

Auroville Today

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Auroville's monthly news magazine since 1988

Auroville's spirituality

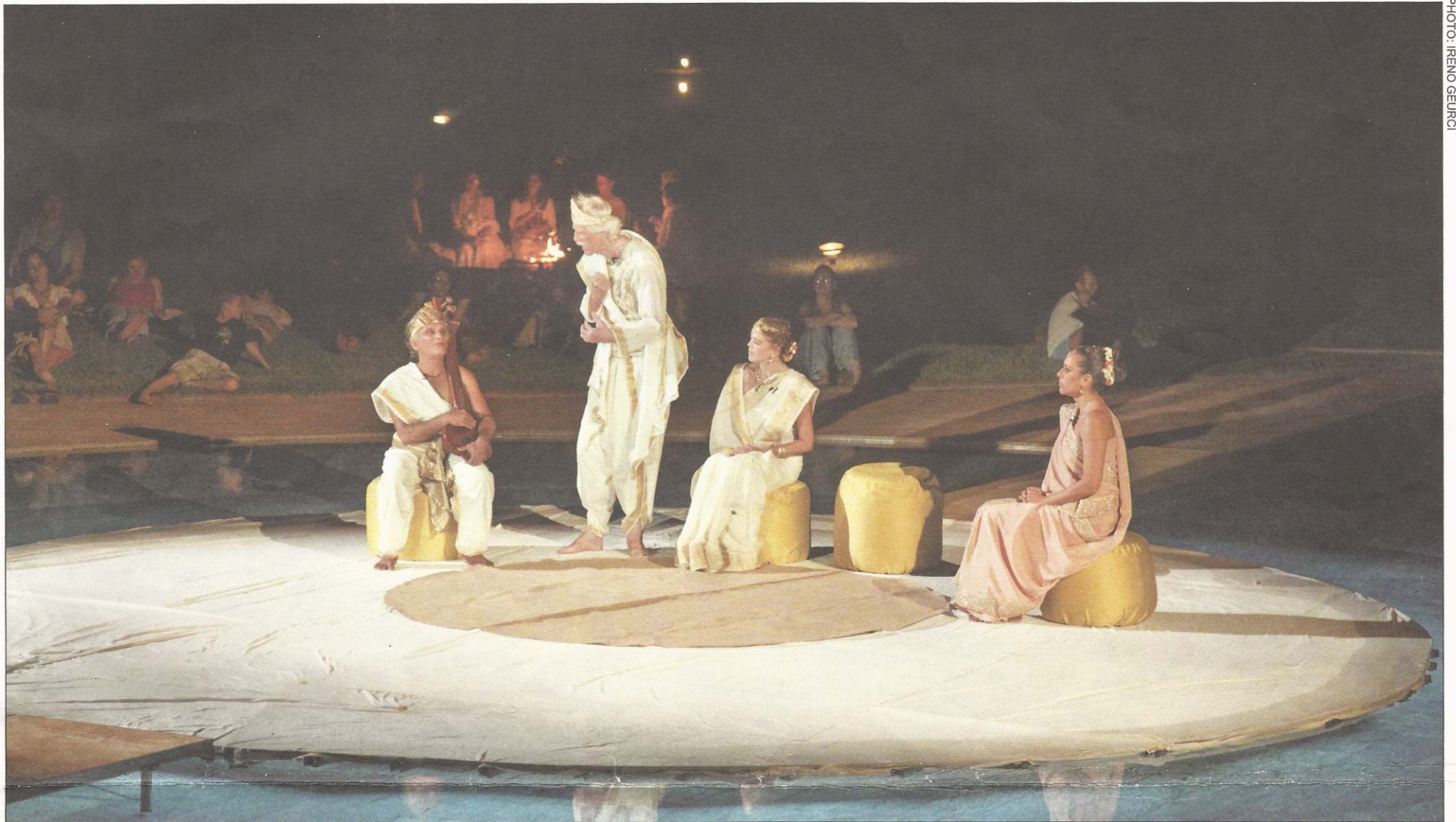


PHOTO: IRENO GEURCI

King Aswapati (standing) discusses the fate of Savitri with Narad, the heavenly messenger, while the Queen and Savitri look on

Auroville is created to realize the ideal of Sri Aurobindo who taught us the Karma Yoga. Auroville is for those who want to do the Yoga of work. To live in Auroville, means to do the Yoga of work. So all Aurovilians must take up a work and do it as Yoga.

The Mother's last message on Auroville

Are Aurovilians spiritual? Some Aurovilians are clear about this. "Whenever I talk to people, I have the impression they increasingly are," says Shraddhavan. "I see a collection of beautiful souls and Auroville as a beautiful garden that is coming up," says Ashesh. "I see more and more people trying to make a difference from an inner perspective," says Manoj. "There is a growing thirst. People are taking yoga seriously."

The question is often asked by outsiders who have difficulty understanding what Auroville is all about. Many are aware of Auroville's outreach work, but few understand the peculiarities of its spirituality. There are no mandatory spiritual group practices, such as collective meditations or devotional chanting. And joining Auroville's Hatha Yoga classes is done for maintaining good health, rather than for following a spiritual path.

"It's in everyday life that we have to find the Divine," says Shraddhavan. "That is the great work that Auroville is trying to do."

To our readers

This issue of Auroville Today is, unexpectedly, a double issue, as due to a death in the family of one of the editors, the August issue could not appear as usual. We submit our apologies.

The editors

Aurovilians are asked to do their work as Karma Yoga, where the attitude in which something is done, the inherent spirit of offering, makes it yoga. And that attitude is mostly invisible. It is a natural outflow of what Mother called 'the inner discovery' – 'the light within that never wavers, the presence which can guide you with certitude' – which, she said in a conversation with early Aurovilians, 'ideally should have been made before coming here'."

Does Auroville have such people?

"There are many Aurovilians who have that psychic quality and who are in the process of organizing themselves around their inner being," says Ashesh. He has been seeing the change ever since he joined Auroville eight years ago. "It is as if every few weeks a new feature is being added to Auroville, very much like a beautiful garden where a new flower opens. Auroville is growing by the blossoming of people in various activities and relations."

Shraddhavan concurs. "There is a solid core of people who know what Auroville is for and why they are living and working for Auroville. They accept the difficult climate, the limited level of comfort, the daily challenges and material obstacles, because they are inwardly-driven."

Yet, for many Auroville observers this inward dedication is not so evident. The lack of outer progress because of difference of viewpoints is notorious. "In Auroville," said a member of Auroville's Governing Board some years ago, "when you want to do something there is

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Scenes from Sri Aurobindo's Savitri

On August 16th and 17th, there was a theatre presentation of *Scenes from Sri Aurobindo's Savitri* in the small amphitheatre in the Unity Garden, close to the Matrimandir and the Banyan. Three key moments from the poem were focussed upon – the meeting of Savitri and Satyavan, Narad's revelation that Satyavan would soon die, and the dialogue between Savitri and Death. At certain times, a narrator explained the deeper significance of the characters and the story and linked the episodes.

Dramatising this epic poem is, of course, hugely ambitious. Nevertheless, there have been many attempts to perform *Savitri* in Auroville, through dance, recitation and music.

In many respects, this latest performance was the most successful. Partly this was due to the magical setting of the Unity Garden amphitheatre, with the illumined pond becoming a stage and the Banyan and the Matrimandir brooding behind in the darkness. Partly it was to do with the staging itself – the background chanting of the mantra, the simple, classical costumes that evoked ancient times and eternal spaces, the austere lighting and the unaffected acting.

In fact, everything was designed to focus upon and exemplify the language of Sri Aurobindo. In this, it was very successful. As the great lines rang out through the darkness, I don't think I have ever experienced so strongly the collision of quotidian concerns with that of a higher destiny, nor the reality of the great Forces that stand behind and are being played out behind our transient lives. In this context, it

is important to remember what Sri Aurobindo wrote about *Savitri*: "The characters are not personified qualities, but incarnations of living and conscious Forces with whom we can enter into concrete touch".

The dialogue with Death, in particular, was a triumph. As the menacingly hooded figure of Death pursued Satyavan's soul round and round the amphitheatre, so Savitri followed Death, steadfastly refusing Death's nihilism and the calls for her to accede to an ineluctable Fate. Finally, Death challenges Savitri to reveal her Power, to show the Mighty Mother's face. When she does, in a magnificent coup de theatre Death takes off the black-cowled robe to reveal a beautiful robe of gold. The god within stands revealed.

As Savitri and Satyavan disappear into the darkness, hand-in-hand on their way back to earth, the chant of the *Savitri* mantra swelled, then gradually faded away. For a long time, nobody in the audience moved. Then quietly, inwardly, we made our way to the Matrimandir gate, immensely moved by the evening's performance.

It seems unfair to single out individuals from such a fine overall performance, but Anandamayi was a superb Savitri, poised and articulate in her determination to defy Fate, and Srimoyi was a magnificently menacing figure of Death. Above all, Aryamani, the Director, did a wonderful job in selecting key passages from *Savitri*, and then finding ways to illustrate them that evoked the epic nature of the material without falling into the trap of empty stylization or bluster.

Alan

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Personal Copy

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Auroville's spirituality



Shraddhavan taking a class at the Savitri Bhavan amphitheatre

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always somebody who disagrees and opposes you. At any moment the best work gets stalled because someone has a fight with someone else."

If people are inwardly-driven, how is it that harmony appears so distant?

"It all depends on the level of consciousness," says Ashesh. "In the absence of the inner experience and realization, we try to find harmony through outer means, by talking to each other, by pushing people to do things or demanding things from people. That is the mental-vital attitude. An inward turn would change this."

If you are able to step back from the surface moments and allow a deeper level of consciousness to emerge, life gets a completely different dimension. The vision which finds fault and expresses itself in a primarily negative way is contrary to the psychic vision. The psychic vision invokes positive responses from the other person and from the group. It has the capacity to visualize the positive and the beautiful in the person and then build on it. If this vision is realized to a larger degree by more people, our communications will be much more positive and creative."

Education in consciousness

The fourth point of Auroville's Charter says that 'Auroville will be a site of material and spiritual researches for a living embodiment of an actual Human Unity'. "We are known to be doing a lot on the level of outer material research. It is less known that the inner research has also started," says Manoj. "For example, an increasing number of Aurovilians are attending workshops to learn about inner development, meeting techniques and how to deepen personal interactions. That has an immediate effect on individuals' interactions." He mentions the recent experience of the Working Committee, which reported in a General Meeting about a difficulty amongst its members which was resolved after they jointly meditated in the Matrimandir. "If a group has difficulty in collective decision-making, experiences a disturbed meeting, or when there are difficulties between its members, the willingness should be there to introspect on what went wrong and how it can be amended. The members should try and understand why certain meetings suddenly open up and give energy to all

present, while other meetings are extremely frustrating. That would give clarity on how to transform the difficulties."

The Auroville Retreat held in March [see *AVToday* # 309, April 2015] underlined the need for education in consciousness. The overall goals of the Education Action Group, created in its wake, are to build Auroville "into a learning society of constant progress guided by the emergence of the psychic being" and "a unified integral youth education aiming to include dignity of all work as a means for inner and outer research and discovery." One of its milestones is "to understand with awakened discernment what integrality means in Sri Aurobindo's perspective – each and every plane of the universal manifestation (seven-fold); the development of the psychic being towards oneness."

Education in consciousness is offered by many people from outside who are coming to Auroville to give workshops [see: *The Workshop Wave in AVToday* # 295, February 2014]. Yet, Shraddhavan is not impressed. "For all the good they may be bringing, most of these workshops have little to do with the *raison d'être* of Auroville. For many, it is just a commercial venture," she says. Ashesh agrees. "Much of what they teach was first introduced by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. They were the main contributors of these new features of life, based on the inner experience of oneness and harmony. If you have studied their work, you won't find much new in these workshops." Manoj points at the risks of confusion. "The tools from outside bring with them different reference systems, processes and terminology that can cause a great deal of confusion. A Vipassana retreat, for example, is not compatible with Sri Aurobindo's yoga as it negates the dynamic side and does not include the development of matter."

"Auroville has been created as a place for the implementation of Sri Aurobindo's vision and Aurovilians should know what that vision is," says Shraddhavan. "That's why we created Savitri Bhavan". Its present focus is on Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* and *The Life Divine*, but classes are also given on other topics such as his social and political writings, on his books *The Future Poetry* and *Essays on the Gita*, and on the writings of The Mother. Classes are free and well-attended. An introduction to the vision of Sri

Aurobindo and The Mother is now part of Auroville's Newcomer orientation programme. "It should include an introduction to Sri Aurobindo's *The Foundations of Indian Culture*, to show the tremendous gift India has given to the world, as well as allowing Auroville to happen," says Shraddhavan.

In fact, everybody who comes to Auroville for a visit, for joining a course or for an internship or volunteering, should know about Auroville's ideals and aspirations. The exhibitions and videos at the Visitors' Centre and at Savitri Bhavan are a help. "But I am also urging the organizers of all educational programmes held in Auroville, regardless of the topic they deal with, to include at least one hour of introduction to the spiritual background of Auroville," says Shraddhavan. "People should know what is different about Auroville."

The Auroville schools

But she is concerned that many of Auroville's youngsters hardly know about Sri Aurobindo and The Mother and that most of the Auroville schools do not communicate anything of their vision. "I am aware that they do not want to indoctrinate the children. But when these children grow up and meet others who know about Sri Aurobindo, they suddenly find they know nothing and are often upset that they haven't been taught. It is essential that they should know something." Savitri Bhavan has a standing offer to all Auroville schools and outreach schools to help develop tailor-made programmes for their students. It is slowly bearing fruit. Deepanam primary school came with a group last August and in February this year, around Mother's birthday, Transition School organized an introduction for the 10-year olds. But a sustained education in aspects of their vision is only happening at Last School, which has a limited outreach.

"I often compare the education system of Auroville with that of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram," says Ashesh. "At the Ashram there is emphasis on the direct study of the works of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, and from childhood a psychic attitude is being cultivated towards the masters. But compared to Auroville, the richness, the wide embrace of life, is lacking. In future, the systems may incorporate parts of each other. I do hope that in Auroville their works will become

part of the curriculum. For that brings a different dimension to individual and collective life. If people study more, they can contribute so much more to the future."

Creating tools for understanding

More Aurovilians than is usually realized have published books on spiritual issues. The late Georges van Vrekhem's voluminous output of books on Sri Aurobindo and The Mother is well known. Joan and Aloka published *Awareness through the Body*, a pioneering work on body consciousness. Shraddhavan has been making substantial contributions to explicating *Savitri* and *The Life Divine*. Rod Hemsell has written on *The Life Divine*, and various anthologies of recollections of people meeting The Mother have appeared. Two videos on Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga have been released. The works of Auroville's poets – Meenakshi, Rod,

Shraddhavan, Roger, Anu, Noel, Lloyd, Abha, Alan, to mention a few – all reflect spirituality. Santé, the Integral Health Institute, has opened its doors, aspiring to look at the healing of the body in connection to spiritual psychology. In brief, Auroville is

and the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. The courses are now in their third year." In parallel, he is investigating the pedagogy of transformational practices.

