Back to the future by Alan

By 2023 the community had reached gridlock on a number of issues and it became clear that the structures we had set up 35 years ago no longer served the community. At this point, those people who had been trying to infuse something higher into the groups felt that their continued presence was simply giving support to old thought-forms; one by one, they withdrew.

Until then, they had acted as individuals. Now a natural resonance drew them together in small, informal groups to explore alternative futures. Each group evolved its own way of working. Some focussed upon inner change, some on the economy or new forms of meeting and governance, but a common factor was the attempt to access a deeper guidance and to surrender individual opinions and desires to something larger.

At first, these groups explored and experimented upon themselves. Among their findings was that embodied energy is more powerful than mental energy; and that generosity evokes generosity while possessiveness evokes possessiveness.

Above all, they began to understand that the most powerful energy to manifest change derives from harmony and integrity rather than from confrontation, division and imposition.

Participants in these groups also explored the personal roots of the distrust and fear that they felt underlay so many intransigent issues in the community. They learned to drop their defences and to speak openly about their doubts and dreams. Then they began making practical experiments. They explored how best to help each other transcend the ego, how to come to genuine collective decisions based on inner alignment, and some of the groups began pooling their financial and other resources and setting up small-scale 'Prosperity' systems.

In 2025, two of these groups decided to make a detailed study of the larger community. They looked at our economy, governance, town planning, health and education structures and tried to assess their utility in relationship to realising the ideals. They found many aspects of our organisation encouraged behaviour that was antithetical to these ideals and were predominantly old forms that reflected a worldview which was fast losing its relevance and purpose. Remembering that Mother had said that Auroville "wants to be a new creation, expressing a new consciousness, in a new way and according to new methods", they re-examined in this light many of her messages to the community, particularly regarding the need to make the inner discovery and the ideal form of governance and economy. They concluded that these were not outmoded but blueprints for the future.

When these groups presented their findings to the larger community, there was a mixed response. Some felt that we should continue with our present structures for the time being, as we did not have the required consciousness to jettison them. Others, particularly the young and many of those who had entered the community in the past ten years,

recognised the need to replace our sclerotic and bureaucratic organisation with something much more revolutionary.

There was deadlock. At this point, larger events intervened. By the late 2020's the effects of climate change were undeniable. Auroville was experiencing its third drought year, and all over India crops failed and food prices escalated. There were serious water shortages in the local villages and mounting resentment of Auroville's relative affluence.

Then, in 2030, there was a major meltdown of the global economy. This was the death knell for many of our commercial units, most of which had been struggling for years. At the same time, government and private funding for the Auroville project collapsed, as did tourism.

Auroville was confronting a situation akin to that in 1978, when the Sri Aurobindo Society cut off funding.

A chaotic period resulted. Many people left the community. For those who remained, there was a new urgency to do the inner work and to create the conditions for a new world to manifest. Realising that in difficult times the power of community was much more resilient than that of individualism, they agreed, among other things, to pool all their personal resources in one collective account and to adopt a prosperity system that would allow everybody to sustain themselves at a basic level. Building on the work of the small exploration groups, creativity was poured into exploring new forms of economy, governance, environmental restoration, education etc. that would reflect Auroville's spiritual ideals but also meet the needs of a world plunged into financial, social and environmental chaos.

As news about Auroville's experimentation spread, young idealistic volunteers from all over the world were drawn to the community – many were accommodated in the former guest houses – and the population began to rise again.

By 2050, almost 5,000 people from many different nations were living on the plateau. Compared to 2018, in 2050 the standard of living was simple and much more egalitarian. The Galaxy had not been built, but accommodation, health care, living expenses, etc., were provided free to all who wanted to work for Auroville's ideals. The financial resources of Aurovilians, along with the income from units, most of which provided essential products for the community and the villages, went into a central fund that supported community services, research and a sustainable bioregion.

There was no longer any need for an Entry Service as Auroville was no longer attractive to those who were not willing to give up material advantage in the service of an ideal. There were also far fewer working groups and regulations as there was a high degree of self-motivation and trust. When a community decision was needed, everybody stopped work and came together for however long it took to access collective inner guidance.

In 2050, nobody believed that Auroville had yet become the 'cradle of the superman', but the old-timers who remembered 2018 agreed that there had been an important course correction.

The Auroville Resort and Spa by Manas

Almost 50 years ago, Dylan Evans founded the Utopia Experiment in the Scottish Highlands. But after a year of living in a fully self-sustaining way, the community collapsed, and Evans found himself in a psychiatric hospital. What explains the short life of most intentional communities and the lasting attraction of Auroville?

Looking back at the old two-dimensional photos of the 50th Anniversary, it's surprising how little has changed on the surface. In the old days, there were interminable meetings and numerous petitions about the so-called City. The Galaxy was very fashionable in 2018. And the opposition was equally strident. Other than the retail spaces that have come up around Savitri Bhavan Museum, the City still retains its quaint 20th century eco-village feel. But look under the surface, and you will see that the changes are deep and widespread.

The changes can be traced back to the Collective Agreement Workshop of 2020. Over five agonising days, what was then called the Residents Assembly created the Path Toward Future Realisation. Not that all Residents were a part of this, but we used to celebrate 5% people showing up as deep participation. In any case, the event was a resounding success. It allowed Auroville to reinvent itself and avoid suffering the same fate as other eco-spiritual communities.

Facilitated by a team of multi-cultural management consultants, the workshop participants looked deep within themselves. This continued for four days. And on the fifth day, like a flash of lightning, we found our Path Toward Future Realisation. It was triggered by a simple question from the consultants, who clearly were preparing the ground for it during the first four days: what is Auroville's core competence? The answer was as simple as the question – healing and hospitality.

