

Auroville Today

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Estate developers target the Master Plan Area



Auro Park – which has nothing to do with Auroville – is a new housing plot development in the Master Plan area

It's a depressing sight: a plot of land along the road between Pitchandikulam bridge and Edaiyanchavadi has been denuded and fenced. Fronted with an imposing gate, Auro Park – the name mischievously suggests affinity with Auroville – is to become a housing estate. Once again, developers wishing to cash in on the lush forests and the presence of Auroville are trying to create a housing plot in the Auroville Master Plan area.

The situation is serious – so serious that the Secretary of the Auroville Foundation, Mr. N. Bala Baskar, invited the Residents' Assembly Service to announce a silent gathering to invoke Mother's Grace for the protection of all the lands required for Auroville. The call, though issued late, was successful and on Sunday, August 25th, over a hundred Aurovilians joined their quiet aspirations under the Matrimandir Banyan Tree.

"We are taking action," says Sauro, a member of the Town Development Council (TDC). "The development is in contravention of the Auroville Master Plan, which was published in the Gazette of India in 2010. We have issued a warning notice to the developers and are appealing to the Tamil Nadu authorities for help. We will also take every possible legal action to stop it."

It is not the first time that Auroville is asking the authorities of Tamil Nadu to protect it from unwanted developments. A few years ago, a similar development near Dana community was successfully halted by the Town and Country Planning Office of the Government of Tamil Nadu, also at the request of the TDC. "The estate developers will continue trying to cash in on the popularity of Auroville, probably hoping that their buyers would eventually be allowed to become members of the Auroville community," says Eric, a member of the Working Committee

(WC). "But we'll fight it. The Master Plan has to be respected."

Eric is also a member of the Land Coordination Committee, the working group that is responsible for the purchase of land for Auroville to consolidate the City and Green Belt areas. "Three members of the group, Dhanapal, Jacques and Paul Blanchflower, are our field executives," says Eric. "They interact with the land owners, and present proposals for purchase or land exchange to the entire team, which also includes Kali, another WC member."

Fighting an uphill battle

"It's not easy," says Jacques. "We are fighting a difficult battle. First of all, we have little funds. Recently, we got an 80 lakhs [approximately US \$ 130,000] loan from the Auroville Unity Fund with which we can purchase only two acres, very essential for land consolidation. It would be easier if Auroville could sell its outlying lands, lands which are far away from the Master Plan area. But for that, Auroville requires permission from no less than the Cabinet of India [the Union Council of Ministers of India, eds.], the collective decision-making body of the Government of India which consists of the Prime Minister and 32 Cabinet Ministers! This is a tremendous barrier to quick decision making!"

"We were happy that the Advisory Council of the TDC, which met this July in Auroville, also realizes this," adds Sauro. "They have now officially recommended to the Governing Board that it requests the Cabinet for permission to sell part of the outlying lands without the need to refer back to it, so that lands in the Master Plan Area can be bought and the development of Auroville can proceed as required by the Auroville Foundation Act. This should be possible as those lands have not been bought with

Government funds and were purchased before the Foundation came into existence. In fact, all Auroville lands have been bought with private donations."

Land exchange

In the absence of the possibility of sale, and lacking sufficient funds to purchase land, the alternative is land exchange. "The community is rather divided about this," says Dhanapal. "In 2008, the Residents' Assembly approved that a number of specific plots would be exchanged for land within the city and Greenbelt area, and we are proceeding along these lines. The community did not yet take a decision on the exchange of any other lands. We expect that this issue will feature prominently in the coming months."

He mentions the successful exchange of a major part of the former Auroannam land, situated near Highway 66. "We divided this large area into eleven plots, and have exchanged four of them with lands in the City and Greenbelt areas; four more exchanges are in the process of being finalised. We are taking great care that the new owners come from all the villages around Auroville so that we will not be accused of giving preferential treatment," he says. "On one piece, an Aurovillian is still living. The exchange of that piece will happen only when the Aurovillian agrees to move out."

In another location, exchange has met with opposition. The owners of some very large plots of land in the Greenbelt are willing to consider exchanging them against the land and houses of two outlying Auroville communities. But understandably, the residents of these communities are not happy with the proposed exchange. "The Funds and Assets Management Committee has agreed to offer generous rehabilitation to these residents," says Sauro. "This includes mak-

ing a plot of land available to them where they can live in the way they are living now." The issue is still being discussed.

"We also meet objections to proposals to exchange unutilized land," says Dhanapal. "For example, some Kuilapalayam villagers proposed exchanging Djaima Farm (five acres) against their land in the City area. We can exchange it against 15 acres of land in the city! Yet, the Farm Group, who are the official stewards of this land, object – even though the land is not being farmed and the current caretaker agrees to move closer to city."

Land exchange, he explains, is the only option to acquire the lands in the City area. "The owners of these lands are not interested in money; they want land, preferably land that has a high economic value such as that along the new Pondicherry-Tindivanam bypass road. We are in negotiation with a family that owns a number of plots within the city area. The discussion is about the value of the land. According to our calculations, the value of an acre of land they hold is about 1/3rd the value of a piece of land Auroville owns alongside that road. They have a different view. But we are hopeful that these negotiations will end positively for both parties, particularly as a member of the owner's family is an Aurovillian." Does Auroville have sufficient lands to offer for exchange? "No," says Jacques. "Most of the outlying lands are of no interest to the land owners, or have people living on them. We may have to purchase outlying lands for that purpose."

"For the other lands in the city area we have to find creative solutions," says Sauro. "We are seeing if we could enter into a kind of 'lease' agreement with the owners whereby Auroville would pay them a yearly sum, on the condition

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Estate developers target the Master Plan Area

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that the owners will use the land only for agricultural purposes and sell the lands to Auroville in the future. If the lands are needed for an Auroville development, such as making a road or laying infrastructure, the agreement should allow Auroville to do so. Another option would be to offer them intangible benefits, such as health services or helping with the costs of the education of their children in some way. Ultimately, we have the option of requesting the Tamil Nadu Government to initiate land acquisition proceedings – this would be possible as the Auroville Foundation has been constituted by the Government of India. But we would prefer not to go that way.”

Fundraising

Is a fundraising campaign for land purchase still a realistic option? “It’s becoming increasingly difficult,” says Eric. “Land prices have risen enormously. For example, the land along the road from Pitchandikulam bridge to Edaiyanchavadi now goes for up to Rs 1 crore [approximately US \$ 160,000] an acre! This is not an issue for a developer – he will simply include the costs of the land, plus his profit, in the price of the housing plots. But our purpose is to make Auroville a reality and manifest its ideals. For us, these are enormous amounts to fundraise. Auroville’s fundraising work, which now succeeds in collecting donations between Rs 70 lakhs to Rs 1 crore a year, will have to intensify dramatically to make-up for this price escalation.”

“Fundraising is very much a necessity for acquiring smaller plots in the Greenbelt,” says Jacques. “We get many offers for purchase or exchange. Many people need money, for example to pay for the increasing costs of education for their children. But we often lack the funds. If the Cabinet would agree that the Auroville Foundation can sell outlying lands, this would dramatically change the situation as many of Auroville’s far outlying lands are extremely valuable. With the proceeds from those sales, we could purchase a

major part of the Greenbelt. Here too, of course, the residents of those lands should be offered generous rehabilitation.”

The Greenbelt

The Greenbelt, in fact, is in danger,” says Dhanapal. “We hear of similar developments like Auro Park that are being planned in the Greenbelt. If those would succeed, the homogeneity of the Greenbelt would be lost forever.”

“Many Aurovilians probably don’t realize that we have already lost a sizeable section of the Greenbelt,” says Jacques. “We can safely assume that the entire stretch from Edaiyanchavadi to Bharatipuram – Kottakarai and beyond will never become the Greenbelt as was originally envisaged. I believe this area is lost to us – it is for the villages there to develop. We have to concentrate on acquiring all the lands in the remaining area.”

“But for acquiring the major plots in the City and Greenbelt areas, there are only two options: getting a grant from the Government of India, or going for the exchange of outlying lands,” adds Dhanapal. “In the past, the Governing Board has applied to the Government for grants for land purchase. It was denied. This leaves only the option of land exchange.”

“A community decision for such a step will be required,” says Sauro. “Of course, if the residents of those plots would agree to move out, the issue becomes simpler. But if the residents object and no agreement can be reached, a decision of the Residents’ Assembly may become necessary. Auroville must acquire these lands.”

Improving the relationship with the villages

Do the villagers who own the lands have goodwill for Auroville? “They do, but that doesn’t prevent them from asking for the maximum,” says Jacques wryly. Dhanapal qualifies. “It’s understandable that, just like the Tamil Aurovilians whose families own land within the City or Greenbelt areas, they too want the best possible deal,” he says. “A number of them are aware of the benefits of dealing with Auroville and of the

dangers of dealing with land developers. They know that Auroville pays up immediately, contrary to the developers who sometimes withhold payment of the last instalment for years. They often are afraid of the developers, who have the reputation of being quite ruthless in their dealings.”

“But they also have serious problems with the way Auroville deals with the lands it owns,” continues Dhanapal. “For example, many Auroville lands are lying fallow for year after countless year. This is unacceptable for people who are farmers! We can grow a cash crop such as casuarina, which will earn money. Moreover, when we buy land, we have to appoint land stewards to guard the lands and allow them to build temporary accommodation there. We cannot buy land and not have guardians – that is an open invitation to encroachment. I understand that the TDC is afraid that temporary constructions will become permanent ones and may obstruct future developments. But a presence on the land is necessary.”

“We need to improve our relationships with the villages,” says Sauro. “We want them to develop on a par with Auroville, and that means that we need to offer them all the help we can to make suitable development plans and help them acquire government support to realize those plans. Both the Central and Tamil Nadu Governments offer financial support for village development, and Auroville can help in securing that for these villages.”

A good relationship with the panchayats (village governments) is also necessary to be able to integrate the many government-owned (*poramboke*) lands that crisscross the Greenbelt and city areas. “These lands are owned either by the Panchayats or by the Government of Tamil Nadu, and we have to deal with this issue with sensitivity and care,” says Dhanapal.