"The demand for introspective education is increasing," says Newcomer Sheba, whose work in offering leadership courses all over India together with Newcomer Leena, is now taking off from Auroville. "They include quite a lot of personal reflection, looking at one's self and one's leadership style, understanding how people see you and to what extent you are motivating them. Many senior leaders in industry talk about 'legacy', what they intend to leave behind to the next generation. This includes their motivation to do business, which is often on an inner level. In these discussions spirituality always comes up. But I only talk about Sri Aurobindo when asked – I use words such as 'connectedness' or 'linking to the source', as the word 'spirituality' has become something of a jargon for some people. But the fact that I come from Auroville has a big impact – many people say that they want to come to Auroville. They all have heard about it."

"More and more people are coming to Auroville to learn about Sri Aurobindo's and The Mother's vision. I would like to see Auroville developing like Taxila or Nalanda, India's ancient centres of learning, and becoming a world university where one can learn about practical spirituality," says Manoj. "Sri Aurobindo's and The Mother's framework is so comprehensive, there

Spirituality is not a high intellectuality, not idealism, not an ethical turn of mind or moral purity and austerity, not religiosity or an ardent and exalted emotional fervour, not even a compound of all these excellent things; a mental belief, creed or faith, an emotional aspiration, a regulation of conduct according to a religious or ethical formula are not spiritual achievement and experience. ... Spirituality is in its essence an awakening to the inner reality of our being, to a spirit, self, soul which is other than our mind, life and body, an inner aspiration to know, to feel, to be that, to enter into contact with the greater Reality beyond and pervading the universe which inhabits also our own being, to be in communion with It and union with It, and a turning, a conversion, a transformation of our whole being as a result of the aspiration, the contact, the union, a growth or waking into a new becoming or new being, a new self, a new nature.

Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, Book 2, pp. 889-90

The Mother, in describing the nature of a true Aurovilian, said the first step is "the inner discovery by which one learns who one really is behind the social, moral, cultural, racial and hereditary appearances" and the discovery that "at the centre there is a being, free, wide and knowing, who awaits our discovery and who ought to become the acting centre of our being and our life in Auroville."

For there is a starting-point: "When you have found within yourself the light that never wavers, the presence which can guide you with certainty, then you become aware that constantly, in everything that happens, there is something to be learnt, and that in the present state of matter there is always a progress to be made. That is how one should come, eager to find out at every minute the progress to be made. To have a life that wants to grow and perfect itself, that is what the collective ideal of Auroville should be: "A life that wants to grow and perfect itself", and above all, not in the same way for everyone – each one in his own way.

The Mother

becoming a hub for spiritual research, attempting to find ways to communicate the higher laws of the spirit in everyday life.

Sharing the Vision outside

But are Aurovilians teaching spirituality outside? This outreach is beginning as well. Shraddhavan has been giving *Savitri* classes and Ashesh has been teaching about Sri Aurobindo's and The Mother's yoga in some countries in Europe and in the USA. Manoj is part of the Telos team (www.telos.org.in), providing courses on self-awareness and integral *Karma Yoga* at the Indian Institute of Technology, Chennai. "It's a semester course, an elective which students and faculty members of all branches can attend. It includes a visit to Auroville

is nothing which comes close to it. There is an enormous potential, and there is now an enormous demand."

"Auroville is a place with a purpose, and to the degree we are able to manifest that, we can share that with the world," says Ashesh. "And we are helped. There is something in Auroville which is very psychic, something very intimate. The Mother has put a force here and many people who come here feel that. I believe Auroville is a specially-chosen and charged place where people are being prepared for something – a collection of souls with a very special mission in the world – even if their outward personalities show little to indicate this. A distinct psychic Auroville is being developed."

Carel

A testimony to stubborn persistence

Watching YouTube is often vexing. Downloading is slow, the wheel appears time and again and much fun fades in the waiting. Auroville's telephone-based internet of 700-odd lines is limited in capacity and unsuitable for high speed internet access. "The official requirement is 2 Mbps [Megabits per second], but if you live far away from a BSNL telephone exchange, the reality is 256 Kbps [Kilobits per second]," says Chandresh. "The lack of a reliable and fast intranet is a major constraint."

Together with JV Avadhanulu, popularly known as JV, he set out to do something about it. That was seven years ago. The path was uphill, he says, not only because of dealing with agencies outside Auroville, but also within Auroville where various working groups showed a tepid interest at best. In March this year JV declared he had had enough and left Auroville, to collaborate from a distance. Chandresh continued. Today, their work, now supported by Anandprasad, Manu, and Dyuman, is bearing fruit – a testimony to stubborn persistence.

High-speed internet connectivity is not easily available in India, particularly for those without funds. But Auroville is listed amongst the Institutes of Higher Education in the Ministry of Human Resource Development. Would it be possible

for Auroville to become a member of the National Knowledge Network (NKN), the state-of-the-art, multi-gigabit, pan-India fibre-optics network supported by the Government of India, offering speeds up to 1 Gbps [GigaBit per second]?

NKN, says its website, "goes to the core of India's quest for building quality institutions. NKN is to enable scientists, researchers and students from different backgrounds and diverse geographies to work closely in the advancement of societal development in critical and emerging fields of knowledge." For that reason, NKN created a unified high-speed optical fibre cable (OFC) backbone, connecting all institutions of higher learning in the country.

A long shot for Auroville? Certainly – but worth a try. After lengthy deliberations, it was agreed that Auroville can be considered a campus and that it could, and should, apply. ICITI [Integrated Communication and Information Technology Infrastructure] was started, a research platform to study which infrastructure would be required, where the cable network could best be laid, and how to make contacts with the NKN.

The Governing Board gave ICITI the green light and funds were solicited to purchase network equipment and fibre optic cables. Rs 21 lakhs (US \$ 33,000) was received from the Auroville Foundation, Aurovilians and Auroville units, and equipment was donated to the value of Rs 16



Chandresh supervising the laying of the optical fibre cable

lakhs. In the beginning of 2014, Mr. N. Bala Baskar, the Secretary of the Auroville Foundation, requested the Government of India to connect Auroville to the NKN "in order to enable the community to partake in the researches envisaged under the NKN and catalyze wider collaboration within India and abroad." The request was approved in November when the Minister of Human Resource Development sanctioned a 100 Mbps OFC network connection on a trial basis for two years. "We are elated," says a beaming Chandresh.

The ICITI project is being rolled out by Aurinoco Systems, an Auroville activity to build the Auroville-wide network. By the end of 2014, the first optical cable went underground. A Network Centre was set up in the Auroville Foundation building, connecting all the services in the Town Hall, SAIER and the Auroville Foundation. Optical cables now also connect Auroville's Centre for Scientific Research, Future School, Transition School, Last

School, Dehashakti and TLC, The Learning Community.

This is just the beginning. To efficiently utilize the NKN facility and data link, community institutions such CRIPA, Kala Bhumi, Arka, Santé (the new Integral Health Center), PTDC, the Auroville Water Service, the Library, the Solar Kitchen, Deepanam School, Bharat Nivas, Savitri Bhavan, the Unity Pavilion, the Auroville Language Laboratory, and many more need to be connected. A lot of trench digging – along the planned roads where feasible and along existing pathways in other places – will happen to realize the NKN backbone in Auroville. To finish it, another Rs 40 lakhs will be required, which is expected from the Government of India grant. That would bring Auroville's total investment to about 77 lakhs, which is reasonable, considering that the optical cable connection from Pondicherry to Auroville's Network Centre has been borne by the NKN at the cost of Rs 27 lakhs. "And if you consider that an

independent 100 Mbps network would cost Auroville Rs 60 lakhs per year, you can only conclude that the NKN connection is an act of Grace," says Chandresh.

More grace could be expected if Auroville's usage exceeds 100 Mbps. "In that case, the speed may be increased from 100 Mbps to 1 Gbps. But if we don't utilize it well, Auroville may be disconnected after the trial period of 2 years," warned JV. But Chandresh is not concerned. "The possibilities are enormous," he says. "Auroville Radio and Auroville TV can be streamed. Performances at Bharat Nivas, meetings at the Unity Pavilion, exhibitions at Pitanga, concerts at CRIPA – they all can be videoed and watched online in the comfort of one's home." In a not-too-distant future, the usage can include voice over intranet, and e-governance services such as those providing access to municipal databases. Auroville International Centres can have online discussions with Auroville working groups about the development of the International Zone. Auroville can benefit from tele-medicine and get connected to research in healing. Last but certainly not least, the connectivity will open the doors to online education, not only from external sources, but also from Auroville to the outside world. ICITI, then, will be a platform for boundaryless collaboration to expand the presence of Auroville beyond the geographical area of the City.

Auroville's commercial units too can benefit. Aurinoco Systems plans to set up a Community Communication Center (CCC) that will get a commercial fibre optic access from either BSNL or RailTel to which all commercial units can be connected, against payment. Those who do not require superfast internet can continue to use the existing modem based system.

It is not yet clear if individual homes can be connected. "Auroville is considered a campus, and like other university campuses in India, connection may also be provided to the homes of researchers and students. We await the Memorandum of Understanding from the NKN which will clarify these issues," says Chandresh. "But we foresee that each entity or home in Auroville will soon have fibre optic access to the internet."

When will the connection be operational? "Before the winter monsoon" says Chandresh confidently. That would bring the number of NKN-connected Indian institutions to 1407. Welcome to the club.

Carel

The benefits of NKN connectivity

Research and education

- Manifest the dormant potential of ongoing researches through collaborations
- Catalyze new collaborative researches by combining the complementary strengths of Auroville with the (traditional) educational institutions
- Provide education in consciousness through country-wide classroom service of NKN

Economy

- ICITI could have major positive impact on the Auroville economy due to:
- Reduction in out-flow to BSNL and creation of new jobs
- Reduction in the need to travel and making travel optional
- Promotion of industrial growth with e-access to a wider market

Cultural

ICITI enables Auroville to be effectively integrated with the rest of the world through:

- Broadcast of multi-cultural programmes
- Remote participation in cultural events and seminars
- Complementary and alternate telemedicine and tele-education to the bioregion and beyond

Social

ICITI can be leveraged to take the competencies in social research to the next level by

- Deploying services especially tailored to the needs of Auroville
- Pooling resources from across the world in outreach projects and spreading the reach beyond the bioregion
- Effective collaboration and coordination with AVI centres for the realization of the Dream.

I am part of an Auroville Task group that prepared governance goals for the recent Retreat. The group was very dynamic for the first phase of its existence but now that it has entered the next phase, that of fulfilling its post-Retreat responsibilities to materialise these goals, it is finding it hard to revive that former energy and commitment.

There are many possible explanations for this but one thing that strikes me is that the energy required to initiate a project is very different from the energy needed to sustain it. Initiators, for example, tend to be one-pointed, focused on specific goals, and highly creative in suggesting pathways towards it. Sustainers are those skilled in keeping a group together or a project running long past its initial 'glamorous' phase. Where initiators tend to be creative in ideas, the creativity of sustainers lies in their interpersonal skills, in finding ways of getting diverse individuals to work towards a common goal.

A group made up only of initiators will tend to be high on energy but also high on conflict as initiators tend to be more focused on ideas than on the wellbeing of others. Such groups tend to be short-lived, either because conflict cannot be handled or because initiators quickly run out of steam when

the work no longer interests them. Typically, they get bored easily.

A group made up exclusively of sustainers may tend to process each other's issues and problems endlessly rather than pushing ahead with new ideas. They may also immerse themselves in analyzing the trivia of an issue as a way of avoiding difficult choices that may jeopardize the unity of the group. Typically, such groups last longer than initiator groups, but they tend to be held together by inertia and habit rather than by a shared inspiration.

Clearly, for groups or projects to succeed, both energies are needed. But it is rare to find one person embodying both – the narrowly focussed energy of the initiator does not easily mix with the more inclusive energy of the sustainer – and often groups that begin with both initiators and retainers tend to end up as a monoculture of one or the other.

This is largely because each does not understand the role and value of the other, so they frustrate each other or drive each other apart. Initiators stereotype sustainers as being people more interested in maintaining the status quo

Initiators and sustainers

than in taking risks and making progress. Sustainers see initiators as simply ideas people who are incapable of understanding or taking up the daily challenges and responsibilities involved in bringing something to fruition.

Such stereotypes are sustained because people embodying a certain energy tend to gravitate to the same groupings, where they support each other's perceptions. Nevertheless, when the respective energies get unbalanced there is a grain of truth in these views. Initiators can become dogmatic, narrow and uncompassionate in the pursuit of an idea or ideal. Sustainers can become attached to the way things are, suspicious of change, and attached to precedent and bureaucracy.

At the risk of huge oversimplification, I think that in Auroville sustainers are over-represented in the bureaucracy and services and the commercial units tend to attract more initiators. And here we may even perceive a subtle status distinction. For the fact that initiators tend to be better communicators and that the work of sustaining is often less visible accounts, I think, for the fact that the work of sustainers tends to be undervalued.

Does it really matter that this energy demarcation and mutual misunderstanding exists? After all, don't the different energies balance each other out on a community-wide basis just as couples in a good relationship find ways of balancing out and complementing each other's different energies?

I'm not so sure. My sense is that the perennial tensions that run, for example, through so many discussions between the services and commercial units, is partly due to the fact that they inhabit, to a certain extent, different energy fields. The familiar accusation that the services are inefficient and adverse to change, or that the commercial units only exist to improve the lifestyle of those who work in them are parodies of the truth, but they dimly reflect this energetic demarcation.

My concern is that as long as these differences are not recognized and valued, they will continue to act as invisible fault-lines that drive us apart and hinder our progress. For the reality is that each needs the other. Initiators are strong on ideas and overcoming inertia, but they are weak on the wider and more humble work needed to sustain momentum, while sustainers tend to be weak on new ideas and less willing to take the risks needed to escape the gravity of the known.