The differences disappeared. The animosities atrophied. And the community came together. Now that we knew how we could be effective, we had to become efficient about it. External grants had dried up by then, so the first task was to cut expenses. In those days, we used to have something called the City Services budget, and the biggest expense on that budget was education. But as some truly enlightened people argued on that fateful day in 2020, how can we have a budget for something that is unending? Isn't it illogical to place a monetary value on something that is the essence of Auroville and enshrined in its Charter?

I won't go into the boring details of the budgeting exercise that followed, but we saved a lot of money that day. The mantra was to focus on the core and let go of the rest. Anything that helped build the healing and hospitality sector was retained. Everything else was axed.

As might be expected, the question of leadership soon came up. The

naïve idealism of participatory governance had long given way to apathy. So, the Economists met little resistance when they took the reins of the community and, more importantly, of commerce. Services were disbanded and contracted to competent private contractors. And all commercial units were merged into one – The Auroville Resort and Spa.

What followed was a case study in turning a muddling community into a successful commercial venture with its own crypto-currency (this case study is still used in Management Experiences 30 years later). The problems of taxation, investment and return on investment were solved in one fell swoop. All operations were integrated in one online application. A visually intuitive dashboard answered critical management questions, such as "What is the most popular kind of massage among visitors today?"

If you are thinking that we were stuck with old-fashioned healing methods (strangely called New Age at that time), you would be wrong. To make use of research from without and within, we set up an Innovation Incubator. The results of this prescient and visionary action can be seen in many of our current products and services, such as the gene-editing bracelet and the gut-brain alignment dance.

Other than the managers of healing and hospitality outlets, very few Aurovilians live in the City (I will come back to Aurovilians in just a second). Most houses and apartments have been turned into guest houses and boutique homestays. The International Zone now gives visitors the opportunity to stay in diverse settings including an igloo, a yurt and a tepee. Now you might be wondering what an igloo is doing in Auroville long after the Arctic ice has disappeared completely. But humans have a deep sense of history and a longing for the good old days. And what is Auroville if not a bridge between the past and the future?

The term Aurovilian sounds a little dated now. Some people – those who were part of creating the Path Toward Future Realisation – call themselves the Pathfinders. Most of the Pathfinders live in the City, in beautiful houses that express their unique sensibilities. I once visited a house that had five levels of Japanese gardens. The Pathfinder was saying something vital, but I wasn't paying attention – I was immersed in the AI-composed music that was wafting through the gardens.

The rest of the Aurovilians, those who didn't sign up for the healing and hospitality movement, live in the Forest. The edges of the Forest – both toward the City and the Outside – are impenetrable. Secret paths and passages connect the small communities that have come up. Most of the children go to the Forest School (the City does not have any schools, nor does it have any children). Farms grow organic food. People stay in natural houses. And they wear hand-made clothes. It all reminds me of Dylan Evans and the Utopia Experiment.

The Sustainable Livelihood Institute

The Sustainable Livelihood Institute (SLI) is a joint project of the Government of Tamil Nadu and Auroville to promote rural development based on the principles of sustainable development. It began running programmes three years ago. We talked to the Director, Ramasubramanian (Ram), for an update on its activities and its impact.

Auroville Today: *The name suggests that the Sustainable Livelihood Institute represents a very different concept of development from the conventional one. What is that concept?*

Ram: Our concept of development draws primarily on two sources. One is traditional models, the other is Auroville's experience. I think Auroville has created a new form of economy where certain values are not compromised. You do not deplete resources, you replenish them, and you are trying to minimise the impact of inequality. So our idea of development could be articulated as not only being ecologically-sensitive but also ecologically-proactive, socially-responsible and, at the same time, economically-viable. This is what we are trying to bring together in our programmes here.

What we are doing here is continually transmitting alternatives into the mainstream but it will take a while before it changes. However, the driver of these changes is something that, increasingly, we cannot ignore.

What is this?

Climate change is already a huge reality if you live in Tamil Nadu. For the past three years we have experienced extreme weather conditions. In 2015 there were terrible floods in Chennai, in 2016 we experienced the worst drought in 140 years. Last year the state government released a report of the consequences of climate change. The signs are not good. If we continue on the present trajectory, most parts of the state will see an increase of 4 degrees above pre-industrial levels by 2050. The consequences of this have not sunk in yet. A soil biologist told me that just a 1° rise means the end of staple food as we know it today as paddy will not grow.

Then again, 82% of our groundwater is in a critical state, the forests are depleting, and much of the coastline will be inundated by sea rises in the future.

In this situation, centralised planning is an oxymoron: policy and planning has to happen at a bioregional level in alignment with the larger reality of climate change. Today, for most parts of this state, we have the data to design a solution for each bioregion, but the effort has to be to do it through the people themselves, by empowering them with the required skills and knowledge. At the same time, in SLI we are raising the awareness levels of government rural development officials on the impact of climate change and showing them some of the responses from Auroville. As a consequence, government agencies in some parts are moving from looking at rural development primarily as 'poverty alleviation' to 'sustainable growth'.

So in SLI you are working with both government officials and those who live in rural communities?

Yes, we work at all levels. Every head of the Rural Development Department of Tamil Nadu's 32 districts has visited us for an orientation programme. The middle level managers, those who design local rural area initiatives, come more frequently for regular capacity-building programmes. We also train government rural community facilitators as well as community leaders, farmers, etc.

In contrast to Auroville Village Action, we work with the whole state and we are very closely linked to the state government. We do not make interventions but are primarily purveyors of knowledge.

What kinds of programmes do you run?

