

No more toxic fumes this summer?



PHOTOS: RIBHU VOHRA

The Karuvadikuppam landfill near Auroville in February 2012 – noxious fumes are no longer released, unlike in the past (insert).

In October 2009, *Auroville Today* wrote about the health hazard caused by the Puducherry municipal landfill site at Karuvadikuppam, less than 4 kilometres from the Matrimandir. The thick clouds of grey smoke, produced by the burning of plastic trash at the landfill, wafted over Auroville and the villages of Edaiyanchavady and Morattandi in the hot dry summer and caused headaches, nausea and sore throats. The article ended on the hopeful note that soon measures would be taken to address the problem. What has happened since?

"Quite a lot has happened," says Bindu who, since 2011, has been coordinating Auroville efforts to remedy the Puducherry garbage situation. "In 2009 and early 2010, a group of four Aurovilians, Angad, Renu, Akash and Dilip Kapur, discussed the problem with various departments of the Puducherry Government. Also NDTV, a well-known Indian TV Channel,

Due to good collaboration with the Puducherry Government and PMSPL, for the first time in years Auroville may enjoy a summer without the toxic fumes of burning plastic from the nearby landfill.

showed a video on the issue on its television network. This had good results. The Puducherry government started to seek solutions for the problems and, as a first step, agreed that the fertilizer company, Coromandel International, could begin work at the dumpsite, sifting through the waste and composting the organic components. And a collaborative process between Auroville and the Puducherry Government started."

Privatising a public service

In July 2010, the Puducherry Government, which so far had been responsible for all aspects of waste management, took a second step. It awarded a 19-year solid waste management concession to Kivar Environ Private Limited, a Bangalore-based firm that had no previous experience in managing solid waste. For technical guidance, Kivar Environ entered into an agreement with Waste Connections Inc., one of the largest waste management firms in the USA.

To execute the work, Kivar Environ and the Puducherry Urban Development Agency formed a joint venture named Puducherry Municipal Services Private Limited. The scope was extensive: PMSPL was given responsibility for street sweeping and

drain cleaning; door-to-door collection of approximately 146,000 tons of municipal solid waste per year (400 tons per day); waste transport and processing; design, construction and operation of a sanitary landfill; development of a state-of-the-art laboratory; monitoring environmental impact; and post closure monitoring of the landfill. Puducherry, moreover, allocated a 25-acre yard adjacent to the Rajiv Gandhi Government Veterinary College in Kurumbapet, nearby Ossudu (Ousteri) Lake, to PMSPL for it to be developed into a modern waste disposal facility.

PMSPL started work in January 2011, deploying teams who collected unsegregated (mixed organic and inorganic) waste door-to-door by pushcart and transferred the waste to plastic dumpsters. From the dumpsters, a fleet of mechanized compactor trucks transported and then dumped the waste at Kurumbapet. With the shift of the landfill site away from Karuvadikuppam to Kurumbapet, Aurovilians breathed a sigh of relief, for they thought that their problems were over. But the relief was short-lived.

For the residents around Kurumbapet vociferously objected to having a landfill next door. Their protests were heard. On 22 January 2011, *The Hindu* newspaper reported that the Puducherry Pollution Control Committee (PPCC), acting on a complaint from the Puducherry Environment Protection Association, had issued notice to the Puducherry Municipality for dumping solid and biomedical waste at

Kurumbapet. According to the PPCC notice, "the activity leads to severe environmental degradation and is a gross violation of the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, Bio-Medical Waste (Management and Handling) Rules, 1998, and the Municipal Solid Waste (Management and Handling) Rules, 2000". The municipality was asked to stop dumping waste immediately, and was informed that action would be initiated if it failed to do so.

The Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India in its report for the financial year 2009-2010 also pointed out that Pondicherry had been dismal in ensuring observance of the solid waste management rules, and that the PPCC had not properly monitored the implementation of bio-medical waste. Of the 211 hospitals/healthcare establishments in Pondicherry, 200, including 76 government institutions, had no valid authorization from the PPCC to dispose of bio-medical waste. The CAG also criticized the absence of a common disposal and incineration site and the unhygienic transporting of the waste.

On 29 March 2011, *The Hindu* reported that PMSPL was continuing to dump mixed municipal waste at Kurumbapet, more than two months after the PPCC's notice to stop the dumping. The burning of the garbage posed serious health hazards to the people in the neighbourhood. Students of the Rajiv Gandhi Government Veterinary College, located right next to the yard, complained that the smoke from the burning garbage engulfed their campus every day, resulting in burning sensations in the chest and the eyes, forcing them to shut doors and windows and to remain inside their classrooms.

Also the fact that the yard was located near Ossudu Lake, which was declared a bird sanctuary in 2008, raised concerns.

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The problems of burning plastic

The burning of plastic at the Karuvadikuppam landfill creates a health hazard for Auroville and the neighbouring villages as it releases toxins such as dioxins, furans and polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) that are highly carcinogenic. Dioxins, moreover, are very dangerous to infants and babies, are known to cause reproductive problems and damage the immune system.

The Karuvadikuppam landfill burned regularly, either because the waste was deliberately set on fire by rag pickers who extract recyclable metal from the waste, or because of the spontaneous combustion of methane, which is produced when the organic component of the waste decomposes.

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The Hindu quotes Deputy Conservator of Forests, Anil Kumar, as saying that 'the smoke that arose from the yard would have serious implications for the birds and would keep them away from the lake.' As the yard is located within five kilometres of the protected lake, an Environment Impact Assessment and a Public Hearing were mandatory before converting the land into an area for garbage segregation. These, apparently, hadn't yet happened.

Finally, on April 6, 2011, following large-scale protests and in response to a court order staying further dumping at Kurumbapet, PMSPL shifted its dumping operation back to the landfill site at Karuvadikuppam, where it restarted the dumping of unsegregated waste. The residents around Kurumbapet rejoiced. But Auroville and its neighbouring villages were back to square one and were in for a very unpleasant summer.

A toxic summer

The summer of 2011 seemed the most toxic of all. Many Aurovilians complained of being smothered by the thick acrid smell and smoke produced by burning plastic. So severe was the problem that in September 2011 there was a community-wide movement and another group of Aurovilians, who called themselves the Pondy Garbage Control Group, came forward to volunteer their time and energy in tackling the issue. Some Aurovilians led by Frederick and Sathyaseelan proposed to initiate legal action against the improper waste management by starting a Public Interest Litigation. Others, like those who already had contacts with the Puducherry Government and PMSPL, wanted to continue their efforts towards greater collaboration. They pointed out that litigation in India is a time-consuming process which can take years, if not decades, and that the main objective of the Pondy Garbage Control team is to stop the burning as soon as possible.

Finally, both actions were agreed upon. For, while India has some strong environmental laws, they are often flagrantly violated and there is poor law enforcement because of vested interests and corruption. A verdict following a public interest petition would force the Government to act.

The Karuvadikuppam landfill site, for example, is too close to habitation clusters as well as to Auroville, which is 'a place of important cultural interest'. The site is also too close to the 125 acres of Auroville forests that harbour endangered species. Also, the location of the upgraded Pondicherry airport within two kilometres of the landfill violates the legal recommendation that airports be situated 20 kilometres away from landfills. The landfill, moreover, contravenes health regulations as the methane levels at the landfill are well over the acceptable level of 650 milligrammes per cubic metre, leading to the production of toxic fumes. All these are reasons to go to court.

On the basis of this legal foundation, the Pondy Garbage Control Group also launched a massive awareness and implementation campaign. It comprised an audio-visual presentation in English and Tamil, made by the Auroville unit Ecopro, which highlighted the dangers of burning plastic. In the course of a month, Guna and Frederick showed this presentation to Aurovilians, students in outreach schools and workers in Auroville, and collected over 3,000 signatures in a petition that appealed to the Puducherry Government to initiate proper waste management procedures.

Collaboration

"While the awareness campaign was going on, we had an excellent meeting with Ms. M. Sathiyavathy (IAS), the Chief Secretary of Puducherry," says Bindu. "We discussed the problem and possible solutions. We all agreed that segregation of waste at the source is the



PHOTOS: RIBHU VOHRA

Around 150 gypsies live at the edge of Karuvadikuppam. The landfill is their livelihood: children and adults search through each new load of trash to find things to sell and sometimes to eat. They are the worst affected, subject daily to the toxins of the landfill. Some Aurovilians are looking into ways to help this community lead a better existence.

beginning of proper waste management. But that is not possible for a number of reasons. So how to stop the waste from burning? Solid Waste Management experts had informed us about a simple and effective remedy to stop the production of methane: to constantly turn over the waste that is being dumped. So we requested the Chief Secretary to prevent the auto combustion at the Karuvadikuppam landfill by ordering that the waste be turned over every day with excavators. She took immediate action and since October last year there have been no more fires at the landfill."

Also PMSPL, who had been given a copy of the petition, showed goodwill. It contacted the Pondy Garbage Control Group and expressed their willingness to collaborate. Based on their meetings with Ecopro, PMSPL has started using Effective Micro-organisms (EM) and mixed it in their compactor trucks when picking up the waste in Pondicherry to control the stench of decomposing organic matter and flies. Negotiations are still on with PMSPL to try and use larger quantities of EM that would eradicate the smell and flies at the landfill site as well.

Is there any indication that the Puducherry Government is planning to move the land fill back to Kurumbapet or to any other place? "A so-called Rapid Environmental Impact Assessment study for establishing a waste processing plant and landfill at Kurumbapet was submitted in August last year, and the Pondicherry Pollution Control Committee called for a public hearing on December 29, 2011. But so boisterous were the proceedings that the Collector cancelled the meeting for the sake of maintaining peace and order. So we don't know if this site will ever again be used," says Bindu. "And we have no idea if the Government is considering another location."