Alan

Economics for People and Earth – part 2

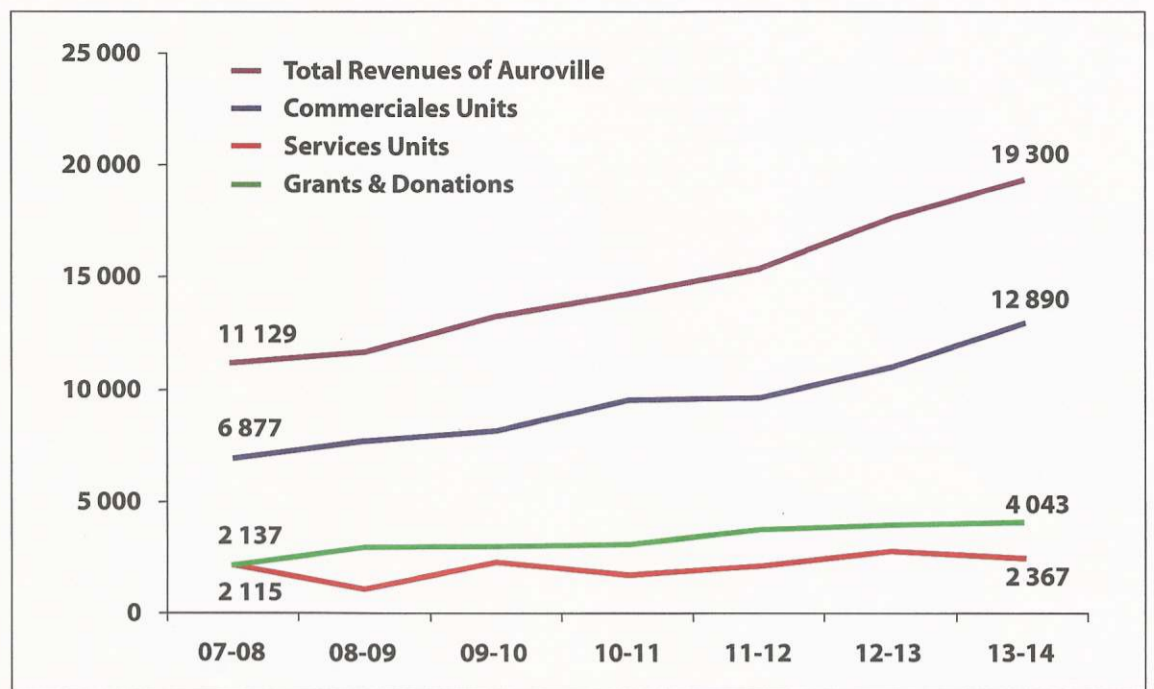
In December 2013, Auroville Today reported on the work done by Manuel and Henk Thomas researching the Auroville economy. Over a period of 15 years, the chartered accountant from Chennai and the professor from The Netherlands had been studying how the economy had developed in the first 40 years of Auroville's existence. It resulted in an impressive scientific monograph, *Economics for People and Earth – the Auroville Case 1968-2008*, launched in October 2013. [see AVToday # 293, December 2013]

Harini Sampathkumar of the Auroville Social Research Centre has now updated the work for the years 2008-2014, collecting data of all commercial units and services, the Central Fund (nowadays called City Services), and all grants and donations. She gave a presentation of her findings on June 27th.

The work, said Harini in her introduction, had taken 18 months, many more than anticipated as the financial data over the years 2008-2010 were not available in electron-

ic format. The accounts had to be traced all over Auroville, and then manually entered. "All praise for chartered accountant Mr. Prabakaran, who saw my misery and graciously offered his staff to do the work", she said.

Asked if there were any surprises, she replied that "the surprising thing was that there has been very little change. Even the closure of Filature and Auromode, two of Auroville's main garment units, has only changed a few percentage points. In terms of revenues, the fall of these two units was cushioned by the rise of others. The handicrafts and the garments sectors went down by 4%, but the food and shops sectors went up by 8% which compensated for the downward movement. In terms of contributions to Auroville, the entry of Varuna has created some substantial increases in the last 2 years, ranging from 9% to 13% of the total commercial units' contributions. Its donations for the payment of electricity bills have clearly made a significant difference."



Auroville's total revenues 2008 – 2014

The figures show that the number of commercial units increased by 30% from 158 to 206 between 2008-

2014. Their total revenue grew by 87% and their contributions to Auroville by 81%. The number of

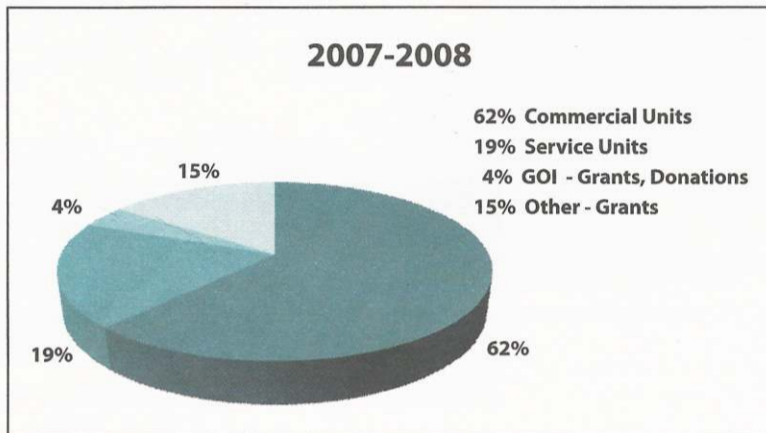
service units increased by 65%, their revenue by 51%. They include grants and donations, which increased by 89%. Auroville's total revenue during this period went up by 73%. "But these are all actual, not inflation-corrected figures. My guesstimate is that, after inflation-correction, the figures will show a slow growth, like everything else in Auroville. It is a mirror of what we see around us," says Harini.

"I'm not convinced that inflation-corrected figures necessarily give a true picture", says Guy, who has been assisting Harini with her data compilations. "An alternative could be to compare growth percentages. These 7 years' data show an average growth percentage. How does this percentage compare to the growth percentages of the previous 7 years, and the 7 years before? And then one should add the increase of Auroville's adult population to get a more complete picture."

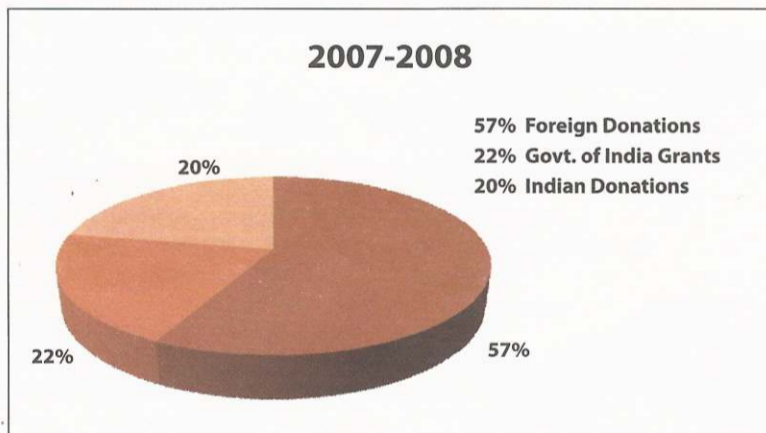
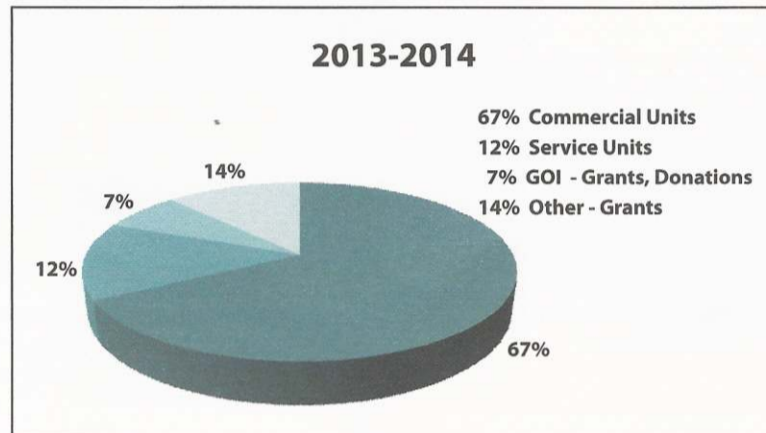
What these consolidated figures do not show is the actual health of Auroville's individual commercial units and services. A commercial unit may show a loss due to depreciation of its assets, while it has a positive cash and bank surplus, or show a profit while it carries the burden of considerable unsecured loans. Likewise, a service unit may not function optimally with too few or too many people. "I'm concerned that such essential information does not show in these data", says Harini. "The commercial units have mushroomed, but how many of them are small, barely surviving and not contributing to Auroville or only providing a maintenance for the unit executive(s)? How many service units have a record of poor performance? Neither the Funds and Assets Management Committee nor the Budget Coordination Committee have an insight into the functioning of the individual units. They would have to set up a permanent group to evaluate and help units in difficulty."

Harini's 7-year updates have meanwhile been sent to the two Thomases for inflation correction and interpretation, and for integration in their monograph.

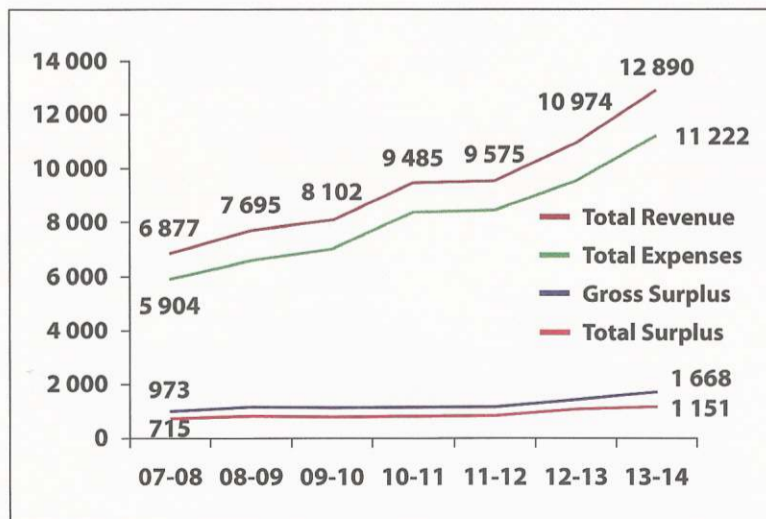
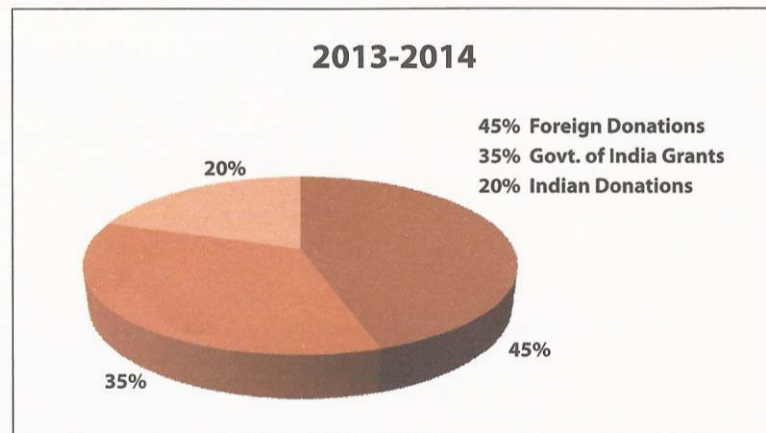
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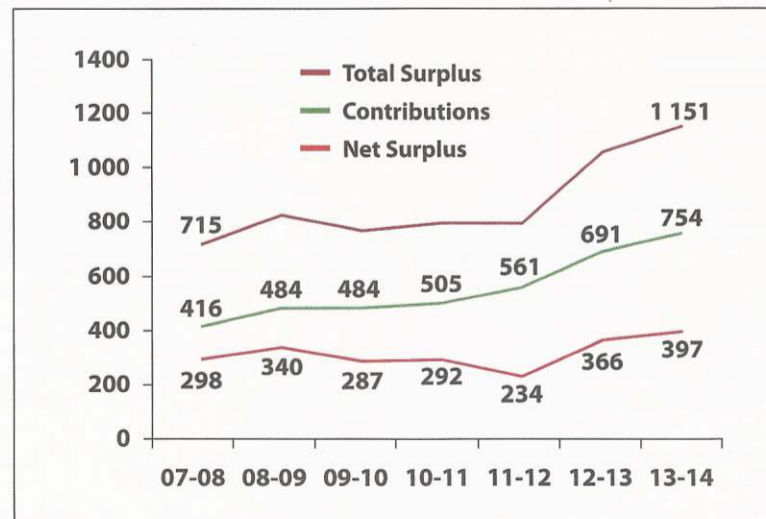
The overview of the total Auroville income shows a 5% increase in commercial units income and a 3% increase of Government of India grants and donations



The break-down of grants and donations shows that foreign donations have diminished while the Government of India grant has increased



Overview of the revenue of Auroville's commercial units and their contribution to Auroville in the period 2008 – 2014



HOUSING ISSUES

Newcomer housing

The Housing Board is struggling to find accommodation for those without funds, as it can on average only allocate five pro bono houses each year. Many Newcomers and young Aurovilians do not have the funds to make a donation for a house. They are moving

from one house-sitting to another or are occupying a Newcomer's house for a much longer period than initially agreed upon. Thanks to the new Matreiya housing project the number of Newcomer units has increased from 56 to 83. But due to the shortage of new houses and for economic rea-

sons, 50 units are occupied by Aurovilians in need of a house, and only 33 units are used by Newcomers. 147 members are staying in these Newcomer houses, 103 Aurovilians, 12 non-Aurovillian spouses, and only 32 Newcomers.

The Housing Board hopes that in the next years some alleviation will be brought through the building of 12

temporary houses at Pony Farm and the completion of projects that have started, such as the Sunship Housing project, which will have a number of pro bono houses; the Kalpana Housing project of 40 apartments of which 12 apartments will be made available with subsidy of 40%; and the Humanscape project which will offer about 20 pro bono apartments to

youth in its first phase.

Taking all ongoing construction projects into account, the number of new houses and apartments will increase by 307 in the next three to four years. This would provide proper housing for approximately 750 Aurovilians and Newcomers.

Auroville News and Notes
August 29, 2015

The Integral Entrepreneurship Lab

One of the most interesting initiatives to emerge out of the Auroville Retreat was the Integral Entrepreneurship Lab (IEL). Here some of the core team talk about its objectives and what they have been working on so far.

What are the origins of the Integral Entrepreneurship Lab?

Gijs: The lab is partly a continuation of a work that had begun some time before. A group of us had been involved in incubating and supporting entrepreneurs in Tamil Nadu through UnLtd. Tamil Nadu. At the same time, we had also been helping quite a few Auroville units, like Wasteless, Koodam and Ecofemme, to improve their operations.

Aurelio: The origins of this latest initiative can also be traced to a reflection on the sustainability of the Auroville economy that took place in the Auroville Board of Commerce (ABC) about a year ago. The ABC for the last years has just been fulfilling an administrative function and some people attempted to bring in new initiatives and ideas. Nothing concrete came of this fresh impetus but some interesting ideas came up that we are now bringing forward.

And some of us still remember and are inspired by the big community meetings several years ago on what it would mean to do business in a different way from the outside world. We also had an inspiring international conference on Business and Consciousness here, with cutting-edge thinkers and pioneering entrepreneurs in the field.

The term 'social entrepreneurship' is very popular these days, and I have heard it used by people in this group in connection with your work. What does it mean?

Dhanya: It is doing business for something useful, meaningful, of value to something greater than oneself. The term came into existence recently, but I think many Auroville businesses have been doing this for years.

Gijs: Somebody argued all Auroville units are 'social enterprises' because they all belong to the Auroville Foundation. I think this is a misconception. Social entrepreneurship is really about the intention with which you start your organisation. It is when your intention is something larger than yourself, larger than just profit maximisation, whether the objective is to solve an issue in society which has not yet been solved or to be a community-based project in Auroville.

