

Residents' Assembly approves a new Entry Policy and FAMC mandate

On Wednesday April 20th, the Residents' Assembly Service announced the results of a vote called by the Auroville Council on a new Entry Policy and a new mandate for the Funds and Assets Management Committee (FAMC). A total of 327 residents participated in the online and manual voting, well-exceeding the quorum of 10% of the registered adult residents (1831 persons as on December 2015). The results showed the community's desire for change: both the Policy and the new mandate were approved.

The new Entry Policy

Sindhuja is one of the Auroville Council members who has put in a lot of work to achieve these results. She is satisfied with the outcome but would have preferred it if the vote hadn't been necessary. "We wanted to start the new Entry Policy without a vote of the Residents' Assembly, as we feel that voting pushes us into an outdated pattern, but this was objected to. Some felt that we were working in an opaque and manipulative manner and being disrespectful of the Residents' Assembly. We had no choice but to put the Policy to a vote."

Though a vote has the distinct advantage that nobody can accuse the Council of 'pushing its will through', the disadvantage, says Sindhuja, is "that it may be more difficult to make amendments later." In anticipation, the Council has announced that the new policy, or parts of it, may need to be amended if necessary. "The Council will do a policy review after 18 months. If we realize that we have made mistakes, we should have the freedom to change it. We would like to do that without going through an entire community voting process, simply by announcing a proposed change and declaring it approved if no substantial disagreements are raised," she says. "But that the future will tell."

The process

It has been a long, elaborate process. The first draft of a new Entry Policy, published in August last year, received more than 600 comments from 157 residents. The Council published a compiled feedback with answers to all comments, and followed up with a General Meeting in the beginning of September. A second draft, published in October, received another 120 comments, this time from



The voting at the Solar Kitchen

48 concerned Aurovilians. Feedback was processed in a 'feedback integration meeting' attended by 29 people at the end of November. This led to a third and final draft, published on February 9th, followed by another General Meeting on March 24th and the concluding vote.

All this was a continuation of an attempt made months before the Auroville Council took office, back in 2014 when a self-appointed Entry Task Force tried to change the entry policy, but it was stalled for various reasons. There were strong objections to its proposal to de-link entry from housing (which, says Sindhuja, had become linked without following a proper community process), and so make it possible for people to join Auroville even if they had no funds to contribute to an apartment. This, opponents argued, would lead to an avalanche of people coming in for whom no housing would be available, and so create a tremendous pressure on the community.

"Soon after the Council had taken office, the Task Force came to one of our meetings, submitted their ideas, and told us 'do what you need to do with it,'" says Sindhuja. "At the same time, we noticed that there was a lack of people wanting to work for the Entry Service. The Entry Service kept complaining about having too few people, but those who joined didn't stay and when they left they told us that they were not happy with the process, which, they felt, was very unwelcoming to Newcomers."

The Council decided to restudy the matter, using the existing policy and the policy proposed by the Task Force as a base. It constituted a group of resource persons, inviting members of the community as well as current and past members of the Entry Service. "There was a good response; we started off with 10-12 people, some people came in and went out, and finally 8 people rewrote the policy and kept working on it till the final document was put to the vote."

The findings

The group studied the strengths and weaknesses of the former Entry Policy and the way it had functioned over the years. It found that fear and doubt had been the driving forces behind the policy. But the Entry Group's fear of selecting the 'wrong people' led to situations where Newcomers were fearful of being judged and of being rejected, and so they were not always honest about what they were doing. Attempts at exercising control over 'all that might go wrong' – in the entry process or in Auroville generally – had proven to be a futile endeavour.

"No systems, policies or rules will 'keep out' the people we presume to be unsuitable for Auroville," found the study group. It also stated that the entry process was judging people by criteria that were not observed in the community. "This is unfair. We ourselves are not yet true Aurovilians. We can begin by observing the rules we keep ourselves as a means of deciding which ones to keep."

The group stated that, "The answer lies in sincerely looking at the manner in which we are attracting to Auroville the difficulties that are triggering the 'bad newcomer' fear in the first place, and how these difficulties are a reflection of ourselves individually and of the society we are manifesting. We need to deal with all these symptoms at root with

an approach that seeks the Truth that prevails behind all things and all people, searching instead for ways to transform situations and conditionings."

It concluded that the policy and process of entering Auroville need to be changed. "Less rules, which remain but rigid tools estranging us from the intuition and loving reality we are aspiring to, and instead to attempt openness and intuitive practices in the ways we deal with the entry process. The mission is to make the entry process more welcoming."

The mentors

One of the major changes in the new policy is that the Entry Service becomes a mainly administrative body, and no longer the group that has the sole authority to decide if a person can be admitted to Auroville.

The first step in the new process will be a Welcome Talk. The applicant will be informed about the entry process and the various possibilities of engaging with Auroville. The intention of the talk is to communicate clearly the current ground realities of living in Auroville, along with the ideals we have chosen to honour. The applicants will be encouraged to have all of their questions answered before entering the Newcomer Process.

To help them, the Entry Service will select two mentors, and the applicant one, from a pool of Mentors. The three mentors will ensure that the applicant is given the space, the time and the attention he or she needs in order to reach an informed decision about whether or not to join Auroville and become a Newcomer. When the applicant together with the mentors agrees the time is right to start the Newcomer Process, a request will be made for a meeting with the Entry Service. In an informal talk, the applicant, together with the mentors, will jointly confirm their intention to follow through with the Newcomer process. The Entry Service will provide the relevant paperwork and handle it in a timely fashion to allow a harmonious flow of energy and goodwill. The applicant will be announced as Newcomer immediately or, in case of a foreign national, upon his or her return from abroad with the required Entry Visa.

Then the Newcomer period of about one year starts. During this time, the Newcomer and his or her mentors can assess if the choice of living in Auroville is the right one. It is also the period where the mentors, the Entry Service and the community can engage with the Newcomer, and help sort out the issues that may crop up and provide general guidance.

The mentors – Newcomer interactions will promote a better understanding of each Newcomer's journey and they will jointly seek collaborative solutions to the 'bumps and hiccups' that may occur during the Newcomer Period. The mentors will encourage and assist the Newcomers in their personal growth to materialize those aspirations which are in harmony with Auroville ideals. At the end of the Newcomer year, the Newcomer, mentors, and the Entry Service will jointly decide if the person can be recommended as an Aurovillian to the Residents' Assembly.

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Other ways to relate to Auroville

Auroville Student

An Auroville student is (a) a person below the age of eighteen years who has been accepted to study at an Auroville educational institution without being accompanied but with the agreement of the parent(s) or legal guardian; or (b) a person of eighteen years or older who has asked to study at an Auroville educational institution or with an Auroville unit without being an Aurovillian.

Relatives/Partners of Auroville

A relative / partner is (a) an ageing or ailing family member of an Aurovillian who does not want to become an Aurovillian or who has not been accepted as Newcomer or as Aurovillian but who needs to be near the Aurovillian relative; or (b) a person who does not want to become an Aurovillian or who has not been accepted as Newcomer or Aurovillian but who is the spouse or partner of an Aurovillian and wants to stay permanently in Auroville with their spouse or partner.

Friends of Auroville

A friend is (a) a person who wants to come occasionally to Auroville, is committed to Auroville but cannot be physically present here e.g. a person living abroad who can only come whenever their situation abroad allows; or (b) a person who comes once or twice a year and wants a permanent place to stay for an extended period of time, but no longer than nine months. Such people are often people connected to Auroville, but also have commitments in their home place.

Associate of Auroville

An associate of Auroville is a person who is associated with an Auroville unit / activity through work, or who is involved in a project of Auroville or of an Aurovillian, and wishes to be part of the Auroville family.

People joining in any of these categories can use Auroville facilities but not participate in community decision-making.

