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PHOTO: ANNEMARIE

A spectacular rainbow coloured the sky above the Matrimandir on August 14th, on the evening before Sri Aurobindo's birthday which is also the Independence Day of India.

Auroville offers alternatives to the mainstream world view

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During this visit he offered an open workshop on Sri Aurobindo's text, *The Mother*, and gave a talk on 'Modernism and Postmodernism in Art: Trajectories and Futures' in which he mentioned that Postmodernism allows for multiple world views or 'teleologies'. [Teleology is the explanation of phenomena in terms of the purpose or goal they serve rather than of the cause by which they arise, eds.]

To what extent does the yoga of Sri Aurobindo represent an alternative aim of life or teleology to that of the mainstream?

The mainstream teleology at present is still Modernism, which is an ideology that emerged out of the Enlightenment movement in Europe. It was about a new way of seeing in which we, as humans, reject all unverifiable authority (such as that of the Church), explore everything systematically with our minds, and apply the truths of our exploration to create a better or perfect world. The world changed due to the universalization of this kind of ideology and we are all part of such a way of thinking today.

Colonialism gained much of its confidence from the self-justification of this ideology. One may see a noble trajectory among its possibilities, as in "the white man's burden", which stressed the importance of universal education to arrive at

human unity. Of course, behind this "noble goal" was the image of the human as a rational being, a premise which may be questioned and which has led to its own evils.

Apart from this noble goal, the Enlightenment movement had a shadow side to its will to power and this led to the evils of colonisation and eventually what we experience now, which is a world of hyper-technology run by corporations, a world where the quality of life is defined in alienated and consumer terms. This leads, among other things, to the exploitation of nature and the exacerbation of social divisions because this kind of lifestyle needs an under-class to support it.

The mainstream teleology is also premised on the division between church and state and the subjugation of religions; religion is pushed out of the public space. But when it gets pushed to the wall, it often returns as right wing violence and this is what we are seeing around the world now. Benjamin Barber in his book *Jihad versus McWorld* has given us an image of a dystopian future in which huge cities are completely franchised and ruled by a few multinationals while nomadic fundamentalist jihadists operate on their peripheries in infranational warring societies that combat the corporate Empire with suicide bombers.

That is an extreme dystopic projection of the present mainstream teleology. A less extreme but no less dangerous image is that of the careerist who lives only for the corporation. Underlying such a life is a huge boredom caused by alienation and the death of the soul. This is the tragedy referred to by Nietzsche in his description of the 'last man', the man who takes no risks, and seeks only comfort and security.

Sri Aurobindo presents an alternative teleology. It's an aim of life that is not about *having* but about *becoming*. He is saying that we have to lead a life of self-exploration and self-exceeding; we

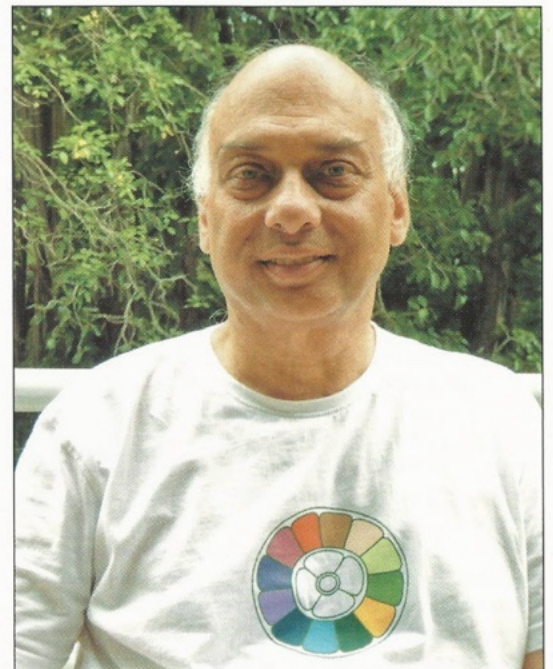
recognize ourselves as transitional beings in a process of becoming the fulfillment of our developing image of perfection. And it's a full-bodied life. We don't leave society and go to the mountains; we reclaim the foundations of life.

The idea of becoming is very different from the corporate idea in which our lives are defined for us and all that is left is to fill in the lot we have been given by having, by accumulating more and more possessions. In fact, Sri Aurobindo revises the Enlightenment definition of what it means to be human. He says it is not the mind but the soul that defines the human.

In what way does Auroville represent an alternative to the mainstream?

I think there are different alternative teleologies in Auroville. Two of the principal ones, which refer to the texts of the Mother, is that Auroville is a place for human unity and that Auroville is the cradle of the Superman. The latter connects with the idea of man as a transitional being, which is the full-fledged teleology of Sri Aurobindo. The former is not the full-fledged teleology but it still requires us to think of the life of the human as different from what it is right now. It is about wanting to create a better world, not through the competitive application of our rational discoveries, but a world of fraternity: a communitarian world which is also sensitive to the whole biosphere. If I relate this to the yoga of Sri Aurobindo, I'd say it's a state of being in which the vital or life-being is under the influence of the soul or psychic being.

It's not as ambitious or as grand as transforming the cells, or arriving at a consciousness beyond the mind; it's not the full-fledged notion of



Debashish Banerji

becoming divine but it could lead to the possibility of the emergence of the psychic being and so become a transition from the first teleology, Auroville as a place of human unity, to the second teleology, Auroville as the cradle of the Superman.

There is a danger, however. If the ideal of human unity is understood simply as some kind of better life, or some kind of higher humanity, one may get stuck at that level and the other ideal may get covered over or wiped out over time. In such a case, Auroville would become, perhaps, a place of beauty and greater goodwill, but it would no longer be supporting the transition to the Superman.

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In The Human Cycle Sri Aurobindo writes about the coming of the "Subjective Age" which is characterised by intuitional knowledge and the aspiration towards self-consciousness and self-realisation. Could we do more in Auroville to support this aspiration?

I think there could be more self-reflection using the texts of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother. Recently, I gave a workshop here on *The Mother*. That was a reflection on a text of Sri Aurobindo. I know that in Auroville many people are allergic to a kind of religiosity that includes too much repetition of the words of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother. However, reflecting on the texts of Sri Aurobindo can be of two different kinds. One is a kind of reflection where only a closed version of Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga is presented and people are uncomfortable in opening up to other interpretations. The other is where his works are studied in a more open way.

For example, we should be able to look at the work of modern philosophers side-by-side with the texts of Sri Aurobindo and be able to see how they

mesh or don't mesh. And we can also bring our own experience to the texts and try to express this in our own words. This is an exercise that may develop the subjective intuition.

What about the danger of expressing a profound personal experience too early or too soon? Won't it risk being dissipated?

It is true that individuals have to guard their experience because as soon as you put it into words you limit, to a certain extent, the experience. Nevertheless there is a time when the experience can be spoken about and it's important to do this to create communities of belonging that have a shared experience. Of course, one can have one's own language for that experience, and that language can be words or paintings or some form of embodiment.

When you are presenting texts of Sri Aurobindo at CIIS do you talk about your own inner experiences?

Sometimes, but I talk about them in a more universal way. I will not talk about them as private experiences because then it becomes completely

subjective. I will talk about an experience and compare it to other experiences which are not necessarily of the Sri Aurobindo tradition, and try to see where things overlap and where they differ.

Isn't traditional academia suspicious of any kind of experiential exploration?

It is true that the foundation of the modern knowledge academy is the Cartesian subject-object split which distrusts such exploration. But places like CIIS are challenging that model. Now there are 'scholar-practitioners' who practice the discipline that they are studying, who talk about their experiences and try to put them in a larger context. This is a science of experience. There are also new methodologies, new disciplines, like contemplative studies or transpersonal psychology, which are not restricted to this subject-object split. They acknowledge there are many ways of knowing, that there are embodied as well as intellectual ways of knowing.

Some people feel that certain experiences cannot be put into words. However, I feel that every way of knowing has a translation to language, even though it may not be a full translation. When The Mother referred to the messages of flowers she said

she received these messages at a certain level where they are not words but she is translating them for us into the world of words.

So when we talk about what Sri Aurobindo termed the 'Subjective Age' in terms of language, that's what we are talking about to some extent. However, to tap into the body's knowledge or the knowledge of the emotions, requires a more poetic kind of language than a language of denotation; it requires a suggestive language. Yet there can be an objectivity and precision to such a language. In *The Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo speaks, for example of "experience-concepts."

Even modern philosophers are introducing terminology which is extremely suggestive of realities that can be experienced below the threshold of mind. Gilles Deleuze, for example, talked about the "body without organs" or "the rhizome" in reference to intuitive realities that can be perceived or experienced at a deeper "vital" or "psychic" level than the objective surface. These thinkers are trying to give us a more complete description of the human that may be termed post-human. I think exploring them is one way by which we can avoid becoming closed to new ways of seeing ourselves and the world.