But you are approaching it in an entrepreneurial way, which means that you are focusing on opportunities



From left: Aurelio, Daniel, Torkil, Gijs, Taranti, Mark, Dhanya

rather than challenges. Entrepreneurs have a vision and a passion; they are manifesters. They are creating solutions to real problems. We need to reclaim this term 'entrepreneurship' back from a narrow interpretation of it only being confined to profit maximisation.

Daniel: At the same time, for me profit is important as the search for profit involves a tireless attention to avoiding waste, inefficiency, as well as ensuring the quality of the product and the welfare of the staff.

Aurelio: I think the basic principle of the capitalistic system is individualism, based on individual initiative. People who are more socially-aware tend to be more interested in socialist or communist models of the economy where there is more equal distribution. Social entrepreneurship tries to bring the two elements together. Mother always said there is a 'third' way, and that is what we are exploring.

Is this what you mean by the term 'integral entrepreneurship'?

Gijs: Yes. It means you are using your organisation not only to meet a real need but you are also using it to do inner work, to learn about yourself and grow into your own potential. And you do it in a responsible way. For example, you don't have a renewable energy company that pays minimal wages because this is not being integral, holistic.

Clearly, you set up the IEL to respond

to a need. What is that need?

Gijs: During the recent Retreat, there was much talk about distributing a lot of resources within the community, for education, buildings, services etc. But where are these resources to come from? Auroville needs to be generating income to do this. One function of the Integral Entrepreneurship Lab is to explore how to do this and to support those who would like to incubate new income-generating projects.

Aurelio: I think in the Auroville economic landscape there is a change of paradigms. Many of our old bigger units have closed and now there is a shift to the knowledge economy. However, we felt there were no facilities to share information about this new economy between us. I went through this process of starting a business unit out of what was originally a social entrepreneurship programme, and then having to invent everything from scratch because I couldn't find anybody to teach me the ropes. There was no mentorship.

We have this amazing resource in this community, the people who have been experimenting with doing business in the context of karma yoga for the last 30 or 40 years. But we have hardly documented these experiments. So one of the tasks we have set ourselves is to make this knowledge available for the young generation to build upon and experiment with further.

Gijs: We are also trying to change the climate around business in Auroville. As a very concrete way of

bringing the topic to the Auroville community, we are planning something like a TEDx event where we can share inspiring ideas, and learn to see business not as something evil but as something inspiring.

Torkil: The Auroville economy is highly complex. We have collective ownership of units by the Auroville Foundation but the unit holder has a lot of freedom. It's a very strange combination of pure capitalism and pure socialism but it seems to work in many ways. For example, one of the strengths is that all the units are carried by the passion of the people who run them. However, this personal aspect makes it a little difficult for the units to work together, and there is a succession problem – the people who run the units find it difficult to hand on the work to others. So part of the work of this group is to find ways of making sharing and succession easier.

Daniel: I think the main problem we are confronted with is there are not enough people in our income-generating units, and many of the new people who start up units only want to do business outside Auroville. But we need energy to be put inside Auroville as well.

What has the IEL been doing so far?

Gijs: We've got an office and a place to meet in Upasana, thanks to Uma. And another office is being prepared in Auromode as a start-up place. A design and production-oriented space is also planned, probably it will be at CSR.

We had an Open House in April. We invited people from established commercial units who wanted to consolidate their ecosystem, and we asked each of them to identify the three things they needed help with the most. The top three topics were human resources, marketing and fundraising. So now, every month we are organising an Open House on one of these topics. We just did one on human resources, the next one will be on marketing, and probably then one on fundraising, and resource mobilisation will come later.

The idea is that by organising such activities we form a community of practitioners who meet together to discuss their challenges. On these open days we offer best practices and ideas from the larger world of business, but my experience with the incubation process has been that peer-to-peer learning works best. You are much more likely to take advice from somebody you can identify with.

Daniel: Regarding incubation, an idea came from this group for a

Knowledge Centre, where Auroville know-how and experience is displayed in one place. This can be both a window to the world and also an inspiration for people to begin new start-ups in Auroville.

Torkil: We are also working on a starter kit so that people planning start-ups don't have to reinvent everything from scratch.

We also have established a relationship with the Institute of Management in Ahmedabad. They are looking at the Auroville economy with interest and asking the same questions about it as we do. We are at such an interesting stage of the experiment. From being a cottage industry, either we will become a knowledge economy or we will develop more into the luxury market which, in India, is growing steadily.

The Institute of Management actually runs a course called 'Crafting Luxury and Lifestyle Businesses' and they have made one space available on each course for an Aurovillian (Uma is attending one at present). Each course concludes with a visit to Auroville.

Aurelio: The IEL initiative is only one of four or five initiatives of the Economy Forward group, a group that came out of the Retreat and which is focused on bringing more energy and more income into the Auroville economy. Other people in this Group are focussing on issues like in-kind contributions for full work participation. If you take these four or five elements together you have a full picture of what we are trying to do.

Do you think the kinds of shift you are envisaging will happen gradually, or are there one or two levers that could shift the economy much faster?

Gijs: One of the big questions is why are not many of our units living up to their full potential? There are a number of bottlenecks. One of them is the marketing issue. There seems to be a certain level of scale when you are not big enough to hire a professional marketing person, but if you don't do that you are never going to grow. It's Catch-22.

That's why we are talking about things like shared services. If four or five units get together they could employ one solid marketing team and this could help all of them shift to the next level. Another bottleneck may relate to human resources. Another might be capital. The Unity Fund is sitting on many crores which are being invested who knows where. If you reallocated some of that to the local economy, it could make a huge difference.

Two or three interventions like this could have a big leverage effect on the whole economy.

Daniel: If we can achieve the in-kind society, where everybody's essential needs are looked after, then doing business would become yoga rather than a way of subsisting day-to-day. It would give income-generation a completely different aspect.

Torkil: I think we are not taking advantage of the fact that people outside see Auroville as one brand. We have a good name in India and very strong brand identity. As unit holders, we all have our strengths. If we can all try to work together more, rather than as separate entities, we can take better advantage of that brand identification. That to me is one of the things that would really make a change.

Gijs: One theory states that change happens when more and more people have positive experiences of doing something because this inspires more people to do it. It's a virtuous cycle. So bigger changes can start with a little group of practitioners like us who get excited about doing things differently and who support each other to realize their visions.

From an interview by Alan

Building on collective knowledge about Human Resource Management

"How can I keep control over the quality of my clay products once I start hiring people?" "How can I retain talented women employees once they get married?" "How should I design my project so that it can cope with seasonal demand?"

Aurovillians have built projects that they are passionate about. They want to make sure that they give their customers the right product quality; they would like to pass their passion on to their team. And they are really keen to get practical advice from peers.

This was the objective of the Human Resource Management Forum held last Saturday by the Integral Entrepreneurship Lab at Vérité. That day, the famous Aurovillian Pizza boxes from Tanto contained food for thought. Organized around four stands, tools currently in use by successful Aurovillian ventures like Marc's coffee, Upasana or Svaram were presented to help new project holders to help address their most urgent HR challenges.

The idea was to share experience and best practice

among peers. After a round of introduction of the different tools, we discussed in two circles the most popular topics:

- How do I make sure that I build an organisation culture that is aligned with my values?
- How do I make my employees feel that training is a reward rather than a punishment?

Finally, inspired by the discussion, everyone wrote a plan for his own project.

What did the group like best?

- The open exchange of past experiences in the discussion circle
- The opportunity for informal discussion at the coffee break
- The fact that we left with an action plan

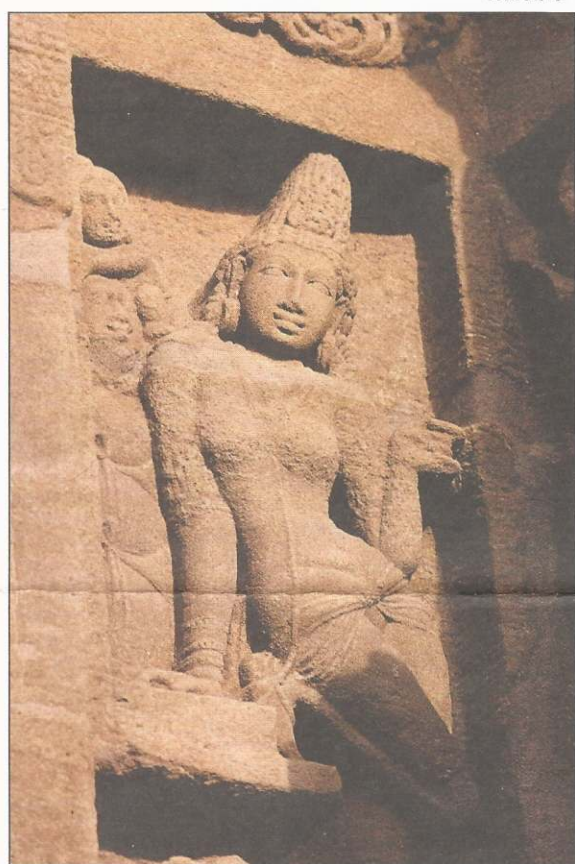
What are the next steps?

The next session will be hosted before the end of September, and the selected topic is marketing. Join us there!

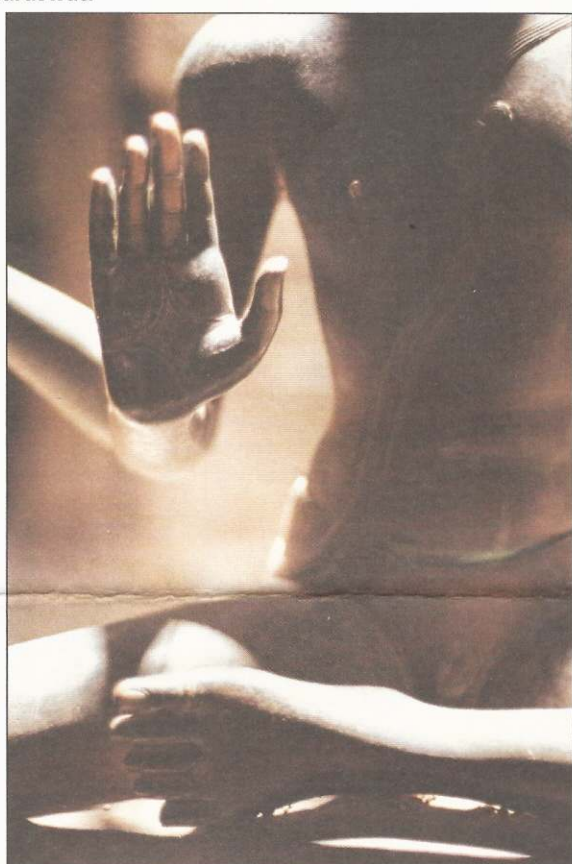
The Integral Entrepreneurship Lab report in Auroville's News and Notes of 22nd August