Is Dhanapal optimistic? “We all are,” he says. “We are convinced that we will be able to acquire all the land and stop all the illegal developments. But the understanding of the situation and the goodwill and cooperation of the community is essential.”

In conversation with Carel

Auroville working groups dealing with land matters

The Land Consolidation

Committee (LCC), which is constituted by the Governing Board and whose members are appointed by the Residents’ Assembly, deals with land purchase and exchange. Where required, it interacts with the Farm and Forest groups. Before entering into any land deal, the LCC checks up on the history of land ownership for the last 60 years. Decisions of the LCC need to be ratified by the FAMC and approved by the Secretary before they are executed.

The Land and Resource

Management (LRM) team is constituted by the Residents’ Assembly. This team is tasked with maintaining Auroville land and its resources. It has 6 members and a field team of three.

The Land Resources Development

Task Force (LRD) is constituted by the Funds and Assets Management Committee (FAMC). It is working on a Land Development Strategic Plan for the outlying lands of Auroville. [see the article “The Outlying Land of Auroville” in Auroville Today # 279 of October 2012]

The Land Matters Task Force

(LMTF) has been constituted by the FAMC and has representatives of all groups working on land plus the Working Committee, the TDC and the FAMC. It aims at providing information to the community for land exchange, identifying the stewards for the land acquired via exchange and coordinating all the different groups involved in this matter.

MATRIMANDIR LAKE

There are different views in the community regarding the size, depth, function, method of construction and way of filling of the lake that is to surround the Matrimandir. As of today, no agreement on any of these topics has been reached.

Over the years, Auroville Today has reported on the many discussions regarding the size of the lake [see for example the article “What is happening with the Matrimandir Lake” in Auroville Today # 259 of January 2011] and has highlighted two different proposals on the function of the lake.

One is by the Matrimandir Lake Team, a self-formed group of Aurovilians who propose that a large and deep lake is excavated and the earth used to create a hill with, on top, a second lake. The water flowing between the two lakes could then be used to generate electricity for Auroville for the times when there would be no external supply. The lake would be filled using desalinated water, while the electricity needed to operate the desalination plant could be ‘wheeled’ from wind-energy. [see the article “Towards a sustainable and uninterrupted power supply” in Auroville Today #271, February 2012].

Another proposal, made by Auroville’s Centre for Scientific Research, is that a terraced lake is built which could be filled with harvested rainwater. This lake could also have a function in the drinking water supply of Auroville. [see the article “Harvesting rainwater for Auroville’s water needs” in Auroville Today # 284, March 2013]

Here we present a report on the research done by the Matrimandir Lake Team into the geological underground structure of the Lake and hill area.

Core drillings in Matrimandir lake area completed

At the request of the Matrimandir Lake Team, and supervised by German expert Mr. Goldenbaum from the TÜV Rheinland LGA Bautechnik GmbH, Nürnberg, in June this year the Indian company of Bhumi-Soil conducted ten core drillings at a depth of 15 metres each.

Eight drillings were done in the future Matrimandir Lake area. They are necessary to understand the geological formations underneath the lake in order to determine its depth, the possible sealants and the way the earth is to be excavated. If, for example, the drillings would show the presence of a solid rock-like formation, this could be used as a bottom-layer for the lake. The drillings would also show the permeability of the soil, so that the right type of sealant can be selected. The solidity of the soil-structure moreover determines the way the lake can be excavated: vertically, excavating meter by meter forward through the entire lake depth; or horizontally, layer by layer, removing first the top soil and then each of the next layers.

Two drillings were done in the area where the excavated earth is proposed to be used to build a hill with a lake on top. These drillings are required to understand if the soil conditions allow for the creation of this hill. They also provide an insight into the composition of the soil in the area behind the proposed hill site, where an additional storage lake could be built. The earth from this additional lake could also be used to increase the size of the hill.

The excavation of the lake areas has to be coordinated with the construction of the hill. It would be ideal if the excavated soil could straightaway be used to construct the hill and would not need to be deposited in a



Drillers at work in the Matrimandir lake area

temporary storage area. However, the top layers of the lake areas might not be suitable to become the bottom layers of the hill. A coordinated plan about how to construct the hill with the soil from the lake site and the additional lake has to be developed; accordingly, an excavation plan for both lakes has to be designed. The plan will include the slope of the hill, the method of compacting the soil when constructing the hill, the thickness of the layers to be deposited and compacted, and what reinforcements would be necessary.

Preliminary findings

While the outcome of the soil tests is still awaited, the preliminary findings show that the geological structure of the entire area – the future Matrimandir Lake, the hill area and the storage-lake area – is very similar. This was unexpected as geological

maps obtained from Water Harvest some 13 years back indicated a change in the geological structure along a line from the northeast to the southwest, running through the middle of the Matrimandir oval and the future lake. This information has now been shown to be incorrect. The under strata of all locations is very strong and consists of a compact and solid clay stone or sand stone. (Laboratory tests are being done to get the correct name which, according to Indian standards, is determined by the grain size of the soil.)

For the Matrimandir Lake this means that there is no soil formation which would imperatively determine a certain depth, like a solid rock formation or others. Also, shifts in the under strata are not expected to happen and cracks in the sealants due to geological reasons are unlikely to occur. But a decision on the lake’s depth will have to wait till the geolog-

ical underground map of the lake area is ready and other tests have been made, such as biological tests of water quality at different depths.

The preliminary test results also bode well for the construction of the hill. There are no geological concerns against a construction of the hill in the proposed location, and the soil of the Matrimandir lake and of the future storage lake areas is very suitable for constructing the hill.

Next steps

Work is now ongoing to prepare the final test report, after which the specialists of the LGA will write a preliminary Detailed Project Report (DPR) for the project of the excavation of the two lakes and the creation of the hill. This is proposed to happen in collaboration with a firm specialised in constructing hills and lakes, also situated in Nürnberg, Germany. The preliminary DPR may be expected by March 2014.

In the meantime, the Matrimandir Lake Team will carry out other tests which are not dependent on the geological survey, such as determining the rate of evaporation, the water quality at different depths of the lake, and the type of sealant to be used. In the next few months five sealants will be tested, one in the test-pond which was constructed in 2000 and four in four new test ponds of 10 x 10 metres that are still to be dug.

The final DPR and the detailed plans for the excavation of the lakes and the construction of the hill can only be written when the community and the TDC have agreed on all parameters, after which the work can start.

Based on a report of the Matrimandir Lake Team

Auroville International meets in Spain

The 31st Auroville International meeting was held in Tortosa, Spain from May 21–26 and was attended by representatives from Auroville International Brazil, France, Germany, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, USA, UK and by a number of Aurovilians

The focus on this year's meeting of Auroville International (AVI) was on how to integrate more "youth energy" into Auroville and also into AVI. For that reason it had invited ex-volunteers and young Aurovilians who are presently living in Europe. A major part of the meeting then focused on the challenges of young people who wish to volunteer in Auroville. Accommodation is the number one problem. The facilities offered by the Mitra Youth Hostel are limited as there is no kitchen where the young can cook for themselves. Moreover, the inhabitants of neighbouring Citadines complain about noise. The Fraternity Youth Camp can only offer a few rooms, which is also the case in Kailash, Aspiration, WDK, and the Youth Center. Youth facilities in Gokulam should be developed. SAVI, the group in Auroville which deals with the placement of volunteers, has started to try and convince guest-houses to save one or two rooms for volunteers, but this attempt has not been fully successful, especially in the high season. The overall expense of between €200 – €500 a month is a barrier for many young people.

Michael, who came to Auroville in 2010 and worked with SAVI, gave a presentation on volunteerism. "In Auroville there were 2,500 volunteers in 2012, an average of 300 per month, with a growth of 30% per year. The biggest group is French, then German and US-American. There are 300 work places and 15 lodgings for volunteers. Ideally, the volunteers should be given food and lodging against reliably working a certain amount of hours but only a few workplaces can offer this." Michael also mentioned the positive benefits of volunteering. "In several conferences on volunteerism I have told the story of volunteers in Auroville, for instance of skilled people who were asked to work with village woman or in village projects. After a first attitude of rejection and feeling 'overqualified' they realized their arrogance and the kind of brainwashing they get at university. They got a feeling of self-fulfilment and happiness to do something really worthwhile." According to Michael, volunteerism is one step in the present worldwide quest to find a new concept of economy. Moreover, studies have shown that volunteers develop new professional and social skills, and better mental and physical health.

The participants observed that it would be good to create a place in Auroville for volunteers to meet on a regular basis and that volunteers should be carefully introduced to the spiritual



Alfonso from AVI Spain introduces Dr. Federico Mayor Zaragoza, former Secretary General of UNESCO and former member of the Auroville International Advisory Council

message of Auroville. "SAVI has done some exit interviews and found out that only few volunteers knew about this background," said Michael.

The Centres discussed what role AVI could play. AVI France has been approached to help get the beach settlement Gokulam ready for volunteers. It was also proposed that AVI centers help raise funds for youth accommodation. AVI Centres were also stimulated to promote youth from their country studying or volunteering in Auroville by finding out about the existence of government-sponsored programs in their country, like the German "Weltwärts" programme or university programmes like the American "Living Routes". Lastly, AVI centres could play a role in helping volunteers to stay in contact with Auroville. AVI Germany mentioned that the 'reverse cultural shock' on returning home sometimes can be quite heavy. AVI centers should try to offer something concrete for them to get involved with, like with fundraising efforts or with presentations in universities. Regular informal Auroville round table meetings also proved to be a good step for the German volunteers.

International Zone

A second point of discussion was how the International Zone could be made to progress. Progress in the planning of the pavilions is lacking and it seems that the role of the national pavilions is still not clear to many Aurovilians. Here also,

AVI Centres would be willing to help in whatever way possible. AVI Germany has funded a solar lamp close to Tibetan Pavilion/International House/Inuksuk and AVI UK has funds available which could be used for greenwork in the zone. On the bright side, fundraising has started for the Africa house, for which the building plans, designed by architect Satprem, are ready and have been accepted by Auroville's Town Development Council (TDC). AVI will write a letter to the TDC to pressurize for temporary housing and temporary use of land in the Zone, and also mention the problem of youth accommodation.