We tailor the programmes to the people with which we are working. The highest level – the heads of government departments – don't need to acquire skills, they just need to know how to think differently: we call these 'perspective building programmes'. For the middle level managers, we have 'management programmes' and at the village level the programmes are mainly about imparting skills and knowledge.

We have designed 24 different types of training programmes. During the first year, our programmes were aligned with the programmes of the government rural development departments. However, we introduced certain unique features. For example, in SLI the trainers are the practitioners, the ones who, like Krishna of Solitude Farm and Bernard at Pebble Garden, are doing the work. This already challenges one of the underlying assumptions in conventional training institutions which is that theoretical knowledge is more important than practical knowledge.

Secondly, we are emphasizing action-oriented learning, which means less classroom teaching and more hands-on experiential training. The other thing we insist upon with government officials is repeat training. One-time exposure is often not sufficient to motivate them to make changes, so they come back for a more advanced course. Also, we do follow-up visits to check which community initiatives are succeeding and which are not.

Another thing we do is we digitalise everything: from the moment a trainee arrives till the feedback, follow-up and impact stories, everything we do is entered online and is accessible. We maintain a very high level of transparency and this has given us a lot of credibility within the government.

By the second year, the villagers were calling us to say we have learned this from you and have implemented this and now we have this problem. Can we come to learn how to solve it? So now the community programmes are driven more by their needs. When somebody comes with a request, we look at the situation, we design a training for them and we send it to the authorities for approval because all these trainings are sponsored by the government.

In other words, we and the government have become facilitating agencies, linking an empowered rural community with the knowledge and skills that they need.

There are many components of sustainability, including sustainable construction, governance, economy. When you impart skills to the villages, are you trying to cover the whole range?

Yes. Our faculty consists of more than 42 Auroville units, including the Earth Institute, Sunlit Future, Village Action, Botanical Gardens, Pitchandikulam, and tailoring and food-processing units.

We have also been able to host as guest faculty thought leaders in their respective fields, from all over the state. When they come, they share this knowledge with government officials and community members. But obviously they also want to interact with Aurovilians, and this enables a cross-pollination of inspiration and ideas.

This is all very hopeful. But two big challenges that development schemes in India face are corruption and caste discrimination. How do you deal with this?

It cannot be denied that this state is probably one of the worst in respect of white-collar corruption: the rural people are exposed to a lot of corrupt practices by government officials and have to deal with it because they have no choice. However, while corruption is deeply embedded in the system, a government official has a choice to be a part of it or not.

One thing we do when officials come here is to create a space where they can honestly discuss all issues, including corruption. One participant said he resented the corruption when he joined his department fifteen years ago but he realised that he had succumbed to the system and he had become what he hated. When he left our programme, he said he realised he had a choice.

One thing that works well in getting them to reflect is we ask them to talk to a camera every day as if they were talking to themselves 20 years from now. We also ask them to write letters to themselves about the legacy they would like to leave behind.

These exercises are very powerful; for some of them it is the first time they have reflected upon themselves.

So we push them into situations that break down barriers. They do drumming circles, forest work, bodywork, clowning work and cycling. These are people who have not got out of their jeeps and cars in a long time; one of the things that we emphasise is that, "slowing down is the beginning of sustainability".

Once, after a cycling session, a government official said, "Now that we are always travelling in jeeps and on motorbikes, we are completely isolated from the community which we are meant to be serving. What has become of us? The first thing I will do when I go back is buy a cycle for myself and start to cycle again."

What about the influence of caste discrimination?

This is definitely an issue. For example, a government official, a community facilitator, came here for a training programme in food-processing. She

was so impressed she went back to a Dalit community in her area and convinced some women to set-up a food processing enterprise. However, they could not sell the products even in their own village because food from their community was not acceptable to other communities, castes, in the same village.

But that was not as shocking as facing a similar response when they went to a government office to sell their products. This was humiliating for them.

We heard about this story when we went to that district for a follow-up visit. We went to the village and spoke to those women and you could see the anger and humiliation in their eyes as they described their experience of this caste-based discrimination. We told them we would ensure that the blockages would be removed and their products sold, but would they be willing first to attend a training programme with us to ensure that they make products of a quality that cannot be easily rejected in the market?

They agreed and received training. When they returned to their village, they were accompanied by two graduate students in rural development who were interning with us (we receive interns from six universities across India). The students market researched their products and presented their findings to the district authorities, who granted one lakh capital to set up the enterprise. The students then stayed on until the first cycle of production was completed and did test marketing.

The district authorities were very happy about the way we had handled this and they launched this project at a district level function.

So, through our continuous support (we continue to monitor this enterprise), we made the local problem of caste no longer economically relevant for the women because now they could sell their products elsewhere and so negotiate their space better.

But there is also a balancing act for us as facilitators of these interventions because while caste discrimination is terrible, caste is also an aspect of local identity and, as such, a means of preserving local values against the global economic onslaught on local identities.

The story demonstrates that caste discrimination is also prevalent in government officials. Can you address this when they come here or is it too sensitive?

It is very much prevalent but we cannot address it directly. What we do is we put them in a very different environment. They soon realise that this is a place where there is no caste discrimination, a place where they are given care and respect by people, like youth from the local villages, who are complete strangers. This affects even high-ranking government officials.

In the government bureaucracy there is this huge hierarchy, so if you come from a background where you are already socially discriminated against because of your caste and you are confronted by this huge government hierarchy, it only reinforces the sense of inequality. We break this sometimes without even realizing. Often, we have Joss taking officers for a morning walk in his community to show them the afforestation work. They are very impressed. But they are even more awestruck when he serves them tea afterwards, because in terms of their hierarchy, Joss would be many levels above them and he should not be "serving" them. This breaks down a conventional barrier and they begin to understand there are other ways of interacting, knowing and learning. Higher officials often complain about the lack of honest feedback, but the lower officials in the department are rote taught into practicing hierarchy out of deference. Hence, they do not share their experience honestly.