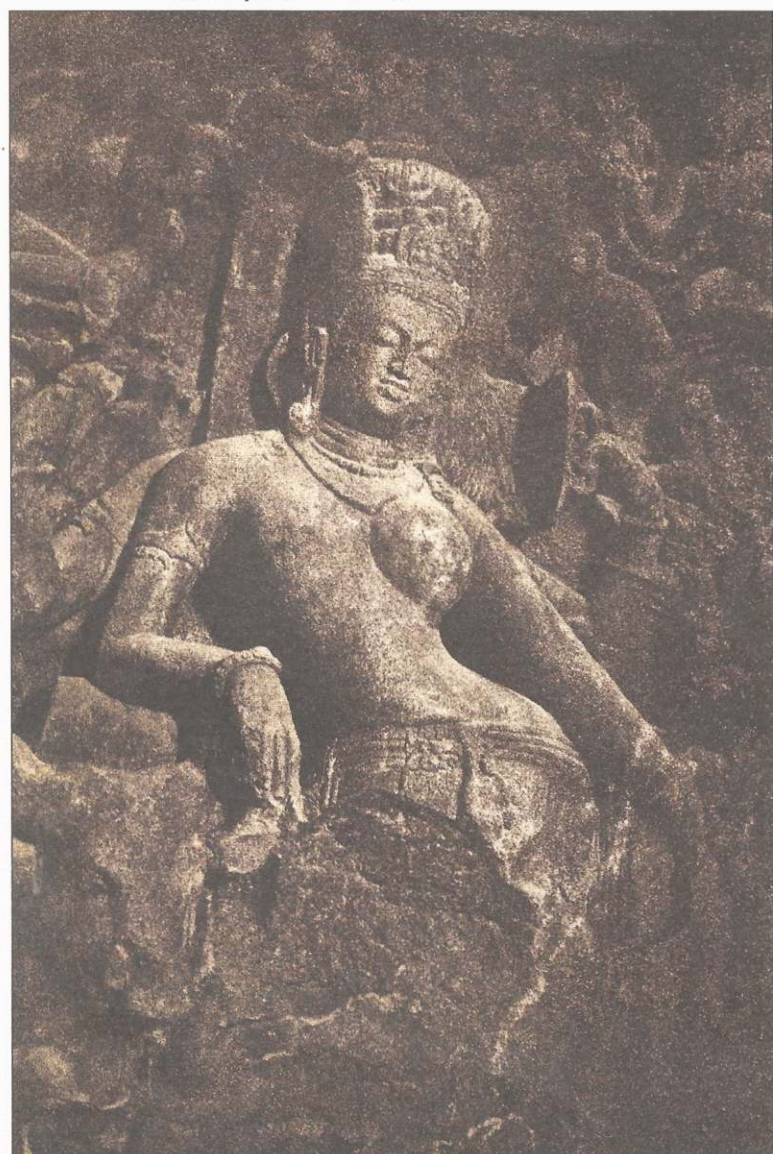
Halebid – Saraswati



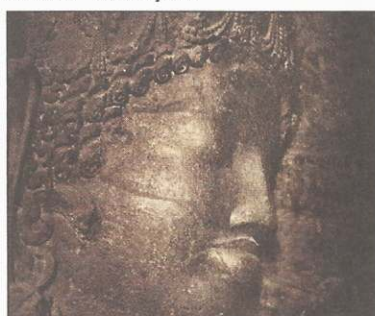
Kanchipuram – Parvati



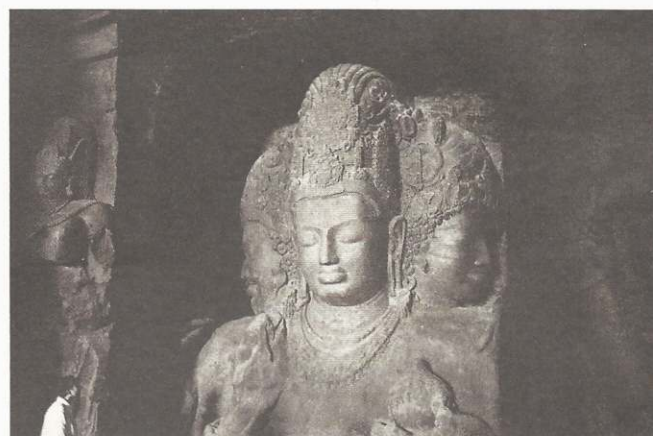
Madurai – Abhayam



Elephanta – sculpture



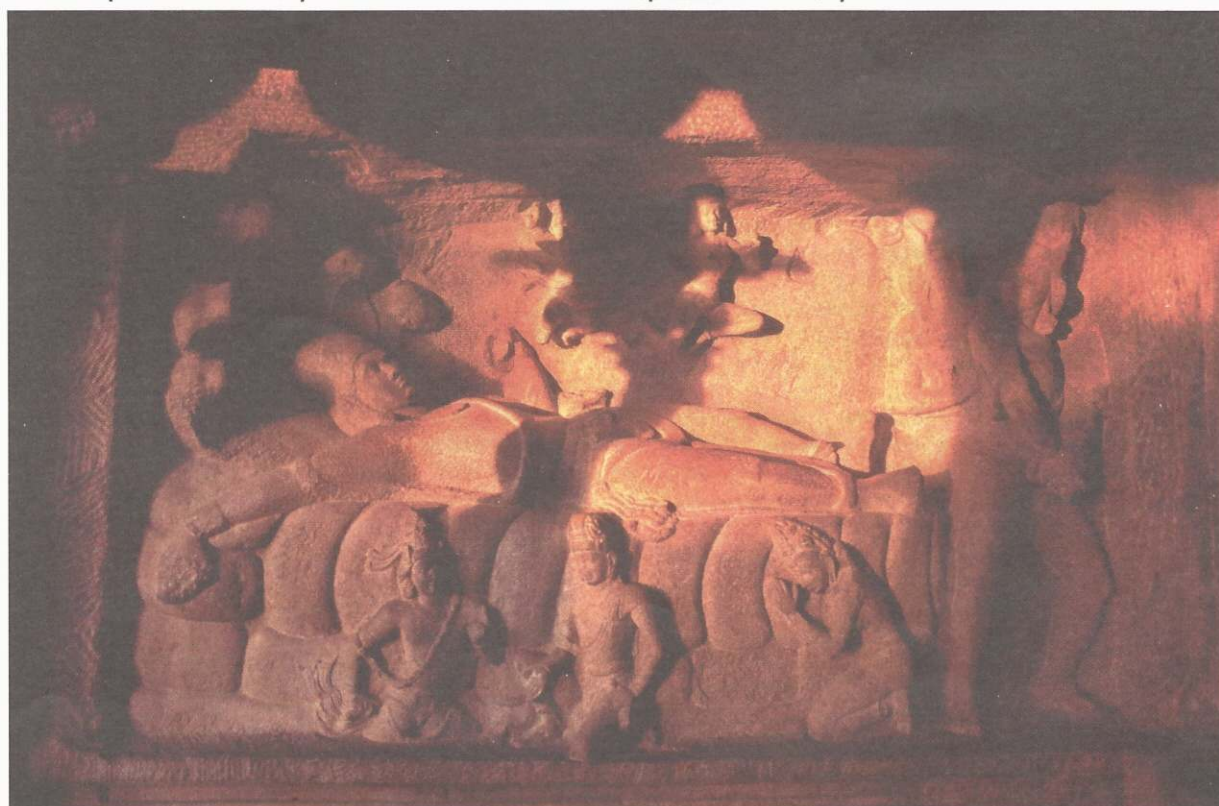
Elephanta – Trimurthy



Elephanta – Trimurthy



Varanasi



Mahabalipuram – Vishnu Anantashayi

India, Land

The Mother once described Sri Aurobindo as having “a face from eternity”. That same quality of deep spiritual timelessness pervades many of the photographs in Aurovillian Olivier Barot’s photo exhibition that premiered on 4th August in the new Kalinka Gallery in Pondicherry. Entitled *India, Land of Light*, the exhibition is a retrospective of photographs taken by Olivier over the past twenty five years, part of an ongoing project. It features scenes from sacred and historical sites like Varanasi, Rameswaram, Khajuraho, Hampi and Mahabalipuram.

However, these are much more than tourist snaps. Through evocative sculptures of gods and dancers, luminous river scenes and haunting landscapes, as well as through the expressions and postures of the people inhabiting these

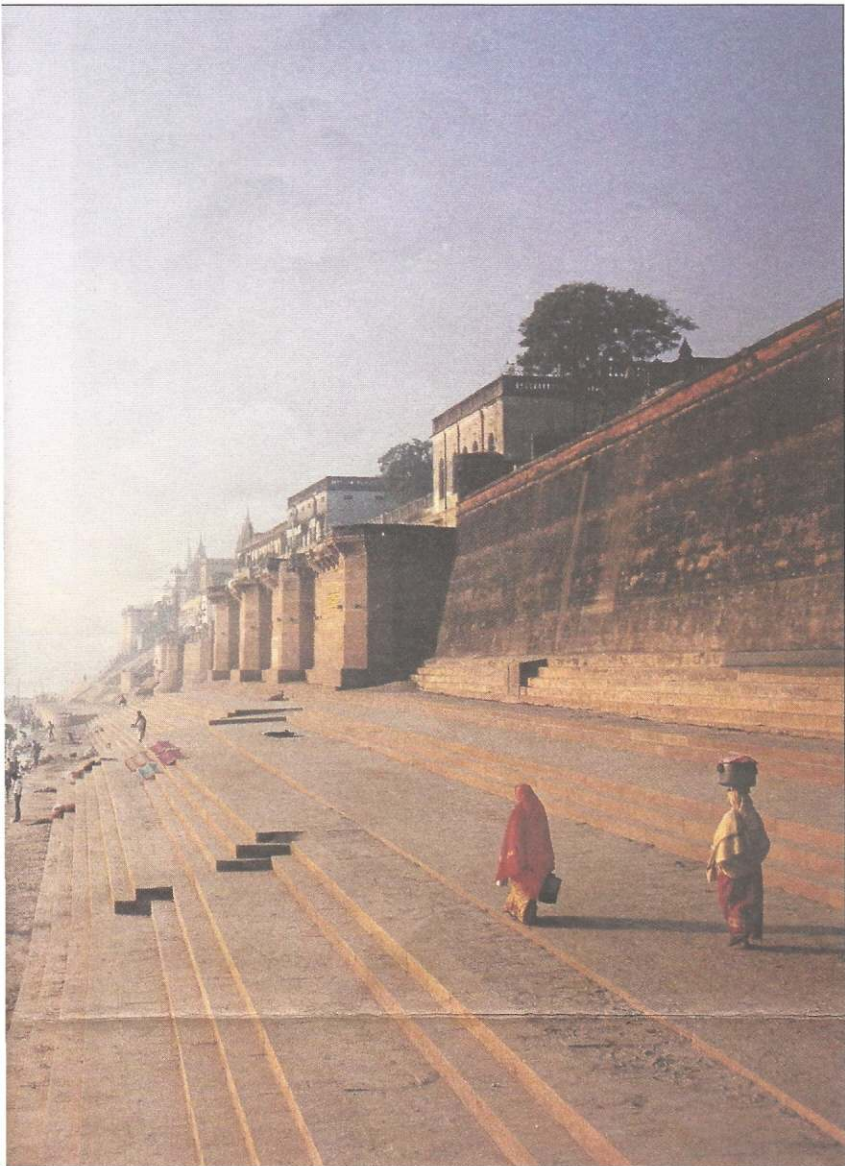
of Light

places, they capture and illumine India's 'inscape', that eternal zone of stillness, wisdom and light that underlies the bustle and frenzy of modern India. Their cumulative effect is to transform the Kalinka Gallery on Rue du Bazar Saint Laurent into an oasis of calm, a still point in the turning world.

Beautifully photographed and curated, *India, Land of Light* is the first part of a two-part exhibition. Part two will be held in Citadines from next February.

Alan

India, Land of Light can be viewed at the Kalinka Gallery at 14, Rue du Bazar Saint Laurent, Pondicherry, until the 4th October. For more information and photo sales, contact olivierbarot@auroville.org.in or kalinkapondy@gmail.com



- Ghats



Thanjavur - Nandi prayer



Thanjavur - Sadhu



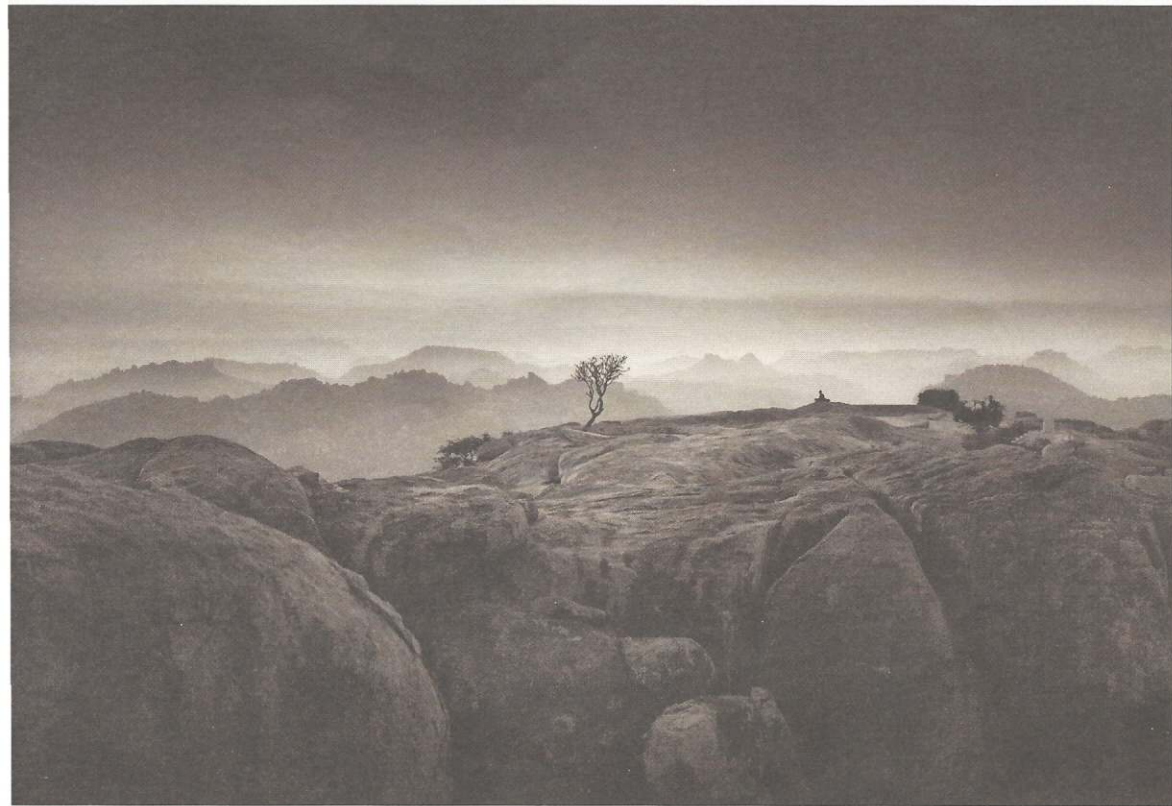
Rameswaram - The temple door



Orchha - Dawn



Khajuraho - Apsara



Hampi - Sunset



Hampi - Hanuman puja

"There are many more Aurovilians in the world"

Kavitha was one of four Aurovilians who recently attended the Global Ecovillage Networks' (GEN) 20+ Summit, held in Findhorn, Scotland. There she represented Auroville as well as Youth Link. Auroville Today caught up with Kavitha to learn more about her experience at the Summit.

How did you come to know about the conference?

When I was studying at university in the Netherlands, I wrote my thesis about the work of GEN, particularly its Ecovillage Design Education (EDE) curriculum and its relevance to Auroville, so I've been researching their work since 2012. Other conferences have been expensive to get to, but I didn't want to miss this one. It was a celebration of 20 years of GEN and 10 years of Gaia Education, from which the EDE has emerged.

What was it like to represent Auroville at the conference?

It was great. People there generally knew about Auroville; they'd either heard about it or they'd visited. But they often had a very rosy picture of Auroville. They didn't really know as much about our challenges.

What was the youth presence like at the conference?

NextGEN is the youth wing of GEN, and they were present at the conference, but pretty well integrated into the overall network. It's not difficult to be a NextGEN Youth Member, as our Youth Link team here is already doing that type of work. What was nice to see is that GEN supports NextGEN through funding. One young couple traveled from eco-village to eco-village and shared their stories between communities, and their project benefited from GEN funding.

You gave a presentation on Auroville at the conference. What was that like for you and how did it go?

It was challenging! With all of these amazing ecovillages represented, I had to really think about how Auroville was different. Joss from Pitchandikulam helped a lot. I told them the basic story of Auroville, but I highlighted a few aspects. I told them that what is unique about Auroville is its support and recognition from the Government of India. Many other eco-villages don't have such strong support from their country's government. There's also the spiritual aspect. Other communities may hold higher ideals or philosophy, and some may not. However, Sri Aurobindo's philosophy has really grounded Auroville comparatively. We have

guidance through texts on integral education, for instance, and a lot more. For us, it's so simple because it's already written, whereas other communities are writing it themselves, which must be pretty tough. Overall, the presentation was really well received. A lot of people were particularly impressed with our Government of India and UNESCO recognition. They also loved the idea of the Sustainable Livelihood Institute (SLI), as an example of an institution being created on the basis of a collaboration between ecovillage and government. The government coming to Auroville to learn from its 'green' solutions is a huge achievement in the eyes of other eco-villagers.

After returning, you wrote on AuroNet, "I had an uncomfortable realization about how Auroville seems to have lost its sense of 'community' and 'togetherness' and I was humbled by the many excellent examples from the world that we could learn a lot from." Can you elaborate on that?

I felt a real sense of community at Findhorn. There was a lot of sharing, mutual respect, and time given for addressing issues within the community. We don't have the same atmosphere at our General Meetings. We also don't have the same community spaces for meeting. Places like Aspiration and Aurodam used to be alive and active; people would come together for sports and holidays. But now they're just spaces where the collective life has disappeared. Why are Solar Kitchen and the Unity Pavilion our central meeting spots? I'm definitely concerned about our sense of community. We need a safe environment and healthy lifestyles, but we also need a community in which people are more connected to one another.

One thing that tends to dilute our sense of community is our population size. Most of the eco-villages present at the conference were 200 people or less, but Auroville is in comparison very big, and that presents a challenge. Another challenge is clarity around a shared goal. In early days, I think the cause of the pioneers was clear; rejuvenating the land and building the physical city brought them together. Today the youth have to find their cause in Auroville, and it's not really the physical building but it's on



Kavitha presenting Auroville at the Global Eco-village Network Summit in Scotland

the social level. We need to figure out how we are going to develop as a society.

How do you envision the future relationship between Auroville and GEN?

There's a lot of potential for future collaboration with GEN. At this conference, Auroville officially became a registered member of the Global Ecovillage Network, which was a step forward. Further, there was a discussion about creating exchange programmes between eco-villages, especially for the youth. There could be a 3, 6, or 9 months house-exchange programmes.

