

## A new way forward?

For six days in early January there was a collaborative planning workshop or charette involving over 60 Aurovilians and visiting experts. The stated aim of Auroville - A Way Forward was to "bring the purpose of Auroville into our life, built environment and organization". It was also an attempt to come up with a road map for Auroville's development.

**"T**his is the third attempt in the last decade to chart a way forward for Auroville," explained Andreas von Sadow, one of the visiting experts, who chaired the process. The first attempt in 2010 culminated in the Integral Sustainability Platform (ISP) concept. The second was the 2015 Retreat which was designed to come up with a road map for the ensuing three years. While both the ISP and the Retreat threw up many interesting ideas, most of them have not manifested on the rocky ground of Auroville.

This time it was decided to try another way. It was to be a hands-on planning charette with input from visiting experts. The main focus was upon town planning but it was understood that as this is an integral process it would also include issues like governance, youth empowerment and bioregional relations.

### Problems, dreams, actions

On the first morning participants made lists of problems, dreams and desired actions in relationship to Auroville's development. The problems were all too familiar: plans get made but are not implemented, not enough skilled people for the work, lack of accountability of working groups, a few people blocking development, lack of consensus about the overall vision, etc.

The dreams included a unified society with everybody working to achieve collective well-being; new thinking free from prejudice and old patterns; a society that is honest and collaborative, open hearted, open minded and joyful; a welcoming vibrant city where education is a priority and which is in harmony with nature; a true innovator of innovative and sustainable living; and a place that shares resources responsibly with the bioregion.

When it came to desired actions, some broad suggestions were made – like don't keep going back to what Mother said but decide for ourselves what is best, build friendship with the plan we have been given, create platforms to share and discuss openly – then the participants split into groups to focus upon different themes. The governance group suggested a new selection process in which group members would select new members; the village relations group said we need to find a better way for local people and Aurovilians to exchange skills and

ideas; while the youth group pointed out they felt excluded from decision-making so much more needs to be done to encourage their potential.

By day three the experts had a better understanding of the main challenges. They summarised these later as declining unity among Aurovilians; disagreement over the need for a city of 50,000 and over a fixed or evolving Galaxy plan; pressure of development from the bioregion; the need for a new economic model; youth issues; shortage of skills; the need for a sustainable transport system; and lack of community participation in planning.

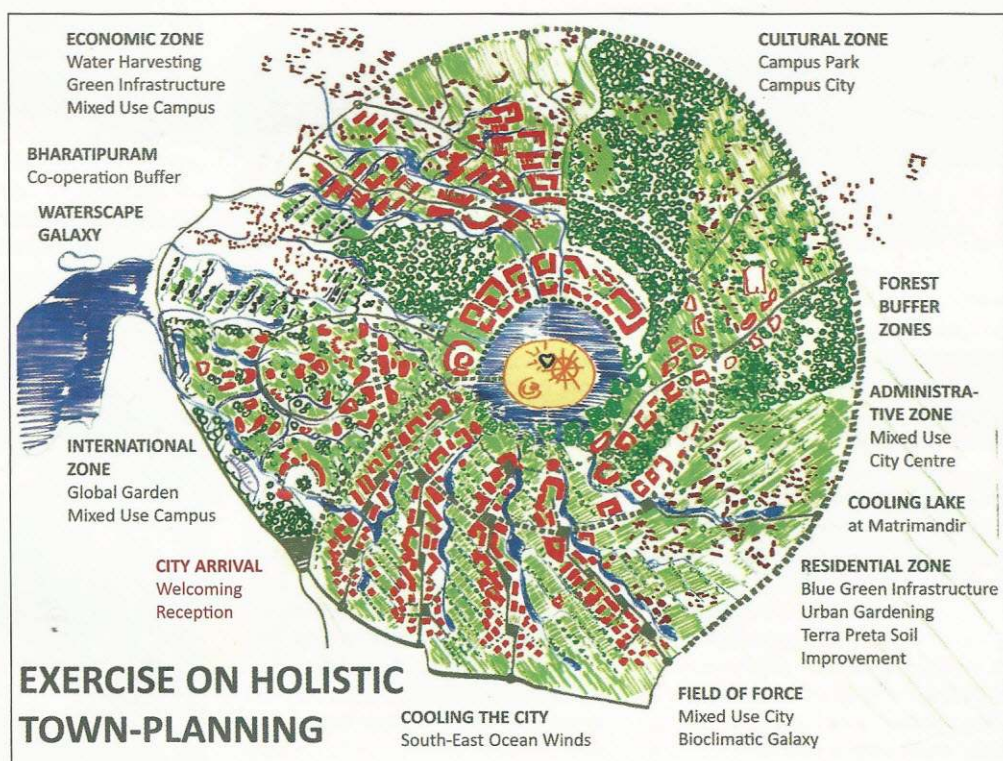
However, they were still unclear what the Aurovilians wanted from them, so they organized a fish-bowl session with the participants to draw this out. The experts concluded from this that the Aurovilians wanted them to concentrate on practical issues, particularly small-scale examples of a possible way forward, to help them develop the idea of Auroville as a 'garden city', and to find a 'third way' beyond the planning antagonisms of the past.

What the experts felt they could offer to the Aurovilians was their experience with participatory planning processes, and with using water in innovative ways and as a design principle. They would also introduce the toolkit of holistic town planning.

They made inspiring presentations on these topics, drawn from their own experience of working around the world (see accompanying article), and then the participants broke up into five focus groups to work upon actionable ways forward. Their suggestions were presented to the community on the last afternoon.

### Representation and reaching out

Andreas, on behalf of the 'good governance' group, noted how difficult the job of the Town Development Council (TDC) is. The TDC has to consult numerous groups on any new proposal. Moreover, it has to deal with four major forces that influence development in Auroville: its spiritual ideals, the Working Groups, the Residents Assembly and non-local forces (like Indian planning laws and regulations). Another reason why so little gets implemented in the present set-up is that a few people in the Residents Assembly or Working Groups can block proposals favoured by the majority.



Andreas suggested one way out would be to create an elected parliament, a chamber of representatives, because then the TDC would have a body to negotiate with if they run into trouble.

The 'widening participation' group felt that another way forward was engaging more people in the planning process, including volunteers, newcomers, villagers from the bioregion and, above all, youth. Participation should be fun so planning events could be held in different venues, like the Youth Centre, using movies and computer games which help people do hands-on planning.

To stimulate and empower the youth, a youth forum could be set up to tackle youth issues. To prepare youth for serving in major working groups, a support group of older Aurovilians could be created, citizenship could be taught in schools and working groups could welcome young people, first as observers and later as full participants. This group plans an 'unfestival' in the near future to 'plant the seed'.

A third group worked on a pilot project entitled "fusion not confusion". They were concerned by land encroachment from village development but they also recognised that the villagers suffer because of tourism generated by Auroville. This group's proposal was to develop a plot between Center Field and Edayanchavady village as a shared space in which villagers and Aurovilians could meet, exchange ideas and develop projects. This new 'frontage' to the village could be a mixed-use space incorporating, among other things, village businesses and new technologies to manage water and waste in the village. A new road could wind through this shared space which could replace the road which at present takes day tourists through Edayanchavady village en route to the Visitors Center.

"It is a transition concept," explained one of the team members, "that could also be applied in other areas where Auroville and the villages meet as a way of dealing with the interface of the two communities."

### Water ideas

The water team looked at four different aspects of water management. Regarding the larger bioregion, they recommended that shrimp farms be closed around Kaliveli Tank and the indigenous vegetation reintroduced;

eco-agriculture be encouraged to the south of the Tank and afforestation on the sandstone Auroville plateau; artificial barriers and recharge be used to harvest rainwater; and that treated water from the Pondicherry sewage farm be channelled to neighbouring tanks in Alankuppam and Irumbai to help re-establish the water balance in these areas.

Professor Herbert Dreitsel, a water specialist, shared some "very preliminary" ideas about how the beauty, spirituality and functionality of water could be integrated in the centre of Auroville. He sketched a water channel around the Matrimandir, on one side of which could be something like a temple tank, and on the other natural forest and gardens. "The gardens could be both aesthetic and a means of treating and filtering water." Bridges would cross the water channel to the Matrimandir. "Crossing a bridge would be like taking a journey from the outer to the inner world and water is a perfect symbol of this transition."

Finally, the water group felt there was a need for a professional awareness programme for Auroville architects and contractors that would focus upon water. Blue-green integration (a balanced ecosystem of water and vegetation) should become an integral part of the site application process and design awards could be given to people who come up with the most water-conscious designs.

They felt it is necessary to develop a common understanding in the wider community of water management, and this could be done through videos, brochures and water festivals.