Moreover, the relationship between the Puducherry Government and PMSPL has come under strain. In an article in *The Hindu* of March 15, 2012, the present Chief Minister of Puducherry is quoted as saying that he is not happy with the agreement with Kivar Environ signed by the previous Puducherry Government, as he deemed it to be 'illogical and in favour' of the private firm. The article also mentioned that the Government owes PMSPL a sum of Rs 22 crore. This dispute may not bode well for the future of the landfill.

Legal action

Meanwhile, a court case has been initiated with the National Green Tribunal, a special fast-track court to handle the expeditious disposal of environmental cases. There is wide community support for the issue. Many Aurovilians have made donations to cover the substantial legal costs. But nobody knows how quickly the National Green Tribunal will deal with this issue as it has only been in existence since October 2010. "We are prepared for the long haul," says Bindu. In the meantime the Pondy Garbage Control Group hopes to continue the good collaboration with the Puducherry Government and PMSPL. "Thanks to their action, for the first time in years we may have a summer without the toxic fumes of burning plastic," concludes Bindu.

In conversation with Carel

One of the Aurovilians who has done extensive research on solid waste management in India is Brooks Anderson, an American born communication and documentation specialist and director of Clear Impression Documentation Services. In June 2011 he released the 50-page policy review Privatisation: A formula for provision or perversion of municipal solid waste management? comparing the rationale for privatisation with the performance of privatised public services. The review also presents the track record of privatised waste management in Pondicherry and other cities, which has been used for this article. The full report can be downloaded from http://www.environmentportal.in/files/privatisationofmswm_0.pdf



Excavators turn over the waste at the landfill every day to stop the production of methane

The ineffectiveness of the Municipal Solid Wastes Rules

In 2000, in response to a Supreme Court order, the Government of India enacted the Municipal Solid Wastes (Management and Handling) Rules to mitigate a burgeoning solid waste crisis. Pollution from haphazard municipal solid waste disposal was gravely jeopardizing public health, undermining the nation's development gains. The Rules mandated measures by which local bodies were to minimize waste, in an attempt to avert a projected 500 percent increase in annual waste production in the coming decades. The Rules' prime objective was to protect public health and the environment by minimizing disposal of waste in landfills, thereby aligning the Government's municipal waste management policy with its commitments to international treaties to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, control the production of persistent organic pollutants, conserve finite resources, and achieve broad development targets.

Had they been implemented assiduously, the Rules stood a strong chance of transforming India into one of the world's cleanest nations. However, in November 2009, nearly a decade after the Rules' enactment, ex-Minister for Environment and Forests Jairam Ramesh publicly declared India's cities the world's dirtiest: in other words, the Government had done little to bring the Rules into effect.

The Auroville landfill

Auroville's Eco Service collected a total of 6,057 kg of waste in January 2012. Of this, 1,510 kg (24.9%) was landfilled, and the remaining 75.1% recycled. Income from recyclables was Rs. 29,342, and efforts are on to increase this further by establishing relationships with new waste dealers and storing more waste so that it can be sold in greater bulk (meaning more income).

The landfill saga continues. We have been given a new plot for the Auroville landfill in Poothurai, near Ousteri Lake. It is far from ideal given how far it is (though the Budget Coordination Committee is paying for the additional cost of transportation), and also since it borders a small stream – which means it can contaminate the water in that stream. However, we will use it for now until a better site becomes available. We have also been dumping at a plot in New Farms but there are access issues there.

Problems are being reported in the manner that some communities and households are disposing of their waste (i.e. improper recycling or waste strewn all around the disposal area). There is a need to revamp the outreach service which helps communities and households dispose of their waste properly, and which gives training to workers and Aurovilians on how to recycle, etc.

From a report of the Eco Service

New Secretary takes office

Shri N. Bala Baskar, IAS (retd.) was appointed as Secretary to the Auroville Foundation from 7th March 2012 for a period of 3 years.

There was general rejoicing on receiving the news of the appointment of Mr. Bala Baskar as Secretary of the Auroville Foundation. Mr. Bala Baskar had been Secretary from 1996 till 2001 and was very well appreciated for his dedication as well for upholding the ideals of Auroville. He was welcomed back in an open meeting with the community on the roof of the Solar Kitchen on March 22nd. That same evening, the community bade farewell to Mr. S. Loganathan who had been Acting Secretary since the departure of former Secretary Mr. N. Ramaswamy on 31st October 2011.

Auroville Today: So what have you been doing since you left Auroville?

Bala Baskar: I first went to Chandigarh and worked there as Secretary to the Government of Haryana. I started working in the area of public health, drinking water and sanitation; then I worked for 2 years in irrigation – a very major charge in Haryana; then for about a year I was charged with municipal administration (this includes urban development) and finally I became Principal Secretary Finance for more than two years. In 2007, I went to New Delhi, and was appointed Financial Adviser of the Ministry of External Affairs. I retired from there as Principal Adviser Finance in 2009. Afterwards I became director of the Bharathidasan Institute of Management, one of India's most respected Business Schools, in Trichy, which I gave up in January 2012. And one month later I joined Auroville.

You have kept in contact with Auroville during all these years?

Yes, but less so when I was in Haryana. From 2007 onwards I managed to come down at least once a year. But all along I kept in touch with my Auroville friends; some came repeatedly to Chandigarh and New Delhi. So I was reasonably well informed about what was going on in Auroville in some areas.

Then what made you want to come back?

(laughing) Well, I don't know myself. I suppose there was an urge in me somewhere ...

Of course, you had left on a popular wave ...

Yes, and I am acutely aware that it will be difficult to live up to the expectations. The second innings can never be as good as the first. But I take this as something that has to be done, so I don't worry too much.

You have meanwhile assumed office. What are your first impressions?

I'm less than a week in office and I've had only first interactions with the Working Committee and some other working groups. I am still sorting through the work, trying to get a sense of the priorities.

One of these is the land situation. There was both good and bad news for me. The bad news is that in these last 11 years far too little progress has been made in purchasing the lands in the city area. About 211 acres need still to be purchased. With land prices going up all the time, this is a worrying situation. Also, quite a number of encroachments have happened on Auroville land.

The good news is that Auroville has managed to get all necessary data on the lands. This was not available during my first period in office. That's a good starting base. We now need to study what exactly happened and we will take action against all those who are encroaching on Auroville lands and against whom, for whatever reason, no action has been taken in the past.

Do you have views on how to purchase the lands in the city area?

I want to discuss possible approaches with the Board when it meets here in Auroville on April 7th. I do not exclude acquisition, but I would prefer other ways to convince land owners to sell their land to Auroville.



Mr. N. Bala Baskar

There is also an issue coming up of Aurovilians who own land in the Auroville area starting building houses there.

I believe that, as a matter of principle, Aurovilians should not own land within the city and greenbelt areas and these lands should either be sold to the Auroville Foundation or the person should cease being an Aurovillian. The two are incompatible in the light of Auroville's Charter. Similarly, Aurovilians should not rent out their house for personal gain when they disappear from Auroville for a few years. If we allow this kind of thing, we are reinforcing the existing ownership structures in the world and do not live up to Auroville's Charter.

Here the community will need to take action. And one of the first actions is to make clear regulations which provide for equal treatment for all, not one rule for the persons you like and another for persons you don't like. During my first period as Secretary there was very little enthusiasm in the community for making regulations; but I believe people now realise the need for it, the more so as the number of Aurovilians has increased.

Any other first impressions?

I have seen a number of good developments in

Auroville with quite a number of new and beautiful buildings having come up. For example, when I left, the Matrimandir was not yet ready. Now it is a spiritual focal point which draws many tourists and visitors. A point of concern is how to receive the special visitors, the VIPs. I've asked the Working Committee to create something like a public relations group which receives and welcomes these people.

But it appears that the relationship with the immediately surrounding villages has not improved compared to 2001. People from the villages have visited me and complained. I am still too fresh in my job to have formed an opinion – there is always more than one side to a story and even within each village there are various factions – but I am wondering if there exists a positive lobby within the villages for Auroville's presence. We need to think this through...

You have been appointed for three years. Is this the limit?

The age limit for Government functionaries is 65. This can sometimes be relaxed, particularly with autonomous institutions. But as things stand today, my term will be over on August 16, 2014.

In conversation with Carel

AUROVILLE REGION

Towards a sustainable regional plan

A half-day workshop on a Sustainable Regional Plan for Auroville, Villupuram and Cuddalore Region was held in Auroville on March 16th.

It is ambitious, but that's no hindrance for INTACH Pondicherry, PondyCAN and Auroville's Town Development Council to jointly try manifesting a model Inter-State Sustainable Regional Development Plan for a vast, 2,540 sq. kms large area, which includes the 11 enclaves of Pondicherry and Auroville. The area, which ranges from below Cuddalore in the south to Villupuram in the west, Kaluvelly tank in the north and is bounded by the sea on the east, is located within two districts of Tamil Nadu and comprises the Puducherry Urban Area. It has three major towns, Puducherry, Cuddalore, and Villupuram, and an estimated population of 4.6 million people. The area is part of an integrated natural ecosystem, has shared natural resources (water bodies) and common historical, cultural, and religious links.

"In 2008, we started discussions about regional planning here in Auroville and since then we have been slowly but steadily working to get the process going," said Bankim from INTACH Pondicherry. "In 2010, we received financial assistance from the French agency ADEME for a pilot project to take this regional planning process further." Since then, the group has interviewed approximately 2,500 people, including Government officials, and has held a number of workshops. The workshop in Auroville is the fourth and final one.

