

# Auroville Today

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## "Have faith and stop criticising!"

**T**he term of office of Shri N. Bala Baskar, IAS (retd.) the Secretary to the Auroville Foundation, will end on August 16th. He had been Secretary from 1996 till 2001, and rejoined the Auroville Foundation on March 8th, 2012. Here he speaks about his experience during his second term.

*Auroville Today: On returning to this job, you predicted that your second innings would be harder than your first one. Were you correct?*

**Mr. Bala Baskar:** Yes, my prediction came true. My job has not been easy this time. But to expect a replay of the past is not logical. I have changed, and so have the Aurovilians. And perhaps your expectations of me have been too high. Someone told me jokingly that some people thought I could walk on water!

*What would you term your successes during this term of office?*

The success is that I have survived these years! Otherwise, I don't think there are any great successes.

*What were the main challenges you encountered this time?*

Generally, I don't think things have been moving at the right pace and in the right direction, and I was not able to do much about that.

*How the situation in Auroville changed since your first term of office?*

Yes. One dominant impression I have is that now more Aurovilians are concerned about looking after their own private space than about the larger community. I think about 30% of the population here are doing very good work, and another 30% are just here for themselves. But I feel that the other 40% who were in the middle are now drifting towards the negative side, becoming more concerned with their own problems than with the welfare of the community. And there is much more internal politics now.

*You have interacted with all the major working groups in Auroville. What has been your experience?*

In many cases, I felt they didn't take positive action when required because they were afraid of what people would say if they did. In the case of the land, I told them that they needed many more people in the group to look after the land, and that they needed to be better organized. However, they didn't agree. They seemed to think they were doing a wonderful job.

*Was the land situation particularly frustrating for you? Very little land has been acquired over recent years.*

Yes. Dr. Karan Singh observed last time we met that I seemed to have lost my enthusiasm about the land, and he was right. If one's proposals about land management or exchange are all the time ignored, that is not encouraging.

Take the case of the Swamy land, for example, for which the land group wanted to exchange some Auroville land. I told the Auroville land groups that their approach was incorrect. They were asking Aurovilians to vacate land, but the whole thing was very vague because nobody had talked to the Swamy first to see what he wanted. This is like building a house made of cards. So one part of this story is certain Aurovilians saying, "This is my house. I am not moving. You cannot exchange this land." The stance taken by



Mr. N. Bala Baskar

these people is very incorrect, and this is why Dr Karan Singh had to write that letter in which he said that people should not have the sense of private property in Auroville but should see what is best for the community.

At the same time, I think that if you want to move somebody, you must first discuss a rehabilitation plan with them. Give them some land elsewhere, and arrange for them to be properly housed. Only then you can talk about exchanging the land where they are living at present. I had advised the land group about this. But the concerned land group has not followed this advice.

It is the same with the case of the man who has put a teashop on land near Certitude. I don't think confrontation helps. Rather, I would give the owner some other land where he can run the tea shop profitably. However, the concerned group does not want to do that, perhaps because they are afraid somebody will criticize them if they do. They are watching their own backs, so nothing gets done.

*Why did the Foundation office not act in these situations rather than leaving these important decisions in the hands of a few people?*

But this is the job of the community – the community has chosen to leave these matters in the hands of these people and then fails to exercise supervision and control over them! It is not up to the Secretary to decide these things because, in the long-term, this could be very damaging for Auroville. You have to understand that with the Foundation you are not dealing with individuals; you are dealing with a system, and the system can throw up bad as well as good people. Given the nature of this office, such powers in the hands of not so good officers may cause great harm, and while it is possible for the Residents Assembly to supervise and control the Working Groups constituted by them, it is not possible for it to supervise and control the Secretary. So it is best not to set precedents which I think are against the spirit of Auroville as well as the Foundation Act.

*Over the past years, the Governing Board has created certain Auroville working groups – like the town planning group – which are accountable to them rather than to the community. Are you happy with this development?*

I am not happy with this. In fact, I obtained a legal opinion against this, and I approached the Governing Board with it. But I was told the Board had acted upon the advice of the previous

Secretary, and they wanted to give it time to see how it worked. In reality, however, the community has always chosen the people who will be on these groups, not the Governing Board. However, the Governing Board has chosen the Advisory Group to L'Avenir, and this is their privilege.

*You are reported to have said that you have been part of the Indian bureaucracy all your life but you have never experienced anything like the Auroville bureaucracy.*

Yes, that is correct. Someone once joked that all Indian bureaucrats should learn how to play croquet, because in croquet you win by blocking the other guy, not by going ahead yourself. This is how many bureaucrats work. My impression is that the people in your major groups are playing croquet because they are obsessed with blocking someone else they do not like from doing something. In this sense, there is a lot of politics in Auroville, and this is a very undesirable development.

What makes it worse here is there is a dislike of rules and regulations, so decisions are taken based on personal likes or dislikes.

*What is the remedy?*

There is a need for some basic and simple regulations. I have been pushing for it, proposing to start with very simple rules that apply to everybody. You can modify them over the course of time but no deviations should be allowed for individual cases. But there is much resistance to this.

