

Auroville locked down

January 30. India reports its first Covid-19 positive case in Kerala's Thrissur district in a student who had returned home for a vacation from Wuhan University in China. In early February, two more cases of students who had returned from Wuhan are reported. On each subsequent day March, a gradually increasing number of cases are reported in various states and territories of India.

March 11. The Government of India suspends the validity of all existing visas, except diplomatic, official, international organizations, employment, and project visas, till 15 April. The Government also announces that all incoming travelers, including Indians, arriving from or having visited China, Italy, Iran, South Korea, France, Spain and Germany, will be quarantined for minimum 14 days.

March 18. The ban is extended to include arriving international passengers, including Indian passport holders, from the United Kingdom, Turkey and the whole of Europe and the compulsory quarantine for a period of 14 days is expanded to include passengers coming from UAE, Qatar, Oman, Kuwait with effect from March 18, 2020.

March 19. The Government of India announces that it will not allow any commercial passenger aircraft to land in India from the beginning March 22 for a period of a week.

March 22. A nationwide voluntary curfew comes into force in the whole of India. The shutdown lasts for 14 hours until 9 p.m., leaving markets empty, train stations quiet, and all roads deserted.

March 23. The Government of Tamil Nadu announces that people should stay home and only come out for obtaining essential food items and services, till March 31st. It also instructs all

employers to pay full wages for this period, even though the employees were not coming to work.

March 24, evening. Prime Minister Narendra Modi announces a lockdown, a total ban on all residents of India leaving their homes for 21 days, coming into force at midnight, closing all commercial and private establishments and places of worship, with a few exceptions such as hospitals and food shops. "To save India and every Indian, there will be a total ban on venturing out of your homes," Shri Modi said. "It is impossible to say the price India will have to pay if irresponsible behaviour continues."

The position of Auroville

Auroville had been pro-active. On March 13th, the Working Committee called for a meeting in which it was agreed to close the Matrimandir Inner Chamber to external guests: Aurovilians were still free to meditate there in the early mornings and evenings. Also the video room at the Visitors' Centre, and the pre-Kindergarten, Kindergarten and primary schools and secondary schools were closed.

On March 16, a wider directive was issued, informing about restrictions and precautions to be taken while visiting essential services such as the Solar Kitchen and the food and grocery outlets. Admission to these units and to Auroville restaurants and eateries was open only to Aurovilians, to guests holding an Aurocard and to volunteer card holders. All events which involved large gatherings, such as general meetings, concerts, festivals, were shut down. The Visitors' Centre was closed for outside visitors; guesthouses and home stays were instructed to stop taking in new guests; the Quiet Healing Centre was closed and Santé closed

all body-contact treatments. Instructions were given that those who recently returned from abroad or from Covid-19 affected areas of India had to self-quarantine for two weeks. A list of mandatory precautions, such as the wearing of masks and sanitization of hands, was circulated.

On March 19, the Health Authorities of Tamil Nadu set up a screening camp at Santé in Auroville, where all those who had arrived from elsewhere in India or abroad were told to get themselves screened. Also those who had no travel history but had contact with people who have returned from abroad were instructed to getting themselves screened.

On March 21, the Collectors of Pondicherry and Villupuram district and its Health Service administrators visited Auroville. For them, Auroville, with citizens from over 58 countries, is a very sensitive zone.

A few days later more restrictions were imposed. The dining rooms of the Solar Kitchen and of all restaurants were closed, and only food delivery and take away services were allowed.

The Working Committee created a Covid-19 Task Force and intensified its interactions with the district authorities to ensure that all government orders, guidelines, quarantines and safety measures were communicated and implemented.

Lists of guests, volunteers and Aurovilians were shared with the authorities as required. All residents have since been requested to reduce their visits to places where many people gather at the same time and reduce their shopping trips as much as possible. A 'basket' food delivery system is being developed, in particular for the elderly and those with special needs. The larger aim is to fully move to home delivery and stop all

individual shopping. This will be implemented if the pandemic progresses into the Auroville area or when the government orders a stricter lockdown.

The situation became difficult for many Auroville guests and tourists, who found themselves stranded in Auroville. Foreign missions, such as the German and French consulates, started to organize flights home, which involved close coordination of the local authorities with the Working Committee. More special flights for tourists and short term visitors are being coordinated by the EU Embassies in New Delhi to repatriate European people from various countries.

In addition to all the 'practical' announcements, the Working Committee also suggested that all Auroville residents come together in a quiet meditation in their own homes on Sundays at 10 am, which can also be joined by the many Auroville friends outside Auroville. As one participant wrote, "A nice concentration this morning at 10:00. The feeling of being united with all the brothers and sisters connected to Auroville and Mother throughout the world, forming like an invisible network of protection. And also remaining passive, silent and open to the Divine Force, letting it flood and strengthen our being, which becomes then an instrument for its diffusion around us and in the world."

As of April 8, 2020, there are no confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Auroville.

As Auroville is in lockdown, and we do not know when the printing of this issue will take place, we issue this special double issue which we will email to all our subscribers. In our next issue we will explore the effects of Covid-19 on Auroville in more detail.

Editors

Deep adaptation and Auroville

Is Auroville prepared for an uncertain future? In 1968, Auroville was a desertified plateau. Since then, the landscape has been greened by millions of trees and fauna and flora have exploded. But could Auroville return to that former state in the foreseeable future?

It seems highly unlikely. Yet Auroville and the bioregion are threatened by a potential water crisis while the world outside its boundaries at present is wobbling on its axis due to the coronavirus. In addition, mutually reinforcing challenges like climate change, large-scale species extinction, pervasive pollution, serious geopolitical tensions and a precarious global economy – the extreme vulnerability of which is presently being tested by the coronavirus and an oil price war – all suggest that the future is, to put it mildly, extremely uncertain. One school of thought, basing itself on worrying statistics like those released by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, believes that we have already surpassed a tipping point, and that wide scale ecological, social and economic collapse is now inevitable in the not so distant future. Jem Bendell in his paper *Deep Adaptation: A Map for Navigating Climate Tragedy* and Pablo Servigne and Raphael Stevens in their book *How everything can collapse: a small manual of collapsology for the use of present generations*, are in the forefront of this.

Others dispute their gloomy prognostication, pointing out that it is 'bad science' and undervalues the ability of humans to rise to the challenge. And, from a spiritual perspective, Mother has made it clear that a new transfigurative Force is at work in the world. But Mother also pointed out that its eventual triumph could take many years and that in the interim "falsehood rises in full swing", guaranteeing a great deal of disruption and uncertainty.

The world, particularly the young, is waking up to this. School Strike for Climate, Extinction Rebellion and Greta Thunberg with her speeches that lambasted leaders at the U.N. and Davos for their inability to do anything effective about climate change are the most visible manifestations. But is Auroville prepared for such a future? Or are we complacent, believing that we are in some way insulated from the travails of a world in crisis?

We tried to find out by talking to the Auroville Deep Adaptation group and to Aurovilians in the key fields of farming, energy, water, shelter and the economy. We also discover how the Findhorn community in Scotland, which has deep links with Auroville, is responding to the challenge.



Auroville, 1968: the desert landscape

In Auroville, the Deep Adaptation group is focussing on providing information about climate change and its consequences for Auroville and the bioregion and to stimulate appropriate action. An Auroville Whatsapp group on the topic has over one hundred members. But what does the group stand for? And, practically, what is it setting out to do?

We spoke to some of the core team, along with other Aurovilians who have an interest in making the community more aware of the possible existential threats to the environment and our present lifestyles.

Auroville Today: *Can we begin by defining deep adaptation and collapsology?*

Daniel Rodary: Jem Bendell says there is going to be a collapse, a near-term environmental and social collapse, so deep adaptation is about adapting to that reality. The UN speaks of the need for resilience in a climate-changed world, but most of the time they do not imply the collapse of most of the global systems. Deep adaptation starts from this premise and tries to find ways of preparing us for this and reducing the damage.

continued on page 2

The energy challenge

Planning for a different future

The food and farming challenge

Out of necessity

The Findhorn experience

pages 3–4

Ready for a post climate era?

Corona is here but where is karuna?

Restoring the earth

Housing development lacks

momentum

pages 4–7

Home is where the heart is

The African Pavilion: bringing

the African identity to Auroville

The Annapurna community farm

Indian traditional crafts mela

pages 7–10

The Auroville effect

Brief News

Passing Jayaram Ramalingam

Letter from Dr. Karan Singh

In memoriam: Roger Harris

pages 11–12

continued from page 1
Collapsology is about basically the same thing, but we stopped using this term in Auroville when we realised that it has a negative effect on people.

Dave Storey: I'm working for UNDP at the moment on an adaptation project and from my perspective it's interesting to see how the UN funding has shifted in a significant way from mitigation to adaptation [mitigation addresses the causes of climate change, like accumulation of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, whereas adaptation addresses the impacts of climate change eds]. It feels like mitigation is not as important anymore because there is recognition, particularly in places in Africa, that collapse is already happening and they can't afford to be spending a lot of energy and time on mitigation.

Do you feel that this is in contradiction to what Sri Aurobindo and The Mother have expressed in relationship to the action of a new consciousness in the world? Mother said a New World is born.

Dan Greenberg: I've had a lot of discussions with people in Auroville about deep adaptation and a common response is all we have to do is meditate and achieve supramental consciousness and then all our problems will be solved. I'm not so sure. For me it is clear that, as Sri Aurobindo said, we are on the brink of an evolutionary leap in consciousness, but I think the leap is going to happen through our engagement with climate change and other manifestations of our collective consciousness.



We are at a fork in the road. We have been playing out the story of ego, of separation, for millennia and I'm convinced that if we continue with that story we will go extinct. So now we have the opportunity to make the next step, that of unity. I think those who survive the emerging climate catastrophe, and I hope some will come through, will be a changed species with a changed consciousness.

How did you introduce deep adaptation to Auroville?

Daniel Rodary: In 2018 there was a request to do a conference in the French Pavilion on collapsology and we presented it in French and then in English. Later we organized a series of 'collapso-coffee' sessions where we gathered our insights and feelings about collapse and we've also held workshops on the water situation. We've tried to get the message across, but it is quite a heavy message...

Dan Greenberg: The baseline message of deep adaptation is that collapse is inevitable, catastrophe is likely or probable, and extinction of the human species is possible.

How have Aurovilians responded to this message?

Eric Chacra: I read the book of Pablo Servigne on Collapsology last year and I got very depressed because I realised that humanity might crash. I had to do a lot of inner work and I am still not clear. After identifying an emergency it is important to act. But Mother and Sri Aurobindo tell us to find our true nature before we act.



Daniel Rodary: For some, the first reaction to the news of a coming collapse is "We've known that for a long time". However, people assume it's in the future, not something that can happen suddenly, and soon. We also had the Aurovilian kind of denial which says that The Mother and Sri Aurobindo predicted some kind of upheaval, but they created Auroville as an answer to that so as we live here we will be O.K.

Laurence: When we had a conference on water and talked about an impending water crisis, people said, "We were told about water scarcity 15 years ago, and we still have water, so it's all rubbish."

Dan Greenberg: There's a fair bit of climate denial in Auroville. My sense is that even in the climate movement there is an unspoken norm that you can talk about all these things, but you

a certain collapse coming, but we can't say it will come tomorrow, so people can start changing their lives without going into panic mode. At the same time, Sevigne says fear is a good catalyst when something urgently needs to be done.

Joanna Macy says that despair can actually be a trigger for personal and collective transformation...

Dan Greenberg: Joanna Macy said that despair can be healing, particularly when we realise that it comes essentially from a place of love, that we are feeling despair and loss because we love what we are losing. My experience of deep adaptation groups is that they are very heartfelt. When you strip off the layer of 'We can do this and it will all work out', and you recognise impending loss, it really connects us very deeply. Common suffering may be one of the ways we will find or deepen our connection with others.

Daniel Rodary: What we felt very strongly, and what has expanded our group very fast, is that this is something coming from the larger global consciousness, something which is reflected in movements like Extinction Rebellion and the School Strike for Climate. Promoting deep adaptation awareness and activities is happening in many places in the world.

So what is happening in Auroville?

Dan Greenberg: Some of us are adapting the 'Awakening the Dreamer' symposium created by the Panchama Alliance for the Auroville context, to help people see Auroville as part of a global movement for positive change.

Daniel Rodary: We found that the process Michael and Gail devised in Findhorn was interesting (see accompanying article), so we did a first run of what it could look like in Auroville. We gathered around 50 people and asked them four questions. In terms of the present global crisis, What do we want to keep? What do we want to let go of? What do we want to restore? And what do we need to make peace with?

We ended up with a series of responses for each question, which we prioritized. This has resulted in the formation of action groups on topics like food, water and emotional support.

Laurence: These are offering support to existing groups. For example, Eric is already part of the existing Water Group so he will introduce the ideas of deep adaptation there.

What are you bringing that is very different from what is being done at present?

Daniel Rodary: One thing is a sense of urgency. If you read Sevigne or Bendell you realize we don't have ten years to start changing things. To prepare for a collapse we need to be more autonomous in terms of food, so we have to start achieving this today on a war footing. We have to start changing our diet, changing the economy, changing our land priorities. Everything we are doing at present

has to be very much questioned. And the same for energy, water, transportation etc.

Eric: We cannot change people but we can constantly warn them that it is an emergency.

Regarding water, for example, what very practical things can be done that are not being done at present?

Eric: We could install water meters everywhere, and we can all give feedback on the source and state of our wells. In spite of the efforts of the water group, a lot of this data is missing at present, data that can help us design more sustainable systems, like interlinked wells.

Guilio from the Water Group made

Laurence: Yes. One of the best ways to survive collapse is to be part of a strong community, and this is where Auroville fits completely.

Daniel Rodary: We all have to simplify our lifestyle, which includes eating what is only grown locally and minimizing our carbon footprint. As the lifestyle become simpler, community tends to be strengthened. The message we need to get across is that this is not all loss: a simpler lifestyle can be more fulfilling. Auroville, a spiritual town, should be able to understand this but I'm not sure that it's ready: the need to simplify the present lifestyle would be a major change for many people.

Laurence: But it's worth noting there's already a lot happening in Auroville along these lines. For



a presentation to the Forest Group. He pointed out that simply controlling the run-off is no longer sufficient given our present rainfall pattern, so now, as a short-term solution, we have to store the rainwater. But most of the people present did not get this; they felt that simply controlling the run-off was enough.