From an interview by Alan

ENVIRONMENTAL RESEARCH

MGE goes TATA

In November 2015, (issue # 316), *Auroville Today* reported on the work of MGEcoduties, an Auroville unit that manufactures household and well-being products that contain probiotics, live microbes that confer health benefits. Today the unit is vigorously expanding in collaboration with four TATA companies.

"We have been visited by at least five vice-presidents of various TATA companies," says Margarita, the Colombian-born chemical engineer who together with Italian-born Guidelma started MGEcoduties (MGE) in 2011. "And they always tell me the story about the late J.R.D. TATA, one of India's foremost industrialists who was a member of Auroville's first International Advisory Council. After his visit to Auroville, he flew back to Chennai by helicopter and, circling over the Matrimandir, blessed Auroville by showering bougainvillea flowers, which Mother named 'protection'. They all know this story. And somehow, his contact with Auroville has created a link and there is much goodwill for Auroville. All these top-level people, who run huge industries, come to Auroville to our small establishment to see what we do."

The collaboration started auspiciously on August 15th, 2016, Sri Aurobindo's birthday and the anniversary of India's Independence. MGE received an email from TATA Rallis, one of the companies of the TATA multinational conglomerate. Rallis was looking for an Indian company that has a proven track record in probiotics, to help it research and manufacture a line of new products for the aqua industry, particularly for shrimp farms.

Aquaculture is a 26-billion dollar export market. India is the second-largest fish producing country in the world. But the European Union and other international customers now reject consignments of shrimp and other aqua products that have antibiotic residues. This meant the death knell of shrimp farms in Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and Malaysia, whose ponds were heavily polluted by the overuse of antibiotics. In India, the authorities banned the use of antibiotics in aquaculture and, consequently, American, European and Australian customers began sourcing products from India.

But how to deal with shrimp seed mortality and shrimp diseases if antibiotics cannot be used? The only alternative is probiotics. And as there is no probiotics manufacturer in India, many Indian companies import Probiotics, especially from the USA, Europe and Japan. MGE too sources its OMRI Listed and Generally Recognized As Safe (GRAS) and United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved probiotics from the USA. The dormant mother culture is then activated by placing it in a 'super-source', mainly consisting of jaggery or molasses, a process that takes about 14 days. Once activated, the probiotics is used in MGE's wellbeing and household products. But the dependence on an imported product was neither to the liking of Rallis nor of MGE. The collaboration, then, would need to include research and manufacture of probiotics in India.

ProB Aqua



Pro-B Aqua

Rallis agreed to partner with MGE. The collaboration made it necessary for MGE to obtain the necessary certifications and approvals from various government institutions. Once this was done, the first joint product, ProB Aqua, was developed and MGE became its exclusive manufacturer for Rallis.

ProB Aqua is a probiotics product that enhances shrimp growth. But there was more to the collaboration than just ProB Aqua manufacture. "I had to visit every single shrimp farm in Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Orissa and West Bengal to explain the benefits of this product," recalls Margarita. "For almost two years I worked from six in the morning to midnight. It was one of the most tiring activities I've ever taken up. TATA had organized the visits and provided the necessary translation services. So there I was, standing in front of a farmer or group of farmers, and explaining what probiotics are, what the product does and what the benefits are. Of course, belief comes after trying it out, so we gave them free products and invited them to try this in a few of their tanks and compare the size and weight of the shrimps and the quality of the water with the tanks which were not treated." The product turned out to be hugely successful.

GeoGreen Aqua

Aquaculture has a very high carbon footprint. Shrimp farming in particular produces large volumes of sludge, often caused by overfeeding. As the sludge contains ammonia, nitrate and nitrite, which kills the shrimps, the farmer needs to remove the polluted sludge after every batch, usually once a year. In doing so ammonia, nitrate and nitrite, greenhouse gases compounds, are released in the air.



Margarita and Guidelma

Margarita knew from her earlier research in North Carolina, USA, that the sludge volume can be substantially reduced using probiotics. This led to a second Rallis product, the GeoGreen Aqua pond soil quality enhancer, an organic compost for shrimp farming. It reduces sludge volume by up to 50%. In consequence, the water level in the pond increases, which not only leads to more shrimps, but also to a substantial reduction of ammonia, nitrate and nitrite. "This is one of the most successful products," says Margarita. "Moreover, the shrimp cycle reduces to 9 from 12 months." The farmers' incomes have steadily increased.

GeoGreen, Prebiotics and Fossence



Fossence

From Aqua compost to farm compost is a small step. In collaboration with another TATA company, TATA Chemicals, MGE developed 'GeoGreen', a natural organic manure for farms, with special formulas for rice farmers, sugarcane farmers, vegetable farmers, coffee farmers, tea farmers and ornamental farmers. "We've used it for the Matrimandir gardens with exceptional success," says Margarita.

It did not stop there. Together with engineers at the TATA Chemicals 'Nutraceuticals Project', MGE studied the role of probiotics in the human gut bacteria and extended the use to prebiotics. "This product does not depend on any imports, but is 100% made in India," says Margarita proudly. Prebiotics was then used to produce 'Fossence', a very low sucrose-level non-digestible product that promotes the growth of good bacteria in the gut. It can be used by the food and beverage industry to replace sugar. In a country that is known to be amongst the largest sugar consumers in the world, and where there is an epidemic of diabetes, this is an important development which can help prevent many serious diseases.

As an offspring, MGE started using prebiotics in all its wellness products. "We went to see the new factory and discovered while working with the scientists of TATA that by using

prebiotics in probiotics, the life of probiotics increases. I suggested them to use pre- and probiotics in all the wellness products that TATA Chemicals want to promote, including soaps, shampoos and toothpastes," says Margarita. This led to a long visit of TATA Chemicals scientists to MGE. "They sampled all our products that are under testing in their laboratories. Now, TATA Chemicals wants to take our wellbeing line."

Brackish Water Aquaculture

Brackish water aquaculture has been identified as one of the high potential areas for increasing fin fish and shell fish production. The Central Institute of Brackish water Aquaculture (CIBA) is India's nodal agency for the development of brackish water aquaculture. Jointly with TATA, CIBA's scientists created a special probiotics culture for controlling ammonia, nitrate and nitrite in brackish water. The formula was patented by TATA Rallis, which in turn licensed it to MGE. Margarita was then trained at CIBA. "This shows the trust TATA has in us," she says. New products are now being developed.

Green Clean Schools Programme

The final TATA company to contact MGE was TATA Trust. Their interest was in following a programme initiated by the Supreme Court of India born in 2005 which made Environment a compulsory subject in schools. "One consequence is that the schools must promote cleanliness. We joined the programme, but instead of promoting 'clean schools', we decided to promote 'green clean schools' and supply our probiotic multi-cleaner free of costs to all Auroville schools and Institutions," says Margarita. "When the TATA scientists heard about this story, they told us that TATA Trust would like to join this campaign. We now are exploring the way to go with our multi-cleaner product to them."

And next?

"I'm extremely happy and proud that Auroville is working hand-in-hand with TATA," says Margarita. "But we'll have to increase our production to answer demand. Today MGE employs 12 people, but our production will expand exponentially, even while our research with the various TATA companies to make new products continues." She mentions ProB Poultry, a water soluble probiotics feed supplement for chicken made jointly with TATA Rallis. And the manufacture of probiotics in India? "MGE and TATA Chemicals are working on it," she says. "India will have its own probiotics manufacturer very soon."

Carel

For more information on MGE visit www.probioticshouse.com



Probiotics daily food drink supplement

Perceptions and misconceptions about Auroville

What does Auroville represent to its immediate neighbours? To the average person in Pondicherry? To the average tourist? Despite it being a popular sightseeing destination on the Pondicherry itinerary, how is this town and its inhabitants viewed and understood by many Indians?

When I first came to Auroville in 1993, as a graduate student on a two week break from Canada, I was perplexed that Auroville could not be seen even when one was in the midst of it. I remember entering Auroville from the AuroOrchard side and when the taxi was on the winding road from Edaiyanchavady to New Creation I was told that I had arrived. I wondered what was hidden behind those beautiful silk cotton, tamarind and acacia trees. A sense of mystery hung in the air. And this mystery continues to greet every first comer because even today much of the town's built environment, whether it is residential or administrative, is somewhat removed from the main roads of this unique growing international town. This town, if it can be called one, is still a cluster of interspersed settlements and small communities scattered between the East Coast Road on one side and the old Madras highway on the other end. There are few signposts indicating Auroville's real location on nearby roads and highways, thus mystifying the place further.

