

New experiments at the Matrimandir Lake

While preparatory work for the expansion of the Matrimandir Lake has started, two new experiments involving the Lake are under way. One is pumped hydro; the other, underwater water storage.

“All the earth from the digging of the Test Lake was deposited on that hill over there,” says Rohan, pointing at a now 14 metres high hill behind the Matrimandir workshops. “The depth of the Test Lake is 10 metres, of which about 4.2 metres has been filled up by the monsoon rains. With a level difference of about 20 metres the idea came up to generate electricity by pumped hydro by creating a reservoir on the hill.”

Pumped hydropower is generated when, under the influence of gravity, water moves down from a higher to a lower reservoir passing through a turbine. The hill is well-suited to host the upper reservoir, while the Lake serves as the lower one. Energy produced by the Matrimandir Solar Power Plant will be used to pump water from the Lake back into the upper reservoir. “Pumped hydro-power storage is considered to be ‘state-of-the-art’ energy-storage,” says Michael Bonke, who came up with the idea.

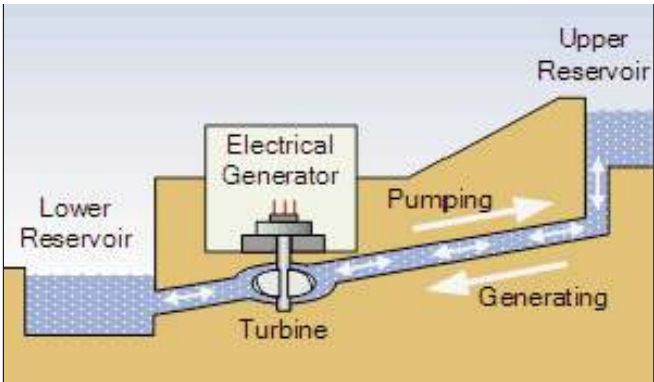
Is pumped hydro necessary given that the Matrimandir already has its own solar power plant? “The problem with solar energy is its storage,” explains Michael. “Solar energy is generated in excess during the day, while in the mornings and evenings we must draw from the TNEB grid, unless we can store the surplus energy from the lunch-hours. For many solar systems the excess energy is stored in batteries, which is not ideal. As compared to hydro storage, batteries are environmentally unfriendly (the production of lithium-batteries is a “dirty” business), inefficient (only around 60% as compared to 85% for hydro-power storage) and expensive (collective hydro-power storage costs only a quarter compared to individual battery storage).”

The Matrimandir Solar Power Plant generates more electricity than it can consume at certain times of the day, e.g., during lunchtime and on Sundays. The excess electricity is exported to the ‘Auroville High Tension Zone’ where it can be used by other Auroville consumers. But there are other solar-energy producers inside that high-tension zone, like on the roof of the Town Hall. This results in this zone producing excess energy at certain times, which is then exported into the TNEB grid, for which Auroville receives no compensation.

The new hydro storage could allow for the storage of some of the energy produced by the solar plant. “It is an experiment,” concedes Rohan. “The digging work for the upper reservoir



The Lake on the hill



(35 x 20 x 4 metres) and its lining with 2 mm thick HDPE foil is finished and the reservoir was filled for the first time with water from the Test Lake on May 31st. The 25 cm diameter pipeline between the upper reservoir and the Lake has been installed and a small turbine will be installed soon. Then we’ll see how it works. We hope the hydro storage will be able to generate about 100kWh of electricity a day.” This will contribute towards the energy being consumed by Matrimandir, and in fact Matrimandir can then function in the evenings and mornings with its own hydro-stored electricity.

The expansion of the Lake – starting section two

It has been decided and will remain decided that the Matrimandir will be surrounded with water. However, water is not available just now and will be available only later, so it is decided to build the Matrimandir now and surround it with water later, perhaps in a few years' time...

From a letter written by André, on The Mother's behalf, to Huta, 14 February 1969

Roger Anger, Matrimandir’s architect, had approved a basic design proposal for the Lake of about 90 metres width and a central depth of 10 metres. The Matrimandir Executives have announced that they would like to complete the entire Lake by Mother’s 150th birth anniversary, February 21, 2028. It’s a huge challenge.

The Lake’s second section is envisaged to be about 250 metres long (more than twice the length of the Test Lake) and will be excavated on the south side of the Matrimandir as the existing workshops block lake construction on the east side. For this, the current public Viewing Point has to move. Work has started; trees at the Viewing Point are being pruned in preparation for their transplantation; the boulders from the old ‘Rock Garden’ area are being removed; and a new, higher Viewing Point, just behind the current one, outside the boundary of the Lake section two, is being made. Once all that is ready, the removal of the existing public Viewing Point and the full excavation of section two will start.

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The Matrimandir Test Lake, filled to 4.2 metres

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The Executives hope that this section will be functional, (e.g., lined with geotextile and HDPE foil, covered with granite gravel, and the end wall of 'Lego' blocks installed) before the winter monsoon of 2024.

At the same time, work on the first section of the Lake continues. The reinforcement of its two end walls and their height increase from 5.3 to 8.5 metres will start soon, so that they will be high enough to contain the rainwater from the 2023 winter monsoon.

Filling the Lake

The 2022 winter monsoon and the healthy 2023 summer rains have filled the Test Lake to a level of 4.20 metres. The high level is due to direct rainfall on the Lake and to the harvesting of runoff rainwater in the 7.5 metres wide rainwater-harvesting channel around the Matrimandir Gardens, which was fed into the Lake. "But this level will soon go down due to evaporation," says Rohan. "It will take maybe two more monsoons before the 10 metres deep Test Lake will be fully filled up, and even more when the second section of the Lake will be added to the first."

Is it possible that the level will go down because of leakage, for example due to bad welding of the HDPE foil? In an open letter to the Executives of Matrimandir, Auroville engineer Jan Imhoff mentioned this possibility and warned that leaks might show up once the lake is full, as then the pressure will more than double. Michael doesn't believe this will be the case. "The technology of waterproofing a water body with HDPE foil is well proven. In Germany, from where our foil is imported, producers of HDPE foil give a guarantee of 100 years on the leakage-free performance of their foil, which includes the welds. This is fixed by law, because for German garbage dumpsites the manufacturers have to guarantee that no toxic chemicals can percolate into the groundwater. There

which is not immediately used. The idea came up to store it underwater in large HDPE cushions inside the Matrimandir Lake, and pump it out when needed. The cushions have the additional advantage of pushing the lake level upwards."

Experiments with different cushion models have meanwhile started: a balloon, a cube, a cuboid and other models. "These models are HDPE foil sheets welded together in inventive manner," says Rohan. "We don't yet know how they will respond to repeated underwater compression and refilling. We'll soon find out, using ordinary drinking water. If they work, we will be able to create a huge underwater drinking water storage reservoir for Auroville."

Calculations have shown that this system will be cheaper than storing water underground or in water towers. The experimental cushion that will be used will contain 1,000 cubic metres of water, seven times the water volume held by the Elephant Water Tower near Arati community. But the costs of this system will be only a fraction of the costs of building a water tower and an underground tank. "So there is a huge potential in this technology, once it is proven to be functioning well," says Michael.

The Auroville Water Service is happy with the development. "There is a big demand for more drinking water storage. The new system will probably be used immediately once it has shown to be reliable," says Michael. In this way the Matrimandir Lake would become part of Auroville's drinking-water management, a possibility foreseen by The Mother more than 60 years ago.

A future expansion?

Michael has not only been thinking about the lake level and energy requirements of the Matrimandir, but also about the water and energy requirements of Auroville itself. "HDPE foil is allowed for drinking-water storage all over the world, as it is the most durable and indestructible foil in existence. So the combination of HDPE foil, underwater storage of a different type of water, and hydro-power energy production, gives a lot of possibilities which have been unthought-of till now," he says.

He muses about building huge underwater storage cushions in the open sea and filling them with water from the desalination plant. Such an underwater reservoir could then act as the lower lake of a large hydro-power storage system, while the cushions inside the Matrimandir Lake would function as the upper lake. "Calculations have shown that with the level variation of about 45 metres between these cushions – the Matrimandir is situated on a plateau with an elevation of 50 metres above sea level – Auroville could become independent from outside energy-sources. The energy required for pumping the water upwards



The new Viewing Point will border the Lake, the excavation of which has started

would be obtained from solar power. So Auroville could produce all its required power by locally installed solar-energy, and store it battery-free."

Underwater storage cushions could also benefit the nearby villages, which are suffering from saline water intrusion in the aquifers and which now rely on water tankers for their drinking water. "Once our pilot desalination plant is up and running and we have cushions installed in the sea, Auroville can advise municipalities on this water management system," says Michael. "For this purpose patents have been applied for, to give Auroville the possibility to generate additional income while propagating these environmentally friendly technologies of water and energy management."

In conversation with Carel



HDPE welding was done at night

are more than 1,000 artificial water-bodies and garbage dumps in Germany which have proven that HDPE is leak-free."

The underwater water storage

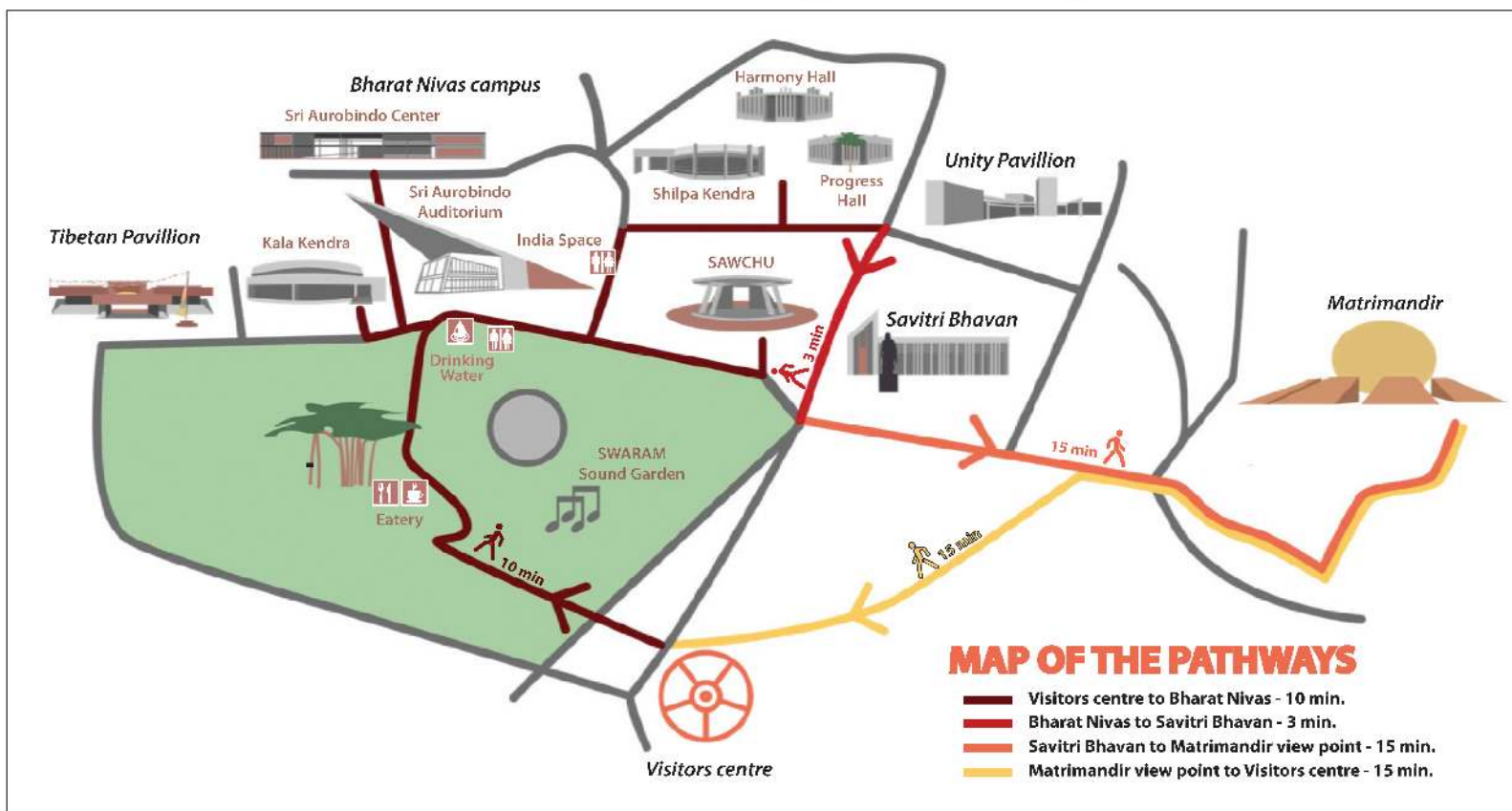
How is the Lake level to be kept at its maximum? "Roger Anger, the architect of the Matrimandir, had the vision of a filled-up lake with a water level that should not vary more than 80 cm. That's a big challenge, given the climate change and high levels of evaporation," says Michael. He came up with the idea of an underwater drinking water storage system. "Once the Auroville desalination plant is up and running [this is expected to manifest in a few years, eds.] we need to find a place to store all the potable water



The balloon cushion model

TOURISM

Ekattva Maarg inaugurated



On June 21st, the Hon'ble Lt. Governor of Puducherry and Auroville Foundation Governing Board member Dr. Tamilsai Soundararajan inaugurated the *Ekattva Maarg* and three exhibitions. *Ekattva Maarg* [meaning Discovery Path] is a Unity Path to discover Auroville. The pathway comprises the loop that starts at the Visitors Centre and passes through Bharat Nivas, Unity Pavillion, Savitri Bhavan, the Matrimandir Viewing point and ends at the Visitors Centre.

The project will offer to the guests of Auroville and interested Aurovilians guided tours, visits to ongoing and new exhibitions as well as participation in daily activities, such as painting, theatre, mud-art, mime show, sustainability, dance, sound bath, kolam yoga, incense and many more.

Bharat Nivas announced it will soon present a new cultural programme offering a pleasant ambience to families with a few "snack corners" and a new cafeteria.

Entry tickets for *Ekattva Maarg* are priced at Rs 100/person, tickets to Bharat Nivas and its exhibition are Rs 200/person.

The Entry Board: an interview with the interviewers

One of the powers of the Residents' Assembly, says the Auroville Foundation Act, is to allow the admission or cause the termination of persons in the Register of Residents in accordance with Regulations. These Regulations, called “The Auroville Foundation (Admission and termination of Persons in the Register of Residents) Regulations, 2020”, prepared and approved by the Residents’ Assembly and subsequently approved by the Governing Board and Government of India, were published by the Auroville Foundation in the Gazette of India on April 4th, 2020, and came into force that same day. In accordance with these Regulations, the Residents’ Assembly constitutes a nine-member Admission Committee which is empowered to accept or reject an applicant; to request the Secretary to recommend the appropriate visa for an applicant and his or her descendants; and to recommend to the Secretary that the name of an applicant is entered in the Register of Residents. To get an update on its functioning, Auroville Today talked to a few members of the Admission Committee, better known as the Entry Board.

AVToday: *How is the work?*

Swadha: There is a lot of work. Over the last 12 months we have announced about 150 people as being ready to become Newcomer or Aurovilian. The rejection rate was minimal: five to seven percent of all applicants were refused Newcomer status; two percent of the Newcomers were refused to become Aurovilian, and fifteen percent of all Newcomers were given extensions of their Newcomer period.

How do you go about evaluating if a person is suitable for Auroville?

Matilde: We are not on a level where we can ‘see’ that a person who applies to join is in contact with his or her psychic being, as was mentioned by The Mother. Each person is interviewed by at least three Entry Board members; we make a report and then discuss it with the full team of nine members. Some cases take hours to discuss, some we just ‘walk through’.

Grace: For example, we interviewed children of Auroville who were turning 18 years old, and we appreciated how a visible seed was growing within them which could be useful in the future for us all. Their answers were fully connected to The Mother’s vision.

Some local people prepare for the Entry Board interview as they would for a government exam, memorising lines about the ideals of The Mother and Sri Aurobindo. But if we dig a bit, we find that their understanding is very limited. But that doesn’t mean that the person wouldn’t fit in Auroville. Other aspects of their personality may be very convincing.

Swadha: We’ve found that each of the Entry Board members has a different approach. We are planning to do a team building session about values and what we, the Entry Board members, expect from a Newcomer. We all have very different ideas about what a Newcomer should know. For example, I get very worked up when someone sits here and tells me that they think Auroville is for peace and for human unity. But for others, this is exactly what they feel Auroville is about. We are all different and we are meant to bring something different to the table. The fact that we are nine people from different backgrounds is a healthy thing.

What are the reasons for extending a Newcomer period or for rejecting people?

Swadha: The reasons vary. For example, we found that some Newcomers had not obtained any knowledge during their Newcomer year about the spiritual background of Auroville and had not read anything by The Mother or Sri Aurobindo. Here we extended their Newcomer period by six months, taking into consideration to what extent they had been contributing actively, were integrated and had been bringing a positive energy. We generally refuse those who have been involved in verbal or physical violence, or who have not been able to integrate into the community, or were found to be living outside of Auroville and had lied to us that they were living in Auroville.

Matilde: We are careful, when we extend the Newcomer period, that we do not give people the feeling of ‘having been rejected’ as this is perceived as ‘sticking a negative label’ on a person. For example, we ask people who have no knowledge about Auroville’s spiritual ideals to go to Savitri Bhavan, talk to people about The Mother, and then come back to us. Most of them are then accepted.

Swadha: Our decisions are always based on feedback. The Auroville Entry Policy 2017, which we follow, makes it mandatory that each Newcomer has two mentors, one chosen by him or herself, the other by us. This means that we, the Entry Board, don’t meet the Newcomers during their Newcomer year; we meet them twice only, at the beginning and at the end of the year. We rely on feedback from the mentors and from the community when we announce the name of the Newcomer as a potential Aurovilian for taking a decision. So we actually have very little contact with the Newcomers. I personally consider this far from ideal.

Matilde: When we are discussing if we should reject an applicant, we are always asking ourselves if this is really the right thing to do. Because such a decision can change a person’s life. Although it’s sometimes very clear that it’s a ‘no’, we try not to be judgmental and to remain open. And in these cases it is very useful that the Entry Board has nine members. Each of us has a different approach and observes and notices different things. To come to such a decision is tough; we are always cross-checking with each other and with the mentors.

But is the large majority accepted?

Swadha: Yes. As I mentioned, only a small percentage of the applicants get extensions or are rejected. But for more than 85% of the applicants we receive positive feedback or no feedback at all. For us, ‘no feedback’ means ‘good feedback’. So the process of joining Auroville is in fact very simple. Sometimes I think it’s too easy and I don’t feel happy with the way the process happens. We are not here just to increase the number of Aurovilians. We are here to ensure that people

join who are inspired to progress and to become more conscious. There has to be quality to the aspiration of those who want to join Auroville.