Daniel Rodary: Looking at the larger picture, there are 6000 wells on private land around Auroville over which we have no control and which are over-pumping the aquifers. The government of Tamil Nadu is unlikely to solve this water problem soon, so maximizing surface storage in Auroville makes sense. One suggested solution is a series of interlinked catchment ponds. When we cannot count on the existing authorities to deal with a problem, we have to do it ourselves.

Are there a few core principles of deep adaptation that can be applied everywhere?

From an interview by Alan

Deep adaptation in Auroville: suggestions for practical action

Water

1. Address Auroville's denial and inaction on the water crisis
2. Dig ponds – revive traditional storage and distribution
3. Measure and reduce consumption in your community and workplace
4. Develop the 'Water Commons' – linking and distribution of water sources
5. Widespread recycling and reuse of (treated) grey water
6. Participative visioning and resilient water master-plan for Auroville

Food

1. Address Auroville's inaction in creating a resilient food supply for Auroville
2. Radically increase organic, local, seasonal and rain-fed crops
3. Take action in your home and community, ask the difficult questions
4. Invest in smarter irrigation to minimise water and energy consumption
5. Reconnect to the land and food – volunteer on a farm even once a week
6. Participative visioning and resilient food system for Auroville

Energy

1. Address Auroville's inaction on creating a resilient energy supply
2. Replace hydrocarbon sources in a strategy of reducing carbon footprint by 10% pa
3. Take action in your home and community, ask the difficult questions
4. Prepare for grid collapse, install "microgrids" with local generation and storage
5. Participative visioning and resilient energy system for Auroville

Economy

1. Address denial on the vulnerabilities of the Auroville and wider economic systems
2. Re-design away from tourism and accumulation and towards a fair share of limited resources
3. Strengthen internal systems of exchange and focus on essential needs incl. infrastructure
4. Evaluate your resources and plan for difficult times, at home and with all neighbours
5. Innovate and financially invest in resilient social/economic projects
6. Participative economic vision addressing likely systemic failures – water, food, social fabric

The energy challenge

We need to recognise that widespread climatic, economic and social disruption due to climate change, global economic instability, etc. cannot be dealt with in isolation. These are issues that affect everyone and must be dealt with at, to start with, regional level. Food, water and energy (to name a few of the most essential ones) in particular cannot be addressed only at a local (Auroville) level. We have to work with what some of us call the “WELL nexus” where “WELL” stands for Water, Energy, Land, Livelihood. These are interconnected and call for a holistic approach.

The question that can be asked is whether Auroville is on the right path in making a contribution to a sustainable energy future for all. Let us list some of the initiatives that Auroville has taken in this regard:

Auroville has a mix of renewable energy sources which includes on-site solar energy systems (stand-alone and grid-connected) and off-site

Agency) and TANGEDCO (Tamil Nadu Generation and Distribution Corporation) on numerous sustainable energy initiatives including the pioneering of grid-connected rooftop solar PV, solar energy policies, solar villages, solar energy for agriculture programmes etc. Auroville has also been active in several other States in this regard and is uniquely placed to act as an initiator, developer and demonstrator of innovative energy solutions.

Auroville needs to do more in the field of energy conservation and efficiency and accelerate the transition to green mobility and low energy precision irrigation, to just name a few. Also the completion of the backbone of the Auroville internal distribution network is a priority. This will allow an increase in distributed renewable energy capacity and distributed energy storage systems. Distributed and connected. This will give a high level of resilience and enables the sharing of resources. With adequate on-site renewable energy generation and energy storage capacity and remote (automatic) demand side management, the system can run in autonomous (island) mode for a certain period of time.

The electricity grid transitions from being a one-way highway over which energy flows in one direction from high capacity fossil fuel generators to millions of consumers to a network where the grid acts as a balancing system between a large number of distributed renewable energy generators and storage devices in conjunction with smart demand side management.

A question is sometimes raised about a scenario wherein the public electricity grid collapses (the generators, the distribution network, or both). With sufficient energy generation capacity and large energy storage capacity one can go beyond interim autonomy and make the local system long term autonomous. But this can be done only if the area for which you want to create that autonomy has sufficient renewable energy

generation potential, which matches the local energy needs and with energy storage capacity that is sufficiently large. For Auroville this means that the trajectory of distributed renewable energy generation and distributed energy storage is the correct one and if one wants to plan for total long term public grid collapse, the on-site energy storage investments will have to be much larger and the local grid will have to be even more robust. The present Auroville trajectory allows for incremental energy storage capacity enhancement and internal grid strengthening.

Whatever “future-proof” solutions we come up, these should also work for (most) places other than Auroville. Whatever we do needs to be replicable elsewhere.

Auroville will continue to play a role in demonstrating that the vision of a sustainable energy future for all can become a reality.

Toine van Megen



Rooftop solar panels on the offices of the Auroville Foundation, SAIER and the Auroville Archives buildings

wind turbines. The combined annual energy production of these systems is about 30% more than the electricity Auroville consumes. This makes Auroville net-positive as far as sustainable electrical energy is concerned.

The distributed solar energy systems of Auroville which are connected to Auroville’s internal distribution network allow for multi-directional energy flow between buildings and facilities. The first smart mini grid of Auroville which is in the final stages of completion includes distributed solar energy, distributed energy storage and smart metering which enables remote demand side management (e.g. peak shaving and peak shifting).

Other energy-related initiatives include smart street lighting (with solar energy), precision irrigation, e-mobility and various energy conservation and efficiency measures. Auroville is, and has been, working with the Tamil Nadu Government through TEDA (Tamil Nadu Energy Development

The food and farming challenge

The future is very unpredictable and will unfold in many unexpected ways and we have to be responsive and alive to that. The weather is becoming more erratic and resources like water and energy will become scarcer and more costly. The cost and availability of labour is already a big issue. This means we have to farm more efficiently. Right now each farmer is on his/her own and most of them are hardly breaking even. This is unsustainable and definitely not a very good environment in which to face an uncertain future.

We need to look at steps to improve the functioning of our farms and food production, to improve food distribution and



Taking out paddy seedlings at Annapurna

Planning for a different future



The late Roger Anger (left) examining a model

Human activity, especially over the last 300 years, has caused a measurable increase in the concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, disrupting the climatic conditions of the Holocene epoch that has shaped every aspect of human civilisation. Even the most cautious forecast indicates drastic impacts on human settlements; rich or poor, urban or rural, coastal or inland. Any mitigation strategy will necessitate a complete rethink of human settlement planning, development and management.

For Auroville, located in the tropical dry coastal zone, the climate output will include the increased frequency and force of cyclonic storms accompanied with storm surges, and longer durations of hot – dry weather with short periods of heavy rains accompanied by a sea level rise. This will impact our urban planning and development and require a framework that allows for an adaptive system of urban management.

This planning will necessarily need to consider the topography of the site to maximise our surface water holding capacity as our main source of potable water, and to improve our waste water recycling systems so they can be used for construction and manufacturing. Technologies that allow recycled waste water for toilet flushing may be expensive presently, but in the near future using recycled water for flushing will be a necessity. In fact, the very system of water diluted piped sanitation will become history.

Urban land use planning that reduces if not eliminates all unnecessary movement of people, goods and services will be forced on us, as oil and electrical energy will be too precious to waste. Replacement of personalised petroleum vehicles with electric mass transport is just a convenient way to defer the problem to a technological fix. Food, waste, water and energy generation and recycling will need to be an essential component of urban land use planning. The 20th Century urban planning model, dependent on cheap fuel and planned obsolescence, with large zones outside the urban perimeter supplying resources and absorbing waste, will not be possible. Auroville’s urban management will need to

be integrated within a regional socioeconomic plan to avoid becoming the soft target in the conflict over resources.

The increasing frequency and scale of extreme weather will require context-specific solar passive urban planning and design, with built structures which are able to buffer the effects of cyclonic storms. Of course, decentralised energy generation, prevention of heat island effect and decentralised roof and surface water harvesting for supply of potable water needs will become non-negotiable.

As the costs, both monetary and environmental, will only increase for high embodied energy building materials like steel, aluminium, cement, ceramics and various alloys, the only cost effective option will be to reduce the building surface area for the built up space. This means basically fewer walls and more efficient circulation. Along with the multi-use of spaces this means that one is building less. Single-use designated spaces in residential and other buildings – a recent phenomena fuelled by property developers to boost a consumption based economy – cannot continue if we are to meet emission targets globally to stabilise at below a temperature rise of 2 degrees C. The green building regulations and designs which use technological fixes to hermetically seal off buildings to conserve energy will not bring about the desired drop in emissions as long as the urban environment continues to be hostile due to lack of synergy between land use and mobility planning.

Some of the strategies adopted will be inspired from the pre-fossil fuel era to drastically reduce dependence on goods and services provisioned by the global supply chain. The segregation of work and life, a heritage of the industrial era, will be phased out. Instead of being isolated by distance, the communication and networking technology will allow for a wider exchange of innovations, ideas and collaboration. If we would allow ourselves to be bold and assimilative with our imagination, the potential for the Galaxy concept to be translated into a climate-resilient urban plan for Auroville is within our reach.

Suhasini

planning, agree on standards in the different areas of work, look at infrastructure needs and more. Farming in Auroville has to become much more professional. Farmers need to be able to handle increased financial responsibilities, to be computer savvy, to embrace advanced technology and to understand soil/plant/ecology science. They also need to develop considerable managerial skills to handle it all.

We also need a kind of food board/task-force which includes, in addition to some farmers, various food/finance/policy makers/techies/water group members who will chalk out and practically support a sustainable way forward. This will be a very challenging task given our current Auroville situation but I see no other way for Auroville farming to

progress into the future. It is time to come together instead of fighting or being silent in our corners.

We also need to decide, as a community, to make healthy, local food a central part of our diet and grow it in all its aspects. And we need to be ready to pay a higher price for food which is produced according to our values and high ideals, like good hygiene standards, fair labour conditions, proper animal care, and strong ecological concerns.

In the context of an uncertain future, it’s important to understand that in farming there are no short cuts, no fast fixes, no ready solutions, and that the focus has to be on the quality of the process in what will be an ongoing exercise.

Tomas

Out of necessity?

Auroville's history is very much interwoven with the story of water accessibility. When the Mother launched Auroville on this desertified plateau, it was out of necessity that tree planting, contour bunding and check dams were started, so that life could prosper and sustain the growing needs of the population. Because of the obvious advantages it created, these efforts are still supported.

Today run-off from rain is used to recharge the groundwater. It turns out to be our near-to-only accessible fresh water resource because other resources (rain water harvesting, recycling, reduction of water usage, optimized irrigation practice, etc) are poorly developed. In ancient times the water was collected in the nearby lakes and ponds and visibly recharged. Today the runoff simply "disappears" for us underground or is fast drained away. We lost the visual connection to the natural cycle of water, just as we lost the connection to the many other things we are burying underground.

With trees being planted, dams and erosion control being developed, helping – invisibly – to maintain our groundwater, settlements and urbanised areas emerged in Auroville and its neighbourhood. However, the influence of fast-changing surroundings was massively underestimated or even denied. For along with these developments one could observe a shift of paradigm, in Auroville as elsewhere, from ancient preservation and respect for land, water, wildlife and population to a money-driven society.



Water recycling plant in Invocation community

As a result, Auroville's bioregion, not so long ago described as water-rich, is now facing a serious water crisis: the irrigation tanks are not maintained, groundwater is massively overexploited and depleted, sea water is intruding into the area, while the pollution of land and water is increasing. The Tamil Nadu Government is not blind to the seriousness of the situation. Massive funding is being mobilised to protect and

recharge the groundwater around Kaliveli Lake, groundwater extraction is being moved 20 kilometres inland from the coastal stretch, and purification of wastewater and river remediation are also underway.

But are we ready in Auroville? NO!

With our one single water resource from the past we are certainly not able to face this crisis and move towards the New. The way forward is

only by considering all resources available – that means multi-sourcing resources and their optimised usage.

What holds us back still is our attachment to the predominant top-down, centralised, non-consultative, opaque and largely dogmatic approach that we have developed and is today preventing a new move forward. For example, for the two coming financial years no request for financial support of water projects has been requested to the Government of India, water metering in communities is not done or not shared, degradation of the quality of water is not monitored, and water infrastructures are developed without considering population growth and other factors like global warming.

A true effort is necessary to become free from the prevalent socio-economic model and our psychological and physical disconnection from water. Then one can enter a space of creativity.

Yes, we are in the middle of an evolutionary crisis and it is not by

repeating old ways that we can face it. And, yes, humans are a transitional being, invited to participate in this evolutionary process. But with or without humans, the material and spiritual evolution is happening.

The call is there, which means to never rest with what has been achieved.

"Higher, always higher!" (The Mother)

Gilles Boulicot

Deep adaptation: the Findhorn experience

The Findhorn community, an intentional community in the north of Scotland, came to deep adaptation a little later than Auroville. Daniel Rodary, who is part of the Auroville deep adaptation group, gave a Findhorn member, Michael Shaw, a copy of the Jem Bendell paper, *Deep Adaptation: A Map for Navigating Climate Tragedy*, in July. The paper had a profound impact, particularly around "inevitable near term social collapse". It was realised that something about deep adaptation needed initiating in Findhorn.

Forty copies of the article were distributed to the key players in their community, followed by an invitation for a meeting. Given the likely scenario of collapse and the need to prepare for this, the attendees were asked, "What do we want to keep, to let go of, and restore and reintroduce in Findhorn?"

What also helped focus minds was the realisation that the far north of Scotland, where Findhorn is located, is both cooler and less populated than the rest of the U.K., and therefore would become a prime haven for huge numbers of refugees from the rest of the country in the event of social upheaval.

The first meeting was followed by several others at which people came together to focus on different aspects of deep adaptation. "There were existing groups, like the food and energy groups," says Gail Shaw. "So all we were doing by introducing deep adaptation was planting a seed, and saying take it to your group and work with this. And it was like popcorn, it really took off."

Findhorn had just hosted a Climate Change and Consciousness conference in the community in which many leaders in the climate movement participated and so the ground was well prepared.

The food production group realised that in the event of widespread collapse they would need to look at what is the most nutritious food, and what can be produced locally and stored for long periods. They came up with five or six different crops. They also realized that Findhorn did not have sufficient land to be autonomous in food production, so a land purchasing group was set up to explore buying more farmland. The bioregion is also being mapped to see where additional food can come from by building alliances with local regional food growers.

The energy group is exploring options with the local army base who admitted they have no plan for climate change, but are happy to work with the community on energy. The army has a lot of the land and would like to install solar panels, and Findhorn along with two Scottish Universities would like to put together a district micro-grid solution with the army to generate energy in renewable ways. "We agreed we have to be very locally resilient and not rely upon the European energy grid working," says Michael.