What happens when they go back to their usual work environment?

Both in local communities as well as in government, the younger ones, in particular, want to change things in their work environment, but they also express frustration at not being able to make a difference. But we tell them it is possible, you have a choice; you do not have to perpetuate this. We provide them with examples of alternatives, so they



Ramasubramanian

know they can challenge it, and they know that there are people here who will support them in challenging it. Often they call us and tell us they have challenged or changed something.

Each one of them is personally impacted. When we go to state government offices, people come and telling us how their personal choices they have changed because of coming here. A

very senior officer came for a programme and made his own farm organic. In one village we went to, an official took us to his house because he wanted to show us how he was composting his garbage now.

Radical change is possible in individuals but in systems like the government it cannot be radical; it has to be gentle, like a whiff of fresh air. I think we are slowly working towards building a critical mass of people in the system who talk a different language, who hold certain values as important. When ten of them sit in a room to discuss rural development and at least eight of them are using terms, values, processes, practices, they have learned here, that for me is serious impact.

So you are optimistic about the impact of SLI?

There is one village, Chinnampatti, in Vellore district where almost 65 people have come to us for different types of training. If you go to that village, you see evidence of Auroville knowledge everywhere. There is a beautiful tree nursery created and managed by about 20 women that is supplying saplings to the Forestry Department where the plants come from Auroville nurseries. There is organic farming, a cattle camp using ethno-veterinary practices, women creating herbal cosmetics, while another group is thinking of setting up a food-processing unit. And all this happened because one man, the panchayat secretary, came here for a training, saw the value of what we were doing in Auroville and convinced his people.

For me, the most promising thing is that new initiatives are coming up all over the state based upon ideas of sustainability. One of our faculty mentioned that there are 400 dedicated organic food shops in Chennai alone. Organic farm-related shops and millet bakeries are appearing in all parts of Tamil Nadu, farmers are exchanging seeds etc. When SLI organized a seed exchange programme among local farmers, more than 600 farmers from the area visited us that day and more than 350 varieties of traditional seeds were showcased and exchanged.

At every level you see these changes happening and SLI is being seen more and more as a facilitator for such changes. There are five other government training institutes in rural development across this state and now many of the practices we use in SLI, like practitioners being trainers, have been adopted by them.

Recently, a hundred million dollar government programme was launched by the Tamil Nadu Rural Development Department. The government is recruiting 600 officials for this project from all over Tamil Nadu, and we have been asked to provide orientation and induction for all of these newly-recruited staff. This is a very significant recognition of our work. In fact, this new government 'rural transformation' project and how Auroville ideas and practices of 'transformation' are providing inputs into it is another interesting story in itself.

Another recognition is the number of civil society players who have heard about us and want to see what is going on here. Many of them have visited us and now there are requests to do programmes for NGOs as well. I am often asked to share our ideas with governments in other states as well. For example, a few months ago we met the Chief Minister's team in Maharashtra and gave a presentation about SLI because they were considering doing something similar in Nagpur.

So even without broadcasting what we do and just concentrating on doing it well, people are starting to recognise us. In the larger rural development space we are still very small in terms of the numbers that we are able to process, but our impact is already quite large.

From an interview by Alan

Auroville Today earlier published an article on the Sustainable Livelihood initiative in February 2016, issue #319

Auroville Dream and Reality: an anthology

When Akash Kapur told me some years ago that Penguin India were keen to publish a collection of Auroville writing, my first reaction was, 'Why?' I was convinced that we didn't have enough good writers to warrant such a publication, and that if something was somehow cobbled together and Penguin went ahead and published it, the result would be, at best, an embarrassment for all concerned.

Auroville: Dream and Reality proves how wrong I was for it contains writing of the highest quality and originality. It is also by far the best anthology of Aurovilian writing that I have come across.

What makes it so successful? Well, quite a lot is due to the editor, Akash Kapur's, decision to focus upon a particular kind of writing. Noting in the Introduction that the writing that emerges from Auroville often has an 'abstract quality' because it focuses upon the 'ideal and philosophies rather than the salt of daily life', he decided to favour pieces that 'dug below the surface of grand policy statements, ambitious blueprints and (often whitewashed) portraiture'.

The result is that much of the best writing in this collection has an immediacy that seems to draw directly from the grain of the Auroville experience. Here, for example, is Bob Lawlor, one of the very first pioneers, on working in the midday sun of the tropics:

"At noon one looks into the face of the worker that hands the stone slab to you, and into the face of the worker to which you hand it on, and sees that the slightly staggering bodies are empty and hollow now.

God sometime provides a space above the body of labour into which the essence of the being can escape during those sun-seared hours of pressure and fatigue. The bodies are moving, the dance continues, the work goes on."

But even in the sun-seared landscapes of the early Auroville, amid the daily struggles to survive, the focus upon 'essence' of being and the search for something else is never far away.

This intense conflation of material struggle and spiritual search seems to be a keynote of the early Auroville experience and it required a particular kind of person: not a hero in the grand romantic mould, but somebody very different. Namas understood this one evening while observing fellow Aurovilians in Unity Kitchen. "I saw it in several eyes and bodies, in the sudden almost trance-like immobility striking randomly here and there, sudden motionless silence falling in between the mass of food and talk. I saw it in myself, how, suddenly, between thoughts, with a mouth full of soup and a spoon poised for more, I was suddenly doing nothing but staring at the wall, all my life and energy focused purely and stupidly on nothing but pushing, pushing against that wall.