I also think that Auroville would benefit from using the EDE framework to better understand the way our community functions and further understand our problems. It is an educational framework that looks at a locality through several lenses: worldview, economy, social, and ecological. More Aurovilians could be a part of these courses. Marti has been hosting these courses in Auroville on occasion, and we may be having more EDE trainers coming as well.

It would be also be great to host the GENOA (Oceania and Asia) friends in Auroville more often, and to connect with our geographical neighbors and their projects more closely.

Right now, we're working to create a team and also working to create an outreach desk for Auroville's many connections to the world. GEN

is one of these connections; we can foster relationships with other GEN members, welcome and host them in Auroville if they come, as well as work on the exchange and education programmes I just mentioned. The Auroville International centres are another connection. Right now we're trying to incubate the outreach desk at Pitchandikulam.

Is there anything else you'd like to share?

From my experience of spending one week in Findhorn, I really opened up from the heart, and learned a lot. Just meeting people from all of the different communities and listening to their stories and being together was eye-opening. There are many more Aurovilians in the world, and we have a lot to learn from them! If more youth could visit other eco-villages, I think it would naturally facilitate an integration of what they learned when they return to Auroville. I hope that many more Aurovilians get to visit these communities, and that we realize that we're not the only place in the world trying to do something special.

In conversation with Ing-Marie

To learn more about the work of GEN, visit: <http://gen.ecovillage.org>. To learn more about the Gaia Education & the EDE, visit: <http://www.gaiaeducation.net/index.php/en/>

International Youth Day

International Youth Day was celebrated for the first time in Auroville, on August 12th. Originally, the United Nations designated this day to draw attention to youth issues worldwide. The Auroville edition was organized by Youth Link and focused on units, art exhibitions, performances and other projects in which youth are intimately involved. Unlike previous youth gatherings which were often held at the Youth Centre, the chosen venue was Bharat Nivas, which allowed for more space and a different atmosphere. Kala Kendra hosted both exhibitions and multi-media presentations, outdoor stalls featured the work of various units, and throughout the afternoon, the main stage was buzzing with performances and presentations. Youth, older Aurovilians, friends from the villages and volunteers mingled happily in an event that Youth Link plans to be held annually. We look forward to the next edition.



International Youth Day celebrations at Bharat Nivas



The Eco-Femme stall



Outside the new Youth Link office at Bharat Nivas

Youth Link takes off

Youth Link is a new youth group that aims to engage the youth in Auroville and the surrounding area and to work towards providing Auroville youth with, among other things, better opportunities in housing, higher education and employment. Auroville Today spoke to some of the group to find out how they are progressing with their ambitious agenda.

Youth Link grew out of the Auroville Retreat. Some months before the Retreat, Vikram, Jesse and other members of the RAS approached some Auroville youth to see if they would help involve youth in the Retreat process. This led to a series of meetings at the Youth Centre. "Maybe 30 to 40 young people came to some of these," remembers Luca, "and we did rounds to see what everyone thought about the present Auroville and how things could be improved. One of the exercises was to put the Charter and The Dream into our own words and then brainstorm about how we could make Auroville better based upon these ideals. The content for our Retreat presentation actually came out of the Festival of Ideas, a one-day event we organized to get youth talking about their concerns and about Auroville's future. Three themes came up strongly – the need for youth housing, higher education and employment – so at the Retreat we presented these as our main concerns."

"The vision that came from the Retreat was really goal-oriented," explains Kavitha, one of the core members of Youth Link, "but the vision that came out in our later project proposal was completely different – it was vaguer, yet more encompassing, it was about Auroville's Charter and the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. We were trying to create a vision and mission that would be able to include newly emerging youth initiatives and projects, rather than only be focused on the Retreat's Goals."

The main goals

Providing housing, employment and higher education for Auroville youth have remained their main concerns. So what progress have they made so far in achieving these goals?

"A lot of work has been done for housing," says Vika, one of core members of Youth Link who also works in the Housing Service. "We began by finding out how many Auroville youth are in need of housing. So far, we know of fifty plus people who are looking for permanent housing, and most of them do not have the funds to build something. While Auroville at present provides accommodation for about forty young Aurovilians and volunteers, all of this is temporary housing: at some point these people have to move out."

One possible solution is the projected 'Humanscapes' housing project. "explains Vika. "Originally it was planned to provide 500 living spaces for Aurovilians, Newcomers and volunteers," explains Vika, "but planning permission has only been given for the first forty places, and now it has been decided that this initial phase will be for younger people. Youth Link was asked to come up with criteria for how such people would be selected and to send one representative to be on the client body for this project."

"The problem is that we do not have enough youth who want to be involved in this kind of work or who have the necessary experience and skills," says Kavitha. "At present, only four or five Aurovilians in their 20s are part of major Auroville Work Groups. The Governance Action Group is concerned about this and wants work groups to provide training through internships for young people. We were also thinking of arranging trainings in basic skill-sets so that young people can integrate into a working group more easily."

Interestingly, young people are asking that the schools run an



Photo (from left to right): Madhu (Mohanam Cultural Center Youth Group Representative), Vinay (Youth Link Coordinator), Vika (Youth Link Housing Service Representative), Anand (Mohanam Cultural Center Youth Group Representative), Babu (Youth Link Core Team Member), Balu. K behind (Housing Service Representative), Luca (Youth Link Core Team Member, working on Charter-related Project), Angeli (Youth Link Core Team Member, working on Apprenticeship Program with ACI), Amal (Visiting short term member, documenting events on film), Kavitha (Youth Link Coordinator), Usha (Youth Link Core Team Member).

'Auroville class' so that they can understand better how Auroville functions. They stress, however, that they want the high schools to cooperate in doing this as another of their goals is to bring the schools together.

The second of Youth Link's major goals is to improve employment possibilities for Auroville youth. Here they have focussed on two approaches. Firstly, they have been collecting data about job opportunities in Auroville, and collecting a list of those in need of employment and their skill set/background/interests. Secondly, Angeli from Youth Link and Michael from the Auroville Campus initiative are developing an apprenticeship programme. The idea is to provide apprenticeships for Auroville youth in various areas. These would enable them to take up this kind of work in Auroville but would also be recognised outside Auroville as a qualification in that field.

"We have decided to start next year with apprenticeships in greenwork, carpentry, and food-related topics," says Angeli, "and we are creating syllabuses for these topics. The apprenticeships are for those who are 16+, and the courses would last two years. Different Auroville units and workplaces would be involved for each topic. So for greenwork, Botanical Gardens, Pitchandikulam, Greencare and the Forest Group will provide expertise and experience of environmental conservation, botany, wildlife, forestry etc."

They are hoping that the academic side could partly be provided by classes in the high schools. "It is quite difficult to get organised because so many people are involved," admits Angeli, "so we are taking it step-by-step at present. But it's working. If all goes well, after they have completed these apprenticeships the young people can go on to become land stewards, or join existing units or they can start up their own businesses."

As for the education goal, for youth who are considering higher education YouthLink is making a database of university courses both in India and abroad. They would like more spaces to be available for Auroville youth in groups that visit

Auroville for educational purposes, like the Living Routes programme that ran for many years. They would also like to work closely with the Auroville Campus Initiative and Education Action Group, who have similar goals of developing a Semester Programme and exploring the creation of an institute for Auroville's higher education.

At the same time, Youth Link is working with Pitchandikulam outreach, where Kavitha is liaising with the Global Ecovillage Network to see if Ecovillage Design Education and Trainings could be held in Auroville for people in this locality. The Global Ecovillage Network's youth branch may also be a good connection through which young leaders could be invited to Auroville for Youth Link's planned Green Conference in 2018.

The challenges

Clearly, Youth Link has set itself ambitious goals. What are the challenges they have encountered so far?

"One of the big challenges is that at present, all the work falls on a few shoulders," says Vika. "This work requires quite a lot of effort but some of us are already working full-time elsewhere for our maintenance, so we can only give the time and energy that remains over from this other work. We definitely need more people to come and join our core group. As the group grows and more experienced people come in, hopefully it will ease the workload because different people can focus on different objectives."

So far, they haven't structured themselves very much, although they do have coordinators, core group members and extended members.

But are they at all worried that they might become just another cog in the Auroville organizational 'system'?

"I don't think we have decided how we're going to work or if we're going to be different from other work groups," says Usha. Angeli, however, recognizes the danger. "I've seen people's attitudes change when they become part of a work group. It makes me very conscious and observant of everything we do in this group. I keep asking myself, what is this person's intention, where is this coming from? So far everything is fine, but it is

something I am concerned about."

"Everything is still very fluid," says Kavitha. "As new members come in, new goals seem to be emerging. At the moment, a lot of people in our group are trying to find their space, trying to discover what motivates them in relationship to youth in Auroville, and this takes time. We are still at a very early stage of our work."

Some years ago, a film was made in which the first generation of Auroville children said they felt that doors were closed to them, that the youth did not get enough support from the older generation. Have this generation experienced this?

Kavitha nods. "I know a lot of youth who definitely have a hard time, whether it is dealing with the Housing Service or finding a mentor or whatever. I think it's exactly because of this that I feel personally motivated to be part of this youth effort, because an individual voice is just a shout of protest, but as a group we will be taken more seriously."

"I think certain doors are closed, but some are open," says Angeli. "For example, the BCC asked for a young person from Youth Link to join them to see how they were working. These are the small green lights we're getting here and there. We are not being told to go away."

In fact, Youth Link is receiving more and more emails from Auroville groups and projects offering to include youth. These include the L'Avénir project for solid waste management group, as well as an Auroville security proposal to provide part-time maintenances for fourteen younger people to work on security in the area. For this, they would receive training in various aspects of self-defence, first aid etc. Gijs from the Integral Entrepreneurship Lab has offered information on marketing, fundraising, and incubation, Ananda from the ABC has offered to teach accounting, while units like Aureka have agreed to give practical training for the apprenticeship programme.

Meanwhile the BCC has provided two full-time maintenances for two Youth Link coordinators and the Bharat Nivas group has provided Youth Link with office space. Both are

temporary – the maintenances are only for six months, and Bharat Nivas has made it clear that providing a permanent space for youth is not part of their long-term plans – and the BCC has stressed that Youth Link has to find ways to make itself financially self-supporting. But the core team is grateful for this help because it gives the youth a breathing space, time to focus upon its core objectives without having to immediately begin fund-raising.

Is there any specific support the youth need from the community at present?

Kavitha mentions a proposal for the youth to build a new space for themselves. It would be a meeting point for different youth groups, include accommodation for youth and visiting student groups, and provide space for young people to start new units. The idea is it could be designed and constructed by the youth. The proposal has gone to the 2018 celebrations Visioning Committee and they have received some positive responses, but they would like the community as a whole to support this initiative.

Bringing people together

One of Youth Link's major aims is to bring the larger community together around youth-themed events. One of their early initiatives was organizing the recent International Youth Day event at Bharat Nivas. It was a big success and now they want to repeat it each year. But how challenging was it to pull it off?

"We started organizing it very late," says Vinay, "All the main work happened in the last week, but we got a lot of support from groups like Mohanam and people from Kuilapalayam and Edayanchavadi youth groups: everybody helped. In the end it went very smoothly."

What played a bit part in making it a success, they say, was a two-day leadership course they did with Leena and Sheba about ten days before the event. There they got to know each other much better and it helped them establish a common vision.

The need for a common vision is crucial, given that they are defining the upper age of youth at thirty-five. How far do they feel they are accepted by and representative of this very diverse age group?

"From the beginning we said this is not just an Auroville thing," explains one of the core group. "We want to include newcomers, guests, volunteers and other non-Aurovillian youth from this area. We would like all the people who are living here now and concerned about this area's development to participate. So far, we have had a lot of support from the different schools and youth centres and organizations in Auroville and the local area. And even those who are not actively engaged definitely know what we are doing."

"We are not doing things just for youth," stresses Usha. "Whenever we organize events it will be for everyone. We want to do a service for the whole community by bringing people together and bringing people's attention to certain issues."

Kavitha remembers her early days in Auroville when there was a much greater sense of community. "Maybe the youth could play a part in recreating that spirit. At the same time, we realise that something like housing is an issue for all generations, particularly for those who are getting older, so we want to be involved in solving their problem as well."

From an interview by Alan and Ing-Marie

On Sri Aurobindo's birthday 2014, the *Acres for Auroville* (A4A) land campaign – a collaboration between Auroville International and *Lands for Auroville Unified* (LFAU) – was launched. Its target was to raise funds for Auroville to buy urgently needed plots in the Matrimandir Area and the International Zone. The idea was to prepare a collective gift for Auroville's 50th birthday – the gift of a unified physical base – by creating a momentum of solidarity among the greater Auroville family. In addition to raising awareness of the City of Dawn's priority need, the campaign had several other successes in what could be called a very encouraging first year:

- after 11 months, 98% of the fundraising goal was reached;
- in June, the Land Board purchased a major Matrimandir area plot, financed by A4A donations. This new Auroville land has become an integral part of Mahalakshmi Park and the Educational Zone near Deepanam school;
- 22 accounting reports have been presented to the Auroville International Board and to the Land Board, fulfilling our promise of keeping fully transparent accounts;
- so far, about 345 donations have been received. All donors received Donor Recognition envelopes containing the Campaign Certificate (designed by Emanuele), an Auroville earth card, and Loretta's DVD "The Message of Flowers: The Life and Work of the Mother of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram" (which she has donated to the campaign).

The A4A team of Mandakini Lucien Brun (Auroville International France), Aryadeep, Sigrid and Jothi works in tandem with Sathish, and with Kumar and Guna of the Unity Fund. While *Acres for Auroville* began before the arrival of the new Land Board, A4A has been working as full collaborators with the new Board team since their arrival.

The team is extremely gratified and encouraged by the support that has come from all quarters of the greater Auroville family – Aurovilians, senior Ashramites, ex-Ashram students, contacts of Auroville International Centres and the Centres themselves, as well as other long-term donors to Auroville. Many have donated repeatedly or sent monthly contributions. According to Divya of the Land Board, "A4A has become a buzzword in fundraising enthusiasm. Auroville and the Land Board are truly grateful to the AVIs for A4A and for donors' responses!"

"How encouraging it is to know that the extended Auroville community and so many friends and well-wishers around the world have contributed to make *A4A Phase 1* a success!" said Friederike, Chairperson of Auroville International.

Two new land campaigns

The *Acres for Auroville Phase Two* and *GreenAcres* campaigns were launched on August 15th.



Members of the Land Board and LFAU. From left standing: Kaniappan, Sandeep, Aryadeep, Mandakini Lucien Brun, Divya, Gérard. Sitting, from left, Prasad, Suhasini, Sigrid.

"It was hard to imagine a year ago, when the campaign started, that such a concerned and generous response would be forthcoming, given the global financial crisis and its repercussions on available individual resources."

"We see the campaign as a consecrated action," explains Mandakini. "So, at every Darshan since August 15th, 2014, we have sent out inspirational letters and fliers, calling for action. In between we publish campaign updates. We have also made a campaign Powerpoint presentation and a short fundraising film (Sergey was the filmmaker)." She highlights the importance of the AVI-LFAU collaboration and the role of Aryadeep: "*Acres for Auroville* could not have existed without him and the donor respect that he's built up over the years."