You recently announced in the News and Notes that you need more mentors. Is the mentor system functional?

Matilde: Some people are very good mentors, others not so much. Sometimes it comes very naturally because they are working together or are neighbours or friends. But some mentors are very busy and have many other commitments in other places. Theoretically, the structure of an Entry Board of nine people plus the mentors should work.

Swadha: But it doesn’t. I’ve found that having your friend as your mentor is not conducive to putting the Newcomer out of his or her little circle. And then there are mentors who know less than the Newcomers about The Mother and Sri Aurobindo. I think that this mentoring thing has to be improved, also as there’s no filter for being a mentor, apart from that you have to be living in Auroville for a minimum of five years. There should be a kind of education for mentors, because they’re meant to serve as resource persons for the Newcomer and be a link between the Newcomer and the community. The mentor has also to make sure that the Newcomer follows through with the things that they need to do. I would say that if the mentors did their job, we wouldn’t have to extend the Newcomer periods as often as we do. But this is not happening. Right now, about 75% of the mentors are just helping their friends out, and most of them never ask their mentee to participate in useful things.

Matilde: But when the mentors come here and join us in the interviews, they see that we aim to uplift the values of Auroville through the questions we ask and through our engagement.

Do you have a mandatory ‘introduction to Auroville’ programme each Newcomer should attend?

Matilde: Yes, all Newcomers have to attend the so-called Yucca programme, which is a full week of an immersion into Auroville. The Newcomers are exposed to many aspects of Auroville, from education to research to commerce to service, including information about Auroville’s legal and spiritual background.

Have you seen a difference since the Secretary joined office in July 2021? She has caused quite some anguish in Auroville, which has also been broadcast out of Auroville. Has this resulted in fewer people coming to Auroville?

Swadha: No, we haven’t seen that. Actually, we have an overload of applications, not only from people from the villages surrounding Auroville, but also from people living in big cities in India. I think this is the after-effect of COVID as many people who were somehow stuck in the city suddenly had this wish for a better lifestyle.

But the Secretary has definitely affected our work: over the last two years, she has not accepted any of our recommendations to enter the name of a new Aurovilian into the Register of Residents. Strangely, we received a request from the Governing Board appointed FAMC for a list of all Aurovilians and Newcomers (announced and confirmed) who have completed their process. They want to fast-track their inclusion in the Register of Residents because they need people for the Governing Board constituted working groups. We replied saying that everyone since two years needs to be fast-tracked because the Register of Residents has not been updated since.

Matilde: What people are concerned about is the instability. In the present situation many people, even those who have the money, don’t want to make a donation to the Auroville Foundation to become the steward of a house or apartment. They prefer to stay in guest houses and see how it is going to be for the next two years. And it doesn’t help that the office of the Secretary delays issuing letters of recommendation for new visas and for visa extensions. Some Aurovilians are waiting for months to get their letters. This creates a lot of insecurity, not only for those Aurovilians, but also for the Newcomers who are afraid that they might be treated similarly in future.

Sara: One can foresee that there might be fewer and fewer applicants from abroad, as the crisis and chaos that is experienced in Auroville at the moment brings a sense of insecurity and stifles the creative and adventurous spirit needed for progress and the ‘Great Adventure’ we are called for. Someone who is new to Auroville might be intimidated and discouraged by the disharmony we live in at the present moment as a collective entity. Only the future will tell.

What is the ratio of Indians versus non-Indians who apply to join Auroville?

Matilde: 60% of the applicants are Indian nationals; 40% are non-Indians.



The Entry Board members. From left: Lakshmanan, Matilde, Grace, Swadha, Alain, Jayanthi, Sonja and Sara.

Visas are granted on the conditions that the person ‘lives in’ and ‘works for’ Auroville. Is it acceptable to the Entry Board that Newcomers are staying in a guest house?

Swadha: Right now we are trying to accommodate people who have long term agreements with guest houses. Our rule is that there should be basic amenities, such as attached bathrooms and a kitchenette. People have to stay there for a year, so it cannot just be a room. We accept that as a solution to become Aurovilian.

Matilde: We are becoming a bit more flexible. We had a similar housing crisis 15 years ago, and at that time we had set a rule that if you don’t have at least five lakhs to put into future housing, we wouldn’t even start the Newcomer process. But we have dropped that demand.

How important is it today that people live in Auroville? Do you still see the condition as strong as in the past? Or can they now rent a house or a room in a nearby village?

Grace: We hold on to that rule. Village life is very different from Auroville life; it is still very much ruled by politicians, by the temple, and by the customs of the villagers. Living in the village as compared to living in Auroville is not as conducive to developing oneself as an individual. In Auroville, the Newcomer will become integrated into a community and will interact with other Aurovilians, many from countries with completely different cultures.

Swadha: But we have a few cases where we know that the Newcomers are living outside Auroville, in one of the villages surrounding Auroville or in Pondicherry; they rent a room in Auroville only to satisfy the process, without the intention of settling in Auroville. The mentor, if it is a friend, is sometimes complicit. They know that we, the members of the Entry Board, can’t go and check all the Newcomers. If we find out, and cancel the Newcomer process, there is drama, and the mentors will always tell us that the Newcomer is an amazing person. And some really are. They have been working in Auroville for 20 or 30 years and have built a house in one of the villages and have a very strong social network within the village and in Auroville. Becoming Aurovilian is for them a sign of status. But they don’t intend to actually move to Auroville.

Matilde: I know people whose parents encroached on Auroville Foundation owned land. Their children became Newcomers and had to live in Auroville. But as soon as they became Aurovilian, they moved back to live with their parents on the encroached land. We have all these different situations. And we don’t have solutions for that.

How do you evaluate Newcomers and new Aurovilians becoming part of the Auroville collective?

Swadha: I think 85% of our Newcomers are very decent beings and will integrate seamlessly. My main problem is with our current community members who don’t care to build something better, who don’t care to give feedback even if they know that a person has done something wrong, and people who are here to do their own little thing, who only are here for their personal gain. That is why I am very insistent that people have a minimum understanding of what the ideals of Auroville are. If the aim is not to progress and evolve together, then I don’t know. Sometimes I feel that the exit part of our policy is much more needed than the Entry one.

Aren’t you afraid that it would be misused?

Swadha: Yes, of course. And I would never be part of an Exit group. But before even starting such a group, we need to get legal clarity on the respective roles of the Residents’ Assembly and the Governing Board and its Secretary. This means that we need the judgements in the many court cases that are now pending before we should move in this direction.

The Governing Board has mentioned its ideal of a large increase in the number of Aurovilians. What would be required from the Entry Board to do something like this?

Matilde: To just double the number of applicants we are dealing with from 150 to say 300 a year, we would need to have full time members in the office, who receive full maintenances to do this work. Most of the members of this Entry Board work without receiving any maintenance, which is not sustainable. We would also need to have super competent secretaries and more resource people. But then again, even if we process 300 people a year, there wouldn’t be enough housing or infrastructure for them. Growth is an organic community process of expansion of our social fabric. It includes so much more than just numbers, such as schools, health centres, houses and workplaces. This doesn’t happen overnight. And it is not about quantity, but quality.

In conversation with Chandra and Carel
Auroville Today June-July 2023 **3**

Accountancy today is highly complex

The Auroville Foundation has 37 management trusts which together hold 600 units and activities. Palani, the executive of the accounting unit Omega, gives his views.

“I’m just back from a 400 kilometre cycle tour from Chennai to the Javadi Hills and back,” says Palani, by way of opening the talk. “I’m cycling more than 40 kilometres each day; I’m training to join the Paris-Brest-Paris event in August.” This quadrennial amateur cycling test, known for its endurance and sleep deprivation, will depart from Chateau Rambouillet outside Paris on a 1,219 kilometre long route with 14,188 ft of climbing. Palani has 84 hours to complete the feat. Is he up to it? “Not yet,” he says. “But I will be.”

In his daily life Palani is doing another type of endurance work. He is the executive of Omega, one of the first accounting units of Auroville. Omega does the accounts of two trusts, the Freeflow Trust and the Kattidakalai Trust. The Freeflow Trust holds 14 units; the Kattidakalai Trust has 47 units and 77 activities. Omega also checks if each of them is up to date with all operational licenses required for their type of business. “It’s a lot of work,” says Palani. “I employ eight people and soon will need three more, also as the Auroville Foundation office wants to have the yearly accounts of all trusts finalized by the beginning of May, a month after the closure of the financial year. So you’ll appreciate that our hands are more than full.”

It was not always like that. Palani fondly remembers the ‘good old days’ when, mentored by Jean-Luc Rose, he did the accounts of four units and submitted them to Ezhumalai, the then Senior accounts officer of the Auroville Board of Commerce, for consolidation by late September, beginning of October. “Jean-Luc taught me accounting, at first manually, later we used the ‘Auroville accounting’ software, which had been developed by a group of Aurovilians. At the time it was a big thing. Now, of course, everybody uses the Tally accounting software.”

How did he become an accountant? He laughs. “I was born in the Health Center of Auroville at Kuilyapalayam, and joined the Auroville Kindergarten when I was 5. My education was all in Auroville. During my summer vacations I did all kinds of jobs in Auroville: mechanics with Nagappam, painting with Carlos, electronic board soldering with Matthias, soap making with Dara and acting as an assistant production manager at Auromodèle Atelier. But I didn’t feel comfortable in those jobs. My talent was used, but I didn’t learn anything new.

Then I met Jean-Luc & Milene. They were French, and as I had picked up French in Last School we went along well. From Jean-Luc I truly learned accounting. I had only been taught some basic accounting, but now it got real. I was constantly learning something. In 1988 we started the accounting unit Omega, but our aspiration for it to be an Auroville service unit was not accepted. We were told that there was no money to pay us and that Omega should instead be a commercial unit. I became an intern.

In 2002 we created the Kattidakalai (meaning “the art of construction”) Trust with 5 entities. Jean-Luc was one of the trustees, next to Jean-Marc and Carlos, and I was the trust’s accountant. Jean-Luc at some point left Auroville. That put the responsibility for Omega on me, and I also replaced him as trustee of the Kattidakalai Trust. I was a trustee for about 18 years, in fact until April this year when I ceased to be a trustee, as some people felt that there might be a conflict of interests in being trustee and executive of the accounting unit that does the trust’s accounts.

Standardisation of accounts and MoE instructions

In 2018 I was selected by the Residents’ Assembly to be a member of the FAMC, the Funds and Assets Management Committee. One of the FAMC’s main projects was the standardisation of accounts and developing a standard coding system – all units use the same code for the same types of income and expenses – as this makes the consolidation of all accounts so much simpler. We worked on it for a year, helped by some senior Auroville accountants. I was a member till 2022, when the Governing Board setup its own FAMC and appointed other people as members.

My FAMC managed to set up a 7-digit coding and standardisation system, and we tried to use it to centralise all the accounts of the Foundation using a centralised server. But last year we received an instruction from the Auroville Foundation Office that now Auroville’s accounts must correspond to the format used by the Ministry of Education (MoE) of the Government of



Palani in his office

India. [The MoE is the Ministry that holds charge of Auroville, eds.] We were told that the format that we had been using for so many years was wrong. Nobody was aware of this, not even our Chartered Accountants. We were instructed to redo the accounts over the financial year 2021-2022, which had already been submitted to the Comptroller and Auditor General of India. This meant redoing the balance sheets of all the trusts, units and activities and of the Foundation itself in the new format of the MoE. All our coding and standardisation work became ineffective.

The problem, as I see it, is that this new format doesn’t really fit Auroville and doesn’t give any advantage as compared to the old one. Our previous balance sheets gave a much better and far more detailed explanation of our activities. The format of the MoE has evidently been developed for schools, colleges and universities, whereas a place like Auroville has also many commercial and service activities. Only about 20% of all of Auroville’s activities are educational. It has proven to be difficult to merge our accounts in this new format. It needs modifications and we are working on that in order to finish the accounts of 2022-2023.

The system audit

Another issue we accountants faced was the system audit, ordered by the Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation, to randomly audit some Auroville units in order to find out if they were in compliance with the Indian Government rules. This audit was conducted by a private accounting firm from Chennai. After the audit was done, the concerned executives and accountants were called for a meeting to clarify the findings of their audit. Most of the unit executives were able to answer the questions asked. Only some units and individuals were found to have made mistakes in their accounting practices. As an outcome of this exercise a ‘list of compliance’ was sent to all units and activities of all the Trust under the Auroville Foundation for adherence.

I also learned that some people hold the Auroville accountants responsible for any suspected misdemeanour of a unit executive or activity manager. But accountants can only work with what the executives and managers provide them. We ask questions if we see from the submitted accounts that something is unclear, and we will inform our trustees if we think that something remains incorrect. But we do not have the power to check if a bill is correct or false. It is the responsibility of the executives and managers to do that.

Closing small activities

Recently, a few Auroville residents stated that small activities, with a turnover of three lakhs or less, should be closed for administrative reasons. This would marginally affect the Kattidakalai trust. The activities are all ‘micro’; most of them have a yearly turnover of less than 10 lakhs; some are below 5

lakhs and only a few below 3 lakhs.

But I think that the people who push this ‘closing’ idea have a too limited understanding of Auroville. For sure, to keep accounts of very small activities adds to our workload. But why have they started? For two simple reasons: one is that people need to live and that Auroville is not providing a sufficient income to the residents. The second reason is that people must be given the opportunity to express themselves – I consider this a fundamental right. Many of these small activities are run by artists who occasionally sell their art, or by people who make jams or cookies. The structure of the Auroville Foundation makes it necessary for them to start an activity – something they wouldn’t need to do if they were living outside Auroville.

Through these activities those Aurovilians sustain themselves and the people they employ; they do not depend on Auroville. Also, it should be kept in mind that no outsiders invested in any activity and so are not exposed to any financial risk. All equipment and all materials have been purchased with funds of the individuals who run the activity. So just closing them for administrative reasons doesn’t seem right.

Moreover, how is Auroville going to maintain those individuals if their business is closed? We already have a track record of not providing pensions to people who have dedicated their lives to Auroville and who have grown old here. The Silver Fund which the FAMC wanted to introduce never came from the ground for many reasons. Are we going to have Aurovilians around who have no work and need to be supported by Auroville? It would become a heavy burden to support these people. Indian Aurovilians could work outside of Auroville; but foreign Aurovilians cannot, as this would go against the Indian visa policy for Auroville.

Goods and Services Tax (GST) – seek exemption

The structure of the Auroville Foundation with its 37 trusts has also caused issues with the filing of Goods and Services Tax returns. Some people think that all trusts should be merged so that there won’t be any GST in the dealings between units and activities of different trusts. But the GST Commissioner of our area has stated that merging 37 trusts into one or two is impossible. He advised the present structure, a trust-wise GST filing. We could only merge trusts – and then only two or three – if we would have the administrative capabilities and sufficient and qualified manpower to handle the accounts. But we don’t have that.

I believe there is a better solution. Instead of closing small units, they should be officially exempted from having to file GST. India is moving in this direction. Currently, in India registration for GST is optional for firms with an annual turnover of less than Rs 40 lakhs for goods and Rs 20 lakhs for services. The Government found that firms with less than Rs 1.5 crore annual turnover account for 84 per cent of total registrations but contribute less than seven per cent of the tax collected.

Our problem is that each trust has to file GST returns as the total turnover of all its units and activities exceeds Rs 40 lakhs. But many units, and all activities, have a turnover that would exempt them from GST if they would be outside of Auroville. For that reason I propose that the Auroville Foundation make a request to the GST Council that Auroville units and activities that have a turnover of less than Rs 40 lakhs for goods and less than Rs 20 lakhs for services are exempted from GST filing. Accounts will need to be kept, that is in accordance with the Auroville Foundation Act. But for GST, we should seek this special exemption, if possible.

The Auroville maintenance: insufficient

There is a general tendency to pass judgement on unit executives who earn more than the Rs 16,000 monthly maintenance that Aurovilians working for Auroville services receive today. I believe that this thinking is too narrow. A maintenance of Rs 16,000 a month to live on is not realistic, certainly not for a family. So some executives book certain costs (telephone, motorbike repair and insurance, etc.) as expenses of the unit.

Of course, those who work in Auroville services do not have that opportunity. But they have other benefits. Instead of criticising unit executives, I think we should stimulate them to do better so that they can contribute more to Auroville, so that all Aurovilians can have sufficient maintenance.”

In conversation with Carel

The Auroville Foundation Act 1988 transferred everything related to Auroville to the Government of India, which later transferred it to the Auroville Foundation established by the Act.

In order to properly manage these assets, the Foundation created management trusts, which in turn began to host units [*having a yearly turnover of 10 lakhs or more*] and activities [*having a yearly turnover of less than 10 lakhs*]. Today, the Auroville Foundation holds 37 management trusts. All trusts together have 296 units. Five of them are umbrella units holding a total of 304 activities.

For each trust, each unit and each activity, separate accounts have to be kept. Each year all accounts are consolidated: the activities in their umbrella unit, the units in their trust, the trusts in the accounts of the Auroville Foundation.

Each account is scrutinized by a Chartered Accountant. The consolidated accounts of the Auroville Foundation, in addition, are audited by the Comptroller and Auditor General of the Government of India. The accounts of the Foundation, as certified by the Comptroller and Auditor General of India together with the audit report, are forwarded to the Central Government which lays them before each House of Parliament.

RESIDENTS’ ASSEMBLY

Prioritising RA decision making

In order to prioritise the upcoming decision making events of the Residents’ Assembly, the Auroville Council organised a poll asking Aurovilians to express their priorities from a list of ten topics. 132 submissions were received online, by mail or on paper. The top five priorities are: (1) the reformulation of the Master Plan; (2) the right of the Residents’ Assembly Service to call for an emergency decision upon receiving a request signed by 300 Aurovilians; (3) the giving of emergency powers to the RA Working Committee, selected in May 2022, to constitute/nominate groups as needed (for e.g. Entry/Exit, FAMC, RAS members, etc) for six month periods; (4) the formulation of an Internal Exit policy which provides an internal framework for the implementation of *The Auroville Foundation (Admission and Termination of persons in the Register of Residents) Regulations, 2019*; (5) the rights of the Residents’ Assembly Service to process multiple RADs simultaneously.

My life in Auroville at the Service of Truth, by Mallika

“Once upon a time ..” is how we begin telling stories, and here’s mine. Once upon a time exactly 50 years ago, there was a report about Auroville shown on French television and, quite by accident, I turned on my TV that evening to that channel! The next day, I called Jean-Pierre Elkabach, the journalist who made the film. After a few brief words, I got the information I needed and then made my way to 67, Rue de Rome in Paris to meet some Aurovilians. I couldn’t believe it – this place called Auroville really existed! And thus began my path to Mother and Sri Aurobindo. It was this film that began everything of what has become my life since 1973!