From the economic perspective, Findhorn already has its own alternative currency: For deep adaptation, some kind of internal system is crucial. But for the next five to ten years conventional money will be spent to buy land for farms, so it is fortunate that Findhorn also has its own bank, with several millions pounds invested in it.

Education is the main focus and money-earner for Findhorn at present. One idea is to introduce a new course where everything is laid out 'upfront' concerning climate

change and the need for deep adaptation. "Essentially, people would be contemplating the end of the world as we know it," says Michael. "They would be given the data and then helped in responding to this in a quiet and supportive environment. The typical Findhorn attitude to climate change would be to trust and cooperate with nature as far as we possibly can, and to work on inner process as well as outer actions."

Gail, who is a psychotherapist, explains there is an art to holding people when they are confronted with such a bleak scenario and helping them process it. "One of the things that helps people hold it is having a spiritual framework. And when groups are organised around people sharing their strengths and fears, it builds energy. At the same time, I agree with Greta Thunberg that you should not pretend there is hope that a major disaster can be averted. So we have to act now because we have very little time to get prepared if we are not all to be washed away."

"Personally, I find it energising," says Michael. "Suddenly it's very clear what the focus of our lives should be and what has to be done. I would hope that Gilles Boulicot's report that Auroville will run out of water in three years if there is not quick action will have the same effect here."

Is there anything that Auroville can learn from Findhorn regarding deep adaptation?

Michael and Gail are doubtful, partly because Findhorn and Auroville are so different. "Findhorn is tighter, smaller, and functions in groups," explains Gail. "There is a lot of group process, of group sophistication. My experience of Auroville is that it's much more amorphous and the consciousness here is pioneering but also anarchic. This is an energy that fights groups and authority. But I think that wherever the deep adaptation people want to work in Auroville, they must link up with or infiltrate your existing governing structures. They must also be given real power to work on the deep adaptation agenda. There's a lot of expertise in Auroville regarding new approaches to water management, energy etc. but money and power are needed to implement these solutions."

Findhorn and Auroville may be very different, but are there fundamental principles and practices of deep adaptation that are relevant everywhere in the world?

They believe there are. For example, a simple lifestyle is essential, like growing one's own food and minimising one's energy use. There is also a fundamental need to protect the commons – natural resources like water, energy, food – while 'smart' tools can be particularly helpful when the communities are no longer connected to the rest of the world. (In fact, Auroville and Findhorn are already collaborating on such projects, like smart irrigation at Buddha Garden.)

Gail believes that Auroville has one big advantage. "Quite a number of people here, as well as the villagers, are used to hardship; that's a really big strength. Findhorn has become too 'cushy', comfortable. One of the things that brought us to Auroville is that here there is still a strong pioneering spirit. However, in a time of tremendous change we cannot keep holding on to a tight structure of how things have to be. Auroville needs to open its gates to new people, new ideas, and I think this might be much better achieved here than at Findhorn."

Alan

Is the Auroville economy ready for a post-fossil fuel, post-climate crisis era?

The short answer I believe is, 'no'. The long answer will take 500 words more. To start with, we need to define "economy" as not just counting coins, but running our collective household ("oikos" – the root of the words eco-nomy and eco-logy). In this case, we can't rely on our current model of using income from tourism, foreign remittances and government grants to fund individualistic lifestyles. Instead we will need to re-focus on the foundations of human life: clean water, food, health care, resilient social relations, and trust. All of these are dwindling in Auroville, or at best stagnant.

Water tables are sinking fast and aquifers are turning salty. The groups concerned can't see eye-to-eye which makes it unlikely we will swiftly shift to catching and using the only other source: rainwater.

Food security has not been a priority in the last decade. In 2010 we grew 15% of our food. Today we don't know our level of food sufficiency because nobody measures it.

For serious health issues we rely on private hospitals and commercial pharmaceuticals, but at least we have a forest full of medicinal plants, so we might survive if we learn how to use those in time.

Once the physical body is taken care of, the remaining needs depend on "community". This word has all but lost its meaning in Auroville for we tend to call everything by this term, from practical neighbourhoods to political vote banks to collective purpose and identity.

What we will need to both enjoy each others' company and to troubleshoot our way through the unknown is trust. In previous months we have seen what could be a fire drill – a preparatory crisis inflicted by a vindictive lawsuit and a suspicious Governing Board. If our response to this is anything to go by, we are far, far away from accessing goodwill and solidarity as a source of strength. Official bodies don't trust residents nor each other, leading to imposed and superfluous regulation, which in turn leads to resentment and loss of trust. The doctrine of not involving police in community disputes has been abandoned. When put under stress we seem to communicate less, not more. And again, we don't know how far removed we have become from each other because nobody is documenting it.

All in all, the future looks bleak for Auroville's economy, and it has nothing to do with markets, money or manpower. If we are to adapt our utopian experiment to a dystopian future we will need to shift our attention and start collectively acknowledging, tracking, nudging and nurturing non-financial types of capital (i.e. natural, physical, social, cultural, knowledge, experiential, spiritual). Sometimes it takes a shock to the system to muster the courage to shed the old familiar ways of management. Maybe it's time for another cyclone or a virus?

Gijs

Corona is here, but where is the Karuna?

The grave crisis that has developed worldwide due to the spread of a tiny invisible virus reminds us of the well-known story of the *Samudra Manthan*, the churning of the milky ocean. Continuous churning went on for centuries in which the Devas and the Asuras both participated in the hope that great gifts would emerge. Instead, suddenly a dark and deadly poison – the *garala* – emerged and spread throughout the world. The Devas and Asuras fled in terror, and it was only when Lord Shiva, Karunavataram, the Incarnation of Compassion, collected the poison in his hands and swallowed it, thus containing it in his own throat which turned blue – hence his name Neelkanth – that the churning continued and the great gifts began to appear.

If we consider the violent churning that the human race has indulged in over the last few centuries – the ruthless exploitation of nature, the cruel destruction of millions of plant, insect and animal species, the pollution of the air, the earth and the oceans, the unsustainable high protein diets and the consumption of strange animals

and reptiles – all this has, at last, thrown up a new *garala* that threatens the very existence of the human race. Perhaps this is nature's way of telling us to slowdown worldwide for a while so as to enable her to regenerate, which she seems to be doing rapidly.

To expect Lord Shiva to appear once again and contain this poison is, to say the least, unrealistic, but nonetheless we urgently need the compassion he embodied so that together we can meet this challenge. This must extend not only to the victims of the virus but to those millions whose lives has been uprooted and disrupted in the process. The sight of lakhs of migrant workers desperately trying to walk hundreds of kilometres to get back to their villages was heart-rending. Have we seen a countervailing upsurge of compassion? Let us recall Shakespeare's immortal words in the Merchant of Venice:

*The quality of mercy is not strained,
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath : it is twice blest
It blesses him that gives and him that takes*

That is the Karuna we need.

The present crisis has taught us some valuable lessons.

Firstly, despite the attempts by several world leaders, notably President Trump, to trash globalization, the fact remains that in the face of any major worldwide crisis we will all in the final analysis sink or swim together. Our ancient ideal of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*, the whole world is a single family, remains valid.

Secondly, it shows that our basic health infrastructure remains woefully inadequate. *Sharir Madhyam Khalu Dharma sadhanam*, the body alone is the foundation for all dharmas. Unless we triple the percentage of GDP that is at present allotted to health and education, we will never be able to safeguard the welfare of the weaker and most vulnerable sections of society. A restructuring of our national priorities is long overdue.

Dr. Karan Singh,
Chairman, Auroville Foundation

PROFILE

Restoring the Earth

Alan Watson Featherstone is a long-term member of the Findhorn community as well as a former Trustee of that community. He is also the Founder of Trees for Life, which has restored 10,000 acres of the Caledonian Forest in the Highlands of Scotland. He visited Auroville in March and gave two well attended presentations on 'Forests of the World' and 'Restoring the Caledonian Forest', as well as a talk to the students on the ecological horticulture course at the Auroville Botanical Gardens.

Auroville Today: Tell us how you came to the Findhorn community.

Alan Watson Featherstone: I moved to Findhorn in 1978 drawn by their work of co-creation with nature, and the spirit, intelligence, consciousness and purpose in nature. It resonated in my heart. One of the things that Findhorn and Auroville have in common is that they conceive of us as spiritual beings in physical form. Our mission here on earth is to make higher spiritual consciousness manifest in our daily actions, work and relationships, and to bring into being something that hasn't existed before.

Since being in Findhorn I've discovered that by following the path of our heart we discover our true potential as human beings.

I had the standard career trajectory in Findhorn. I worked in various departments, served on the Core Group and as a Trustee, and organized big conferences. All this prepared me for my life work.

Say more about your life work.

My life work has two aspects. Firstly, to know my spiritual self, my true identity, that's the personal part. Secondly, to be of service, to help transform the relationship between humans and the rest of nature. I have been helping to heal and transform nature in many forms; by working in the garden, by co-creating with nature and the power of love, setting up recycling programmes, growing sprouts in Findhorn kitchen. I published the Findhorn Nature calendar and Trees for Life calendars for many years. Then I began work on restoring the Caledonian Forest where my prime purpose is healing the relationship between humans and nature by restoring a highly degraded ecosystem to its natural state of diversity, abundance and health as a wild forest.

Auroville was hugely influential along the way. I first heard of Auroville when I arrived in Findhorn from Eric Franciscus who had lived here for 9 months. It sounded interesting but I didn't really connect then. However, in 1984, around the time I felt called to do something for the dying Caledonian Forest, I started finding brochures and leaflets about Auroville and they grabbed me. I also had a series of dreams about Auroville. They culminated in one dream where I got into the car belonging to Eric and fell asleep. The car stopped and Eric said 'We are here' and I was in Auroville.

I had no money at the time, but I believe in the laws of manifestation, that if it's meant to be it will come, it will happen. I was in my room when I got a knock on the door saying I had won £1000 in a Greenpeace raffle, and that was how I able to come to Auroville.

I arrived here in February 1985 and was hosted by Jan and Johnny in Fertile. Jan had spent 9 months in Findhorn and she wanted to return that hospitality. She took me around, introduced me to people and got me sorted. I worked with Walter and Tine in their tree nursery at Shakti. I became deeply touched by Auroville and what it had achieved by 1985. It was young forests on Auroville lands and all the surrounding village land was red earth, and you could still see canyons with no vegetation in them. It was tremendously inspiring and touching to see the dedication and commitment of those living

in the Greenbelt. They drilled their own wells, guarded trees at night to stop villagers cutting them down. When you do that, nature responds. Now it's all green. I thought that if they can do this in Auroville where there is no top soil and lateritic pan everywhere and ten months of the year is without rain, we can certainly do it in Scotland where it rains all the time and there is topsoil, albeit leached and poor.

After that time in Auroville I stayed connected. Periodically I would buy books on ecology and send them with people who were going to Auroville. There was more of an ongoing exchange then.

In 1989 Paul Blanchflower got in touch with me. He had been in Fertile and heard that I was regenerating the Caledonian Forest. At the time, he was studying for a forestry degree in Edinburgh University and had to do a field project for his final year. So he did a study on the first 50 hectares of overgrazed seedlings that we were about to fence for regeneration. His research showed that 100,000 Scots Pine seedlings had germinated naturally in the area from mature trees, but were unable to grow because of the pressure of too many deer eating them all. My vision of restoring a big area in Highlands with native trees touched Paul a lot. After he graduated, he came back to Auroville and started championing the growing of native trees here.

I came back to Auroville in 1998 and went seed collecting with Paul and Joss in Gingee and learnt more about their work, how they were trying to bring back the Tropical Dry Evergreen Forest and replace 'work' trees and non-natives. It had parallels with what I was doing on a different continent. We were a wave of humanity with a new consciousness that I would describe as being the 'givers' as distinct from the 'leavers' or 'takers' as defined by Daniel Quinn in his book *Ishmael*. 'Givers' is my term for people giving life back to the earth via our ecological restoration work, through our hands and the power of our hearts.

I was formulating a dream: that the 21st Century would be about restoring the Earth, where people of all cultures and nations would help heal our wounded world and revitalise degraded ecosystems. The work I was engaged in with Trees for Life and the greenwork in Auroville were two of the pioneering projects to prepare the way for that.

In 2002 I helped to organise the 'Restore The Earth' conference in Findhorn. Joss, Anita and Paul came and give presentations of their work here as part of that conference. It feels like a lot of cross pollination and fertilisation has happened between Auroville's greenwork and Findhorn and Trees for Life.

Tell us more about ecological restoration and 'rewilding'.

Humans have destructively affected ecosystems; exploiting them to death or near extinction. This was summarised by Chateaubriand as 'forests precede civilisations, deserts follow them'.

We operate under the illusion that we are not connected to nature. That's at the heart of many of the problems of our culture in the world. If one positive thing comes from this coronavirus pandemic, it is that we are all connected. What happens in one part of world spreads rapidly and what we do to



Alan beside a banyan tree (Ficus benghalensis) in Fertile forest.

nature comes back to bite us. The theory is this virus started in markets selling wild animals...

Ecological restoration or 'rewilding' is a conscious attempt to turn the tide of destruction: to reconnect the strands in the web of life and to restore diversity and abundance. To step back from what the American writer David Ehrenfeld called the 'the arrogance of humanism', the idea that we humans are the pinnacle of nature and know better. Ecological restoration on a significant scale has never been attempted before. Nature has taken millions of years to evolve to its present level of complexity, abundance and interdependence and we need to create space for that to continue on the planet and allow all other beings to continue their evolutionary journey, instead of harnessing them all for human greed.

Rewilding is about allowing space for nature. For example, we need to ensure there is enough natural habitat, large spaces, for species such as tigers to flourish at the top of food webs. By implication humans have to shrink their demands on the planet. It's not just about planting trees or bringing back species but making conscious choices to minimise our effects on world. For rewilding and restoration to be successful we have to rein in humanity and find a way to live simply, to put into practice Gandhi's saying that "the earth has enough for everyone's needs but not for everyone's greed". It's why I became vegan 40 years ago, why I live in an eco-village and buy few things, and they are often second-hand.

What about the impact of climate change?