Speakers

Three distinguished speakers addressed the AVI meeting. Dr. Federico Mayor Zaragoza, former Secretary General of UNESCO and former member of the Auroville International Advisory Council (IAC) attended the meeting briefly. In his short address he said that today, more than ever, humanity needs a new vision and that he agrees with people like former IAC member Doudou Diène that Auroville is one of the leading alternatives where the future can be reinvented, a new point of reference for all those who are looking for a new beginning.

Dr. Vicente Merlo, Professor of Religious Studies at the Barcelona University, who has lived for two years in Pondicherry and has founded the Spanish 'Society of Indian and Oriental Studies'

as well as the 'Transpersonal Association of Spain' gave a talk on the global situation and the critical moment that our planet presently experiences. "In all ancient cultures there has been knowledge about certain planetary cycles, and it seems that all of them have mentioned our present period as a major transitional time for the earth." A lively discussion started; Vicente shortened the talk on "Philosophy, Psychology and Spirituality" he had prepared and guided the attendants through a beautiful 'integral meditation'.

The third person who addressed the meeting by Skype conference was former IAC member Dr. Marc Luyckx Ghisi. He took up the thread from Federico Mayor, speaking about the crisis humanity is facing. "The big transformation is taking place inside people. Activists today are different, they are all working also inside, many of them practice meditation. Most understand that love and not hate is the way, the idea of brotherhood, of collective intelligence is catching on. In future, we will probably have a reduced lifestyle but a different and higher quality of life." Asked about how we could go from small-scale activism to bring about real political

change Marc answered that politicians and big institutions will only change if and when the majority demands it. Asked to comment on the slow growth rates of Auroville, he replied that the IAC has often called upon Auroville to solve its problems of governance and lack of vision. "Auroville is at the crossroads. Will it become the place Mother wanted, of unending learning, of constant innovation? The potential is there but the click must come." He called on AVI to exert its influence on Auroville to make the necessary next steps and expressed the hope that the young generation of Auroville also come to the front. "Young people are different, think differently, they should push for a transformation, occupy the seats in the power groups. Create a YAP group – Youth and Politics in Auroville."

Conclusion

The feedback from the participants on this AVI meeting was very positive. The youth mentioned in particular that they finally understood and appreciated what AVI is all about and also why these meetings are necessary. This was followed by a discussion on the content of the next AVI meeting, to be held in Auroville in February 2014. It was agreed that this meeting will be organized as a cultural festival, with the focus on the International Zone to highlight the role of national pavilions.

Based on a report by Friederike Mühlhans

BOOK REVIEW

"...But it is done..."

The title of this book, which is a quote from the Mother, reveals the theme of this new commentary upon and compilation from Mother's Agenda by Jyoti Madhok and Kireet Joshi: the accomplishment of Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's Avataric work and mission. This "real work," the authors conclude, "was to open the consciousness of the cells by fixing the supramental consciousness in the body consciousness." (p. 108)

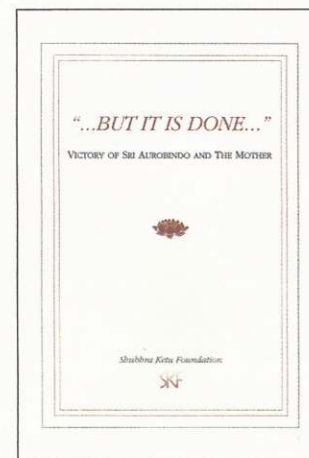
In the last issue of Auroville Today, we reviewed another compilation from Mother's Agenda titled *The Mother's Yoga 1956-1973*, which also focused on the Mother's work of physical transformation. Whereas that book was a pure compilation, without commentary, and more comprehensive – 886 pages in two volumes – the relatively brief commentaries in this new book help lead the reader through a selection of essential extracts in only 123 pages, while highlighting Mother's statements that the main work was completed, and it is now only a matter of time for its complete

working out and expression in the outer nature. This is important because one often hears the suggestion that the Mother's work of physical transformation could not be completed due to the disciples' unreadiness.

I liked both of these compilations because they helped me extract the essential message of *Mother's Agenda*, which at 13 volumes of conversations covering a wide range of issues and experiences, can be confusing and distracting. While the *Agenda* is packed full of interesting and important material, one often loses sight of the central process of transformation. In both these compilations, at their different levels of conciseness, we can more easily follow the main thread of transformation.

It may also be useful to contrast this book with *The Mind of the Cells*, which was Satprem's compilation and commentary on Mother's transformation. Satprem's compilation has relatively more commentary; in the present book the authors' comments are quite brief and serve mainly to bridge the connections between the quoted passages. In

addition, Satprem's commentaries continually put the extracts into a kind of biological evolutionary perspective focusing on the emergence of the next species, and seem relatively more interpretive in their nature. In the present text, the comments appear more straightforward, sometimes stating the essential significance of the experience in psychological or yogic terms, sometimes summarizing a period in the progression of Mother's experiences. Finally, there seems to be some difference in emphasis. I find in Satprem's selections a greater emphasis on the inner battle, on the inner and outer resistance to the transforming force, and on the contradictions between the present world of falsehood and the emerging supramental world. In contrast, in this compilation I find a greater emphasis on how all the oppositions are an integral part of the evolutionary process and become acute as they are taken up and transformed through this process. For example, after mentioning some difficulties in her physical functioning, the Mother says, "And all this is what we



may call the "transfer of power": it is the old power that withdraws. But then until the body adapts to the new power, there is a period which is, well, critical. As all the cells are in a state of conscious aspiration, it's going relatively fast, but still... the minutes are long."

Other passages reveal how various physical problems show her specific obstacles which must be overcome. I believe both compilations are very valu-

able and that they are complementary.

At the end of the book there is an Appendix on the significance of Auroville. Here are distinguished several different levels of its significance. It is not only a counterpoint to the destructive tendencies in humanity that seemed to be leading to a widespread war, and not only a focal point for the transformation of human difficulties, but also was to become "the cradle of the superman." In Georges Van Vrekhem's terms, this would be translated as the "overman," the intermediate being between present humanity and the supramental being. The final quote of the book is perhaps the most significant for Aurovilians: "...the attempt will be to get those who will live in Auroville to collaborate."

Larry

"...But it is done..." is published by Shubhra Ketu Foundation, and printed at Auroville Press. Available at the Wild Seagull bookshop at the Visitors' Centre in English, French, and German. Price of the English and German versions Rs. 190, of the French version Rs. 230.

Building the city based of the

At the end of July, the Advisory Group of the Town and Development Council (TDC) met in Auroville. The attending members were Dr. Doshi, member of the Governing Board and chairman of the TDC; Mr. Aromar Revi, Director of the Indian Institute of Human Settlements; Mr. K.T.Ravindran, former head of the Department of Urban Design and Planning in the School for Planning and Architecture, New Delhi; and Toine, an Aurovilian.

On the morning of July 29th, the Advisory Group listened to four presentations which can be called landmarks in the history of Auroville's town planning. For all studies took the geophysical reality of Auroville as the baseline and stressed the primary need to conserve and augment the present natural ecology of the land in the township rather than attempting to impose an idea of what the city should look like. The studies integrated and sought to harmonise geophysical, social, economic, aesthetic and architectural aspects and stressed the need for implementation in the near future.

The presentations moved from the macro to the micro level of planning. Gilles Boulicot began by giving an overview of how rainwater catchment could play a crucial role in providing water security for the township; Suhasini Aiyer followed with a presentation on the land use in the city; Bankim introduced factors like urban form, mobility and the affordability of housing; while Luis Feduchi gave a detailed analysis of how development could proceed in sectors one and two of the Residential Zone.

The Advisory Group was very appreciative of the presentations. As Aromar Revi put it, "In these presentations I feel we are going in the right direction; we are beginning to hear the landscape speak. I think the principle of working from the ecological services is very central to what Auroville is about, and also that integrating the existing villages in your development is a very critical principle." He noted, however, that mobility will be one of our biggest challenges over the next 10 years, and that we have to work hard on evolving mobility networks in the city which do not favour the internal combustion engine.

In this issue we present excerpts from the presentations of Suhasini and Bankim. The presentation of Gilles has been covered in the article "Harvesting rainwater for Auroville's water needs" which appeared in the March 2013 issue # 284 of Auroville Today.

"Auroville needs to wake up and get on with the job"

Aromar Revi is the Director of the Indian Institute of Human Settlements. For over 25 years he has studied and lectured in major universities across the world in public policy and governance, technology, sustainability and human settlements.

"Auroville is one of the very few experiments in the world which is trying to be a catalyst for radical social and ecological change. Auroville needs to succeed in this, not only for its own survival but for the rest of the world: the world needs Auroville much more than you can imagine. For example, climate change is going to be a very critical factor in future years. It is clear now that we will have at least a two degree rise at the equator in the foreseeable future, which means much higher mean temperature rises than this on land and at the poles. Under these conditions, and factoring in the inevitable population rise, the major cities of the world will not survive because their ecosystems will collapse. In other words, the challenges that we face both developmentally and environmentally across the world are huge, and we may only have 20 – 30 years to reverse or mitigate present trends. So it is vitally important that a place exists where people can come and see that another way of life is possible.

"I understand that Auroville has been in a period of rest after your tremendous efforts to help the forest grow and to build Matrimandir: you've been able to do something that is absolutely remarkable. But the city has not yet been built. And if it isn't built, I have nothing to show the rest of the world that another way is possible. So now you need to wake up and get on with the job.

"But to accelerate the building of the city I think you need to do five things over the next five years. Firstly, you have to open your doors to more people, especially young people, who feel moved to join this experiment. If between now and 2018 you can get in 2000 more people that would change things dramatically. You also need to engage with the 25,000 people who live close by. The city cannot happen without them; you need their support and participation. You cannot build a wall around yourselves, either physical or psychological, because India is awake and is moving. If you don't move soon, you may be crushed by maldevelopment.