To backtrack: I was born in South America at Cayenne, French Guyana and I came to France with my family in 1938 when I was two years old. My father was in the military, which led his career, and us, to settle in France. Twenty-five years later, after the Rue de Rome meeting, I decided to go to India. With my two children, Pascal (11½) and Nathalie (6½), off we went, arriving in Mother India on the 4th of July 1973 and finishing our journey on July 5th at our destination – Pondicherry!

Aurovilian Alain Grandcolas welcomed us at the Auroville kitchen, which, at that time, was on the Pondy seaside. Then we were taken to stay at a big guest house in town, at what is now the site of “Casablanca”, the store created by Aurovilian Dilip Kapoor.

Next was our discovery of India, and the love and affection of Indians for children – which at that time you could feel even more than now. It was something quite remarkable: there was their gentleness and heartfelt joy in meeting kids, in being in contact, in trying to understand them by gestures, smiles and mimicry. Their welcome and contact were always so touching!

And for myself, I felt in complete security in India and in the small city of Pondicherry where, as an extra advantage, the rickshaw drivers spoke French. We were extremely lucky – we arrived in time for the privilege of seeing The Mother at her last Darshan on August 15, 1973.

Then we began to explore Auroville and the place that was destined to become the Matrimandir. And we discovered Auroville’s largest community: Aspiration. The Aspiration community gathered people from different nationalities, although the majority were French, many of whom had come with the first caravan travelling overland from Europe. But getting to Aspiration wasn’t so easy! From the Pondy main road you then had to cycle up and up the sandy slope that led to Aspiration. My kids had brought their bicycles with them from France and then I quickly bought one so I could pedal along with them up to Aspiration, and Auroville!

Aspiration is one of the twelve qualities represented in the Mother’s symbol and I greatly resonated with it. So I was very happy when one of my Indian friends gave the name “Abhipsa” – “Aspiration” in Hindi – to my daughter Nathalie just a few months after we arrived.

In 1975 my kids and I took a year’s break and went back to France, returning to India in ‘76. I considered this my definitive return and I told this to my family, explaining that my goal was to live in Auroville, the international community founded by The Mother in 1968 and supported by UNESCO. However, it wasn’t until 1986 that I officially became an Aurovilian.

In the meantime, even though I had a degree as an education and career advisor, to have an income, I taught French as a foreign language to adults at the Alliance Française in the evenings. But I was also a volunteer French teacher at the Ashram School in the mornings, and in the afternoons I taught French to Indian Ashram School teachers who wanted to improve their level. In addition to that, I went out to Auroville to teach French to teenagers at Last School. I carried on working like this, going back and forth between Pondy and Auroville every day for about 13 years until I became an official Aurovilian.

Once back in India, my children had the choice of studying at a developing Auroville school, at the Lycée Français in Pondicherry or at the Ashram’s school. My son, Pascal decided to pursue his education at the Lycée Français and my daughter Abhipsa chose the Ashram

doing recycling work using her great sense of creativity with a team of Aurovilians linked to the upcycling shop in the Visitors Centre.

Getting back to 1978, I learned that The Mother had asked Nolini Kanta Gupta, Sri Aurobindo’s first and oldest disciple, to give a Sanskrit name to disciples that corresponded to the name she herself would have given. Everyone called him Nolini-da (the ‘da’ meaning ‘elder brother’). As my birth name, Claude, had little meaning for me, I went to see Nolini-da in his room just next to the Ashram’s Meditation Hall. He asked me a few questions and then told me to come back in a few days. That’s what I did, and then continued to do, bringing flowers each time, because he was waiting to receive an inner answer. Then one morning after about nine months of my regular visits, he said “Yes, your name is coming! Return to see me on May 1st and I’ll tell you then, because this occasion should happen on a beautiful day!” On May 1st, as usual I started by meditating at the Samadhi with flowers in my hands, before going to Nolini-da’s room. He took the flowers from me and gave me my name: ‘Mallika’. He also handed me a card where he had written ‘Mallika, Purity’” At last I had an Indian name, what joy! I thanked him enthusiastically and then went to put my head on the flower-covered Samadhi.



ALL PHOTOS COURTESY ACRES FOR AUROVILLE AND MALLIKA



The Sri Aurobindo Ashram main building in 1973

When I got up, someone told me that Nolini-da wanted to see me again. On my knees before the bed he was lying on, he showed me the same flowers that I had given him that morning – simple white fragrant jasmin flowers that Indian women put in their hair, the ones that flower-sellers carry in baskets on their heads, calling out ‘Malli, Mallipu’ (‘pu’ means ‘flower’). Mallika! I was thrilled, and my Indian friends

were thrilled for me. They explained that my new name Mallika is written with two l’s, the name for jasmine in South India. (Malika with one l comes from Urdu in the North and means princess or queen, which wasn’t the name I was given). The Mother had given ‘Purity’ as the spiritual meaning for jasmine, and now that was my name! It became for me the way to follow on the path of the Yoga of Mother and Sri Aurobindo!

Four years later, in 1982, I legally adopted a Tamil boy who was only three months-old. Again it was Nolini-da who, at my request, chose the name. I gave a photo, and then the baby to Nolini, who held him in his hands. I waited outside his room, and after a few minutes I was called in. Behind the baby’s photo, Nolini had written the Sanskrit name ‘Subhadre’ and its meaning in French ‘Très Gentil’ (in English, his name means ‘very kind’). Today, Subhadre has founded a family and lives in France, but envisions a return to where he grew up – Auroville!

The 12th December 1986 was the day of my decisive arrival in Auroville. My companion and I had finally met the Aurovilians who were the first members of what today we call the Entry Group. Unanimously, as we say, they declared that we were welcome – and worthy – of being Aurovilians. It was a very simple process where everyone gave us their trust, feeling the great aspiration that was carrying us. At last an official Aurovilian, I devoted my work to healing practices in addition to continuing on as a French teacher at Last School, and I also began my work at and for the Matrimandir.

In healing, I am a Massage Therapist with training in a multi-disciplinary bouquet of Eastern and Western techniques. Starting in 1983, I learnt and practiced massage and acupuncture and was qualified for these practices in 1986 by my teacher Dhruva Grinnell, who was himself an Acupuncturist, Masseur and Osteopath. In 1989 and 1990, I received degrees in Reiki 1 and 2, and then in 1994 and 1995 in Advanced Pranik Healing and Pranik Psychotherapy under Master Choa Kok Sui. I provide this healing work at home at Citadine where I have a special

therapy room, and also at the Auroville Health Center.

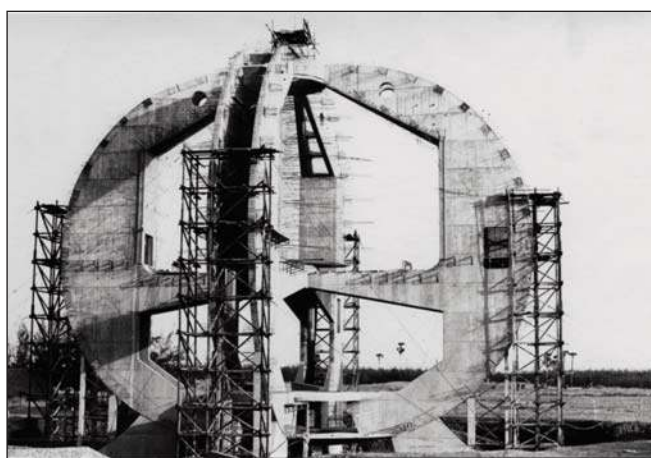
The Matrimandir’s development has been a great focus of my Auroville life and aspiration. Early on, I became part of a group of Matrimandir workers and one role was to welcome visitors and answer their questions. I also was involved with ‘Matrimandir Nouvelles’ which was a translation of the ‘Matrimandir Newsletter’ into French.

Then the work in the Inner Chamber accelerated! I had the privilege of being there and participating at these memorable landmark moments when the marble panels were installed, the twelve columns were set up, and the white carpet that covers the entire Inner Chamber area was laid and the pedestal representing Sri Aurobindo’s symbol on all four sides was put in place upon which the crystal coming from Germany was to rest. And finally, the crystal arrived! It was with great emotion that we were present and part of the process when the crystal in its protective box was hoisted up into the Matrimandir’s Inner Chamber and at last set upon the pedestal in the centre. There it receives the ray of light that passes from above to go into and through its centre, as regulated by a specially-conceived electronic apparatus.

Of course, from then on, many people wanted ‘to come and see’ and the imperative question for the team became when could visitors pass through the Chamber. We had many meetings and discussions about this, but the best guide for us were Mother’s words in the Agenda. And she was very clear: “One hour a day, or one day a week ... to see ...”.

The Aurovilians in charge of the practical side of the Matrimandir work have learned how to best safeguard this space and have it respected by visitors and all who come. Over the years, good-sense rules have been established to protect this marvellous structure, this wonderful space, and its special atmosphere. Daily ‘Matrimandir Duty’ schedules were set up for greeting and leading visitors.

In this way, the silence and harmony needed for entry is established, ensuring respect for this extraordinary place chosen by The Mother – the unique space of the Matrimandir and its twelve gardens. For many many years, I did ‘Matrimandir Duty’



The four pillars of the Matrimandir

work, a privilege in the service of The Mother and the community. Another privilege in my life was to travel to Japan – a country much loved by The Mother for its sense of beauty – to be a witness at a friend’s wedding. This gave me the wonderful opportunity to visit Kyoto where The Mother lived before her definitive return to Pondicherry on 24 April 1920 to pursue the “Adventure of Consciousness” with Sri Aurobindo.

Living in Auroville for these past 37 years hasn’t always been very simple but the joy of becoming part of this great outer and inner adventure has always guided me – to live my life here, help build the city – a garden city – and work in service to create an inspired and inspiring city! It is true that as the days, weeks, months and years passed, the recommended and required unity for this great creation has often slipped through our fingers like fine grains of sand ... instead of firmly settling in place to support our collective aspiration.

But I also feel, and I know, that despite the challenges, Auroville WILL grow and shine, WILL marvel, and WILL lead men and women of all countries towards the promised future: an integral change, a Supramental transformation for Auroville, humanity, and for Planet Earth. After these many decades of joyful work dedicated to The Mother’s vision and the City of Dawn, my happiness still always soars when I’m seated under the Banyan Tree and see these words of aspiration which encircle it ... the words which have inspired since the start and serve to guide us: “AUROVILLE the City at the Service of Truth.”

Mallika, Auroville, April 2023

This article was first published in the Acres for Auroville Newsletter.

Mallika passed away on June 24th in PIMS, Pondicherry. See page 15.



In the 1970s, cycling was the way to go from Pondicherry to Auroville

School where she was accepted. Thus, my children each chose different routes which led them to life choices that have richly satisfied them. Today, Pascal has a fulfilling career as a history and geography teacher in a high school in the south of France. Abhipsa lives in Auroville

Acupuncturist, Masseur and Osteopath. In 1989 and 1990, I received degrees in Reiki 1 and 2, and then in 1994 and 1995 in Advanced Pranik Healing and Pranik Psychotherapy under Master Choa Kok Sui. I provide this healing work at home at Citadine where I have a special

On a sultry May summer's evening, after one of its communal and tasty pizza nights, the Youth Centre (YC) premiered a documentary simply titled 'The Youth Centre'. Sitting under the night stars, we watched 90 minutes of interviews, a sliding historical review from its founding in the 1990s to the present, about what the YC has given our young. The honesty, energy and openness was touching and captured some of the adventurous and experimental spirit of Auroville.

The film originated with three friends: Anastasia, Lucrezia and Cheenu. Anastasia, then a German Weltwärts volunteer at AV Radio, and Lucrezia from YouthLink suggested to Cheenu, a film-maker, to make a documentary about the YC together. This was in the seemingly innocent days before the tumult of Covid and what they now simply call 'the destruction' (of YC buildings on December 9, 2021). "We wanted to express what the YC was about to the community and to the TDC," recalled Lucrezia, "... to open their eyes to the world of youth."

The trio interviewed 35-40 people, starting with the founders and including a range of people who either lived there in the past or live there at present. Most of the interviews were recorded in 2020 but two of the interviews were done in early 2022.

"We wanted to share our story with the community, show them what we practise, how we live, the essence and spirit of YC and its youth," said Lucrezia. The Auroville community, she pointed out, "didn't support youth and we wanted support, but we struggled to get the necessary support." At one point the YC were asked to move to a new place, as originally they were not meant to be on that plot of land, "but no support was given to find a new place or in terms of money to rebuild what already existed. So we decided not to move, to keep our presence in the centre of Auroville, where all young people can easily access it." They want to grow the YC, by building new tree houses and a better store room. Yet in the present moment there are only two maintenances for the ten people living in and working for the YC, and even these two have been recently reduced to a two-month bridging maintenance with an unknown future.



Anastasia

Freedom to grow

For Lucrezia, the motivation to promote the YC through the film came from "the growth and opportunity [the YC] gave me" and wanting other youth to have access to such a space. She felt supported both by the freedom and discipline of the YC. Coming from

The value of youth



Cheenu at work

aschool where everything was imposed, the YC "changed my whole lifestyle. Here I felt like I wanted to do so much because I had the freedom to do it. So that was very empowering for me. And I think it's a point that a lot of people shared in the interviews."

Cheenu's story

Cheenu, who grew up nearby, arrived in Auroville in 2010 to live with his uncle after his mother passed away. He studied at NESS school and then completed a BA in Photography and Film-making at Chennai University. He took his last exams virtually in 2020, at the height of Covid, in the YC main space (now destroyed), and says that before living at the YC, "I didn't really speak English or have friends."

He had resided with his uncle for seven years and then his sister's German guardian for three years. With the latter, he "got the freedom to live on my own and look after myself. It's one of the ways I came to the YC." Cheenu explains, "In Tamil culture, they never teach you how to live on your own, so [youth] don't have the confidence to do so. I got here today because I didn't really have much [family] pressure."

With no financial support, it was hard to prioritise the film's editing but after 'the destruction', Cheenu realised that "this is the time. The message is now not just for the community, but for the outside world too, about the value of youth." He completed the editing in one month, "just day and night editing." This was his first longer documentary film and calls it "my purpose." Cheenu became a newcomer while living at the YC and experiencing community life there. He worked on the film with "a lot of motivation and will to create, to do something good for this place and Auroville. I just felt like it was one of the most effective ways I could help the community."

"The destruction," Cheenu recalls, was "hard the whole time, everyday. I was deep into emotion." Up until that day, he had never spent a night outside the YC. But on the fateful morning of 9

December 2021, he was not there. "Maybe I had to be away that night [before]. I was very shocked when I came back in the morning, when everything was destroyed. After that day it was not fun mentally, living and working at YC. It took us one month to clear up the [uprooted trees] and rubble of what they destroyed. When I edited the destruction part of the film, it was not easy. I was crying in front of the screen, seeing the fighting. It was sad."

Perceptions of the Youth Centre in Auroville

The events of 9 December 2021 didn't happen in a vacuum. Ever since arriving in Auroville at age seventeen, Lucrezia noticed that there was a lot of talk around youth being lazy and not caring about work unless they were paid. The perception was that youth "want money. They want an easy life and to have fun." Lucrezia says the narrative about youth always drinking and smoking is fake. "It's a really strong opinion of a lot of people. That's why some families don't send their kids to YC. I have actually heard people saying that we come here to have sex. It's crazy."

Lucrezia offers a very different perspective. "I came here from Europe where I didn't have an easy time. Back there, I drank, smoked and had a lot of friends who were getting lost into drugs. Here I got so inspired, and stopped doing all that. Instead, I was being creative and motivated, and this was only because of YC, because it was the place where I could use my body, my mind and my heart as well."

The gift of the Youth Centre community

Some Auroville youth do leave the township to work outside or abroad, but Lucrezia has seen quite a few realise that "they want something more, not money, but growth." Lucrezia notes how the film documents the ways the YC provides the youth "a safe space, to go away from their home and find their own community and peers and an understanding of what community living means." In Lucrezia's experience, only Fertile, Udumbu, and the YC offer this kind of community living in Auroville. She elaborates, "Community means learning how to communicate with others, learning and expressing what your needs are, and at the same time taking responsibility, including by washing your clothes and your dishes. And for me, that was very powerful in terms of growth. Because of course you have days that might be challenging. But there is always an attempt to find a balance and understand one another."

It's evident from the film that community building and learning how to communicate, alongside living with nature as a constant and literal backdrop have been a big part of what YC has offered. The safe space to be young, away from societal pressure, to discover life and the deeper levels of what Auroville proffers were repeating themes in the film.

For reasons hard to understand, the YC and Auroville youth in general often seem to be on the literal frontline of our current polarity. This film conveys with honesty the joys, the value and gifts alongside some of the realities of living in YC, and also shows what freedom can offer to the young.

Peter

Trailer to film: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ztFaNzBuR5Q>

My journey of perseverance and growth

Yuvabe team member Vigneshwaran writes about striving for personal growth despite challenges posed by a flawed education system.

I was born in a small village called Alankuppam. I would like to begin my story from the time I was in school. People tend to have fond memories of their school days, but not me. The reason? My parents, my teachers, my friends.

My parents and teachers pushed me to study, but not once did anyone bother to explain to me what I was studying – or even why. My ability to comprehend, not to mention my memory, were not really up to the mark. I have appeared for more exams learning by rote than by understanding what I was writing. This system of education did not inspire me or motivate me in any way; I remain a strictly average student.

From childhood through the end of school, my home environment posed a massive challenge for me. My father was fixated on me getting an excellent education, but he never recognised the things I enjoyed or my eagerness. To him, anything except studying was pointless and good for nothing. I loved sports, but was I any better at sports? Sadly, no. My lack of stamina ensured that I was always the first one to fall behind in any competition with friends.

Somehow, I finished school in 2015 and went to college. I had very different expectations for college; I had hoped that, unlike at school, I would be guided well, and fantasised that I would become an excellent engineering student. There was no great difference between (the teaching system in) my school and college.

I'm not blaming the education system in my country; I have met a few people who have succeeded with our system of education. I simply feel that, if only a few succeed, it's not a successful system.

My college turned me into a shining symbol of a student lacking critical thinking, self-confidence and gumption. Was it going to be easy for such a person to find a job?

This was the time I started the lesson called Life. Unable to find employment, I faced routine humiliation from parents and others. Finding it unbearable to put up with their words, I did whatever jobs I could find. I have worked the night shift in vehicle manufacturing units, delivered food, and worked in a biscuit factory. I have been a VMC operator, worked in construction, and even in temple festivals. Every job gave me a different experience, but none of them could give me happiness. As a result, I never lasted too long at any of them.

My mind never stopped thinking one thought: if we don't add value to our life, it is our greatest betrayal to ourselves.

Though I wanted to be an achiever, my life seemed to be drifting aimlessly, away from my dreams, and that saddened me. But what Life taught me was this – all I needed to do was try. I could achieve the life I wanted. The biggest barriers to progress had been my inability to understand what I needed to do to change my life, my workload, and my laziness.

When a friend saw my difficulties, he found me a job at his place of employment. And that is how I began my journey at Yuvabe.