The mainstream modern day capitalist society is racing to the cliff edge of self-destruction. Its days are numbered; the question is, how is it going to change? It could be a gentle graceful change or a catastrophic one. However, the choices made collectively over the past decades point to a catastrophic one. Since 9/11 I am asking, are we ready? Are Findhorn and Auroville ready? We know what needs to be done on the physical level with wind power, permaculture, recycling etc. But are there strong enough spiritual practices? Are we ready to shift from a culture of fear, control and 'power over' – power over others, and over Nature – to a new culture seeking to incarnate the supramental based on love and values of the heart, which liberates the power within each one of us. Are we strong enough to stand solid and true amongst the approaching chaos? I don't know the answer to that.

We need to take steps to be as prepared as we can be for whatever comes along. After 9/11 we had a chance, it could have been a pivot point if we built on the love, care and community cohesion that was present for a short while, but other forces quickly took over, the war on terror etc. We were not strong enough in love and spirit to hold that space. Now we have another opportunity with the coronavirus. It is time to break through or break down. At present, the forces of fear are running the show. We have to make personal choices to live by the heart and not give way to fear.

What's it like being back in Auroville?

It's quite sobering and shocking to me that somehow I've let twenty two years go by since my last visit to Auroville! In some ways the community is physically almost unrecognisable. There is green everywhere and it's not just on Auroville lands but it has spilled over to surrounding lands, so the huge contrasts of the past are not so obvious now.

The community has grown in diversity and sophistication, and technology has advanced. In 1985 pushbikes were the main transport, now it's mostly motorbikes. The spirit of the place is still here, though, the commitment to fulfilling the vision of Mother, to experiment with different new ways, to strive for unity through all the challenges on the way. The challenge now is similar to that which Findhorn faces: not to rest on your laurels, on what you have already achieved, but to remember what your real work is: to be the city of dawn, an experiment in human unity, a laboratory for the supramental.

You have a life here now that is quite comfortable. The risk is people get into a rut and don't apply as much commitment and dedication to a higher purpose, to manifesting a higher vision. In Findhorn and Auroville we have laid the groundwork for massive changes ahead. Peter Caddy, one of the Findhorn founders, saw Findhorn as a training centre for world servers and I see Auroville doing the same thing, even if it is not articulated. Mother described Auroville as the City of Dawn and Eileen Caddy, another of the Founders of Findhorn, described Findhorn as a City of Light, so we are both engaged in the same work.

The work of places like Auroville and Findhorn is to be centres of sanity in times of madness, islands of hope and beacons of positivity that work for all.

Interview by Peter

Housing development lacks momentum

Lack of available housing threatens the growth of Auroville. The reasons for this are lack of planning, bureaucratisation, ‘not in my backyard’ attitudes, over-dependence on government grants and bad economic policies. All need fixing.

In the last two decades Auroville Today has repeatedly reported about Auroville’s housing crisis. Today’s situation is once again grim. 201 Aurovilians and 132 Newcomers are in urgent need of housing, in addition to a steadily growing number of youth and volunteers. The Housing Service expects the numbers to increase by 50-60 people a year. But it has no means to address the need for there are no new building projects.

The only ongoing projects are Humanscapes Block 2, which will provide youth housing for 36 beds; Humanscapes Block 3, for which building permission is still awaited; Vibrance (61 beds); and the extension with a few small units of Kriya and Pony Farm. But all have their problems.

Ongoing project problems

Humanscapes is a government-sponsored project which was approved about 4 years ago after three different peer reviews. Block One – 48 beds – was opened in February 2018 when the Prime Minister of India handed the key of the first apartment to a young Aurovillian while inaugurating Auroville’s 50th anniversary. This project was later awarded the 2nd prize in residential category for 2019 by 2A Continental Architectural Award 2019 and was the 29th JK AYA winner for Green Architecture 2020.

Block Two – 36 beds – was to be completed and occupied by October last year, but is delayed as the funds did not arrive in time. It is now scheduled for completion by June 2020 – assuming that the construction blockage due to the coronavirus will be lifted in time. Block three – 48 beds – has not yet started. “We had made the application in April 2019,” says Ole from the Housing Service. “But the application was not processed in a timely manner. The Town Development Council (TDC) was changing its application forms, which took 3 months, and the peer review took another 6 months.” The Funds and Assets Management Committee (FAMC) afterwards gave its approval on the basis of the preliminary concept and costing. “But as the Government of India grant was delayed, the making of detailed drawings and estimates had been kept pending. The completion of Block three is now estimated to happen in mid 2021,” says Suhasini, the architect.

Vibrance too encountered funding problems. Funding from the government grant was first approved by the FAMC, then implicitly by the Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation,

and construction started early 2019. But in January this year the Ministry of Human Resource Development, the nodal ministry of Auroville, objected to government grants being used for this project. The construction has since been stopped. The architects are modifying the building to become a privately-funded apartment project and the government funds will be re-routed.

Kriya and Pony Farm are temporary low-cost housing communities, as they do not fit into the Master Plan [for Kriya see AVToday # 365 of December 2019]. Their location was chosen to protect the lands from encroachment. While Kriya was funded from a grant of the Government of India, the Pony Farm houses were privately funded. Because of their temporary nature, it’s difficult to get Auroville permission to extend these projects. “The lack of clear planning prevents quick approvals,” says Sonja, another member of the Housing Board. “The Master Plan says that a road needs to be built through both communities; and because of that uncertainty, it took 15 emails to get permission to build two more temporary units in Kriya. This issue could have been avoided if the TDC had clarified how long the site could be used.” She complains of over-bureaucratisation. “The permission process is far too cumbersome. The TDC site and building permission, and the FAMC financial viability approval together take a minimum of 5 and a maximum of 13 months. This is no longer acceptable.”

Insufficient planning

“It is the task of the Town Development Council to make an urban plan on the basis of the Auroville Perspective Plan (Master Plan 2025). For this, a number of steps have to be taken. They are, firstly, to do a land suitability analysis and make a land use plan; secondly, to make Development Controls and Building Regulations; and thirdly, prepare Detailed Development Plans accordingly. All these are required before sites and building permissions can be given,” says Suhasini, who was instrumental in preparing the framework for the functioning of the TDC in 2017 [see AVToday # 335-336 of June-July 2017, “New town planning methodology approved”].

The work of preparing a land suitability analysis for the city area was given to Suhasini in May 2013 and was completed in July the next year. In November 2019, Suhasini and Prashant, as technical consultants to the Town



Development Council, started preparing a land use plan for the Auroville Master Plan area, which is now almost completed.

Suhasini explains. “The land suitability analysis proposes the best usage of each area from plot to zone based on multiple criteria. For example, a low lying area could be ideal for rainwater catchment and not for buildings or roads. The land use plan details the proposed purpose of each plot of land in the city area. Development controls (DC) and building regulations (BR) prescribe what type of development is allowed based on the proposed land use and contain details such as permitted building heights, sustainability, sanitation, safety and so on. Detailed development plans describe, locate and budget the programmes and projects that are needed for growth and development.” The DC and BR document is yet to be framed, but the identification of the development priorities that are needed to prepare detailed development plans is almost complete.

The work of the TDC

For the development of the Residential Zone sectors I and II, the TDC now uses the draft Detailed Development Plan made in 2015 by Luis Feduchi, an urban designer living in Spain. [see AVToday # 308, March 2015]. This plan, which was neither based on any land use plan nor on any development controls and building regulations, was an attempt to interpret the Galaxy master plan for a part of the Residential Zone. Though it was widely discussed with Auroville experts and Feduchi has incorporated feedback to a large extent, community approval was never given. “It is a very technical document,” explains Tejaswini, a former member of the TDC. “We need people who can translate this document into a lay person’s language and guide it through the community approval process. But with the gradual demise of the former TDC, which started in November 2017 when most of the team resigned within the year, we never found the person to do it. The TDC now uses the document as a guide, not a bible. It is on the basis of this plan that the sites for Humanscapes and Vibrance were opened up for development.”

But what about recent permissions? “In 2019, three housing projects were submitted, two by the Housing Service and one by an Auroville architect,” says Tejaswini. “One of the Housing Service projects was approved and was given site

permission, but this was later withdrawn and a new site was promised. The second project, near Vikas community, ran into objections from neighbouring communities and got stuck. They argued that the proposed location was in a green corridor, something which was apparently approved by a former TDC, but of which we have no record in the TDC. The third project, that of the architect, had a site permission, but failed to get building permission as the TDC no longer accepts that the architect is the jack-of-all-trades, doing the site layout, finding clients, being the architect for each house or apartment, managing the funds, choosing the contractor and managing / supervising the construction site. Such a comprehensive job for a sizable project has proven to be unmanageable and leads to burnouts [see for example AVToday # 338 of September 2017 about the Sanjana community]. The TDC now only accepts proposals where the responsible person or working group for each of these roles is clearly defined.”

New housing plots and NIMBYism

“Auroville Planning cannot base its development on density-number games as urban planning sometimes asks us to do,” says Tejaswini. “The TDC has recently concluded a study – an extension to Luis Feduchi’s draft Detailed Development Plan – marking plots for collective housing developments in sectors I and II of the Residential Zone [see map]. This zone houses at present 800 people or 16% of the zones projected population of 5,000 people. 4,200 more people need to be accommodated in this area if we want to achieve this projected population. The TDC will soon invite Auroville architects to submit housing projects for these plots.”

A major project is the completion of Progress, one of the two Lines of Force in the Residential Zone and the smallest of all the Lines of Force of the Galaxy Master Plan. Progress was conceived in 1998 [see Auroville Today #113 of June 1998] but was stopped after the first section was finished. A team of project holders, an architect and a group of Aurovilians is now working to amend the project to fit the requirements. “It is meant to house roughly 700 people. But even if this project manifests with the said density, it is highly unlikely that the density of 5,000 will be reached,” says Tejaswini. “But at least we’ll have experimented with one

Planning for a township

In India, all places with a municipality, corporation, cantonment board or notified town area committee, so declared by a state law, are called statutory towns. Census towns are places which have a minimum population of 5,000; where at least 75 per cent of the male main working population is engaged in non-agricultural pursuits; and which has a density of population of at least 400 persons per sq. km. Towns with population of 100,000 and above are called cities.

The Auroville Foundation Act 1988, though referring in its preamble to Auroville as “a cultural township” does not confer any statutory status on Auroville; it has not declared Auroville to be a town as defined in Indian laws. The Act only mentions that it is the responsibility of the Governing Board “to prepare a master-plan of Auroville in consultation with the Residents Assembly and to ensure development of Auroville as so planned.”

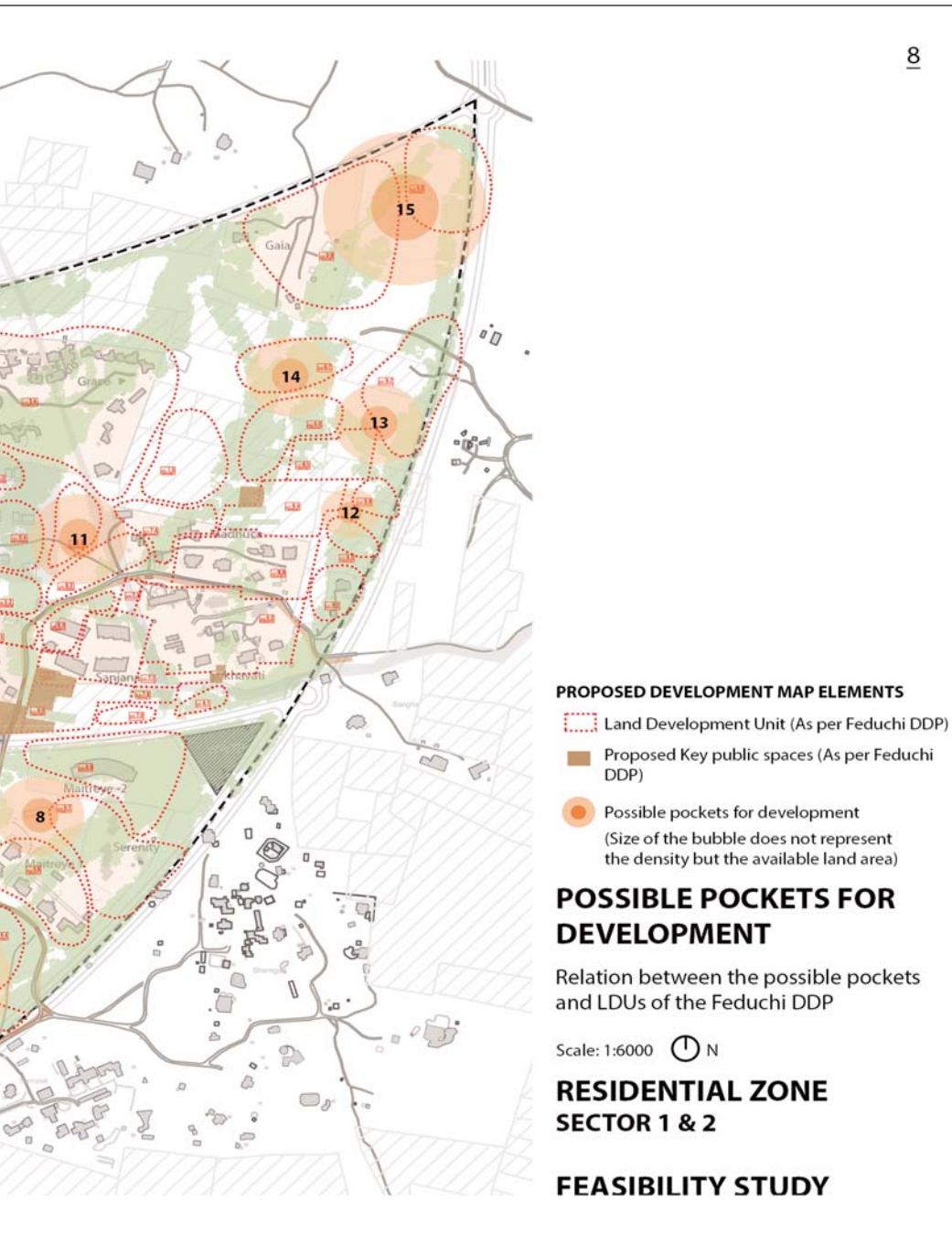
In Tamil Nadu, all planning issues are the responsibility of the Tamil Nadu Government. As the Government of Tamil Nadu has never notified Auroville as a town, Auroville does not have a statutory status of itself. It is for this reason that Auroville must prepare a “proposed land use plan” for the city and greenbelt areas. Only when such a land use plan has been approved by the Government of Tamil Nadu, will it become binding.