*Perhaps because Mother said there should be no rules in Auroville. And when she chose people for Auroville she did not follow rules and regulations...*

Then why not let Mother choose today? I have proposed lotteries for membership in all the major groups. Just pull the names out of a hat and trust that She will see to it that the names of the right people are pulled out. Then don't criticize whoever is chosen, let them do whatever they want. It won't be any worse than what is happening today!

You need to have faith and let go of your personal preferences. Another thing that needs to stop is all this criticism. I get on average 3-4 emails a day of people complaining about the behaviour of other people (I have stopped reading them). Try not to criticize. It will make a big

difference because Auroville is here to help people rise, and this will come about only if you have faith together in that larger purpose.

*You once said that bureaucrats are taught to manage problems, not solve them.*

Yes, in my view that is our basic training.

*But we see you as somebody who has been keen to solve problems. So have you stepped outside the role of the traditional bureaucrat?*

There are two major influences on any bureaucrat. One is the milieu in which he works. I worked for some time in the Tamil Nadu Government, but for most of my life I worked for the Haryana Government. The Tamil Nadu Government is more influenced by the British system of strict rules and regulations, but Haryana is different. There you are expected to find ways to get things done, and not to apply rules and regulations to block everything. I learned a lot there.

The people you work with in the early years of your life also shape you a lot. I worked with an officer who is now the Chairman of the Minorities Commission of India. Not only was he very hard working but he also put in extra efforts to help anyone who was in distress or was disadvantaged. He has been a great influence on me. I always try to help people who come to me; my door is always open to everyone.

*Are there disadvantaged people in Auroville? Some people seem to feel we live in an unequal society where some people, for example, do not have equal access to influence and power.*

No, I don't feel Auroville is an unequal society. If you see what is happening outside and compare it with what is happening here, you realize the difference. Here you always give people an opportunity. The problem is with people seeing membership of major groups as power positions. This perception is very strong now because as there are no defined rules, it is felt that being in the Working Committee or FAMC allows you to exercise power and authority. This leads to lobbying for positions on these groups.

That is why I say you should use a lottery to choose the people on these groups, because then nobody is dependent for their position upon special interest groups. And then every day you have to make them realize it is not a power position.

*Regarding Matrimandir, over the years we've seen increasing pressure from outside parties to promote Matrimandir as a tourist attraction. Today there is a limited visiting arrangement. What do you see as the future?*

I have a contrarian view on this. At present, you're making the Matrimandir look so exclusive that all visitors feel they also have to get inside the Chamber. When I first came here in 1992, we stood in a long queue, and went inside, saw the Chamber and came out. I strongly feel you should have some arrangement of that sort even today, for one hour or one and a half hours daily. Then the pressure of many people wanting to sit inside will disappear because about half the people who want to see inside have no interest in concentrating there. They are just curious because they're not being allowed to go in and see the Chamber.

Your present policy is creating bad PR for you. Ultimately, in the Indian system you cannot deny people access. Look how the Ashram handles it. The Ashram has no problem with thousands of visitors, the people on the job have good PR skills and consequently the Ashram has fantastically good public relations with everybody.

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# Wanted: a Working Committee

In our last issue, we reported on a new way of selecting the Working Committee and Auroville Council which had been approved in March: Aurovilians were invited to nominate themselves for one of four different positions – coordinator, facilitator, resource person or silent listener. This was followed by a three day event which all of those who had nominated themselves were asked to attend. During these three days a selection process took place involving the whole group, and most of the attendees were selected for a position in either the Working Committee or Council.

The people selected were presented to the community in a General Meeting. At this and a subsequent General Meeting, while there was appreciation that new people were putting themselves forward for this work, concerns were raised as to the competence of some of the people selected. There were also objections that the community feedback regarding some of these individuals had not been properly dealt with.

At the end of June, the Auroville community was invited to vote on the outcome. Over 280 Aurovilians

(a quorum) participated and 65% approved the members of the new Council. However, 63% disapproved of the outcome for selecting the new Working Committee.

This split vote threw the community into disarray. While the new Council could begin functioning, it was not at all clear what the next step should be concerning the choice of a new Working Committee. The situation was complicated by the fact that voters had only been given the option of a blanket 'yes' or 'no'. So did a 'no' mean that all the people who had been selected for the new Working Committee were unacceptable, or only some of them? And had some people also voted 'no' to the process which had resulted in this outcome?

The nature of the objections became clearer during a series of General Meetings called to find a way forward. The main reservations expressed once again were that many of the proposed members lacked the experience or competence to perform this important work; that the proposed membership lacked balance as it was overwhelmingly Tamil and male; and that a few of the people proposed should not hold such positions as allegations about their past

behaviour would unfit them to represent the community.

Each of these reservations was contested during these meetings. Regarding the first two, it was pointed out that the Council and Working Committee, in this new process, were no longer small self-contained bodies but were required to involve many people in the larger community. It was argued that as expertise in the larger community could be called upon whenever needed, lack of expertise or experience in the core group was not necessarily an issue. As to the other major reservation, those who had been the subject of allegations felt they had been unfairly victimized.

However, as the community had rejected the outcome regarding the Working Committee there was clearly no point in simply resubmitting the names. Instead, it was suggested that an interim Working Committee should take office for 3-6 months. This would allow the substantial feedback received by the Selection Group regarding certain proposed members to be dealt with properly. It would also allow the community to re-examine the selection process and, if necessary, suggest modifications.