Working at Yuvabe has been a life-changing experience for me. As a designer, I was able to secure a job at the company based on my ability to learn and use skills, rather than my diploma. The atmosphere at Yuvabe is one of respect and freedom, allowing me to consult with my colleagues and learn from their experiences. This was the first time I truly enjoyed my work and felt fulfilled in my career.

My boss at Yuvabe is truly unique - it's hard to understand him at times, but what sets him apart is how he treats his employees like human beings and friends. Despite his approachable nature, he is no pushover and can keep a watchful eye on everything.

During my time at Yuvabe, I've been able to expand my skill set and learn new things that have had a positive impact on my life. I've delved into acting, which has helped me better control my emotions. Additionally, I've gained proficiency in visualising, communicating, and sustainability, and even picked up yoga, which has allowed me to express myself in new ways.

But the best part of my experience at Yuvabe has been the people. My colleagues have been a constant source of support and inspiration, and I've even had the opportunity to give back by teaching local children at a school in Auroville once a week. Overall, my time at Yuvabe has been a truly trans-



Vigneshwaran

formative experience, and I'm grateful to the company for providing such a nurturing environment.

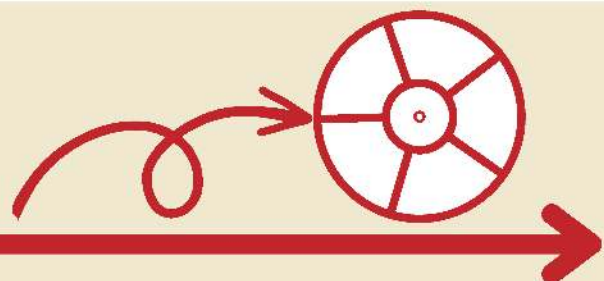
So many things I believed were impossible, became possible once I refused to give up. I have started expressing myself with confidence; I have understood that my life is meant to create something great.

K. Vigneshwaran

This article was originally published on Yuvabe's website as part of a fundraising effort launched through the AVI USA newsletter. To learn more about Yuvabe's programme for youth empowerment, visit www.yuvabe.com.

The Youth Issue about Youth Issues

A SPECIAL INSERT BY YOUTHLINK



A new Auroville Youth Integration programme has been developed by the YouthLink team for 'Children of Aurovilians' between the ages of 16 and 25. The programme offers participants an opportunity to delve deeper into their understanding of Auroville, connect with their peers, and discover more about themselves. The aim is to enable participants to make informed decisions about becoming full-fledged members of the Auroville community. Similar initiatives have been attempted in the past, most notably the Youth Forward programme, which was discontinued in December 2021 after three sessions.

Before designing the AVYI program, YouthLink looked at the framework of Youth Forward and the Yucca program and also engaged with the Entry Service and Yucca teams. We envisioned a program that would go beyond mere information, that could create a safe space for connection and sharing, while also providing tools and techniques for introspection and personal growth. This mindset led to the inclusion of unconventional activities such as roleplaying as the Entry Board, meeting Aurovilians from different generations and various energising games and exercises.

At the end of May, a first cohort of nine youth participated in what is currently a four-day programme. Day one included an exercise called 'Spectrum of Feelings' where participants examine their feelings about joining Auroville and their reactions to questions such as whether they see themselves living in Auroville for the rest of their lives.

The second and third days were spent diving more deeply into aspects of Auroville that children and young adults growing up here might not have discussed at length. There was an exercise related to Mother's values, a talk by Satyavan Bhatt about The Dream, a discussion about the Auroville Charter with Raman, and a theatre exercise related to Auroville Services. Carol Thieme explained how Auroville is organised; Manas Chakrabarti spoke about the Auroville economy and finance; and Deepti Tewari facilitated a sharing and discussion on how to be a true Aurovilian.

The last day included several more games and exercises which were intended to help participants examine their own and others'

The Auroville Youth Integration Programme



Top from left: Viknesh, Satyavan, Ankita, Mahana, Lucrezia, Leela, Asia, Madhu, Tenzin, Yolane, Arav.
Bottom: Zohar, Namu, Gwjwn, Yam, Neha, Aurore, Gautam.

perspectives and biases. During the discussion on opportunities and difficulties of living in Auroville facilitated by Lucrezia, an interesting observation emerged. Many of the difficulties listed by participants were perceived by other participants as opportunities. The programme concluded with an appreciation exercise to reinforce for participants and facilitators alike the sense of caring

and community that had been fostered over the four days.

Initial feedback by the participants (see below) and facilitators has been very positive. We hope to incorporate some of the changes suggested, to learn from the experience and to continue to improve the programme design in order to make it a recurring offering.

YouthLink team

Participants' experiences

AVYI was an amazing experience. I learnt so much more than I expected. All the organisers and participants were amazing, and I had so much fun. My goal going into this workshop was to get a good enough understanding of Auroville, to be able to explain what it is to anyone I meet in the future. And after the workshop, I finally feel capable of it!

The best part of the programme was the people. I knew some of them already, but most were barely acquaintances. By the end, after multiple conversations, tears and laughter, I realised that the organisers and other participants are what made this workshop fun. So thank you to all of you.

As feedback, perhaps an extra day and possibly a visit to some of the working groups to have a discussion with them could make this programme more complete.

Overall, my understanding of Auroville has improved so much. And finally, understanding the place that your parents decided to move to is an amazing feeling and makes me even more happy I grew up here.

Satchi

This programme helped me somehow gain so much information. The AVYI programme organisers definitely did their best and achieved what they wanted to do. My favourite part of the programme was learning about the foundations of Auroville groups from such a friendly team. I just wish the programme had been longer than four days.

The thoughts and questions I had about Auroville have changed after attending the AVYI program. I think that this programme should happen often so that all the youth get to know Auroville better. Thank you, YouthLink!

Viknesh



The programme was enjoyable, fun and lively. At the same time, I felt there was space to explore in-depth and speak sincerely. There were some things I didn't feel like expressing, but that was a personal choice.

There was plenty of important information about Auroville. Some of it went by fast, like the system of governance. If I didn't have prior context, I would have understood less.

My least favourite part was the 'spectrum of feelings' exercise, but I also feel that it was useful, to understand how I felt about the entry process.

I feel my ideas about Auroville ideals are refreshed. I see that some current community members may not be dedicated to its ideas.

Thank you. I am very grateful.

Yam

I was very happy with the AVYI programme. Make it at least one week.

It taught me a lot about Auroville, but surprisingly, it also taught me about myself and others. My favourite part of the programme was that it felt like we were creating a mini family. This sense of team and family was

very much appreciated. After attending the programme, I feel a bigger sense of community, and I'm feeling more interconnected.

I would have liked more team building exercises and to have learned/discussed more about our views and Auroville philosophy.

Maybe we could have also done a group trip to the Matrimandir!

Thank you, and I wish to keep seeing this. YouthLink, and more youth oriented programme development.

Asia

I really enjoyed it. I felt really stressed and overwhelmed at some point, but I also felt that I was in a really safe space so I managed to overcome it. I also understood some things that I think will be useful for the rest of my life. I learned a lot about Auroville and the way it functions, which gave me a lot of clarity on where I am and where I want to be in life. And I gained the enthusiasm to learn even more and invest in myself.

I really enjoyed the circle exercise because it really made me understand both that I feel a sense of belonging in Auroville and that I feel really uncomfortable and meaningless in the outside world. I also enjoyed making a presentation because, for the first time, I managed to turn my anxiety into adrenaline while speaking and that was really interesting and empowering.

I don't think my thoughts on Auroville have changed, but I can now put them into words more easily. The programme also made me appreciate my parents for bringing me here against my will ten years ago. I feel gratitude and clarity.

Madhu



Integral Youth

Recently, Jai Naidoo, an ex-freedom fighter from South Africa, visited Auroville and addressed an important question to the youth: "You say you are open to everyone and invite people from all over the world, but have you actually created an environment where African people can integrate into the community?"

I would like to ask a similar question from a different perspective: Have we created an environment where today's youth can integrate into the Auroville community?

As someone who grew up in Auroville, I have observed that we struggle to retain our own youth. Many leave Auroville for further education or employment and then do not return. Do we understand why that is and is there a way we can better encourage youth from everywhere to engage with Auroville in the long term?

Room to grow

Youth is best understood as a period of transition from childhood dependence to adult independence. It is a phase defined by learning, trial and error, and self-discovery. An ideal environment would encourage youth to try new things, provide room for initiative, and offer a sense of growth and purpose.

Auroville in its early years provided just that to its first generation of young pioneers. With that generation visibly ageing

and aged, it is now up to the younger generations to assume responsibility for moving Auroville forward. The transfer of knowledge and experience is crucial for cultural evolution, and every member of society must contribute to creating a "brighter tomorrow." However, this is a gradual process, and the young must also reach a certain level of maturity and understanding of the world to avoid repeating past mistakes or making even worse ones.

Motivation and purpose

To support and enable this transition, youth must feel that they are doing meaningful work and finding inspiration despite various challenges. One of my mentors used to say, "You must feel good to do good work." It is only when you experience some level of contentment or satisfaction that you can move away from primal instincts of self-preservation or competition. Basic needs must be satisfied, which may vary for each individual.

Recent conversations with several older Aurovilians led to a question of why it is that the youth of today are not taking up unskilled job openings at Auroville services. Their narrative was that the youth saw Auroville as a camping ground to indulge in hedonism, and that the youth were lazy.

In the capitalist world, growth and purpose revolves around generating output and maximising profit. Individuals are

viewed as tools to an end and are expected to do their best with minimal time and resources. The primary motivating factors are money (purchasing power) and ego boosters (power, authority). In Auroville, we are obviously striving towards something different.



Namu

I would question whether an average Auroville maintenance is an adequate incentive for youth or anyone to work at a job that may lack fulfilment or purpose for them. At the same time, I know of quite a few youth who are committed to working with a maintenance or less in areas and at units where they find purpose, growth and community. This includes youth at Wasteless, Kajimba, Coffee Break, Tree House Community, TreeCare, Future School, Transition School, Youth Centre, and here at YouthLink.

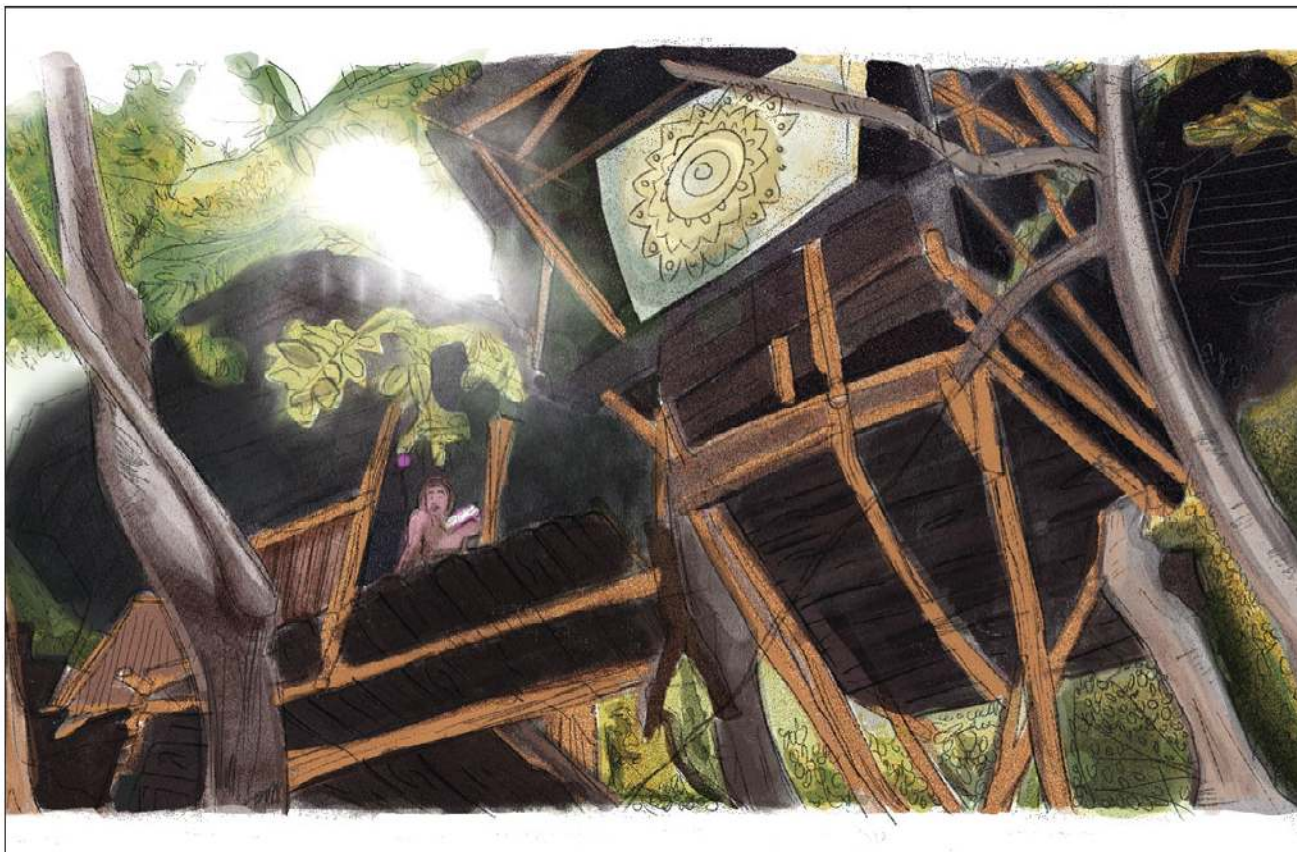
So, what's the future that we want?

Well, we're here to explore that together.

In my understanding, we in Auroville strive to create a community where authority or egocentric incentives do not dictate our actions. We aim to foster collaboration rather than competition, encouraging equality rather than superiority among neighbours.

Let's collaborate in creating an environment and culture where people of all ages can work together to grow, improve, and broaden perspectives. A place where we love, accept, and understand one another, and collectively move towards a brighter future.

Namu, YouthLink Team



Youth Center Treehouse, artwork by Lucrezia Fassi

Collaboration between Youth Center and YouthLink

The Youth Center incident in December 2021 served as a significant wake-up call for many young people in Auroville. We began networking, communicating, sharing, and organising ourselves. General meetings within the "youth network," a group of 120 youth in Auroville, were held to share information and perspectives. YouthLink and the Youth Center have both made remarkable progress over the past two years, actively addressing our own problems and needs while also striving to understand those of the broader youth population in Auroville. We are actively trying to "be the change that you want to see in the world."

The two organisations have started working closely together, exploring ways to collaborate in greater synergy. There is a sense of responsibility among the youth towards Auroville, and various individuals within and outside the organisations are taking initiatives. We believe that no one understands us better than we do, and that's the power we aim to harness. Instead of constantly having things created or done for us, we want to understand our needs and empower ourselves to fulfil them, developing our own capabilities in the process.

If you're reading this and you consider yourself a youth of Auroville, please join us in this beautiful journey. Otherwise, we will reach out when we need your help and opinion. We greatly appreciate your inputs and perspectives, let us move forward together with compassion and understanding!

YouthLink, my University of Life

Gwjwn Daimari first heard about Auroville while he was working on his B.Sc. in Physics at Pondicherry University. He returned to his native Assam after completing his degree but came back in 2022 to explore Auroville. After volunteering at Kinisi, he eventually made his way to YouthLink and has been a full time volunteer team member since April of this year.

Working at YouthLink has been truly a transformative experience that will have a lifelong impact on me. It has become more than just a job; it is a place of continuous learning, personal growth, constant progress, a place to explore the meaning of community, and a place where I can try to reach my full potential. YouthLink to me is a lot like a university.

YouthLink values practical knowledge and real-life learning experiences that are truly valuable in shaping our own lives as well as the lives of those who are connected with us. The environment fosters personal development and skills acquisition beyond what can be found in textbooks.

My time at YouthLink has surpassed my expectations of a traditional workplace. Team members share a special bond that goes

beyond our professional duties. We genuinely enjoy each other's company and often choose to spend time together even outside of work. This has led to strong friendships that will last a lifetime.

One of the most inspiring aspects of our team is our shared dedication to creating a positive impact in the community and beyond. The team is united because all of us serve a common goal. This encourages us to think beyond ourselves and work towards making a meaningful impact in Auroville and elsewhere around the globe. Our sense of unity and mutual support enables us to work efficiently and effectively. Where there are work related challenges or personal struggles, everyone is there to lend a helping hand whenever needed.

The way YouthLink operates is a unique approach. We start each day by sharing how we feel, fostering mindfulness and empathy.

Decisions are made collectively, allowing every team member to contribute their thoughts and ideas. Before we start talking, we raise our hands to politely ask questions or to have important discussions during a meeting. This ensures that everyone feels heard and valued. Moreover, tasks are not merely seen as obligations, but rather as personal commitments that we are enthusiastic about undertaking. I invest my entire effort into the work I engage in. It's not like 'I have to do it' but more like 'I want to do it'.

For me, conventional universities are just about earning certificates and scoring high marks. YouthLink, on the other hand, is like an upgraded university where I can work on my personal growth while developing skills necessary for my life.



Gwjwn

Gwjwn

An Abundance of Love

Over the past seven years, Lucrezia Fassi has been involved in various youth initiatives and projects including the Youth Center, Aura App, and Disha. These experiences eventually led her to Youthlink where she has supported education and community service oriented projects for the last two years.

I discovered the Youth Center on a pizza night. I was a young adult on my second trip to Auroville. As an Italian, I thought it was only natural that I end up there. However, it wasn't the pizza that made me go 'crazy' but rather the love that made this the best pizza in town. Seeing young peers cooking with love for the community and bringing people together through food, music, games and a joyful environment made me incredibly happy. It was the first time I had ever experienced an environment with all these qualities, and I fell in love with it at that moment.

I started volunteering at the Youth Center and then began my newcomer process a few years later. Over time, I fell more in love with the place, with Auroville, and all the possibilities for growth. By the time an opportunity arose with YouthLink, I already knew that I was following my true calling. I wanted to provide the next generation with a safe, organised environment, where they could experience all the amazing opportunities I had been given and more. My goal is to help them connect and understand the power of Unity.

Youth's challenges

I often hear that the youth lack discipline, that we prioritise money over service, and that we therefore lose interest if we don't receive a maintenance. From my perspective, Auroville's youth, newcomers and volunteers come from diverse backgrounds, and we have all experienced

Auroville in different ways. Some grew up here and believe in its aspirations and ideals, while others have joined later, inspired by its vision. Nevertheless, we all seek opportunities for growth and new experiences. We want to contribute with love, tapping into our inner creativity and generating energy. When we do so, we feel grateful and have a sense of purpose. We also share a common experience of challenging circumstances that make it difficult, though not impossible, to fully manifest our aspirations. We are often preoccupied with securing basic necessities like housing, food and transportation. Our minds are often consumed with finding solutions to immediate problems. This can impede creative thinking and innovation, and leaves little room for processing and transforming ideas into actions.