The Auroville Universal Township Master Plan, Perspective 2025, was published in February 2002. It was prepared for a time frame of 20-25 years. On the basis of this Master Plan, a land use plan is being developed. The plan will include:

- 1) Reference to the Auroville master plan with the four zones and the essential networks as per the concept plan of the galaxy
- 2) Maps of the existing land use, including roads and village and Auroville settlements
- 3) No-build areas where there are established woodlands, ravines, and ecologically fragile zones
- 4) Marking of hydro-geological zones for ground water tapping, replenishing and protection from pollution
- 5) Maps of existing and proposed national / state and district developments (roads, railways)
- 6) Hydrological maps, e.g. marking of aquifer usage
- 7) Identification of surface water storage areas for rainwater harvesting
- 8) Identification of area that is topographically suitable for gravity based decentralized sewage treatment.

Together with the proposed Land Use Plan, Development Controls and Building Regulations documents need to be made.

The detailed development plans define, describe, locate and budget the programmes and projects along with policies to develop the required civic amenities, social and public infrastructure based on projected growth, to meet the needs of the existing population along with the projected target population for the next 5 years.



high-density habitat, and this Line is an achievable project in today's conditions."

But it is increasingly difficult to start new projects. "NIMBYism [the not in my backyard attitude, eds] is very high and goes, in fact, way further than the backyard," says Tejaswini. "This attitude hinders the manifestation of Auroville and may affect the plots now proposed by the TDC." Tejaswini recalls that two youth hostel projects, for which the architects / project holders had been making and remaking the project brief and designs, were blocked because of NIMBYism. "That was really unfortunate. We need youth hostels. We keep talking about accommodation for young people and an increasing number of volunteers are coming to Auroville, but we do not have space for them. Moreover, the architects, who had been doing a lot of work, ran into financial problems as they were not paid. This has to change."

How to proceed?

So far, collective housing projects have been realised either by the future inhabitants, who pooled their resources and interacted with the architect and builders, or by an enterprising architect who initiated and managed an entire project from planning to delivery, or by the Housing Service for projects financed from Government of India Grants. Now a rethink of the process is necessary.

Three things need change. To prevent blockages due to NIMBYism, the TDC will need to interact with immediate neighbours and get their approval for the development of a plot, before inviting architects to submit a project proposal. If agreement with the neighbours cannot be found, the TDC may seek community approval for the proposed development.

A second required change is to make funding available to architects for the work of making project proposals, to prevent them from incurring losses as happened to the architects involved in making and remaking the designs for the rejected youth hostel proposals.

Thirdly, the Housing Service should be the client of all Auroville collective housing projects. Its role should be to invite occupants and ensure the collection of funds, and be responsible for tendering the project and supervising the construction.

Who pays for housing?

While some Newcomers to Auroville have funds to contribute to a house or apartment, many don't. Now that funding from the Government of India for housing projects is diminishing and may completely stop, finding alternative sources of funding is becoming increasingly urgent. One way is to ask for donations from large Indian companies which like to support Auroville from their Corporate Social Responsibility budgets, or from Auroville-friendly organisations in India and abroad. Another way is to stimulate Auroville commercial units to use part of their profits or reserves to contribute to the building of staff quarters. But is this possible?

Many of Auroville's commercial units do not invest in developing Auroville. They make their mandatory contribution of 33% of their profits to Auroville, but hold on to their 67% as they are insecure in the present economic climate and need their surplus to carry them over the lean periods. If they want to invest in housing for a fellow Aurovilian who is working in their unit, they have to make a donation from their 67%. They cannot deduct this donation from the 33%, and neither can they deduct the donation from their profit and then pay 33% from the difference.

"Auroville's present economic policy does not encourage investment in the development of Auroville," says Suhasini. "We need to have a system of progressive contribution. This one-size-fits-all 33% contribution on the net surplus without distinction on size and output, type of activity and number of the jobs created, is counterproductive to the development of Auroville. For example, units that generate below 5 Lakhs net surplus should be exempt from the contribution for a specified number of years to allow them to invest in growth and expansion, including in housing the Aurovilians working in these units. Expansion and growth creates more jobs, permitting young adults to join Auroville and finance their lives here."

Suhasini also believes that the FAMC should relax its requirement that 100% of the housing project funding has to be secured before it gives financial viability approval. "In the 35 years I've lived in Auroville, I've seen all housing projects getting fully occupied after completion. The FAMC is too risk-averse, they believe that housing units and apartment will remain unoccupied, but history

Home is where the heart is

Home. House. Home. On my mind, in my heart, and on my lips. Lately, it is all I think about. It is what I long for and if you met me for more than 5 minutes, it's what you would hear me speak of – the house I do not have in the place that I call home.

This is my "now" reality. Same as it has been the reality of almost anyone who lives in Auroville. Because, at one point or another, most of us have had the experience of feeling one's home is Auroville regardless of having a house.

It can be said it's like this everywhere else and yes, of course, it is, especially when we speak metaphorically of an inner sense of home. However, as with most things in Auroville, having, or living, in the actual physical structure we call house is poignantly and distinctly Aurovilian because in Auroville you are either a steward or a house sitter. There is no in-between.

Being the steward of a house means you have invested money in the exercise of responsible non-ownership, fully aware that the home you have chosen to invest in is, in fact, a property of Auroville. Whereas being a house sitter means you are the temporary caretaker of an Auroville property during the time in which the steward of the home is Temporarily Out of Station. This entails sharing the responsibility and, usually, the running expenses of the house.

So far so good, yes? It then follows that as long as our lives carry on in a straight line, and provided we are okay with our current housing situation, we will continue to make do with our circumstances. End of story. But, what happens when we are no longer okay with our current housing situation and, for whatever reason, are unable to become the steward of a home? What happens when there are no available houses, or when the available ones don't match our needs or resources; or when life changes in a way that impacts our living arrangements, like for example, if we separate from our partner and can't continue to live together under the same roof anymore. What happens then?

Aside from a few alternatives – newcomer housing (time of occupancy: 1 year), youth housing (age of occupants: under 35), staff quarters (by work engagement) – what other options are there? None.

So let's imagine a new possibility for an in-between housing alternative in Auroville which lets us feel at home. Could an income-generating unit or activity of Auroville invest money and become the steward of one or several houses? Could these houses be made available to people

who are looking for a home and can pay a monthly amount? Could the fees from such an exchange cover the administrative expenses of the endeavour and eventually even generate interest?

I tried out this suggestion on a friend. "Run the numbers," he said. "Talk to the architects and with the people involved in housing. Do the research, see if this is a viable alternative, write a proposal, present it to the community." My jaw dropped open. There I was looking for empathy and instead was being made responsible. "Look," he said, "if this is coming up for you then it's coming up for others as well. And if you benefit from working on this issue, then others can also benefit."

"But it's a considerable undertaking and I am already overloaded," I muttered, feeling completely flustered. "That's so typical," he countered. "I am tired of people who are ready to criticize and complain but when it comes down to it, are unwilling to take things up and see them through." Needless to say, I was stung by his words. It took me a while to process and grasp the intended meaning of what he was saying.

The thing is, you see, I experience Auroville as an extremely reflective place where everything I am dealing with is mirrored back at me with unmerciful clarity. Despite the profound challenges it brings, it's also the saving grace that offers me the opportunity to hold the concerns of everyday life in a wider context. Helping me understand, for example, that 'home' is not a static concept I can move into and within which I remain fixed; rather, it's a dynamic expression of an inner space where I can take residence within myself. And 'house' is not only a place where our bodies can relax and be replenished. It is also where we rest our minds and nourish our hearts. Where we can experience a sense of stability that allows us to give more of ourselves, do better work, and relate more generously with each other.

We need places that let us develop a stronger sense of belonging, where we can stay long enough and feel steady enough to put down roots, and make deeper and more effective commitments with the community.

Only time will tell whether it is or not my job to "run the numbers" and explore alternative housing solutions that are better suited to accommodate the ever changing landscape of our life. However, as my friend rightly helped me understand, it is my responsibility to do what I can do. And what that boils down to right now is asking a question and seeing it through.

Can we have houses for rent in Auroville?

Let's begin the conversation.

Mariana

shows otherwise. The demand is greater than what is on offer, and people will accept what's on offer even if it is not to their preference."

Decisions are urgently required

The Housing Service has rung the alarm and has written to the Entry Service that there are hardly any Newcomer apartments available as these apartments are occupied by people who have nowhere to go. In particular, the situation for large families is grim. "There is a new attitude," says Ole. "When we ask people to move out of a

Newcomer apartment, as their term is over, they expect to be provided with a suitable and nice housing option, otherwise they don't move out. We have the same problem with house-sitters [people who take care of a house during the temporary absence of the steward, eds.], and with people who live in a staff quarter but no longer work for the unit who paid for that staff quarter. We have to find solutions. Decisions on how to stimulate Auroville's housing development are urgently required."

Carel

Earth Institute struggles

More than seven years ago, Auroville's Earth Institute headed by architect Satprem completed Realisation, a community housing project. The project met many hurdles on the way. Conceptual and project execution mistakes were made, and the project became a financial loss for the Earth Institute to the tune of Rs 19.5 Lakhs.

Since then, the Earth Institute has not executed any major project in Auroville and focused on training courses instead. In February this year, Satprem informed the Working Committee and others that the Earth Institute is out of work and that only the income from its earth-architecture training courses are keeping the unit alive.

In the years 2011 to 2012, at the request of the former TDC, the Earth Institute designed the Green Kasbah, a collective housing project for 48 apartments. As urban guidelines were not available, the Earth Institute defined them as well. The TDC's site permission and building approval for the first phase of 16 apartments were given. "But the Housing Service, perhaps because of the negative experience with the Realisation project, did not inform potential clients about the project, and even lost all the information that was given. Other projects were promoted," says Satprem. The Earth Institute lost another Rs 8 lakhs and kept the unit alive with projects outside Auroville. The Kasbah idea collapsed.

"Since last year, we have been struggling to pay the workers. The curtain fell in December, when we had no more money. We agreed with the workers that we would not dismiss them – some of them have been with us for more than 25 years and they are like a big family! But something needs to be done urgently," says Satprem.

Change is in the air. Now that the TDC is opening up plots for development, the Kasbah plans can be upgraded and re-submitted. The project is interesting as it uses compressed stabilised earth blocks for construction. For more information on the Auroville Earth Institute see Auroville Today # 357 of April 2019.

African Pavilion: Bringing the African identity to Auroville

A new team – Axum, Elene, and Malcolm – has recently stepped forward to manage the African Pavilion, one of the more prominent pavilions in Auroville's International Zone, due both to its high-visibility location next to the Visitors' Centre and its regular cultural events. The renewal of the team came in the wake of a turbulent period during which the previous African Pavilion team became unable to cope with the number of visitors and guests staying at the newly made guesthouse and campground. Auroville Today spoke with two members of the new core team about their vision for the future.

Elene was born in Ethiopia and first came to Auroville in 2003. Her uncle Tekeste was instrumental in establishing the AVI network on the African continent and the African Pavilion in the International Zone. Since the allotment of the land for the Pavilion in 2006, she would come for forest clean-up events on the African Pavilion site and helped with cooking dinners for African students from the surrounding colleges, as well as African Pavilion fundraising events. Malcolm is from America but began working with the African Pavilion when they were looking for a web developer in the winter of 2017. Though initially it was just one of many jobs he had in Auroville, he was drawn to the African Pavilion, and by 2018 both Malcolm and Elene were regularly engaged in Pavilion work.

How do you see the mission of the African Pavilion?

Elene: I think it changes and evolves with time. At the start, it was just about having a few Africans around who were in Auroville. And by Africans, I mean anyone with origins in Africa. Today, I see the focus being on understanding what the soul of Africa is and being a centre of research. It is only now that I have started reading more about Africa, because if I am to project this to the outside, I first must have it somewhere inside me: it's an exploration of myself but also the continent. In regard to the Pavilion, the aim is not to have a final product, but to allow people to come and see it as it grows.

Malcolm: There is the material aspect of this complex of buildings that has been envisioned for the African Pavilion since 2006. And even before, there was talk that Africa House was going to be a hub for Africa-related activities, personalities, artefacts, studies, etc. All this gives us a very clear direction to walk towards. But it seems more and more that the mission is to experience the different flavours of our culture and the one unifying string that connects us all. I don't know of many places where Africans can assemble and work for something larger than themselves. It's the purity of the message "There should be a place on earth..." where we as Africans can be who we are and build a dream together that benefits the entire world.

How is this important to the larger Auroville?

Malcolm: The Mother said that Auroville must be in India because "India is the representation of all human difficulties on earth". I feel similarly about Africa. I feel like the core of human unity starts with Africa. It's the most diverse mix of cultures, so if we can do it, everyone can do it.

Elene: In Africa, often the conflicts are happen-

ing between very similar tribes. It's a reflection of what is happening inside us. One needs to unify one's different personalities, with the biggest victory that one can have being the mastery of all the personas we have inside. The unification of Africa is also symbolic of the unification of one's inner world.

Working towards a strong African Pavilion brings together large groups of people around one idea. For instance, Malcolm and I are very different, but there is something that connects us, a Venn Diagram of stuff that we share. I wish I could find a term that denotes this feeling that could replace "African", because it is not just bound to the continent of Africa. It is essentially everyone who truly feels connected to this place of origin. People from this continent have travelled everywhere. And what is the purpose of grouping ourselves together? It's because if we come together around common material that we all share and other groups come together around theirs, then the two big chunks can merge, as opposed to every little country trying to find common ground with each other. If we see ourselves belonging to one big circle, then it's easier to move towards the next level of unification.