Why is a regional plan necessary? "There is a huge disparity in income levels within the region which has led

to high mobility of people," explained Lata from Auroville in her presentation. "Many people from Villupuram and Cuddalore come to Pondicherry to work. The consequence is that Puducherry is bursting at its seams, with shrinking areas for construction and a stressed infrastructure, while adjoining pockets of Tamil Nadu are underdeveloped. This results in an

uncontrolled and unplanned development affecting both states adversely and will lead, if not checked, to chaos and haphazard development and to the destruction of the area's common natural resources. This makes a unified approach essential."

The benefits of such a regional plan are substantial. It would preserve rural areas and agricultural land, miti-

gate the development pressures on natural resources and promote a balanced sustainable growth of new developments. "The regional plan would cut across administrative boundaries and deal with issues related to natural resources, infrastructure and economic and social development of the region. It would address the overall development of the area (rural as well as urban and transition areas) and so create a win-win situation for all."

"No initiative of this nature is currently going on in India," explained Dr. Suresh, a lawyer connected to INTACH who is also advising the Planning Commission of India. "At present," he said, "plans are being made beyond our control, where the word 'participation' has become a strategic term to be put into documents, but which has lost all meaning. The notion of participation as a democratic ethic has disappeared." He advocated studying the past to see what we can learn from ancient forms of governance, which were more self-sustaining and equitable, but without romanticising it. "In ancient times in Tamil Nadu," he gave the example, "the weakest, poorest and most vulnerable would, in times of scarcity, have the first claim on a community's resources. This principle got broken in colonial rule. The question is, how can we get it back?"

According to Dr. Suresh, the challenge is to create a governance system owned by the people and based on a democratic ethic. "Many of us make the very big mistake in thinking that governance reform is the same as Government reform. Governance

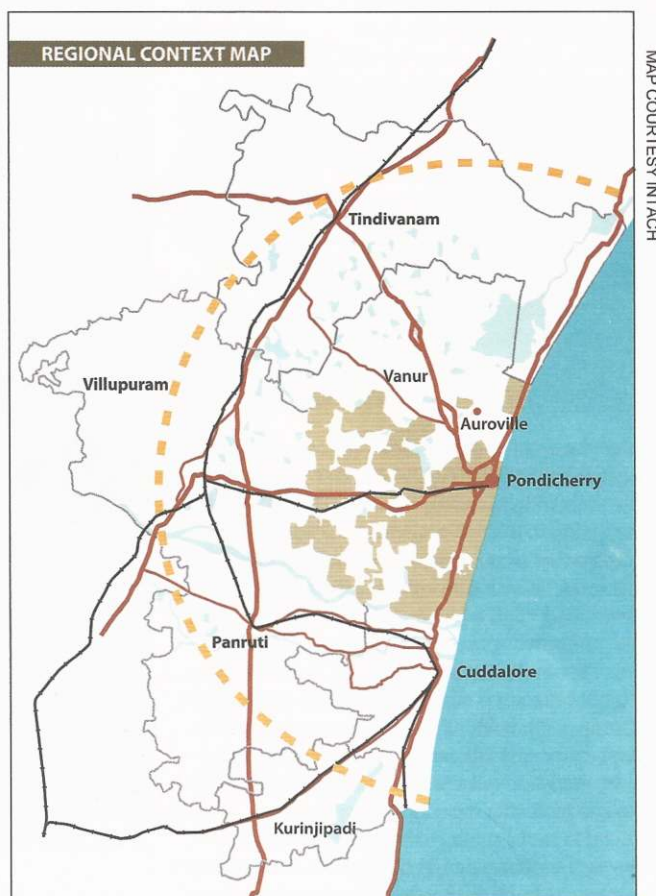
reform includes the Government but goes beyond the Government; it includes people who bring in their energy, understanding and vision. They come with ideas and these ideas have to be welded together into a plan. If people own a plan which is theirs, there is no need to impose it. My experience is that when there is a sufficiently strong will in the people, there is a push that cannot be stopped."

How to realize such a shift in governance? "Collaborative participatory planning is the key," explained Dr. Abdul Razak, the head of Department of Planning of the Anna University Chennai, who talked about his experiences with such planning processes in different parts of Tamil Nadu and Kerala. "People have to get involved and we need to get their ideas about the choices they want to make. Then these ideas have to be brought into the panchayats and through them to the higher Government institutions."

This is a difficult process. "But it is not impossible if the ideas are held and pushed by the people," said Dr. Suresh. He called on the audience to take the bull by the horns. "This bull is not the bureaucrat or the politician, but it is the development process. The entire Indian subcontinent is looking for an example of a sustainable development of a bioregion. This initiative of INTACH, PondyCan and Auroville is unique and, if successful, will be of immense importance for India."

Carel

For more info contact regional-plan-puducherry@googlegroups.com



MAP COURTESY INTACH

Citadines



Maurice, who is both a resident and project holder of the Citadines project, moved to an apartment in Citadines in February, 2010. Why? "I had been asked by Louis to be one of the project holders of Citadines. At that time, I had no intention of moving there. Then, at a certain point, in the middle of construction, I decided that I was going to make that move. It came just like that, it wasn't a reasoned decision."

He had been living in a beautiful house in Auromodèle. What adjustments did he have to make? "Nothing hard. We have agreements in Citadines concerning things like having no personal ammas, no A/C, no pets, keeping the volume on TVs very low. But I don't experience any of these as a restriction: they are just commonsense. Now I have a shared amma who comes twice a week for two hours at a time, and that's fine. There is a community restaurant where lunches are provided, and a common laundry where you can wash your own clothes or give them for washing and ironing. Acoustically, there are some issues here: you have to make sure that whatever you say is fit to be heard by others! But, to me, this apartment is much more private than most houses. When I close my door I am on my own, whereas in a house people can always pop in."

"But the biggest change in my lifestyle relates to the proximity of Matrimandir. When I lived at the other end of Auroville, I rarely visited. Now, I walk in the Matrimandir gardens every morning and every evening when I return from work I go to the chamber. Matrimandir has become an essential part of my life."

Maurice has a beautiful, spacious apartment on the top floor of one of the blocks. "I consider myself extremely lucky. The apartment suits me perfectly. I get good ventilation and, an inestimable gift, I have a wonderful view of the Matrimandir."

But Citadines is more than a collection of tasteful apartments. It is primarily a human experiment. The basic concept is that the apartments are offered free and fully furnished (even curtains) to those who are involved in the growth of Auroville so that their time and energy is not absorbed in the daily struggles of life, an idea similar to the Golconde experiment in the Ashram. How has it worked out? "Very well; everybody here is engaged in doing something of collective benefit for Auroville. Also, the fact that most residents did not pay for their apartments lessens the sense of possessiveness. So far, only one person has left. Of course, the project holders were quite concerned about selecting people; two of us were mostly handling this task, meeting candidates." What criteria, beyond commitment to Auroville's growth, did you use? "It was mostly a feeling; there are people you immediately have a contact with at a first meeting, and others you don't."

Is there a danger that Citadines becomes an exclusive club which can only be joined if you know the 'right' people or hold the 'right' opinions? "It doesn't strike me at all that we are a club, or that we all think alike. I don't even know what some of the residents think about the Master Plan or other matters; we certainly didn't choose people on this basis."

So, was it a good move? "It was an excellent move. Not only do I have no regrets, I am full of gratitude."

Maitreye



The aim of the Maitreye project is to provide various types of cost-effective housing for approximately 250 residents. The project brief stated that Maitreye is intended to "cater for the needs of Newcomers and Aurovilians with limited resources for their housing needs". So far, only the first phase has been completed. Emanuele and his family moved into an apartment here last August.

"We moved from a place in Auromodèle which was basically the same size. However, this apartment feels much bigger because the layout is really nice, and it's also much cooler. It's also well finished considering that we went for the low cost option, and it's a miracle that the original price of the apartment - ten lakh rupees - did not increase during construction, which is something that often happens in Auroville. One or two details, like the fact that the overhangs over the windows are insufficient, could have been improved, but basically we are very happy with the apartment."

Emanuele is less happy, however, about the lack of communal facilities which had been promised. "It took more than a year to put up a fence around the community, which meant that cows were coming in all the time. The wastewater treatment has also been a big issue. For one year the water was let out untreated into a field, but when we complained the project holders did not accept responsibility. They blamed L'Avenir, saying the planners had promised we could hook up to a common wastewater treatment plant, but this hasn't even started. Now

they are going to try to do something, but I think this is happening only because we put a lot of pressure on the project holders."

"It's the same with the collective parking space. Originally this was part of the project, but we went through the whole monsoon without one and now that something has been built we had to finance it ourselves - and it's not even lockable! We were also promised a rainwater harvesting system which hasn't happened, and nothing has started on the landscaping and gardens yet."

"The project holders are still promising that these things will come, but I suspect they just don't have the budget to do these things. The other thing is that the project is still under construction and it's very noisy, dusty and dirty living on a construction site. There are plastic bags all over the place and the workers have not been provided with toilets or a place to wash, even though this was promised from the start. It's probably no worse than any other construction site in Auroville, but I think that in the area of site management Auroville should be an example of best practice."

"But I kind of expected these kinds of things, particularly with a project that has dragged on so long. In the end, we can progressively create these common facilities, it doesn't have to be all perfect when you move in. I've lived in six other places in Auroville and I've never moved into a place where everything was perfect!"

Luminosity



The Luminosity project developed out of discussions in the 'Dreamcatchers' group. The idea was that it would aspire to be a "temple for living and working". It would also incorporate new ideas and technologies and be an example of denser collective living.