The final work group was basically a town planning group which addressed the three pillars of holistic town planning: spiritual influences, environmental sustainability and the human issues of social and economic sustainability. Their work was presented by Joachim Elbe, a specialist in eco-design, and reflected the approach he had outlined in his earlier presentation to the participants.

He advised that the first step in making a master plan was to connect with the 'soul' of the site through various means, including geomancy and meditation, because each site is full of different spiritual and elementary energies. "This is the most important aspect. Once you have done this you can use earth healing ceremonies if there are places which have to be cleaned up from the past."

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## How to bring healthy vibrant water systems to Matrimandir that can work?



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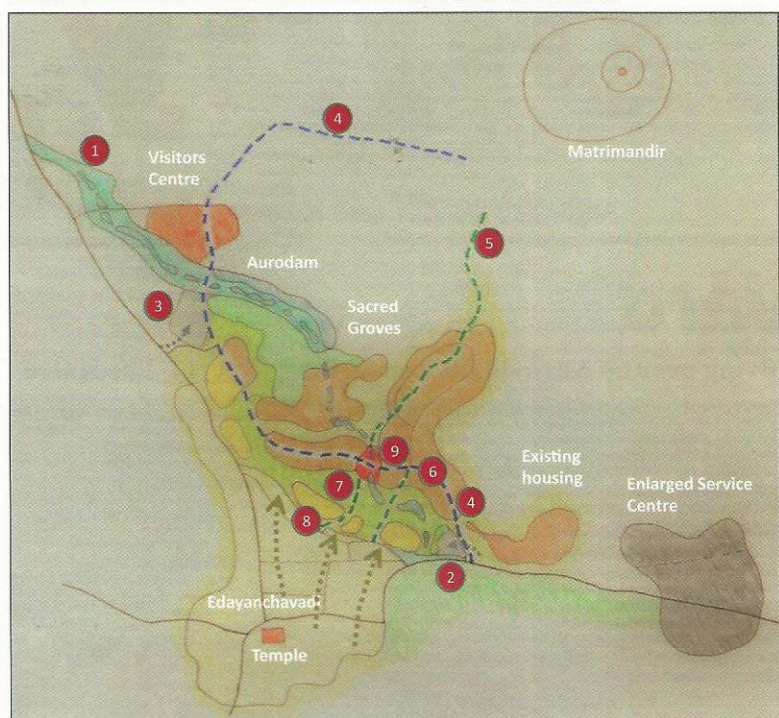
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Concept for a 'shared space' between Auroville and Edayanchavadi village

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The next stage is a physical reading of the site in order to understand water flows, etc., and to implement a bioclimatic response and a circular blue-green infrastructure. The human 'pillar' would involve, on the urban scale, designing a settlement to foster health and community.

Based upon these guiding principles, the group had come up with a new take upon the galaxy concept which is "a field of force organized like a galaxy". "It's not a plan, just an idea about what a new process could look like, and it's full of mistakes," clarified Joachim. They wondered if there could be a "galaxy of water" by linking up and redirecting some of the existing watercourses in the city. Future activities in the different Zones could be integrated according to this.

For example, in the International Zone this "water master plan" could be used to demarcate the continents.

The group also suggested that Bharatipuram village could be surrounded by a buffer zone because it is an exchange space. It could be opened up for different activities, like new forms of agriculture, workshops to make it into a breathing space between the village and Auroville.

The group spent most of its time on the environmental aspect of the Residential Zone. As this Zone is the most exposed to the prevailing winds, they considered how this Zone could look if its design related to the existing Galaxy form yet prioritised natural cooling and water management by using eco-city tools and strategies. For example, the Lines of Force could be replaced by blue-green infrastructure –

an aquaforest combining trees, gardens and water. Communities and community spaces would then be embedded in this infrastructure. One of the group characterised this concept, half-jokingly, as "kissing the Galaxy alive".

#### What next?

The focus groups that emerged out of the workshop say they will continue their work as long as they have energy, and their findings and suggestions will inform city and bioregional planning.

Certainly there was no shortage of enthusiasm and ideas – some readily actionable, others far more 'visionary' – during the six day charette. However, the experience of the previous two way forward initiatives in Auroville is that it is one thing to come up with ideas and objectives during a high power workshop but quite another to implement them in the cold light of day.

However, it may be wrong to expect a one-to-one correspondence between plans and action in a place as non-linear and complex as Auroville.

And these workshops may be more about re-stimulating the undoubted innovativeness and idealism of Aurovilians as the first step towards new, unexpected and adventurous initiatives in the sphere of town planning and elsewhere.

It would not be before time...

#### Aftermath

Ten days after the workshop, a number of senior Aurovilians addressed a letter to the community in which they expressed strong reservations about the workshop. While they conceded there were many inspiring elements, they were disturbed by the process and the emphasis upon sustainable approaches to town planning because "Auroville's higher aim and plan as a city for human unity also takes into account the present evolutionary crisis which cannot be resolved by sustainable paradigms alone".

In their view, the final presentation offered not a merging of eco and urban elements but "a green suburban settle-

ment for roughly 5,000 – 10,000" in which the main elements of the Galaxy were excluded or distorted: the Lines of Force and Crown abolished, the Zones radically modified and the Matrimandir Lake mainly a channel.

They concluded, "Eco cities are being built in several places. We are here to manifest Auroville in its totality. Towards this, we want to work together in collaboration and openness."

The fact that more than 50 years after Roger first presented the Galaxy plan we still can't agree on how to manifest it suggests that there are deep fault lines in the community over development, which urgently need to be healed.

Clearly, if it has done nothing else, the recent workshop has opened up the town planning debate in Auroville to a wider audience. And the way forward, everybody seems to agree, lies in genuine collaboration.

But the question remains, on what basis?

Alan



The charette participants

## The presentations

### Healthy place making - eco-city principles by Fred London

architect, urban designer and healthy cities specialist

**F**red pointed out that all six major causes of death can be seen to be city-related. His work is about minimising the adverse impacts of urban life upon the environment and human health, and maximising well-being and community feeling. Good quality public spaces, integrated greenery, climatic comfort, balanced mixed use neighbourhoods, and correct density are all factors in achieving this.

Cities are made up of neighbourhoods, communities, and the walkable community is the fundamental element in healthy place-making. In order to qualify as a walkable community, it needs to provide all one's daily needs within walking distance, integrated green space, and a compact mixed-use urban structure. If you can achieve this, you have less traffic, better air quality, communities are stronger and you have the experience of nature.

A hundred hectare medium density walkable neighbourhood development could have about 13,000 people. There would be community public space, neighbourhood building blocks and car parking would be at the edge, not at the centre.

How does this relate to the Auroville master plan? Fred pointed out that if we think that healthy place-making is not already there, it's important to incorporate it. The key points are we need to commit to having a non-motorised, non-polluting city centre and increase our mixed-use areas.

### Dimensions of water - by Professor Herbert Dreiseitl

water specialist, landscape planner and urban designer

**H**erbert began by observing that "None of us have experienced a galaxy, yet it is everywhere in little water drops. Water is full of structure."

Herbert did some striking demonstrations to exemplify this. When he let a drop of colour fall into a column of water it created a vortex. When he brought movement into the water, the vortex acquired a rhythmical movement: "it is like an endless spiral that is dancing, going up and down".

Then he scattered coloured moss on the water and drew a straight line bisecting it. "It creates six galaxies! And they are not the same. When you look at the forms you can see how a simple impulse like a straight line bisecting water makes it react in a very interesting way. It's as if both sides start to talk to each other, and to make vortices. In water, contrasts can come together, so we can learn from water about how to balance two opinions."

A river, he pointed out, is always reforming, changing, "and it's the same for a galaxy: a galaxy is something that is never fixed, it is in a permanent process of change. But our consciousness is limited. We cannot imagine change processes easily, but water is a very good teacher. Water relates to fluid thinking, to perfect integration, and we can learn from just a single drop how we should create our cities."

One example he gave of this 'fluidity' was an open space he redesigned in Singapore. During the monsoon it floods to absorb and control the water flow but when the water subsides, it is a park where children can play.

In the open discussion after his talk, somebody remarked that in Auroville we should have a 'water master plan'.

### Liveable Cities - spiritual designs by Joachim Elbe

urban planner whose expertise is in eco-design and spiritual design

**J**oachim revealed that seeing the Auroville Galaxy design in a brochure in 1968 inspired him to continue studying architecture. In 1975 he learned about the healthy building movement that started in German architecture. "My journey started with researching into healthy building materials and step-by-step my eyes widened to all the ecological aspects."

These also included the different aspects of sustainability, like social and economic sustainability, as well as the aesthetic and spiritual dimensions. "You can never advance unless all these aspects are integrated, layer by layer, and if you do not employ learning loops. This is why town planning is so complex: there is no other profession on earth that deals with so many different levels."