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"The mentors are not 'judges' as the present Entry Service members are conceived to be. They are also not 'contact persons' who 'monitor' the Newcomer," explains Sindhuja. "The idea of the mentor is different. The mentor is not intended to closely follow the life of the Newcomer. It is a support role, a friendly accompanying role to help the Newcomer if the Newcomer needs help." Sindhuja acknowledges it might not work out as anticipated. "We might fall back into the old patterns as they have dominated our thinking and behaviour for the last decades. We have received many comments that we won't be able to draw a sufficient number of mentors, that it is a very tough job and that people will drop out, and all these concerns may be valid. We will have to face them." Today, 47 people have signed up to be mentors. With about 20 Newcomers at present, the mentor pool has to be extended and strengthened.

The housing contribution

Another major change is that the new policy doesn't link entry to housing, and so makes it possible for people to join Auroville even if they have no funds to contribute to an apartment. "A Newcomer being responsible for obtaining housing within Auroville will discuss the matter with the Housing Service while keeping the Entry Service informed," is all the new policy says about the topic. "This issue is still under study," says Sindhuja. "We feel that both the Housing Policy and the Newcomer Contribution Policy need an overhaul as they do not express the conclusions of the Retreat. As we did not want to freeze the new Entry Policy till all related topics are resolved, we put it to the vote while work on the other topics continues." She mentions that according to present policies, a Newcomer has to contribute up to Rs 4.15 lakhs to become a Newcomer. "This obviously goes in the wrong direction. The idea is to encourage new people to come and join, not to make them bleed financially. If we base ourselves on trust, other solutions should be found." The Council will come with proposals on these issues in the near future.

Carel

What are the initial costs?

Three months guest contribution: Rs 13,500, 12 months Newcomer contribution (without maintenance): Rs 37,800, Health fund: Rs 5,400, Health check up: Rs 4,000, Health insurance for first 6 months: Rs 5,000, Admin fee: Rs 10,000, Flight ticket deposit: Rs 40,000 (for foreign nationals), Housing deposit: Rs 3,00,000, **Total: Rs 4,15,700**

The new FAMC mandate

Another major shift is the change of mandate of the Funds and Assets Management Committee. This Working Group, which is constituted under the Rules of the Auroville Foundation by the Residents' Assembly, has been slowly growing in significance. Mandated to deal with all funds and assets of the community, its members now meet two afternoons a week, discussing an agenda prepared by its secretary who also serves as non-voting chairperson. The members are representatives of various official and non-official working groups, but not necessarily specialists in the topics under discussion. Though much is done by email, none of the members works full-time for the FAMC.

"We realised that meeting just twice a week is not giving them sufficient time to do any creative work," says Sindhuja. "The FAMC has a large agenda, and of necessity is mostly doing fire fighting and dealing with the incoming mail. There is no time for creative work. But over the years an Auroville economy has developed which is nowhere near the ideal of Auroville." The two Thomasses, in their presentation in February [see *AVToday* # 321, April 2016] have been very explicit about the shortfalls of our present-day economy – the insufficient carrying capacity to sustain Auroville's population; the stagnation of business development; the increasing income inequality; and the increasing monetization of our internal dealings.

Daniel, one of the Council members, drove the idea forward. The Council constituted a subgroup which, after about 6 months of regular work, came up with a solid proposal for a restructuring of the FAMC. "If it works in the way we envisage, in the next few years we will have something which is closer to what The Mother had foreseen, an economy that looks very different from what we have today," says Sindhuja.

Working groups representation discontinued

According to the new FAMC mandate, the FAMC will no longer consist of representatives of working groups. Members will be selected on the basis of competence through a community process similar to that of the Working Committee and the Auroville Council. A member may simultaneously serve on

another working group, such as the Working Committee or the Town Development Council.

The FAMC membership, like that of the Working Committee and Auroville Council, will be staggered to promote continuity and understanding of issues in progress. Unlike the term of office of the present Working Committee and Council, which is three years, an FAMC member may serve two consecutive three-year terms after which he or she may not serve again for at least one year. This is to ensure that the FAMC does not become dominated by the same person(s) for prolonged periods of time and to bring in fresh ideas. Also, unlike the mandate of the present Working Committee and Council, the FAMC mandate contains a provision for early termination of membership in case of poor performance or an inability to function in the group.

The selection process has been strongly challenged. Some Aurovilians question if the selection process – which lasted 2.5 days for the members of the Working Committee and Council – will produce a reliable, strong FAMC. Stating that "the only people who swear by the process are those who created it, the few who have participated in it, and everyone who has been selected by it," the objectors accused the Council of being biased in promoting this particular process. The vote result, however, shows that the majority of the community prefers it.

A full-time FAMC Secretariat

A second major change is the FAMC Secretariat, which is proposed to be composed of a minimum of three Aurovilians working full-time. The reason for this is to provide much needed support to the FAMC to prepare and maintain basic documents, answer queries, and do investigations. It is an open question if these competent people can be found.

The last major change deals with planning. To ensure more cohesive financial planning, the new mandate stipulates that the FAMC will approve all budgets, so that at least one group has a complete picture of projects, activities, and plans, and can therefore assist in directing them. The FAMC is also tasked to prepare an Annual Work Plan, conduct an annual review of its work plan, and interact with Auroville residents in General Meetings at least four times a year.

NEWCOMER'S EXPERIENCE

Reversing the gaze

For many years, Martin Littlewood was one of the mainstays of Auroville International (AVI). A few years ago, he and his wife, Dany, decided to live here and recently they completed their Newcomer process. Why did he decide to move here? Did it change his perspective on Auroville? What does he think are the main challenges facing Newcomers and the community? And does he feel that AVI has a particular role in preparing potential Newcomers for Auroville? Here are some of his thoughts.

"In the 1960s, my mother did a study course on comparative religions with Edith Schnapper in Cambridge. My mother had been studying the *Gita* at the time and came across Sri Aurobindo's *Essays on the Gita* on Edith's bookshelf. She found it very profound. Edith became a family friend, and my mother became part of a small circle in the UK that met together to study Sri Aurobindo.

"I don't remember when I first heard about Auroville. I started to see the leaflets that were coming out of the Ashram and then Auroville, and they were quite inspiring. What I do remember very clearly is when my mother told me of The Mother's passing. That was a shock and I remember wondering what was going to happen to Auroville. I met Dick Batstone [a founder member of AVI UK, eds.] at an exhibition in London and asked him the same question, and he reassured me that Auroville was well established.

"But my life was very busy with other things at that time. It wasn't until I started visiting Boytons [the home of Joy Calvert and Edith Schnapper, which became a centre for Auroville International U.K., eds.] in the early 1980s that I felt the time was right to get more involved. My mother was very happy because she felt it was a step she could not take herself.

"I first visited Auroville in 1985. My prior contact with Auroville was an inner one and this helped me connect to what was happening here when I arrived for a month's stay. That connection was strengthened through my work on Matrimandir. I spent most of the time high up on the structure, moving scaffolding about with the rest of the team. What impressed me was not just the work but also the people. Even though I

could tell they were normal human beings with all their weaknesses – I attended Matrimandir meetings and was quite shocked by some of the things that went on there – their dedication to the work was very touching.

"That visit made me realise that Auroville was a very important part of my life, and that I would return. In fact, I began coming back for a month every two years, and in 1990 my whole family accompanied me.

"Meanwhile, I became more and more involved with the organisation of Auroville International UK and, later, with the larger organisation of Auroville International, attending the international meetings every year.

"The next phase began when I changed my job and got the opportunity to work for Auroville part-time. I worked with Greta Jensen on obtaining European Commission funding for certain Auroville projects. While Aurovilians were overseeing the work on the ground, I was the overall manager for all the projects funded.

"I always had at the back of my mind, even from my first visit, the thought that I would come and live here. My wife, Dany, and I even talked about it when we brought the children in 1990, but we decided it wasn't the right time then because it would disrupt our children's education.