Marie signed up for Luminosity because she wanted to experience collective living, but not in the sense that people would be ground down by 'duties' and daily chores, while Peter had always wanted to live in the city but this was the first urban project that had inspired him. "The architects created something which is very sober, almost Zenlike in its beauty in simplicity, and I felt enchanted by this." Bridget, unlike the other two, had not been involved with 'Dreamcatchers' but felt very aligned with the ideals of Luminosity, along with the ecological aspects.

So to what extent have their expectations been fulfilled? Marie is happy that Luminosity offers her a choice of 'cocoons'. "We have our private space in our apartments where we can be alone but we also have other spaces, like the roof terrace, where I can choose to be with others. This works very well for me. I am completely happy with my apartment: I have never been in such a beautiful space. It's very simple, but there is beauty everywhere, and the big windows and the louvers allow me to play with the light."

"What I appreciate here," says Bridget, "is how the architects have created a balance between aesthetics and functionality. Nadja, in particular, paid enormous attention to details and was also very good at accommodating requests for modifications."

However, not all the original environmental aspects of the project have been incorporated or are working well. As yet there are no solar panels on the roof, the experimental dehumidification system has been abandoned, while the innovative artificial aquifer - which would have been fed by rainwater from the roof to provide much of the non-drinking water resources for the inhabitants - is only partially functional due to damage to the plastic liner. Marie was very attracted by the idea that recycled greywater would be used to flush the toilets but admits that, for the moment, the water smells so many people do not use it. It seems, however, that this will be remedied in the near future.

"Actually," says Peter, "when you are introducing new prototypes there are bound to be flaws. In Luminosity enormous energy was put into creating a high level of perfection, but there were too many details for only two or three people to handle and maybe certain experiments happened too fast and on too big a scale. Perhaps things should have grown more slowly and in a more financially-balanced way, because when you strive for this level of perfection it costs far more than making experiments on a smaller scale."

And Luminosity is expensive. An apartment here costs around 20 lakh rupees (30,000 euros) and already the residents have had to invest at least two lakhs more. "There are so many experiments here that we have had to finance by ourselves," says Marie, "that at one point we had to say, that's enough. That's one reason we don't yet have the solar panels."

"Actually, as one of the architects admitted, Luminosity cannot be replicated because it is too expensive," says Peter. "Maybe the next experiment will be a little bit more appropriate. The principle is great but it needs some tuning to make it replicable."

What about the community aspect of the experiment? One of the agreements made by the residents is that no ammas will be employed in Luminosity and that everybody will take care of cleaning their own apartments and also the collective spaces. "As an ideal this was very interesting," says Marie, "but in reality we soon found that some people's standards were higher than others and we had to put some rules in place. And then, at a certain point, it felt like a duty. We definitely have an aspiration to do things differently but, so far, we don't have the correct tools to achieve it. In order to avoid some friction between us, now we will employ an amma to look after the collective spaces."

"Originally the ground floor was going to be a more open space for collective use," Peter says, "but for financial reasons individual offices were built here." However, the huge rooftop terrace which now func-

Joys and disa
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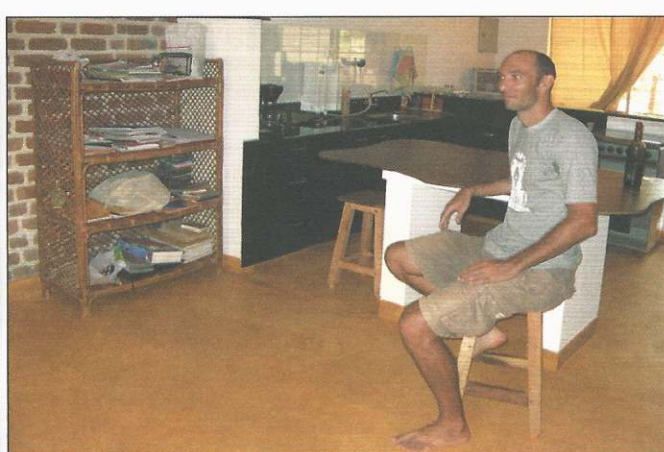
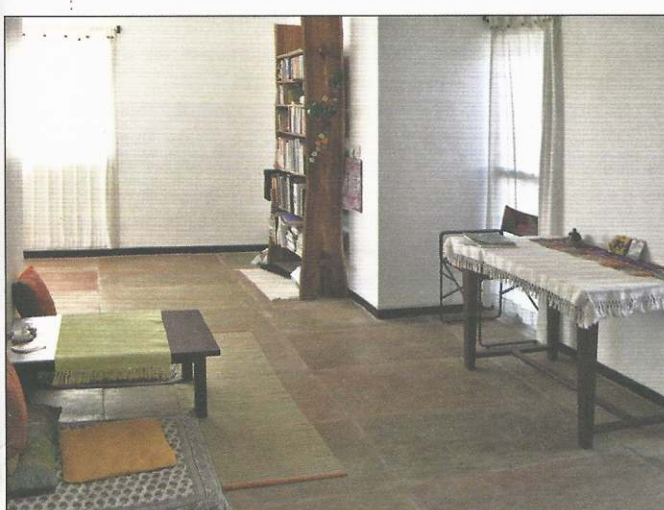
In May, 2009, Auroville Today reported t
Luminosity, Maitreye, Arati 3, Realizatio
called) - were planned or under construc
at least a year ago. Here is the first fee



First row: balcony and interior at Citadines. Second row: seating
Luminosity. Third row: interior of Realization. F
Fifth row: interior of Arati (with Susmita)

Appointments: Living in Auroville

That six new apartment buildings – Citadines and Joy (as it was then called). All these projects were completed back from some of the residents.



g on the roof (from left Marie, Bridget and Peter) and interior of fourth row: interior of Inspiration (with Meera). a); Interior of Maitreye (with Emanuele).

tions as a collective space for the Luminosity residents is appreciated by everyone. "This is my favorite place in the building," says Bridget. "I come up here practically every morning and evening. You can see the sun rise and set as well as the Matrimandir. It's amazing."

"It's a lovely space," agrees Peter. "Although it is a little too big for only 12 people it is just right when opened up for wider use. However, this exclusivity, in the sense that many things here are both outrageously perfect and expensive, is the only point where I feel uneasy about this place. Well, it's not so easy to realize beauty in simplicity on all levels."

Arati III



Arati III is the final phase of the Arati project. The design and construction method did not follow that of the first two phases as the architect had changed and Shama wanted to try something more related to the individual needs of the residents. Susmita was the first person to move in, one and a half years ago.

"I wanted to move from Courage because it was not very comfortable for me, so I went to L'Avenir to find out which projects were coming up. I felt that Arati Three was the best one for me because I had the impression it was very well planned and, after I met the architect, I felt she was taking this project very seriously. For example, she is very precise. She gave me the details of all the materials she would use and I had a choice of tiles and could make small changes. Generally, however, I've always agreed with her choice. I've finally found an architect with the same ideas and taste as my own, someone able to combine the sense of beauty with practicality and high-quality materials. Here there is an overall feeling of solidity: everything is well done."

Susmita's apartment is on the top floor and is light and breezy. She has furnished it simply and tastefully. "Everybody who comes here likes my flat very much. I think that the sense of beauty and cleanliness is an integral part of the yoga so I like places which have a certain atmosphere, a sense of beauty, clarity. It never gets too warm or noisy because there is an ecological material on the outer walls and on the roof that dampens noise and heat and I have balconies on all sides so I can enjoy both sunrises and sunsets."

Susmita is one of the main proponents of making Auroville more accessible for all. So how accessible is Arati III?

"The ground floor apartments are accessible as the architect made a ramp. Lifts are not a good idea here because we have so many power cuts, but I asked the architect to construct the staircase in such a way that a battery chair can climb the staircase."

Shama had always planned that the collective facilities would be minimal, leaving it up to the residents to decide to what degree they want to interact. So there is a common bathroom on the ground floor, a garden and community parking but not much else that is shared. Is this a problem for Susmita? "Not at all. I brought my amma from Courage because we get on well together, and though we don't have community washing machines I'm against this for hygienic reasons. But there is a good community feeling. We share the responsibilities; each one has a task, like taking care of the waste, the accounting or the garden. We look after each other if we are ill, and sometimes we have dinner together on the top terrace."

"When we came together for the first time we put down a few things that we agreed on. For example, we can have pets here but we have to keep them in our apartments, not let them run free. But there are no rigid agreements and we are always ready to change things. Somehow we all seem to have the same ideas."

Inspiration



The Inspiration apartment project was originally called 'Joy'. Unlike other apartment complexes in Auroville, this one was Government-funded. The apartments have been provided free to those who are working for Auroville. One of the residents is Meera who is also one of the caretakers.

"I'm in an interesting situation. I'm an architect, an Aurovilian, and I am blessed because I have been given an Auroville house free. Now I understand what it means to have a physical base, it really grounds you mentally and physically. I feel all my energy gathered now to give back to Auroville, so I'm really grateful to everybody who made this possible."

"At the same time I am trained to make designs which optimize space and resources, and I see that many things could have been done better here. For example, there is wrong placement of taps, electrical sockets and fans, and the counter slab is the wrong height. In most places there are no overhangs over the windows, which create problems with rain, wind and sun in this climate. In heavy rain, at least

three apartments have had their electrical boxes blown up because of leaks. Again, poor design of common places means they are not used optimally and an expensive data cable infrastructure installed everywhere in the building cannot be used because the final connections have not been made."