In truth, the world is undergoing a lot of healing and restoration, but we, as humans, must meet our basic needs to achieve the generative culture of service and giving we aspire to. We must eliminate fear and eliminate the notion of sacrifice, allowing everyone to wake up with a sense of purpose and the ability to contribute to the universe happily. Rather than feeling victimised by the challenges we face, we need to work together to find solutions and create new opportunities. We must listen to each other and understand one another's insecurities. Instead of judging others or their ways of doing things, we should share our strengths and support one another. We must move away from fear and foster unity, creating an environment brimming with possibilities

for growth, creativity, and an incredible sense of community.

Nurtured

I still remember the feeling of love and freedom that seemed to immediately fulfil my entire being when I arrived in Auroville as a child on my first visit. It was an incredibly powerful sensation that made me feel both vast and safe. I remember sharing with my mother that Auroville felt like home, and that I didn't want to leave. When I realised I had to depart, I was overwhelmed with sorrow and began to cry. From the moment I left, all I could think about was returning to Auroville. I was in touch with my heart, and I knew where I wanted to be.

When I returned to Auroville a bit older, I felt immense joy. It was as if I was blooming, and I sensed great opportunity therein. The diversity of exposure offered me the chance to explore completely new and different thoughts, and I cherished this process. I learned through my experiences and connected more deeply with my body, mind and self.

Auroville helped me to gain a greater understanding of the many layers of life and people. I experienced an abundance of cultures, stories, learnings and perspectives, and still I could hardly get enough of them. I have been strongly influenced by Auroville and its many colours and continue to feel more inspired by the good things than the bad.

The opportunity to learn every day is ever-present in Auroville. However, it is

essential to tap into this with love and dedication, having a direction in mind, in order not to get overwhelmed. While Auroville offers tremendous growth, there is still room for improvement, especially regarding the organisation and accessibility of all its offerings. Nonetheless, Auroville remains an incredible place full of abundance, a place that has changed my life forever.

Lucrezia



Lucrezia

All photos: YouthLink

Embracing the Melody of French

Bonjour! My name is Nivetha Narayanaswamy, and this is the story of how I came to master French. Growing up in Auroville, I never could have guessed the journey I would be taking when my father expressed his desire for one of his daughters to speak French. Little did I know that this desire would ignite a passion within me and set me on a course of personal growth.

When I entered high school at Future School, I joined the French class taught at the time by Gildo. His warm smile and his fragrant flower arrangement greeted me each day, and I soon discovered that French was not just another subject, but that it was my true calling. The intricacies and nuances of the language intrigued me, and I connected with French in a way that would only grow stronger with time. I attended weekend classes due to my enthusiasm, practising pronunciation and immersing myself in the language.

Mastering French was not without its challenges. I considered myself a slow learner. Pronunciation, in particular, was so frustrating that it occasionally tempted me to give up. However, with Gildo's support, I found the strength to persevere. His encouragement and unwavering belief in my abilities helped me build confidence and keep going. My efforts paid off when I achieved an exceptional grade in my O-level exams, reaffirming the value of my hard work and determination.

Despite the financial constraints that forced me to seek work immediately after completing high school, my passion for the French language burned brightly. Determined to continue my studies, I found support at the Alliance Française in Pondicherry. Under the guidance of my mentor, Tapas, a kind and helpful teacher, I signed up for evening classes, often driving to Pondicherry after a long day's work. At the Alliance, I encountered Nicolas, my new French teacher, whose dedication to teaching never wavered despite his busy schedule. This setting where we can



Nivetha

speak only in French really helped me take it to the next level, while creating deep friendships with fellow language enthusiasts of all ages.

As my French improved more and more, I started to feel more confident, leading me to undertake the DELF B1 exam. Out of 25 candidates, I emerged as one of five successful participants, which gave me immense joy and validation. Fueled by my own achievements, I discovered a newfound passion for teaching French. Taking on the role of an assistant teacher in Chennai, I experienced the indescribable joy of sharing my knowledge with others. Now, in addition to working full time at YouthLink, I teach French in the evenings to children between the ages of six to ten.

My journey with French has taught me so much about myself and about the power of passion and determination. It was rewarding in many ways, and it is a skill that I will cherish for the rest of my life. From my early days of curious exploration to my current role as a dedicated teacher, I have experienced the countless rewards of embracing a foreign language. My story serves as an inspiration to all aspiring linguists, reminding us that with dedication, support, and a willingness to embrace challenges, we can unlock new worlds of knowledge, understanding, and personal growth.

Nivetha



All photos: Nivetha and her students



Home

I came to Auroville as an angry, friendless twelve year old who refused to go barefoot and hated the red soil, the stains it left on my clothes. I was dragged here kicking and screaming, and I'm so grateful that Auroville proved to be more stubborn than me, that it stayed patiently and held me until I learned to love it, until I learned to call it home.

I will always count spending my teenage years in Auroville as a blessing. I would have become someone very different without this environment, and I don't think I would like that person as much.

I have mostly my education to thank for how much I've grown. In Deepanam and Last School I made friends, read poems, met teachers, and had experiences which shaped me into who I am. When I talk to my friends in other cities, they speak of school with frustration and fear, and it reminds me that my ability to associate school with a sense of safety is a rarity and a great luxury.

Having a solid support system might be the most important thing Auroville has given me. I've learnt that a feeling of community builds confidence; I have learnt to express and stand up for myself because of the knowledge that I have people standing with me.

I have learnt to care. I am no longer the little girl so afraid of being hurt that she barely allowed any of herself to be seen. I have learnt that vulnerability is our most accurate measure of courage, that loving fiercely is an act of strength and defiance.

I'm almost seventeen now and I still can't get the red soil stains out of my clothes, but Auroville has seeped in much deeper. I wish I could talk to the girl I was when I arrived here. I wish I could hold her and tell her of the laughter and tears and indestructible peace awaiting her. I know she would be proud.

Manya

Free expressions

A Journey

In a world where love brings joy and pain,
We seek solace and light in the darkest hour,
Seeking support from loved ones
With laughter, but wounds they bring,
Burdened with doubts, fears that go into
Our shattered souls trapped by despair's weight;
To open again, courageous souls
Need to break free from the dance of material life
And embrace a new chance.

A journey to find positivity,
Auroville, a beacon of change, shines bright;
Personal growth, introspection, new perspectives
ascend;
And it holds the key, To set souls free,
To awake, to be mindful,
To let go of burdens, past pains and strife
And let our soul dance;
In each breath, find truth and essence
Embracing new hope, embracing new life,
A journey to unity.

Gwjwn

Rain hits the ground
Not shatters, not falls;
Hits.
Clear drum drop sounds
On the cement pavement
On the mute glass windows
Shot into the grass
In a chorus of
Millions.

The thunder base rolls from the distance;
It's too far to harm but just
Enough
To feel those echoes within me
That only respond
To rain.

There's no lightning. There's no wind.
A tired white sky offers
An "any weather" notion
Like someone's thrown a blanket
Over the sun.

I've got the best seats in the house.
Mesh frames offer me the 3D experience,
To feel spare drizzles caress me
And remind me
That it's cold outside.

How magical how dark clouds can transform
Putrid heat
Into glistening showers
Of unending bloom.

More than shy candle flames
More than boldly growing shadows

Is Auroville,
In its crisp and waving freshness
Post-monsoon.

Neha

I walk through a parking I once knew, daunting me
Its ever present skeletons dimly lit up
Pastried murals and sticks and rocks are put in such a
way.
I smell the mornings and still hear the birds singing
And us, do you hear it?
those old broken melodies
In that old endless place
And our laughs, oh how they crafted an abundance of
joy.

I'm still bringing you through chaos and ruins, I say all
this, but know
If I left pieces of me in places, they're here.
And,
If I've been happier since,
It's because,
This is where,
taught me how.
I'd tell you
where, but I want you to feel it too.
Okay, sure there's still home, and home and home and so
more is,
So let me tell you a little about home, my mom's here too,
she who calls it home but doesn't know, so here, mom, I'll
try telling you in my oh so many words.

Dear mom and anyone listening,
You made wastelands into forests and the smallest defini-
tion of a hut into a home with a family, hey dad you did
that too, remember?

Dear both of you and anyone listening,
But none of you grew watching our small pool get smaller
as you saw it less blue,
A little less,
Dear bro, I guess this doesn't apply to you,
Dear anyone else listening,
You didn't watch the extra hanger you put up for my
towel get half your height,

Well,
I guess you watched me in between all of that,
You see me and see a little girl and I laugh and cry and
smile and feel everything a little bit at once.
Sure you made me a day everyday, but you don't think of
all the things we grew up to,
The butterflies that hang in the house between the pillars
where we wrote.
You wrote.
our heights.
slowly watching my brother overtake this little race we
created. Yes, he wins, and yes, he gets a little smaller in
reality as our worlds get a little bigger than just us.
I love you though.
Remember when we really were each other's first person
to love and hate all at once every day?

My house was all of Auroville for the longest time, now
Auroville's the home and my house is a capsule of time
and growing up
And home and home and home.

But love, it travels and feelings do too and home is people
too.

And I'll be all this with this and more
You taught me so much more, you know?

Maybe this made you me, for moments, or feelings, or
maybe you see,
Maybe we're all home and we're all here trying to find it
in each other a little more every day.
With smaller walls in the house and different paths in our
home, but
It's us.

I hope you see.

Anonymous18, a child of Auroville



Artwork by Gauri



YouthLink website



Scan for more photos
and videos of AVYI



Artwork by Madhu Leconte

When was the last time you walked alone?
In nature, undisturbed, no worries, no phone.
Do you observe your surroundings?
See the trees, the birds, the bugs, the bees?
Or do you like to just get lost in deep thought,
enjoying the freedom, the peace, the soothing AV breeze.

What makes walking in AV so special?
Maybe the answer can be found through deep
contemplation,
Or maybe it's a random mix of constant variation, just an
ever evolving unique amalgamation.
What if walking is a form of moving meditation?

We can question endlessly...
But why bother with such pointless speculation?!
Why you love something should not be the fixation.
All that AV's nature needs is our endless appreciation :)

Bad things happen, good things happen.
Either way, we can always count on a long walk to
unwind.
Smile, admire, and leave our worries behind.

Sanata

Towards Auroville: A journey of dedication and resilience

Anjalai is an Aurovilian who has worked in Auroville for the last 50 years. She grew up in Kulilapalayam and has been living in Auroville since about 2000. She currently manages the Citadines staff and kitchen.

Ever since I was 11 years old, the idea of living in Auroville captivated my imagination. Now, at the age of 60, I reflect on the remarkable path that led me here. My journey in Auroville began when I started working as a child in Fraternity with Voldemar. My father worked as a gardener there, and while my brother had the privilege of attending school, my sisters and I were entrusted with household responsibilities from an early age, while also expected to work and earn an income. Those were the beginnings of my lifelong dedication to work and service.

In those days, I had an innate fear of Voldemar, a tall and foreign figure. Whenever I brought food for my father, I would then quickly scurry away in apprehension. Eventually, the amma who worked for Voldemar ceased to come, so he approached my mother, seeking a replacement. Instead, my mother suggested that I take up the opportunity since my father was already employed there. To equip me for the role, my mother ingeniously fashioned a small child-sized sari from an old, tattered sari.

Fraternity

Thus, armed with my makeshift working attire and bolstered by the presence of my father, I timidly presented myself at Voldemar's house. Though I did not understand a word of English, I possessed a keen ability to learn by observation. Initially assigned tasks such as cleaning, washing, and fetching water from distant sources, I adapted quickly. The concept of conserving water by using three wash basins for dishwashing, instead of running water, was a valuable lesson for me in those early days. Although I was initially slow, I soon received praise for my efforts, instilling a sense of accomplishment within me.

One day, I was offered the opportunity to learn ironing when someone was scheduled to demonstrate the skill. I eagerly embraced the chance and honed my ironing and folding techniques. Subsequently, I also took on the responsibility of collecting flowers from the garden and crafting flower mandalas for composting. On occasions when my father fell ill and couldn't tend to the garden, I stepped in, shouldering the laborious task of watering plants with heavy buckets.

However, my journey took a turn when I decided to follow my heart and marry for love, around the age of 19. It was a bold and unconventional choice, met with resistance from my parents, particularly my mother. Their objections stemmed from the lack of financial gain associated with the union. Yet, I remained steadfast in my decision, firmly believing that love was the driving force behind a successful marriage. The consequences were severe, as my entire family cut me off. For seven long years, my mother refused to speak to me, despite the proximity of our homes. Over time, however, our relationship gradually mended.

My mother's dream was for me to have a better life, to marry a wealthy man. However, material wealth didn't hold much allure for me. All I truly desired was a fulfilling life. Yet, the journey of getting married and joining my husband's family proved to be arduous. The lack of employment opportunities and scarcity of food made it even more challenging.

Utility

Eventually, I stumbled upon some work with Coco and Rakhal in Utility. They had a young child whom I took care of, in addition to my own daughter. At work, I found myself engaged in various tasks such as cleaning, doing laundry, and attending to the child's needs.

Initially, I had limited culinary skills, familiar only with basic local dishes. But with Coco's guidance, I gradually learned to prepare Western meals and salads. It was a revelation to taste salads for the first time since we never had them in the village. At first, I found them tasteless and made a face when Rakhal offered me one. However, over time, my palate adapted, and I grew to appreciate the flavours.

During lunch breaks, I used to walk back to the village from Utility. Coco and Rakhal were pleased with my dedication and hard work, which in turn made me happy. They praised my keen eye and efficiency, occasionally visiting me at home during festivals like Pongal. Their daughter affectionately called me 'mom' and we developed a warm bond.

The work never ceased. I would wake up at 4 am, attend to my own household chores, wash clothes, fetch water, and cook breakfast and lunch for my family. Then I would prepare for work, where the cycle of tasks would begin again. When evening arrived, and I returned home, the cycle resumed once more. There was no time for contemplation or any space that allowed me to even think about what my wishes, desires, likes or dislikes might be. On top of it, family complications and challenging situations frequently arose, requiring me to care for numerous relatives.

Eventually, Coco decided to leave Auroville with her daughter. They were saddened to part ways with me, particularly because the child had become attached to me. Coco kindly offered me her house, inviting me to live in Auroville. However, at that time, I was unsure about what I actually wanted to do. I found it challenging to make decisions. Additionally, I felt tied to the village because my mother and mother-in-law opposed

my departure. They relied on me for care and sustenance, fearing that if I left, there would be no one to look after them. On one occasion, my mother-in-law even resorted to crying and rolling onto the street to prevent me from leaving.

Auromodele

Then, through my husband and Rakhal, I was introduced to Louis, who was searching for an amma. Those were trying times in every aspect, including financially. There was a year when I possessed only two saris, constantly having to wash one while wearing the other.

I arrived at Louis' newly built house in Auromodele, and it required a thorough cleaning. I diligently tackled the task of



Anjalai and Genevieve

cleaning the entire house on my own. During those early days, Roger and Jacqueline resided in Pondy but would come to the Matrimandir for work and joined Louis in Auromodele for lunch. I single-handedly cooked meals for a group of 8-10 people.

As time went on, they hired a cook for dinner, which presented an opportunity for me to expand my culinary skills. A few times a week, I stayed late into the evening to learn how to prepare dinner. Then, I would return home and cook dinner for my own family, including my husband, child, mother-in-law, and sisters-in-law.

Working so tirelessly was undoubtedly challenging, but I found satisfaction in the knowledge I gained. I enjoyed the learning process and was afraid of refusing work or saying no. There was a lack of autonomy in my life, as I merely followed the instructions of my mother and husband. I rarely considered my own desires. Even when I offered food to a friend, I faced reprimand from my mother-in-law due to the strict rules and regulations that governed our lives. Life wasn't free, and I constantly navigated complex dynamics.

In the village, there was a prevailing belief that going to Auroville meant abandoning our responsibilities to care for and provide for the family. We faced opposition from various sides when it came to my desire to become an Aurovilian. The village was reluctant to lose me as their caregiver, and workplaces didn't want to lose me as a valuable worker. I encountered difficulties when inquiring at the Entry Service, as they preferred I work for an Auroville service rather than at a private household. Despite these challenges, Louis assisted me with Tamil and English classes, and I gradually improved my English skills. Eventually, I began working at Pour Tous, where I remained for many years.

Initially, I worked there for free, but later they started paying me. I earned 300 rupees a month for my part-time job at Pour Tous, in addition to the 300 rupees I received from my other job with Louis. Throughout this journey, Louis remained a steadfast supporter. When I finally decided to stop working, Jacqueline became emotional, embracing me and tearfully comparing me to a little bird spreading its wings and leaving the nest (at the time Roger and Jacqueline were also living in Auromodele and I worked for them too).

Sangamam

That's when Sangamam was constructed, initially intended as housing for workers. Louis and Roger pooled their resources, allowing me to move into the first Sangamam house with my husband, 7-year-old daughter, 5-year-old son, and father. The beginning was slow, as there was no running water, and we had to fetch water from outside. While I was incredibly happy and grateful for the change, it was also challenging. I felt afraid, particularly because there was only one house with nothing around, and thefts occurred frequently. Thieves would steal various items, including any food left out. I remember a time when I returned home from work and found no one there. Filled with fear, I climbed up a cashew tree in the darkness and waited, crying, until my father returned. I will never forget that experience. The tree felt safer than being alone in the locked house.

After a few years, funds were secured to improve the infrastructure, constructing larger houses with all the necessary facilities and water tanks. Now, Sangamam has grown into a bigger community with 12 families.

Becoming Aurovilian

To facilitate the process of becoming an Aurovilian, it was recommended that I live in another house within Auroville. There was a house available for purchase, priced at 50,000 rupees, but I didn't have the money. Eventually, a solution was found, and I moved to a better house in Sangamam under the arrangement of taking care of the place.

I made multiple attempts to continue the process of becoming an Aurovilian, revisiting the Entry Service. However, due to some negative feedback, my application remained pending for years. Finally, Mallika accompanied me to the Entry Service and inquired about the issue, emphasising the support I had received from numerous people in my aspiration to become an Aurovilian. After a long wait, I finally achieved Aurovilian status about 20 years ago. It has been challenging as I didn't receive a formal education, making it difficult to express myself in writing and effectively communicate my aspirations, thoughts and opinions.

Citadines

When Citadines started, Louis asked me to manage the kitchen. I initially doubted my ability to handle such a sizeable kitchen. I was experienced in many things, so I could take care of eight ammas and train them in various skills such as cooking and ironing. But cooking for up to 50 people per day seemed daunting. However, with the belief and support from Louis and others, I decided to give it a try. By gradually adjusting the quantities and learning to predict the food requirements, I realised it was possible to cater to the increased demand. Managing the kitchen required me to draw upon all the skills and experiences I had gained, from my time at Fraternity, to Pour Tous and beyond.