In the mid-nineties when I came back to Auroville for a longer stay, I got the opportunity to teach a couple of years at the local college as a temporary lecturer. It was here that I got to know how Auroville was perceived by a sizeable group of people in its immediate vicinity. While most of my colleagues credited Auroville for its greening work and eco-friendly manufacturing initiatives, they had not really spent any time there beyond a one-time visit.



A busy day at the Visitors' Center

During those days I felt under constant surveillance. It wasn't just my accent that set me apart, it was everything. I was an outsider not because I was a non-Tamil Indian woman educated in the West, but because I lived in Auroville, a place that made me doubly so. A tiny forested settlement, Auroville was in effect a limbo township without clear boundaries, although it was officially part of Tamil Nadu. It had carved a weird place in the local imagination mainly because no one understood why hundreds of people from so many different countries had chosen to make this rural place on earth their home and why the men and women, with their casual attire and careless habits, continued to thrive in the seemingly godforsaken place. For the traditional minded, Auroville signified a lack – of definition, of decorum, of cultural roots – that made it suspect in more

ways than one.

To add to the already tarnished image of this somewhat hippy town was the history of its conflict with the Sri Aurobindo Society (SAS). Some supporters of the Society promoted Auroville as a place of eccentricity and loose morals, where Western couples lounged all Sundays on the beach.

However, for Priya Davidar, a professor of Ecology and a long-term resident of Pondy, Auroville's simple but "free-wheeling lifestyle" was a welcome break from the conservative milieu she encountered in Pondicherry when she arrived from Harvard University in the 1980s. While doing her PhD under the renowned ornithologist Dr Salim Ali,

Priya, of Tamil Christian parentage, would often visit Auroville where pioneering work was still going on. In recent years, she feels Auroville's steady entrepreneurial expansion in the areas of food, clothing and other "innovative" products and services while involving the local communities has changed its reputation in a positive way in the local minds.

In relation to tourists who have visited in person or online, Auroville holds a somewhat ambiguous place. Many metropolitan Indians, especially from Mumbai and Delhi, only 'visit' Auroville via websites or shops in their city where they can buy the unique products manufactured here. Others associate Auroville with mainly a spiritual identity and expect to find a temple-centred commune or ashram lifestyle when they come to visit the place for the

first time. What they discover instead is a fast-paced tourist circuit that is composed of the Visitors Centre, Matrimandir Viewing Point, Auroville boutiques and restaurants where normal looking people, not the *sadhaks* they imagined, conduct their day-to-day business. It is possible to do all this tourism in a few hours. When they are back home, the tourists are unable to recall whether Auroville is a town, city or an eco-village. What they often do remember, however, is an atmosphere that they have perhaps not encountered before.

Adjectives such as "marvellous" and "inspiring" can frequently be found in the personal responses recorded in the visitors handbook at the Information Centre. An American tourist had this to say after watching the video and visiting the Matrimandir Viewing Point – "truly an enlightened concept and vision". "Serene, amazing, blessed," was another comment left by a South African tourist. Not all comments from the Indian tourists were positive, however. Some complained about having to wait one day to meditate in the Matrimandir chamber when they wanted to visit on the same day. It is hard for tourists to understand that they need to wait and develop some understanding of the place before they can be allowed inside the Chamber.

Perhaps there are varied responses to Auroville because this is a place that resists definition and cannot be categorized neatly, and this can lead to some misunderstanding. It is indeed a unique place where fifty nationalities jostle for mental and physical space to create something that is outside the mainstream. But it is not easy to explain this to people who either do not live within Auroville or who are here on a first and perhaps only trip.

Abha Prakash

Another Auroville

At the moment, a number of residents are actively engaged in coming up with new proposals for our organization, including ways to strengthen the Residents Assembly and select members of key working groups. Other Aurovilians are working hard on finding ways to protect the land.

All of this work is essential. However, since many of these discussions take place in public forums it is easy to assume that these are the only issues, or even the main issues, which preoccupy most Aurovilians. But this is not necessarily the case. For Aurovilians who depend on a basic maintenance and have dependents to look after, ensuring that they can manage to pay their bills and/or repay loans each month often assumes a higher priority, while many Newcomers are more focussed on the need to find accommodation and/or fulfilling the quota of work hours prescribed by the Entry Service. Teachers, commercial unit managers and those working in services often have little energy or interest to devote to larger community matters.

All this is reflected in the fact that so few people attend our community meetings: it is exceptional that even 10% of our adult population turn up. Rather more may contribute to discussions online but, even so, the vast majority of our population take no active part in debating issues of community import.

However, it's worth remembering that in most societies only a minority of the population engage with civic issues. Even in ancient Athens, which is often cited as a supreme example of democratic "people power", only a small minority of the population at its peak took part in assembly meetings. (In fact, by the 4th century B.C. attendance had dropped so drastically that the authorities had to resort to paying people to attend meetings.)

Why do so few people worldwide actively involve themselves with civic issues? There are many reasons. In ancient Athens certain groups –

women, slaves, foreigners – were not eligible to participate. Today, in rigidly controlled societies, democratic involvement is impossible. But even in more democratic societies, many people are willing to leave such matters to professional politicians. Only when events impinge directly upon their lives are they prepared to take to the streets.

This seems to confirm Confucius's belief that "When the empire is well-ordered, the common people will cease to discuss public matters." But what may be closer to the truth is that while we may enjoy discussing big political issues in coffee shops, most of us are uninterested in involving ourselves in the nuts and bolts of civic governance.

Why, then, should we feel disturbed if so relatively few Aurovilians attend our meetings?

Well, sometimes the issues discussed at such meetings really are big issues. 'Big' in the sense that Auroville's integrity and continued existence as a unique experiment sometimes seem to be at stake. For years we have been battling land speculation in the area, and recently there was the threat of a new major highway being constructed close to the Greenbelt. In such situations, the Residents Assembly can perform a vital function as it is empowered to make major policy decisions for the whole community. This is why some people agonize over poor attendance at meetings and devise all kinds of strategies, like local area meetings and online referenda, to increase the level of participation.

But perhaps there is another way to look at it.

Mother made it clear that, in addition to the physical dimension, there is an occult dimension to Auroville; that it represents something of huge significance not only to India but, potentially, to the evolution of mankind. The residents can be conscious participants in this 'work'. However, this is dependent upon their sincerity, upon the degree to which each of them makes themselves a

vessel for the new consciousness, for the new world that is taking birth.

Normally, we don't like to talk about the occult dimension: we are aware of how little we know about this. Nevertheless, many of us feel that the Matrimandir is far more than a structure of cement and steel; that its subtle influence extends far beyond its physical boundaries. We also learn from Sri Aurobindo and The Mother that in the occult dimension, when it comes to influencing events, it is not sheer numbers that count but rather an individual's intensity of aspiration and *tapasya*. As Sri Aurobindo put it, *If the French Revolution took place, it was because a soul on the Indian snows dreamed of God as freedom, brotherhood and equality.*

In this context, there are individuals in Auroville who never or infrequently attend meetings or participate in community discussions but who are quietly dedicated to trying to live the ideal. They form a kind of invisible "community" in our midst, not because they meet or even know each other, but because they share a certain attitude and belief; that an attempt to live a life based on 'truth' will have larger consequences, and that every time an individual manages, for example, to make a small surrender to Mother's Force or a conquest of the ego, this will have its effect not only upon that individual but also upon the larger community. For, spiritually, we are one.

This is not to suggest that any of us are Sri Aurobindos, nor that the work of these individuals necessarily represents, as yet, a fully effective counterbalance to all the challenges, both internal and external, that face Auroville today. Nor does it suggest that those who are actively engaged in physical meetings are not doing a similar work within. But it does indicate that there is more than one way to work for the collective. And that while physical meetings undoubtedly have their importance, there are other, less visible ways of serving the community and the ideal.

Alan

A roller-coaster of a century

The twentieth century was like a roller-coaster ride at amazing speed! Early in the century, European thought took a curve ... towards a 'subjective' turn. It covered an entire spectrum – in philosophy, psychology, literature, arts. The pioneers are only too well-known. Just to mention a few names, Kierkegaard, Henri Bergson, later Virginia Woolf, Freud, the cubist experiment. Even sciences such as physics and biology started to make a new order of discoveries, which made the former reductionist method of enquiry gradually redundant. There followed the rise and slowing down of the communist/Marxist ideology and movement.

The two World Wars, coming fairly close to each other, led to the 'angst' of the existentialist period. As was inevitable! There was no meaning and purpose of life. Writers and philosophers were prolific and they dominated the mentality of the generation in quite a remarkable manner.

From that ground, there arose two powerful movements that swept the world. The first was the building up of International institutions such as the United Nations and its subsidiaries in all areas of human activity. The second was the widely sweeping students' movement of revolt in May, 1968, which rejected the old norms of education and culture and asked for new ones that prepared the youth for a meaningful and 'holistic' future!