"But now we could come every year, and our annual visits were made easier because there was a house in Samridhi where we could stay. That was an important step for us because it allowed us to put down roots and feel part of the community.

"Our eldest son, Matthew, joined Auroville in 1999. About two years ago, we made the decision to try living in Auroville for a longer period to see if it was the right thing for both of us. We came for about five months, at the end of which we had decided that we did want to live here.

"For me, the most important part of being here longer was I could be much more focussed on what I really wanted to do. I also began to understand how your perspective changes when you are a resident rather than someone observing Auroville from outside. You get a more holistic view of things, and you feel more responsible for what is happening because you are part of it.

"Quite often, living here involves taking up some of the challenges yourself, which is quite different from sitting back and saying 'this ought

to be done' and 'that ought to be done'. However, if you're willing and you have something to offer, it is quite easy to get sucked into many things here. At a certain point, it was so physically challenging I fell sick.

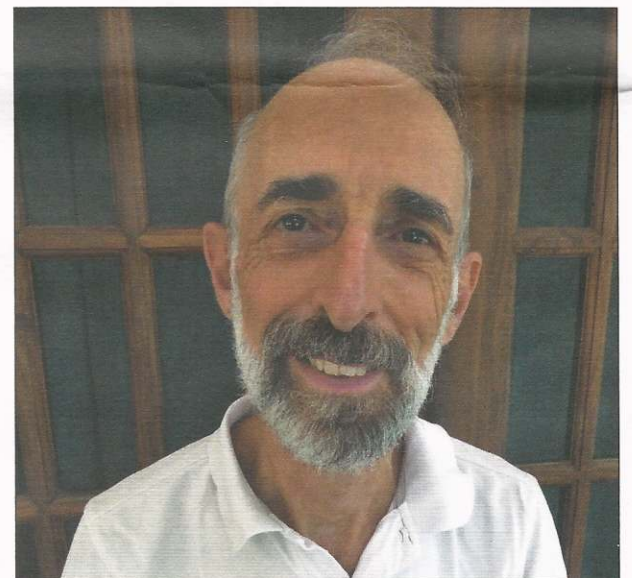
"I found I was being challenged on many levels, both inner and outer, but I had always accepted, right from the beginning, that Auroville would not be easy as there is a pressure here pushing us forward, both individually as well as collectively. I think Newcomers are often not prepared for that. Even I, who knew about it, was not sufficiently prepared.

"Some Newcomers also have difficulties with the way people deal with each other here. However, my relationship with people has been one of my most rewarding experiences. Now I know many Aurovilians better, I understand their problems but also their genuine sincerity and their aspirations for Auroville, and this continues to touch me deeply.

"I feel passionately that Auroville's future depends on its work for human unity, and the way that people work together in groups is an important step towards the larger work of human unity. When you work closely with people, it is important to get beyond their surface problems, issues that often reflect one's own, to find out what is behind. And when I do this, I nearly always find we share a deeper connection with the vision.

"Since coming here, I have been very keen to bring a bit of my experience of working with groups and organizations in the UK to help Auroville groups work not only more harmoniously but also more efficiently. I also realised quite early that the success of a group depends not just on people working together, but also on the diversity of the people in it. This brings its own challenges. But you have to have these different viewpoints because Auroville's work is to synthesise them, and then somehow rise above them.

"I am also learning every day. For example, when a group of us were asked to be trustees of NESS School, which was on the point of



Martin Littlewood

collapse, it turned out to be a big task because, in some respects, we were starting almost from scratch. But working with the other trustees has been a very interesting experience. The dynamic, the energy, in that group determines a lot about what happens in the wider work. Funds will flow into something that has a certain energy and this is already happening with NESS.

"I am also very interested in the larger Auroville organisation. I am trying to understand through my work with the Governance Action Group and the Active Residents Assembly how Auroville works and how it can evolve.

"I was also part of the focus group on growth in the Retreat and I see the lack of significant growth in our population as primarily a blockage of energy: there are certain constriction points where energy is blocked. One of these is clearly on the financial level, but another has also a lot to do with how we deal with Newcomers. There is still this idea that, rather than welcoming them, we have to police their entry to prevent the wrong people coming in. During the Retreat, we were trying to envisage the ideal situation, and we all agreed that this is a constant flow of the right people into Auroville.

"So I would like to see the entry process becoming more welcoming because I think the people in the present group have trapped themselves in a certain perspective that needs to be changed.

"Housing is another blockage point. Many

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Looking in, looking out

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people think the problem is financial, but I think financial issues are symptoms of a blockage of energy rather than the cause of something. Here again, I think we need to change our vision. My vision of housing is that housing should be provided according to need, rather than according to the financial status of the individual. We know we're not ready for this yet, but if we could see

this as our goal, then the flow of people into Auroville could begin to be unblocked.

"I think the most important thing for a Newcomer is that they are somehow touched by Auroville: if they don't have that inner connection, I don't think they will make it here. While there is no replacement for that, I think you can help enable that contact to happen. Here the people in the Auroville International centres have an

important role to play in the way they give information about the community.

"Of course, they should not paint too rosy a picture for people who are thinking of coming here: these people need to know about the challenges. At the same time, the AVI people need to show that Auroville has a specific purpose, to communicate what that vision is because, without that, Auroville is nothing. If you can inspire

somebody with that vision, that person is already beginning to have a deeper connection.

"This is why, when I was writing the AVI UK Newsletter, I always felt that I had to be very careful in what I wrote or said because sometimes the wrong word may put somebody off, somebody who otherwise might have had a great experience in Auroville or been of help to the project."

From an interview by Alan

Through a Newcomer's lens

Mimi came to Auroville for the first time in March 2015 and felt a deep connection. She moved here in September with her partner, Manas, and three dogs. Mimi has been a photographer from her school days and loves to capture human stories.



I find La Terrace such a comfortable place to be, whether you are with friends or all by yourself



Lessons in sustainable living start early in Auroville!



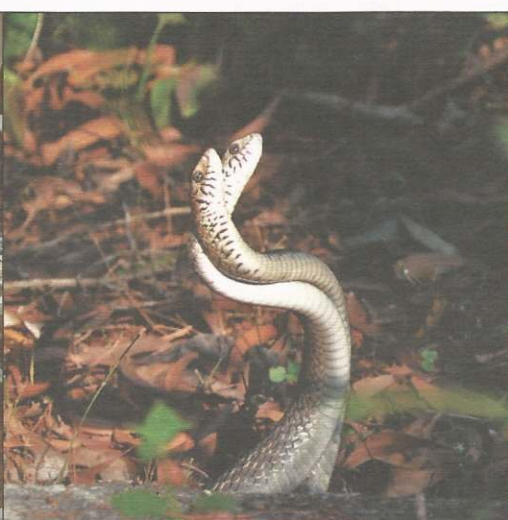
The Aurovillians are so diverse, even in their footwear!



Wheels of life



There is so much creativity everywhere. There is never a dull moment and so much possibility for learning and growth



This is not something I would ever see in Gurgaon – male rat snakes combating in my backyard



I love children. They are so free and open to playing with anyone, irrespective of culture



Aurovillians are always discussing and debating community issues. Left: Children writing suggestions about the roundabout



Every time I see her, I am transfixed by her Parisian outfits and her intriguing smile



I like the way the road blends into the trees. "And the leaves that are green turn to brown"



Mimi Chakrabarti

Evergreen Horses: the Natural Horsemanship

In a quiet and shaded enclosure in the Evergreen Forest, a small herd of horses flick their tails while sipping cool water in an effort to beat the ever-increasing summer heat. Sitting close by around a table are their companions Sara, Matthia, Maya and Divya, the four young people who dedicate the best part of their days to running Auroville's Natural Horsemanship School. As with many activities in Auroville, Evergreen Horses is an initiative that started off as a small-scale activity, fuelled by the passion of a few individuals, and subsequently grew into a full-blown project. The school is the first of its kind in India and hosts more than 25 regular students. Since 2014, it has offered an in-depth study programme aimed at supporting young people in their partnership with a four-legged friend.