Being a team leader and taking care of the ammas presents its own set of challenges. I often find myself torn between satisfying the personal needs, requests, and salary aspirations of each amma and adhering to what is feasible and financially viable for the Citadines community. Finding a compromise that keeps everyone content is not always easy, as it involves making the most of available resources and finding a balance between individual desires and the community's overall needs.

Continuing

Now, my only wish is to continue working. I have never stopped in my life, hardly taking any time off. I want to keep serving, but I have noticed that my body is not as resilient as it once was. These managerial positions are helping to alleviate the strain. There have been instances when I experienced back pain, and the people here, like Samuel, would recognize the tension on my face and arrange for a massage from their therapist. It was incredibly touching to feel loved and cared for, reminiscent of how only my own mother could sense when something was wrong.

Once, I had the opportunity to accompany Louis and Genevieve to France for two weeks during Christmas. It was a remarkable experience to witness streets adorned with Christmas lights and to immerse myself in a different way of life, exploring new shops and encountering a whole new world. It was an emancipating experience for me. One day, Genevieve encouraged me to venture out alone. I had never done anything like that before in an unfamiliar place. So, for the first time in my life, I put on a pair of jeans, took the house keys, and ventured out alone, remembering the way to the beach and back. I even asked someone to take a photo of me. It was immensely satisfying to manage that on my own, and Louis and Genevieve were proud of me.

What strikes me right now, is that I have been working in Auroville for such a long time, consistently dedicating myself day in and day out, yet nobody ever asked about my feelings or sought to hear about my experiences. It is an honour to be asked now.

I am incredibly happy and grateful for all the help I have received from Louis and Genevieve and others. I am uncertain about what lies ahead in my life, but if my body allows it and with the blessings of The Mother and Sri Aurobindo, I will wholeheartedly continue dedicating my life to service.

In conversation with Chandra

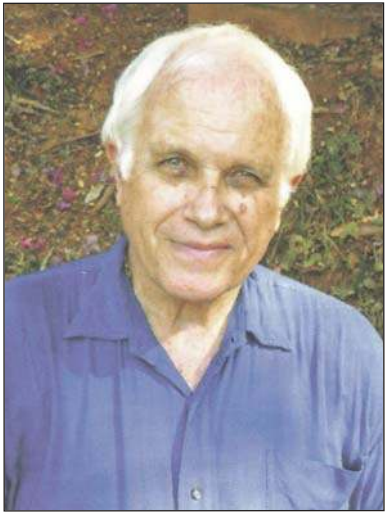
Embark— come what may

In April word spread that Frederick was seeking personal testimonies of what drew us to and kept us living in Auroville. He wrote, "In Delhi a senior friend and supporter of Auroville asked me: 'What brought you to India 60 years ago?' I narrated my story and he said: Bring me more testimonies of people in Auroville speaking from their heart, why they came, how they contributed to the growth of the City and what are their dreams. Such a collection would be a talking point in India, as people are genuinely interested in life-stories. This will open doors for you, to demonstrate that Auroville attracted people from all over the world, who gave up their past life and dedicated themselves to The Mother's Adventure: 'Embark – come what may'. Aurovilians confessed to me that writing was an interior journey to recall why they are in Auroville in spite of the present difficulties. Please take these documents as a personal statement of trust. They are addressed to Mother India, to The Mother and to Oneself. At the Service of Truth. Frederick."

There were dozens of testimonies sent in; here is a taster of some of them.

My name is Alain Bernard. I heard about Auroville in the fall of 1971. I found 'The Future of Humanity', a small compilation of texts extracted from various essays written by Sri Aurobindo. I still remember vividly the extraordinary impression these texts made on me. I was sitting in my office and kept repeating to myself, "Here is someone who speaks the Truth, here is someone who speaks of what he knows to be true from personal experience." I was in total awe that such a being had existed. I had been from my childhood quite a devout Catholic, even to the point of nearly becoming a priest. Religions speak about the 'the kingdom of God' but it is for the after-life. Sri Aurobindo simply declared that the Life Divine is the future of Earth, that it is going to happen and human beings are called upon to cooperate towards this manifestation. The Mother was made to create Auroville as one important step towards this goal.

I visited Pondicherry in the summer of 1972, applied to become Aurovillian and was accepted by the Mother. Eleven months later in mid 1973, I joined Auroville, an adventure towards creating a different world. I am still there 50 years later...



Alain

September 5, 1988, when its members unanimously passed the Auroville Foundation Bill. This scene will remain vividly etched in my memory forever. It is why, even now, when another Government has so far taken actions which for me contradict the letter and spirit of the Auroville Foundation Act, I cannot despair as I am sure another typically Indian miracle will occur and rescue the true Auroville.

After the passing of the Mother many problems arose and a majority of residents became involved in a battle with the Auroville legal sponsors who wanted to impose unwarranted controls as if they were the owners of the Auroville project, in deep contradiction with the spirit of the Auroville Charter given by the Mother. This battle with many ups and downs lasted for about 12 years.

What touched me immensely was the then Indian Government's efforts to rescue the project to the point of practically siding with a majority group of residents, including many foreigners, against an Indian society. I am sure that in any other country the Government would have just closed down the project. Deep reverence for Sri Aurobindo and The Mother kept the project alive. I was present in the gallery of the Lok Sabha on

I prefer to contribute anonymously. For what is it to tell one's own life story when all lives, even if unique, will find hundreds of thousands of life stories that are similar to theirs? The details that make a life unique are intricate and minute, woven in the fabric of time and 'coincidences', yet the essential patterns on the fabric tend to repeat themselves in the course of eternity; they might change colour or size, but the magic thread that is used is the same: that of the Divine Will.

The Divine Will with its 'push & pull' in humanity's collective consciousness where it plays 'hide & seek'. Individuals are awakened, individuals are bewildered, at loss, in despair for Justice, hungry for Beauty, seeking Peace, crying for Freedom, aspiring for brotherhood yet waging war on their own family, disoriented by the darkness they grasp for Light, drowning they call out for a saving hand that will deliver them from the Human Made Misery.

We contemplate Infinity yet we hold tightly onto futile ideas and things.

And so, when Life seems to have no meaning and the pain of the world seems to tear one's heart into pieces, and the Question becomes more urgent than anything else, a matter of life and death, then something arises from the backstage and gently reclaims its space in Life. "Will you make space for the Truth?" It asks, and if the individual answers "Yes, come what may!", well, then the journey of Discovery and Adventure begins.

I was graced in this lifetime to be called on the Great Adventure. At the age of 20, I left family and country behind, to embark, without questioning, on a journey.

Sri Aurobindo and Mother have given me a Certainty that is beyond comprehension. The happiness and joy that is there, knowing that I'm being held in their arms, is expressed with infinite gratitude each day I wake up.

Auroville expresses the finest Ideal of Sri Aurobindo and Mother, grant you, with the limitation of present-day humanity, because, let's not forget, we are humans after all, complex, stubborn, reticent, full of conditioning and traumas. I dare you to change that without the Grace of God. It is Impossible. It is indeed a Herculean task to work on human nature, but this is what I came here to do, with Their Help and my sustained and caring effort.

I have learnt that patience is essential, and so is kindness.

Society nowadays is goal oriented, worshipping 'success', disdaining failure. Yet the Real Work that humanity needs to do is that of kindling an unwavering aspiration, a burning flame where personal gain is forgotten entirely, and the only success is to be a better instrument in the hands of the Divine or, simply put, to become a kind, compassionate, creative and sincere human being, with loads of Goodwill.

To surrender and be grateful and happy because the Divine always Smiles at us even when times are dark.

If Auroville becomes an institution governed by people that have not chosen to Live here (and so can't understand Auroville in its entirety), people that are perhaps stuck in the past, in the old idea of Religion, imposing a mechanical, fabricated, artificial discipline on the collectivity, then the Auroville that was flourishing will wither.

We owe it to the Future to preserve and protect Auroville from Destructive forces, because this is what I have witnessed in the last year and a half. Wanton destruction, devoid of beauty and kindness, devoid even of common sense.

Nature, Divine Nature, the Shakti expresses itself in everything, yet we humans do hold some responsibility, we do make choices, we can make the journey hard and painful and arduous by aligning ourselves with strife, division, competition; or we can build on the foundation of real brotherhood, equality, freedom so that humanity can really flourish. This doesn't mean that the journey will not be long and arduous, but it will greatly reduce the hardship and the pain.

The destruction that I see, I hope it will awaken in us the wish to become better human beings; less greedy, less stubborn, less competitive. So that we can really build together the Auroville Sri Aurobindo and Mother intended.

I'm just a humble woman, writing to a stranger, a stranger who is my brother, my sister. A stranger who, like me, lives in the world of today and knows that Dream is essential.

Auroville is that Dream.

A Dream that runs in our veins and is a flame in our heart, no matter where on this big planet we are, no matter what our belief system is.

The Ideal of Auroville is the Ideal of Sri Aurobindo and Mother for the entire world.

My given birth name is Eric Chacra. I left France more than 11 years ago to live in Auroville. That was Eric, the person. Now, there is the consciousness that Eric is a character played by the Divine. Now, there is the consciousness that Eric has no free will by himself. Now, there is the consciousness that my true Nature is Peace and that I share this true Nature with everybody and everything. How many lives it would have taken to open my eyes if the story of Eric had unfolded in another context other than India. Gratitude, Gratitude....

Divine Consciousness brought me to Auroville, leaving my comfortable life, my family (my mother, living alone), my

friends and, there was no courage in this, it was simply 'natural, an inevitable call'. It was never a choice of Eric, only an expression of the Leela through the 'Ericness'.

Most of my money, my energy, my time go to Auroville. No courage in this.

When I stepped foot on the soil of India, there was a feeling of being at home. I feel the Life, the Energy and I enjoy so much the smiles from most people here.

Still, the specific character, the Ericness played by the Divine, is a baby



Eric

facing the most incredible challenge for humans in the collective – the Auroville ideals: Human Unity through True Collaboration and Peace upon Earth.

I pray for the Grace to never forget this.

I aspire to live in the more beautiful world our hearts know is possible. To foster the emergence of the collective intelligence.

And I can appreciate what Nisargadatta Maharaj said and eat a nice mango:

"Wisdom tells me I am nothing. Love tells me I am everything. And between the two my life flows."

Dear friend of Frederick, A letter from the heart – that is not easy – I try. It all started with that word 'Auroville'. Someone threw it into a conversation we had about life and what we would do with it. We were a mixed group of friends with kids. I registered that word 'Auroville'. My life at that time was difficult. Miraculously, that word 'Auroville' came back to me. Now my ears got big; I wanted to know what was this 'Auroville'. That friend knew a man who had lived there. We invited him to visit us. It was very different from a casual visit and quite intense. He played some music from Sunil, the musician of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, and gave an introduction to this project. We were about 20 people. After a short walk in the forest nearby, it had gotten dark, and he showed us some slides and a short movie.

That was it. I can't explain it. For me it was absolutely clear: we will go there. Whatever other people say, positive or negative. I will go there with my two daughters. The only problem was money.

Two friends of mine and a sister of one of them and I opened an account for Auroville. It took the four of us almost three years to save enough. We sold everything of any value, worked as much as possible and lived a simple life. The urge to go grew and grew. Finally we were ready to depart. Lot of drama with parents, etc – but we left. It felt so right. I knew that was it. And never regretted it.

We arrived in February 1976.

Cycling from Pondicherry along the



Melike

beach road and then the sandy path up through the village, past it, up a light slope, sweat running, a lonely palm beside the road. As I passed that one palm standing in a desert, something changed. I was still sweating and the cycle was still hard to move, but I was home.

The heat, the dust didn't matter anymore.

Everything was right, perfect. I was home forever.

That feeling never changed. Of course, there were plenty of difficulties. They were solved or disappeared. The hut we moved into was very romantic, not practical, near a noisy village and the thatched roof full of rats.

The joy of being in Auroville never left me. After we had settled in, we looked around to see what we could do for Auroville. In the fields around we found

stones with AV on them and got the information that they marked the land that was bought for Auroville. We started to plant some easy vegetables and local grains and slowly over some years built up a farm. We were no farmers – learned a lot from the villagers – and studied books about organic farming.

When we came to Auroville, about 350 people lived here. It was very different from now. No services, you did it yourself or it would not be. Your neighbours would help, and you them. It was hard work, but we were happy, joyful, enthusiastic, full of energy and never any doubt that Auroville would be what it should be.

Life changed many times. Work was done as it came along. I did all kinds of work, just what came up and I was able to do it or learned.

All that joy is not totally gone. It is still good and needed more than ever to be here and help Auroville to grow. It is not easy to keep the joy, the drive to move forward. We have our breakdowns, loss of energy and sometimes I cannot hold back the tears. Again and again we – I – try not to lose hope and trust. I am sure almost all of us feel the disharmony around us.

The good that came out is that we stick more together – do not keep in our corner and suffer. That what keeps us upright is the love for Auroville – for each other – that helps us to focus on what we have come here for.

Thank you for reading what flows from my heart.

PS: We were five persons to come here and we are all still here.

I am Gillian, Aurovilian since 1977. I came to India in 1974 from Australia. I was staying in Pondy where I lived for a year. Here I befriended a young Indian man. Every day he read a Canto of Savitri to me with a deep rich voice that penetrated into my soul, and opened me to the journey of my life.

We would walk out to Auroville quite often and slowly befriended some Aurovilians. Very soon I knew this was my true home as I felt more and more the immense embrace of the rarefied atmosphere of Auroville and felt a deep and lasting gratitude to Mother and Sri Aurobindo for creating Auroville.

In 1977 I decided to return to Australia and prepare to move to Auroville.

What do I do? I have done and do "What has to be Done."

From the beginning I became highly motivated to DO. As there was so much to be done. It was in the very beginning of the manifestation. There was a powerful feeling of movement, of drawing Auroville, the invisible city, out of a dream state onto the land.

A group of us began the cycle paths as there was an urge to be off the roads that were very dusty. I ended up the last survivor of the original small team who wanted to see them built, and to this day am still working on them.

We created a waste management system which became Ecoservice. Houses, schools and kindergartens were built. Farms were started to grow food for Auroville.

Everyone was planting trees for their garden and forests to protect the land from the burning sun.

I was drawn to working in Kuilapalayam village as there were big settlements of Auroville interspersed in that area. There were no toilets at all in the whole village and it was very unsanitary, so I built several public toilets and slowly introduced private toilet schemes funded by the local government. Then the garbage developed and added to the chaos. Nothing has really developed that has been sustainable in the village as time has shown it requires a large amount money to establish something that can last. I have developed a project waiting for funding.

Slowly over 50 years emerged a vibrant sustainable microcosm of a new society built with goodwill of the people who came with their skills and lives.

The Aurovilians have been woven together into a tapestry of care and love and faith and joy that can and will endure.



Gillian

My name is Frederick. Born in 1939 in Germany as the youngest of five children, I have vivid memories of the third Reich and the war. I have not been able to understand how Germany could become such a barbaric nation. From an early age I knew I was not part of Germany and looked for a new home.

Finally, when I was 20, I landed in India and realised I had come home. My Darshan with The Mother when I was 21 changed my life and I dedicated my life to Sri Aurobindo and The Mother. In 1966 when I finally settled in the Ashram and shortly after in Auroville, I surrendered a significant inheritance to The Mother. I became the father of the first child born in Auroville and also built the first proper house.

My work in Auroville was very varied, from creating a Tamil Fund, working with J.R.D Tata, Kireet Joshi and many other prominent figures on legal, educational, political and administrative levels.

The funding and building of Auroville became my



Frederick

life's work, and its aims as expressed in the Charter and The Dream became the meaning of my life.

No other country than India has the insight and the breadth to give shelter and foster a project like Auroville, which aspires for human unity and transcends national borders.

My gratitude to India, to Sri Aurobindo, to The Mother, to Auroville.

My name is Sandya Ingrid Andrassy. I am 64 years old, a native of Germany, and have spent the past 15 years blessedly living in Auroville. When I initially visited in 2007, on the second day, after the concentration in the Inner Chamber, I sat under the Banyan Tree and sobbed tears of joy for over an hour.

My entire being was pulsating with the profound knowledge that I had arrived home. This intuition was reaffirmed when I discovered that the force that had been with me for years was Sri Aurobindo —whom I referred to as "my Indian Jesus"—during his formative years. I was both humbled and blessed.

There were no questions or obstacles in my path to Auroville, and I received a clear call from the higher forces. A calling that required me to leave behind my loved ones, close friends, my lucrative business, and my comfortable home in the lush countryside of Bavaria. A calling that also promised to satisfy my profound urge to infuse spirituality into daily life, a place where community members hold a great desire for human unity and where the soul can be set free by turning over control to the Divine.

I worked with the bioregion during my Newcomer period, eager to learn more about India, its culture,



Sandya

and its people. I felt a strong connection to India, the country with its deep spirituality that gave me a new home and gave Auroville the space to grow and become an example for the rest of the world.

Soon after my Newcomer period, a group of friends and I were given a farm to develop, in which I eagerly invested all my savings. It enabled us to triple the farmland for producing vegetables for the community, dig water catchment ponds, build volunteer houses, and so on. After a spiritual experience with Sri Aurobindo, I felt compelled to take on more collective responsibility, which led to my

appointment to the Auroville Council.

Throughout this time, I never stopped volunteering in the community as an energy healer (working with cellular consciousness and energetic alignment to source), holistic counsellor, and life coach. My passion is also the evolution of consciousness, so I devote my energy to creating spaces for collective healing, fostering collective intelligence, and discovering new forms of natural justice and collaboration. In this field I contribute by being an executive and therapist in Holistic Healing and a therapist at Quiet Healing Center.

I've spent many years studying and contemplating Mother's symbol, the deeper meaning of the four Mother Powers, and the twelve Qualities. I am a member of several meditation groups and feel deeply connected to the Matrimandir.

I consider myself fortunate and honoured to be a part of The Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's experiment, and I am hopeful for the future of human unity. To contribute to unification and peace, I decided to participate in the current heart-weaving process, which aims to bring the community into a path of peace and harmony while honouring the entrusted task of building the city the world requires.

With a lot of gratitude in my heart.

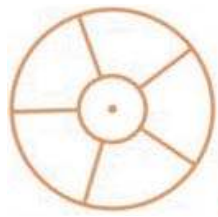
My name is Lella, a resident of Auroville originally from Italy. In the early 80s I heard for the first time about Auroville, a place where there was no circulation of money. Unbelievable! Was it possible that on earth would exist a place where people would live together and work for reasons other than money?

I travelled to Auroville a year later: strange indeed, I felt immediately at home. During that stay someone put in my hands the book by Satprem 'Sri Aurobindo or the Adventure of Consciousness'; a revelatory experience. I came to know about the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. Sri Aurobindo gave me fully satis-

factory answers to my existential questions, and thus I finally understood the meaning of my life.

Back to Italy, the 'call' was too strong to resist. I left my job, my finance, my studies at the university, to be back to Auroville in 1986, leaving a comfortable life in Italy for a precarious existence here. At times even some courage was needed. I lived for several months in a hut with a big cobra on its roof...