At the same time technology, born of fresh discoveries of science in the nature/composition of Matter and Life, began to change the way we lived and worked.

And it was in February, 1968 that The Mother founded Auroville! What a history of this century!!

The work begun by Sri Aurobindo and The Mother in the latter part of the nineteenth century came into a concentrated focus in the beginning of the twentieth. And what do we see? What are the visible signs? The freedom of India... and of the Asian and African countries. In that free space, there was a renewed understanding of their ancient civilizations in the setting of modern life and its developments. A veritable renaissance of Asia became visible in a manifold way.

As this panorama of the world moving into its future possibilities unfolds, the Supramental manifestation takes place... in 1956, which was the evolutionary work that Sri Aurobindo and The Mother came to do. And for which Auroville was founded by Them.

A few lines from The Mother strike me as of the greatest evolutionary significance in our times:

"...the Supermind has burst forth into universal play. It has become a principle at constant work upon all earth – a possibility of a general order, as when the mind was first diffused over the earth."

May 22, 1956

Aster Patel

Finding one's own path: a profile of Sagarika

Sagarika Bhati was born and raised in Auroville. She is among the few students who chose to follow the Free Progress system of education offered in some schools in Auroville. Proposed by The Mother, this approach focusses on the integral education of an individual rather than on grades or qualifications and is thus designed to respond to each student's own line of progress and areas of interest. Sagarika spoke to us about her education, the alternative schools she went to, the experiences that Auroville offers and how the choices she made shaped her. Included here are excerpts from her portfolio on the basis of which she recently received a substantial scholarship for an Arts programme at the University of Bennington, VT, USA.

You were part of the first batch of Nandanam Kindergarten.

Yes, that was a beautiful time! Nandanam gave me a lot of space and while I was aware of the people around me, I was allowed to emerge from my little bubble gradually. We were offered several activities – cooking, gardening, Awareness Through the Body (ATB). It's important that even at that time, while there were several activities, none of them were compulsory. If children didn't want to read, they wouldn't be made to. I felt I could keep my boundaries, a connection with my inner self, and this was very grounding.

After Nandanam, I went to Transition School. When I was in second grade at Transition, however, The Learning Community (TLC), an exper-

IN TLC this feeling grew into a strong sense of inferiority and inadequacy. And while I struggled to be included, I felt there was no support from the community at TLC. I found myself in a space feeling separated. During this period neither the world nor I were good enough; I could either wear a mask and blend in, or work on self-reflection.

This sounds like a really tough phase for you...

Looking back, though this period was difficult, it became the very reason for finding myself and questioning my identity. And I was lucky to find spaces and very different playing fields where I was able to grow into my skin and accept, even appreciate, my differences.

The first breath of fresh air came in the form of Last School. We all left TLC together after three years and went to Last School. This was a deeply nourishing and uplifting time for me. We were only around seven students in Last School at that point and each one of us was treated equally. This was not something I was used to! Everyone looked at us as a person,



Sagarika (top centre) with the BTG team

my brushes as to doing the research and actual artwork. I would like to learn how to work like that while embracing who I am at the same time.

Embracing yourself is a theme you returned to when you were 14. Tell us about that.

After two years at Last School which is based on free progress and Integral Education, our entire group had to choose between staying on or shifting to Future School, which offers a more structured curriculum as well as the possibility to take exams and attain certificates. It so happened that all my friends chose to shift to Future School. I found myself at a crossroads. I had to decide if I would join them and choose to be part of their environment or stay on in a place where I had begun to discover myself as an individual. I needed to answer some questions by myself. Do I need a certificate? What is my calling? What do learning and art truly mean to me? Was I going to choose the direction and propelling motion of Future School or did I need more time for myself, to deepen my sense of self-respect, to learn to trust myself and blossom?

It was at this point that I went for the first Ganga Yatra, a month-long trip for students through sites and cities along the Ganga. This trip came at the perfect moment and gave me the opportunity to self-connect and understand what I wanted to do at this point and in the future. I made "finding my path" my project. Through the journey, I started to observe and photograph paths. I watched for little clues, the obstructions and undulations, twists and turns, life, colour and energy. I also observed myself as I travelled these paths. I realized that whether the destination uplifted or disappointed me depended on how involved and interested I was on the path. Slowly, the paths became the destinations and I found myself satisfied in just being there. Over the days I decided I didn't want to be propelled by an external system that would dictate my direction. Instead, I wanted to grow more into myself, learn to trust myself and follow my heart. I wanted to make my own path.

So, I chose to stay at Last School with a completely new class. I was more in me, more settled.

I could see myself at the centre of my life. I no longer asked others what they were going to do. I asked myself what I was going to do. In retrospect I felt that all my experiences had led me to this point of clarity. The next couple of years were most fun and fulfilling for me.

Tell us more about your art work.

In the last few years I've been lucky to have many opportunities to make and present my work, which in turn have contributed to my growth and confidence. I made my first "public" work for the Tango Festival in 2015 when I made paintings that were hung at one of the venues. In 2018, when I was a bit older, I made these huge three-metre by three-metre circles on cloth. This was a big project for me. The research lasted seven months – this long process gave me room for trial and error – during which I learned to trust myself, my decisions and artistic process.

Another experience that stands out are the glass classes with Robert from Luminosity from Happy Studios. Learning to design for glass is different and has to be a much more structured process, more than I was used to. Surprisingly, I got completely immersed in the design process, the cutting and the soldering. I found I could encompass them and understand the principles of working with glass, which broadened my reach and perspective of art further.

In your portfolio, you talk about the experience of working with the youth in this area through 'Bridging the Gap'. What was this project?

Bridging the Gap (BTG) is an initiative with 'Katradi', an NGO from Chennai. The principal aim of BTG is to bring the youth together on a regular basis and interact over Ultimate Frisbee, an inclusive, collaborative and non-contact sport while spreading awareness about basic fundamental rights. As facilitators and youth leaders, Bhavya, Smiti and I from Auroville, and two people, Shiv and Kalai from the neighbouring region selected by Auroville Village Action Group, underwent an intensive training period in September 2017. We came back with new found skills and knowledge which we used to coach 180 youth between the ages of 13 and 18.

Our aim was to bring young people from the entire bioregion together and increase their physical abilities, capacities and self-confidence while addressing values such as gender equality, honesty, teamwork and sportsmanship. We discussed issues like gender, sexuality, safe sex, gender and media and sexual abuse, while looking at our cultural understandings of gender roles and expectations. This was the first time many of these kids, boys and girls, could speak openly about such subjects. The most rewarding part of this exercise for me was that we had mixed groups - Tamil students from the outreach schools and students from Auroville schools. Through this process, they could see and understand a little more about each other. This was an important impact of BTG. We generated a platform to work with both Auroville and outreach schools together, creating a firm ground for conversations, interactions and lasting friendships. This was my life story! This was why I was there!

From an interview by Anusha



Exploring installations – Sagarika at Last School

imental middle school and an all-parent initiative, was formed. As many of the children whose parents were involved were my close friends, I chose to join their pioneer batch.

Was that an easy switch for you to make?

It was a completely different experience. TLC was experimental, outside the box and liberating. They wanted to return to the very core of education to see what makes a child learn and to create those conditions rather than following a fixed curriculum. The teachers were primarily the parent community and though they were not officially qualified to teach, they shared with us what they knew and were passionate about. A class that stood out for me was History with Gijs. He taught us History through Greek mythology. And as we listened to stories of these Gods and Goddesses, we would imagine ourselves in their worlds, and draw them or enact them.

But I did face challenges. I was the only Indian among nine children. The majority of the others were Europeans. And moving in this small circle I realized that the cultural and background differences between us became a big gap. This was not a challenge I saw coming, but looking back I realize that even in Nandanam I was focused on the white people! I felt these kids had something I didn't. These dynamics are so subtle. But they get conveyed in the mass media, in the images we see, in the way people look or don't look at us. I had this sensation that I was in some way less than them. And I didn't understand, at such a young age, that in focusing my attention on them, I was actually unable to enjoy and appreciate who I was! It's sad but some non-Western kids and local Tamil students experience this in different ways, to a greater or lesser extent.

an individual at the same level as everyone else. People made eye contact with me! Also, Deepthi would talk about Indian culture and mythology, and about Sri Aurobindo. In our discussions she gave us the Indian context or perspective. Suddenly I felt like I could see myself, like I had a place. I began to look at myself as an individual, with importance and, slowly, even with respect.

And was it at Last School that you discovered art?