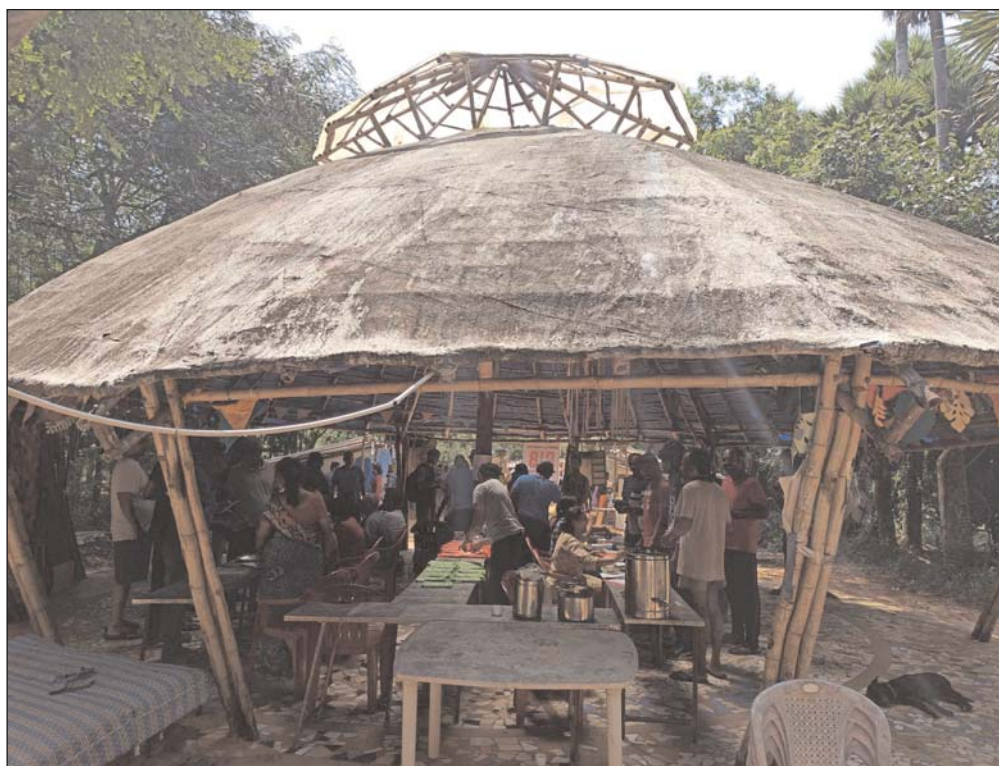
What is the African Pavilion doing to progress?

Elene: We are fundraising towards Africa House, which is part of the master plan that was made in 2006 by an Ethiopian architect named Brook Teklehaimanot. Tekeste had organised a competition with various universities in Africa. They were given the site area and information about Auroville and asked to design an "Africa House" that would capture the essence of Auroville, as well as the mixture of African architecture. Brook won and he came here with his designs, which were accepted by L'Avenir, the town development council. That was a few years ago, and so now we are trying to update it with Brook's gained experience and the present context of Auroville.

We are a bit limited in what we can do right now with the present structures. Developing Africa House is important because, for instance, we just had a photo exhibition and we had to do it at Bharat Nivas because we didn't have the facilities here, which defeats the purpose of bringing people to the pavilion. But the structures are coming as well as the people.

Malcolm: The African Pavilion has been doing cultural events since before there was even land. A cultural centre approach has been used to connect to the general expectation of what a pavilion is with tangible cultural identifiers like dance, food, and music. Our online media presence has expanded too. What we would like is to have more consistent events to constantly keep this flavour in the air, not just with the weekly drumming session; to have this energy and sound so as to attract the kind of people that we want to attract. It's a public space, so people can come in all the time.

To develop our space, we have revived the vegetable garden with a variety of flora which can serve



The African Pavilion dome

our kitchen needs and are collaborating with foresters in Auroville to learn how to diversify and curate our forest. There is constant work to clear the land and secure it with natural and wire fences, funded by the weekly drum sessions. We provide guest accommodation at Habari Guesthouse, which was built on the African Pavilion site in 2019, and strive to make our guests' stay enjoyable.

Part of our project is to remain connected to "our" land, but not just in a work way. When we go home, we miss this place. Being at the Pavilion and feeling the energy of the place, doing creative things together or relaxing together, we are experiencing human unity. And, hopefully, this is training us. In the same way that in Auroville the 3,000 now are training towards a final population of 50,000, so we are training towards whatever number we are pursuing for the African Pavilion. I set the goal at 100.

How many people are involved in the African Pavilion now?

Elene: Three in the core team. But seven or eight in the outer circle.

Malcolm: It's like a Rubik's cube, trying to get people to help with something, finding where they can be productive.

Elene: But we need people who are drawn to this project, who are either African in origin or who resonate with this culture, because if we do it without the people, it's just going to become a museum. And making another museum is the last thing we want. So we want to do an internship programme. We have a dormitory that is currently being used as a guesthouse, but later we would like to start having students who can stay here and experience Auroville, because another mission of the African Pavilion is to be a bridge between Auroville and Africa. We want to marry the philosophy of Auroville with the traditions of Africa, especially around human unity. We want to do an exchange programme and we want to arrange travels. A lot of people are interested in going back to explore Africa, ourselves included. We have to get updated; we have to remain connected to the values of the continent.

And we also want to bring personalities here: artists, writers, etc. so that we can have more cultural events on Africa-related themes. Because we are just three people in the core team, and this is a continent of 54 countries. We need people. So many of the things we want to do are just about bringing people in.

How many African nationalities are represented in Auroville, either as Aurovilians or connected in other ways with the community?

Elene: In terms of Aurovilians, I think there are close to 20 Africans: South Africans, Ethiopians, Rwandans, Algerians, and an Egyptian.

Malcolm: And then one of our volunteers from Sudan is applying to be a Newcomer. It would be interesting to see how many Africans apply and just don't make it.

PHOTO SRIKOLARI



African mask made at the mask and theatre workshop at the African Pavilion in January 2020

Elene: It is so hard to get Africans to come here. Many of those who have started coming to African Pavilion still do not know what Auroville really is, so we are trying to help them understand, step by step. And if they become Aurovillian, they will probably be the first of their nationality to join.

Malcolm: The Entry Service's goal when someone joins Auroville is for them to integrate. So the things that don't fit within the undefinable box of what it is to be Aurovillian tend to get chopped off. I think the cultural shift, for example, from France to Auroville is far less drastic than the shift from some of the other cultures on the planet to Auroville. My vision, therefore, is to give more of a subtle feeling of Africa to Auroville, so that when someone comes from Africa, they are not so shocked because they can find something here that feels a little bit like home.

Elene: Some of the misunderstandings that happen at the beginning of the Newcomer period are from a lack of understanding of other cultures. For instance, there are cultures where discussion of



Shamba Ya Moto, the African Pavilion's weekly drumming circle

money is a taboo, so if the first thing the Entry Service asks a potential Newcomer is about money, it's not going to go well.

Tell me more about how you engage with the African student body in India.

Elene: For many years, African students have been coming to India: they see it as a privileged education. Some African students from Pondicherry University or the surrounding schools meet up regularly and are drawn to Auroville because they have friends here. Currently these African student social groups just hang out, but there is potential for them to be more beneficial and the African Pavilion would like to help in this. We would like the African Pavilion to offer them a social structure like that back in their home countries.

Malcolm: We have an idea to do a programme for Africans in India similar to that of Swadharma, Auroville's five-week experiential learning programme for young people between the ages of 18 and 30. The range of things that African students come to study in India is immense and the talent is incredible. I believe that it is our mission to create a haven for Africans in India to empower themselves.

From an interview with Hilary



The larger African Pavilion Team

The Annapurna community farm

The past, today, and anticipating the future

Like so many Auroville projects, Annapurna farm started with a simple keet-roofed hut, no money to speak of, not many expectations but with high aspirations. That was at the end of 1980s. Annapurna was to become Auroville's largest food producing farm. With its 135 acres and heavy clayey soil, cultivating field crops such as rice, millets and pulses was the option of choice as these were not being produced by any other Auroville farm.

The farm set up a windmill, a biogas unit, and used animal traction and solar energy. But over the years, Annapurna's managers realised that rigidly adhering to these environmentally-friendly values would mean that the farm would produce very little food and Auroville would have to buy more conventionally grown rice, millets and dairy products from the open market. A shift of focus became necessary, and in the late 1990s Annapurna went 'less green' to become more productive. "Our products were not as environmentally-friendly as we wished but still 'greener' than conventional produce from the markets in Pondicherry," recalls Tomas, who has been managing Annapurna since the early days.

Life was intense and in certain ways rather lonely. "Since Annapurna is approximately 10 kilometres away from Auroville, we were often on our own because Auroville services focused on the Auroville area. This made us pretty individualistic and a bit less connected to the larger community life," says Tomas. He recalls that outsiders sometimes criticised Annapurna's managers as being proprietors, not understanding how incredibly intense stewarding

involved and the farm largely relied on its own day-to-day financing. Sometimes, the Auroville Farm Group would be able to secure a little capital for infrastructural developments, but mostly the steward would be on his own to find the investments to build the farm. "That hasn't changed much," says Tomas. "Even today, Auroville's governing bodies do not understand how much money is required to run an organic farm the size of Annapurna. Huge investments are needed to make it productive and even more if Auroville wants healthy food produced in a sustainable way." He compares the organic to the conventional farm. "A conventional farm purchases all its inputs from outside; it externalises its needs and so puts the burden on the outside world. An organic farm strives to produce these inputs on the farm itself and create an entire ecosystem to support it."

Over the years, the farm slowly shaped itself, depending on the people involved, finances available and factors such as the increasing cost of hired labour from the surrounding villages and the changing monsoon rains. It took many years before Annapurna was able to stand on its own feet. "That turning point came when we started adding value to our products," says Tomas. Annapurna began milling its own grains and the grains produced by other Auroville farms, as well as organic millets bought from the bioregion which were no longer grown at Annapurna. The farm also started producing its own cheese, fruit jams and sesame products, and growing fodder for its animals and biomass for composting and mulch material.

Challenges

Annapurna is a rich ecological farm. It has forest areas and live fences, water bodies and land that provides biomass. "But if I compare Annapurna to organic farms elsewhere, I realise that it is not enough. We have to move towards more sustainable practices. The farm will stand or fall depending on how successful we will be in transforming Annapurna into a more sustainable place," says Tomas. But there are many challenges.

A major one is that the farm needs to develop more acres. This is a slow process and depends mainly on the availability of water. Today, the farm cultivates around 20 acres of seasonal rice, two acres of fruit trees, a few acres of sesame and an acre of bananas. The water requirements are met from harvested rainwater. Annapurna has three large rainwater catchment ponds, and is in the process of building a fourth 'uphill' which will be fed from the lower ponds, for which solar pumps are planned to be used. These ponds hold sufficient water to farm the present acreage for most of the year, but in long dry periods water drawn from the underground aquifers is required. "More acres need to be developed: but to achieve this water has to be secured, irrigation systems must be installed, and more fertiliser material has to be grown," says Tomas.

Another challenge is to grow more fodder for the dairy. "We have a wonderful cow herd but we still feed the animals substantial amounts of grains which are actually fit for human consumption. Our vision is to slowly move away from these grains and grow more fodder throughout the year. This will require more water and labour and may reduce the milk production. Since the dairy



Deer in the rice fields of Annapurna

is the financial engine of the farm, we must tread very carefully here," says Tomas.

A third challenge is caused by the increase of wild life. "It's beautiful to see deer in the rice fields, but it makes crop cultivation very challenging," says Tomas. This could partly be remedied with a proper fence around the farm, but this is a big investment as Annapurna has a periphery of approximately seven kilometres. For the time being, only small plots are fenced. "We are preparing a new banana plantation and

state-of-the-art grain processing unit which will cost a lot but is essential if we want to supply organic and unpolluted grains to Auroville."

Then there are the ever-increasing costs of labour. The farm will need to mechanise more but this will also increase its energy consumption. "I'm not happy about this," says Tomas. "We prefer to work as green as possible, but we have to be pragmatic and the needs of the crops and animals come first. Yet, I am appalled by the diesel/petrol/electricity guzzling machines we operate. But to reduce our energy-usage or to move to solar will be very challenging, and we will need both human resources and financial support to improve on that front."

Lastly, there is the issue of succession. Annapurna today is managed by two Aurovilians, both of whom are in their sixties, and a Newcomer. They need new people, but getting them is not easy. "We have not been good at this in the Auroville farms; when the first steward wants to hand over to someone else it is not easy to find a successor who is willing and capable. Also, people often prefer to start their own farm project instead of picking up the heavy load of someone else," says Tomas.

The support group

A few years ago Annapurna invited a few interested Aurovilians to be part of a support group, a sounding board to help plan the future of the farm. "Members are all involved in other aspects of Auroville and in this way we get a wide range of inputs," says Tomas. "The group helps us to stay connected to the needs of the community." He hopes that the support group will make the farm more of a community project where stewards can participate, act, then move on, leaving behind a farm richer, more beautiful and more productive for generations to come.

Carel



Planting rice seedlings

Auroville land is, especially when taking care of isolated plots which otherwise would have been encroached upon and lost to Auroville. "Sometimes, people said we are acting as if Annapurna is our personal place. Working group members fail to understand that having stewarded this land for over 30 years and having seen all those working groups, such as the Funds and Assets Management Committee and the Land Board coming and going, all with different policies, ideas, and guidelines, we tend to ignore them a bit because the reality on the land is usually quite different and challenging. We are often not understood and our suggestions are ignored. All this makes us look like small land lords in the eyes of some Auroville bureaucrats. Of course, we are human and have our attachments as well."

Lack of funds

The lack of funds prevented a speedy take off. Apart from providing a maintenance to the farmers, the community was not otherwise



Dairy: a very important component of the farm

we have put up an electric fence to protect the plants from the wild pigs, deer, and the village cows that wander in from time to time. Once fruiting starts, we have to keep a few humans at bay as well," comments Tomas dryly.

A fourth challenge is improving its grain processing. "The Solar Kitchen is complaining about our rice quality. This has partly to do with the fact that our machines are outdated and consumers are used to higher standards than in the past," says Tomas. "We need to purchase a



Red rice ripening at Annapurna

India's traditional crafts revitalised in students' hands

Auroville's second Endangered Craft Mela took place in February, and it was a lively event. For one week, the Youth Centre was transformed into a hive of activity, with 50 craftspeople sharing their skills and 250 excited children being inducted into the pleasure of making objects with their hands.

Observers, such as this roving reporter, were free to wander around the many covered spaces to watch students working with artisans who had come from far and wide for the mela (festival). From the girls learning to crochet bags from banana fibre, to the teens painting fabrics in Kalamkari designs, the sense of exploration and creativity was high. The metalwork forge and the leatherwork tables were crowded with students who appeared to thrive on the sound of constant banging, as they brought a new creation to life. Some children flocked around the large pottery wheel, while others wove baskets, learnt to spin rope, or watched a demonstration of clay flute making.

Fabric art

Sudarkar and Chandra, the Kalamkari fabric artists from Andhra Pradesh, explain that it was their first time in Auroville. "It feels good to see a lot of people taking interest, especially children," said Sudarkar. Chandra recounts that the art form was previously done on walls for ceremonies or was conserved as museum pieces, but now the designs are painted onto everyday sarees and dupattas, which gives them significance. The two artists emphasise the everyday possibilities of their art form, and how they encourage their students to stitch their painted fabric into their bags, "so it has a functional meaning."