37 years have passed and I am still here, practising the yoga of work/action of Sri Aurobindo. I am immensely grateful to the Mother and the Master for having chosen me, and grateful to Mother India for hosting me on her sacred soil.



I arrived in Pondicherry August 7, 1969. When sitting in a chair meditating on a painting in the house of a friend in Tucson, Arizona. April 11, 1968, the painting disappeared and a face appeared and said, 'come to India now.'

The voice did not leave a name and address so I travelled slowly east to India —and finally got to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. Upon approaching the *samadhi*, I felt an inner resonance, which was even stronger in the meditation room. I met The Mother for the first time October 13, 1969 and she gave me permission to live in Auroville. I had already started working with Lisa on Aurocreation, and eventually Jocelyn Elder and others joined us and we opened the first Auroville boutique and got the first export licence. I moved to Auroville on February 28, 1970 and built my first house, Silence, on what is now the Bharat Nivas field. I put in the bore well which the Bharat Nivas compound uses till today for water. On February 28, 1971, I was sitting meditating with many others in the early morning and I heard mother



Jocelyn

tell me my work at Silence was finished. I then asked for and got permission to build a community for artists and artisans at what is now Sri Ma. When I returned from a short trip to visit my parents, I returned to the beach to find some French people living in my hut. I wrote to Mother asking her what to do —she replied, find your psychic being, try and I will help you.

I moved into my friend Ravindra's house near Bharat Nivas when he went to Bombay. Mother saw two people from Aurocreation every two months in 1972-73 —and each time I was one of the two she called. In October 1973, I went to the USA because my father was ill. When I returned in 1976, I went to live in the forest now called Silence with Gillian Chvat. I built a workshop that produced crocheted shoes, leather, beaded shoes, bags and garments. I had a unit called Amadi. I also worked with Gilles Guigan on the Auroville Resource Center, and sat on the maintenance desk from 1987-1989 when a friend invited me to California and I went. When I returned in 1990, there were other people in all the buildings I had built at Silence, so I went to live in the house John Walker was building when he died, which was then a guesthouse. After the manager's hut burned down and he left the community, I was given the house so it became my house. I did years of research in sacred art and wrote a novel, 'Antithesis of Yoga', and maintained the house and built a garden.

In October 1971, I arrived in Bombay searching for a Guide who would help me to live a more conscious life. With two friends we began visiting different Ashrams and, in January 1972, we arrived at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry. We had the grace to be received by The Mother and that put an end to my travels and my search. I had found my Guru and decided to remain in the Ashram near The Mother. I lived there for 16 years practising, as best as I could, the yoga of Sri Aurobindo while working in the Ashram schools and doing translations from the writings of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother.

Then, in 1988, we left the Ashram and went to live in Catalonia for the next three years and in October 1991 were called back to Auroville by Mother's dream: There should be somewhere on earth a place which no nation could claim as its own, where all human beings of good will who have a sincere aspiration could live freely as citizens of the world and obey one single authority, that of the supreme truth: a place of peace.... Since then, my family and I are living here.

I chose to come to Auroville to participate in the adventure of the evolution of consciousness. I wanted to be part of the transition towards the New Being of which Auroville, Mother tells us, is the cradle. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have brought down on Earth a Higher Force which will bring the human species



Aloka

a step higher. I wanted (and want) to become a tool of their Force.

I work with the body. Exploring it and becoming aware of all the possibilities has always been my way to contact the deepest in me, the way to align all the different parts of my being around the Essence, the Presence inside myself.

Since I came to Auroville, I have continued to work with my body and, through my body, to gain awareness, to expand the consciousness. With a friend of mine, we created and developed Awareness through The Body (ATB), a programme to offer tools to the children who attend the schools of Auroville, to help them discover who they really are, and thus be able to manage themselves more effectively and consciously. Since 1992, ATB is part of the curriculum of the Auroville schools. Later on we started to offer this programme to adults too, here in Auroville and elsewhere in the world.

I am in Auroville to continue my path in The Yoga of Sri Aurobindo. Here the Force for this endeavour is much more accessible than anywhere else in the world, and even in moments of difficulty, like the one we are transitioning now, the Force is always there and helps us to grow.

I am extremely grateful to Life that has brought me to The Mother and Sri Aurobindo, I am extremely grateful for the existence of Auroville, and I thank India for having made space for Auroville to be.

The view from next door

Arun Kumar (age 24) and V. Vignesh (age 22) are both Kottakarai village youth who grew up in and around Auroville. Here they share some of their experiences and perceptions of Auroville the community, the project and the Dream.

What is Auroville?

Arun Kumar: From my point of view, Auroville is the only place where so many people from so many countries are living together. It is known for its biodiversity, and recognised for promoting peace and equal rights for everybody. So, from my perspective, it is a special place that has the potential to become the future of the world.

V. Vignesh: Auroville is a centre for conscious living, humanity, spirituality and unity in diversity, but Auroville seems to be losing some of its original values as a result of its internal crisis.



Arun Kumar

Is Auroville welcoming?

Arun: In my experience, it has been a very welcoming place. Auroville welcomes all kinds of people for various purposes, such as studies, research, tourism, and those who want to become residents here.

Vignesh: Auroville is welcoming to people from elsewhere as well as to the local population, but somehow the process to join Auroville can be a little hectic.

Do you feel safe in Auroville?

Arun: I feel Auroville is one of the safest places I know, but living in a city surrounded by security measures is not necessarily comfortable. It has also become normal for outside police to enter Auroville without informing anyone..

Vignesh: I used to feel safe inside Auroville, but the current tension in the community has changed that to some extent. There is fighting, environmental destruction, and increased business activity, which doesn't feel right to me.

What impact has Auroville had on you?

Arun: I would say that Auroville has had a profound impact on me. Growing up here, I had access to excellent schooling and actively participated in sports at Dehashakti. As a young adult, I sang and acted for a number of years with the Yatra theatre group in theatre awareness programmes. And I still play ultimate frisbee with the Alphas. These and other Auroville experiences have greatly influenced my personal growth and development, and I am grateful for the opportunities Auroville has provided. On the other hand, it can be challenging to live in Auroville as an adult. Finding employment and sustaining myself has been difficult, which has had an emotional impact on me. It has made me realise that life in Auroville is not always as fulfilling as it was during my school days or when I had time for sports. The need to focus on survival and work has sometimes caused unhappiness and feelings of uncertainty. Nevertheless, I recognize that these challenges are part of the journey and can contribute to personal growth.

Vignesh: Auroville has had a positive influence on me. It has enriched my life by giving me a sense of mindfulness and community living. I have been pleasantly surprised by how easily I have been able to learn foreign languages within the Auroville setting. The education system and its focus on sports have played pivotal roles in my personal growth. Moreover, Auroville has instilled in me a profound understanding of environmental conservation, highlighting the protection of forests, water, and sustainable living practices.

What impact has Auroville had on surrounding villages?

Arun: The establishment of night schools, which provide tuition and education in all the villages, has had a positive impact on the children in the bio-region, allowing them to learn spoken English, yoga, sports skills, and more. However, some people in the bio-region believe that some of the donations and support collected for these projects hasn't always reached the intended population, so they feel dissatisfied.

Vignesh: The most significant and positive changes I see are related to child development and education (scholarships, international standards, and enhancing co-curricular skills such as sports, dance and arts). Auroville has helped with sanitation and hospital hygiene, and has participated in reducing local social disparities while promoting inclusivity and community living. The idea of living without money or religion has also been positive in my opinion. On the negative side, I think there are issues with Auroville's acquisition of local land and the way commercial business has been promoted. I think the continued social disparities between the local villages and Auroville has created an inferiority complex. I also see a lack of communication and cordial relations with the local panchayats.

Do you think Auroville creates opportunities for local communities?

Arun: I don't believe Auroville is currently creating enough opportunities for people in the bio-region. While there are various opportunities available within Auroville, they are not easily accessible to those living in the surrounding villages. The decision making processes and control over existing opportunities are primarily held by Auroville's residents, which limits the involvement of people from the area. As a result, the benefits of Auroville's initiatives and development do not fully reach the local communities. I suggest that Auroville actively reach out to the surrounding villages and inform them about the available opportunities.



V. Vignesh

Vignesh: It does create more opportunities for the local population in different fields, but people often don't know about the opportunities inside Auroville and don't know how to approach the units to find work.

What changes do you hope to see in the future?

Arun: Looking ahead, I would like to see stronger integration between Auroville and local communities, including closer collaboration, joint projects and a genuine effort to understand and address local needs. Auroville should strive to ensure that project benefits are shared more inclusively. By fostering direct connections and transparent communication, Auroville can bridge the gap and provide more meaningful opportunities.

Practically speaking, I believe Auroville has the potential to contribute much more to the local education and health care sectors. Restarting Primary Health Centres in the villages, especially those that have been affected by the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, would be a positive step. Moreover, establishing educational initiatives that support underprivileged individuals to access higher education and to meet their basic needs would be greatly beneficial.

Vignesh: Youth are the building blocks of tomorrow. I see a future where youth clubs are established in each surrounding village, creating a strong bond between Auroville children and local village children. It is crucial to raise awareness among both Auroville and bio-region youth about Auroville's purpose, significance, and role in preserving the environment, encompassing forests, water resources, hygiene, and more. Auroville should also establish platforms that offer employment opportunities and make the various workshops happening in Auroville more inclusive of the local population.

Would you be interested in joining Auroville?

Arun: Yes, I have completed my physiotherapy training and feel this will allow me to contribute something worthwhile to the community. I am in the process of becoming a Newcomer and will work at Santé as a physiotherapist.

Vignesh: Yes, I would like to join Auroville because it is a place for a more conscious and communal way of living. The education system is completely different from the Indian education system. Within Auroville, students have the opportunity to discover their life's purpose at a young age. It acts as a laboratory where individuals can explore their innermost emotions and aspirations. Additionally, Auroville provides access to worthwhile work opportunities.

Interviewed by Gwjwn (YouthLink)

Divine Love and Amazing Grace

*Few are those from whom the Grace withdraws,
but many are those who withdraw from the Grace.*

Sri Aurobindo

If vengeance and retribution have been the driving force in human history, as is so often asserted and by so many, then another force – seemingly so feeble and so rare – of love and compassion, of nobility of heart and of amazing grace runs like a warm current in the icy torrents of life. It is this force that gives meaning and substance to the idea of Divine Love and of Amazing Grace.

The tremors of uncertainty and disquiet that have shaken up Auroville over the past year and a half certainly seem to invoke the meaning, and the extent, of grace and divine love in the most existential terms.

How does one respond to certain debilitating words and actions that seem so steeped in arrogance to so many?

How does one keep a window open for a dialogue when so much is perceived by many to be brashly shut off with crass impudence?

How can one truly be “a willing servitor of the Divine Consciousness” when you are trampled in your own home by policemen in the name of ‘official protocol’ of the distant and unyielding powers-that-be?

How can those who are intoxicated with the love of power ever understand the power of love?

As I see some dark shadows engulf Auroville, I wonder where could one look for hope and certain Divine Grace, for some redeeming light that would make everyone see – far beyond one's own limited and stunted view – the special and unique grandeur of the idea and vision of Auroville in the grand human journey across the ages.

Don't we all, at some time or another in our lives, let go our own individual stance for the sake of something grander: a mother's sacrifice for her child, a seer's for his vision, a soldier's for his country, an explorer's for his mission, a seeker's for Truth?

It is thus that once I heard a psalm of hope in the words of the Russian poet Yevgeny Yevtushenko in the midst of the most devastating war in the human history. In 1941, at the age of 8, he saw a certain divine grace descending in the faces of war-ravaged women in Moscow as they came out to watch a march of 20,000 German prisoners. Each one of these women had lost a brother, or a son, or a husband to the Germans. The women saw the emaciated, blood-stained soldiers hobbling past on crutches, or leaning on each other.

“Then I saw an elderly woman in broken-down boots push herself

forward,” wrote the poet in 1962. “She went up to the column, took from inside her coat something wrapped in a colourful handkerchief, and unfolded it. It was the crust of black bread. She pushed it awkwardly into the pocket of a soldier, so exhausted that he was tottering on his feet. And now, suddenly, from every side, women were running toward the soldiers pushing into their hands bread, cigarettes, whatever they had. The soldiers were no longer enemies. They were people. They were human.”

What is the source of such ascension in the human spirit? How does such sense of oneness and human unity emanate even in the most sordid moments? In the words of 15th century weaver-sage Kabir:

*From one light all has come to be
What is good, what is bad
Are all phantoms of your own mind.*

In the midst of such seeming distance and turmoil in Auroville at present, one wonders how does one – how do we all – prepare for such grace to emanate?

How does Auroville, as one large family with members from all over the world, and India, as a hosting nation and as Vishwaguru – through her various representatives – prepare?

A fourteenth-century Indian text takes an analogy from the world of painting. Like the linen cloth on which the painting is made, the heart, the text suggests, must first be washed, and cleansed thoroughly of impurities. It must then be ‘primed’, made properly smooth, for only upon such a surface can a clear outline be drawn. With the drawing completed, the last stage follows: the colours are filled in.

Each one of us then fills in the colours in accordance with our own pratibha, our own hidden talent for grace. Or we imbibe that talent from the words and inspiration of such sages as Sri Aurobindo and The Mother.

“Nothing worth doing is completed in our lifetime; therefore, we must be saved by hope,” observed theologian Reinhold Niebuhr. “Nothing true or beautiful or good makes complete sense in any immediate context of history; therefore, we must be saved by faith. Nothing we do, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone; therefore, we are saved by love.”



Prof. Sehdev Kumar

Hope. Faith. Love.

Could these be the seeds in the ground of our being that bring forth the fruit of Grace imbued with the fragrance of Divine Love?

I believe this is how, each one of us in Auroville – as a willing servitor of the Divine Consciousness, and in celebration of the vision of human unity – must let our self-centredness go so we can learn to move, slowly but surely, towards the Centre of the Self.

It is not an easy journey for any one of us; it has, in fact, often been very arduous for me in my own endless hankerings and seekings in many lands and over many years. Yet, I believe, it is a necessary journey. A real Pilgrimage.

Empathy. Love. Grace.

Is there anyone among us who has not struggled to see the face of another as our own?

“What is done out of love,” insisted Nietzsche, “always takes place beyond good and evil.” In that penumbral region, in a certain state of grace, sometimes we are blessed to discover how, on the face of each one of us, we wear, in the illuminating words of Thomas Hardy, “but one mask of many worn by the Great Face behind.”

In the midst of such reflections, I found myself quietly speaking to the children of the City of Dawn:

O Child of this new Light,
Remember
If such a tiny seed
In such dark dingy waters
Can rise to become
Such a beautiful lotus
What might not you and I
My Love
Become in our journey
To the Sun.

Sehdev Kumar

Professor Emeritus Sehdev Kumar is author of ‘7000 Million Degrees of Freedom’ and ‘Ocean in a Drop: Verses of Weaver-Sage Kabir’. His new book, ‘Angels in Black Holes: Hope, Light & Redemption’ is expected to be published soon. In Auroville, he presents workshops on ‘Freedom from Fear’, ‘Yoga of Forgiveness’, ‘Peace Within: Peace Without’.

Deborah Lawlor

On May 2nd, Deborah Lawlor left her body in Los Angeles, California at the age of 84.

Deborah and her husband Robert started Forecomers community in 1968, where, on the barren fields and baked, eroded red laterite earth, they had built two huts, one for living quarters and one for a dance and painting studio. With a background in dance and theater, they presented a torchlit drama in the Forecomers canyons during the early years and built a check dam in the canyon by hand that was, however, soon washed out by a major cyclone. In 1972 they left Auroville for two years to recover their health, and held a summer immersion in upstate New York introducing a group of college students to the philosophy behind Auroville and taught yoga, dance, macrobiotics and organic farming.

Upon returning to Auroville, Robert researched chlorella algae as a supplement to the local diet, as well as aloe vera and experimented with earth stabilization using natural materials. Together, Robert and Deborah made a deep dive into sacred geometry, aided by their friends Andre and Goldian VandenBroeck in the US and Constance and Dhruva in Auroville. They started work on translating "The Temple of Man" by R. A. Schwaller de Lubicz from the original French with help from Lucie Lamy, de Lubicz's niece and Ehud Sperling, of Inner Traditions, who eventually published the book.

Alarmed by the revocation of the visas of Francis and Savitra by Navajata of the Sri Aurobindo Society, Robert and Deborah moved to Flinder's Island, Tasmania, with the help of Joss Brooks, in order to hold a Commonwealth country passport and allow them better access to Auroville. The ensuing years of drama between the SAS and Auroville pushed them to create a home in Tasmania and focus on their research, making occasional trips to the US to be with friends and family and participate in the Lindisfarne Association.

Bob and Deborah parted ways as a couple with Deborah moving to Los Angeles and collaborating with director Stephen Sachs in founding The Fountain Theater and holding festivals of flamenco dance. Deborah's love of flamenco and the cultivation of new flamenco artists created a lasting legacy in that community.

She and Robert returned to Auroville in 2018 for the 50th Birthday celebrations but by that time she was showing signs of memory loss due to Alzheimer's. But she was very happy to see many dear pioneer friends from Auroville's early days.

Volkher Eike Riech

On May 11th, German Aurovilian Volkher Eike Riech left his body in his Mahalakshmi Home apartment. He would have been 82 in June and had been suffering from severe rheumatoid arthritis.

Having worked as an Ocean Scientist before joining Auroville, Volkher first arrived in Auroville in '97 and became Aurovilian two years later. Being keenly interested in geological and environmental issues, he was drawn to Auroville's green work, and worked and lived during his first years in Darkali, Discipline and Aurogreen.

He then moved to Vikas and started working at the Botanical Gardens, where he initiated and maintained the centre's elaborate cactus gardens, which he kept up until health issues interfered four years ago. However, his interest remained and pretty soon Mahalakshmi Home would have its own cacti arrangements in gardens and balcony.

On May 15th, Volkher's body was buried at the Auroville Burial and Cremation grounds.

Mirajyoti Sobel

On June 3rd, Mirajyoti (Jyoti Sobel) left her body at her room at Arka at the age of 94. She had dual USA/French nationality.

Mirajyoti had a rather eventful life, about which she wrote some years ago:

"I was born on October 22, 1929, in Paris, France, from a French father and a Russian mother, and lived with my parents from 1931 to 1945 in Cambodia and Viet-Nam, while going back to the West to visit our families every two and a half years.

In September 1939, we landed in South Vietnam with the last French boat to leave France, and were 'stuck' in Indochina during WWII, including during the Japanese occupation of the country from 1942 to 1945.

In 1945, we were repatriated to France and two years later my father decided to migrate to Montreal, Canada, where I studied one year in an English high school, then 4 years at the Mc Gill University, where I graduated from in 1952 with a B.A. in English and French literature.