"However, I don't wish to criticize but to look at the root cause. One perspective that has drawn all of us here is referred to in the Charter: "Auroville will be a site of material and spiritual researches." Here we have the example of Matrimandir that we built collectively over 40 years because of our aspiration for perfection down to the smallest detail. But are we in touch with this aspiration all the time? I feel that in our daily life there is a big gap between the ideal and the reality, and we can see this in places like Inspiration. Another reason why there are so many practical problems here is that there is a lack of ownership from all sides. The money came from the Government of India - no individual money was put in - and this made the ownership of the planning and design process weak. At the same time, since the residents have not put in their personal money, they also don't really take ownership of the collective aspect of the project."

"Generally, such Government-funded projects in India are more about numbers than quality, and the attitude is not to bother too much about details but to finish one project and move on to the next. It seems we fell into the same trap. But here in Auroville our standards should be higher; we should be an example of the very best in everything."

So how to ensure that future Government-funded projects do not go the same way? "It's a matter of bringing more consciousness into the work. Also, I think we should involve a bigger team of architects and technical professionals to enrich the process; part of the brief for a Government-funded building could be that at least four architects should work together on it. Ideally, there should be a design platform in Auroville to which a project like this could be brought and where professionals could give their input to make it beautiful, functional and optimal in the use of resources. We should aspire for collective enrichment. Unfortunately, we don't work like that at present; we work in a very conventional way."

Realization



The Realization project began in late 2007. It aimed at providing "sustainable and affordable homes", partly through getting the residents to donate their labour. This didn't happen but the first block was completed in 2010. Ingrida was one of the first people to move in.

Ingrida had always wanted to live in the city. She was also attracted by the ecological aspect of this project. All the houses are constructed in compressed earth blocks and the original brochure spoke of incorporating waste water recycling and rainwater harvesting systems. However, not all of these are operational today.

"We use mains electricity," says Ingrida, "because we have to buy the solar panels and solar hot water heaters ourselves and these are expensive. Also, one of the reasons I signed up for this project was the proposed innovative cooling system which would draw cooler air from underground. It is a very good idea but so far it has not worked because there is a problem with a noisy fan and the underground tank, through which the pipes pass, is empty. There is a leak, but nobody can find out where!"

"My house is cool downstairs but upstairs, where I am closer to the vaulted roof, it's too hot and I always have to have the fan on. There is a natural ventilation point in the roof but the original overhang covering it was not big enough and rain came in. This has been remedied but rain still comes through the ceiling."

"Most of the materials used in the house are of poor quality. For example, I had to change the front door because the original one was so flimsy, and I had to redo the bathroom. Also the floor tiles, made on site, are breaking up and have holes in places. The problem is the architect was not here to supervise the workers so they don't work well. Also there is not good site supervision so every Sunday I have to go around and clean up the waste."

"Then again, the architect didn't think about certain things. Originally I had no cupboards, no storage, in my main room. There are also louvers set 6 metres up in the wall without any access to them. They are good for ventilation but are very difficult to clean and maintain: the glass tends to slip out."

Ingrida notes that many residents now make modifications themselves because they don't like the quality of the workmanship and the materials. There is also a financial aspect. "The original cost of this house was nine and a half lakhs, but now I've been asked to pay an extra three lakhs and I have had to take a loan from Auroville. The financial aspect is a big problem for everybody here: it is much more expensive than expected."

Regarding community facilities, they were told there would be a wastewater recycling system but it doesn't exist. There is no community laundry or eating place, "and we have no common space where we can meet together, although it was promised."

Would Ingrida have signed up for this project if she knew then what she knows now? "Oh, yes, I like my house, I'm happy here. This place is called Realization so now the original residents have decided to work together to realize this project, to make it better. We are all of one mind in this. So it's good to have problems because it draws you together."

Based on interviews by Alan

The main hall of the Unity Pavilion opens

On the Golden Day, February 29, 2012, the main hall of the Unity Pavilion in the International Zone was opened.

“It felt like a bottle of champagne being uncorked,” says Jaya. “The entire day was filled with activities. The Bulgarians were making ‘Martenitsi’, small traditional dolls to welcome spring, the Kazakhs had erected a Yurt where children were doing crafts, Swedish volunteers were making *Flower of Life* kolams, the Koreans conducted a tea ceremony, the Americans were interacting with Auroville friends in America through Skype and Facebook, a Chinese Newcomer was doing calligraphy, SAVI gave a presentation of how it is directing the Auroville volunteer activities, there were collective body movement sessions, there were panels on display on the qualities of various nations, and, of course, there were loads of food and drink: Ethiopian Coffee, Russian and German Tea with traditional snacks and special cakes. In the evening there was a small bonfire with Hungarian food cooked over the fire and African drumming. But the most intense experience was the reading of three lines of Sri Aurobindo’s *Savitri* in 30 languages. ‘*The truth-light capture Nature by surprise, a stealth of God compel the heart to bliss, and earth grow unexpectedly divine.*’ To hear these lines in your own language and then to hear those same lines in other languages gave such a strong feeling of human unity! It was unbelievable, particularly when the last line, ‘*and earth grow unexpectedly divine*’, was once again read by everybody together at the conclusion!”

“We’d wondered if there should be an ‘official’ opening, but, in the end, it was clear there shouldn’t,” adds Shivaya. “So there were no speeches, no ribbons were cut. The only ‘official’ moment was when the German Consul lit a light on the Peace Table on behalf of the entire diplomatic corps in India.”

Shivaya and Jaya have been the driving force behind manifesting the main hall of the Unity Pavilion. They still feel the strain of weeks of tensions and preparations. “The adrenaline wore off the morning after,” says Jaya, “but I woke up with the impression that we had launched an ocean liner and that now the International Zone can take off.”

A long history

The Unity Pavilion has a long history. In the mid nineties, Jaya, who had become involved with the International Zone, proposed to build something which, she said, ‘would be an expression of inclusiveness’. This gave rise to the idea of the Unity Pavilion. It was backed by the International Zone Group and slowly financial support came: from late Dimitri von Mohrenshildt, an inmate of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, from Auroville International USA, from the Vitalis Association in France and from Auroville International Switzerland. They together provided the funds to build the first part of the Pavilion, an office building. The foundation took place on February 28, 2002. “Here too,” says Shivaya, “nobody laid ‘the first stone’ – everybody was invited to lay one brick and even Lakshmi, the elephant of the Ganesh temple in Pondicherry, participated. Afterwards we found that more than 800 foundation stones had been laid.”

The office building was completed in 2004, and since then this building has been the hub for the International Zone group, for the Pavilion groups, for Auroville International and for Savi.

When Dr. Kireet Joshi was Chairman of the Auroville Foundation, he proposed to build a Centre for International Research in Human Unity as part of an Auroville University and in this context the Unity Pavilion was seen as the Faculty of East-West and Human Unity. This made it possible to apply for funding from the Government of India. But it took some time. Only in 2010, funds became available for the main building of the Pavilion.

“It was because of the long gestation that it was a difficult design process,” says Piero who, together with Gloria, were the architects of the Unity Pavilion. “I have lost count of how long Gloria and I have been busy with this project. When the idea was first mooted I made a quick plan and a summary model and showed it to Roger Anger. Roger was very pleased. At the time the project had a second floor, and the building was larger. But then the purpose of the building changed and we adapted it. The office building was the first to be built. Afterwards, we looked again at the Main Hall, and reduced it to a ground floor only illuminated by skylights and with a small caretaker studio on the second floor. As nobody really knew what exactly was going to happen in that hall, except that it would host multiple functions, we played for a long time with either having walls for exhibitions or having windows instead, and if there should be a raised dais or not.” The final result, he says, has exceeded all expectations. “We managed to get a first-class finishing with good quality flooring, an acoustic ceiling, and frameless glass doors.

“But the building process wasn’t easy,” says Shivaya. “We found one day that the funds allocated for the project had been diverted to another purpose in Auroville. It took the intervention of the Chairman, Dr. Karan Singh, to set things right.”



The main hall of the Unity Pavilion

The role of the Unity Pavilion

“Members of the community often questioned the need for another public space when we have such a housing shortage,” says Jaya. “Our response is that you cannot weigh the two against each other. We are here to build the city of Auroville in all its aspects, which includes the International Zone. Mr. B.V. Doshi stressed the importance of this zone in an interaction with the L’Avenir d’Auroville last year. He stated that, after Matrimandir, the International Zone is the most important zone of Auroville. He called it a balancing zone between the spirit of Matrimandir and the interface to the world.

“The Unity Pavilion is pivotal in manifesting this Zone. The Mother spoke quite specifically about the International Zone being manifested with the involvement of governments. We believe that the presence of this Unity Pavilion will bring the message that the International Zone is really happening. We hope that the Unity Pavilion will become a platform for an increased interaction with the foreign missions in India, as a step towards the building of their national pavilions.”

“The Hall is a multipurpose space,” explains Shivaya. “It can host exhibitions, cultural events, workshops and conferences. People tell us that the place has a very good energy, that the space ‘feels good’ and invites reflection and interaction. Many people have come already with proposals to do something. For lectures, workshops or cultural events, chairs will be installed. When there are no special happenings, the panels on the various nations as well as Auroville art will be on display. The Hall can also be used as a meeting space for the community; as it has a beautiful and peaceful atmosphere, the place will be conducive to working towards harmony and collaborative solutions.”