And I couldn't help but be impressed. Not so much with myself – oh, a little with myself – but with the quality of the bodies gathered together here in Auroville. They know how to endure, those bodies. It is perhaps all they know, but still it is a kind of genius. The idiot savants of endurance, obstinate as mules."

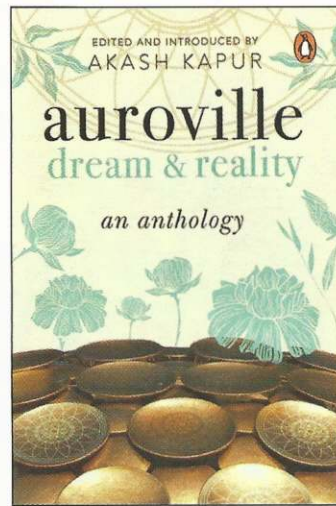
Those early Aurovilians did not look upon themselves as writers. In fact, 'literature', great writing, was

something they eschewed. As Savitri put it in his introduction the first issue of *The Auroville Review*, "We want simply to convey something of Auroville, something that comes from our life here. We don't want just to play with words and weave brilliant verbal canvases. We want to express Auroville." And, he asks, among all the great writers of the world "where is that one drop of the True?"

The search for the 'True' required new ways of looking as well as new forms of expression because, as Ruud Lohman pointed out, a 'city with a soul' cannot be explained in conventional terms. Consequently, some of these writers seek other approaches. They fictionalise Auroville, or they cast it into metaphors that help us see with new eyes. Here is Raymond Thépot on the frequent clashes that took place between Aurovilians:

"Flare-ups do occur between complementary poles. There are also contradictory poles, which will have to wear out their opposition and discover that they need each other, integrated within a wider circuit. Meanwhile, it may be that the crackling tension sparking on and on between them is fruitful for everyone. The most stable relationship seems to be triangular: one is not sure where the apex of the triangle is located but all the connecting threads do pass over this pulley, without which nothing would hold up."

In his Introduction, Akash speaks of wanting to bring Auroville writing out of the shadows. This he has triumphantly done. He also suggests that the anthology could be an opportunity to begin defining the contours of a literature of Auroville. Does such a literature exist?



It's hard to say. However, what is apparent from this collection is that certain themes keep emerging. One is the primacy of experience over philosophy. Ruud Lohman returned to Auroville with the idea of writing a thesis on Jesus and Sri Aurobindo. But he soon realised that this was pointless as "the dialogue between the Great cannot be understood mentally but only by a plunge into identification".

Distrust of the mind and of conventional ideas is strong in the early writers. David Wickenden defines the choice confronting Aurovilians as being "to release the old ideas, attune to Auroville's naturally evolving reality, and trust the external conditions would work themselves out as they should, or to resist, hold fast to the concepts, and try to twist stuff, or otherwise coerce reality into the mould". It's a challenge which remains with us today.

Another recurring theme is that outer manifestation depends upon radical inner change. As Bob Lawlor puts it, "That red hot landscape by the

sea in south India will be transformed into a City of the Dawn – if the inner landscape of human nature can change and evolve towards the spirit".

Transformation accelerated by the intensity of the search for 'the true' and by the challenging material conditions (which are always taken as a spur to change) is another leitmotif. David Wickenden, describing Angad's difficulty of getting even the simplest things done in constructing a pottery, characterises it as Auroville's "peculiar alchemy". In another context, contemplating the radicalism of Auroville's early society which sees westerners in loincloths driving bullock carts and villagers designing windmills, he realises that "This in itself makes possible, even inevitable, rather powerful human mutations and quieter, more immediate, fruitful, syntheses."

This anthology contains writing (as well as photography and cartoons) from the beginning up to the present, but it is clear that the 1970's and 1980's was a golden period of Auroville writing. Somehow, those early Aurovilians lived with an inner intensity that enabled them to forge a poetry of the soil out of their daily struggle with matter.

Today, the Aurovilians face different challenges. They require, perhaps, a different mode of expression that has yet to be discovered. But one thing we can learn from those early writers: that without 'fire' there is no art.

Alan

Auroville Dream and Reality: an anthology. Edited and introduced by Akash Kapur. Penguin Random House India, 2018. Available on auroville.com and on Amazon.in

NEWS IN BRIEF

Walk of Hope

On the initiative of the Auroville units Restorative Auroville, Prima, Auroville Village Action and Aikyam School, Auroville hosted a Walk of Hope for Peace and Human Unity to spread the message of oneness, inclusion and respect among Aurovilians and the village communities around Auroville on January 28th and 29th. The walk was led by Sri M. (Madhukarnath), a spiritual guru, educationist and social activist, who had taken out a 700 kilometres 'Walk of Hope: from Kannyakumari, the southern tip of India, to Kashmir in 2015-2016.

On the first day, the 10 kilometre walk

started at the Irumbai temple and traversed Kottakarai, Bharatipuram, Auroville's International Zone, Edaiyanchavadi, and concluded at Aikyam School in Kulapalayam. The next day, a shorter 3.5 kilometre walk took place from Auroville through Alankuppam, ending at the mosque in Royapettai. A brief address by Sri M. in Tamil and English, and planting a tree at each stop was part of the schedule.

Many people from among Aurovilians, guests and villagers joined the walk, as did the Lt. Governor of Pondicherry, Ms. Kiran Bedi.

A conversation between Sri M. and the Chairman of the Auroville Foundation Dr. Karan Singh, can be heard at goo.gl/HSfnh6.

Savitri around the World

The continuous reading of Sri Aurobindo's epic poem *Savitri* will start in the Savitri Bhavan Sangam Hall on Monday 19.02.2018 at 3a.m. ('The hour before the Gods awake'). Four hundred and seventy one people from all over the world are participating, representing ninety-nine countries and states around the world. They have responded to the invitation to provide video or audio recordings of *Savitri* passages assigned to them.