Evergreen Horses teaches that the horse becomes the mirror that tells you the truth about yourself in aspects such as communication, personal development, leadership, truthfulness and taking responsibility. In the footsteps of Pat Parelli, the American cowboy behind the Parelli method, Evergreen Horses seeks to make the world a better place both for horses and humans. The focus of Evergreen Horses is on horsemanship in its entirety, not just riding, and on promoting a philosophy that helps you become the person you always wanted to be with your horse. In the quietness of the Auroville forests, encountering a rider bareback on his horse without a bridle is not uncommon. In fact, it is just one of the many amazing things that happen on a daily basis at Evergreen Horses.

"We want to be that voice in India that says 'something different exists.' Natural Horsemanship is about seeing the world from the horse's perspective. At Evergreen Horses we are taking something from the outside world, adapting it to the conditions we have here, and then offering it to children, as we believe they are the future of horsemanship," says Matthia. The team's real aim is to give a different kind of education that can empower children and provide them with a skill-set that can enable them to develop as consciously as possible.

A little bit of history

Since she was 16, Sara's life has been all about horses. In her early days in Auroville, horses and ponies were loyal companions as well as a mode of transportation to go to school or to the Solar Kitchen. Back in the early 90's, when she had to choose between going to school or spending time with her pony, 'Magic', Sara didn't hesitate. And she hasn't looked back since. She recalls that, back then, it was the pony that taught her most of what she knew.

In 1998, together with Bettina, Sara's love for horses resulted in the beginning of one of Auroville's first riding schools in Evergreen. At that time, it was home to three horses and a bull. "I didn't really know what I was doing, and we struggled quite a bit. After two years, I shifted to the Pony Farm to help out Nicolette, and I stayed there for the next eight years. Then, in 2009, I returned to Evergreen to start the project that we have in place today," Sara says.

In between, Sara met Matthia. A computer



Camilla and Leela with horses Kal-El and Kayla playing a circling game

geek, working at AuroFuture and later part of the team of the early graphic section, he was as far from being a horse person as one could be. Having experienced a traumatic fall from a horse in his childhood in Italy, Matthia was more into music and sound systems. He even had his own recording studio. Sara exclaims, "He was so afraid of horses that he could not even walk a short distance through the corral!"

To combat his fears and as part of an inner exploration, Matthia began to search for answers. By chance, or perhaps fate, he discovered a handful of Parelli DVDs that someone brought to the Pony Farm. Immediately, he felt that he could learn something from the methods that this man practiced. He says, "The videos spoke to me, and I asked myself why no one in Auroville was using this knowledge and putting it into practice." During his next trip to Switzerland, Matthia bought the first level of the Parelli programme, in Italian. "I thought that this programme would be good not just for my own development, but for others as well. I really liked it and it brought me a connection to something I had lost many years ago. So, I watched all the video cassettes in Sara's hut, surrounded by the horses I feared, and then continued to learn more on the first Parelli Savvy club on a slow broadband connection," he laughs.

The moment Matthia began to show interest in Natural Horsemanship, his life underwent some drastic changes. He decided to start a

journey of discovery with a horse that he got from Red Earth Riding School. "So there I was, with some sort of a manual, expecting things to go smoothly. The reality couldn't have been more different. It was an extremely difficult



Aadi playing a friendly game with Amber

start! Not only did I have to handle my own fears, but everything was new. I got stuck for a year on something that usually takes two weeks. But I persevered, despite having no one to turn to for answers." Slowly, with each step forward he saw results, and he fell in love with the majestic animals.

Matthia's initial year exploring Natural Horsemanship also triggered a change in Sara's life. "I was using a too assertive method in which I would tell the horse what to do and when to do it. Those phases were part of my learning curve. It was difficult. Matthia hadn't known anything and he had been afraid of horses! Just one year later to ask his advice was a big blow to my ego."

When Matthia's horse passed away some time later, his newly-found joy in learning also took a fall. For Sara, on the other hand, her enthusiasm at the discovery of Natural Horsemanship made her want to share her newly acquired knowledge with others. So she returned to Evergreen and, together with Maya, started to set up a project that would be drastically different from anything else they had ever done. "Being pregnant at the time, I focused on groundwork and on understanding a little bit more what Natural Horsemanship was all about. I started getting results with my horse, and things started moving really fast, something that I had not experienced before. We made some changes to the school and then decided to focus solely on Natural Horsemanship, inspired by the Parelli method," she says.

Matthia says, "I saw that Maya and

Sara had a lot of obstacles. On the one hand they were doing what they loved, but on the other hand they were compromising in order to manage financially. That made me uneasy and I began to imagine how to create a programme that would focus on horsemanship in a structured manner, particularly focused on the children that attended classes all year long.

Also, I wanted to start this journey of exploration as a team, together with Sara and Maya. Taking the decision to establish a school based on concepts of Natural Horsemanship in Evergreen was the spark that got me back into horsemanship. When Sara and Maya gifted me a

horse, 'Kal-El', it all came back to me, and I felt excited to restart the journey. In between, the Parelli programme also evolved a lot and offered us more support. Things were starting to look up."

What is Parelli Natural Horsemanship?

This method came into existence in the 80s. It synthesises all the knowledge Pat Parelli received from his contacts in the horse world into a people-training programme that focusses on the study of horse behaviour and



Julia with Amber



Sara with Kayla

Partnership School

horsemanship skills. Using this knowledge, he developed, along with his wife Linda, a programme that spans four 'Savvys', or areas of development, through four distinct levels of skill improvement. The cornerstones of the programme are a dedication to never-ending self-improvement and an acknowledgment that the improvement of horsemanship is a lifelong pursuit for those passionate about horses.

The programme encourages students to develop creative problem-solving skills and think in a lateral manner, while taking the non-verbal feedback and expression of the horse into consideration. He saw that when riders encountered a problem, they would take their horse to a trainer to 'fix the horse's problem'. Parelli introduced the idea that most of the problems actually stem from how the riders deal with their horses.

His fundamental philosophy is to learn what a horse values and see the world from its perspective. With this, he was able to develop a programme that develops the human as much as the horse. "A horse that doesn't feel safe will not eat or drink and won't be in a frame of mind to learn. Human emotions like anger and frustration are perceived as predatorial from the horse's point of view and will result in its feeling of safety being compromised. So you need to become the leader for that horse and provide it with a feeling of safety; you need to be assertive without being aggressive. This is challenging for most people, but it can bring a new perspective to our daily lives. You understand how to communicate at a different level by starting from oneself. When you make that change, communicating with horses is much easier," says Matthia.

Evergreen Natural Horsemanship School

Sara explains that during their programme at Evergreen they encourage the students to ask questions. "We want to provide a platform for them to focus on their own development. On the practical level, the most tangible thing is that our horses are safe to be around because the environment is not 'predatorial'. We create a space where the kids can go and brush and play with them. In practice, that means that things such as hoof trimmings, injections, and getting on and off become pleasant and effortless.

The most rewarding example is when a horse truly begins to relax. Sara and Matthia explain that when the horse feels safe and comfortable it starts to be curious and starts to ask you questions. Then, communication becomes extremely effective. For example, when a rider focuses on going in one direction, and moves his or her shoulders in that

direction, the horse perceives that and responds accordingly. "This takes a ton of focus. With a bit, short reins, a whip and spurs you can make and force a lot to happen, but it will not serve any purpose. We want to allow rather than force," says Matthia.

The team at Evergreen Horses takes the students through the different aspects of Natural Horsemanship. This starts with basics on the ground and later in riding. The classes are set up in such a way that the students are able to troubleshoot their own problems. Since all the horses are different, the students have to adapt to the different 'horsanilities' and to what the horse needs at the moment.