I've enjoyed drawing and painting since I can remember. My work was, and still is, an expression of my learning or emotions or things in my world that trigger something inside me at a particular time. Each time I make something, it's a new process, a new journey. I don't have a specific style or a particular way in which I work. I was allowed to develop my own understanding of my work. At end-of-workshop presentations, for example, we had to talk about where we had arrived, what motivated us, and what our process had been, and judge for ourselves whether this was a process we would like to adopt again. This open, yet safe, space was very precious. While teachers would ask questions and encourage us to reflect on our work, they wouldn't judge it as good or bad.

At the same time the graduates of Last School have set very high standards for students who have followed. Watching them work or teach is very inspiring. They are extremely aware and responsible in how they work through all the stages of a project. They really clean up everything when they leave and they give everything when they come. That's something I want to aspire to. If I start a project, I want to give as much attention to taking it down, clearing up, cleaning



Sagarika's artwork

Translating and presenting Sri Aurobindo

Many years ago, Aryamani decided to translate *The Life Divine* into Portuguese. "Initially, I was doing it for myself. Translating was a way for me to enter into this difficult and complex work. And I got so much help, in an inner sense, with the translation; somehow, it didn't come from me."

It took her six years. The complexity lay not only in the content but also in the challenge of translating it into Portuguese. "Portuguese is a very rich language, the vocabulary is very vast, but each language has its own rhythm, and Sri Aurobindo's writings are 'mantric'. It is almost close to impossible to re-create this rhythm in a translation. And sometimes Sri Aurobindo creates new terms in English and I had to do the same for the Portuguese. Above all, I wanted the language of the translation to be not only beautiful, but most of all, to be faithful to the original. Today, almost all languages seem to have become very much reduced in their vocabulary, whereas Sri Aurobindo's language is rich, expansive, so I had to discover or create that sense of expansiveness in the Portuguese. I felt I was engaged in a kind of alchemy."

When she finished the translation in 2011, she didn't know what to do. "I had become 'possessed' by the book, it had become the axis of my life, so on completion of the work I felt completely empty. For a few months I felt lost." After some time, however, she received an indication that she should revise the translation and see later on if it could be published. At this point, Jivatman, another Brazilian Aurovillian, stepped in and helped in the final revision.

Before coming to Auroville in 1979, Aryamani had been a member of a small community in Brazil dedicated to Sri Aurobindo's Yoga. One day she received a visit from an old friend who had also lived in this community. He told her he had difficulty reading Sri Aurobindo because only short extracts had been translated into Portuguese, so she gave him a pen drive with her translation. "For him, *The Life Divine* was a great discovery."

The friend, a businessman, was so enthusiastic that he started doing whatever was necessary to get the translation published in Brazil. Largely through his efforts, it was finally published by a major Brazilian publisher in 2018.

At that time, April 2018, the political situation in Brazil had become very bad. Nevertheless, Aryamani was invited to come over to present the book to various groups. "It turned out to be an amazing adventure. *The Life Divine* was like a

beacon of light in a very dark political moment."

A small group planned her programme of visits. The first presentation of the book was at the Indian Consulate in São Paulo, a symbolic act of connection with India and Sri Aurobindo. After that she started travelling, presenting the book at yoga and meditation centres around the country. She was also invited to present the book to groups of students at universities and also at the Indian Embassy in Brasilia. "I had to find a language that would be accessible to the group I was meeting. I would begin by giving some background on Sri Aurobindo and then I would read extracts from the translation, starting at the very beginning, because the first chapter encapsulates, so to say, what follows."

Interestingly, she discovered that while most people knew little about Sri Aurobindo himself, the name was not unknown. "He represents something that is new and great but they don't know what it is, so there are all kinds of interpretations. Some of the meditation teachers I met wanted to deepen their knowledge and so were very keen to learn more. But many young people are also looking for another way of functioning and understanding the world. I'm still in contact with some of them who want materials for teaching and I send them whatever I have."

Brazil, like the rest of South America, is predominantly a Catholic culture. Does this make them more or less open to Sri Aurobindo?

Aryamani feels there is an opening because the South Americans are "very mystical. People believe that behind outer appearances there is something else. Of course, they mix everything together, there is an incredible mixture of religions and religious practices, but they all believe there is something else behind and beyond. The South American culture is also much less mental than the Protestant culture of parts of Europe. This is why I think there is a chance that in the evolution of consciousness there the logical, structured mind, that guided humanity till now, may be overleapt, maybe it can evolve to something else without passing through those aspects of the mind."

Aryamani's schedule was intense. She travelled all over Brazil, yet she rarely felt tired. "I feel that *The Life Divine* is an entity in itself, it has a power.



Aryamani in Brazil presenting her translation *A Vida Divina*

When I was travelling with the book I felt its presence. I was living almost like a nomad, sometime spending one night here, one night there, but the energy of the book gave me the strength and energy to keep travelling and presenting: the book was carrying me."

Aryamani has not stopped her translation work. She has finished a first translation of *The Synthesis of Yoga* and is working on revising it. In future, she may attempt to translate other of Sri Aurobindo's works, like *Essays on the Gita*. But what about the ultimate challenge – the translation of *Savitri*?

Aryamani is adamant. "In my opinion, *Savitri* cannot be translated. There have been attempts to translate it into different languages, and in Brazil there are some people working on a translation of *Savitri* into Portuguese. A close friend went quite far, but stopped at a certain point. I think you lose

too much in the translation because *Savitri* is a mantra. Of course, *The Life Divine* is also a mantra but that it written in prose and can be translated while *Savitri* is poetry."

Meanwhile Aryamani continues to work on presenting Sri Aurobindo's works to the community. She has directed performances of four of his plays and now is working with other Aurovillians on a dramatisation of selected parts of Book Seven of *Savitri*, *The Book of Yoga*.

"I have done so many different things over my past 40 years in Auroville but now it's as if life is guiding me to something that I need to do, which is concentrating more and more on the essential. And for me this, along with my work at Matrimandir, is essential. It's a unique privilege to be able to dedicate myself to this."

Alan

REFLECTION

New attitudes to work

I moved to Auroville in January 2018, and as a Newcomer I must admit I am still adapting to this very special place. While exploring different working places and activities, and trying to create a more conscious lifestyle, I find myself getting rid of many old conditionings in the way I used to conceive of work as the main activity and outer goal of my life. I'm welcoming and creating not only brand new possibilities in this field, but also a very new concept of what work means.

When you are facing a new reality – specially one so unique as Auroville – you need to apply your discernment with caution to find the right balance between being humble and flexible enough to drop your preconceptions and surrender to the journey, but at the same time being courageous and sincere enough to stick to your truth and values, even when they may be in conflict with the reality that you perceive around you.

Being in some sort of in-between state (not feeling part of that "other society" anymore, but not yet being officially part of this one) can be tricky, but it can also be an advantage. I can observe and choose which things I want to put in practice, and which toxic ideas and behaviours must be transformed.

In terms of work, there are some beautiful new ways that Auroville has shown me for which I'm deeply grateful. For example, colleagues and co-workers will treat you in a much more human and equal way than in any other place. You are genuinely allowed to put your physical, mental and spiritual health first, and take the time you need to attend to other big priorities in your life, such as buying your basics, moving house, or even taking a retreat for a few



Valentina

weeks if you feel you need it.

It is a very flexible environment in terms of hours and timings, and you are allowed to design the schedule that meets your needs. You are also encouraged to do your best without being so attached to the final result. All this makes it a much more open, playful and conscious environment than the rigidity of the achievement-based mentality prevalent in my country of origin, Chile.

In fact, taking a full week off to attend a workshop that you are interested in would be totally unconceivable there and I'm sure in many other countries too. But not in Auroville, where the aim is far from the capitalist style of "taking as much as possible while paying the least".

However, as I worked in different units and projects, I came to understand that achieving human unity in diversity requires a tremendous effort as it involves accepting all the differences, backgrounds, talents, styles and personalities for the sake of manifesting something together.

Yet, does that means that everyone is equally qualified to make certain decisions or to hold certain roles, especially when some of them required professional knowledge? Maybe not.

I think that qualified professionals are needed in Auroville. Especially when we need to interact and communicate with the outer world with credibility. Professionals should provide useful methods, techniques and procedures to facilitate organisation and make processes more efficient. At the same time there is a danger of assuming that someone with a degree will do a better job than someone who doesn't have one.

After six years of studies, I can say that even if all the theory, practice and experience acquired in the journey has been quite useful, to be a good professional is not necessarily dependent upon having a diploma. There are many colleagues with the same diploma that I have that I wouldn't choose to work with. Not because they don't have certain skills but because their level of consciousness would make our collaboration very difficult and disharmonious.

At the same time, I've been amazed by many Aurovillians who, without any formal studies in their fields, have achieved amazing results. Driven by their passion and commitment, these people are embodying the idea that Auroville is a big university, and that nothing teaches you better than constant experience and discipline.