The next phase

Encouraged by the first year's results, A4A has moved on to its next phase of targeted fundraising for Auroville's land. Phase 2 of the *Acres for Auroville* campaign was launched on August 15th, 2015, targeting the city area as a whole, the 4 zones – Residential, Cultural, Industrial, International – that encircle the Matrimandir, Auroville's heart. This new target is in response to the Land Board's specific request to help purchase land for a coherent, consolidated urban centre.

Unspent Phase 1 donations will be held in trust

for future purchase opportunities in the Phase 1 area (the Matrimandir and International Zone).

Also on August 15th, the *GreenAcres* campaign for land purchase in the Greenbelt was launched. This new campaign is led by Sigrid, with the rest of the LFAU team participating wholeheartedly. The goal is to purchase 20 plots in the Greenbelt corresponding to the Land Board's priorities in regard to water, consolidation of existing Auroville land and other parameters. Resource persons in the campaign are Priya (Green Group and Buddha Garden), who has been actively supporting with information and writing, as well as Martin Littlewood (ex-AVI UK,) and Joss (Pitchandikulam and SLI). Anita P., with her professional skills with eco-projects, has also joined.

"It took one year to get *GreenAcres* set up, and finally it all came together!" says Sigrid. "*GreenAcres* is the start of yet another 'impossible' task, and it became clear that we need to contact new donors. We hope that Aurovilians and well-wishers can help us link to NGOs and individuals particularly inter-

ested in ecology who can see the Greenbelt's potential as an existing and expanding eco-resource centre."

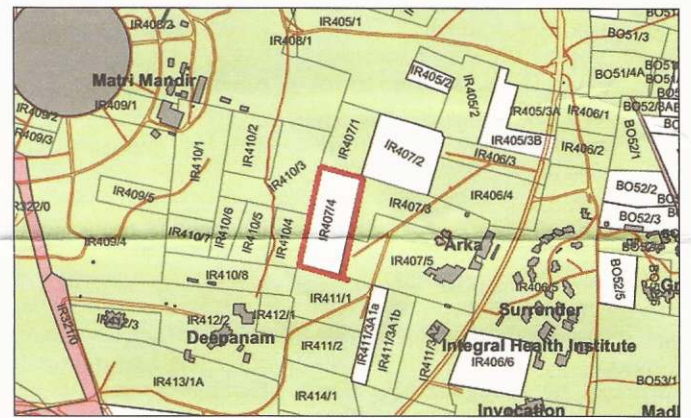
As a first step in this direction, Martin S. and Vikram from Auroville GreenPractices have linked their www.green.auroville.portal.org website with www.colaap.org, the official site of *Lands for Auroville Unified* and the two campaigns. Like A4A, *GreenAcres* will have Donor Pages on COLAAP, a Success Barometer (in green), and the same type of accounting (but since it is not an AVI-initiated project it will not send its accounts to the AVI Board for review).

In preparation for these two new campaigns COLAAP has been upgraded, and it is now a much richer Auroville land action and information resource. It provides information on the City and the Greenbelt, on the campaigns and their news, in addition to hosting the Donor Pages for both campaigns. *A4A Phase 2* and the *GreenAcres* launch, along with a message to the AVIs from the Land Board, were presented by Mandakini at the recent AUM-AVI annual meeting in Woodstock, New York.

Auroville now has two dedicated land campaigns – *A4A Phase 2* and *GreenAcres* – covering the totality of the Township's Master Plan area. The need is great and we invite everyone's support! Building Auroville is an affair of the heart, so please give to the campaign of your heart!

Mandakini and Sigrid
on behalf of the A4A and GreenAcres teams

If you are donating, please specify "*ACRES FOR AUROVILLE*" or "*GREEN ACRES*". You can donate via Auroville Unity Fund (checks or bank transfers) – Auroville Donation Gateway (credit or debit cards) www.auroville.com/donations/ or through – Auroville International www.auroville-international.org. See COLAAP site for information on tax deductibility: www.colaap.org.



The recent land purchase nearby the Matrimandir (in red)

REFLECTION

Reading the runes

A friend of mine would regularly examine the annual 21st February bonfire to see if the coming year would be a good or a bad one for the Auroville community. 'Reading the runes', he jokingly called it. Quite what he was reading he never disclosed. Was it the something of the smoke, the shape of the flame or the patterns in the ashes? Whichever method he used, his prognostications always tended to be positive, if not always accurate.

Reading the runes is a chancy business – at times, the augurs of ancient Rome delivered deeply ambiguous messages to keep their reputation for correctly reading the signs intact – but a fascinating pastime.

So this 15th August, can we discern any straws in the wind, hints of future developments in Auroville? One possibility that I see is an accelerated movement towards greater integration and unification in certain areas. The signs? Well, it is interesting that the people involved in raising money for the land have continually expanded their focus to include and integrate more and more of the Auroville area. Their first appeal, some years ago, was narrowly focussed on acquiring land around Matrimandir, later this expanded to include the city area, and now they have decided to open up a new fundraising front to acquire Greenbelt land.

The opening of Santé, the new multi-purpose health centre, is another example of wider inclusion and integration, in this case of some of the health specialists who, until now, have been working in relative isolation from each other. Then there is the stated aim of the new Youth Link group to "bridge the gap between the generations through cultural and educational events", something which they successfully began to put into practice in their recent International Youth Day event at Bharat Nivas.

Finally, I was deeply touched to read, on AuroNet, an announcement giving a combined overview of August events in both Auroville and the Ashram. On the face of it, it doesn't seem much, but those who know something of the past history will understand that such a low-key announcement matter-of-factly linking the two institutions is actually pregnant with significance. Interestingly, the initiative came from a group called 'Sourcing Our Oneness'.

My other straw in the wind concerns new signposts. The history of signposts in Auroville is a fascinating one. In the early years, there was a strong resistance among the settlers to signposting roads or the names of communities. Perhaps it was a kind of horror of the wrong people turning up at one's door. The inevitable result was that uninformed visitors could be seen wandering for days in the early



Greenbelt, like souls lost in limbo.

There were some half-hearted attempts to remedy the situation, a few hand-carved community signs were made, but their shelf-life tended to be short. A rather fine one in Samridhi disappeared overnight, presumably because the scrap value of the pipe supporting the sign was perceived by someone to be of greater interest than the information the sign was imparting.

However, some years ago, a former Secretary decided to take the matter in hand and erected a slew of new signposts indicating the names and directions of some of the main Auroville institutions and communities. It was not a universally popular move. The signposts were dubbed

'institutional', the 'kind of thing you would find on motorways in the West' and 'not at all in the spirit of Auroville'. While nobody dared take them down, one was covered up one night by a huge butterfly art piece and other, alternative community signposts began to spring up, carved on rocks or artistically etched into wood.

However, in the past month or so a new type of road sign has started appearing along our roads. A combined effort of Nathalie and the students of Udavi School, Marie from Botanical Gardens, Monica with her design studio, as well as the Auroville Road Service, the signs communicate necessary road safety instructions or warnings in a fun, playful way. So a warning to slow down because you are

approaching a traffic jam area is accompanied by an illustration of black ants streaming towards a pot of jam; 'Slow, wildlife friendly road' is illustrated by an image of snakes swallowing cars; a puncture area is indicated by a porcupine with quills flying off its back; and, my favourite, placed strategically close to Poppo's megalithic excavations, warns 'Slow, dinosaurs on the run'.

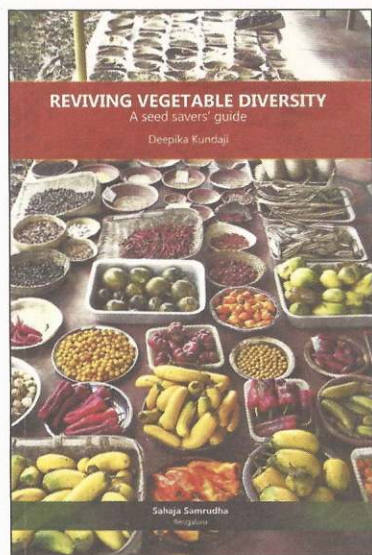
The signs were generally enthusiastically received – 'It is the first time I feel we got the road signs right, they carry the spirit of Auroville' wrote one Aurovillian, 'A refreshing way to approach serious traffic problems', wrote another – although, this being Auroville, dissenting voices soon surfaced on AuroNet. Who gave permission for these signs to be erected, one Aurovillian sternly asked? Are we so hopeless we need to find entertainment in traffic-signs, wailed a proto-Puritan: 'Road signs are meant for safety, not amusement'.

In fact, what these unhappy voices were detecting and, perhaps, fearing, was that signs can signify much more than the actual message displayed on them. Perhaps the deeper message behind these signs (apart, once again, from the fact that they represent a successful collaboration) is that at last we are learning to be a little more playful, lighter, with each other, through daring to use humour rather than the traditional imperative case to try to modify people's behaviour.

It would not be before time.

Alan

New books and DVDs



Reviving Vegetable Diversity – a seed saver's guide

Barely twenty years ago, around Puducherry, the staple food was fermented ragi and a particular variety of kambu (Bajra). That variety of kambu is now virtually extinct and today's staple food is polished white rice. Traditional varieties of bottle gourds and pumpkins were commonly seen trailing all over the roofs of village homes. Now we only see TV cables. Indian farmers had developed around 200,000 varieties of paddy for hundreds of specific uses and growing conditions. Today they are all but gone as the Green Revolution introduced dwarf varieties to promote agribusiness. Also the number of vegetable species and the different types of each vegetable have almost been wiped-out in the past century. But vegetable diversity is critical to human health and well-being and undeniably, the nutritive power of a chemically-grown cabbage is not the same as of an organically-grown one.

Fortunately, some of the once-rich diversity still survives, in remote areas and in people's backyard gardens. Protecting this diversity is critical if the species are not to be lost forever. In *Reviving Vegetable Diversity – a seed saver's guide* Deepika Kundaji, an organic gardener and seed saver who has preserved more than 90 traditionally-bred vegetable varieties and who has worked since 1994 with non-commercial vegetable varieties at Auroville's Pebble Garden, highlights diversity within vegetables and illustrates how to effectively conserve it.

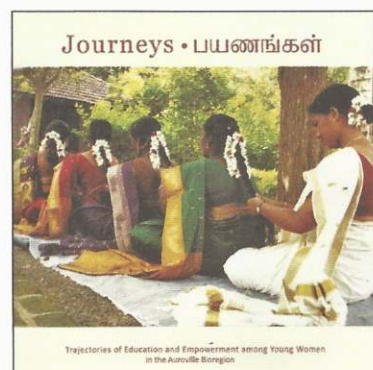
The booklet covers the basics of seed-production – what is a good seed, what is a pure seed and why 'maintaining purity', which is not traditional practice, is necessary today. It takes up popular vegetables such as Lady's Finger, Brinjal, Tomato, Chili and Gourds, and shows the simple techniques with which anyone can propagate pure and good seeds that are of excellent quality.

The booklet is an introductory guide which focuses on the crops that can be grown in the Auroville area. The lay

farmer will benefit from the conscious absence of intimidating 'scientific' terms and technical jargon normally considered necessary to discuss this subject. For more information one is invited to contact the author, who also conducts workshops on vegetable seed saving, at deepikakundaji@gmail.com.

The booklet has been translated into Oriya and Tamil, but these translations still await publication.

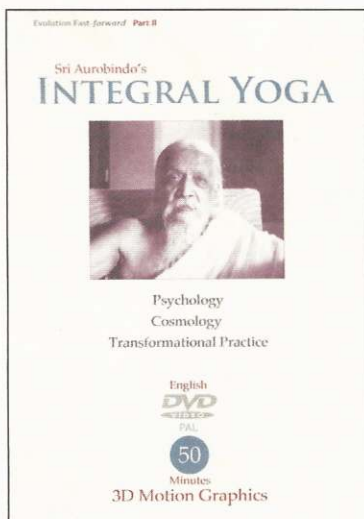
Reviving Vegetable Diversity – a seed saver's guide, by Deepika Kundaji, published by Sahaja Samrudha, Bengaluru. Price in India. Rs 150. Available from the publisher sahajaindia@gmail.com, and in Auroville from Foodlink.



Journeys

The Life Education Centre (LEC) has published *Journeys*, a narrative documenting its 24-year journey since 1991 as seen through the eyes of its graduates and current students. Twelve young women whose ages range from 17 to 35 share their unique personal stories in this book. Coming mostly from unprivileged backgrounds, their struggle to find themselves and blossom into confident human beings is a fascinating read. Through their self-reflections and observations on life, one is given a glimpse into the rich and varied lives of girls growing up in the villages surrounding Auroville. These personal stories show that individual struggles and successes are helped by being part of a larger supportive group or community. Whether it is a group that meets a few times a week for sharing experiences, or for learning, as happens at the LEC, the end result is a metamorphosis of all those involved. Each of the 12 stories reveals the women becoming the shining human beings that they are meant to be. Richly illustrated with photographs of the women and of life in the LEC, this little 60-page book is a pleasure to read. The LEC's efforts at documenting how quiet activities of Auroville impact human lives that would otherwise go unnoticed are laudable. The publication has been made possible through funding from the Project Coordination Group.

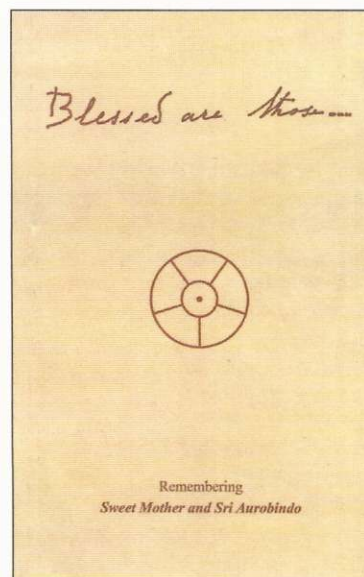
Journeys: Trajectories of Education and Empowerment among Young Women in the Auroville Bioregion. Available from Life Education Centre, contact lec@auroville.org.in.



Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga – psychology, cosmology, transformational practice

Sopanam Auroville has released its second DVD in the series *Evolution Fast-forward*. This 50-minute DVD directed and scripted by Manoj Pavitran gives a brief introduction to Sri Aurobindo and The Mother and their ashram, and then deals with Sri Aurobindo's concepts of evolution, cosmology, yoga-psychology, parts of the being and principles of transformational practice. Visualised and animated by Hemant Shekhar, the DVD offers a choice of a female or male narration in English, or just music, and provides subtitles in Tamil, Hindi, Russian, Italian, French, German and Spanish. The video was made possible with financial support from the Dutch *Stichting de Zaaier*.

Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga - psychology, cosmology, transformational practice, by Manoj Pavitran, published by Sopanam, Auroville, price in India Rs 700, including the first dvd in this series. For information visit www.sopanam.org, or email sopanam@auroville.org.in.