The Unity Pavilion has a quite comprehensive exhibition on the International Zone, including the panels of various nations. “We have suggested that the pavilion groups make some more panels on

different aspects of their country, culture and their work, so that when we have events connected to specific countries or to the International Zone as a whole, we can use this material to create small relevant exhibitions. But we have noticed that the panels also raise questions,” says Jaya. “There is a tendency to display how good a nation is and the things its people are proud of. It’s natural. We look for the soul aspect, so we look directly for what is beautiful and enriching. But some panels mention their freedom struggle against other countries that oppressed them. Shouldn’t we bypass that kind of history? For every country has been oppressed and has been oppressor. Should we not rather focus here on what a nation has contributed to the evolution of mankind, as part of the whole, expressing each country’s contribution towards Human Unity in Diversity?”

The Hall of Peace

The Peace Table for Asia, which was donated to Auroville by The Nakashima Foundation for Peace and inaugurated on the Golden Day of February 29, 1996, may become a help in this. “The Peace Table was temporary located in Bharat Nivas. Piero proposed to create a Hall of Peace as a special section of the Unity Pavilion,” says Gloria. “This proposal was accepted and this Hall is now under construction. Meanwhile, the Table is housed in the Main Hall.”

“The Hall of Peace won’t be a museum,” says Shivaya. “We want the Hall to be used by people who want to resolve their difficulties, with the Peace Table as a focal point to foster Unity. Within Auroville, mediation and non-violent communication can take place here. But the Hall will also serve people from outside Auroville.”

Jaya explains. “One example is that of a group of Rwandans who study in Chidambaram and who have participated in several Africa House events here. When they came to the opening of the new hall, they again brought up a project we had discussed earlier, to work together around the Peace Table, using Auroville’s experience and their experience of the Ubuntu and the Truth and Reconciliation concepts, as part of their yearly commemoration of the Rwandan genocide. We had earlier proposed this project and received funding, but at that time we were not able to carry it through. We now plan to do it in April this year. This is one example where the Hall of Peace will be used by outsiders.”

The Hall of Peace is planned to be inaugurated on February 28, 2013. “There are a number of other projects that I need to finish first, as deadlines are involved,” says Piero. “Also some more fundraising has to be done. The estimate for finishing the Hall is Rs 22 to 25 lakhs, of which Rs 8 lakhs has already been raised. If the funding materialises, we should be able to inaugurate it as planned.”

With the completion of the Hall of Peace, the Unity Pavilion Complex will be almost finished. “There is still a provision for a guesthouse but this cannot start as Auroville doesn’t yet own the neighbouring lands. We may also need to build some kind of wall to protect the building from dust and noise when the Crown Road in front is completed,” says Gloria. “But these are details.”

In conversation with Carel

For more info contact unity@auroville.org.in

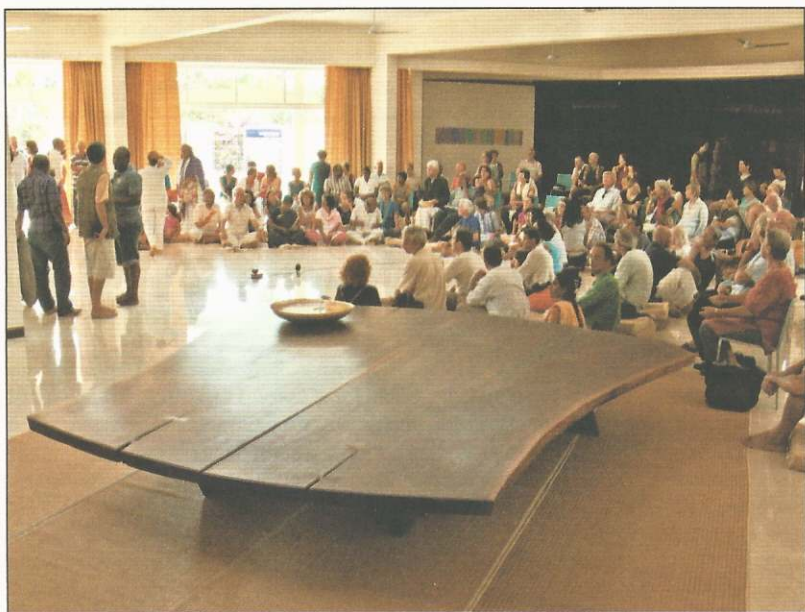


PHOTO GIORGIO

A Table for Peace for each continent

Some thirty years ago, renowned Master Woodworker George Nakashima conceived the idea of offering to each continent of the world a Table for Peace, crafted from two enormous 300-year-old Eastern Black Walnut Trees. These trees had grown into extraordinary natural phenomena in the state of New York, something that, he said, “occurs perhaps only once in the history of a nation”. They were about 1.5 metres in diameter at the small end, 2.1 metres at the flare, and 3.6 metres long. Sundarananda felt that the trees should be used in their full length and width. By matching two adjoining slabs, he crafted the Tables of Peace.

On New Year’s Eve 1986, the Peace Table for North America was dedicated in the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City with a concert for Peace conducted by Leonard Bernstein and blessed by representatives of the religions of the earth before diplomats of many nations. When George Nakashima passed away in 1990, mountains of flowers were lovingly placed upon the Table at the interfaith memorial service.

The Peace Table for Europe was dedicated on September 24th 1995 at an interfaith celebration for the Fiftieth Anniversary of the United Nations in the same cathedral. It was placed and inaugurated at the Russian Academy of Arts in Moscow on June 26th, 2001.

The Golden Day, 29th of February 1996, marked the inauguration of the third Peace Table, the Peace Table for Asia, in Auroville. This Peace Table found a temporary location in Bharat Nivas, awaiting its final place in the Hall of Peace of the Unity Pavilion.

The fourth Peace Table, the Peace table for Africa, will be housed in the Peace Room of the yet unconstructed Desmond Tutu Peace Centre in Cape Town, South Africa.

Photo: A view of the Peace Table for Asia in the Main Hall of the Unity Pavilion on the opening day

Creating a contemplative garden

Martin Mosko is a garden designer who founded the landscape design firm, Marpa Design Studio, in 1974 and who has won many awards for his work. He is also a Zen monk and Abbot of a Zen temple in Colorado. He recently visited Auroville, during which time he worked with the Matrimandir gardens design team and gave a public presentation on landscape as sacred space.

Auroville Today: What kind of garden design do you specialize in?

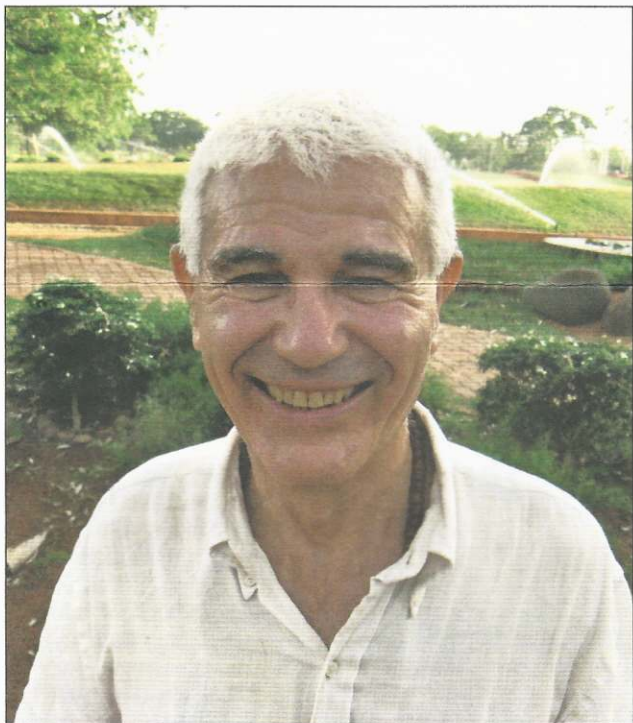
Martin Mosko: There are many different types of gardens, depending upon the different intention that a garden is trying to express. I limit my work to what I call 'contemplative gardens', or creating sacred spaces.

How would you define the contemplative garden?

It's a mandala, meaning an energetic system that brings some sense of intentionality rather than chaos, and which is contained by a boundary. It's a seamless integration of many elements into a whole. As such, it expresses harmony and 'at-onement' with its environment and culture and its place in time while enhancing certain qualities, like the divine within you. I want my gardens to restore that sense of wholeness, of not being cut off from the world: you become the bird that is singing, the sun setting, the breeze blowing...

How do you design such a garden?

You can only design a garden from a contemplative mind: you cannot create it through a logical method.



Martin Mosko

A good design is always heartfelt, so when I design such a garden I first ask myself, what kind of feeling am I trying to stabilize here? Then, and this is the most difficult part, I need to experience this feeling so deeply in myself that I am completely saturated by it. Once the feeling is stabilized and I empty myself of all preconceptions, the garden comes as a totality, the images just emerge. Then it's just a matter of zooming in to see the details.

To what extent is the garden related to the client? Do you have to know the client before planning their garden?

It's definitely related to the client. When people call for an architect, they generally want somebody to elegantly display their ego: when they call for a garden designer, they want someone who can express their soul. People don't know how to talk about that, so I have to listen for their deeper aspiration. However, while you can make a garden which is compatible energetically with the client, it must also harmonize with its environment and with itself.

Do you see in the design of the Matrimandir Gardens elements of the fundamental language of garden design that you spoke about in your talk?