In this context, the ongoing experiment of the new Council might furnish valuable indications about what needs to be improved.

One of the suggested modifications was to allow people to nominate others for membership of the Council and Working Committee to ensure that competent people were nominated. A more radical suggestion was that everybody on the Master List should nominate a few names for the Working Committee. These would be totalled up and the top 30 or so would then choose the next Working Committee from among themselves.

It was pointed out, however, that as the community had approved the new selection process, any change would have to be approved by the community before it could be adopted.

Some people felt there was no point in trying to form a temporary Working Committee as this would take as long as choosing a permanent one. Nor was it clear how an interim Working Committee would be formed. Suggestions included inviting the present Working Committee to stay on for a few more months; asking the seven new signatories who had emerged from the recent selection process (and who had received

no adverse feedback) to serve; or asking members of previous Working Committees to step temporarily into the breach.

Other inputs suggested that the present imbroglio should be looked upon as an opportunity to redefine the role of the Working Committee. One Aurovillian felt that the role of the Working Committee specified in the Foundation Act was merely that of a secretariat to the Residents Assembly, not the 'power body' which it had become. Another felt this was an opportunity for the Council to step forward and take up its true role of guiding and coordinating community activities.

After three general meetings with diminishing participation, it was clear that there was no agreement on the way forward. The last general meeting therefore decided to let the Council, which had taken up the selection of a new Working Committee as its first priority and which had already started working on the issue with the Organization Study Group, explore the matter further and make its recommendations to the larger community.

Alan

## Organisation: Satprem's letter to Kireet

November 8, 1983

Dear Kireet,

I dictate these notes to Sujata.

I spend my time in concentration. It's difficult for me to mentalise problems, as all problems are false problems created by the mind and the ego. I'll rather go to the real root and find the true remedy. There would be no longer problems, if the Aurovilians were doing this sincerely. I verify the experience of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother step by step, and I see to what extent it is concrete and radical. I don't like to meddle with the affairs of Auroville; not because I don't feel interested but, on the contrary, because I believe that all beings should grow by themselves and progress by their own mistakes. If there are no longer any mistakes, there are no longer any means to progress.

The proposed means to "govern" Auroville tend precisely to replace temporary and fruitful mistakes with permanent and imprisoning rules. I am not speaking about changes of labels. Executive Council is more pompous than the simple "Cooperative", which really meant what it meant (we operate together). I imagine, though, that in the world of falsehood where we live we still need titles and appearances. It doesn't matter.

So, they want to draw by lots twelve people out of a list of fifty Aurovilians chosen by "consensus". It's a way to replace wisdom and expertise with the lottery. It's also a way to replace the "democratic" blindness with the blind law of fatality.

The Mother found that democracy was "pestilential", and wished to replace the political groups or parties with a government by "organisers", as she used to say; meaning capable, efficient people, each of them an expert in his [her] field - (waiting for a "government by wise men" that will happen... when people will decide to give up their ego). Where are you going to find, in Auroville, fifty people who really are organisers? It's already difficult to find twelve of them. So, you're going to ask the lottery to draw twelve people with the other thirty-eight, whose organising capacities aren't evident. Then you'll imperturbably establish the kingdom of those lucky (or unlucky) twelve people for eighteen months. This seems to me quite a blind rule; its only merit is to hide the lack of courage behind the back of fatality. If a certain number of Aurovilians are unhappy with the decisions of the present Cooperative, what prevents them from expressing their criticism and asking for the withdrawal of the inefficient or incapable "co-operators"? Henceforth there'll be no longer critics, as fatality will choose the

new "executive advisers".

It's true that the Divine can also play roulette and choose, among the fifty people who have been proposed, the twelve best ones. I don't believe, though, that this is the method of the Divine, who wants people to grow by themselves, moulding constantly themselves through their mistakes. I don't believe that drawing lots is a good "ersatz" of wisdom or efficiency.

In Greece too, from Pericles on, the Archons were chosen by lots. They found themselves facing the same problems: incapacity or average mediocrity of the elected ones. The Archonship became a purely honorary post, while the real practical problems had to be solved differently. Our new "executive advisers" risk falling into the same trap. Finally, like anywhere else in the world, they'll replace the lack of talent and clear ideas with politics and democratic expedients.

If the Aurovilians are convinced that the members of their Cooperative (or whatever goes under some other label) must be organisers and experts, as the Mother wished, and not orators or woolly minded individuals [des esprit cotonneux], there's no reason why in Auroville we shouldn't find twelve capable people, who'll always be open to public criticism. There'll always be mistakes, but if people are sincere they'll progress through their mistakes without being locked up within a "system". We proceed towards the Truth by a constant moulding.

The underlying mistake regarding the difficulties of the "Cooperative" in Auroville is a mistake in the spirit of certain Aurovilians, who subconsciously hang on to the selfish idea of "power" and "prestige". These should understand that the task of 'organisers' is thankless, difficult and exacting, and one must really be an organiser. As soon as an incapable person steps in, politics steps in, as the incapable one wants to hide his incapacity behind rhetoric.

It appears to me anti-veracious to replace the effort of consciousness with the roulette's blindness.