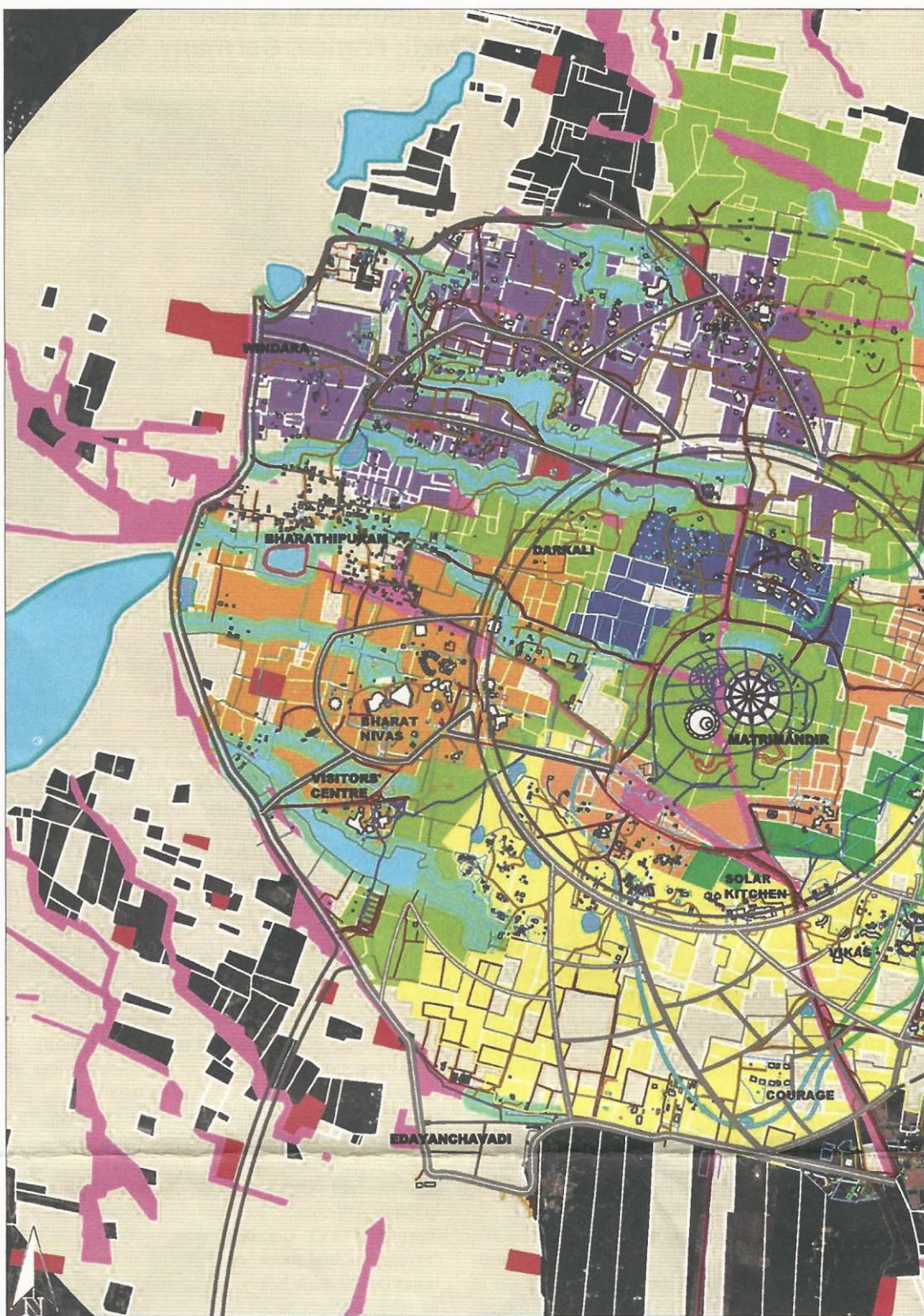
"Secondly, you have to secure all the land in your core area because this is where the work will be done. Thirdly, you need to solve two very central questions which are not only relevant for the development of Auroville but also for the survival of the planet. This is the challenge to reimagine and reorganize your economy, especially in regard to the role of money. You need to solve this challenge in Auroville because if you do not you will not be able to optimise the energy of those who are living here.

"The other question you need to resolve revolves around power. You need to build a new frame of governance in Auroville because what you have now is dysfunctional and is making this place dysfunctional in many different areas. You need to write a new constitution for yourself. Mother, of course, would be in the preamble but the rest of it has to be constructed by you. And framing a constitution means arriving at some kind of settlement between the various interests which are in conflict at present. With goodwill and openness, this can be done.

"Finally, Auroville has to work harder upon implementation. I am very concerned that Auroville seems to have caught the disease which is very common in India, and that is to talk a lot and not do anything about it.

"I don't want to downplay your achievements. When I came here in the 1980s I saw things which made me think this place is a basket-case. Today, the situation is much better, so in some sense the graph is ascending. But you can't sleep for too much longer."

From an interview by Alan



Making a Land Use plan for

"It's a three-stage work," says Suhasini, who, as member of the Auroville Design Consultants team, is working on the Land Use Plan for the Auroville City area, commissioned by the TDC. "Stage 1 involves the preliminary mapping of existing geophysical features like climate, contours, green areas, soil typologies, hydrogeology and surface water management; the preliminary mapping of existing land use of Auroville settlements, village boundaries, regional networks and infrastructure; and the integration of all this information with overlays to derive a draft of a 'proposed land use'.

Stage 2 will be a public consultation on proposed land use and more detailed information mapping overlays. Stage 3 will be detailed land use maps integrating the consultation feedback and the detail maps; and legal land use conversion if and when needed."

Suhasini's presentation was based on the first draft of stage 1. She gave a detailed analysis of each zone and some recommendations.

Residential Zone: (43% of city area)

"We have a few 'givens' or, what we prefer to call 'non-negotiables', in other words, situations that we assume will not change. In the Residential Zone these are the partial presence of the village of Edaiyanchavadi and the Aurodam canyon. Also, we didn't look at any land which does not yet belong to Auroville, and there was no discussion of areas which are already settled. For the rest, we looked at factors like geophysical capacity, density in relationship to the services which could be provided, and equity of open space. Then we studied how surface water flowed. Our recommendations are:

1) Regarding water harvesting: The present depressions and water paths could be augmented to make 6-8 metre wide depressions which can collect rainwater and direct it towards the Matrimandir lake, in order to harvest rainwater for Auroville's water needs as specified in the study of Gilles Boulicot. For those areas below the level of the Matrimandir Lake, natural depressions

can be enhanced to store surface water in open tanks.

2) Regarding housing, we felt that most of the high-density projects should be situated close to the Crown Road and the less dense, more park-like row clusters should be towards the periphery of the Zone. This would ensure that the maximum roof and paved area run off will be drained to the Matrimandir Lake and the lower density run off can flow by gravity to the catchment tanks below the level of the Matrimandir Lake.

According to the Master Plan, sectors one and two should together house around 4,500 people. Today, only 450 people live in these sectors. We believe we can reach the desired population by giving people a choice of four different types of habitat – single standing houses, cluster developments, street and apartments – all with 50% or less ground coverage. In taking this approach the density of these two sectors can reach 5,000 without having to build higher than ground plus three. Thus there would be no need for lifts, for large-scale infrastructure, or centralised water or sewage.

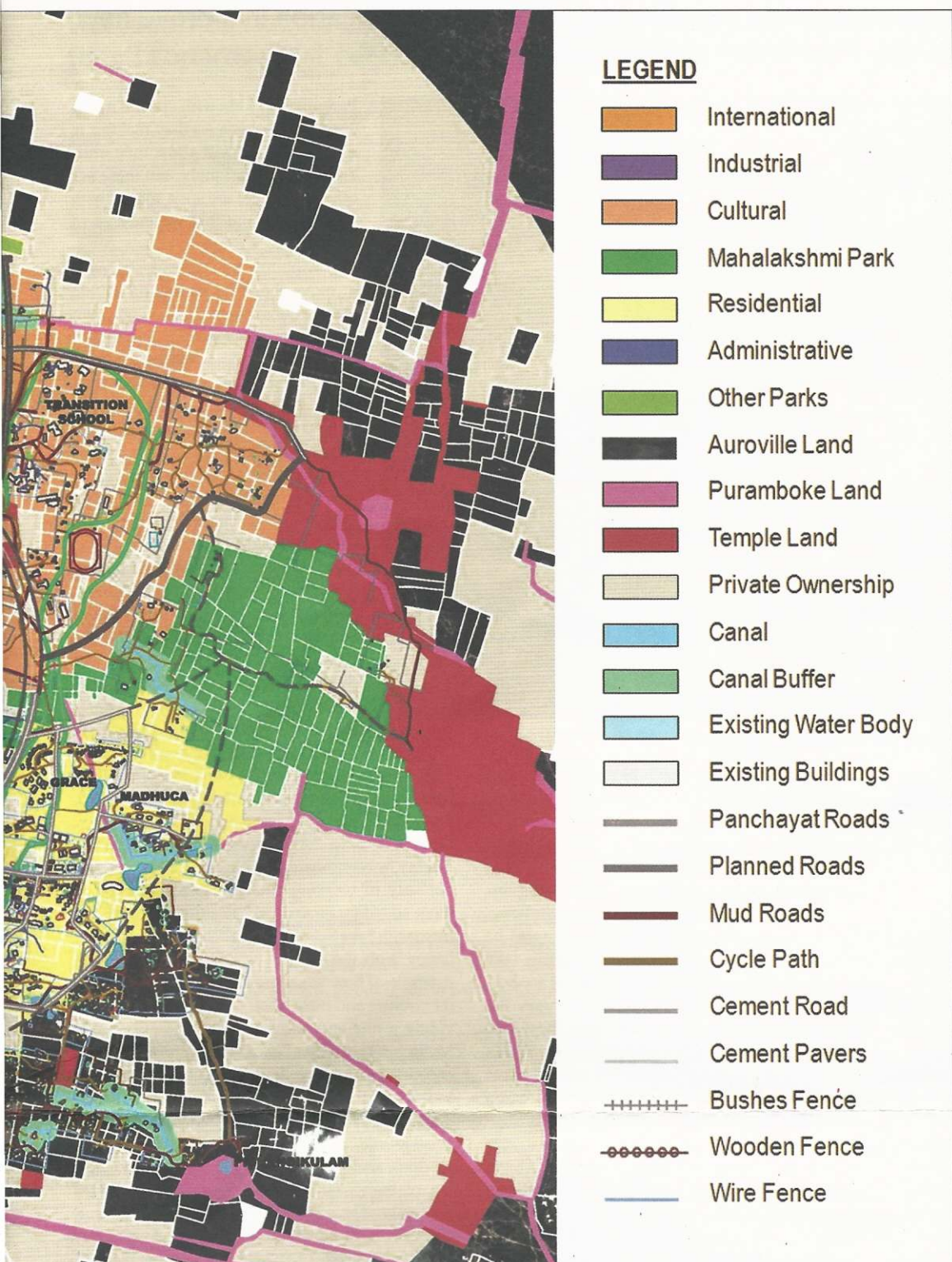
International Zone (12.3% of the city area)