Puppet making

The puppet-making table was also a magnet for children, with its colourful leather marionettes that invited playful interaction. Vinod, a puppet maker based in Auroville's Pitchandikulam forest, explains that while puppets were traditionally used in Tamil Nadu to tell mythical stories, such as the Ramayana, they were also used during the freedom fighting era in order to spread anti-British messages to the population. "Tamil people are so smart they would include the information in the middle of the play, in front of the English people sitting and watching. They'd say: '[Mahatma] Gandhi is coming for Satyagraha [*non-violent resistance*], on such-and-such day, so come and take part.'" And then they'd continue the story! The English thought it was part of the play! So we used this artform for activism and a way of making news travel." Vinod explains that his present-day puppeteering team uses the story telling aspect to educate local children about environmental issues.

Weaving coconut leaves

As I pass another stall, a young guest from Latvia is weaving a hat from coconut leaves. "I'm really enjoying it," he says of the mela, and swears he will wear the hat back in Latvia in summer time. Nearby, Moeni and Anya, two Auroville children, are chipping away at their wood carvings. "It wasn't too hard, as the wood is really soft," says Moeni. "I've learnt a lot. I didn't know how stuff worked before, like how to cast metal or glass cutting, but after coming here, you see how to do it, and it's more real."

The Bhuj group

In an impressive effort, a group of students from Bhuj in Gujarat travelled 36 hours by train in order to participate in the mela. Hailing from Karigashala, a school that teaches carpentry and masonry work to school drop-outs, they were enthusiastic about the many new crafts they got to try out. Their chaperone and teacher Rajguru explains that the learning has not only been professional, but also an eye-opening experience for the group. "I really love how the people live here, how they interact with others, how they are open-minded with new people," he says, and recounts how the group played football for the first time with Auroville youths. Shayesh chimes in: "This place is different from Bhuj," he says, pointing out it's the furthest he's gone from home to date. "It's like another planet! Many different things are happening. The lifestyle is different here."

Learning useful skills

"To see their enthusiasm, and how fanatical they are about all the things they want to try, it's fantastic," says Jessamijn, one of the organisers. "It's empowering for children to see that they can make whatever they want. They're really into it." "It's been incredible," chimes in Johnny, another organiser, who is happy with the increase in both students and artisans this year. They both point to the way in which contemporary life is focussed so much on TV and computer screens that children forget that they can use their hands to make things, and don't learn useful skills such as fixing cycles or knowing how to repair a chair. "If kids can get the confidence that there's nothing they can't do with their hands, it will really help them to survive in this world. If they get some practical skills, then life is so much fuller here, and it's really the renaissance." So is he cultivating renaissance children? "That's the headline!" laughs Johnny, "They'll come pouring in!"

Marudam school inspiration

The spark for the craft mela came from Marudam School in Tiruvannamalai (about a two-hour drive from

ALL PHOTOS MARCO SAROLDI



Therukootu actors entertain the children



Alan teaches leatherwork



Basket weaving



Children learning wood working



Rope making

Auroville), which has an informal 'sister school' relationship with The Learning Centre (TLC) in Auroville. Marudam school is "a total inspiration" according to Johnny, growing its own rice and involving children in the garden. "They believe in the spirit of adventure overruling the spirit of academics." Marudam School has been holding its own craft mela for the last eight years, and after participating in it, some of the TLC adults thought it would be a good idea to do a similar event in Auroville. Auroville's first mela was held last year, with funds from Auroville's 50th birthday.

Johnny recounts the speech he gave at Marudam's first mela, in which he laid out an argument that became the rationale for Auroville's own mela. "If you go back 50 years, the most highly paid and most knowledgeable people in the community were craftspeople, such as cabinet carpenters, stonemasons and toolmakers. Only in the most recent period has intelligence been considered to be located solely in the head. So, part of what we're trying to do here is getting kids capable and confident of using their hands. And the other half is to encourage endangered crafts."

Reviving dying crafts

Johnny and Jessamijn define endangered crafts as those that will probably die out in another 20 years time, unless a significant effort is made to preserve them. Jessamijn highlights that most of the artisans at Auroville's mela are not teaching their own children, so the skill "will probably disappear with them". She points to two groups of women artisans who travelled long distances to participate – one group doing embroidery, and another crocheting bags from banana fibre – saying that the women had stopped doing these traditional crafts until NGOs stepped in.

Bio-regional participation

Despite much reduced funding this year, the mela has grown. Twelve schools from Auroville and the bioregion participated, plus another three schools from further afield. While the organisers hoped to gain the participation of 150 children, more than 230 registered. "And then more children came!" laughs Jessamijn, referring to the controlled chaos. Johnny points out that some Auroville schools were slow to participate because they felt that children should prioritise book learning over learning with hands, "but the children, given a chance, would sneak out to come here!"

Co-organiser Pragnya explains that, while children are given the first two days to explore the different crafts, they are then encouraged to focus on two crafts for the remaining days, so they can develop sufficient skills to make an object at home by themselves. Some crafts require an investment of time, such as Kalamkari fabric painting (because of the staged dying process), metal casting and bamboo baskets, all of which were popular with the participants. Johnny points out how much more concentrated children can be in a setting such as the mela, and how this is illustrated by the number of children "fighting for the right" to get into the foundry to work with metal. He asserts that while the more pervasive concept of learning is that of one-hour segments, Maria Montessori's philosophy is borne out at the mela: "In situations where children are confident about what they're doing, they have an incredible concentration span," says Johnny. "That should be encouraged."

Highlights

So what were the highlights this year? For Johnny, it was finding additional craftspeople, such as a hand wood carver and a village blacksmith, who were willing to work with children. For Jessamijn, this year's highlight was the introduction of an evening programme of concerts. "It brought people here in the evenings, and created a bit more noise about this mela," she says.

Jessamijn and co-organiser Alex emphasise the big leap that many craftspeople have to take in order to participate in the mela, particularly the female artisans from regions further afield, who had little experience of travelling by bus or staying in new places. "For some women, it's the first time they left the village, so it's scary to sleep in the 'jungle'," says Alex. Alex points out that the crafts people are required to play a new role at the mela – an experience they shared in the evening feedback sessions with the organisers. "Usually they're just looked at as a tradesperson," says Alex, "so asking them to teach is a different kind of recognition. It's nice to see that the connections keep growing."

Expanding the craft learning experience

Johnny expresses his enthusiasm at being able to offer a large-scale craft experience to so many children this year – a significant expansion from the small group classes he's offered for 40 years in Fertile that aimed at empowering children to work with their hands. He attributes the expanded vision to the "incredible machine" of 10-15 organisers behind the event. "It's wonderful how that works," he says. "For years I felt like I was working alone, and suddenly we're all working together, it's wonderful."

Johnny's long-term aim is to create a permanent crafts centre in Auroville, where people of all ages can learn from a community of craftspeople. The centre would also aim to stimulate collaboration between traditional craftspeople and Auroville designers, and to create a support system to ensure that endangered crafts are sustained for future generations.

Lesley

The Auroville Effect

At my father’s funeral, my mother disclosed to me that I was their love child. What this means is that there was a moment in time when two people united and created a chemistry, such as that of the cauldron that Obelix fell into. I then understood the energy that drove the first half of my life. My parents broke boundaries on many levels, making their world full of adventure, excitement and passion. Everything was vibrant and bursting with potential. And tough, really tough. This led to stress and insecurity, causing confusion in their relationships. I grew up in atmosphere of conflict. But as a child I hardly noticed it, thanks to the love potion I was born into. Embedded in my being from the onset was the seeker, the inquirer, the believer. I lived in the unpredictable and ever changing landscape of dreams, one moment wandering carefree through the hills, grazing cattle, and the next staggering hopelessly through the parched deserts of desire. A longing for something I knew not.

A longing that led me on a dance through life, from one experience to another. It lured me across continents and carried me over the threshold of every relationship. It brought me to Auroville, first when I was nine and then later as a young mother. It was a heaven for our daughters, a place where anything is possible. My first ten years in Auroville were wonderfully dynamic. I was endlessly hungry for more, and always filled with hope. I was brimming with a fertile vitality of raw power. I was (or at least I thought I was) the

I clearly saw that certain confused conditions made me nervous. These were moments of uncertainty or insecurity. I was caught in a loop, charged by emotion, which was causing more conflict. Locking me into a futile battle with my own mind, exhausting my energies and leading me to a profound feeling of isolation. This is not an uncommon experience in Auroville, and many will recognise it. Throughout this time, I had a distinct feeling that this was not my battle alone. It is this nervousness, stemming from insecurity, that forms the background frequency of our whole planet. No wonder countries spend so much money on defense, and communities like ours are constantly seeking restorative solutions.

Through the art of contemplation, I discovered that my battlefield was actually the fertile ground for transformation. This is what I have come to call the Auroville effect. It starts by taking you to war. It was only then that I realised the single flaw that resided within my old dynamic self. It was self-obsessed. Unwilling to see beyond my own needs, unwilling to rest – no matter how great the achievements in the outer world, my inner world was up in arms. I turned to tools that synthesise practical wisdom in order to gain a deeper understanding of myself and to try to find my higher purpose.

One day in a yoga class, the instruction was to roll my eyes to the back of my head. In that brief moment I experienced a silence on the battlefield. From that day on, I was hooked. To discover that this fundamental state of being had its counterpart in the body was a turning point in my journey. The practice of yoga is the offering of this body to the altar, alone and clean, focused in attention and will, not a burnt sacrifice but simply myself raised to my highest potential. It demands a complete and total effort in which there is no space for mechanical repetition. By its very nature, it is each time and in every moment a living act. It is in the asana that I can grasp the most counter-intuitive aspect of life: that opposition brings concord.

With a mummy on my shoulder, I walk into the forest each morning feeling the winds of change upon my skin. Still saying my goodbyes to summers of past, and all their fruit. There is no room for fear or doubt. I have to leave that behind, take off my chappals, feel the bare earth beneath my feet. I look at my life, whatever shape it’s currently taking, whatever winds are curling around, whatever fate has brought me and whatever stage I am unfolding within the drama of my life. Here in the forest I can step out, off the stage into the real, into the eternal, into the magical place within my being, a body of infinite softness and ease, a place of wonder and silence and light. My troubles drip from my body as I sweat. There are no faces here, not loved ones, nor ones I fear. Just the smile of the forest. There’s a great simplicity and mystery, and as I work, I begin to feel this within my body. I have to give myself up to it, and it makes me disappear.

As told to Lesley



Natasha



FOREST TREE. SKETCH BY NATASHA

turbine that drove several projects, an active participant of the community. I could have kept going, but there was a flaw I couldn’t put my finger on. Everything around me crumbled. Separation was at the core of the crises. A wound that has followed me throughout my life. My path turned to healing and understanding the underlining mechanics of conflict.



FOREST SKETCH BY NATASHA

LETTER

Dear Aurovilians,

I was particularly happy to read the cover article by Guy Ryckaert in the February edition of Auroville Today in which he has stressed the fact that the Mother looked upon Auroville as the spiritual workshop for the development of overmenhood I say this because in all my interactions with Auroville and Aurovilians I hardly came across any discussion regarding the spiritual quest. On the contrary, the Aurovilians seem to be involved in some very unspiritual problems and conflicts. I hope this article will remind all of us of the real purpose that has brought you here, and help you transcend inter-personal tension and negativity.

Through the Working Committee I have received your good wishes on my 89th birthday on 9th March, which I greatly value. All these years, as Chairman of the Auroville Foundation have been a valuable learning experience for me.

With warm regards to you all,

Karan Singh
Chairman, Auroville Foundation

Equestrian competition

Red Earth Riding School held its annual equestrian competition from 28 February to 1 March. The Auroville Horse Tournament drew horses and riders from riding schools all around South India for a mix of dressage and show jumping events, with Auroville riders particularly excelling in the higher-level dressage and the fast-paced jumping relay. Horse shows have been taking place in Auroville since the early 2000s when the riding school was still in Kottakarai and have provided many young competitors from the outside clubs with their first glimpse of life in Auroville.

The RE-CENTRE opens

On the 28th February, the RE-CENTRE welcomed the community to the inauguration of a multi-discipline centre dedicated to tackling humanities most dirty problem – waste. Envisioned as a campus for collaborative innovation in the field of waste management and circular resource use, the RE-CENTRE provides space for Ecoservice, Eco-Femme, Upcycling Studio Auroville and WasteLess.



Citizens' Assembly pilot launched

Sunday, 8th March, was the first day of the Citizens’ Assembly pilot project. 24 randomly selected participants of very different ages (the youngest is 18, the oldest 83) and from very different backgrounds and cultures met to get to know each other and listen to various presentations on water. The next two sessions, which will happen when the corona virus threat subsides, will involve further presentations on water and small group discussions. On the final day participants will hopefully come up with a water vision for the community, along with practical proposals about how it can be implemented.

Water events

Water is very much in the news at present. The Water Group launched a series of weekly Water Talks throughout March and the theme for this year is ‘Celebrating those in the field’. The topics included the ecology of water, envisioning a blue-green Auroville, exploring water works in Darkali community, and new technologies for research on water conservation. All the talks were given by Aurovilians who work with water on a daily basis and who are concerned that we learn to live within our water means. Concurrently a group is putting up water/snowflake images all over Auroville reminding us that water is alive. For more info go to www.aurovillewater.in

Holi Tango Dance Festival

From March 9th-11th, Auroville celebrated its ninth edition of this annual festival. Professional dancers from Argentina and Europe were invited to teach the dancing technique to the enthusiastic Tangueros in the community. Milongas and classes happened in different spots during the week. A public performance was put on at the Visitors Centre, and Argentinian food was served for dinner at the cafeteria.



PHOTO: PIERO CEFALONI

Women's Day Celebration at AVAG



Auroville Village Action Group held its annual International Women’s Day celebration on March 11th this year. Along with Aurovilians and invited guests and judges of various competitions, 350 representatives of the Udhayam Women’s Federation came for the event. Different activities, including singing, speech, drawing and kolam competitions, allowed the participants to showcase their leadership and creative skills. The highlight of the day was the debate competition where sixteen women passionately discussed the question “Which is more challenging – bringing up girls or boys?” The celebration ended with lunch for all, adding to the sense of solidarity and sisterhood that was felt during the whole day.

PASSING

Jayaraman Ramalingam

Jayram of Arka he left his body on March 17 due to heart attack. He was 38 years old. On investigation it was discovered that he must have suffered various silent attacks before.

Hailing from Kuilyapalayam, Jayram attended New Creation School where he got to know Maria Grazia, who was teacher there at the time. Subsequently he followed an electronics course, worked at New Creation’s swimming pool and always remained in touch with Auroville. At the age of 25 he officially joined and started working at Arka, eventually becoming its manager and executive. Jayram’s body was cremated at Kuilyapalayam’s mandappam on March 18.