Matthia explains: "I wanted both the practical and theoretical aspect of Natural Horsemanship to be transmitted, and especially a lot about horse psychology and behaviour. I am more of a facilitator since I am a student myself." Sara continues: "What I enjoy most is starting to teach the younger students between seven and twelve as they have a lot of imagination and are eager to learn. It is much easier if they can start on the natural path right away instead of having to unlearn a lot of bad habits, which is what I had to do."

There are three ingredients to the Parelli programme: Love, Language and Leadership. Each of these aspects is then



Matthia and Kal-Ei

applied by the children in their daily lives. For the language aspect, Matthia explains that the point is to make sure that both the horse and human understand the same idea, and if you need to be assertive there should be no negative feeling attached to that communication. Since the horse is the mirror, if the rider gives a suggestion and the horse doesn't respond, the students ask themselves if they were consistent or clear enough in their intentions, energy or body language. He says: "Giving the students the chance to be a leader in a safe environment gives them the opportunity to express themselves without being afraid of whether it's right or wrong, or being judged by the result. In the teenage years, this is especially important. I also love to talk with the older students about how to set goals for themselves and how to achieve them. These aspects are important not only for horsemanship but also for human development."

In the Parelli perspective

Matthia and Sara are learning a lot from their mentor and friend Carmen Zulauf, a five star Parelli master instructor whom they try to meet regularly in Switzerland during the summer holidays. She provides tremendous amounts of support to the Evergreen Horses school.

Sara and Matthia have seen countless times how, when using Natural Horsemanship methods, a horse's behaviour towards learning can change within even just one hour. By empowering riders to improve their relationship with their horse, the horse becomes a willing participant and the quality of the movements and engagement is higher. In fact, many high level equestrians have discovered that Natural Horsemanship is a tool to advance their careers.

Inge van Alphen

Barefoot running in Auroville



PHOTO: MARCO SAROLDI

On Sunday April 17th, fifty-five runners took part in the "Auroville Barefoot Run 2016"

Barefoot running has been gaining popularity slowly but surely in Auroville. In the early days, almost every runner was a barefoot runner because sports shoes were simply not available. Things changed in the 1990's and barefoot runners became rare. Indeed, for competitive sports, shoes offer a protection against small wounds, allowing you to run faster and further.

Nowadays a small group of barefoot runners is active in Auroville. Some like François Gautier have been running barefoot for decades, since their days at the Ashram Sports Ground, while others like me have recently taken to it. When Barefoot Ted (Ted McDonald) visited Auroville in 2012 to run the Auroville Marathon, he gave a talk and I (like many others) was inspired by his charisma and his message (you can find it on Auroville Radio: <http://goo.gl/OXemJP>). He is one of the real life characters depicted in the book 'Born to Run', the reference for every barefoot runner! His message is simple: running barefoot is good; done wisely, it could actually spare you a few injuries in the long run and it will enhance your running experience because your soles will enjoy the contact with the earth! Other benefits are the strengthening of your foot muscles and soles, and of your calf muscles. It will also avoid heel strike and therefore reduce possible knee injury. Minimalist running includes running barefoot, or using sandals similar to those made by the Tarahumara Indians of the Copper Canyons in Mexico, or minimalist running shoes like 5-finger shoes.

The cycle and foot paths crisscrossing the Auroville forests are a paradise for walking or running barefoot. Their mostly soft sandy surface is ideal for your soles and the tree cover prevents the ground from getting heated. As you practice, you learn how to land lightly and avoid impact with an occasional pebble or thorn, and in the process your sole thickens and isn't anymore bothered by those.

On a December afternoon, François and I crossed while running in opposite directions. As we greeted

each other, the idea came to organise a barefoot run in Auroville to raise funds for buying the lands of Auroville. Frederick, François and I finalised the route for a 10k Barefoot Run which would take the runners through the most beautiful stretches of the Greenbelt and also include a round of the oval circling the Park of Unity. On the early morning of April 17, volunteers marked the route with white chalk. They identified intersections where a volunteer would be stationed to prevent runners taking a wrong turn. The run was open to everyone above 12. It turned out to be one of those light-hearted-happy Auroville events, with volunteers pouring in from all sides, eager to help with registration, aid stations, showing the way, cycling along, etc. With 55 runners for the first edition, it was a success. Half of the participants came from Chennai, Tirupati, and Pondicherry, and the other half from Auroville and the villages around Auroville.

For the fastest runner (our very own Sukrit from Auroville) who completed the run in 46 minutes, to the last one, who took 1 hour and 40 minutes, it was a very joyful event. Later in the evening I called on one of our young runners who had taken up running barefoot for the first time and got huge blisters! As I was telling her that I felt sorry, she cut me off saying "Nooooooo, it was so much fun!". During the run, we kept meeting runners enchanted by the beauty of running barefoot through the Auroville forests.

We must thank all those who have helped to buy, protect and plant the earth of Auroville over the past 48 years and turn it into this admirable and unique green wonder. To help protect the integrity of Auroville and its Greenbelt which are under threat from developers and real estate agents, three runners were sponsored on the day of the event, thanks to LFAU (Land For Auroville United). The amount raised was modest (Rs 13,000) but it all helps. We hope that with the next edition of the Auroville Barefoot Run, we will raise the bar so all runners are sponsored for this noble cause. Stay tuned for more Barefoot Runs to "land Auroville!"

Eric



PHOTO: MARCO SAROLDI



d Mistique

"Yes we can!"

Nammal mudiyam - the "we can" project - is a project of the youth of Edayanchavady. As a step in transforming their village, they organized an alcohol-awareness programme on 28th February in the temple square. Why did they choose this topic? What was the response? And what other barrier was broken on that day?

According to an article in *The Times of India* of 13th April, Tamil Nadu has the highest alcohol consumption of all the states of India. Although the per capita consumption is higher in one or two other states (including Pondicherry), almost half the male population in Tamil Nadu consumes alcohol. While the numbers who are addicted is unknown, reports suggest the problem is very widespread.

"Alcoholism is really a major problem in the local villages and it is getting worse," says Shankar, who runs an Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) programme in Edayanchavady. "Alcohol is the main reason for every problem in the village, and every household is affected," says Prabha, who works with the Thamarai Healing Centre in the same village. Those problems include violence, poverty, crime, ill-health, early mortality and frustrated educational opportunities for children.

But was it always like this? If not, what changed? Kalai, a member of the local Youth Club also working at Thamarai, says the change happened when the State Government licensed bars all over the state to sell alcohol. The closest one to his village is in the neighbouring village of Alankuppam.

But it is not just the older men who drink, says Tamilarasan (a community volunteer and secretary of the local development council). "I noticed in 2005 that most of the younger boys in the village were starting to drink. At night, they would sit in the playground and drink. There is an age limit for buying from the bar but the older boys would buy for the younger ones. When I saw the young boys drinking, I warned them. Afterwards, I started a sports club for them and this really began to change their habits for the better. But I had to close the club due to politics in the village."

Meanwhile, the youth of Thamarai had attended a *Stewardship for New Emergence* workshop in Auroville with Monica Sharma. During the workshop, they became aware of their own inner capacity, reflected on the problems they perceived in society and realised they had the ability to create change. In a subsequent meeting between the Thamarai team, Srinu from *Yatra Media* and Roland (AVI France) the possibility arose of a project through drama or film. To the question "What would you like to change in society?" they chose alcohol consumption as it was perceived to be at the root of many health issues.

There was a touching moment, a few minutes after the answer emerged, when a young drunk man stumbled in the gate and fell asleep on the platform outside the Thamarai Healing Centre where they were meeting. "So this confirmed for everybody that this was the major issue that needed to be worked upon," says Kalai. "This man was only 25 years old but he had already spoiled his body. We youth do not want to be like that. We want to change, to make our village an alcohol-free space."