Joachim's office in Tübingen was the first eco-settlement in Germany. "We learned a lot from this project about healthy building, about permaculture and how to integrate rainwater cycles." From there his team began developing eco-city master plan principles based on the step-by-step layering of ecosystems and social systems. They concluded that decentralised neighbourhoods are the most important basis upon which to create eco-cities. Also that nature has to be brought into cities. "Where there is a lack of nature in our cities this creates physical and mental diseases. In this sense, as architects we are not only shapers but also therapists."

When they embark on a new project they always start by contacting the genius loci, the 'soul' of a site. Once they know where they can build - and they never use concrete, only wood, glass and brick - they employ techniques like bio-climatic design. In one of their pioneer buildings, they collected all the rainwater, cleaned it, and then used the cool water to create waterfalls on the edge of a greenhouse attached to the main building. "This is a natural air-conditioning machine. As the warm outside air passes through the waterfall it is cooled and cleaned."

"We learned from this that we can create

climates using architectural means, not only in a building but also on an urban level. All you need is water, plants and an understanding of ventilation geometry."

"In other words, with organic architecture and in organic urban planning you work with the natural elements. And in an organic approach to a master plan concept you never use the right angle or the axis because these come from the mind." When all the different aspects are taken into account, "you have a flow in your master plan and step-by-step it becomes an organism which is almost like a living being."

He then spoke about the spiritual aspects of creating a new settlement. His team always starts by contacting the unseen energy fields from the planets, the elements, and from elemental beings which are already there on site. "We have to communicate with this unseen living nature as well as with living nature. When we plan, we are always in dialogue with it."

"In other words, in every project we try to touch the ground not only intellectually but also with our hearts through meditation."

A fascinating example of this was a design they did for a settlement around a new railway station in Sweden. The railway engineers had been trying for many years to construct a new tunnel through a nearby mountain, but it kept collapsing. Joachim and his partner did a weekend meditation and became acquainted with the energy of this mountain.

"To explain it in an image, it was a dragon and his family who did not like the tunnel. So we had a conversation with it about how to heal his situation. We implemented all our ecological approaches and gave it a particular form and the dragon agreed to what we were designing. The jury in the international design competition did not understand our plan - it looked a little like a dragon! - but finally we won the first prize. And the tunnel was successfully completed."



# Water is the key

Some of the organizers and participants reflect upon the recent workshop. Friederike, a member of AVI Germany, was instrumental in bringing the visiting experts while Auroville International helped fund the event. Mita R. helped organize the team in Auroville, while the architects Fabian, Peter A., Jana and David Nightingale were invitees to the event.

**Auroville Today: What was the reason for organizing this charette?**

**Mita:** This workshop grew out of a feeling that divisions and differences in approaches to town planning, the Galaxy, etc., had been hindering Auroville's growth for too long. We need to find a way forward, to bring Aurovilians together in an envisioning, unifying exercise which would give a new fillip and energy to living in Auroville and in particular to Town Planning.

**Friederike:** After the Matrimandir was finished, there has been increasingly a sense that while Auroville has so many wonderful projects, something was lacking to tie it all together. A fresh, unified approach to town planning going beyond differences could provide a new unifying centre for Auroville.

**Why was it structured as a charette?**

**Jana:** The charette is a key element of the participatory planning methodology which aims to bring all people of a community together – stakeholders, decision makers, experts in different fields, etc. – to be inspired to plan their living environment. The main element is to work together to integrate peoples' visions. From a common vision a way forward is derived. At 'hands-on' planning tables participants work to prepare a way forward beyond polarities, to create a new solution which integrates all the different levels and perspectives. The experts act as mirrors, listeners and inspirers, as happened with Herbert Dreiseitl's water experiments.

**So what were the most important take-aways from the workshop?**

**Fabian:** The last presentation of the workshop revisited the Galaxy from a wider perspective, including a focus on essentials such as water and green spaces and existing ground conditions like village settlements. I was quite touched by the apparent simplicity of it. It showed me that maybe/hopefully not much is needed to get united behind one renewed and updated vision of the city. Still a galaxy (I believe the Galaxy was ever-present throughout the workshop), but allowing for movement, adaptation, fluidity ... And with that, I believe very much in the spirit of Roger.

Similarly, when I saw Herbert's final presentation, it was the first time that the concept of the Matrimandir lake opened up for me. I could never relate to the confined geometric concept, but now I could see an administrative zone with beautiful buildings and towards the southern part of the lake, where he suggested the topography opens up and there could be small islands, it was beautiful. The other thing that was really interesting was the proposal to create a buffer zone around Bharatipuram where we can work together with the villagers on issues like water.

**David:** The workshop felt like the first step towards the next 50 years. In the early days, there was a focus on things that brought the community together, like planting trees and building the Matrimandir. However, when the visiting experts talked to older Aurovilians, what came through from them was a feeling of loss of common purpose. The Galaxy concept could theoretically be that overriding purpose, but it's too amorphous; it doesn't have enough tangibility for the average Aurovillian.

But what came through the charette is that water could be that focus for years to come. After all, without water there will be no Auroville. And someone like Herbert Dreiseitl, who seems very interested to keep engaging with Auroville, could help guide us forward.

**Friederike:** For me, what came out strongly is that what they call the blue-green focus cannot be an add-on: it has to be the basis



From left: Friederike, Mita R., Peter A., David, Jana and Fabian

of all town planning.

**Peter:** Another topic which Joachim brought forward and which we have never touched in our planning is the necessity to work with the unseen energy fields. We have to be careful not to get into occult fantasies, but this could be an interesting way to link with the villages and their traditions.

**Fabian:** I found it very beautiful that someone of his professional standing says that every tree has a faun on top and is convinced we need to heal the land as a first step.

**Friederike:** The very strong insight I gained from the experts was that the big problem in the world today is that the mega cities are prioritised while the rural areas are neglected, and that Auroville is an ideal place to be a role model for rural-urban integration. Some who favour the original Galaxy plan said we're not here to construct an eco-city, that this can be done anywhere in the world. Of course, Auroville is more than that, but I think you can't develop it without it also being an eco-city.

**Peter:** An inspiring moment for me happened on the first day when we went to Darkali and talked with Gopal.

**Jana:** It was inspiring because Gopal was saying it's not about building a city but about developing our selves, and the need to let go of the ego if we are not to be stuck with the same problems.

**David:** In other words, the speed of the growth of consciousness will dictate the speed of the growth of the town.

**Herbert said that water is always moving but our minds are always stuck!**

**David:** The reference to the Galaxy and the movement of water really got me thinking. These days, as architects we're being requested to come up with very flexible solutions because evolution is moving so fast on so many different levels. One hundred years ago, the modern movement in architecture emerged as a response to the demands of that time. The new architecture and urban designs will respond to the different demands of our time. What that will look like none of us know but the next leap will include a higher level, spirituality, which it hasn't done before.

**Peter:** For me the main effect of the charette was that it was a catalyst for us working together on many new levels.

**Jana:** The participatory process offered a fast knowledge exchange. Even if the search started with mostly different opinions, here people managed to listen to each other, to bring all the problems and conflicts to a platform where could be looked at together, in order to go beyond and create new perspectives. All played together, experiencing the joy of being part of a wonderful orchestra.

It was a magical moment when the water expert gave a demonstration of changing forms in the flow of water. It was a simple demonstration of what happens when rigidity is given up in a flow without edges, the ever-changing form of galaxies.

And some practical proposals emerged from this. For example, a blue-green park in the heart of a nearby village as a model for water recycling and beautification.

**How do you communicate the inspirations and ideas coming from this workshop to the larger community?**

**Fabian:** The final open presentations were made late, and many people left before the end, so it would be good if another presentation could be made very soon to bring it to the awareness of the larger community.

**David:** Yes, because now it's up to the community to come together. The experts were there to

give feedback, to share their knowledge, but actually the community has to decide 'we're going to go in this direction'. And these workshops offer opportunities to catalyse a new sense of togetherness and direction.

**Jana:** I felt that in this workshop the process has started. One of the successes of this event is the realization that it is possible to create the 'city of the future', and that we can do it with joy instead of us feeling over-challenged and tired and upset. The other one for me is that a lot of people have been encouraged to look for a new orientation for our community now that the Matrimandir and afforestation projects are completed: a new focus which creates togetherness and unity to overcome all the social and environmental challenges in our rapidly changing environment.

**If we sit around this table one year from now, what do you hope will have happened?**

**Friederike:** The most practical suggestions all seemed to centre around water and the need to widen awareness and participation. So I hope that Auroville makes 2019 the year it focuses upon water.

**Fabian:** It would be wonderful if the problem of excessive water usage at the Matrimandir was solved. If we can deal with the spirit of water around the Matrimandir as well as be part of that participatory experiment with the local villages, it would be something.