On 30th March, Roger Harris left his body after a struggle with lung cancer. He was 64. Roger was one of the close-knit band of early Matrimandir workers, as well as a superb raconteur, a celebrant of fine literature, and an amused and amusing wanderer of the streets of life, with a particular sympathy for the marginalised and the rebel. His was the unique voice of a ‘vagrant heart’, at times celebratory, at others wounded, always seeking that final, fierce transformation.

For many years he worked for Auroville Today, enlivening our editorial meetings with his left-field observations, spiced with references to Dylan, 13th century troubadours and crop circles. He was a fine writer, equally at home with colloquial and high-toned utterances, voicing our idiosyncrasies as well as our deepest hopes and dreams. There’s also a plangent lyricism to some of his most moving poetry.

We thought there could be no better way to celebrate him than by a selection of his writings.

Matrimandir-The Soul of Auroville

The Matrimandir, lit up at night, looks like some strange ship in the desert, an ark under construction, symbol of a new and dawning age. The Mother called the Matrimandir “the cohesive force of Auroville”; “a symbol of the Divine’s answer to man’s aspiration for perfection,” and “the soul of Auroville.”

This binding force that guides and upholds Auroville in a powerful if indefinable way was tangible and evident at a 19-hour concreting of a dome platform for the roof of the structure, held at Matrimandir on 2-3 June 1988. Over sixty Aurovilians, adults, children, Westerners and Indians alike, worked through the night as a concrete mixer ground out its load of sand, cement and stones, which was lifted, one wheelbarrow at a time, by a crane to the top of the structure, to then be poured and vibrated into the mould of reinforced steel and plywood shuttering, completed after months of work a few days before. From within the inner chamber, where scaffolding rises in an Escher-like configuration to the sloping roof, the hum of vibrators on the roof above resounded, echoing like the low chanting of Buddhist monks.

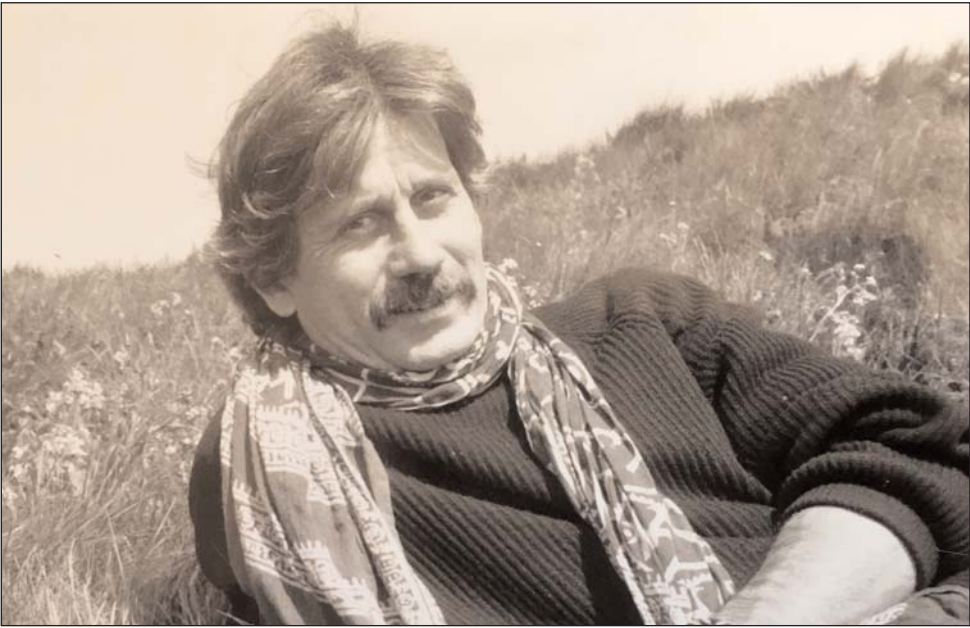
(1988)

‘Common Dignity’: Ireland after 9-11

On 13 September, two days after the day, it felt that time, like those clocks that stopped forever, had come to an end, and I flew from Paris to Shannon. Charles de Gaulle airport had a surreal pre-apocalyptic feel to it. Plain-clothes security outnumbered stranded or flying passengers, and the computer screens and arrival departure panels listing all the flights to or from the U.S. as cancelled made the ramifications of the unimaginable act of horror that had just occurred even more immediate. That evening in a crowded pub in a small village in County Clare I observed a white-haired man trying to explain to a young girl the meaning of the terrible footage being rerun on every news channel. His task could not have been an easy one. The next day was a day of mourning throughout Ireland and all shops and businesses closed down. I spent three minutes of silence at 11 a.m. gazing from across the street at the Irish flag at half-mast in the middle of a small park that contained a memorial to the local Republican dead from 1916 on. The feelings of a shared sense of shock, grief, and sympathy for those affected by the attacks in New York and elsewhere cut across all boundaries and perhaps even united the island for a brief while in a common surge of humanity...

Ideology of whatever sort, even an idealistic revolutionary one, can divorce us from the main-springs of our common, shared humanity. When ideology hardens into fanaticism, it leads to the aberrations and horror that prevailed on such a wide scale throughout the twentieth century – aberrations that are still with us. And perhaps this is the challenge of the twenty-first century: to refuse the perversion of terror while at the same time taking on the tremendous task of globally

Roger Harris



combating its roots, which most often lie in injustice of one form or the other – much of it institutionalized – whether economic, social, cultural or political. The spirit as well as the methods used to achieve this will be of foremost importance.

(February 2002)

Banished now the Bastille Blues

Banished now the Bastille blues,
That once led me astray,
This exile in a land of half-forgotten truths;
The battle for brotherhood leads through
speckled labyrinths
Of betrayal and disguise;
A moonlit clearing, radiant and dark,
Reflects these scattered dreams
Silvered sparks of slivered light wound the
fallen flesh
As sudden movements, fresh as morning
dew,
Stun my dreaming mind,
Surprise my restless soul.
Awakenings banish slumber;
And embodiments of light reveal
Another world:
Light torn and slivered wounds the stubborn
flesh
Heavy falls the mood of an ancient joy
Sister of the moon.

Footsteps and grey corridors, a glance in
the metro;
Beauty now breaks through disclosed:
In each and every face,
In every heart: a rose.

Heading South like Ambrose Bierce: Remembering Kenneth

Dropping in on Kenneth, which I did every six weeks or so down the twenty years I knew him, would most often lead to an invitation to step inside, and a two to three-hour session in his small, cluttered kitchen. Once we’d settled in and become relaxed with each other’s company – ‘How are you doing, don’t give me the macho bullshit, the last few weeks it’s just getting worse and worse’ – our conversation, fuelled with brandy and cold coffee from his rusting fridge, would ricochet. Once he described a play he had started writing, called “Roll On, Shelley.” Its characters included Rooftop Julie (a woman leaving on the bus for Iowa), a man with balloons, a prisoner and a guard coming out of a manhole who end up exchanging roles, a couple of wino derelicts and two lovers carrying a park bench around. I’d say this was fairly typical of his surreal and

often ribald sense of humour. Our conversation would then range from Tennessee Williams and Marlon Brando’s performance in a “Streetcar Named Desire” and “On the Waterfront”, to the Sumerians, Niburu (the rumoured twelfth planet of our solar system) and extra-terrestrials. It would be punctuated with relevant asides such as how Al Capone was a great fan of Louis Armstrong and used to go to his gigs in speakeasies in Chicago.

(October 2002)

In the Ruined Cities of the Mind

Drama, suffering, it’s all a great good-bye, a world which cannot stand itself anymore with all its lacquered histories and all its frescoed pasts, and the cries rise out from the ruins of the north, the rubble of a greater age that once had reason to believe in something, anything, and all our armadas break upon the rocks and all our children watch the sunsets and the dawns break through the crevices of dream and we are here to watch the last age out with all its sculptured hopes and all its noble thoughts and its beauty dancing naked with eyes of lust and flame and the cries that rise again as the beast unconquered walks but knows that its end is near.

The ruined cities of the mind surround on every side as a skinny wildcat sleeps in the chair beside me and India Today on the cement table by my typewriter announces a breakthrough in the Punjab, and I remember last night the Matrimandir stood out eerily beautiful, illuminated by a powerful projector, as I bicycled around it before heading back to the canyons beneath the stars, on this our earth, an invisible ship sailing through the galaxies of space towards what splendid shore?

(September 1985)

The Dalai Lama’s Shoes or “The Buddha can’t do much!”

I am struck by the powerful simplicity of his (the Dalai Lama’s) similes, feeling in some way his presence behind them and realizing how unused we are to such a state of being – we, who are in love with outer complexities and contradictions, children of an age that is dancing out its last dreams in a ballroom of destruction. He does not have the mystic, piercing gaze I might have imagined the Dalai Lama to have. Rather he has a wide, benevolent one, and a strongly anchored physical presence, not an otherworldly, spiritual one. He is sitting in his armchair next to me, red and yellow robes draped over a pockmarked arm and, although I’m concentrating on his questions and following his answers – periodically checking that the tape has not run out – the contact is there. We are talking from our different viewpoints, but behind that there is something else.

“A human being – if you show him something – you will feel sometimes that, at a

superficial level, the other side will not accept it. But deep down something happened there.” And something did.

We are one whether we like it or not, I suggest, and he goes on to use the image of the human body to bring this fact out. “It’s like one’s body, between one’s head and one’s shoe, I mean one’s foot, there is quite a long distance and big differences, but still it’s part of your body and you must concern yourself with every part of your physical. In the same way, the world is one. You simply cannot neglect or ignore another part of the world. You cannot solve one problem, localize it, and solve that alone. And under these circumstances, the key point is human universal responsibility, a genuine sense of brotherhood, sisterhood, with warm heart and clear realization, clear deep realization as one human family....”

As I listen to him, my gaze travels down his body to his feet and, shining out – immaculately polished – beneath his robes, are a pair of walking shoes identical to my own, and I have the distinct feeling that my own pair of revamped shoes are having a spiritual experience.

(1986)

My Mutation

For the last six years, I’ve been experiencing my own mutation. I was translating the book Mother or the Mutation of Death by Satprem six years ago, when I had a motorcycle accident. I lost my right arm and was in a deep coma for six weeks. The doctors didn’t give me long to live when I arrived at the hospital. When I came out of the coma, I began to speak Italian with a German friend who did not know Italian and I told another friend that I had been a wine smuggler during the Middle Ages. At least I wasn’t unemployed in those days! I asked someone else what kind of hotel I was in, because I couldn’t smoke cigarettes and drink beer there, and he said: “It’s the emergency section in the hospital. You’re not in a hotel, Roger.” When they wheeled me to another building in the hospital for a scan, the friend who was there told me that my body, on contact with the outside air, began to react and to tremble. She asked the doctor to stop moving me for a moment so she could talk to me and explain what was going on.

Since 29 February 2012, the “Golden Day” anniversary marking the supramental manifestation on the physical plane on the planet Earth and many universes, my mutation has become miraculous, beautiful, and strange. Before, I used to suffer from depression, but now I wake up every morning just happy to be alive and I thank sweet Mother for that.

(2012)

(A selection of Roger’s writings, ‘Mutation, Alchemy and Grace’, was published in 2017 by Auroville Press Publishers. For further information contact aurovillepress@auroville.org.in)

City of Peace

City of peace and God's unguarded light,
City of silence, and the rich unfolding
word;
City of love and the laughter of the gods,
City of man, his labour born of dream.
City of harvest, born of canyon soil,
City of rich acres, sown with strong-eyed
toil;
City whose song the soul enraptured sings
City of lost boundaries,
Province once of kings
City whose deep calm at sunset does recall
Ages when the earth stood golden,
Heaven-tall;
City on night's borderline,
Outpost of dawn's light,
City born of promise
And a conqueror's delight.

(Matrimandir meeting, 1983)

About Auroville Today

Auroville Today is an activity of the Kattidakalai Trust of the Auroville Foundation. The GST number is 33AAATA0037BXZV

Subscription information

Subscription rates for 12 issues :

India: Print + digital edition: Rs. 600
Other countries: Print + digital edition: Rs 3,000 equivalent
Other countries digital only edition: Rs 2,100 equivalent.

There are three ways to subscribe:

1. Through our website.

Subscriptions can be ordered and paid on–line through auroville.com and www.auroville.org/avtoday. On–line subscriptions have additional unit charges and bank costs.

2. By bank transfer or cheque.

Bank transfer to account # 163101000118 of *Auroville Maintenance* at ICICI Bank, Auroville Branch, IFSC Code ICIC0001631, Swift Code ICICINBBCTS reference *Contribution Auroville Today*.
Cheques to be sent to Auroville Today payable to *Auroville Maintenance*, reference: *Contribution Auroville Today*.

3. By sending your contribution to:

U.K.: Auroville International U.K., c/o John Mulrey, 7 Cubb Field, Aylesbury, Bucks, HP19 7SJ tel. (44) (0)1296 415685 email: john@aviuk.org

Germany: Auroville International Deutschland e.V., Solmsstrasse 6, 10961 Berlin, tel. (49).(0)30–42803150, Fax (49).(0)30–92091376,email: info@auroville.de. GLS Gemeinchafts–bank, BIC: GENODEM1GLS, IBAN: DE 1643 0609 6780 1938 9200.

USA: Make checks payable to Auroville International USA, and send to:

AVI USA, P.O. Box 188158, Sacramento, CA 95818, Tel: (831) 425–5620’ email: info@aviusa.org ‘ **or to:** Pondicherry, 12 Tinker St, Woodstock NY 12498, tel: 845–679–2926, email: info@pondi.biz

The Netherlands and Belgium:

Auroville International Nederland , Voorhaven 13, 1135 BL, Edam. Email: secretaris@auroville.nu Tel. 0031 6 13053213. Triodos Bank nr 1984.20.927, IBAN NL26TRIO 0198 4209 27, BIC: TRIONL2U

Editorial team:

Alan, Carel, Hilary, Lesley, Mariana, Peter, Valentina. Proofreading: Alan. DTP: Carel. Photo editing: Jean–Denis. Published by Carel Thieme on behalf of the Auroville Foundation. Printed by the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press, Pondicherry, and published at Surrender, Auroville 605101, Tamil Nadu.

Contact: Auroville Today, Surrender, Auroville 605101, Tamil Nadu, India. ne: +91.413.2622572. Email: avtoday@auroville.org.in

Auroville Today does not necessarily reflect the views of the community as a whole.