But how to tackle the problem? "We had more than forty meetings to discuss the topic," says Bhuvana from the Thamarai Centre, "and that was a big commitment because we are in college all day." "Finally," says Kalai, "we decided on a well-being campaign that included a drama, a skit on the bad effects of alcoholism, because people would see this and remember it for a long time."

Every Saturday night for months they would meet, initially in Thamarai and, once rehearsals started, in film-maker Srinivasan's Yatra Centre in Kulapalayam, to share their stories about alcoholism. "We talked about what happens in our families and in those of our neighbours," says Savitri, who had come to Thamarai as a child and is now one of the after-school teachers. "At the end, when we combined these into one story, we all felt it was actually our story."

The story

The drama begins with a young man going to his friend's birthday party. While all his friends are drinking alcohol, he is drinking Coca-Cola. They make fun of him and get him to start drinking by telling him that he will enjoy it and it won't make any difference; he can stop at any time. But by the end of the party, he is completely drunk.

After that, he begins drinking more and more. He has a good friend who tries to get him to stop, but the influence of his other friends is stronger.



A scene from the skit on alcohol abuse

His parents are desperate. Eventually an uncle suggests that they get the young man married, in the hope that his wife will stop him drinking. But this also fails. Every day he is drunk and beats his wife and his children, who cannot concentrate on their studies. Eventually, he falls seriously ill and is admitted to hospital. There he has a vision. A good spirit appears to him, shows him what his present life is like and explains how an ideal man should behave.

The young man is transformed. He joins a de-addiction programme, where he meets other addicts and gets guidance on how to avoid alcohol in the future. Then he takes up sports and yoga, gets a good job and begins to look after his family well.

The Thamarai youth decided they would present the drama to the whole village on February 28th as part of a larger wellbeing programme (to emphasise that physical wellbeing is an antidote to addiction). The programme also includes alcohol awareness talks by de-addiction specialists, hatha/acro yoga, Tamil martial arts demonstrations, art and shiatsu. There was enthusiastic cooperation between Aurovilians and villagers in putting on this programme.



Planning the play with Srinivasan

The response

On the day itself, there was excellent attendance for the alcohol-awareness activities, which took place in the middle of the village. What was the response of the villagers to the programme, particularly to the drama? "When we spoke to the women about it," says Savitri, "they said it was very good because this is exactly what happens. They wanted us to do more programmes like this so that the people with alcohol problems would change."

"Some of the people said they were seeing their own character and the fights they experienced being played on stage," says Bhuvana. "During the skit there is a song about how the drunkard loses everything because of his addiction, and at this point one man in the audience started crying."

Kalai mentions that the father of one of the boys in the drama is an alcoholic. "When the boy came home that night, his father was so affected by what he had seen that he promised on the head of his son that he would not drink again. And, until now, he has not." "That is the fourth person I have heard of who stopped drinking after the programme," says Bridget.

"Now we want to take this programme to many other villages because the problem is so widespread and this is such a powerful way to bring awareness,"

says Bhuvana. However, they are aware that bringing awareness is only the first step. This is why they are also organizing follow-up programmes for those who want to become alcohol-free. These include weekly Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) meetings in the Thamarai Healing Centre, and AA family counselling sessions at the Auroville Village Action Group office in Irumbai. There are also wellbeing activities for women and young men.

How many men are signing up for the AA classes in Edayanchavady? Savitri reports that about fifteen men come regularly but they are all from other villages. "They don't come from this village because the meeting at the Thamarai Healing Centre is right in the middle of the village and they are ashamed to be seen coming here." "We are aware of the stigma," says Bridget, "so perhaps the men from this village can go to the AA meeting in Auroville when it is held in Tamil."

Further action

What else can be done? "These people need jobs," says Kalai, "because at the moment they are sitting around all day with nothing else to do but drink."

Muthukumari, coordinator of the Thamarai Healing Centre, mentions that for some time they have run Hatha Yoga classes in the Centre. One man who attended was an alcoholic and through doing yoga, he managed to stop drinking. "He was one of the people who did the Hatha Yoga demonstration on the alcohol-awareness day. In the youth club we also have sports like volleyball and kabbadi. After the programme some of the young people asked us if they could join in sports. So this could be another outlet so their minds do not run on wrong things."

All the major political parties in Tamil Nadu are promising they will bring in prohibition if they are elected in the upcoming elections. Do the young people think this will solve the problem? "I don't believe they will go through with prohibition," says Kalai, "because the Tamil Nadu Government gets huge revenue from liquor sales [over 30% of the State's revenue according to the latest figures]. 'If the government stops selling alcohol, people will find another way to get it, definitely.' Prohibition may also lead to people setting up illegal distilleries and the deaths of those who drink this low-quality liquor."

The young people are under no illusion about the scale of the task before them. "It is a huge problem but we must do our best," says Savitri. "It's not easy to stop them, it will be a long process but at least we have made a beginning. Never before has there been an organised attempt to stop drinking in this village. And we are confident that we can make a difference. That is why we call ourselves 'nammal mudiyam' - the 'we can' project."

Breaking another barrier

In fact, there was another 'we can' aspect to this alcohol-awareness day. It was the first time that young women from the village were on stage to participate in the skit and to introduce the speakers.

"This was radical," says Bridget, "because post-puberty girls are not encouraged to go on stage." She explains they were all having a discussion one night about the difference between boys and girls and the girls were saying it is not so easy for them. In the village, they are expected to behave in a certain way and not do what boys do.

"It was a big step for girls to go on stage," affirms Savitri. "But we thought, why can't we change this? It's not easy to be a girl in this society, so why can't we make this step?"

"I was the first girl to say I would go on stage," says Poovizhi, Bhuvana's sister. "At first, the other girls thought if they did it in our own village, people would tease them, so they would only do it in another village. But then Umaramaman told them, if you all do this, more women will get the confidence to do it; you will create a path for them. And they realised they wanted to break something and joined me to perform and make a big change. We asked Kumari, Murugabadi's wife to act. At first, she refused but we explained to her that we have to bring a change. Finally, she accepted to play the major role since her brother has also been affected by alcohol."

"Through this drama we highlighted not only alcohol but also emphasised the need for equality for women. I think I am just a soul, not a man or woman, and I have been given a body for this soul. So I can also do what boys do."

How did the audience react?

"Before the play we thought it would create a problem," says Savitri, "that people would say 'how dare you stand up there?' We were worried, but the opposite happened. Afterwards, people said what we did was very good."

"They looked very confident and respectable," says Bridget, "they were beautiful in their saris. And they played a key role in one of the most dramatic moments of the evening."



Another use for an alcohol bottle

When the domestic violence scene was being shown on stage, we arranged to stop the play and the Poovizhi and Savitri came forward and addressed the audience directly.

"Poovizhi said, 'Look, what alcoholism is doing to our families. Our mothers are facing such distress; is this the 'gift' they get after marriage? Why are they facing this problem?' Savitri answers, 'We have to give equal rights to women and respect them to get a better society. We can make a change; women can take a step. We can!'"

"It's really changed something," confirms Bhuvana. "Before the alcohol-awareness day, we asked more girls to participate in future programmes, but nobody came forward. But after seeing the drama, many of them asked us to call them when we do the next programme because they would like to take part."

"Many people participated in making this programme a success," says Poovizhi. "They included people from the Kamban team, Jayabharathy from *Reach for the Stars* and people from our village. We would like to thank *Stichting De Zaaier* for the funding, the many Auroville groups who helped us, the health speakers from AA and the Pondicherry Government hospital and, most of all, Srinu and the Yatra team for all their dedication and support."

The flier for the alcohol-awareness day in the village included the famous quote from Goethe: *Whatever you can do or dream you can; begin it. Boldness has genius, power and magic in it. Begin it now.*

The youth of Edayanchavady have obviously taken it to heart.