... As for the remaining proposals, they seem to me to be well conceived and I have nothing to say.

I especially wish to express all my love to Auroville and my fraternal affection for Kireet.

Satprem

[From "Carnets d'une Apocalypse", vol. 3, pp. 472-5. At the beginning of 1984 Satprem forwarded this letter directly to Auroville; see "D'un frere", a compilation of Satprem's letters by Pavitra, an Aurovillian, pp. 150-152].

## AUROVILLE FOUNDATION

### "Have faith and stop criticising"

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Why is that?

*Do you feel that the Residents Assembly is mature enough to run its own affairs without Government involvement? Are we ready to take up that responsibility?*

You can be ready at any time. But as long as more and more residents of Auroville want to preserve their lifestyle rather than build a town for the future, you will not be able to run things on your own. You have to demonstrate in some way that you are serious about manifesting the City of the future.

*There is a sense that some members of the community who are very competent are not putting themselves forward for responsible positions because, like you, they have become tired of breaking their heads on certain issues or of being criticized.*

But I am an outsider, I have come here for work so I may lose enthusiasm. But you who have given up so much to come here, how can you afford to lose your enthusiasm? How can you be apathetic about what is happening here? This is why I find it unacceptable when an Aurovillian tells me they do not want to get involved. This, precisely, is the problem. More people have to get more involved in the community and life of Auroville.

*There is a new government in India, and the HRD ministry, under which Auroville falls, has a new minister. Will there be changes in the Governing Board and the IAC?*

(Laughs) No, I don't think so. I think only Aurovilians are getting excited by this prospect, nobody else is bothered. I do not think it is a priority for the government.

*What is the image of Auroville with government agencies?*

People in government are not aware of what Auroville is all about. They know vaguely it is some kind of utopian community that is trying to do something. But they do not know it is intended to be a township of 50,000 people and that we have only 2300 people at present because there is no money for essential infrastructure. Recent interactions with people in Central Government have begun to change this perception and this is a very positive thing.

*But the relationship with the Tamil Nadu government has not developed?*

It has not improved at all.

We feel we are under the Government of India, so we have developed a certain aloofness to the State government. Perhaps the State officials resent this. They would like Auroville to use local channels rather than going direct to the Centre.

*No Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu has ever visited Auroville.*

This is because you have never invited them in the correct manner. You have to invite them for some particular event, you cannot tell them please come to Auroville because it is such a wonderful place. The present Chief Minister is very busy and preoccupied, but if you organize an event in Chennai with Dr. Karan Singh's presence, like a cultural performance by residents of Auroville at the Music Academy, I'm sure the Chief Minister may agree to come.

In fact, it is important that you make friends at various levels. That is why you should be doing more events in Chennai so that people become aware of Auroville.

*You say you have had a difficult second term in office. Have you lost a certain amount of enthusiasm for Auroville?*

I'm frustrated regarding certain things and I did not want to keep breaking my head on certain issues, but I have not lost my enthusiasm for Auroville. In fact, I don't think there is any other place like this. Nowhere else in the world can you find so many talented people living together. And nowhere else in the world is there such a concentrated wish to do something better.

*You have bought land close to Auroville and are planning to build there and live there permanently. Will you be joining Auroville one day?*

I don't know, but frankly I don't think I will join Auroville.

*So we can't propose you as a member of the next Working Committee!*

(Laughs) If I join Auroville, and if my name is drawn in a lottery, I will take up any responsibility.

*If you had a few words of advice for your successor what would they be?*

The only thing that I would tell him or her is that this is a place where you have to learn to listen, rather than to speak your mind.

From an interview by Alan and Carel



# Land purchase in the early years

**L**ittle is known about those early days before Auroville's inauguration, when land purchase and the first Auroville developments were started by the Sri Aurobindo Society. Here are some memories of Dayanand, who, after resigning from the Indian Forest Service, was involved with land purchase from 1964 to 1976, and of his wife Anjani, (an IAS officer) who, from 1967 to 1973, was Chief Secretary of Pondicherry.

## Dayanand remembers:

My contact with the Mother started in 1953, when I came to Pondicherry as a student of the Postgraduate Course in Ecology in the Botany department of Annamalai University. My professor Dr. T.C.N. Singh had brought us here, so that he could place the entire team who were working on "The Effect of Music on Plants" before the Mother. She used to encourage that experiment. The first time I saw Her in 1953 was in the Ashram playground. We stood in a line and I bowed down at Her Feet. She straight away gave me the *Hymn to the Mother Durga*, which was the first book I received from Her. All the students who were with me left and I too was going out but just stood at the entrance to the playground and looked at Her. As I stared, I saw a column of light and I was stuck to the place. Tears were rolling down my eyes; I could not move. I do not know how much time elapsed till somebody came and prompted me, "Come on, all the people have left." So, that was my first contact with the Divine Mother. It started like that and never left me afterwards. While I was studying I always kept a blessing packet with me all the time.

After finishing my education at Dehradun I left for Chennai; there was a break – destiny had to work itself out. Then in 1963, I came with my wife Anjani and had *darshan* of the Mother. Later on, in 1964, we came with Satya, our child. I got involved in Auroville at that stage, without my knowing anything about it or about Sri Aurobindo's Yoga. I knew that the Mother was the Divine Mother – not from the head, from the heart. The mental part I never knew.