The 'non-negotiables' in this zone are: 1) the presence of the village of Bharatipuram; 2) the presence of two existing cremation grounds; 3) the Aurodam canyon (partly); 4) and the existing panchayat road as the urban limit of this zone.

The International Zone is part of the watershed of Irumbai and feeds three different villages. Whatever land use activities we do here affects their watershed, so we have to be very sensitive in our development.

Our recommendations are: 1) The area with a high water table and good soil should be an institutional area of low density and have productive landscaping (there are already two farms in this area and these should be retained). 2) The educational aspect of this zone should be situated towards the Industrial Zone and Bharatipuram village to create co-development with this village. 3) The recreational/commercial areas of this zone can be situated along and above the Visitors Centre and adjacent to the high-density area of the Residential Zone so that it also feeds this zone. 4) The

geophysical reality of Auroville



Revelation park and towards Matrimandir. 2) All cultural activities can be put more towards the Residential Zone to minimise travelling distance between the zones. 3) Plan land use in such a way as to reduce the density of movement on roads. 4) For higher level education, there should be mixed land use of education and residential.

Conclusion

We believe respect for ecosystem services needs to guide almost all our land use, and in this study we have been keen to avoid land use development which is at the cost of ecosystem services. In our study we sometimes follow land features rather than the circles and arcs which mark the four parks in the Galaxy. Existing water tanks, canyons etc. should be integrated into our urban network. We also feel that existing forested areas should be integrated into land use, interlinked with surface management and suitable development, rather than cutting them up artificially, as these areas are a gift we have made to ourselves over the past 30 years. If this can also be made a non-negotiable we can still have a rich, vibrant city.

So, in the end, we come to what was in the Master Plan, except the lines delineating the zones, city parks etc. are a bit squigglier as we have sometimes followed existing land features rather than the perfect circles and arcs of the Master Plan.

Studying sectors 1 and 2 of the Residential Zone

The presentation of Bankim concentrated on the living conditions in sectors 1 and 2 of the Residential Zone.

In addition to water flow and other physical tangibles covered by Gilles and Suhasini, there were a few other things we wanted to incorporate, like living space, heights, mobility and affordability,” explained Bankim, starting his presentation. “We hired seven interns and they prepared an existing conditions analysis report of these two zones. What we found is the following.

About 15% of the land in these sectors is still privately owned and has not yet been acquired by Auroville. There are about Auroville 20 housing projects in these two sectors. They house about 450 people (about 20% of the present Auroville population), out of which 77 are minors and 376 adults. 41% of this population is above 60 years.

Do Aurovilians like to live in the Residential Zone? In a 2011 survey of 170 Aurovilians about their housing preferences, 78% answered ‘yes’, while 8% preferred to live in outlying areas and 14% in other zones or the Greenbelt.

Do Aurovilians have the funds to pay for housing? In the 2011 survey almost 46% of the respondents said they have between 5 – 10 lakhs to invest as capital in housing, while 17% had less than one lakh. With the costs of housing increasing by the year, these amounts are not sufficient. Only the Sacred Groves project, where apartments are tentatively priced between 4.5 – 9.5 lakhs, may offer suitable accommodation.

All this implies that if one is living on a ‘maintenance’ of Rs 9,000 a month, paying for a house or apartment is not possible. If we take what happens in the rest of the world as an indicator, where 30% of income goes into house expenses such as rent or mortgage, an Aurovillian on maintenance could afford, after 20 years, only a seven lakh house or apartment (not factoring in inflation etc.) – assuming he or she could live on Rs 6,000 a month, which is unlikely. In other words, Auroville needs to start looking at economic sustainability to ensure that individual and collective resources can meet.

The other significant component where the community is highly unsustainable is transportation/ mobility. The average distance Aurovilians travel from their home to their workplace today is between 2 – 3.5 kilometres. That’s a quite lot of travelling so we need to start rethinking this aspect of our lives. From sectors one and two you can walk to the other side of the Town Hall in 20 minutes, which shows to us that mobility has to be about more than personal motorised vehicles. We have to start paying much more attention to cyclists and pedestrians and designing shaded and attractive walking/cycling paths which encourage this form of mobility.”

Auroville

internal mobility of this zone should bypass the villages so we don’t invite uncontrolled strip development. The road within this zone can be looped, so that we can control the flow of traffic.

Industrial Zone plus Administrative Zone. (23.7% of city area)

The ‘non-negotiables’ in this zone are: the villages of Kotakkarai, Alankuppam and Bharatipuram.

The Industrial Zone is the major watershed which feeds the Alankuppam tank and these villages are dependent on what we do in this zone. The soil is clay and there is gully flow, so if there are sudden rains the water is not absorbed and surface pollution flows directly into the three village tanks and the larger tank of Alankuppam. Our Industrial Zone can either be a disaster for these villages or a model of economic activity from which they can profit.

Recommendations: 1) The two major canyons passing through this zone should get a 25-metre wide buffer of trees, groundcover and shrubs, so that surface water runoff is slowed down and pollution is absorbed before it reaches the canyon. 2) Knowledge and service functions should be situated along the two canyons to ensure the least amount of traffic and pollution. 3) Putting more residential mixed cottage industries in the area towards Bharatipuram village will provide employment for the villagers, create co-dependency and provide a barrier against further encroachment on that side. 4) The manufacturing sector and anything inviting heavier traffic should be situated in the area of Auroville’s Centre for Scientific Research. 5) This zone should also have internal mobility that loops back on itself. 6) Pedestrian/cycle paths should be delinked from the roads.

Cultural zone. (20% of the city area)

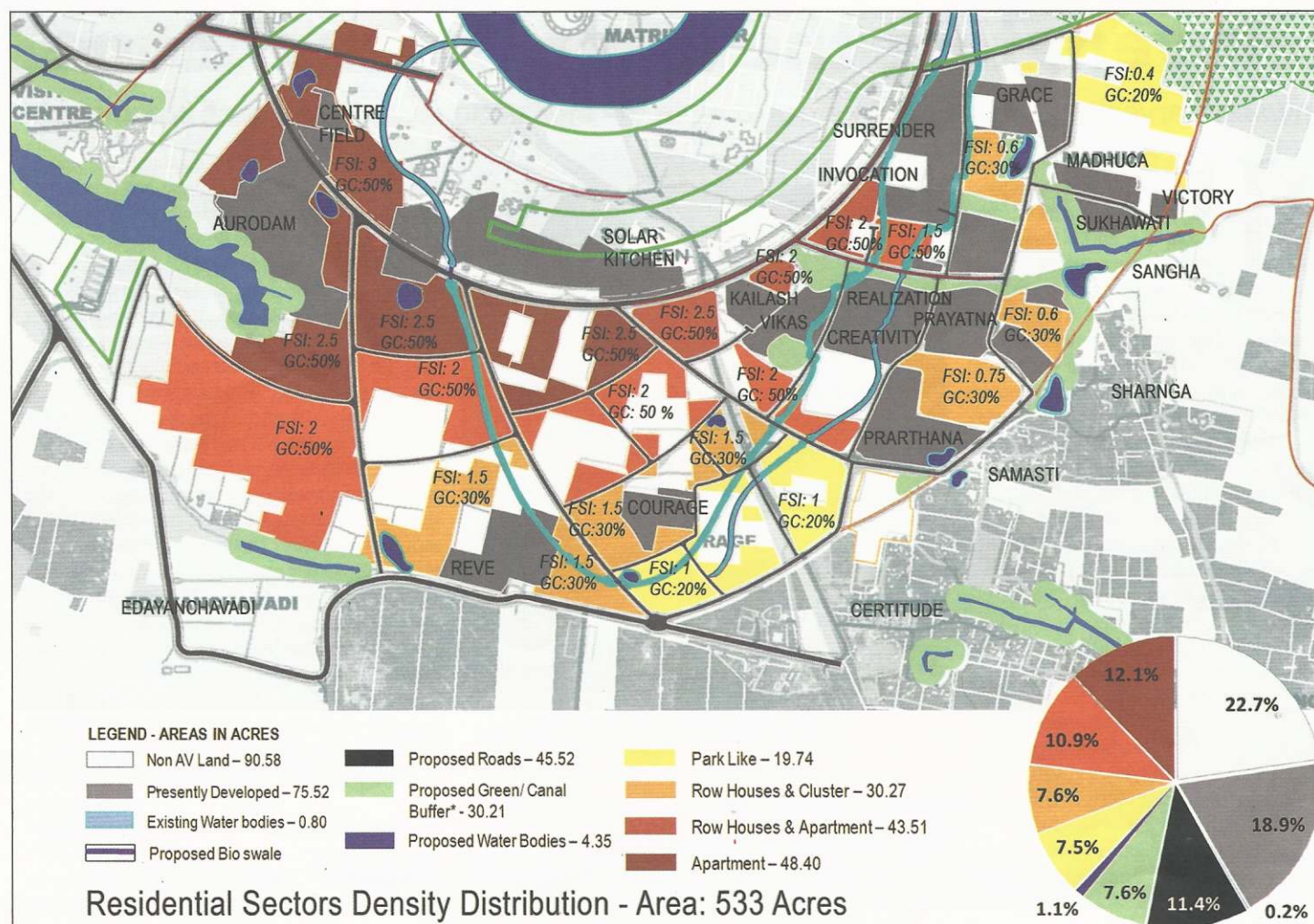
Unlike the other three zones, no villages border this zone. This makes it more of an ‘inward-looking’ zone for the Aurovilians, not a place for receiving visitors.