Alan

If you like to know more or support this work, please contact thamarai@auroville.org.in

"There is much greater awareness around alcoholism now"

For many years, Shankar has been active in combating alcoholism in the area through his work with Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) [see *Auroville Today*, # 306]. A long-term Aurovilian, he was born in Edayanchavady.

Has there been a change in your village over the last year?

Compared to last year, a lot more people are aware of the problem of alcoholism and want to bring change. They see the damage it causes and the good examples of people like me who have recovered. Almost every day people come to my house for help.

What do you tell them?

I tell them about my experience. How I became very ill because of alcoholism; how I received the message I had to change; how I got medication; and then how I was advised to join an AA group - because I was told that if I wanted to remain sober I had to change my mind-set.

I don't make them any promises of a full recovery because once you are an alcoholic, you remain an alcoholic to the day you die. However, I tell them they can control it with the help of a higher power and the AA. Then I offer to take them to an AA meeting.

Do you have any idea how many people you have referred to AA?

We do not keep records. But when I brought somebody to the TTK Hospital in Chennai recently [TTK is a specialised de-addiction centre in Chennai for the most serious cases, eds.] they told me this is the 36th person I have brought from this area over the past few years. And 85% of these people are still sober.

Do you think the alcohol awareness day in Edayanchavady made a difference?

I think the Thamarai people did a fantastic job. The acting was so good it felt like a real situation, so much so that three AA members, including myself, began cry-

ing because we recognised our own stories. I had never seen something like this before in my village. People stayed to the very end, and they were very silent, very attentive.

I know of more than four people who stopped drinking because of that day. Also, after seeing this, many young people from other places asked us to do this in their villages.

How many AA meetings are taking place in this area now?

Overall, we now have 10 meetings a week in different places, which include Pondicherry. Every day I go to a meeting in one of these places. Now we are going to start another AA meeting in the Village Action office. I also do counselling twice a week in the Government Hospital in Pondicherry.

There is also a weekly AA meeting in Auroville, attended by both villagers and Aurovilians.

Is alcoholism also a problem in Auroville?

It's a serious problem here, and it is growing worse. I am ashamed to say this but we should not keep hiding it.

Why do people drink here?

Here we don't have people who will tell us to stop; we are too loose. In the village, people tend to stay in the family house but in Auroville young people move very easily from one house to another, so it is difficult to control them.

Is it more a problem with younger Aurovilians?

Yes. They buy from the nearest village bar then go to drink in the forest. It affects all cultures, but it is the same pattern as in the village: they start drinking because they are encouraged to do so by their friends.

What can be done?

What is missing in Auroville is a rehabilitation facility. It could be a simple, private place where people could go to be treated. TTK have said they can send their



Shankar

councillors and doctors to train us, but the most important thing is that this place should be full of care and love.

The Auroville schools should also run an awareness programme about alcoholism for the students, explaining what happens to the body and mind and how it becomes a disease. And the teachers need to heed the warning signs. I am alive today because the teachers at Transition School saw that my kids were turning up late for class and realised that their father had an alcohol problem.

The big political parties in Tamil Nadu say they are going to bring in prohibition if elected. Do you think this will solve the problem?

No. It will only make the situation worse because alcoholics will always find a way of getting a drink and they will start drinking the poisonous country liquor instead. One thing I am happy about is that there is greater awareness about the problem among the political parties. Now they say they want to help people by providing treatment facilities, not just to stop them drinking. This is new.

There are very few such facilities at present, and all are private and expensive. But the work of the best of them is beginning to be appreciated. Two months ago, the Chief Minister gave an award to Shanthi Ranganathan, Honorary Secretary of TTK Hospital, in recognition of their work.

From an interview by Alan

Circle Gardens in Auroville and beyond



Now the Town Hall has a circle garden. It was started by Krishna from Solitude Farm around six months ago. "Despite Auroville being home to many inspiring and different experiments, the community still by and large does not realize that the essence of our existence lies in our relation to food," he says. "In a world currently dominated by industrialized agriculture, which adversely impacts the environment and where financial profit is the bottom line, circle gardens are based on the principles of permaculture and natural farming."

It all began during the 'localicious food' movement a couple of years ago, when many Aurovilians came together to promote local vegetables. This was later the basis for the 'People-Food-Music' activities at Solitude, which eventually developed into the circle gardens. As Krishna points out, "Nobody is going to solve our problem of where the food comes from unless it's you and me at the grassroots working towards it. We make circle gardens to show people how they can grow local vegetables, and we run workshops to show how they can cook them."

The land used for the Town Hall circle garden is a barren patch next to the entrance, deliberately chosen "as this is the most public spot in Auroville! Ever since the circle garden has been planted here, people come with doubts, questioning the sustainability of the project, or complaining about the way it looks. But this circle garden aims to bring the community together and build conversations around the present crises," says Krishna.

The circle garden took five people a few hours to make, but maintaining it is a problem. Currently, the garden is being cared for by Krishna himself, together with a few other Aurovilians and employees of the Town Hall. "It would need just four to five Aurovilians to ensure the continuity of this garden," he says. "A few people have shown interest and have come to harvest some of the gardens produce - the cherry tomatoes were quite a hit at the Financial Service. But the challenge is to get people's commitment and physical involvement," Krishna admits.

Krishna is also working outside Auroville. Together with children from the nearby village of Chinnamudaliarchavady, he and his team cleared village garbage to make space for a circle garden. In this neatly fenced garden, the children planted tapioca, capsicum, bottle gourds, pumpkins, and spinach along with some flowers. Children from this village were also taken to Solitude where they participated in workshops on cooking. This circle garden, he says, provides food for around 23 children.

For Krishna, both projects have helped him understand the 'different inertia' one faces while dealing with the larger context of food and farming - be it the 'posh' attitudes at the Town Hall or those of a much less affluent village. "Circle gardens are only about reaching out to the collective. Our next step is to work with Meenakshi and the headmen of this village to extend the work into the rest of the village. We also plan to hold a permaculture festival for the village. The village has a complex of issues like poverty and alcoholism. Amidst all that, the circle garden is a source of pride and happiness for the children."

Shradha

PASSINGS

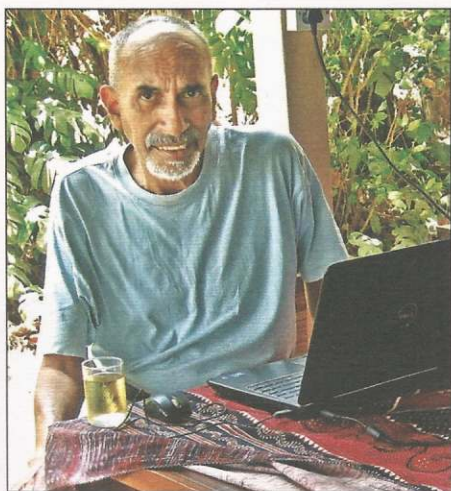
Rauf Ali

On April 1, Rauf Ali passed away in his house at Aurodam, at the age of 62 due to leukemia. He was lovingly surrounded by close friends and his sister-in-law.

In the mid-eighties he came to Auroville as a research assistant from Bangalore's Indian Institute of Science to document Auroville's afforestation activities. He fell in love with the place and its philosophy and decided to stay. He officially joined in 1992.

Describing himself on Auroville's AuroNet as a "maverick biologist now working in the Andaman Islands", the tall and slightly stooping, Mumbai-born Rauf, was also the founder of the Foundation for Ecological Research, Advocacy and Learning (FERAL), and a professor in the Department of Ecology and Environmental Sciences of Pondicherry Central University.

Throughout his years in Auroville, Rauf kept up his advisory and academic work in India. His important research work, mainly centred on the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Western Ghats, was about the impact of invasive species on indigenous and endemic flora and fauna. After the tragic tsunami on December 26, 2004, that ravaged the Bay Islands and South India, Rauf also worked hard for the economic rehabilitation of the tribals, especially those of the Nicobar Islands.