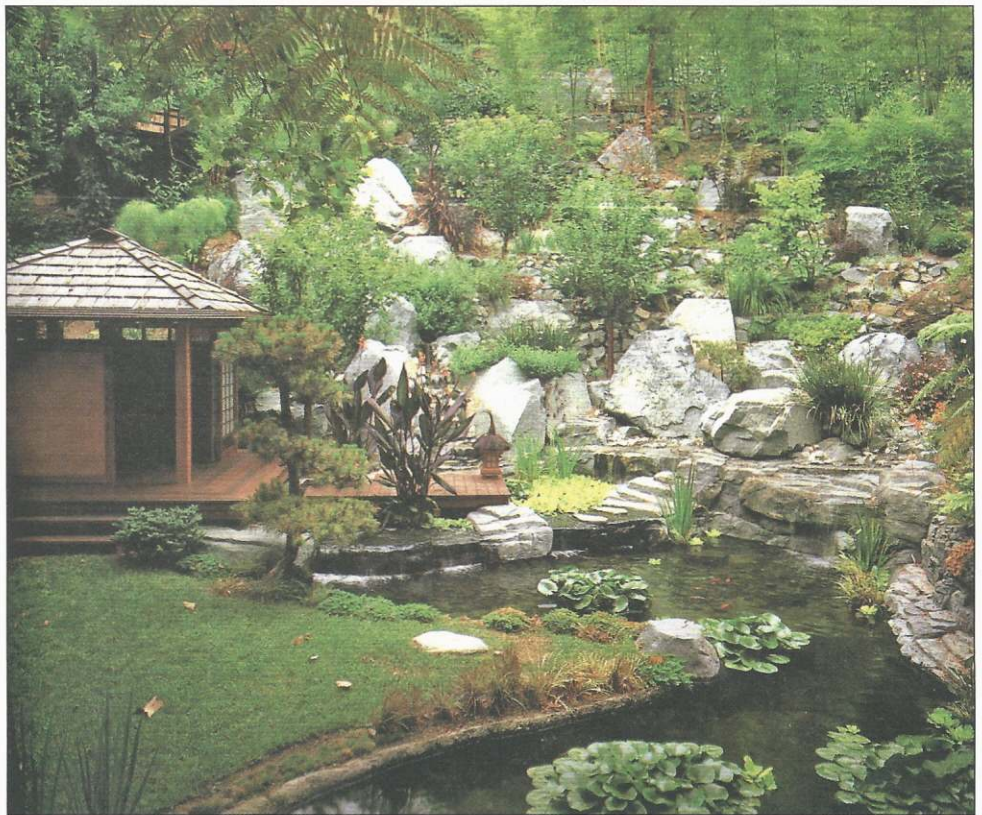
Yes, I do. I think anybody who moves through them is moved by some feeling of what their intention is. At the same time, it's a very particular design. It has nothing to do, for example, with the design of Japanese gardens.

Would you call the Matrimandir gardens contemplative gardens?

No, they are not contemplative gardens, nor are they meant to be. A contemplative garden would have trees, it would provide a comfortable way of passing through it and of being able to experience things there. You cannot linger in the Matrimandir Gardens because it is too hot. What you are creating there are jewel boxes, like a necklace around the Matrimandir. I would define them as artworks, three-dimensional artworks which use plant materials and landscaping to express a particular quality or qualities that have been defined by The Mother.

A contemplative garden starts from integration. If I was to design the Matrimandir area, I would have started with the Lake and the way the Lake relates to the land and the community. Then I would have seen how the gardens fitted into that and only then would I have decided on the location of the Matrimandir.

To me the contemplative garden resembles the Japanese and Chinese vision of a complete



View of 'The Sound of Cherry Blossom' garden. Picture from Martin Mosko's book, 'Landscape as Spirit: Creating a Contemplative Garden'

seamless integration of man and nature, where nature penetrates everything and is the dominant factor: this creates the harmony that I look for as a garden designer. The Western model of architecture and garden design is the opposite of this; it expresses the domination of man over nature.

Which model do you sense is predominant in Auroville?

In the past, Aurovilians put a lot of good energy into the land: it's a magnificent achievement. However, I think it would be a good idea to reinvigorate that energy now because I think that awareness is getting neglected. As a humble outsider, I would suggest that any proposal for a building project should first be reviewed by gardeners and landscape designers; that the land and the environment be considered before the architects are brought into the team. Then there should be a sensible integration of gardens and architecture to create a unity which is harmonious and sustainable. This is an approach that begins with the container, the whole, which is the garden space, the sacred space. I think that awareness is lacking at the moment.

What I also see a need for around here is small gathering spaces and a way of getting you from place to place that is enjoyable, that, instead of speeding you up, slows you down, bringing you more into the present. And nothing slows you down better than beauty...

What is your impression of the gardens you have visited Auroville?

There are a lot of interesting gardens here. I went to Gaia's Garden for the tea ceremony and that's a beautiful garden, and I went to a really nice garden at Afsaneh's place. A lot of people have a really good feeling for gardens. Take Marco's garden. Here is an example of someone who started with the garden. Here is an example of someone whose garden coevolved with his house. That's why it feels really comfortable there. In fact, a famous *feng shui* master told him that his house had the best *feng shui* of any house in Auroville. *Feng shui* is an innate ability in all of us if we pay attention to things with a view of the whole rather than just trying to accomplish a need which is on our mind at that moment.

It's all about finding the right balance, and an awareness that balance begins with the garden and with seeing things whole. From my point of view, the Earth is a garden, and we should look at it like that and treat it like that. But we should view even a small garden as a whole in itself while being related to larger wholes like the surrounding environment and the specific culture in which is located.

If we follow this approach, we can recreate a world which is sustainable and spiritually-uplifting. This is the feeling that always happens in a garden: you feel uplifted.

From an interview with Alan

Martin Mosko's book, 'Landscape as Spirit: Creating a Contemplative Garden' is available from Amazon.com.

PASSING

Ajoy Bagchi

Governing Board member Ajoy Bagchi, who passed away on March 5th in New Delhi at the age of 80, ranks amongst the best friends Auroville ever had. Of all Governing Board members, Ajoy was decidedly the most involved in Auroville. For many years he had daily interactions with the Secretary and the Finance Officer of the Auroville Foundation, showing a deep interest in all that was going on and advising on many aspects of Auroville's development. If this started because he was the right hand man of Governing Board Chairman Dr. Karan Singh in Auroville affairs, increasingly he did so because of his growing interest in and sympathy for Auroville.

Ajoy Bagchi first came to Auroville in 1992 on the occasion of a public hearing organised by The People's Commission on Environment and Development India. Shortly afterwards he joined the first Governing Board chaired by Dr. Karan Singh, and was on it till 1995. In 2004, he was re-appointed to the Board and since then his interaction with Auroville substantially increased and deepened. He worked with many Working Committees, preparing drafts on various issues for approval by the Board or intended for the Government of India. He regularly stayed for long periods in Auroville and interacted with many Aurovilians which, he said, substantially widened his perspective.

His sympathy for Auroville did not prevent him from being at times very critical and concerned. In November 2005, he sent an open letter to the community wondering if we were nearing the end of the Auroville experiment. "In the beginning, Aurovilians joined, inspired by The Mother, and gave up everything to come to Auroville, to a climatically difficult part of the country and live in relatively austere conditions. Today it appears to be different; I have heard that now people joining Auroville have many demands. I started to wonder to what extent people keep asking themselves what they are here for, whether they are steadfastly moving towards The Mother's vision or moving away from it. And that led to my first question. The Mother had a vision of an international conclave, which through its way of life and thought will foster human unity. She gave certain guidelines for the Auroville community to follow so that this experiment could evolve on the lines of Her vision. Has the community, as a collective, paused from its daily preoccupations to introspect, discuss and debate the present situation in the context of the Mother's benchmarks? Has any study been undertaken to determine whether Auroville is moving in the direction set by Her? How far it has progressed on the path set by Her and what were and are the impediments in the way? And what does the community need to do to overcome these impediments and smoothen Auroville's progression in the desired direction?"

Another area of Ajoy's concern was the non-functioning of the Residents' Assembly. He questioned to what extent the various working groups were representing the community, and called on the Working Committee and the other working groups to regularly harvest, through acceptable mechanisms, the diversity of perceptions that exist within the community "so that the decisions and advice these bodies tender are based on a synthesis of the entirety of the views." This, he felt, was also necessary to improve the interaction between the three bodies of the Auroville Foundation – the Governing Board, the International Advisory Council and the Residents' Assembly. He also stressed the necessity of Auroville bonding with the surrounding villages. "The villagers must feel that Auroville belongs as much to them, that it is not an imposition from outside.

What is essential is to emotionally integrate them with Auroville, without doubt a difficult task. Auroville appears as an island amidst a sea of a conservative rural community, and unless there is a stronger emotional bond between the two, problems will continue to surface."

In recent years, Ajoy's interaction with the community grew less because of his illness, and he did not attend the last meetings of the Board. Yet, he



Ajoy Bagchi

was always available on the phone to help and advise.

A memorial service was conducted at the India International Centre in New Delhi on March 9. That same day, the Auroville community held a silent concentration at the Pavilion of Tibetan Culture in memory and honour of him.

Carel

Auroville Holi Tango Festival 2012

Interest in Tango had been growing in Auroville ever since it arrived about three and a half years ago with Jorge, a South American Newcomer. Over these years it brought together a steady group of 20 to 25 individuals from diverse age groups and socio-cultural backgrounds who met twice to three times a week for classes, practicas and milongas (tango balls).

About nine months ago, a few of us started toying with the idea of organising a Tango Festival here in Auroville, inviting teachers from abroad and gathering dancers from across the country for a four-day event of intense courses and milongas.

When we received an email from the 'Project Coordination Group' informing us that they were ready to support our idea with some seed money coming from Stichting de Zaaier, we took it as a green light. Hubert, a friend and tango instructor liv-

ing in Bangalore, who had been visiting us for some time, proposed to contact his two teachers Pino and Caterina from Turin, Italy, as well as a very talented female dancer, Antonella, from Rome, and see if they were ready to close their school for two weeks to come and teach us here in India.