These recordings have been assembled to create a continuous reading, starting from the Ashram in Pondicherry and circling the earth from east to west following the sun, to end in Auroville, the City of the Dawn on the Mother's Birthday, February 21, 2018. The corresponding *Savitri* text is being added in the form of subtitles to each filmed reading, along with the reader's name and country. The 'parayan' is expected to take about 48 hours. The final product will be simultaneously released on YouTube so that it can be viewed from around the world. The project has been initiated by Auroville International France and Auroville International The Netherlands and is hosted and supported by Savitri Bhavan.

Participants come from India (Puducherry, West Bengal, Assam, Gujarat, Goa, Karnataka,

Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Haryana, New Delhi, and Uttarakhand); **Central and West Asia** – Nepal, Tibet, Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Iran, Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, and Jordan; **Africa** – Egypt, Ethiopia, Somalia, Kenya, Rwanda, Madagascar, Reunion, South Africa, Ghana, Senegal and Algeria; **Europe** – Greece, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Bulgaria, Moldova, Ukraine, Russia, Belarus, Lithuania, Poland, Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Germany, Czech Republic, Austria, Hungary, Slovenia, Italy, Spain, Switzerland, France, Belgium, Netherlands, United Kingdom, and Ireland; **North America** – Canada (Québec, Ontario, Alberta), USA (Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York City, Virginia, Ohio, Atlanta, Wisconsin, Missouri, Colorado, Washington, California, New Mexico, Texas); **Central America and the Caribbean** – Mexico, Haiti, Trinidad and Tobago; **South America** – Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina, Chile, Ecuador, and Colombia; **Oceania** – French Polynesia (Tahiti), New Zealand, Australia (Victoria), New South Wales, Western Australia; East Asia – Philippines, Japan, South Korea, China, Hong Kong, Singapore, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka.

PASSING

Christopher Gray

On January 19th Chris Gray left his body in his Yantra after suffering a stroke. He was 75 years old.

Chris first arrived in Auroville in the early seventies, travelling overland in his blue Mercedes van. On reaching Promesse, he said he suddenly perceived a difference in the atmosphere which he later identified as the atmosphere specific to Auroville.

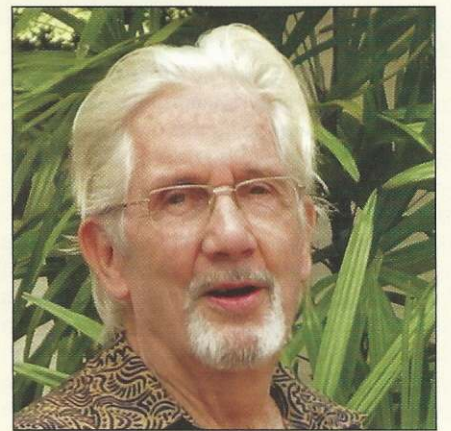
During his first ten years in Auroville, besides stewarding the land, he also started a first bread and biscuit bakery with Thomas (of Gratitude) in Aspiration and, together with Larry, Sundaram and Roy set up an oil drum oven in a Palmyra grove in Kottakarai to create a bakery that made wholegrain breads. Together with Jack Alexander, he also started and ran the first bike repair facility at Abri and trained local boys to twist wrenches on Raleigh and Atlas bikes.

Having teamed up with Jocelyn B, the couple went temporarily back to USA in 1982. In the States, Chris was offered a job to in marble work, a profession and knowledge that turned out to be of crucial importance when the marble work at Matrimandir began. Chris travelled many times to advise the Matrimandir team on the quality and particulars of the marble needed, taught them how to cut and clean it, and worked with the team for months at a time.

In 2001 he returned to Auroville for good and worked as a much appreciated massage therapist in Quiet. He also instituted a "Bike Repair Kiosk" near the Solar Kitchen to make simple repair needs available to the two wheeled converts to cycling in Auroville.

A small video clip of his work at the Matrimandir can be seen at goo.gl/jRdPmw.

His remains were buried on January 22nd at the Adventure burial and cremation grounds.



K. Nishanthi

On January 29th, Nisha (K. Nishanthi), who worked as a nurse in Santé, left her body after a prolonged illness in Nallam Clinic. Her husband Raj and other family members were with her. She would have been 30 this year.

Hailing from Chidambaram, Nisha came to Auroville and, when working as a nurse in the Pondicherry Institute of Medical Science, PIMS, married Raj, who works as sysop in the Auroville Language Lab. She joined Auroville in 2013 and lived in Inspiration. Being a trained nurse with earlier experience in other hospitals, she came to work in Santé.

Nisha's remains were buried the same day in Auroville's burial grounds at Adventure.



A sharing economy in Auroville?

When the Oxford English Dictionary adds a new term, it's time to sit up and take notice. In 2015, the term "sharing economy" was added to the dictionary with the following definition: "sharing economy: (n.): an economic system in which assets or services are shared between private individuals, either for free or for a fee, typically by means of the internet".