So what is the real qualification needed to be part of the experiment of Auroville, if nobody really cares about your diploma, your country, or even your background? Maybe even more than professional experience, what is

really required from everyone in Auroville is to remain present and sincere enough to channel something higher. It is an attitude which says, "Are you going to take it personally if we have some disagreement or are you going to prioritize the creation that we are manifesting together?"

We may have different opinions and be different on a human level, but in the spiritual level we are the same. The more I value and respect you, the more I value and respect myself. Maybe ego will always be there, but it is enough if you recognise that is not you and decide to remember the no-separation reality each time you feel triggered.

Embracing a more feminine way

We are coming from a world that addresses professionalism and work in a masculine way: as productivity and outcomes. I feel it is the time to embrace a more feminine way now. One that is not only focussed on action, tasks, achievements, goals and results but more importantly, focussed on fully embracing the joy of doing in the present moment. With patience, love and compassion.

Every time that work feels like a burden, it is because we have disconnected ourselves from the source and from this truth, so we need to help each other to remember so we can become playful again. The way to measure success shouldn't be any longer how productive, efficient and profitable you are. This mindset can be replaced with how much you enjoy being in the present moment with whatever you are doing. We need to help each other more actively remember that there's a big natural satisfaction in sharing, not because "we have to" but because we genuinely feel

there's no separation: "I don't want anything for myself that I don't want for you too."

Does that mean that we forget about productivity, that we don't aspire for good results anymore? No. The call is actually to integrate a new state. We are not machines serving anything outside ourselves but we are serving the divine within.

A new kind of discipline could emerge on the way: a strong commitment to stay present, to stay honest with your mission, to stay courageous enough to express yourself freely without the fear of being rejected and to set healthy boundaries with transparency.

Despite the fact the inner work that you do is not officially being taken into consideration as work in Auroville, this may be the very reason why we are all here: to transform the consciousness so deeply that the very concept of work will be pointless, because at the end we won't feel any separation between who we are inside and what we do outside; there will be just a constant flowing of bliss.

Finally, I dream of a powerful new combination, the beautiful higher aspiration of uplifting consciousness along with professionally applied strategies, because I feel there's a need to integrate both worlds. Once we do that we can say that the 'Aurovillian Way' is an example of a new form of professionalism.

Valentina Beatriz

Valentina is a 28 year young filmmaker, photographer and dancer from Chile. She joined Auroville as a Newcomer in 2018 and has been directing and editing videos and documentaries for different units and projects.

Paintings of an Inner Journey

Many years ago, in Issue # 188 of September 2004, *Auroville Today* reported about the work of Hufreesh Dumasla Chopra, a young Auroville artist. This August, Savitri Bhavan organized an exhibition of her recent paintings, titled "Inner Journey," displaying her 15-year artistic development.

"I have changed a lot," says Hufreesh. "I've had so many experiences since then. There was first the Florence Biennale, for which I was selected, helped by a grant from the Dutch Foundation 'Stichting de Zaaier' for which I am extremely grateful. Without their support, I would never have grown and matured. It was my very first experience out of Auroville and India as an artist. It cured me of the many misconceptions about the art world. There is a lot more to the art world than meets the eye."

"Then I participated in the International Art Festival in Marseille, France; in the Izmir Biennale in Turkey; in the Venice Pre-Biennale in Venice, in the International women's exhibition in Spain and Berlin, and in many more. One of the most interesting was the Art Residency near Houston, Texas, which happened last year."

Hufreesh guides me through her exhibition. "I call myself an intuitive abstract artist," she explains. "When I start a painting, where it will lead and how it will end is a mystery. I try to be guided by something from within." She points at a painting called 'Gateway'. "I was experimenting with papier mâché and paint, and this was the result. It gave me incredible joy as I was able to achieve a certain unexpected result from the experimentation. I felt on top of the world to have been able to materialize an inspired idea on a canvas."

Nearby is a painting titled 'The Flower of Life', a diptych with strong, dark and deep vibrant colours. "I like to experiment with multiple canvases to inspire my creativity in a different way. These two had to be placed close together like this, while the gap in between gives a dimension which would not be there if I had joined the two canvases."

'Gateway' and 'The Flower of Life' were both created during the six-month art residency near Houston in Texas, USA. "I was one of the three people selected for this art residency, out of a hundred applicants. The Artist in Residence programme at the Horlock Art Gallery & History Museum gives artists the opportunity to live and create art. We were provided with a studio space and living quarters in a 100-year old house. It had an art gallery below and we took turns manning the gallery and receiving the visitors. The locals would visit and I had some of the most interesting conversations about my art. It was surprising how open they were and what they told me about my art, what they saw in my paintings. Once an 11-year old boy explained what a particular painting was about. 'It shows me the chaos caused between the energies of love and anger.'"

"This residency was a gift, as all we needed to do was concentrate on our art, to come up with new forms of expression, free from all the mundane cares of the world. I had the time to envision within myself a new form of art free from material limitation – no more canvas and paints. Technology is redefining art in strange, new ways. Both art and technology challenge our perception. Given the opportunity I plan to create art that is both luminous and interactive simultaneously."

The exhibition is a mix of paintings that were created in the USA and Auroville. Is there a difference? Hufreesh reflects before answering. "I would say 'yes'. Auroville is my home, and the art that is created here is more centered and grounded. In Texas, I was in a completely unknown territory, a new place, new people, and new experiences. Art does get influenced, and sometimes significantly, by the environment of the artist. It pushed me to create in ways I might never had considered had



The Flower of Life

I not gone out of Auroville. But at the same time, the Hufreesh that is here is the same that is there. I carry my Auroville with me wherever I go and that flavour continues to permeate my art.

This residency has been a time of challenge and growth, tempered with disappointments and delightful serendipity."

She points at a painting of leaves, in white, gold, and crimson. "That one was made in Auroville. It took me several years to complete. I had started it in Auroville, left it unfinished, and completed it when I returned. It took its own time. Every painting has its own unique journey and I cannot push it. But it is decidedly different from the works I painted in the US. Does it show a more 'psychic' inspiration, psychic as defined by The Mother? Hufreesh laughs. "There is a certain mindset which thinks that when something

comes from the soul, the colours have to be light, pleasant, a certain shade, expressing silence, going within, and peace. But that's not necessarily the truth. Everything is part of the inner journey. My inner journey can – and needs – also to be expressed in strong colours. We have to break free from those pre-set ideas. For we do not know what's there within. That's what I try to explore in my art: what is there within that I cannot see with the ordinary eyes? In what way does my soul speak to me?"

"I have very diverse interests in life and that shows in my paintings. Most artists stick to one way of expressing, to one style of painting. With me, almost every other painting has a different style and that is who I am. I am also a scuba diver, a salsa dancer, lover of Nature and I have jumped off a plane; there is an adventurous spirit in me, which wants to experience life to the fullest. And that is revealed in my art as well. For example, my love for scuba diving led to the painting of the 'Water Fairy'. In this painting, initially, one only sees the myriads of beautiful fishes in the ocean. It is only after a while, one realizes that there is a presence there amongst the fishes ... a presence that creates this magic underwater. In essence, I aspire to link up to the force which is behind everything, to the energy that is creating all this beauty around us which we are usually unaware of."

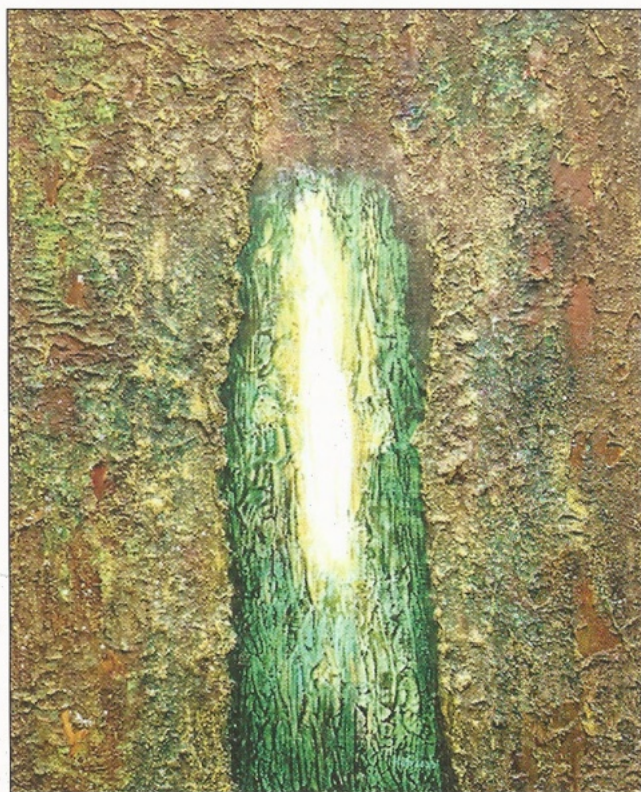
Hufreesh's art, she says, connects with the inner most part of her being. "It is like having a conversation with my soul and expressing that through my art. It's a self-discovery process of finding one's true Nature. My life became a big adventure into the unknown and the unpredictable. My art reflects this adventure ... to find something beautiful in the unknown, in the unpredictable and even in the chaos of life."