All three said yes! The dates were chosen. The festival would start on the 8th of March, the day of 'Holi', the Indian festival of spring, which is celebrated by spraying colours as an expression of the joy of Krishna. In a leap of faith, we borrowed some money and bought flight tickets.

Now there was no turning back. A website had to be made, accommodation had to be organised for our teachers, and dancers from across India had to be contacted and convinced to attend. This happened through the monsoon, the cyclone, peoples' busy days of work, frisbee tournaments and marathons, and through all the petty little human

difficulties along the way. Moreover, for most of us this was the first time organising such an event. March was approaching...

Pino and Caterina arrived a week in advance – I had been having recent nightmares about all the complaints they might have about this crazy little town in the middle of rural India. But it did not take long to realize that these two people were jewels: they taught their first class to us dancers of Auroville on Monday 5th and filled the room with energy and intense concentration – with Tango. Not only were they fabulous dancers (this we already knew, having watched them on Youtube over and over again in the past months), but they were also brilliant teachers, guiding us with ease right through to the core of the dance, as well as beautifully simple and generous people too.

Our three venues, Cripa, Arka and Sawchu, had been creatively decorated, setting the tone for the festival. Our teachers had arrived: Pino and Caterina our maestros, Antonella and Hubert, Tim, an enthusiastic and very joyful dancer who had taught in Mumbai for several years and who joined us at the last minute, and our very own Jorge. Next the dancers started to arrive, with night busses from Bangalore and all the way from Pune, with flights from Mumbai and Delhi. Including thirty-five Aurovilians (some of them first timers), a hundred dancers of different levels attended three classes a day for over four days and a milonga every evening. It was an intense experience, a dream come true.

The teaching was based on observation and aimed at a simplification of Tango, bringing it back to its essential features of elegant sobri-

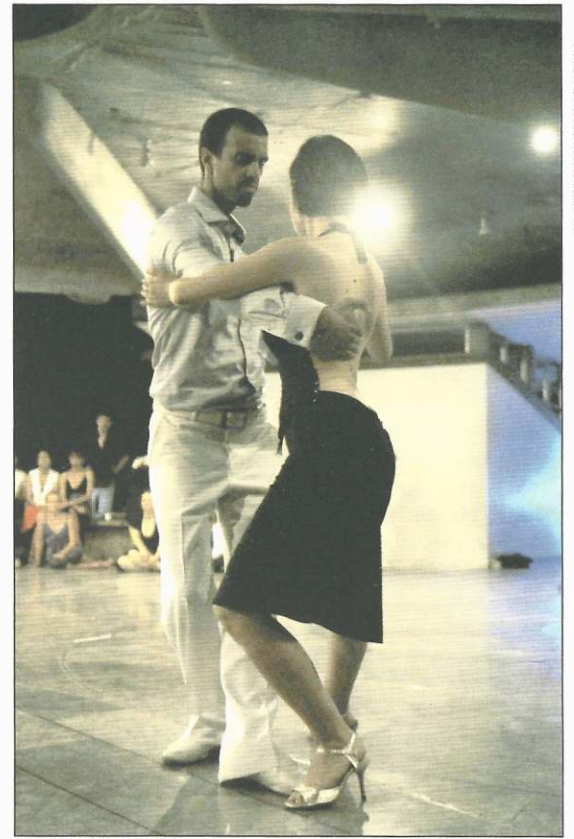


PHOTO: BRUNO ONESTA

Antonella showing the steps

ety. Over these days we were given the keys, the tools needed to create at every moment our own Tango. Beginning always with the fundamentals of the dance: the embrace, the walk, emotion, elegance, music and care for one's partner. The crucial point which we had heard so many times, but not quite comprehended, the secret that if one started and finished each step with one's heels together all the worlds possibilities would open in front of us, was made plain. An attentive listening from both partners to each other and to the music became a must as all sequences transformed into concrete improvisation. Each of us was brought face to face with the simplicity of what Tango is – a walk, only a walk, at every step, a walk – but *sulla musica! tutta la vita!*

Aurevan



Pino demonstrating the Tango Walk

AUROVILLE INTERNATIONAL

Auroville International presents Auroville in Gujarat

When Auroville International announced that they were organizing a meeting in Gujarat and Aurovilians were welcome to join, Miriam and

I took the opportunity as we had not travelled to that side of the country. The first impression is that spending time with members of AVI and Aurovilians outside Auroville is always pleasant. I wish that more of us would come to know the AVI members as they are very often more deeply involved and working harder for Auroville than some Aurovilians. I was happy to get to know afresh many familiar faces from AVI whom I would otherwise encounter only in formal meetings. And the same for Aurovilians, who one sees only in passing or in formal settings.

In Ahmedabad we were housed in an educational campus of the Entrepreneurship Development Institute, India. I don't think any of us were ready for the immense variety of vegetarian food served to us and the delight it created. The programme included at least three feasts of Gujarati food, each an uplifting experience and an education.

The main presentations on Auroville were held at the Ahmedabad Management Association. The included Mona on *A Transformative City: Architecture and Planning in Auroville*, Anandi on *Towards a Non-Monetary Economy*, Joss on *Protection of the Environment, Alternative Agriculture, Ecology*, Manoj on *Organisation and*

Governance and Social Media, Jean-Yves on *What Education for our Common Future?*, Kathy on *A City that Cares for its Bioregion* and Friederike on *The Worldwide Network of Auroville International*. The content of the presentations was impressive and I was also happy to learn about so many new programs in Auroville.

Mallika Sarabhai, one of the two Governing Board members from Ahmedabad, hosted a dance performance at Darpana, her Academy of fine arts, followed by dinner. The dance highlighted many social issues, particularly related to the oppression of women and

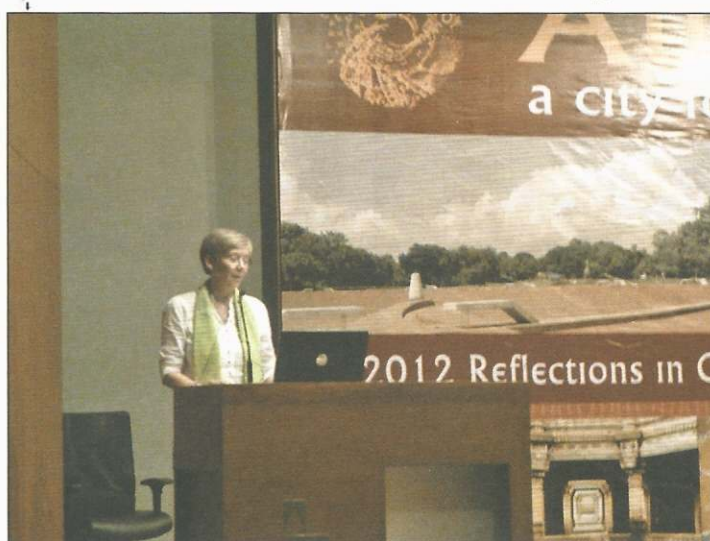
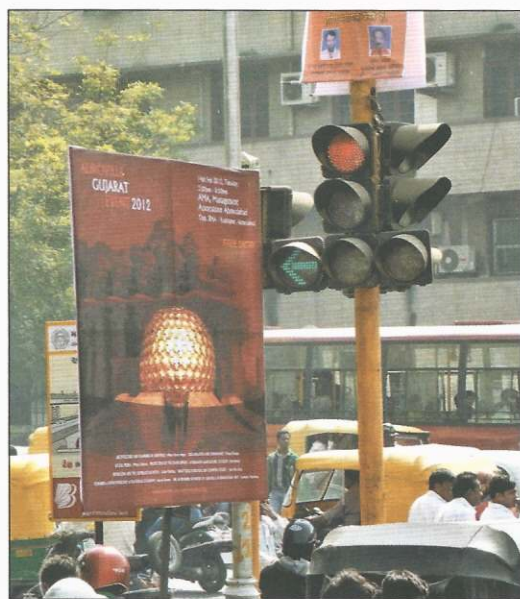


PHOTO: JULIAN LINES

Top: Friederike addressing the audience
Left: announcement of the event in Ahmedabad

poverty. The backdrop of the dance was a poem written by Mallika's mother, Mrinalini Sarabhai, who is a very famous dancer herself. The poem evoked the possibility of an ideal society. The quiet, unassuming but powerful presence of Mrinalini added a touch of grace to the evening.

Mona, who comes from Ahmedabad, took us to see some of the buildings, both ancient and modern. The first was the Adalaj stepwell, a particularly large structure going down five levels. Then Mona escorted us to visit works of some famous architects: the Indian Institute of Management building designed by an American architect, Louis Khan, and the Textile Mill

Owners Association building designed by Le Corbusier.

On our last day there was a concert presented by Gopika and Nadaka with a short dance piece by Devasmita in a very unique kind of building called the Gufa (which means cave) designed by Dr. B. V. Doshi, who is also on our Governing Board. He made a surprise visit and introduced us to the building. The gufa is a collaborative project between the artist, M.F. Husain, and Dr. Doshi. The gufa itself is partly underground, a free flowing space which has

an informal, warm and welcoming ambience. The concert was a great success, attended by the many friends and well-wishers of Auroville, followed by dinner at the Zen Cafe.

The Ahmedabad visit left us with the impression of Gujaratis as a very energetic and creative people, evolving their traditional creativity in all aspects of life – their buildings, food, dress, decor of their homes – into something modern without aping western life-styles. Satyakam and Devasmita and many others who helped them to organize the entire trip cannot be thanked enough.

Sanjeev

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