Recommendations: 1.) All educational facilities up to middle school level could be situated along

Map top: Proposed zones and roads integrating existing geophysical conditions.

Map bottom: Residential Sector density distribution over an area of 533 acres.

Note: These maps are ‘works in progress’ as some of the boundaries have yet to be verified.



Who wants to make a rope-bridge?

The Learning Community, TLC, in Auroville is a community-wide learning set-up which approaches education in a brave new way. They have completed 5 years and continue to see results despite the many challenges they face.

“Who wants to build a rope-bridge?” calls out Johnny. Children run towards him excitedly while Johnny, one of TLC’s guiding inspirations, engages children in measuring the height and distance between two trees in order to calculate the quantity of rope needed to handcraft a bridge.

Compared to the traditional method where learning takes place in a classroom and knowledge is imparted by a regular team of teachers, TLC views the community at large as a space for learning, and the community members its potential teachers and team.

There is a philosophy behind its unstructured appearance. “Activities emerge out of the environment in which we participate, as well as from the children’s individual interests. Each child has a specific schedule that suits their unique growth. Some kids need extra English or Math time, whereas some need to go for special therapies. Nothing is ‘extra-curricular’ but rather all interests are taken into account and incorporated into the school’s programme,” reads the vision document. “We try to balance the needs of parents/teachers and children as much as possible,” shares Tamar, one of the founders of TLC. “When we started we didn’t have an academic system, but over the years some of the parents felt there should be some basic curriculum, so we included English and Math in all the children’s schedules. We try to address academic needs through real-life activities rather than only through books. For example, I teach English through a class called Baking English. Creative writing, spelling and grammar, among other topics, are addressed during these classes.”

What started off with a few parents and 6 children, five years later has grown to 24 children with their parents actively participating. “My kids wanted to go here,” says Matilde, parent and core team member. “But the TLC team told me, ‘if your kids come, you are also coming. I reminded myself that I left Barcelona to try something new here in Auroville even though everyone there thought I was crazy. So I decided to keep up the spirit of adventure and that’s how I decided to be a part of TLC, along with my two kids,” she beams.

There is a reason why joining as a family is so precious for TLC. “Since children spend so much time at home, the involvement of parents is very



Lunch time at The Learning Community

important so that we all move in the same direction,” Matilde says, “As a parent I cannot imagine not knowing what my kids are doing at school. It’s 8 hours of their life I don’t know about. So it is important for me to follow my kids very consciously.” Also, the boundaries dividing home from school need to be effaced in order to emphasize that learning can happen anywhere and come from anyone at whatever time. “We therefore try to move away from fixed timings of school,” explains one of the parents. “We have stargazing sessions at night, classes on Saturdays and overnight field trips.”

“Our camps and field trips are an important aspect of our work,” says Tamar. “Exposure to the wilderness provides a direct experience of wholeness. It is through this experience that children not only gain eco-literacy but also enhance fundamental qualities such as courage, endurance, effort, discipline, care and support for each other.”

But what about those parents who cannot join a system like this? They may be working, or have a lack of time or inability to teach. Is it fair to deprive their child of this adventure?

“There’s plenty that needs done, apart from teaching,” continues Matilde. “There’s shopping, accounts, logistics, coordination. As a parent you do what you can. For example, a mother told us,

‘Look, I’m not so good with kids, but what can I do?’ She offered to bring the lunch from the Solar Kitchen every day, and that is also of great help.”

Matilde smiles when talking about hurdles faced during the past five years. “Every day, every week we face challenges. Not having formally-trained teachers sometimes gets challenging. We would like to have parents who can be trained as teachers. New children always take time to adjust to our environment. Some are bullies, some enjoy the laid back atmosphere. We let them be for a time and, invariably, these kids get bored and tired of their old behaviour. That’s when they begin to learn. But this always takes time. We had one child who just spent time on the swings for 3 months!” she explains.

“Money is another challenge. The first year we ran TLC from our own pockets until we could prove that this is something we can sustain as a model. The following year we presented our project to the school board and SAIER (Sri Aurobindo Institute of Integral Education and Research) after which we started to get some funds for our running expenses. But this is not always enough. Another hurdle is writing the annual reports. Not everyone has the skills but this is again something another parent can do. How we are perceived is also a challenge.

Parents with kids with special needs approach us, because they feel this is a school which will allow their children to grow uniquely, but there are others who feel we are a school with no structure and that we only go to the forests.

“Mobility is a challenge; we have to move the children around all the time. Since we don’t have our own building, we outsource the infrastructure. For example, swimming is done at La Piscine, Play of Painting is done at the Kindergarten, gardening is at Solitude Farm, library time is in the Auroville Library. Only this year we have decided to take a campus at Dana so we do some subjects here. Food is another challenge. These kids have been eating Solar Kitchen food since they’ve been in Kindergarten. Now they want something different, so the parents who have snack duties improve nutrition and flavour through fruits, breads, jams and cheese. How to teach children to eat a full nutritious meal is always a challenge,” Matilde explains.

Despite these difficulties, what takes TLC forward are the results of their efforts. “Our first batch of 5 girls, who are now 14 years old, graduated from TLC last year. They knew they wanted a more formal structure with a proper teacher, a blackboard, a table and books. We felt our way of working couldn’t feed that need in them so we facilitated the transition and enrolled them with Last School. The teachers there are very happy with them. This was for us a successful example of how we empowered children to know themselves and make their own decisions by providing a free and nurturing environment,” says Matilde. “This way of learning for children, being encouraged to follow their natural inclinations and having support at home is so critical for the fulfilment of the being,” Tamar believes that, “being in small groups, sometimes even through one-on-one sessions, really holds children securely. The feeling of being alone among so many disappears gradually. They really have a chance to express themselves, to be who they are, to feel safe, nurtured and noticed. The teachers of our first batch of girls at Last School told us that more than having the academic standard, what they had were the tools to learn; they knew how to learn. You see, a child who wants to learn and knows how to learn, learns anything, anywhere,” concludes Tamar.

Mandakini

WATER HARVESTING

Rejuvenating the International Zone

Rainwater harvesting and erosion control work in the International Zone has been completed.

“It’s done!” says Kireet, surveying his work in the International Zone with a good deal of satisfaction. “For the last three years I have been working in this Zone to stop the erosion and rainwater runoff. Earlier, most rainwater ended up in the Irumbai Lake because of the sloping nature of the land. Rainwater percolation into the aquifers also did not happen because of the impermeable nature of the soil, which consists here of yellow clay and hard laterite gravel. Moreover, the gullies that run through the zone to the Irumbai Lake were also fully silted and had no capacity to store rainwater.”

Kireet is no stranger to designing and executing rainwater harvesting systems. In fact, ever since he joined Auroville in 1996, he has been doing this work all over Auroville, taking the incidental difficulties in his stride. “I loved working along with the men, until one day a block of granite proved too heavy – I was bent over and couldn’t straighten up. An operation followed. Then, a few years later, there were problems getting panchayat [village government, eds.] permission for a work that was within their jurisdiction. The situation got out of hand and someone threw a piece of granite at me, which hit my back right at the same spot. My back has healed, but ever since I only coordinate the work. But now that the rainwater harvesting work in the International Zone



Kireet

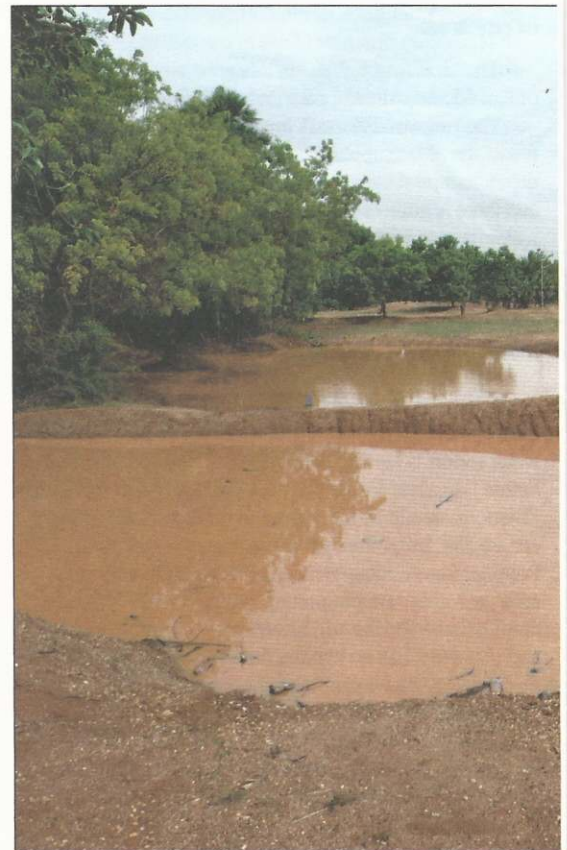
is done, the rainwater harvesting work all over Auroville has been completed,” he says with relief.

During the first year of his work in the International Zone he built some bunds, dug a few percolation pits in the gullies and created some ponds. “Then, during the subsequent monsoon I studied the water flows and planned the work for the next two years. Basically, that work consists of

directing the water flow by making bunds, catching the water in catchment areas and ponds, and desilting the area so that the water can percolate. If a pond is full, the excess water flows over a spill-way into the next pond or gully.” At the tail end of the gullies and catchment areas is the 15,000 m3 pond he created at Ayarpaddi farm, which will be used for farming – perhaps for a second rice harvest. “Only if all the ponds are fully filled up will any water spill over into the Irumbai Lake.” Excess soil has been donated to the Road Service, the Botanical Gardens, Savitri Bhavan and others.