In conversation with Carel

For more information on Hufreesh visit www.hufreesh.com or contact her at hufreeshart@gmail.com



Hufreesh



Gateway



Leaves of Change



Water Fairy

The Children's Book Fair

From August 2-9, the 7th Auroville Children's Book Fair was held at Ilaigarkal Education Centre in Auroville. This highly anticipated scholastic event showcases no less than 50,000 books in Tamil and English, specially selected for the young student audience.

Meenakshi, the main organizer of the Book Fair, was also one of the founders of Ilaigarkal Education Centre, the first outreach school in Auroville started in 1976 for the Auroville workers and their families. Many served by the school were first-generation students and Meenakshi observed the great enthusiasm with which her students would handle their textbooks. She resolved to start a book fair to give them access to a wider selection of reading materials to supplement their studies.

"Children have a thirst to feel the book, to sit with the book," explains Meenakshi, who has been affectionately nicknamed "Puthaka-akka" (Book-sister, in Tamil) by the devoted children who regularly come for each of the Book Fairs.

The Book Fair was originally held in Bharat Nivas, but shifted to Ilaigarkal for the last four editions. While the Book Fair was originally intended as an annual event, it has been three years since the last one because of lack of funding. But this year, the Foundation for World Education was able to provide the necessary financial support. Further goodwill was shown by SAIER which provided a bus to ferry groups of children from the bioregion through Auroville to the book fair. Student groups and teachers from many of Auroville's schools and outreach schools also came to the book fair.

This year, books from close to 30 publishers around Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry were collected together by Kapilan Publications, the book fair's partner in Pondicherry, who



Bioregion students immersed in reading at the Book Fair

selected the books and set up the stalls in the school. While all ages are encouraged to come, the books were primarily geared toward a 5th grade reading level. However, much younger children also came and enjoyed the illustrated books, while parents tended to peruse the large selection of books from the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and Auroville Press.

The most popular books remained those from the ancient poet and philosopher Thiruvalluvar and the nationalist poet Bharati, as well as the ever-useful Tamil-English dictionary.

"I am actually targeting the teachers also," says Meenakshi, "So that they see what new kinds of books are available now."

"I tell the children to save their money all through the year so that they can buy books. And for financially disadvantaged students at

Ilaigarkal, opportunities are given to earn some pocket money by making handicrafts. Some children also decided to enlarge the impact of the book fair by gifting a book to their parents.

This year's book fair also offered far more than just the book stalls. Entering the fair, children were offered "energetic" water infused with cardamom and holy basil and herbal tea along with healthy snacks. Stalls with fabric painting and stone sculptors brought additional energy to the event. The middle of the school had been transformed, with tables covered with an appealing selection of books from the mobile library collection, around which teachers held singing sessions and storytelling for the children. Nearby was an art area where the children could make clay balls with seeds from the Ilaigarkal neem trees to put inside the Ganesh idol next month during *Ganesh Chaturthi*, thus

spreading Auroville neem trees all over the bioregion.

And the books were given a human dimension with the visit of several notable authors. Meenakshi herself is a celebrated poet and has written numerous poems in Tamil for both adults and children. At the beginning of the book fair, a Dharmapuri-based author of books on organic farming passed by the festival, and later literary attendees included authors and editors specializing in children's theatre, children's songs, musicology, poetry, peace work, and local folklore.

The eight-day Book Fair, which attracted 300 children and adults, has given a tremendous boost to the reading culture of the Auroville bioregion and provided a wonderful excursion for its numerous students.

Hilary

Tamil Language and Literature at Ilaigarkal Education Centre

Meenakshi and Ilaigarkal Education Centre spearhead several other literary initiatives in addition to the Children's Book Fair. Since 1997, they have published *Auroville Seydhi Madal*, a monthly Tamil magazine which spans the topics of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother and Tamil culture and history. Every issue contains at least one page targeting women and one targeting children. In addition to circulation around Auroville, the magazine has proven to be popular in the Tamil Departments of universities within the state. Due to the widespread distribution of the magazine, Ilaigarkal also benefits from an on-going literary exchange with devotees of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother as well as Tamil scholars. Meenakshi estimates that every month, she receives 55 Tamil journals from various publishing houses and between 5 to 10 books to be reviewed in the magazine.

"So Auroville's name is there alongside the major Tamil educational institutions," says Meenakshi.

As a result, Ilaigarkal is able to offer workshops and seminars that draw people from all over the state of Tamil Nadu. For the last few years, the events have been particularly focused on the topic of children's literature. Ilaigarkal has been able to invite well-recognized Tamil children's book authors, such as Dr Velu Saravanan, Prof (late) M.L. Thangappa, and Dr Kriungai Sethupathy who have won the *Bal Sahitya Puraskar*, an annual award for children's literature given by India's National Academy of Letters.

These initiatives have greatly benefitted the educators in Auroville and its bioregion by bringing the richness of the Tamil language and literary tradition to the Ilaigarkal campus.

E-MOBILITY

Sustainable mobility for all

"The daily mobility pattern of the majority of the Aurovilians is between 1-7 kilometres," says Debo. "A smaller number, mostly persons who regularly go to Pondy, has a mid-range mobility between 8-40 kilometres. Only a few require a long-distance mobility of more than 40 kilometres. We are trying to supply appropriate and sustainable mobility solutions to cover all these requirements."

Debo is a co-founder of Kinisi, the Auroville unit which has successfully introduced the e-bicycle in Auroville. "We tested all available e-bicycles in the market and gave feedback to the e-bicycle companies on their product's strengths and weaknesses. We also made suggestions to optimize the e-bicycles. Most companies were open to our suggestions. Even today we get requests to test their prototypes". Kinisi today has introduced a fleet of 200 e-bicycles for use by Auroville residents, guests and volunteers. For Auroville residents there is the KIM scheme (Kinisi in-kind mobility), a hire scheme which already has 85 participants and a growing interest.

To meet the mid-range mobility demand, Kinisi just concluded a two-day open-house to introduce a premium electric scooter, designed and made in India. "We tested all available



E-cycles at Kinisi

e-scooters in the market and found this e-scooter to be the best performing at this time. Its performance is comparable – and in our opinion even better – than the average 125cc petrol bike in terms of acceleration, suspension, braking, safety and comfort," says Debo. The open-house was well-received. More than a hundred people visited Kinisi, with a lot of interest in the e-scooter. Kinisi is now in discussion with the manufacturer to get the best possible deal for Auroville, including servicing support. Other e-scooters may be introduced when there is more choice in the market.

Auroville is one of an increasing number of Indian institutions that promote e-mobility. "E-mobility is on the rise. We expect that in three to five years, many electric scooters, motorbikes, cars and buses will be on the roads. India promotes e-mobility and manufacturers are now working on adapting e-scooters and e-motorcycles to Indian conditions or making them according to their own design," says Debo.

Beside e-cycles and e-scooters there is also demand for e-motorbikes. "We are in touch with one of the manufacturers of e-motorbikes and have proposed to them to send one bike to Auroville for testing. They may initially concentrate on the big cities, but it would be great if we can introduce e-motorbikes in Auroville."

Auroville has made the first steps towards sustainable public transport. The larger buses ferrying visitors from the Visitors' Centre to the Matrimandir still run on diesel, as do Auroville's school buses and the buses that take Aurovilians to Pondicherry.

"That should change," says Debo. "Electric buses are still very expensive. But large companies such as Tata, Mahindra, Ashok Leyland and Eicher, are now developing e-buses and we expect that acceptable solutions will soon be available."

Kinisi's vision for the future is simple. "Sustainable mobility for all. It will be all-electric mobility inside Auroville. Auroville residents who need to go to Pondicherry will park and recharge their e-cycle at a hub on the periphery of the township and take an electric bus from there. It's just a matter of time before Auroville's mobility will be all electric, with the energy coming from Auroville's sustainable energy sources."

In conversation with Carel



Carel trying the e-scooter: feeling uncomfortable



Alan enjoying his e-bike

Correction

In our August issue, the name of the author of the article *Horses in Auroville* was accidentally removed. The author was Hilary.

Editors

News and Notes suspended

For some time the weekly community news bulletin, *News and Notes*, has not been published as the editors are busy trying to create a sustainable basis for the work. In the interim, the Auroville administrators have put out a weekly news summary of some of the messages published on Auroville and on email mass bulletins.