**Jana:** Water knows no borders. For this reason I would like to see us collaborating in regional water initiatives beyond the villages in our city area. For example, in water recycling projects with Pondicherry and neighbouring villages. It seems the perfect time to create replicable models to prevent the disaster of the pollution of our groundwater.

**Mita:** That's exactly what I wanted to say. We need to work on a water plan for the bioregion. We had wonderful contacts with the Panchayat leaders and young people in the context of the Highway Task Force, and there was a real opening when I said that the next step is to talk about the water. We already have a presentation about hydrogeology in the area which is being translated into Tamil, and one of the village youth said if we bring the presentation he'll arrange for us to show it in the Kuilapalayam temple.

In this sense, the highway was a big catalyst to take our relationship with the villagers to another level. It's good to have teamed up with our neighbours against the highway, but that's not enough. We have to take the next step, to team up for our collective future, and this means, above all, water security.

*From an interview by Alan*

## The presentations

Community planning strategies by Claire SanMartin  
architect and urban designer

Claire talked about a project in a neighbourhood of Dublin, Ireland. The neighbourhood had historic buildings as well as 1960s style mass housing, but unlike other areas of the city it had failed to thrive. There had been proposals for redevelopment but these had always been blocked by the residents who felt these would destroy the spirit of the place.

Claire and her team spent 14 months involving the community in developing a plan that would have wide consensus. After a high-profile launch, the team met people in the neighbourhood to encourage them to get involved, and to find out what people valued in their area and what they didn't like. There followed three neighbourhood workshops, as well as schools' and young people's workshops, where they looked at problems, dreams and solutions and did hands-on planning sessions.

There were three more public workshops and then a forum was established. "The idea of the forum was to review the local area plan as it went along. At each stage, we did a presentation to the forum and then people would sit around tables and come up with questions and ways it could be improved. We would take it away, redo that part of the structure and come back again. All the time we were being flexible, listening to what the people had to say."

Alongside the forum, focus groups were created that looked at issues like built heritage, environment, arts and culture, sports and recreation, biodiversity and open spaces. "Planning a city is not really about architecture, that's only a bit of it. There are also many other things which are equally important, like the element of water, the greenery and the economy." Consultants were appointed to lead these groups. The groups would meet independently and

come back to the forum and present what they had done.

There was also a communication group that produced newsletters and set up a website. In each newsletter they explained what was going to happen in the next forum, and report back on what happened in the previous forum.

At the end, there was a big exhibition, final amendments were made on the basis of the feedback, and then it was presented to and approved by the Dublin city council.

"The key to our success in getting development moving where it had previously been blocked was bringing people into the middle of the process with regular meetings and providing constant information about what was happening. The forum was good because people could see what they had expressed reflected in real changes, so then they came back and encouraged other people to participate."



# The demand for housing has not diminished

In the June-July issue of 2016 (issue # 323-324), *Auroville Today* reported on 12 housing projects which were under construction. Today, all of these have been finished and 228 new houses and apartments have been added. [see box]. However, the housing requirement is as large as ever. Over the past three years there has been an average annual increase of 175 people, which means that Auroville needs to build about 70-80 new houses or apartments each year. But we are facing a backlog: today, there are 200 newcomers looking for housing.

Two years ago, many projects were under construction. But today, there are far fewer. One of the reasons is that quite a few architects and project developers who were the project holders for large projects have experienced burn-out after finishing their project. For they were in charge with everything, from making the design, to finding clients, to supervising the construction and ensuring the finances.

Those who want to start a construction today face delays in getting the required internal permissions. They have first to ensure site permission, then building permission: site locations, drawings and estimates are scrutinized and the financial feasibility of the project is studied. The community is given an opportunity to comment and object at each phase. These are the reasons why many permissions are being delayed.

## A Housing Development Group is needed

The ad-hoc developments of the past are no longer sufficient. The future of housing in Auroville can no longer depend on the goodwill of individual promoters. The community needs to create a Housing Development Group whose job is to start planning Auroville's future housing requirement over say the next five years, determine how this is going to be financed, and take responsibility for its manifestation. And long before any project is submitted, the Town Development Council needs to plan and allocate plots where new housing can be located, determine the density and height of the buildings for each plot and invite community feedback. Only in this way can we speed up the building of new houses and apartments.

The Housing Development Group should also take responsibility for finding the required funds for new housing. It is reliably estimated that only one third of those who join Auroville have the means to pay for their house or apartment. The next third can pay over a period of time as they do not have the full amount or do not want to invest all their savings in a house; and the last third has very little or no money. The people who have money are usually above 40 years old, those who can pay over a period of time are in the range of 35-45, but those younger than 35 usually have little or no financial means. But Auroville can only grow and develop

when young people join. We need to develop schemes for the middle group, and for those who have no money at all. We have to create houses financed from grants and donations. From the 200 people now looking for housing, 120 have limited or no funds.

We need very diverse accommodation. There is 'lifestyle' accommodation required by people who have money. For people who have insufficient funds for a large house we need incremental housing – housing which can be expanded over the course of years. We should also encourage pioneers to settle and protect outlying lands; and we need to accelerate further our experimentation in housing. We need hostels, studios and apartments for young families. For each there could be a separate source of funding.

While the Housing Development Group should be the 'client body' for all housing funded from collective community funds and donations, such as from the Government of India grant, individual initiatives should remain untouched. The possibility of individuals coming together to develop new projects should be encouraged to ensure diversity, creativity and individuality and prevent over-centralization.



New apartments in Kalpana community

amazing diversity on offer. We could build learning spaces around the Visitors' Centre, create a kind of an experiential zone with offerings like *Awareness Through the Body*; lectures on Integral Yoga; display, teach and sale of art; guided ecological tours; cultural interfaces; architectural journeys; short seminars and workshops, etc. All this would increase our revenue. Moreover, it would assist people in making deep connections to

concept of life-long education which The Mother laid down in Auroville's Charter. The recipients of the education are not only the residents of Auroville but many people from outside. Every year, over 15,000 people come to Auroville for short periods to learn about water and waste management, architecture, fashion, design, organic agriculture, renewable energies, education, and so on. Some come for a few months, others would

staff housing, hostels, visiting faculty guesthouses and service apartments.

The Government of India has explicitly acknowledged that Auroville has this aim of unending education. Four years ago, in 2014, it almost agreed to fund a very large project. This was a Sustainable Urban Habitat project, estimated at 75-80 crore rupees, to demonstrate a model for small towns and institutional campuses. This project was evaluated by various ministries and finally approved by the Indian Planning Commission, which agreed to provide the funding as this would be an example that would benefit the nation and could be replicable in other cities. But before the final OK was given, the government changed and the Planning Commission got dissolved. The project was shelved.

In other words, continuous government support in creating an educational infrastructure which includes youth housing, is money well spent. Just compare: if the government creates a new university, its financial layout is in the order of several hundreds if not thousands of crore rupees. In Auroville, we get only 3-4 crore rupees a year for the creation of housing for the youth. Considering the high impact these funds have on the human resource development of youth from India and the world, an increase in this funding is fully justified.

**Hemant Lamba**

(former member of the Working Committee, member of the Government of India Grant Group)



Sacred Groves phase 1, not yet completed

## Raising the revenue

There is a need to increase our revenue for housing development. There are various ways to do this. One is to increase our internal revenue. Most of our internal budget is allocated for the maintenance of people and assets. We need to make space for a development budget. However small to begin with, once started the energy around such a development pot will increase.

We also need to investigate how to increase revenue from people visiting Auroville and so obtain more funds for house construction. Today, about 750,000 people a year come to the Visitors' Centre and the Matrimandir. That figure will go up exponentially. The Visitors' Center offers a mix of information, shopping and culinary experience. This should be expanded. A day visit could become a transformational journey as Auroville has an

Auroville and creating a positive engagement. I propose that a study group is established to work this out.

## The Government of India grant

Another way of raising revenue is enlarging the external fundraising. Here, the yearly Government of India grant is an important factor. Yearly, we receive between 3-4 crore rupees from the Government for housing projects. I propose that that grant is specified for housing for young people to come and experience Auroville.