As if to bless the work, the day after it was finished the gods sent some nice downpours. “The first day we received 80 mm, the second day 40 mm,” says Kireet. The rains validated Kireet’s claims. Showing a catchment area we see that percolation now happens fast. “See that damp area there? Yesterday it was still under water!” We walk to one of the larger ponds, which is used as the swimming pool of the students of the International House. “Earlier they could swim here for months after the monsoon. But those days are over. The water will now disappear very quickly,” he predicts, apparently indifferent to his loss of popularity.

What about the users of the Irumbai Lake? “The International Zone forms a part, about 26%, of the total drainage area of the Irumbai Lake,” says water expert Gilles Boulicot. “Nowadays, the Lake is less in use for irrigation; the villagers rather work



Ponds in the International Zone harvesting

with bore wells. So they will benefit from Kireet’s work, as there will be more water going into the aquifers. There will be no adverse effect for the villages. This very commendable work is in line with

The challenges of wildlife education

World famous snake expert Rom Whitaker and his wife, author Janaki Lenin, visited Auroville recently to show Rom's latest film 'Leopards: 21st century cats' to the students of Future School. Auroville Today spoke to them before the screening.

Auroville Today: Did you have a specific target audience in mind for this film?

Rom: I think through the films I'm trying to talk to everybody. These films are seen by tens of millions of people so it's very important that we say the right things because people are affected by it.

Janaki: The Leopards film is very oriented towards a Western audience – it has been made for the BBC – but we also want such films to be shown in India.

Rom: Actually, we've shown Tamil audiences our films and they've been appreciative. Now we are trying to get all the films translated into Tamil.

What do you feel about the latest trend in wildlife films, that they have to be very dramatic and show dangerous animals fighting each other or people? There was a little bit of this even in the Leopards film...

Rom: We totally don't go with this approach at all. My initial reaction to them putting the bit about the leopards attacking people in the film was that we didn't want to be part of it. But the producers explained they were just showing that this is the reality in certain circumstances and that the film is trying to answer the question of why it is the reality.

Janaki: Recently, there was an article in *The Guardian* by someone who looked at the ethics of filming wildlife on the BBC, *National Geographic* and *Discovery* channels. He discovered that the American broadcasters don't have the ethical standards that the BBC operates with. For example, in America they regularly demonize wolves in films. He ends by saying the popular animal programme should be called "anti-Animal Planet" because it is doing a big disservice to animals.

Rom: At the same time, attitudes to animals have changed for the better and I think television has helped to change things.

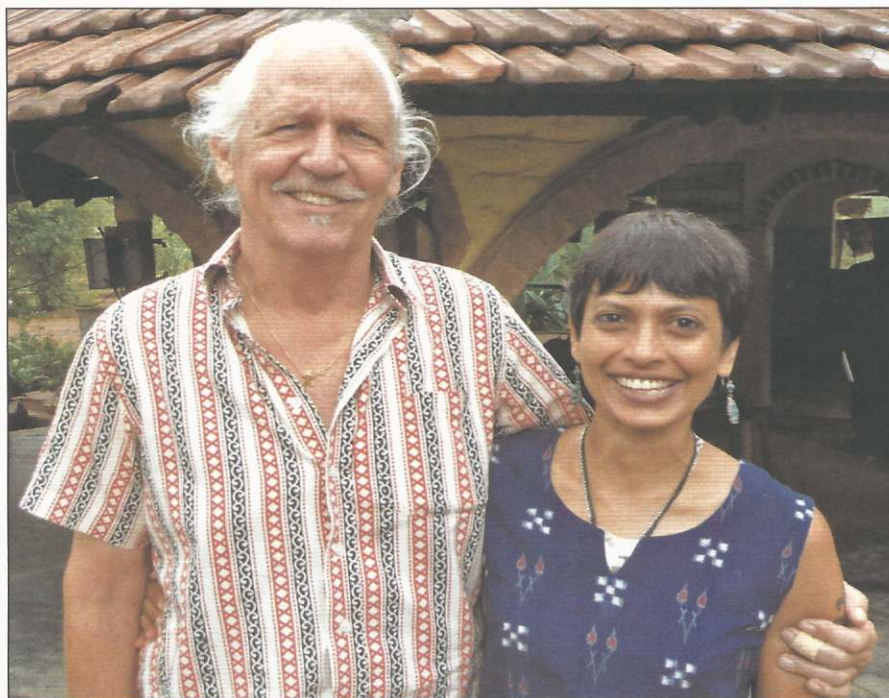
Almost the last words in the Leopards film are the need for tolerance when animals and humans are living in close proximity. But the film showed that the situation in Uttarakhand, where leopards and people are killing each other, is totally out of control. Can such a film change this?

Rom: I don't know. In that state the situation is getting worse and worse every year and I can't see any solution in the near future.

Janaki: The problem is that many local people have been killed by leopards in that state so you can't tell them to stop shooting the animals. And the Forest Department is only too happy to bow to these guys because they're convinced that they're doing the right thing, and the politicians just say the same thing. So with all three groups feeding off the same frenzy, it is very hard to change direction. In situations as fraught as this, films have a limited influence.

Are your articles in The Hindu newspaper more effective in changing people's attitudes to wildlife?

Janaki: When I write my column in *The Hindu*, I sometimes think of it being read by a bank clerk who might be sitting on a bus on his way to work. Initially, I thought my column would only appeal to people who want a connection with animals but, for various circumstances, don't have one. But a couple of people have written to me



saying they hate animals but like the column. I haven't yet been able to figure that one out!

But, personally I have no great drive to change the world through my writing. All I'm doing is story-telling. I'm telling stories about my life, my life with Rom and the strange paths it has gone down over the years, and all the adjustments I've had to make through living in a house with all these creatures just wandering in. These kinds of stories have not existed for an Indian readership.

Then again, people ask, Why should we save the tiger? Why should we save this tree? They don't see the use. If you try to answer in a utilitarian manner you have already lost the argument, so you need to give stories to these animals to make people connect with them. If people don't have this connection, there is no basis for conservation. Here my stories may serve a purpose.

In our last interview eight years ago, you said the key to conservation is to involve the people in wildlife protection.

Rom: That still holds.

Yet films or books only reach so many people. How do you reach the rest?

Rom: We had an idea to do some barefoot environmental education – like taking school kids out to the village pond or forest once a week and showing them what's there – but it never happened. I've seen a few individual examples of this but it should be a mass movement to make it effective. It would be great if the wildlife people with the energy and the money would latch onto this barefoot thing and make it happen.

In the past you have mentioned that the local tribals, the Irulas, have a knowledge that most teachers and even wildlife researchers

don't have. Is there any way that they could be brought into the main educational system to help educate children?

Rom: The Irulas are becoming non-tribal as fast as they can because being a tribal in India carries a lot of stigma. So we are losing their knowledge even as we speak. Anthropologists told me many years ago, when I was bemoaning the fact that the lives of many tribals have gone downhill when they came into contact with 'civilization', that if there was a way of sitting at their feet, of respecting them and learning from them, it might help them and it would certainly help us because we would learn a lot from them. But I don't see anybody doing this at present.

In the past, you have said that, at the macrocosmic level, the wildlife conservation scenario in India is grim. So what keeps you going in spite of all the challenges?

Rom: The microcosmic part of it. For example, we have set up two research stations, one in the South Andamans to study the fauna and flora of the islands, and another, which is India's only rainforest research centre, at Agumbe in the Western Ghats. We've recently linked up with the National Centre for

Biological Sciences in Bangalore, and all their Masters students come and do courses at these two places. I'm not sure how much their work is going to spread but I've got great hopes for these centres.

Janaki: There are a lot more institutes offering these courses today than in the past, there are more wildlife biologists now and many of these prefer to be in the field rather than behind a desk. All this is very positive.

What are your next projects?

Rom: We are going to do a film in the Everglades National Park in America in December. Basically, there is an explosion of pythons in the Everglades; they are breeding there and killing off all the local wildlife. So my idea is that the Irulas, who more or less were responsible for the demise of pythons in Tamil Nadu, could help control their numbers by training the local guys in how to track and kill them. The Irulas are very excited at the prospect. "You mean we can go and kill snakes, like we used to!!"

Janaki: I will try and do one more year of my *Hindu* columns and make another collection of the articles, and then I'd like to do a proper book.

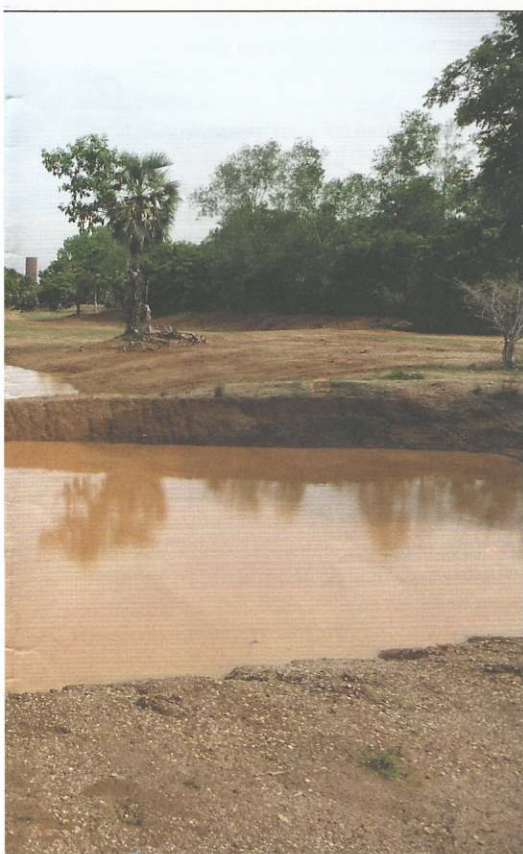
And what about your local leopard, the one who killed your dog and set you off on the making of this latest film? Is he still around?