A very special 15th August bonfire

The organizing group has received overwhelming support from the community for the decision to ban photography at the 15th August bonfire. It was felt that this resulted in a much quieter, more concentrated and dedicated atmosphere. The vast majority of visitors were also very respectful of the ban. The ban on cameras and cell phones will remain for the bonfire on Auroville's birthday, 28th February, 2020.

The organizing group is working to ensure that next time the latecomers are provided with comfortable facilities while they wait, including the audio of the sound track played in the Amphitheatre, and that they do not create a disturbance when they are allowed to enter the Amphitheatre after the meditation has finished.

Residents Assembly creates study groups on organization

Some time ago the Residents Assembly Service received a petition signed by 93 residents calling for a Residents Assembly to discuss and decide on the next steps for choosing the manner in which members for Auroville working groups are selected. At a General Meeting on the topic it was decided to constitute three task forces: to review our selection process, our organization, and to revive the Residents Assembly. The task forces reported back on their progress so far at a General Meeting on 20th August. More meetings are planned.

New Budget announcement from Budget Coordination Committee (BCC)

The BCC announced that the budget for 2019-20 is ready and has been endorsed by the FAMC. 35 new full-time maintenances have been provided. The Auroville City Service contribution to be paid individually has been increased by 5% to Rs.3,475 but this contribution is automatically waived for Aurovilians receiving a full-time City Service maintenance. Those with a half City Service maintenance will only need to pay half the contribution.

This year, the BCC focused on how to build on the basic Care Package, which includes the Health Fund, Lunch Scheme and In-Kind scheme and made adjustments only in the Cash and Kind amounts.

Report of the Working Committee on draft entry and exit regulations

Shortly after a General Meeting held on the topic of these Regulations on 12th April, 2019, the Working Committee updated the Governing Board about this meeting and informed the Board about a section in the Form I of the 2019 Regulations stating that "[...] Ownership of immovable assets in the Green Belt Area of the Auroville Master Plan is only allowed with the written permission of the Auroville Foundation."

Since this clause has been inserted without prior approval of the Residents' Assembly or the Governing Board, the Working Committee has requested the Board to instruct the Secretary that this section will not be used, and that no written permission of the Auroville Foundation will be given to any resident of Auroville to own immovable assets in the Greenbelt Area of the Auroville Master Plan. Meanwhile, 523 Auroville residents signed a petition objecting to this clause and proposing it be replaced.

Further amendments to the draft on entry and exit have been proposed and the Working Committee intends to have all these amendments approved by the Residents' Assembly before these are submitted to the Governing Board for further approval and action. The Working Committee has decided to call for a General Meeting on September 3rd at the Unity Pavilion to update the community on the petition and the proposed amendments on the Entry and Exit topic.

Rainfall

Charlie reports that Aurogreen community has received 260.90 mm this year so far. This represents a deficit of 29.23% over the average for this period for the past 42 years. There was no rain at all in the first four months of the year, and little in May, which meant that the deficit for the first five months of the year was 93%. However there has been more rain than average in both July and August, although there is still a 35% deficit for the south west monsoon period that runs from June until the end of September.

Charlie cautions that there are big rainfall differences in Auroville during the south west monsoon, and some parts of the city may have received as much as 30% - 40% more rain during this south west monsoon than communities like his towards the east.

Opening of CRIPA's new extension



Inside the new CRIPA extension

The new extension of the CRIPA building for performing arts was opened on Sunday, 25th August. Live music was provided by Matt, Holger, Suryan and Dhani.

A Youth Human Library Event on International Youth Day

The human library concept brings together people who might not normally meet to hear each other's stories to challenge stereotypes and prejudices through dialogue. YouthLink had already organized two such events and for the third one on International Youth Day they invited older generations to come to hear the voices of the youth.

The Part-Time Parenting Initiative

YouthLink has launched a Part-Time Parent Initiative based upon the experience of two Newcomers who have developed a Part-Time Parenting process in their lives. It is a wonderful opportunity for potential parents and grandparents to connect with and provide support for younger generations.

Auroville Safety and Security Team (AVSST) Report

AVSST is working hard to redirect visitors' vehicles to the Visitor Center parking and make sure people who might disrupt the community are not let in. They reported that since January, 2019, over 452,000 visitors have come to Auroville. 100,700 vehicles have used the Visitors Center parking. 33,800 vehicles entered the main part of Auroville. Most visitors have been very cooperative, but 218 vehicles did not stop at check-posts.

NDTA update

In a presentation to the Residents Assembly on 23rd August, the Working Committee reported that while there is agreement that private development within the Master Plan is one of the most serious challenges facing Auroville, there is no consensus on the possible solution. On one side there are apprehensions that the constitution of a New Town Development Authority (NDTA) will infringe the autonomy of the Auroville Foundation, that it will not be an adequate guarantee that the Auroville Master Plan will be respected, and that an NTDA will bring more administrative and bureaucratic work.

Others felt that only a statutory land use approved by an appropriate planning authority has a strong grounding to be legally enforced. New proposals are being explored, also in view of the new Combined Building and Development Regulations recently approved by the Tamil Nadu government.

Invitation for feedback on new Matrimandir garden design brief

The Matrimandir executives are starting a new international open design call for the next four gardens around the Matrimandir, namely Light, Life, Power and Wealth. The previous open design experiment for the Garden of the Unexpected last year was quite successful and they would like to use a similar format for the new process. But this time it will be done in a more participatory manner and the community will be involved from the beginning in giving inputs for the design brief. Once it is finalized, it will be sent to potential members of the expert panel and landscape designers all around the world. Aurovillian designers are also invited to participate.

Regarding garbage dumping in and around Auroville

The Working Committee said that garbage dumping is taking place in and around Auroville by some Aurovilians/Auroville units and restaurants. They reminded the community that as responsible citizens it is our duty to keep our environment clean and set a good example and urged that everybody makes use of the efficient and effective services provided by EcoService.

Savitri Nursery

Savitri Bhavan has set up a flower nursery. They explain that it is "dedicated to the spiritual atmosphere that flowers create. Here we grow environmentally adapted plants with joyful loving care, whose flowers are given spiritual significance by the Mother. They will be offered to Auroville and the world as spiritually significant gifts. The aim is to grow in individual and collective consciousness by growing, exchanging and offering plants with spiritual significance that we intimately relate to; to create a field of synergy with people who consciously support it in diverse ways; and to inspire people to perceive and co-create beauty and harmony."

Universal Basic Income

There was a presentation on Universal Basic Income and the Sustainable Development Goals by Hilde Latour, a Basic Income activist from the Netherlands. The talk was part of a collaborative series with researchers and activists of Universal Basic Income launched at *The Bridge*, Auroville's 50th anniversary conference.

It will be followed by an exploratory workshop on basic income in the Auroville context, at the Unity Pavilion in September.

Auroville Architectural Travel Guide

A guidebook has been published on Auroville's architecture written by Aurovillian architect, Anupama Kundoo, and Y. Joshi. The guidebook includes four Auroville itineraries structured around the experimental township's Master Plan and a fifth itinerary located in Auromodèle, which is outside the main part of the city. Three Pondicherry architecture itineraries are also included. Published by Altrim Publishers.

Silver Fund

Although there is no "retirement" in Auroville in the sense it is used in the outside world it is felt that after a certain age a maintenance paid to an Aurovillian should not be tied anymore to a particular workplace or a particular work s/he is doing for the community. Aurovilians above a certain age should be free to decide how they contribute to the community and be able to concentrate completely on their own yoga and spiritual work and physical needs. Aurovilians should be able to leave a workplace and have a security that they will receive a maintenance after a certain age.

A study group has formed to see how to manifest this 'Silver Fund' for older Aurovilians.

Peace Table concentrations

On the 24th of August 2019, simultaneous concentrations for peace in the world happened around Auroville's Peace Table in the Unity Pavilion and simultaneously around Peace Tables in Moscow and New York.

The Saints of Pondicherry

On 10th August, in Cinema Paradiso there was the premiere of a documentary, *The Saints of Pondicherry*, on an old people's home for the destitute and homeless in Pondicherry, which was founded by Aurovillian Albert Zwaan who passed away some years ago. It was a very moving event as all the residents and staff attended, including Royal, the manager, who was Albert's adopted son.

Film Appreciation course

An eight-day course in Film Appreciation: History & Aesthetics Course given by noted film academician Prof. Sudipto Acharyya, will take place in early October at MMC/Cinema Paradiso.

European House Vision Meeting

On Saturday, 17th August, there was a meeting of all European pavilion groups to discuss the future of the European House.

New project in the Industrial Zone

UTSAV (meaning Celebration) – a mixed use commercial and residential development – along the Verite Radial in the Industrial Zone, is ready for the last phase of Building Application. The project offers space for offices, workshops and much needed volunteer accommodation.

Subscription information

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