The question is sometimes raised why the Government of India should pay for housing in Auroville. The answer is quite simple. Auroville is an educational laboratory, a place for unending education. We are providing an incredibly large range of educational activities for children, young people, and for adults, based on the

like to come for one, two or even five years. Quite a few want to take a gap year or a sabbatical. All these people need a simple apartment so they can give voluntary service to Auroville and help build the town. So, like any educational campus, Auroville needs

## Completed housing projects

Pony Farm (community extension) completed in 2014-15, 6 new apartments  
Swayam (community extension) completed in 2016, 8 new apartments  
Marielka's home for the elderly: private house converted into senior home, completed in 2016, 7 apartments  
Invocation (community extension) completed in 2017, 12 new apartments  
Courage 3 (community extension) completed in 2017, 12 new apartments  
Sanjana (new community) Completed in 2018, 21 new apartments  
Sunship (new community) completed in 2018, 42 new apartments  
Kalpana (new community) completed in 2018, 42 new apartments  
Serenity (new community) completed in 2018, 12 new apartments  
Humanscapes 1st phase (new community) completed in 2018, 38 new apartments  
Kriya (new community) completed in 2018, 21 new apartments  
Terra Mata phase 1, International Zone, 7 apartments

## Housing projects in the pipeline:

Sacred Groves 1st phase (new community) 3 prototypes  
Humanscapes 2nd phase (new community) 18 new apartments under construction, 16 rooms for students in the planning phase  
Home for assisted living for senior citizens phase 1, (new community), 8 apartments, under construction  
Kriya (new community) 6 couple apartments almost ready, 2 family apartments in planning phase  
Vibrance (new community). First block of 24 apartments in tendering phase, second block in planning phase  
Sofio (new community). 12 apartment, under construction  
Two staff quarter apartments of SAIER, in the planning phase



The Kriya project



# People appreciate spirituality from a practical angle"

The Government of India recently appointed Dr K. Parameswaran, Associate Professor of Law and Dean of External & Alumni Relations of the Gujarat National Law University in Gandhinagar, Gujarat, as Member of the Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation. He visited Auroville on January 12-14. *Auroville Today* asked him about his life and work.

**Auroville Today:** Can you tell us something about your background?

I have a long association with both the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and with Auroville. I was born in Madurai, studied business administration, political thought and law, and did a Masters and obtained a Ph.D. in International Law. I started my teaching career in the year 2000 and worked in different places. In 2006, I joined the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and lived there for three years. During these years I used to visit Auroville regularly. This was the most fertile period in my life, inwardly and also outwardly: the ashram life helped me to understand how to apply Mother's teaching in life and work in the world. I now live and work in Gandhinagar in Gujarat. I teach at the university and in the evenings and weekends help a centre which has Sri Aurobindo's relics. I give classes in Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* and my wife Ojasi teaches the *Bhagavad Gita* at the centre.

**You presently work as a law professor in the Gujarat National Law University. Is law an area in which you can introduce Sri Aurobindo's and The Mother's teaching?**

Yes, of course. I see this as one aspect of Integral Yoga. I have been teaching a specialised area, that of public and private international law. Public international law deals with peace between nations, whereas private international law deals with resolving conflicts between parties from different countries. But I was not satisfied as the existing legal systems are in essence punitive in nature. They deal with the social and economic consequences of an issue, but they don't deal with the psychological causes and consequences. This also applies to international law: sometimes a state refuses to adhere to the verdict of an international court.

In municipal civil law, one party loses and the psychological origins and consequences of a dispute are almost never considered. In criminal law, the aim is to punish the criminal. Restorative justice to heal the victim and collaborative conferencing to put the offender and the victim in a different space rarely happens. Even when it happens, it has certain limitations. The criminal or an offender in civil obligation is never counselled how to change and the state with legal systems is not motivated to change the situation that led to the crime and secure the prevention of a crime and violations.

The Indian legal system has become insufficient. As is well known, there is a backlog of cases – according to one estimate there are 25 million cases pending in subordinate courts, some 4 million cases in the High Courts and more than 50,000 cases in the Supreme Court.

This means that many people will not get 'justice' by going to court. And the system of justice is also inefficient in another way: it doesn't address the need of prevention of injury. So I am working on developing a system in law to prevent injustice and, if injustice happens, to correct it; and finally, to remove the cause of injustice. For that, an integral knowledge of the human being and life, and the role of individual and collective life in society is necessary, a knowledge of all levels of being – from the mind to the vital to the body, and finally how human beings impact environment with their consciousness – and it is here that Sri Aurobindo's and The Mother's teachings of integral knowledge and consciousness come in. My legal research is to show how this integral method of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother can help the legal and justice system for our future.

**This sounds extremely idealistic.**

It is. The legal system is very fixed in its concepts with only rationality as its basis. I used to tell my wife that if one likes to understand human life in any social collectivity and the struggle of legal systems in relation to justice, the pain and suffering of life, one should read Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*. It has two cantos which describe it very well: the *Descent into Night* and *The World of Falsehood, the Mother of Evil and the Sons of Darkness*. What I intend to explain is the role of ignorance – separative and perverse consciousness plays in bringing suffering to human life and the role higher consciousness 'unity, multiplicity and integration' plays in transforming it. What is applicable in individual life becomes applicable in social life the moment the individual enters social space. So, the ignorance and lack of experience of this higher consciousness results in 'disconnect' within and without through which crimes or violations originate. State, legal systems and its research must understand this disconnect with ultimate justice as their goal.

**So how do you introduce the teaching of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother?**

I decided to introduce some spiritual values into the practice of law and started a course in Ethics Skills Development for lawyers and corporate attorneys. There I introduced the twelve qualities that a lawyer should have, which are, of course, the twelve powers of The Mother. But it was a bit too goody-goody for some people, so I also introduced their opposite qualities – the twelve qualities they should not have! I connected them to legal reasoning and justice, and it worked. For example, sincerity is a spiritual value of awareness and concentration. Its world-value is efficiency. Goodwill inside is mutual-respect outside. Harmony in oneself results in external order. Greed or ambition crushes other's self-existing rights. Lack of empathy leads to violence at various levels, etc. Simply put, spiritual harmony within and without is ultimate justice. I am doing this course now as a training workshop all over India. Next month I will be embarking on a larger adventure, which is judicial ethics for judges. This is all done in my function as professor of law at the Gujarat National Law University, and the participants are invited to



Dr. K. Parameswaran

come to the university and take this as a course.

Incidentally, I also introduced the twelve qualities in our Gujarat National Law University campus. When the university was built, there was a proposal to name the lecture halls after important people. I was a member of the Executive Council at that time and suggested that we shouldn't give the rooms the names of big political persons but rather the names of the qualities they had manifested. I proposed the twelve qualities of The Mother (without, of course, referring to the source). That was accepted. So we now have rooms named Sincerity, Purity, Humility, Courage, Peace, Progress, etc., and everyone reads them every time they pass by or enter the rooms. And shortly afterwards, the large auditorium was named 'Aura'. I do not know who named it, but I was more than pleased when I saw it.

**You mentioned the need to prevent crime and disputes ...**

I have come to the conclusion that the prevention of crime and civil disputes can only be done from an integral understanding of what one is, what human nature and being consists of. That prompted me to take a new turn. I have recently started a full course, The Integration of Law, Religion, Spirituality and Justice. This brings in psychology, psychiatry, some sociology, and is topped up with the spiritual dimension of life in legal reasoning and justice-quotient. In this way I bring in the teachings of integral knowledge of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother. But as it is sometimes difficult to speak directly about Sri Aurobindo and The Mother to an audience which has not studied their works, I often speak of my own experience, of what I have understood from Them. I have observed that law students, advocates or judges appreciate the value of spirituality from a practical angle. My course is about how to prevent injuries or injustices, starting from the most material to the most psychological. I concentrate on problem solving, not on theorising. I bring examples from existing methods of legal systems, constitutional and international laws and show how to move ahead. This is what everybody is interested in. I have done three training programmes so far, and they have been successful with very good feedback.

**Are your ideas used in other law universities in India or abroad?**

There is some response. I hope I will get more after the publication of my book on the Integration of Law, Religion, Spirituality and Justice and another one on why lawyers should be spiritually ethical. I have also been invited by three top Ivy League universities in the USA to teach and research on this course, which will happen in 2020. There I want to illustrate my method based on 20 different crimes and show 45 instances where spiritual dimensions can work in law, reasoning and justice in both individual and collective life.

**To what extent do alternative conflict resolution systems meet your ideas?**

The alternative dispute solution systems, such as mediation and arbitration, are indicative of the direction law and society is moving into. But they are not always fully effective as they usually do not deal with the integral knowledge of the society, of the human being, his psychology, sociology and spiritual aspects of life. And I often see that instead of using the prescribed process to remove the conflict, people contest the process because they are not sure they'll get 'justice'.

But the change towards 'something else', towards spiritual values and a new age is slowly happening in legal systems and can also be seen in other parts of society. The humanistic approaches, jurisprudence embracing the earth as a whole, therapeutic methods, the ideals of sustainable development, are all based on spiritual values. In India, we also have the concept of 'corporate social responsibility' where large corporations are obliged to make donations for humanistic and sustainable projects. Change is happening in all legal systems in the world. We are moving from human to humane, individual to collective, mere commerce to more ecology, etc. All these indicate the evolution of consciousness, from social-external to psychological-internal. My research sees all these from a spiritual angle and brings solutions for issues that are not only curative but preventive too.