In 1952, I returned to France and studied at the Sorbonne, Paris, towards a final English-teaching French degree, which I did not complete because my husband was posted in French-speaking Africa, at the University of Dakar, Senegal, and we had three children from 1957 to 1960. In 1962, I went back to France, and had a divorce in 1967.

In 1973, I came for the first time to Pondicherry and the Ashram just one month after Mother had left her body. I stayed only one month but returned in October 1974 and stayed in the Ashram till 1978 when I had to leave to make money in the USA. Two years later I came back, returning for good, first to the Ashram and then, after 12 years in the Ashram, Mother 'called' me to Auroville in 2001.

My main work has been editing the Ashram's compilations of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo in French, or English, and also working on my own music compilation -- what They have said and written about music, which would be useful to music teachers of both the Ashram and Auroville. I also helped, when requested, with receiving German groups who wished to meet an Aurovilian during their stay and hear about 'The Integral Yoga', and 'Living the Integral Yoga'."

Mirajyoti's remains were buried at the Auroville Burial and Cremation grounds on June 11th.



Bernd Theilmann

On May 11th, Bernd Theilmann passed away in his home at Hermitage at the age of 74. He had been suffering from kidney failures and other physical challenges.

Before coming to Auroville, Bernd and his partner Agnes, both from Germany, stayed in Delhi from 1983 till 1989, with Bernd working as technician at the Max Mueller Bhavan. The couple then joined Auroville and assumed stewardship of the place called 'Hermitage', a large wilderness area west of Auroville, the development of which became the love of his life. Aided by his strong-willed and good-natured personality, all his energies went into the planting of lakhs of trees in his endeavour to transform the place into a paradise which, indeed, it gradually became. He was one of the dedicated green workers who added so much to Auroville's natural wealth.

Bernd's body was buried at the Auroville Burial and Cremation grounds on May 15th.



Jules Arindam

On May 23rd, Jules Arindam passed away at the age of 50 in JIPMER hospital where he had been taken some days earlier. Jules was born in Pondicherry in 1972 to Dawn (daughter of Dietra) and AuroArindam, who was one of the initiative takers of Auroville International. Jules was named by the Mother. He returned to be in his home Auroville in 2019.

Padmanaban

Patha (Padmanaban Erichappan) of Fraternity passed away at JIPMER in the morning of May 30th where he had been taken due to liver failure. He would have been 55 this year.

Born in Kulapalayam, with a quick and alert nature, Patha started working at the age of 20 at Aquadyn where he readily picked up on networking and other electronic activities. In 1991 he joined Aurelec as technical assistant to be soon promoted as service engineer, and remained working there, off and on, in various functions under various ADPS-based units till 2018.

Patha's remains were cremated on May 31st at the Auroville Burial and Cremation grounds.

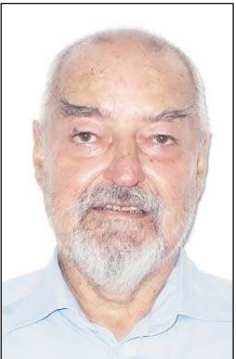


Leonard Meakin

Leonard Anthony Meakin, better known as Tony, left his body at his Sincerity apartment on June 17. He would have been 86 in a few days' time.

Having come from UK with his wife Marion in 2014, he became Aurovilian in 2016, while working at Matrimandir at the time. Due to gradually developing Parkinson's disease, in later years he mainly moved around with his wife Marion. When the latter passed away a year ago, Tony's health too steadily deteriorated.

Tony's remains were cremated at the Auroville Burial and Cremation grounds on June 20th.



Gowri Raman

On June 5th, Gowri Raman of Service Farm (next to the Promesse community) passed away in JIPMER hospital due to kidney failure at the young age of 48. Having been on dialysis for the last 4 years, a week ago her situation worsened and she was taken to JIPMER.

Gowri was one of the bright and hard-working Aurovilians who will be missed at her various working places. She was born in Douceur (earlier known as Udayan community) and had four sisters Lakshmi, Kala, Vishwa and Rajeswari. She followed her education at Transition and Last School after which she worked and learned about farming at Discipline Farm. Later she became part of the Farm Group and Foodlink and actively ran the Service Farm for several years. Gowri was married to Raman (earlier of Land Board) and has two children,

Gowri's remains were cremated at the Auroville Burial and Cremation grounds on June 6th.

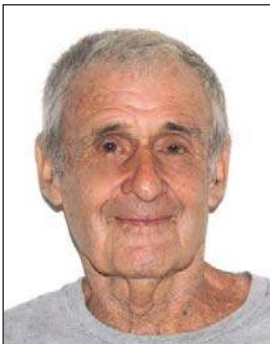


David Nagel

David Nagel passed away in his Aurodam home on June 23rd. He had been struggling with health issues since a number of years, and had just this year become 80.

Hailing from Brooklyn, USA, David came to Auroville in 1976 along with his brother Larry. He had the required 'wackiness', passion and the ability to work in diverse fields that was the need and hallmark of the early pioneering years of establishing Auroville.

After running the Nourishment restaurant in Pondicherry on rue Lally Tollendal, later known as 'La Maison d'Auroville', a place to eat, rest and recuperate for Aurovilians doing errands in Pondy before cycling back to Auroville, he ran the Bharat Nivas Kitchen, providing

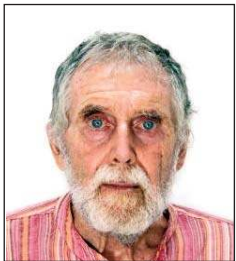


school lunches to generations of Auroville's children.

From 1978 onwards, David immersed himself in afforestation work which became his passion for the rest of his life. He must have planted thousands of trees, provided seedlings from his Aurodam nursery to many foresting people and places, and assisted greening efforts in many places outside Auroville such as the Palani Hills and on village land near the Madras Crocodile Bank together with the Irula Women's Society. He taught how to raise nurseries with thou-

sands of trees and then how to plant and care for them. His greening efforts are a visible legacy for the future. He can be heard speaking about his work at <https://youtu.be/5lnpNzfj2yY&t=8m24s.s>

The cremation of his remains took place at Auroville's Cremation Grounds in the afternoon of Tuesday June 27th.



Mallika

On June 24th, Mallika left her body at the age of 86. Mallika (Claude Leandre) was born in French Guyana in 1936. She grew up in France, living and working there until a chance viewing of a television program featuring Auroville called her to come and join in the "adventure of consciousness". In 1973, she made the journey to Pondicherry and Auroville with her two young children, and taught French at both Auroville and the Ashram School for over a decade.

Officially joining Auroville in 1986, Mallika pursued studies in a variety of healing arts. With her ever-deepening exploration of the Integral Yoga and her special talent for quietly working on the subtle level, Mallika's treatments benefitted countless Aurovilians over five decades.



Her dedication to Mother and Sri Aurobindo's concepts of integral healing also made Mallika a valuable contributor to the establishment and development of various projects in Auroville's health and healing sector, including Vérité, Quiet and Santé.

Mallika took a keen interest in the development of Matrimandir, supporting and participating in different aspects of work there over the years. She also maintained close connections at the Ashram, and always helped coordinate the Darshan day visits and tokens for Aurovilians.

Mallika's other great love was for her children, Pascal, Abhipsa, and Subhadre, and their families. She delighted in being able to be actively engaged with her Auroville grandchildren, and also devoted herself to keeping a strong energetic bond with her family outside of Auroville.

Mallika's small physical stature belied a huge spirit, full of youthful zest, humor, intelligence and care for the world and its future. Bon voyage to a remarkable woman whose presence will be greatly missed.

Mallika's remains were cremated at the Auroville Burial and Cremation grounds on July 1st.

Mallika gave an insight in her life in the article 'My life in Auroville at the Service of Truth' which has been published on page 5 of this issue.

Scorching summer

In May and June, the Indian Meteorological Department recorded temperatures in parts of Tamil Nadu of 2 to 3°C above normal. Temperatures were in the range 35°C to 41°C.

Unexpected rains

The early weeks of May brought unexpected rains that broke all records. Normally, at this time of the year, Auroville is lucky to get a 5- or 10-minute thunder shower, which will cool off the evening and water the surface of the ground. This year, Auroville received over 15 cm of rain in the first two weeks, three times the average expected – a mini monsoon. The effect was great: the summer blooms of the trees and shrubs filled the air with rich fragrances.

Leave India

On June 19th, an Aurovilian who has been residing and actively contributing to the community for more than 34 years, was informed by the Foreigners Regional Registration Officer in Chennai that the Secretary, Auroville Foundation, had revoked his visa recommendation. He was not shown the letter from the Secretary and no reasons were given. Due to this he was issued an Exit Permit and told he must leave the country before or on the 1st of July. The RA-WCom informed the community that “all possible actions are being explored to address this deeply disturbing escalation in the current crisis we have been experiencing for almost 2 years” and invited everyone “to invoke the power of the Mother to guide us through these difficult times.”

Monitoring plantation programmes

The Auroville Botanical Garden reported that it is now involved in the scientific monitoring of their plantation programmes. Supported by the Ramco group, Ecosia, and the Franklin Foundation through a Botanical Gardens Conservation International project, they have completed the first of this year's surveys to check the health and growth of its plantations planted in and around the bio region in colleges, schools and government compounds, as well as within the green belt areas of Auroville.

Planting a coastal forest

The Auroville Botanical Garden has completed the coastal zone plantation programme of a 50 acre site, recreating a coastal forest with local plants adapted to the sandy and salt conditions. Ongoing work focuses now on nurturing the trees and shrubs through the heat of summer, intensified by the surrounding hot sand which is yet to be shaded, which will happen over the next 2 to 3 years as the forest grows and the canopy closes. The firm of Hidesign, owner of the plot, is championing this work and sharing it widely on their social media channel.

Land purchase

Two plots of lands of in total 2.2 acres, north of Certitude and bordering Parthna community, have been bought at a cost of more than 1.77 crore per acre, resulting in an increase in land purchase prices.

New email system: @auroville.community

As the security and accessibility of the @auroville.org.in email system has been compromised for a year, the Working Committee of the Residents' Assembly (RA-WCom) has invited all Aurovilians, Newcomers and Friends of Auroville to join a new workspace and email system @auroville.community. “We believe that free, private and accessible communication is a prerequisite to any form of community-led development,” wrote the RA-WCom. “The management of this domain will remain a-political, and no other domains will be blacklisted in an attempt to censor dissenting opinions. Our administrators are known and trusted members of the community who have signed Non-Disclosure Agreements to protect the privacy of users. We trust this is a needed step in allowing our community to regain its autonomy in communication, and continue to move closer to its original ideals and aspiration, as envisioned by the Mother.” The system can integrate existing @auroville.org.in, @gmail.com or other email IDs.'

Residents' Assembly Service (RAS) takeover

The Foundation Office approved Working Committee (FO-WCom) informed the community that a new Residents' Assembly Service (RAS) has been appointed through an Office Order issued by the Office of the Secretary. The RAS appointed by the community was locked out of its office, as the door lock had been changed by the Town Hall management staff after normal office hours. The RA-WCom subsequently issued a statement that the office order is inappropriate as the RAS is an internal facilitation body for the Residents' Assembly (RA) and the Office of the Secretary has no role to play in selecting or appointing members of an internal service of the Residents' Assembly. The RA-WCom stated that the act of changing the locks is one more example of the disrespect of the Auroville Foundation office for the wider body of residents. Meanwhile, a police complaint has been filed as well as a petition at the Madras High Court to quash (nullify/cancel) this Office Order.

Prosperity experiment launched

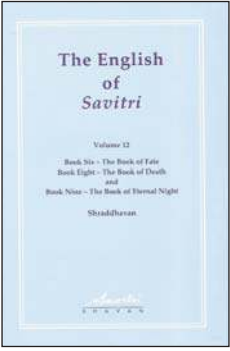
The FO appointed Funds & Assets Management Committee (FO-FAMC) and Prosperity Services have jointly launched a Prosperity experiment for a three month period. A group of around 100 Aurovilians and Newcomers of various nationalities, backgrounds and family situations will do a practical experiment to follow Mother's guidelines as expressed in Her Dream. The results will be published and analysed to improve the proposal.

Entry Board needs mentors

The Entry Board has called on Aurovilians to serve as mentors for Newcomers. Mentors are responsible for supporting the Newcomers by helping them integrate into the life of the Auroville community and its ideals and are the bridge between Newcomers and the Entry Secretariat and the Entry Board. Many applicants are waiting to start their Newcomer process, but the Entry

Board is unable to take them in due to either unavailability or unwillingness of mentors.

The English of Savitri XII



The twelfth and concluding volume of the series *The English of Savitri* was released by Dr. Alok Pandey on June 4th, Shradhdhavan's birthday. The transcription of this last volume had been corrected and edited by Shradhdhavan herself during her lifetime. She considered the series her life's work. This volume contains commentaries on *Book Six: The Book of Fate; Book Eight: The Book of Death; and Book Nine: The Journey in Eternal Night of Sri Aurobindo's Savitri*.

New Prosperity Model (Housing)

The FO-FAMC announced that it is proposing a new housing facility 'Prosperity model' “so that every working Aurovilian will be able to have a house in Auroville”. The model proposes a monthly donation instead of a lumpsum donation, which would eliminate the old method of market valuation of an asset for a house transfer. The funds so collected would be used to support Auroville's housing assets and include the costs of house repairs, panchayat taxes, annual survey of all buildings, repatriation costs and costs of administration for the housing team maintenance and staff. The GB-FAMC estimates that monthly donations would be required for a 7 year period (small houses @ Rs 6 lakhs for singles and couples Rs 7,200/month; medium houses @ Rs 9 lakhs for a couple and a child Rs 10,700/month; and larger houses @ Rs 12 lakhs for a couple and children Rs14,300/ month.) The FO-FAMC believes that “this modality allows for progressively moving all housing assets and also new collective housing projects to be fairly supported for all and maintained adequately without undue burden.”

AVSST concerns

The Auroville Safety And Security Team (AVSST) informed the community that as it did not receive any information or notice regarding the recently circulated Office Order issued by the Office of the Secretary of the Auroville Foundation, which seems to include a change of executives and team members for this service, the AVSST team will continue its work. It will be temporarily focusing the scope of its services on managing the guards currently employed and the volunteer patrols; managing the check-posts and other entrance points and junctions; managing vehicle access and requests; responding to incidents of thefts, harassment, and unwelcome presence; providing administrative assistance for birth and death certificates, police complaints, police verification reports, passport verification; and

escorting external ambulances, fire department, police etc. to the locations of incidents as and when needed. As its email addresses @auroville.org.in have been disabled since 14.04.2023 and as it is an emergency service, AVSST has created a temporary email address: aurovillesafetyteam@gmail.com.

Alleged non-compliance with NGT judgement

The Town Development Council appointed by the Residents' Assembly (RA-TDC) informed the community that over the past months it has sent out letters to the Auroville Foundation Secretary, the Central Public Works Department (CPWD) and the GB appointed Town Development Council (GB-ATDC) regarding non-compliance with the National Green Tribunal judgement as it considers that works being done along the Crown Road and in other places in Auroville disregard the NGT judgement. A legal notice alleging contempt of court has been served on the Auroville Foundation, the persons involved and the CPWD.

Before passing

The RA-WCom has advised all Aurovilians to plan ahead and make a living will in the event that one is unable to communicate one's wishes when medical care is needed. Auroville's Farewell Team has a form to fill out which states what has to be done with one's physical body. The RA-WCom also advises making a testament which should cover what to do with one's money in one's Financial Service account – should it go to a person or be donated to a specified project or for unspecified use in Auroville; what to do with specific personal movable belongings (can one's books go to the AV library and one's clothes to the Freestore and can your friends choose keepsakes and mementos); who will do the clearing of your house; and if there are bank accounts in India, who is nominated to access the account(s). If there are other assets in India, it is recommended to make a testament with a local notary. Foreign nationals are advised to contact a local expert or the relevant diplomatic mission for advice how to regulate one's possessions abroad, as every country has different regulations regarding legacy. In certain situations, testaments are needed, in others not. The RA-WCom also advised to include a 'digital will', e.g. to state what is to happen with everything that is online, including all social media, all photos as well as all documents on one's computer(s), mobile phone(s) and other electronic devices. Lastly, the WCom advises to clean out one's very personal belongings and and provide notes for an obituary or write one's own.

Register of Residents

The accounts officer of the Auroville Foundation informed the community that the Register of Residents “will become the official central database repository that will provide linkage to all information pertaining to Auroville residents, place of work and other working groups”, and that “all persons to be entered into the Register of Residents will provide a <name>@auroville.org.in official contact email only.

@auroville.org.in

The accounts officer of the Auroville Foundation informed the community that “all residents when contacting any working groups for work related queries will use their <name>@auroville.org.in email address in order to have a proper response and have it archived for future reference” and that “all trustees, units, services managers are to only use <name-entity>@auroville.org.in to correspond with other Auroville entities within Auroville or other outside entities” and that “all communication with regard to their work should be using the email address domain auroville.org.in as “this allows for proper communication and archival needs.” The RA-WCom responded to this announcement stating that the @auroville.org.in email service, which was created years ago by Aurovilians as a service to all Aurovilians and Auroville organisations and which has been used for personal, administrative and professional purposes within and out of Auroville, has for more than a year now been under the full control of persons whose identities, roles, powers and intentions have not been communicated publicly, even after multiple requests to do so. These persons can technically do anything to emails addressed to or coming from this domain: read, modify, delete, impersonate or block deliveries and receipts, including all the history, in targeted, manual, or mass automated operations. There is no protection against abuse nor any guarantee that the right to privacy is protected. Consequently, many users have decided to use other email providers, which follow due legal requirements and have clear contracts with their users. The RA-WCom objects that only @auroville.org.in email addresses should be used for all emails within Auroville and that some people have been threatened with being dismissed from their work and responsibilities if they do not exclusively use the @auroville.org.in. Given the opacity of the auroville.org.in service, this is not acceptable.

Kalabhumi borewell

The FO appointed Town Development Council (FO-ATDC) has been served a legal notice in response to its email to users of the Kalabhumi borewell, which includes the residents, the Music Studio, CRIPA hall and Aurofilm. The FO-ATDC had stated that the ATDC is a committee of the Governing Board under Section 16 of the AVF Act; that the detailed plans for the Crown are not meant for scrutiny by the residents of Auroville; that Kalabhumi borewell has to be closed, regardless of its efficiency or yield, due to the fact that the borewell will be buried under the concrete storm water channels on the side of the Crown Road; that the ATDC will seek funds from the GOI for the main water lines; and that users will no longer have to maintain the infrastructure but will have to pay for the cost of networking, water meter and related installations, including cost of labour as well as a monthly water tariff. The legal notice challenges each of these statements and requests that no further steps to cover up the Kalabhumi well be taken. It warns that any illegal activity carried out by the FO-ATDC in the context of the Kalabhumi well shall be dealt in accordance with the law.

About Auroville Today

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