## Buying land

In 1963-64 Shri Navajata, the General Secretary of the Sri Aurobindo Society, called me and said that there is the Auroville project and we have to buy land. "Please go around Puthurai and Pattanur areas and be of assistance and assess the land." So that was how my first contact with Auroville started. At that time, in 1964, Auroville was planned on the east side of Ussudu (Usteri) Lake and it was presumed that it would be surrounded by a large water-body. In early 1965 (probably because the scope of the project had increased a lot), the site was shifted to the "Promesse" area. That's how the Puthurai areas, which are now known as Aranya and Sadhana Forest, and later the Aurobrindavan and Hermitage areas, were the first to be purchased. But later, in September 1965, Roger Anger, Auroville's architect, told Mother that the centre of the town should be shifted eastwards, away from the National Highway, somewhere between the villages of Edaiyanchavadi, Kottakarai and Kuilapalayam. The exact location of the centre of the city (the Banyan Tree) was most probably selected in March/April 1967.

In 1966, I was selected by the Government of Tamil Nadu under the Colombo Plan for a one-year study at Oxford University. I chose as a subject for my thesis 'Reclamation of saline soils with special reference to Kaluveli swamp'. I chose the subject because I had been informed the Mother had said that at some future date there was a likelihood of the Olympics being held at Auroville, and at that time reclamation of Kaluveli swamp would be useful.

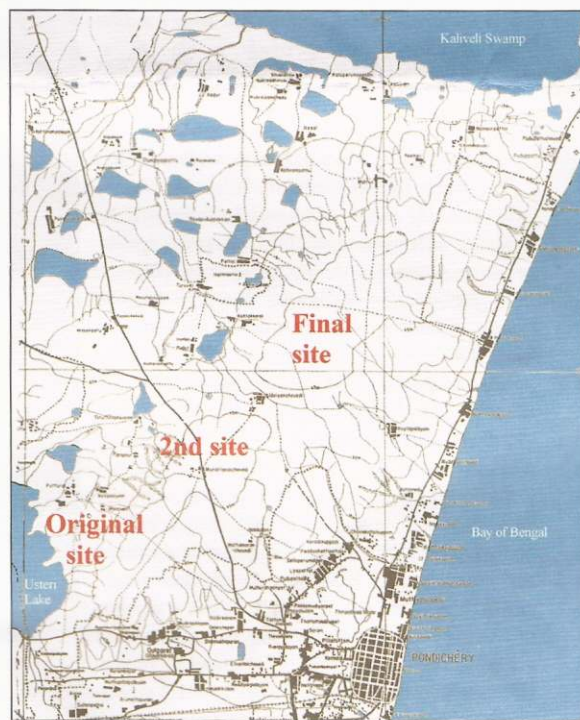
On my return from Oxford in 1967, I was welcomed with open arms by the Mother. When I approached her to do *pranam*, She said, "So you have come back I am happy." I had no intention of resigning my job but something inside me prompted me to ask whether I should resign. Since my attempt to come on deputation to Pondicherry was not approved by the Government, the Mother approved my resignation and offered to help financially by refunding the amount spent by the Government for my training in Oxford. I had taken the plunge.

My regular work in Auroville started straight away. I was looking after land survey, estate management, agriculture, water resource development and much, much more. It was an exhilarating experience. I had three survey teams and we worked with meticulous care to mark out our lands with granite stones marked "AV". I had to walk around



and see that the stones were laid correctly.

The main activity was a hectic and endless identification of the lands needed by studying maps, locating the owner of the land, and entering into long and endless discussions with them to part with the land. Getting the Field Measurement Books was often a Herculean task, locating the land on the ground was another. After finalisation of the land deal, registration of documents was another tedious process. Finally came the payment. Since most of the villagers were illiterate and did not have bank accounts or had even heard of banks, they wanted all the money in cash. What was most difficult was to take possession of the land purchased. It had to be surveyed, boundaries identified, and stones laid to demarcate the property. There were long disputes with the neighbours to settle this. In those early years, from 1964 to 1976, over 1,116 documents were registered and 2,400 acres of land taken possession of and taken care of.



Shifting Auroville: the three sites

## Marking the trees

Along with land purchase work many other things were going on: development of the infrastructure, drilling a series of bore wells to provide water to different areas of Auroville and taking care of the estate. That included the numbering of thousands of trees. Every tree was enumerated. If there was anything interesting like seed, flowers or the soil of Auroville, I would take them to the Mother every Sunday. She was delighted to see them. We even raised a crop of paddy in the Matrimandir area – a short-term saline variety of paddy. I remember taking that paddy in a white porcelain bowl. How She blessed it! At that time, She wanted 24 transformation trees planted in the Matrimandir area. The several thousand palm trees (nungu), cashew trees, mango, jackfruit, guava, nelli, sitaphal, had to be guarded round the clock, fruits collected, and since there were few Aurovilians, the produce was brought to the Ashram Dining Room or the Corner House [The canteen of the SAICE, eds].