To give some examples: nowadays, in family-law disputes, people no longer want to go to court. Instead, they are advised to go for

mediation and, at the same time, for counselling. For these disputes are not only about the social and economic aspects of a dispute such as a divorce, but also about its psychological costs. I tell my students that all issues should be laid out before the parties so that they can consciously choose the issues they are ready to address.

An example in criminal issues is the work of Ms. Kiran Bedi who, as the first female Inspector General of Prisons, introduced a different management system in New Delhi's Tihar Jail, one of the toughest jails in Asia. Ms. Bedi believed in reformation rather than punishment, and empowered the prisoners to take a positive attitude to life through yoga, meditation and creative pursuits. Her idea was to give the prisoners hope of a better future once they stepped out as free people. She introduced Vipassana meditation and even formed a panchayat with the inmates as representatives. They became the bridge between authorities and fellow inmates to talk about various problems and come up with solutions.

**Is the international legal scene changing?**

There are a few indications of change. The best known is the Truth and Reconciliation Commission which was developed in South Africa. Yet, it hasn't been successful in other countries. It succeeded in South Africa because there was active victim participation through a proper facilitator. People found out that this is required, that including those who suffered and the experience of the facilitator is necessary. The system cannot be mechanically used.

Another example is that of the Indian spiritual leader Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, who mediated in the Colombian crisis and played a role in brokering a peace agreement between the Colombian government and the guerrilla movement FARC. He met the FARC commanders in Havana where he urged them to pursue peace and meditation and his mediation led first to the FARC's unilateral declaration of ceasefire, then to the bilateral ceasefire and ultimately to the peace agreement between FARC and the Colombian government.

Yet another example is the Five Point Peace Plan which His Holiness the Dalai Lama has presented to the world to resolve the issue of Tibet. He mentioned the increasing interdependence of the nations of the world and said that lasting peace – national, regional and global – can only be achieved if we think in terms of broader interest rather than parochial needs. He spoke of comprehensive solutions that take into account the aspirations of the people most directly concerned.

But, the integral method of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother is deeper, fundamental, collective and transformative. Their life-oriented and world-affirmative spirituality, its experiment in the Ashram and Auroville, is the beginning of a new creation, the rectification and transformation of consciousness.

**So you are hopeful that more change will happen?**

I am, in the words of The Mother, a voluntary optimist.

**In spite of the regressive policies of many countries today?**

Sri Aurobindo explains that with every new evolutionary movement that takes place, the old systems crumble. We are now seeing that crumbling everywhere. But it is from the ashes that something new will develop and it is happening since the advent of the descent of new consciousness in Earth. If we have a conscious positive and cheerful attitude, we will surmount challenges and be the agents of change. One thing that inspires me the most is the Auroville Charter given by the Mother, "*Auroville wants to be the bridge between the past and the future. Taking advantage of all discoveries from without and from within, Auroville will boldly spring towards future realisations*". This is our focus.

**You have spent three days in Auroville. What are your impressions?**

My impression is very satisfying and fulfilling. I have interacted with many people during this visit and was amazed to realize how many great developments are there in Auroville which are unnoticed in the outside world. A number of Aurovilians have done truly remarkable work. My appointment as a Member of the Board has given me the chance and privilege to serve this project.

Auroville is an example of service to the Divine. Matrimandir is a living reality, and Auroville's psychology is changing impossibilities into possibilities. Auroville's green ecology is another example of this. These two are something unimaginable. This is the first experiment in human consciousness on the whole earth in which more than 50 nationalities are living together in a state of conscious experimentation at various levels, integrating both material and spiritual, moving from old to new. All over the world, people are now talking about Peace and Human Unity, Oneness and Sustainable Development but an experiment like Auroville with spiritual consciousness as the basis has not been done anywhere else. Its success in the last 50 years gives hope to humanity. Consciousness of the Divine Mother and Sri Aurobindo is present, alive and at work here. Those who practice this are pioneers, forerunners and architects of a new spiritual community and creation that is constantly unfolding. No wonder, UNESCO and prominent international organizations and communities are interested in Auroville's work of bringing Divine Consciousness into life itself.

I felt Sri Aurobindo's and The Mother's presence very alive in all the spaces of Auroville and the assurance of the Divine's Love which is protecting and leading.

In conversation with Carel



# The Garden of the Unexpected: evaluating an innovative approach

In early January, the team supervising the process announced that a final design had been decided upon for the Garden of the Unexpected at Matrimandir (see *AVToday* November, 2018). We asked them to evaluate how well the innovative process they had used had worked. They were joined by Mona who, along with Joss, Andreas and Greg, was a member of the chosen design team.

**Auroville Today:** The first phase was an open invitation for people to enter a design competition for the garden. How many people responded?

**Hemant:** Twenty-two people originally responded, eighteen came up with designs and this was filtered down because some did not submit the necessary documents. Only eight made final submissions.

**You gave a very detailed and somewhat technical brief. For would-be designers who had no prior experience of landscape design or architecture do you think it would have been off-putting?**

**Natasha:** We wanted designers who would carry through the whole implementation process, which means they needed to be able to do technical drawings and have a comprehensive knowledge of design. At the same time, we also wanted to include those who don't necessarily have a technical background. This is why at the beginning of the process we proposed to non-specialists that they form teams with those who had design knowledge. But there was not enough time for most of these teams to form. We also wanted people to organize children's gatherings to get their ideas about the Garden but this didn't happen.

**Mona:** Some teams did form, like ours. And some teams did interview children and one Auroville school did an exercise with the students to come up with ideas for the garden.

**Natasha:** The next time we do this we are planning to launch it with a community ideas festival during which people could offer design ideas in any form, including music, dance or sculpture.

**The next phase was submitting initial designs to the experts. The experts were expected to give detailed feedback to the designers to help them improve their designs. Did this happen?**

**Natasha:** No. We had wanted them to give comments to each design team but most of them just gave marks on a numerical scale for different aspects of the designs.

**Mona:** Some of the design groups were upset by not getting better feedback because they had put so much work into their designs. Three of the experts did give comments on our design and we did modify our concept quite radically but this was not because of the feedback. It was because we had more time to work on it.

**Jyoti:** I received some comments on my design and these were very useful. I changed my design as a result of this.

**Hemant:** The feeling we got from the three Aurovilian experts – Piero, Gloria and Narad – was they were not so keen on making written comments because they were concerned about how the designers would take it. They said they would rather talk to the designers personally. However, we couldn't allow them to do that because nobody was meant to know the identity of the designers.

**Were you satisfied that all the experts really understood the concept of the Garden of the Unexpected?**

**Hemant:** What Roger indicated about the Garden of the Unexpected was fairly straightforward, except for the reference to it being an initiatory experience for children.

**Natasha:** We had hoped that the experts would interact, and that the three Aurovilian experts would make any necessary clarifications needed. But this didn't happen: there was no exchange between the experts.

**So how would you improve this stage the next time?**

**Hemant:** We need experts who are willing to give more detailed feedback online.

**Natasha:** We would like to contact the experts before the work starts and ensure they are on board with the process and our expectations. We would also make the evaluation forms more subjective.

**After the experts had made a choice of three designs, the next phase was an information meeting for those Aurovilians who had signed up to be on the panel that would make the final decision. The meeting was rather poorly attended, and information about the three chosen designs was limited to one panel and one video for each concept, and a physical model for one of the designs. Was there not a danger that the panel would make their decision based upon inadequate knowledge?**

**Hemant:** Ideally, the job of explaining the designs to the public panel would be the task of the designers but because we were keeping anonymity they could not do that. We felt that the designs that had been submitted should speak for themselves; we didn't want to try to explain them.

**Natasha:** There was some with design expertise in the room during that meeting and we were hoping they would fill in the gaps for the people with less knowledge.

**In the end, how many on the public panel participated in choosing one of the three designs?**

**Hemant:** Ninety five Aurovilians had signed up to be on the panel. Only thirty seven turned up for the open information meeting, and out of these twenty made a final evaluation. In all, forty two people sent in evaluations, so a number of people were happy to follow the whole process online.

**Natasha:** A lot of people appreciated that so much information was provided online. However, I think the public information session is an important part for those who do not have the technical knowledge because there they could potentially acquire more knowledge.

**Mona:** When I told my architect friends outside Auroville about this public panel which would have the final say they really appreciated it. They said this kind of process could only happen in Auroville.

**But then you decided to introduce an additional phase where you asked the designers of the chosen design to work with Jyoti and Lara, whose designs had also been shortlisted by the experts, to see if elements of the three different designs could be integrated into one final design.**

**Hemant:** We came up with the integration process because many people on the panel said they wanted the different designers to work together.

**John:** The integration part was the unexpected bonus that came out of that open information afternoon. You could call it a manifestation of the Auroville spirit.