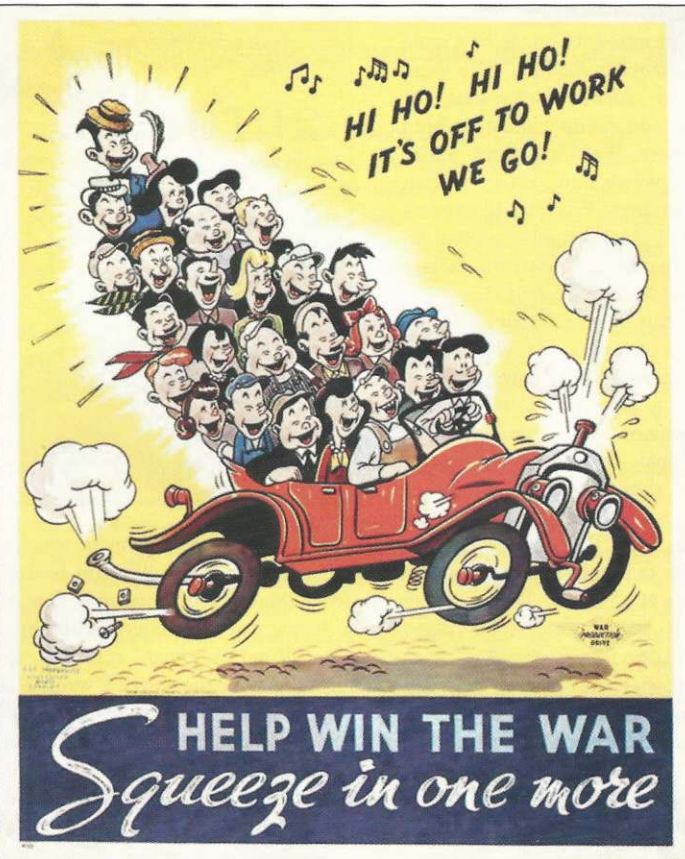
For some people, this new phrase is a contradiction in terms. Much like sustainable fashion, sharing economy seems to be a forced union of two different value systems. On one side is the idea of sharing. And on the other side is the idea of exchange. However, economy as exchange is a relatively modern idea. The word economy has its roots in the Greek words *oiko*, which means house, and *nomos*, which means rule or law. So, the origin of economy is in the sharing of household resources among family members and close relatives.

Like any new idea, there are competing concepts, theories and labels. From the confusing label of "collaborative consumption" to the pejorative term "hippienomics," the field is wide open. Among these ideas, the larger concept of a circular economy seems to be gaining currency. The circular economy "entails gradually decoupling economic activity from the consumption of finite resources and designing waste out of the system." Sharing is one of the elements of such a circular economy.

Sharing has always been common during times of scarcity. The community gardens we find today in Germany, Austria and Switzerland started as shared spaces where people could grow their own food. This started in the mid-19th century when large scale migration took place from rural areas into cities and food was scarce. Similarly, when there was a scarcity of petroleum in the United States in the early 1940's, the petroleum and rubber conservation campaign promoted ride-sharing using innovative posters and advertisements. How different is this from current ride-sharing systems, such as Lyft? Is it merely the use of modern technology to solve an old problem?

Not so, according to Min, who is experimenting with sharing systems in Auroville. "Services such as Uber or Lyft are not sharing systems but are rental systems," he says. He is probably right – the economic morality of sharing for a fee and the idea of sharing for free are two entirely different things. There is growing criticism about using words that generate the feeling of "sharing is caring" to generate huge profits. According to one critic, the meaning of sharing should be "wrestled back from the jaws of those using it to profiteer." But it might be a little late for that. There is much excitement in financial markets about the so-called sharing economy. And for good reason too – Airbnb averages 425,000 guests per night, nearly 22% more than Hilton Worldwide. Price Waterhouse Coopers estimates that the sharing economy will be worth \$335 billion by 2025.

Of course, there are examples of companies that provide true sharing services. For example, you could subscribe to Love Home Swap, and swap your home with a family from across the world. The two parties pay no rental, but merely exchange their homes for a limited time. It's turning out to be a wonderful way to travel, especially for families on long vacations. And there are other companies that make a profit but do it for a worthy cause. One such company is Cohealo, which enables hospitals to share under-



A 1940's poster promoting ride-sharing in America

utilised equipment among themselves.

This idea of sharing idling capacity is at the core of a sharing economy. The capacity could be spaces, such as homes and offices. It could be products, such as tools and toys. It could even be knowledge and skills. Looking at sharing through this lens, Aurovilians have been sharing resources for a very long time. House-sitting is an established Auroville practice and is mostly done without any exchange of money. Sharing of office spaces is less common but might become more prevalent as more and more work moves to paperless offices in the "cloud." It is also possible to think of ways to share underutilised spaces, such as spaces in schools after class hours.

The Free Store and the Library of Things

The Free Store is another good example of sharing. Many Aurovilians get their clothes entirely from the Free Store and are even able to cycle through fashion seasons! The Auroville Library of Things (ALOT) started by Min is another example. But ALOT seems to be a little slow in taking off. Located in a container across from Solar Kitchen, it looks a little desolate. Few people step in to see what is available and fewer still borrow anything. The most commonly borrowed items are kitchenware and ceramics. Only about 50 Aurovilians have used the service ever since it started.

One factor for this low usage could be the limited number of products available for borrowing. A library of things, just like a library of books, needs to have a large number of items to be attractive to users. This, in turn, needs either extensive sharing of "things" by Aurovilians or money to buy products to stock in the library. Sharing has been limited and ALOT really does not have the financial resources to buy things.

Another factor to keep in mind is the difference between donating what we no longer need and sharing as co-ownership. ALOT was started with the idea that people would gladly share

what they own but don't use very often. So, you could co-own with the community the step ladder that you use only occasionally. This is quite different from giving away your child's old picture books. Perhaps people are less willing to co-own and more willing to donate. This changes the nature of the items that are available for lending.

Shared transport service

The other relatively new initiative is the Shared Transport Service, also initiated by Min and his team at Earth & Us. This service is working well – it has an easy to use online booking system, but you can always talk to a real person if you need special attention. There have been challenges, though. The taxi service that originally partnered with the Shared Transport Service backed out after a few months. The second taxi service had to withdraw after they received threats from taxi operators who feared that their profits would take a hit with ride-sharing. Currently, the service is run with independent drivers who are not employed by any taxi service.