In the mid-nineties he served on Auroville's Working Committee, and helped many Auroville-born youth with obtaining OCI status. However, many Aurovilians knew him best through 'Roughspeak', an irregularly occurring blog on Auroville's Intranet, in which Rauf would not mince words when criticising or ridiculing alleged mishaps, hypocrisies, policies or questionable trends emerging in the City of Dawn.

Rauf was an original. Deeply learned, he would have his students and colleagues in splits while making them ponder deeply upon conser-

vation questions. Disregarding his health, he would always be remembered for living life on the edge while inspiring others to inquire about the world around them.

In accordance with his explicit wishes, Rauf's remains were cremated in Adventure the same day.

Françoise Arati

On April 20th, Françoise Arati passed away in her home country, France, after an enduring battle with cancer. She was 66 years old.

Françoise was an architect by profession and active in urban affairs for years in Mayotte, just off the coast of South East Africa. After a change in her life, she immersed herself fully in the study of the Tarot and co-authored a book on the same, 'Pélerinage du mat dans le tarot de Marseille'. Having come into contact with the works of Sri Aurobindo, the Mother and Satprem, she left for Pondicherry around 2000 where she lived near the Ashram, helping, among other things, with the final stages of the translation into French of the *Life Divine*.

In 2003, Françoise joined Auroville, where she lived in Arati (which community, bizarrely, carried her name), and steadily worked as therapist and tarot reader in Pitanga, helping many an Aurovilian through moments of inner need and stress while always placing their situation in the light and context of the Integral Yoga. People



who benefitted from her readings gratefully mention her soft energy, skilful guidance and insightful approach to life.

In June 2014, Françoise left Auroville in order to go through challenging times of her own during which she was supported by various friends. Aude Zeller, her best friend and co-author, and Aurovilian Léonard Pietri, accompanied her up till the moment of transition.

Françoise's remains were cremated at Vannes in Bretagne, on Saturday April 23rd.

Auroville's Ultimate Ladies join Team India

As part of Auroville's integral approach to education, sports plays a large role in our lives. Different programmes in Cripa, Certitude, Pitanga, La Piscine, Dehashakti and New Creation Sports Ground support physical education from a young age with the aim of promoting sportsmanship as well as athleticism. For many years, Aurovilians, especially youngsters, have been taking part in high-level national sport events in basketball, racing (cycle and motorbike), surfing, rugby, and horse riding. In the same line, an entirely new chapter has begun for three girls from 'Spinergy' – Auroville's Ultimate Frisbee team.

Any Monday afternoon while driving past Certitude, you'll see a team of Aurovilians playing 'Ultimate'. Manjula, Bhavya and Smiti are among them – three Auroville youngsters who have been selected to represent India Women's team in the 14th World Ultimate and Guts Championship (WUGC) to be held in the U.K. this summer. As the girls retrace the events of the past few months, their beaming faces and captivating smiles tell an incredible story.

In India, the hype around Ultimate began in Chennai and Ahmedabad approximately 15 years ago, when a college student who returned from the U.K. introduced it. A combination of American football and basketball, its increasing popularity can partly be attributed to its mixed gender component. Since last year, Ultimate Frisbee in India has been played in mixed teams of seven, with at least three women in each team. In fact it is one of the few sports in the world where teams are mixed at the championship level. The sport's emphasis on having mixed teams created a platform for promoting women's participation in sports. Bangalore – the city that hosts the most tournaments, even hosts an all-women Ultimate tournament. All over the country, the number of existing teams exceeds 40.

Beyond Spinergy

In Auroville, Ultimate is mostly played on the ground between Cripa, Dehashakti and Gaia but also in Certitude. The team plays three times a week, and anybody can join. Since it became part of Dehashakti's sports programme its popularity has grown fast. Today, there are enough Auroville Frisbee players to constitute two teams, which means almost 40 people.

Smiti started playing approximately six years ago while both Manjula and Bhavya have been playing for five years. Since then, they have attended about three tournaments a year, usually in a different city. They tell me that this number is increasing fast. When Mark (their first coach) left, Kumaran took his place. He says: "Although as coach I teach the basics, they have developed the sportsmanship and the game skills themselves. They have earned where they are today."

Manjula explains, "Normally each team member has an assigned role. For example, handlers have the best and the longest throws so they handle the disc, cutters are fast and agile runners so their role is to move the disc forward, and receivers can jump high



Auroville's Ultimate ladies: from left Smiti, Bhavya and Manjula. Back: coach Kumaran

and are fast, so they run far ahead onto the opponent's side and try to catch the disc in the end-zone. But every time we play, nobody can figure out our strategy because we don't have any! We run constantly, that's our secret!"

Importantly, Ultimate has 'spirit of the game' rules. There is a team captain as well as a 'spirit' captain. Bhavya has become the spirit captain in India's Ultimate women's team. "The spirit of the game is a crucial element of Ultimate Frisbee", she says. "Together with my co-spirit captain, we ensure that the team knows the rules of the game, as well as how they are implemented, among other Spirit-related things. For example, we focus a lot on honesty. All the players are responsible for administering as well as adhering to the rules. Each player is expected to and trusted to make the right call in the right manner and not for an advantage on field. And ideally, each player wants to do that. As there are no referees in Ultimate, not even at the Championship level, it is our responsibility as players to know what the rules are and how the Spirit of the Game works."

The first women's Ultimate team

"There has never before been a women's Ultimate team at the international level," says Manjula. "So, a while ago, India began to gather more women for the sport. That's when Kumaran, Bhavya, Smiti and I went to Singapore and the three of us girls played for a small women's team of India. Although the tournament was not an

international championship, it was lots of fun." Smiti adds: "When women and girls started to register for the Indian women's team for WUGC, the Ultimate Players Association of India (UPAI) chose coaches as well as selectors and set up selection camps."

"We have a training camp every month," says Manjula, "which includes drills, workouts and throws. One needs a lot of individual motivation. In the last few months, I've been training more intensely, getting ready for the championship. The other teams are made up of athletes and they know each other very well, while we are very new." "Those who play Ultimate Frisbee are like part of a big family," says Smiti, "there is less emphasis upon the competitive side. Anywhere you go you can contact players and the community takes you in."

The selection process for the national team took place in Bangalore and Surat, with more than hundred people vying for places. "Some of the things we had to do was sprint to check our timing, do a stamina test, and perform some long jumps to see how much we could push," says Manjula. "They combined us in different teams, then made us play games the whole afternoon. They also made us throw the Frisbee from varying distances such as 30 or 40 metres and hit a target, using many different kinds of throws."



Manjula in action

"I am so happy to be part of a team which is the pioneer in the growth of women's Ultimate in India," says Bhavya. "This is a big step in the growth of Ultimate in India. And having three players from Auroville makes me very proud. This team will break barriers, conquer the fears that every pioneer has, and make way for more women to represent our country in the future."

Inge van Alphen

The rules of Ultimate

Ultimate is a non-contact, self-refereed team sport played between two teams of seven players on a large rectangular field. The opposite sides are divided by a line drawn across the pitch, and the goal-scoring areas or end-zones are also demarcated by a line. A goal is scored when a team completes a pass to a player standing (or, more likely, running) in the end-zone they are attacking. Players cannot run with the disc. When players get the disc, they must stop and try to throw it to another player. By passing from player to player, the offense moves the disc up the pitch towards the end-zone they are attacking. If the disc hits the ground or is intercepted or knocked down by the other team, then the opposition takes possession. Possession also changes if a receiver is outside the playing area when he or she catches it.

The defending team attempts to stop the team with the disc from making progress upfield by marking them. Just as in football, the offense won't want to pass to a player who is being marked closely, so the offense players try to get free of their markers to receive a pass.



Women's Ultimate Team India (Smiti is not in picture)

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