Before then, the land had been used for dry cultivation by the farmers, that is for raising short-term rain-fed crops. Between July and March, three such crops could be raised by inter-cultivation. As far as I remember, no one from the villages even touched our trees or tried to cut them. They were permitted to collect dry and dead wood free.

We also started a massive Farmers' Education and Training programme to modernise and update the farmers about advanced techniques and the usefulness of high-yielding varieties. This covered all the villages in Auroville and beyond in Vanur taluk. Over a period of 6 to 7 years, we trained over 15,000 small farmers, farm women and labourers in the area. We took many of them on tours to modern farms and universities and gave radio sets to each group of men and women so that they could listen to the Farmers' Programme in the evening.

Cultivation of cash crops on the seashore in Kalapet was undertaken in a 20 acre plot (Ganapathy Chettikulam) [The place is now known as Eternity, eds.]. Seawater of different concentrations was used for germination, and the seedlings were planted using several types of fertilisers. The results of the research were submitted to the Indian Council of Agricultural Research, the funding agency. We noticed that collecting water from the sea and taking it to the research plot was the main problem, not the raising of plants, as the pump which drew water from the sea was soon unworkable due to corrosion.

## Exchanges with Mother

There were many interesting exchanges between the Mother and me. Asked if the work of collecting cashew seeds could be leased out to an outsider, the Mother replied, "It would be better to find among the people of Auroville some who will be happy to do this work." And I once wrote to the Mother, "How does one take decisions based on Truth in action? For example, one villager had agreed to collect and give us 13 bags of cashew nuts during this season (69-70). Now due to drought, he says he can give only 5 bags. It is true there has been drought in the area. How to assess correctly?" The Mother replied, "The thing is false from the beginning. How can the man promise to give a fixed number of bags when he does not know how many he shall get? And how will you know that he gives exactly what he gets when there is no supervision of the harvesting? So now, you have only to do for the best with justice and knowledge." Another memory is about a proposal to start a transport unit. I prayed to the Mother to give a name. This is what she wrote: "Aurotransport".

It was a very busy time, and there were too few people. They had asked me to teach but The Mother told me, "You are doing too much work. So, you should not take up teaching in Auroville." One day, when we had gone to the Mother, Anjani told Her that I was not eating properly. Mother wrote a chit to Purna Prema to see to it that I got non-vegetarian food – chicken – and that continued for three months. That was Her level of concern for each and every individual.

In March, 1970 Mother decided to form the first and only Auroville Administrative Committee. It used to meet every Sunday in the then Auroville office adjacent to the Ashram Centre of Education. The committee consisted of Navajata, Laljibhai Hindocha, Suresh Hindocha, Roger Anger, André Morisset, Anjani and myself, with Wil van Vliet, a Dutch lady, as secretary. Navajata conducted the meetings; the minutes were recorded and shown to the Mother who was the chairperson of the Committee. She corrected and approved the minutes of each meeting. The Committee was suspended by The Mother in February 1971, who commented "No more committees. No more useless talk."

## Anjani remembers:

15th August 1964 was a momentous day, the day when I had my first *darshan* of the Mother. Dayanand had been a regular visitor since 1960. He used to bring the *darshan* and New Year Messages through which I got my initial introduction to the Mother. The New Year Message of 1964 "Are you ready?" was the turning point in my life.

Before the *darshan* we had spent a few minutes in the Society House. Dayanand was a member of the Society. There was a big crowd in the hall. Navajata saw me and came across the hall and asked me: "Where are you coming from? What is your name?" I told him my name. "What are you doing?" I told him my work as Chief Secretary of Pondicherry. At that time, the Auroville project had just been announced.

## Land acquisition

So, after that, he phoned me every morning asking me to do this or that work for Auroville. There was one major thing: he said the Mother was keen that we should acquire all the land – at least the inner circle – straightaway. I prepared a detailed note for acquisition of the required land and took it to the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, Mr. Bhaktavatsalam, who was very understanding and approved the proposal. A Government Order was issued. The Collector of South Arcot District was directed to initiate action for land acquisition. The Collector of Cuddalore sent a letter to the Society asking for an undertaking to pay the cost of the staff to be appointed for the work of land acquisition. The total cost for one Tahsildar, one Revenue Inspector, two Karnams (village officers), and two Talayaries (helpers), worked out to Rs.68,000 per year. But Navajata did not accept the proposal. When I informed the Mother about Navajata's decision, She was very unhappy. "Why has he taken this decision?" She asked. I told Her that Navajata felt that land acquisition through the Government would take a long time, whereas direct purchase would be quicker. In retrospect, his decision was obviously wrong. I am mentioning this because it is good to know, at least now, what the Mother's views were on the issue of land acquisition.

Work on the Auroville project had started in earnest. Preparations were going on for the inauguration of the project on February 28, 1968. A book "Introduction to Auroville" was prepared for distribution. Roger Anger took the book to the Mother for approval. The Mother said: "Show it to Anjani". They came to my office. I went through it and said that I did not feel quite happy about it and that I did not know why. Then they took it to the Mother and told Her about what I felt. She then wrote out a message: "India has become the symbol representing all the difficulties of modern humanity. India will be the land of its resurrection, the resurrection to a Higher and Truer Life." [see *Mother's Agenda*, 3.2.68, eds.] The Mother asked to show the message to me and ask me whether in the context of that message the book was acceptable. What more could I say but express my gratitude to the Mother for giving me this opportunity to serve Her.