**Mona:** But in most architectural competitions



The final design, "a place where we can discover some things we have forgotten; where place order, flora order and mineral order can mingle with laughter to help us in staring from the past and into the future from a present moment of aloneness and sharing. There are four hidden gardens reflecting a spirit of place. Through all of these spaces, there is an unexpected path with entry portals at each path entry which has a unique flavor, hinting at the place within." (Excerpted from the presentation of the chosen proposal)

the team that wins is told to change their design to integrate other designs!

**How did the integration process go? Was everybody involved satisfied with the result?**

**Natasha:** The Aurovilian public panel had a clear preference for one design so we asked this team to lead the integration process. And they proposed a very nice process about how to do it.

**Mona:** We used the 'dreamweaving' process which was developed in Auroville and which some of us used successfully with a design for the Sustainable Livelihood Institute. In this process, a concept is put on the table and then everybody says what they want to take positively from it and incorporate: everybody weaves their dreams together. It's a way of finding the highest common factor but also of creating a safe space where everybody is empowered and encouraged to let go of the tendency of designers to claim it as 'my idea'.

**Jyoti:** This was the part of the process I enjoyed most. I was the only designer in my team so I didn't receive any creative challenges from other designers when coming up with my design. This happened in the dream-weaving process and it was valuable. I felt the integration process was a very creative step forward but it is not the end, it is just the beginning. Other changes will be made in the future. What is important is to maintain that energy now.

**Mona:** We also met with other people like Jacqueline and Narad, so there was a larger integration process, and it's important that we keep on involving other people. We want to set up a site office so people can see what's happening on site and can contribute in unexpected ways! We want to ask people to plant the trees, and to find ways to involve the children.

**John:** But integration is not only about changing the elements of the design. For example, Jyoti will also participate in the execution of the garden.

**What were the main changes in the chosen design that were made as a result of the integration process?**

**Mona:** In the third garden the pathway completely changed. In the second garden we removed the labyrinth and we made some of the pathways more accessible for wheelchairs and prams. We received many comments that said there were too many elements in our gardens, so we thought it's better to simplify. When we saw Jyoti's really simple garden and understood the thinking behind it, it really helped us to do this.

**Natasha:** They also appreciated Lara's advice regarding water and adapted their planting pattern to

ensure there was more water percolation in the formerly dry areas.

**On the whole, are you happy with how the process has gone?**

**Natasha:** What really worked well was we had a clear flow from one stage to another. In the future, we want to get more community engagement.

**Mona:** We had some tough discussions with the organisers early on because I didn't feel that anonymity was a good idea or that it would be possible to remain anonymous. But afterwards I realised how much the team was protecting us from other influences and forces in our small community. And the initial design brief was very helpful.

However, I'm not really for a design competition in Auroville. This time six Auroville design offices worked on separate proposals, and this takes up so much energy and time from our limited human resources. Also, I also think that competition is old world; it speaks to the ego. I think there may be better ways of harvesting the best design ideas, like dreamweaving.

**Jyoti:** Some people react against the idea of competition because Mother mentioned there should not be competition, but I think it's more about attitude. We can use this system as a springboard if we have the right consciousness, if we take it as inner work. Personally, I think this process of selecting a leading team has been very successful.

**Hemant:** The most important thing was we sent out a general call to the community that said the Matrimandir is opening up and let's try a new way.

**John:** There was a lot of talk in places like the Solar Kitchen about what was going on and many people came to look at the designs displayed in the Unity Pavilion. It really generated a happy field of energy.

**So will you use this process again to determine the design of the remaining eight Matrimandir gardens?**

**Hemant:** We are planning to open up the design of the remaining eight gardens for wider participation.

**Natasha:** We are preparing a proposal about how to go about it. I think we have seen during this process that a light, playful energy really helps in nurturing creativity and we want to maintain this kind of approach.

**John:** There will be a general information meeting in February about when the next stage of this adventure will be launched.



The integration process

From an interview by Alan



# The tyranny of the familiar

In 1962, a slim monograph was published in the International Encyclopedia of Unified Science. Later in the same year, it was published as a book. Today, that book has sold over one million copies, been translated into many different languages, and proven to be one of the most influential works about the process of scientific discovery.

*The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* was written by Thomas Kuhn. Kuhn challenged the accepted view that science is based upon the objective observation of facts, and that progress in the sciences is evolutionary, based upon the slow accretion of new information and insights. His thesis was that researchers who share a common intellectual framework – called a ‘paradigm’ – work within the limits of that paradigm until so many anomalies accumulate that a completely new paradigm is necessary to account for them. Researchers then work within the new paradigm until that, in turn, is replaced by a new revolutionary theory.

## Larger influence

The classic case here is the Ptolemaic theory that the earth is the stationary centre of the universe, which was the dominant astronomical paradigm for more than a thousand years. When more and more observations challenged this, the ancient astronomers made many complex adjustments in their attempts to allow the theory to stand, partly because, until Copernicus and others posited that we live in a heliocentric solar system, no rival paradigm existed that would more fully account for the astronomical observations.

But Kuhn’s book was also very influential outside the realm of science. For Kuhn’s thesis seemed to apply not just to scientific knowledge but also to how we acquire knowledge and the process by which certain ideas acquire dominance and are eventually supplanted by new ones.

Kuhn points out that people do not give up existing paradigms easily, even when their usefulness is past. Partly this is because people have grown accustomed to looking at the world in a certain way, and partly because, as Leon Festinger put it in *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance*, human beings strive for internal psychological consistency in order to mentally function in the real world. So that when a person experiences an inconsistency that makes them uncomfortable, they may try to deal with it by avoiding information that contradicts their established beliefs or paradigm.

## The relevance to Auroville

What is the relevance of this to Auroville and the yoga?

At first sight, not very much. Kuhn describes paradigms as the products of relative knowledge and assumptions about the world. Sri Aurobindo and The Mother were exploring and experiencing reality at a far more fundamental level.

For example when, on 29th February, 1956, the Mother announced that *a new world is born, born, born. It is not the old one transforming itself, it is a new world that is born* she was not announcing the birth of a new relativistic Kuhnian paradigm but of an entirely new order of reality. A new order in which many new powers for progress and understanding would become available and things which hitherto had been considered impossible to change would be able to be transformed.

Auroville was created to hasten the materialization of that new world. However, Mother realized that the dominance of the old ways, of the old world-view, would persist in the Aurovilians for some time because *We are right in the midst of this period of transition where the two are entan-*

*gled – where the old still persists all-powerful, entirely dominating the ordinary consciousness, but where the new one is quietly slipping in, still very modest, unnoticed – unnoticed to the extent that outwardly it doesn’t disturb anything very much for the time being, and in the consciousness of most people it is even quite imperceptible.*

The ‘old world’ beliefs include the belief in individualism and self-interest as the driving forces of progress and wellbeing; the widespread belief that some form of democracy is necessary for just governance; and the belief that the main purpose of education is to inculcate knowledge useful to the material progress of one’s society.

Mother attempted to ‘inoculate’ the Aurovilians against the dominance of these beliefs. Against the ‘virus’ of individualism and self-interest she asked us to be ‘servitors of the Divine consciousness’. Against the virus of the tyranny of the majority she said that the governance of Auroville should be in the hands of those with the highest spiritual realization. Against the idea that education is only about the inculcation of socially-sanctioned values, she echoed Sri Aurobindo’s words that *The chief aim of education should be to help the growing soul to draw out that in itself which is best and make it perfect for a noble use.*

Above all, in the quest to blaze a path into this new world she called for bold adventurers, not supporters of the status quo.

*It is not a question of repeating spiritually what others have done before us, for our adventure begins beyond that. It is a question of a new creation, entirely new, with all the unforeseen events, the risks, the hazards it entails – a real adventure whose goal is certain victory, but whose road is unknown and must be traced out step by step in the unexplored. Something that has never been in this present universe and that will never again be in the same way. If that interests you . . . well, let us embark. What will happen to you tomorrow, I don’t know.*

## Old world?

How effective has the inoculation been? Well, this is where Kuhn’s thesis that we tend to hold on to old knowledge as long as possible seems particularly relevant. Because while we can identify elements of new forms of governance, economy and education in the present Auroville, we are still very much driven by old-world values. Democratic processes still underpin our community decision-making; individual accounts remain fundamental to our economy; and while different educational experiments can be found here, most of our students, when they get older, still elect for Auroville schooling systems based upon the traditional inculcation of knowledge.

In other words, we are in danger of reproducing the old world under the mask of something new.

But I think we can extend the point about our inbuilt resistance to the new even further.

## A new consciousness

On January 1st, 1969, there was the descent into her body of what Mother later identified as the ‘surhomme’ consciousness: *a consciousness so concrete, and NEW.* It led to an extraordinary new period of inner discovery for Mother, so revolutionary that she described it as akin to another reversal of consciousness.