Interestingly, Aurovilians continue to post taxi sharing notices in *News&Notes* and on Auronet, even though there is a well-managed service that works fairly well. Perhaps this points to an Auroville-specific reason why ALOT and Shared Transport have not scaled as quickly as planned. This reason is the suspicion of anything that is centralised. It will be interesting to see what happens if house-sitting, which works through informal networks, is organised through a centralised online application. I suspect the people who are looking for houses will be thrilled. But I am not sure stewards will use the system as much.

House sitting is also a special case because

ing to share furniture. Another study asked people to rank their willingness to share different things on a scale of 1 to 5. Experiences (such as travel tips) came in highest at 4.7. Other items at the high end of the scale were ideas, books, tools and services. Homes, clothing and bed linen all ranked fairly low at 2.7, while sharing a toothbrush, understandably, came in last at 1.4.

These surveys show that, more than anything else, people are willing to share their knowledge and skills. While some informal sharing of skills does happen in Auroville, this is one area which might benefit from an organised sharing platform. It could range from something as involved as setting up a grey water recycling system to something as simple as helping someone with their school work.

At the bottom of all this is a set of values. For Min, these values are centred around sustainability. "The reason we started the Library of Things and the Shared Transport Service is to help reduce consumption and thereby reduce industrial pollution and the use of finite natural resources," he says. Do Aurovilians in general share these same values? It's hard to say given the wide diversity of lifestyles in the community.

For many others, sharing is about living a simple, frugal life. For them, sharing is natural, while ownership and accumulation are perverse. This philosophy has a long history, from Socrates and the Buddha to the idea of a gift economy. Many young people in modern affluent societies consider ownership to be a burden and believe that sharing will build stronger communities.

On the other hand, human civilization has always celebrated extravagance as a sign of high culture. Whether it's the Sistine Chapel or the Taj Mahal, our markers for periods of great cultural progress are opulent, and some would say wasteful, buildings. Can the idea of a simple life coexist with the need to leave a legacy? This question is particularly relevant in Auroville today, when there is renewed focus on building the city. And what did Sri Aurobindo mean when he said, "a simply rich and beautiful life



The Auroville Library of Things

the house is maintained and looked after when it is shared (except in some rare instances when stewards return to find their home in shambles). How easy is it to share other products? It's one thing to share something that you don't need any more, such as an old toy. But what about a power tool? If you care about tools, how easily will you share them, knowing that they might be used by people who are not trained or who might not care as much? According to the Nielson Global Survey of Sharing Communities, 23% are willing to share power tools, but only 17% are will-

ing for all"? Did he mean richness in wealth, or did he mean rich in experiences, ideas and expressions?

Growing the sharing economy will not be easy in Auroville. Our differences and diversity is likely to remain our weakness when it comes to changing the way our economy works. Perhaps we will be forced to choose a sharing economy – and a simple, frugal life – when we see that it is the only way to sustain ourselves and protect our fragile ecosystems.

Manas

Subscription information

Subscription rates for 12 issues :

India: Print + digital edition: Rs. 600
Other countries: Print + digital edition: Rs 3,000 equivalent
Other countries digital only edition: Rs 2,100 equivalent.
Reduced rates: Those for whom the subscription rate is an obstacle are invited to email us for information on reduced rates.
Benefactor: Auroville Today does not receive any subsidy nor carries advertisements. Subscribers are invited to send donations to help continue this work.

There are three ways to subscribe:

1. Through our website.

Subscriptions can be ordered and paid on-line through www.auroville.org/avtoday and auroville.com. On-line subscriptions have additional unit charges and bank costs.

2. By sending your contribution directly to Auroville Today.

Cheques sent directly to Auroville Today should be made payable to Auroville Unity Fund, specifying: 'Contribution for Auroville Today'. Personal cheques are preferred to bank cheques. Please do not send money orders or cash.

3. By sending your contribution to:

U.K.: Auroville International U.K., c/o John Mulrey, 7 Cubb Field, Aylesbury, Bucks, HP19 7SJ
 Tel. (44) (0)1296 415685
 email: john@aviuk.org
Germany: Auroville International Deutschland e.V., Solmsstrasse 6, 10961 Berlin, tel. (49) (0)30-42803150, Fax (49) (0)30-92091376, email: info@auroville.de. GLS Gemeinschaftsbank, BIC: GENODEM1GLS, IBAN: DE 1643 0609 6780 1938 9200.

USA: Make checks payable to Auroville International USA, and send to:

AVI USA, P.O. Box 188158, Sacramento, CA 95818, Tel: (831) 425-5620' email: info@aviusa.org ' or to: Pondicherry, 12 Tinker St, Woodstock NY 12498, tel: 845-679-2926, email: info@pondi.biz
The Netherlands and Belgium: Auroville International Nederland, Koninginneweg 129, 1211 AP Hilversum. Email: secretaris@auroville.nl
 Tel. 0031 (0) 6 4807 8595. Triodos Bank nr 1984.20.927, IBAN NL26TRIO 0198 4209 27, BIC: TRIONL2U

Editorial team:

Alan, Carel, Manas. Proofreading: Alan. DTP: Carel. Photo editing: Jean-Denis. Published by Carel Thieme on behalf of the Auroville Foundation. Printed by the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press, Pondicherry, and published at Surrender, Auroville 605101, Tamil Nadu.
Contact: Auroville Today, Surrender, Auroville 605101, Tamil Nadu, India. Phone: +91.413.2622572. Email: avtoday@auroville.org.in

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