When work started in Kuilapalayam village, the people were worried that they would lose their livelihood. The Mother told me to go to them and tell them that it was in their own interest to collaborate as Auroville will bring them a lot of good. We do not want to dictate to them. Roger showed me the plan of a model dwelling to be put up for them, which would help them to live with dignity. It was a very good experience for me to be able to communicate with the people.

The Mother had envisaged the receipt of large funds for Auroville from international sources. I informed Her that the World Bank had the power and authority to sanction a grant of up to rupees five crores for an innovative experimental project. I offered to prepare a project report for Auromodel, which was to be like transit accommodation before joining the mainstream Auroville. After I prepared the report, She studied it in great detail and was very happy. She even went to the extent of telling me to get it printed and informed me that the cover should be orange with black lettering. We submitted the project to the World Bank through the Government of India. However, funding did not come through due to lack of adequate support from international bodies.

## Looking at the present

**Dayanand:** It saddens me that the lands still have not been bought, and I am concerned that Auroville still has not been granted the official status of a township or municipality in accordance with the laws of Tamil Nadu. But I am absolutely sure that this is all a matter of time. No human will can finally prevail over the Divine's Will, said Mother. I am sure that Auroville will manifest.



Records of Auroville's history during Mother's lifetime are found in periodicals (*Mother India*, the *Bulletin* of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, the *Information Letter* of the Sri Aurobindo Society and the *Gazette Aurovillienne*), in books published by disciples (Satprem, Shyam Sunder, Huta, Savitra), in archives (Sri Aurobindo Society, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Auroville), in personal archives as well as in published and unpublished interviews of disciples (Roger Anger and others). Gilles Guigan, one of the Aurovillians engaged in the study of the early history of Auroville, shares some of his findings.

Many Aurovillians think that the idea for the town which would become Auroville was The Mother's. It wasn't. The idea came from Navajata, the General Secretary of the Sri Aurobindo Society (SAS), who brought the proposal to the Society's first World Conference fifty years ago. On August 14, 1964, it decided "To develop a township near Pondicherry for those who want to prepare for a new life".

Navajata's inspiration for wanting to create this new town came from "A Dream" dated 1954, in which Mother described an ideal society. But *A Dream* ends, "The earth is certainly not ready to realize such an ideal, for mankind does not yet possess sufficient knowledge to understand and adopt it nor the conscious force that is indispensable in order to execute it; that is why I call it a dream."

This changed after the Supramental descent in 1956. In a class in 1958 She said: "it is only quite recently for me that the idea of a collective reality began to appear which is not necessarily limited to the Ashram but embraces all who have declared themselves - I don't mean materially but in their consciousness - to be disciples of Sri Aurobindo and have tried to live by his teaching. Among all of them, and more strongly since the manifestation of the supramental consciousness and form [in 1956], there has awakened the necessity of a true communal life which could not be based only on material circumstances but represent a deeper truth and be the beginning of what Sri Aurobindo has called the supramental or Gnostic community."

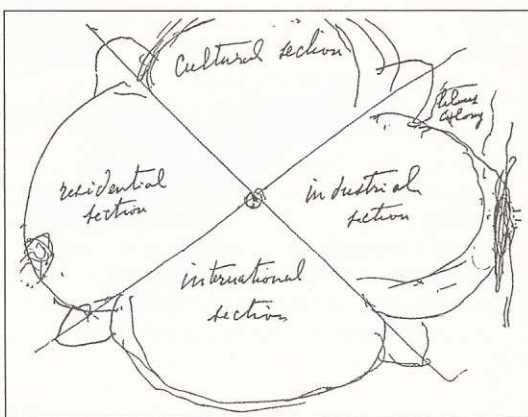
Navajata had quoted these words in 1960 to explain the creation of the SAS, which happened with Mother's support. In those days, an increasing number of disciples had moved to Pondicherry, wanting to live close to Mother. They did not join the Ashram, lived in their own houses and set up and managed their own private businesses such as Aurofood by the Patel family and New Horizon Sugar Mills by the Hindocha family. Navajata may have thought of creating a separate place, a new town, for all these people who wanted to live in Mother's atmosphere but in less restrictive conditions than those of the Ashram - that is, without having to donate all their assets to the Ashram and having to abide by its strict rules. In fact, Mother did find it useful to have a different place for disciples who didn't qualify as Ashramites [see in this regard *Mother's Agenda*, 23.7.66, 30.3.72 and 4.4.72].

But The Mother, initially, appears to have taken little interest in this new township. She spoke to Satprem on 14 August 1964, the day this decision was taken, and then again on the 19th of August about meetings of Ashram related groups such as the SAS, but there is not a word about Auroville. The 8-page report of the conference, published in *Mother India*, carries only one line mentioning the decision to create a new township.