Rom: We captured him on film in July. We also found pug marks of what we think is a female. All the experts say ours wouldn't stay around unless there is a female in the vicinity.

Is there any chance we will one day get leopards in Auroville?

Janaki: A good chance. They have been sighted near Cuddalore, and that's really near!

From an interview by Alan



rainwater after the summer monsoon

"The International Zone has tremendously improved after Kireet's work, both practically and aesthetically," says Jyoti, one of the coordinators of the International Zone Group. "It is like a rejuvenation of the land. While doing the work Kireet removed many spiky plants and pleasantly reshaped the landscape while deepening gullies and building bunds." Kireet agrees. "Due to the increased presence of Aurovilians, the feel of the land is already much better: they are more taken care of and there was less littering. So the Zone appears ready for the next step, the creation of the national pavilions as Mother foresaw. The planners only need to take great care that they don't disrupt the water flows and that they integrate the ponds and catchment areas harmoniously into the landscape."

The Zone now needs to be developed. "There are only three buildings under construction, the Auroville Language Laboratory, the Centre for Indian Studies and the Tamil Heritage Centre," says Jyoti. "And in the absence of detailed development projects for the Zone, Auroville's Town Development Council, in agreement with the International Zone Group, has given permission for two temporary projects: one of two container houses and the other for the unit Aurocreation that manufactures compressed earth bricks. But apart from these developments, and of course the presence of the Indian and Tibetan pavilions and the International House, the Zone is empty. As we consider it unacceptable to let all these lands just lie fallow, and as the topsoil in this area is very rich, we are now planning to dig a new well and allow temporary agricultural projects. This would be respected by our neighbours, and the presence of

people would prevent trespassing or misuse of the land by dumping garbage."

Financing, however, has not yet been secured. "Kireet's work in 2011 was paid for by the TDC, while the work in 2012 and 2013 was funded by Jan Pieter Derksen, a member of Auroville International The Netherlands. But we expect that the Auroville International Centres will get increas-

ingly involved," says Jyoti. "They are already very much focused on the development of this Zone, more than many Aurovilians. Earlier, AVI Germany helped by donating money for a solar light and paid for the fencing of some land in the zone. AVI UK has also promised help. With their support, we hope that this zone will finally take off."

In conversation with Carel



Catchment pond nearby the Visitors' Centre

the recommendation of the water resource management study conducted by Auroville Water Harvest in 2004 on this zone and with the latest surface water study at city level. "

An extraordinary journey home

Rosa grew up in Murcia, Spain. In her town, there were many gypsies, and from an early age she felt the unfairness of their position in the society and an urge to do something about it. When she was 15, two gypsy children asked her if she could help them to learn to write their names. She discovered that they were not allowed to be in the school due to discrimination. So she started teaching them. The group of children quickly grew to about 20. Rosa was already a volunteer in an NGO that was working to bring to light the harsh realities of war and oppression that were not in the news. She used the building where they held their weekly meetings for classes for the children, and had beautiful experiences observing that while children were learning writing and reading, they were also developing self-awareness, trust, confidence and a sense of responsibility.

During her 17th and 18th years, she went to Guatemala during the summers, and when she finished the university school in her 20th year, she went to Guatemala to live there, wanting to change the North-South double reality and also choosing to settle on the other side and help the people to transform that reality. In her words, "I was very young and wanted to change the world."

"It was the end of the war in Guatemala. For about 35 years, Guatemala had had one military government after another. When I arrived, I was a teacher. I went to an indigenous village and worked with adults on education. While working for four years in this village, I got to know that there were many massacres happening."

Rosa was asked if she would be willing to go to the area of the jungle where there had been massacres to accompany the people, with the idea that being an international person, she could help them by reporting what was happening. She went and was there for eight years.

She worked with a team collecting the testimonies of the people, many of whom had been tortured, raped or survived other situations. "We made a set of four books. The last book was the longest, it only had the names of the people who were killed. The others had stories of what had happened. We counted that 440 villages had completely disappeared from the map, and in very cruel ways. The militaries had been trained to create terror in the people. It was a genocide." The purpose, it seems, was to take their land, which contained oil, cardamom, coffee, banana.

Rosa witnessed terrible scenes, took gruesome testimonies, and sometimes faced dangers herself. "When one night I had soldiers who were trying to push open my door, and another time when a man put his gun to my head, I had to acknowledge I never felt compassion in such moments. I thought, 'If I had a gun I would do the same.' So I began to wonder, 'How am I going to change the reality around me? I am part of the same chain.' I began to feel that I don't have to change the world, I have to change myself. It took me 11 years to reach that point."

"After that, I took a couple of years just to settle inside. I realized that for several years I had just been holding a space for people who were in a lot of pain, to allow them to express it or to help them, for example, collect their family member's dead body from clandestine graves. I was not allowing myself to express what was happening in myself while I was doing that."

Sensing that India was her next destination, she came across a remarkable book by Jean Vanier called in a literal translation from Spanish, 'Every Person is a Sacred Story'. Following his own inner journey, Vanier had started a movement of taking care of mentally retarded persons in small family-like communities. As Rosa remembers it, Vanier had discovered while living with two mentally disabled men that he himself felt disabled in his heart.

Through these family-like communities, he found a way to open his own heart while providing a wholesome family life for the handicapped. At the end of the book was a list of these communities, one of which was in Kerala. Rosa wrote to them, but they suggested that before coming, she should try working with one of the



Rosa during an intensive ATB training

communities closer to her home. She spent a couple of years exploring the communities of Jean Vanier and of Lanza del Vasto in Spain and France.

After a few months living in the community in Kerala, despite having a beautiful and intense experience there, Rosa realized it was not her place. She started exploring different ashrams. Then it seemed that the Divine, with a wonderful sense of humour, and through a series of coincidences, brought her to Auroville.

"In every ashram where I would go the people would tell me, 'You should go to Auroville.' I asked, 'What is Auroville?' They always told me, 'It is a place full of foreigners!' I said, 'Come on, I don't want to go to a place full of foreigners, for that I could go back to Spain.' So I always resisted."

"Then one of my sisters, with her husband, came to India to visit. They said, 'You can organize the places we will go for the one month, there is only one place that we really want to go ... to Auroville.'" So Rosa traveled in India with her sister and brother-in-law and then they came to Auroville. But as soon as they arrived, something strange happened. "It was like someone had sucked out all my vital energy. I could not walk ten feet without trembling. I did not have any pain, any nausea, any diarrhoea, anything. I just had no vital energy. Never before in my life did I have anything like that. Unable to travel, I told my sister, 'You should go, you have only a short time, I will stay here.' And the moment they left, all my energy came back!"

Once here, Rosa felt a strong connection with the Auroville Charter, but also felt a disconnection between its ideal of human unity and the disparities between the Aurovilians and the villagers. She thought, "How can they be talking

about human unity when a few kilometers from here people are sleeping in the streets while they have such nice houses? In Guatemala we were living with the people, eating or not eating with the people." She had strong resistance. For a couple of years she would come and go, visiting other ashrams, going on Vipassana retreats, but

cal music concert? Have you listened before they start when they are tuning their instruments, and it is so screeching and jarring you feel like running away? Here there will be a concert, but we have not yet started or even found our own instruments.' I thought, 'It is beautiful if you can recognize that. It may not be so good yet, but there is an immense trust that there is a Force behind.' And I was feeling this Force, that is why I kept coming back. Even when I went away and would do intensive 20 day Vipassana retreats, that felt as a holiday compared with the intensity of changes and inner challenges I was undergoing each time I was back in Auroville."

As Rosa was about to leave Auroville in order to get a new visa, she came across a photo exhibition for a presentation of the book *Awareness Through the Body* (ATB). Although she couldn't stay for the presentation, she was so taken by the expressions on the children's faces in the photos that she knew she wanted to pursue this. When she returned to Auroville, she signed up for an ATB workshop that was being offered for teachers at Transition School and was admitted, even though she was not herself a teacher. Later she became an ATB teacher in one of the schools. She continues this work, now in Deepanam School, and also offers workshops for groups and individual sessions at Pitanga. She is planning to start regular ATB classes for adults this September.

Summing up her journey, Rosa says, "I really love this work, as at the same time I can offer something very valuable, it is a constant work on myself. I think you are called to do what helps you to work on yourself. In the jungle, I had worked with a group of women, with young people, doing theatre and games, which was releasing a lot of tensions, fear, and trauma. But I myself was not connected to my body. When I was going from one place to another collecting the testimonies of others, I would not eat or take care of my body properly, nor would I listen to my emotions or the state of my mind. I was having a lot of malaria and I wouldn't mind, as long as I could still manage to keep working. I was not really in my body, and all this work with ATB has helped me to become grounded in my body. And as I see it works, I feel it is great to share it with others."

"I had a bike accident in April of this year. One shoulder blade was broken all the way through. I had an x-ray, and the doctor said I was very lucky because it didn't move and I didn't have to have a surgical operation. He said the only thing is that I should not move it, then it would heal. He also said I should not take any tablets for the pain, because that pain would remind me of the limits."

"I started to apply the techniques that I had learned in ATB. I started to breathe with consciousness in the affected area, releasing the tension, canalizing the energy, doing relaxation exercises to allow the energy to move freely. After one week there was no pain at all. The doctor said if there is no pain at all then I could start moving it. And after three weeks I was moving freely. I felt it was a gift to have this experience, to explore in myself these techniques to see how they work, to discover that we have inside ourselves so many possibilities."

"The work of ATB has helped me to become aware of myself, by watching the thoughts, watching the emotions, watching the actions, not getting fully involved in them, keeping the connection with the observer. I was a lion, with a Leo ascendent, a really fiery person. Now I can still feel the fire coming, but it doesn't take me over, and sometimes I can canalize it. Now when I look around, I don't see so many difficulties like I did before, they are part of the process. I can see that what look like difficulties are really gifts, and I am very grateful to see it that way."

In conversation with Larry

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