*I could say that my vision and understanding of the world, of life, of everything, have completely changed . . . from the point of view of consciousness it has been the greatest change in my whole existence,* she said on 2nd April, 1969.

Her new discoveries included the realisation that the physical mind could be transformed (something Sri

Aurobindo had thought impossible); the experience of her consciousness being diffused in the bodies of others; the discovery of a realm where the living and the ‘dead’ intermingle; and a vision of a new sexless body.

Above all, she felt she was entering *ANOTHER world, another way of being where the relationship with the Divine is itself on a different footing.* It was a way of being that at moments brought intense bliss (*Never before has the body in these 91 years felt such happiness*) and a sense of awe-some power and knowledge, to the extent that, on 19th November, 1969, she reports her first experience of the supramental consciousness and, on 27th November, 1971, she says that for a few moments she had seen the world as the Divine sees it. *There are no words, it’s inexpressible. Then I understood. Everything became clear, clear, clear...*

Along with the new discoveries guided by this new consciousness, came the realization that *all that I thought it (her body) had learned for 90 years has been demonstrated most clearly to be worthless. You know, it’s day after day after day that there’s something new; and always the same conclusion: I know nothing, understand nothing, am nothing.*

Looking back on what she had said or written in the past, she says, *When I am put in contact with all the things I said in the past (yet I did my best) . . . I so much feel it’s like words of ignorance.*

In fact, already, on March 9th, 1968, after listening to Satprem reading her the text of a playground talk she had given to the children in May, 1953, she had commented, *I would no longer be able to deliver speeches like that! I find it presumptuous . . . these things (indicating the playground talk) are still too cut-and-dried.*

And on December 11, 1968, after listening to another old playground talk, she says, *These are things I would certainly no longer write now! . . . But anyway, they are true on their level (gesture at ground level)*

On yet another occasion, after Mother seems to dismiss a playground

talk with, *Oh, how I chattered! Satprem is driven to protest. “But in fact it wasn’t chatter: you were raining Force on those children. That was it.” Mother confirms, It’s intended for children.*

## Mother’s final years

And yet . . . the vast majority of books, websites and journals on The Mother and the Integral Yoga continue to quote extensively from the playground talks, as well as her other earlier writings, while little attention seems to be paid to the extraordinary discoveries of her final years. Why is this?

One reason, of course, is that in spite of Mother’s somewhat dismissive comments, the *Conversations* are a very useful introduction to the Integral Yoga. In fact, many people find them more immediately accessible than the writings of Sri Aurobindo.

It should also be noted that Mother herself prohibited the publishing in the *Bulletin of the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education* of some of the discoveries of her final years, primarily because she felt many people would find them incomprehensible (and people would think “I am mad!”). *People were not ready, she felt: I go too fast.*

There was also the fact that the final years were also a period of intense suffering for the Mother, interspersed with moments of extraordinary bliss. *Three minutes of splendour for twelve hours of misery. That’s the ratio,* she said. And, later, *It’s like being suspended between the most marvellous and the most vile.* When Satprem wanted to print in the *Bulletin* something that touched upon these struggles, she often demurred: *I like something comforting for the Bulletin,* she said.

But there is one other possibility why we continue to focus upon Mother’s earlier period rather than her final extraordinary discoveries. And this is where, I think, Kuhn’s analysis kicks in. For many of us entered the yoga through the doorway of her earlier writings and conversations, so this became The Mother we became familiar with and identified with: a

Mother who seemed to know everything, and who could express the deepest truths in the simplest language. A Mother we could rely upon to show us the way.

But the Mother of the final years is very different. Now she is feeling her way in an unknown world and in a body which is undergoing a ‘change of government’ as the new consciousness successively takes up the old functions. It’s an extremely radical and dangerous process (more than once she warns Satprem not to try it) which frequently leads her to the very edge of death. Granted, there are wonderful moments of discovery, of bliss, but there also times when she seems extremely vulnerable, even doubting her own capacity to carry on, at one time even asking Satprem to pray for her.

Many people, I suspect, find it much harder to relate to this later Mother – the one who sometimes cannot understand what is happening to her (*I don’t even know where I am going – whether I am going towards transformation or towards the end*), who cannot or can only partially communicate what she is experiencing (*because the language does not exist*) and who suffers terribly – than the Mother of the earlier years.

Above all, this later Mother is challenging us to jettison all that we have come to rely upon, all that we think we know or believe in because *All our old ways of understanding are WORTHLESS, worthless. All, all our values are WORTHLESS.* This is something extremely difficult to do. Most of us would rather tinker with the edges of our existing beliefs than uproot them completely.

However, Mother gives us an assurance. That while the new world is *still very modest, unnoticed, it is working, it is growing – until the time comes when it will be strong enough to assert itself visibly.*

Perhaps then, at last, the shock of the new will explode all our old certainties.

Alan

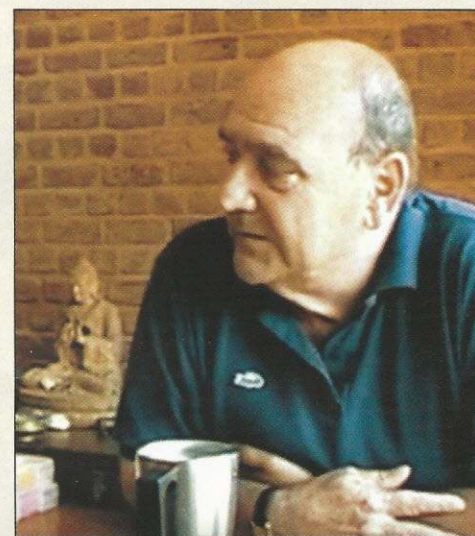
## PASSING

## Gérard Maréchal

Gérard Maréchal, one of Auroville’s early pioneers, left his body in his Sukhavati home on January 2nd due to a fall caused by a heart failure. He was 71.

Gérard arrived from France in the 1969 caravan – after six difficult and tumultuous weeks on the road from Paris to Pondicherry – and settled in Aspiration on the 2nd October 1969 to wholeheartedly give his energies to the Mother and Auroville. Soon after arriving, he met The Mother, which left a profound impression on him. But it was with the construction of the Matrimandir that Gérard found his vocation. He shifted a few years later from Aspiration to the Matrimandir camp, and he was often seen riding the Matrimandir Bullet motorbike to buy materials for the concretings. He was truly one of the pillars of the Matrimandir, while at the same time taking a full part in the often tumultuous life of the community.

In the early nineties, he and his wife Fabienne left for Sudan where he oversaw various construction sites, and he was also able to provide work opportunities for Aurovilians. The couple returned in 2004 and moved into their new house in Sukhavati.



Gérard once again returned to Matrimandir, this time at a calmer pace due to a developing heart condition.

Apart from this work, Gérard was deeply studying the works of The Mother, Sri Aurobindo and Satprem. Just before his passing, his devoted work in making Satprem’s French translation of Sri Aurobindo’s epic poem *Savitri* available to a wider audience concluded in the publishing of a bilingual text of the epic poem.

Gérard’s body was cremated at Auroville’s Burial and Cremation Grounds at Adventure community on January 7th.

A moving interview with him can be seen at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WLiVT0tAwF0>



Gérard (right) in younger days, at work at the Matrimandir



# Pongal

**P**ongal, a harvest festival dedicated to the Sun God, is a very important four-day festival in the Tamil calendar. The first day, *Bhogi*, is when people discard old belongings and celebrate new possessions.

The main event, known as *Thai Pongal*, takes place on the second of

the four days. Pongal means "overflowing," signifying abundance and prosperity. During the festival, milk is cooked in a vessel. When it starts to bubble and overflows out of the vessel, freshly harvested rice grains are added to the pot. At the same time other participants blow a conch called the *sanggu* and shout "*Pongalo Pongal!*" The Pongal rice is then

served to everyone in the house along with savories and sweets.

*Maatu Pongal* is celebrated the day after *Thai Pongal*. The Tamils regard cattle as sources of wealth for providing dairy products, fertilizer and labour for plowing and transportation. On *Maatu Pongal*, the cattle are celebrated by being bathed and decorated. In some parts of Tamil

Nadu there are *Jallikkattu* or bull taming events.

The fourth day of Pongal, *Kaamum Pongal*, is the day when many families hold reunions or visit places together.

On Tuesday, 15th January, Mohanam, the French Pavilion and Ilaigarkal Education Centre held a Pongal celebration on the site of the

French Pavilion featuring, among other things, traditional Tamil and French Games, song and dance performances and an exhibition of Indo-French relations. Two days later Kullapalayam village held its famous cattle run.

Mimi captured both events through the lens of her camera. Here is a selection.



Making a Pongal kolam



Before the cattle run



Entrance of the God



Mr. Chunkath, Secretary of the Auroville Foundation, stirs the Pongal pot



Dressing up the cattle



The one-day market in Kullapalayam

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