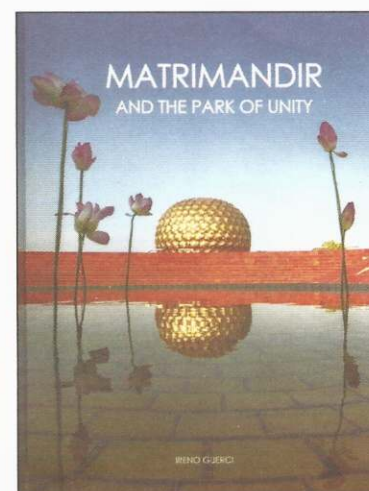
Blessed are those ...

In commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the first meeting of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother in 1914, the

Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research has published its second compilation of remembrances of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother. The first compilation, titled *Darshan*, came out in 2005-2006. The title of the present compilation has been taken from Mother's New Year Message of 1971, "*Blessed are those who take a leap towards the Future*".

The book is divided into three parts. The first part contains 12 reminiscences from Aurovilians and friends of Auroville and of four people who played a significant role for the Ashram and Auroville, Navajata, André Morisset, Karan Singh and Kireet Joshi. The second part has remembrances of some long-time sadhaks from the Ashram, taken from their publications. Part three of the book deals with the *raison d'être* of Auroville and contains experiences of meeting The Mother, of early days in Auroville and of concentrating in the Matrimandir.

Blessed are those ... is available from the Savitri Bhavan. Price in India Rs 200. For more information contact savitribhavan@auroville.org.in



Matrimandir and the Park of Unity

Two and a half years ago, Ireno Guerci presented a photo exhibition in the Unity Pavilion on '*Matrimandir and the Park of Unity*'. The photos were a selection from the many thousand photos that he has taken over the past 30 years of a place that is very close to his heart.

The Matrimandir, of course, exists in many dimensions; it is at the same time a building, a symbol, a force and an evolutionary statement. It is also richly paradoxical – a building with an overwhelming physical presence that is simultaneously a symbol of the transcendent; a transformer for a new way of being constructed of 'old world' materials; a 'temple' which eschews all elements of religion.

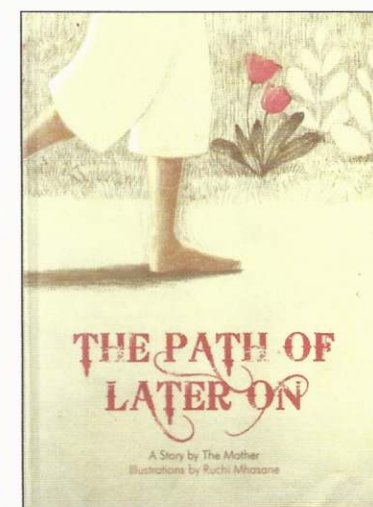
Ireno's challenge was to try to capture something of these complexities on film. He did it by displaying some of the Matrimandir's many 'moods': at one moment, presenting it enveloped in mist, at another as a space age transformer glittering under a starlit sky, at another capturing its

emergence, like a golden promise, out of the dense red laterite. Ireno also revealed the 'human' face of this iconic structure through shots of the workers, of visitors with their different approaches to the structure and the gardens, and, above all, of the children who love to play in the gardens and in the vicinity of the Matrimandir.

The exhibition was very well received and now a selection of these photos, plus some new ones, have been published by SAIER in a beautiful book, *Matrimandir and the Park of Unity*. As Paolo Tommasi puts it in his foreword to the book, "In this world of disorder and war, Auroville and its central zone of the Matrimandir seems a miracle. In these images one feels the hovering joy, a vibration of happiness when a dream of victory becomes reality."

Matrimandir and the Park of Unity is a fine complement to Dominique Darr's photo book *Matrimandir – Hymn to the Builders of the Future* released earlier this year.

Matrimandir and the Garden of Unity is available from Auroville outlets and from auroville.com, price Rs 1200



The path of later on

"The path of later on and the road of tomorrow lead only to the castle of nothing-at-all," is the conclusion of a small boy who, after postponing the day's chores to tomorrow, has a nightmare which shows him the truth of never putting off till tomorrow what one could do today. The story, written by The Mother as a school essay in 1893, when she was a teenager, points to the moral lesson of heeding one's inner voice and choosing the right path, and never postponing that choice. The Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research, Auroville, has now published it as a picture book for children, beautifully illustrated by Ruchi Mhasane, an artist from Mumbai. The book was released in small ceremony on June 20th June, at SAIER in Auroville.

Available from Auroville.com, from *Sabda* and in the Auroville book stores. Price in India: Rs 690

PASSINGS

Juanita Cole

Juanita Cole left her body at night on 15 July 2015 in Denver, USA. She was 81 years old.

Juanita had been introduced to the concept of Auroville by Younghe and Claude Brun when she was working in the USA embassy in Switzerland. Later she was posted to India where she worked as a communications officer for the USA embassy in New Delhi, and then for the USA consulate in Chennai – a position she had negotiated to be closer to Auroville so that she could visit on weekends.

Juanita always had an open house for Aurovilians, in Delhi and well as in Chennai, and was 'a boundless font of generosity and hospitality'. She finally retired from the State Department in 1991 and joined Auroville. But it would not be a keet hut for her. She felt all should live in beauty, cleanliness and quiet, and started Felicity community on the Utility road where she built a beautiful house. It had a guesthouse for VIP visitors, and became a place for many gatherings, concerts, meetings, and US thanksgiving dinners.



In 2003 Juanita was issued a Leave India notice for reasons which were never disclosed to Auroville. Though many Aurovilians testified on her behalf, eventually she was told she had to go to the USA to get a new Entry Visa and then come back. But her application for a visa was refused everywhere. Juanita was then already suffering from Alzheimers Disease. When she returned to the USA, at the end of August 2004, she was well taken care of by her nieces but she suffered and felt abandoned and was not happy to be there. Mother-Sri Aurobindo-Auroville had been the meaning of her life and its sole aspiration.

Petra Janko

Petra Janko left her body at the age of 55 in Pondicherry's General Hospital in the early morning of 17 August, hours after having been taken there feeling unwell by Hari, her husband, living in Pondicherry.

Hailing from Germany, Petra joined Auroville in 1999 and lived in Auromodèle. She was known for the quiet and dependable way in which she coordinated Inside India's Travelshop for many years. She left the Travelshop last year, ready to further explore new and more creative activities in Auroville and in herself.

Petra's body was cremated at the Karuvadikuppam crematorium on August 22nd. There was a silent gathering remembering Petra under the Matrimandir banyan tree on August 26th.



A 4000 ladies' special

Six years ago, Auroville Village Action Group (AVAG) organized its first Women's Solidarity Festival. Thousands of women from AVAG's Women's Self-Help Groups came together in an event that was described as unique, path-breaking and intensely motivating for all participants. Calls were made to do it again.

Yet, funds were not available and AVAG kept postponing. Till this year, when the Women's Self Help Groups decided that the event should happen and that they too would contribute financially. And so, on July 19th, the second Women's Solidarity Festival was held at the grounds of Auroville's Village Action in Irumbai village. More than 4,000 women from the region participated, some from villages as far away as 25 kilometres.

Hours before the event began the women started flooding the compound, huge smiles on their faces, carrying placards with the name of their Women's Self-Help Group, each group dressed in identical sarees. Slowly they passed the display stalls at the entrance and walked to the colourful shamianas, where, surrounded by thousands of other women, they sat down, elbow to elbow, eagerly waiting for the event to begin.

They patiently listened to the speeches of the AVAG co-directors Anbu and Moris and to the words of thanks and admiration of AVAG trustees and Auroville's Working Committee. The Inspector of the Auroville Police Station also expressed his pride at the achievements of the



Performers at the Women's Solidarity Festival

AVAG women, before starting a talk about road safety sporting a big red helmet, drawing laughter and applause.

After the speeches, there were theatre performances, dances and songs. Dalit women performed beside caste women. Traditional songs, accompanied by large drums, inspired many to move to the beat, displaying an ocean of colours. The elder women in particular were very enter-

taining. They danced as if they had no care in the world, truly enjoying the moment and its space where they felt safe. A group of Auroville women also sang some songs, and though the quality was indisputable, the long golden hair of one Westerner was also widely admired. In the late afternoon, Shankar and Vinodhini gave a very lively introduction to Auroville.

"This should be done once a year," said a leader of a Self Help Group Federation. Gnansundari, a member of the Udhayam Malligai WSHG summed it up. "It was a ladies' 'special' where all of us, regardless of age and differences, had a lot of fun. The messages from the guests were encouraging. Next year, I will definitely participate in one of the stage performances. I will encourage my group members to do so too."

For the AVAG management, the event was more than a day of fun and entertainment. It showed the success of AVAG's longstanding work

to remove the social constraints experienced by the thousands of women that it supports. It was an opportunity to showcase the numerous achievements and the development of the Women's Self Help Groups. It was a celebration of women's creativity and talent and an opportunity to show the dramatic improvement of women's self-confidence as witnessed by their insistence that the Festival would happen, the

The Auroville Village Action Group, which started in 1983, collaborates with rural communities to promote village development. It fosters participatory village transformation with rural communities in the Auroville bioregion through community development, economic development, capacity building and psychosocial support. Some exemplary outcomes of this organization's efforts include the AVAL line of clothing by women trained in tailoring, production of spirulina and crocheting, the setting up of 275 Self Help Groups with 4,500 women and 850 men, the exchange programs where people from different castes, genders, and villages get together and break traditional barriers of separation, as well as the many awareness camps and seminars on important topics such as menstrual hygiene, reproductive health, organic farming and climate change.

A recent grant of Rs 1 crore (approximately US \$ 160,000) received through the help of an Aurovilian from the Corporate Social Responsibility budget of a large industrial company will be distributed amongst the Women's Self-Help Groups for girls' education.

increased number of women that stepped forward to perform and the vastly improved quality of their performances.

It's more than likely that AVAG will now make the Women's Solidarity Festival a yearly event. "Perhaps," said one of the trustees, "we can organize one inside Auroville, so that Aurovilians too have the chance to experience the magic that happens when more than 4,000 women celebrate together."

Inge

IN BRIEF

Brief news

Housing issues

The Housing Board has published a note on the way it deals with house pricings and transfers. The stewardship of newly-built houses is being allocated at cost price, while the transfer price of existing houses is assessed on the basis of a valuation made by a certified valuator. The valuation of existing houses takes into account a depreciation of 1 % per year, inflation of the construction materials and wages, and how well the house has been maintained. If the value as assessed is lower than the value of the new house, the price difference will have to be covered.

When an Aurovilian leaves Auroville, and requires financial support to continue life elsewhere, a group is formed to determine the Repatriation Allowance. Repatriation Allowances are paid from the Auroville Repatriation Fund, which gets 50 % of the transfer value of the house which is left behind (if any), while the remaining 50 % will be used by the Housing Service as grant for the people in need of funds for becoming a housing steward or for building an extension to an existing house. There is no link between the value of the house left behind and the Repatriation Allowance: all those who leave Auroville and are in need are entitled to an allowance.

When an Aurovilian passes away, the stewardship of the house left behind is either re-allocated pro bono, or transferred. In this case the transfer value is allocated by the Housing Board as grant(s) to those in need.

Big buses not welcome

The Working Committee and Auroville Council are taking action against the presence of big buses in Auroville. Pointing out that the volume of large buses is increasing day by day and that the Auroville roads are not suitable for large vehicles which are, moreover, are putting other road users in danger, all tour organizers have been asked to inform their groups to come by mini-bus. In the near future, the guards at the check posts at the Auroville entrances will no longer allow access to big buses.

The Matrimandir: honouring Piero

The first part of a film *The Matrimandir: Honouring Piero Ciconesi* was shown at Cinema Paradiso on August 28th. The film, says its maker Francois Gautier, shows the true story of the Matrimandir, from the beginning till its completion, which, he writes, "would never have been built without Piero's quiet and unceasing efforts, day after day, for twenty five years. Every morning, he would come with the drawings and the calculations he had made the night before, without any computer

or electronic device. He was there from the excavation till the installing of the crystal globe in the Chamber. It is this beautiful inner Chamber that we owe to him. Yet, credit was never properly given to Piero, as he never pushed himself forward."

Budokan house warming

On August 30th, a house-warming of the "Auroville Budokan" (House of Martial Arts), the new Aikido Dojo, at Dehashakti/Dana took place. The formal inauguration will take place during the forthcoming meetings of the Governing Board and International Advisory Council in the beginning of October.

A critique of high rise buildings

As part of a two-day meeting held in Auroville on the topic of affordable housing by the Gubbi Alliance for Sustainable Habitat, an association of habitat professionals and researchers which seeks to mainstream sustainability as a core concern in design, policy and habitat management, Professor Ashok Lall, former Dean of the TVB school of Architecture - New Delhi, presented "A critique of the current belief and accelerating trend toward high-rise high-density as the panacea" on August 22nd at the Multimedia Centre. The talk covered the genesis and the 'social health' of high rise living, the limits of density, the economics of high rise develop-

ment, and environmental concerns. It was followed by a question and answer session with a panel comprising Sanjay Prakash, Tamnay Tathagath and Dean D'Cruz - all well known in India for their work on sustainable habitats.

The underground rooms of the Amphitheatre.

The two large underground rooms at the Matrimandir amphitheatre have been cleaned out. The electrical department vacated the room beneath the eastern side of the amphitheatre, which will now be turned into green rooms for all those who will come to perform in the Amphitheatre. The room on the opposite side, used to store left-over marble from the construction of the walls and floor of the Inner Chamber and for the central spiral staircase, will be used as a holding area for garden tools, needed for the daily maintenance of the future gardens.

French Pavilion's third foundation stone

The third foundation stone of the Pavilion of France was laid on August 15th, 22 years after the laying of the first Foundation Stone by J.R.D. TATA and Mireille Albrecht in February 1993. On that day, J.R.D. Tata planted "the Pavilion Tree", a "Service" tree which is still growing. The second inauguration took place six months later when the French Ambassador,

Mr. Petit together with and Mireille Albrecht, laid the first stone which is still in place. The third stone nearby the Service tree marks the final location of the French Pavilion building. While waiting for the funds for a permanent building, the French Pavilion will purchase and install 3 structures: two will be used as a welcoming desk, a small library, a coffee corner and the third will serve as housing for a Newcomer or Volunteer.

Bell of Peace

The Peace Bell [see AVToday # 305 of December 2014] has arrived in Auroville during the dawn bonfire on Sri Aurobindo's birthday, August 15th. It is located in the Pavilion of Tibetan Culture in a wooden stand made by Ricardo and his team.

Auroville in a crossword

'Chance discovery of final archaeologist at Auroville ruins (10)' is the cryptic crossword puzzle that appeared in The Hindu newspaper on July 11th. The answer is 'trouville', a word meaning a lucky find. "Certainly the archaeological finds in Auroville are lucky; perhaps even more than just lucky as they've given us an insight into people living here over 2500 years ago and being involved in trade with Europe, copying pottery from Arezzo on the banks of the Sankraparani at Arikamedu, and shipping it back to Italy," writes Angad who reported the find.

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