Mother's interest seems to have started in the beginning of 1965. In its *Information Letter* of March 1965, the SAS informed its readers, "You will be glad to know that The Mother has taken up the model township project. She has named it 'AUROVILLE'." In March 1965, She wrote to Roger Anger asking him to become the architect of Her "ideal town". In June 1965, She received two letters from Huta which, She said, awakened in Her some old dreams and formations. On 23rd June 1965, She told Satprem that until then, "I had only a secondary interest in Auroville because I had received nothing directly." And on 21.9.66, She explained to Satprem: "... this birth of Auroville wasn't preceded by any thought; as always, it was simply a Force acting, like a sort of absolute manifesting, and it was so strong [when the idea of Auroville presented itself to Mother] that I could have told people, 'Even if you don't believe in it, even if all circumstances appear to be quite unfavourable, I KNOW THAT AUROVILLE WILL BE. It may be in a hundred years, it may be in a thousand years, I don't know, but Auroville will be, because it has been decreed. So it was decreed - and done quite simply, like that, in obedience to a Command, without any thought.'"

Many people assume that, when She decided to take it up, Mother knew exactly what Auroville would be for, and how it would develop. This wasn't the case. Auroville, is part of the "great adventure" of which She had spoken so passionately in 1957, when She invited "those who love adventure" to "a real adventure, whose goal is certain victory, but the road to which is unknown and must be traced out step by step in the unexplored... What will happen to you tomorrow - I have no idea. One must put aside all that has been foreseen, all that has been devised, all that has been constructed, and then... set off walking into the unknown. And - come what may!"

When researching how Auroville unfolded during the last nine years of Mother's life (1964-1973), one sees how She was tracing step by step a road into the unknown and at times backtracked.



Mother's sketch of the town

#### City concepts and population size

In June 1965, Mother described for the first time Her "ideal town" to Satprem and then to Huta. She sketched and described Her concept - the city's four zones with the Park of Unity at its centre and its four intermediate zones (the small petals wedged between the big petals) for public services that would not belong to Auroville. The greenbelt is not yet mentioned.

Projects which Mother had wanted to realise earlier but hadn't materialised yet were now to come up in Auroville: the Cultural Pavilions of Her International University [see *Bulletin* 1952], Her Labour Colony [see *Bulletin* 1954], a hotel by the beach. She also repeatedly spoke of wanting the Olympic Games to be held in Auroville, of a seaport, an airport, a hydroplane station, a yacht club, etc.

Mother dreamt and encouraged Navajata, Roger and all those interested in participating, to dream of a bright future - and dream they did. And as the magnitude of the project increased dramatically, the proposed site was shifted from Usteri Lake's east bank to the Promesse area.

On September 6th, 1965, Roger arrived in Pondicherry for the first time after his appointment as the town's architect. The next day he presented Mother with his first report on the future town. He had many questions which She responded to and, while doing so, agreed to modify many things, such as shifting the site once again from the Promesse area to the present area. Not knowing the intended population of the town, Roger's report spoke of 100,000 people "and even more in the future" and estimated that 50,000 persons would be accommodated within 20 years. It is at that time that Mother told him to plan for 50,000 only and that the city was to be completed in 20 years at the most. In a speech broadcast by All India Radio in November 1967, Navajata spoke of a planned population of 50,000 in the main town; 20,000-30,000 in model villages around it and 30,000 in a World Trade Centre. He is said to have read this speech beforehand to Mother and that She had approved it.

It is unlikely that the 50,000 figure include the population of the surrounding

villages. The idea at that time was to integrate those willing to join Auroville but only a few families did. Some planners thought of relocating those who weren't interested in joining. At that time, the population of these villages was perhaps 20% or 30% of what it is today.

#### Town models

During the next 3½ years of preparation, Roger, who was a key partner in a very successful architecture firm in Paris, visited Pondicherry five times to meet Mother. In March 1966, he presented Her with two possible models of the town - a rectangular model and the 'Nebula' (which was based both on the sketch She had made in front of Satprem in June 1965 and on Mother's symbol). Mother opted for the 'Nebula' and wrote to Huta that it was exactly what She wanted. In August 1966, Roger returned with nine of the people who were working with him on these urban concepts and models in his Paris office.

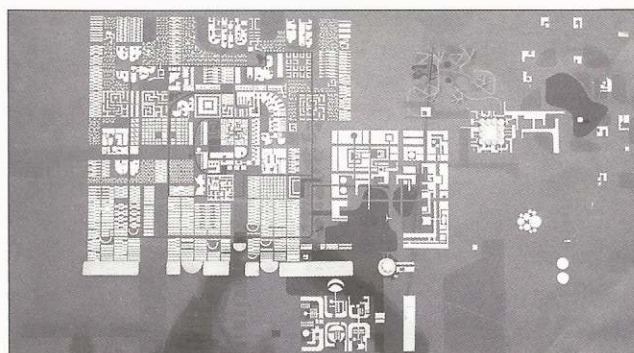
In March/April 1967 he came very briefly to present to Mother his 'Macro-structure' model, even though he wasn't satisfied with it. It is most probably during this visit that Mother finalised the position of the centre of the future town, at the crossroad of two existing pathways where a lone and beautiful banyan tree happened to stand [now the Matrimandir Banyan, eds.] During that visit Roger gave an interview in which he described the town to be. The following excerpt provides a good example of how he and others were dreaming. It also shows that, at that time, his understanding was that Auroville would be open to the world.

"The [Crown Road] - itself encircled by a hundred-metres wide canal where artificial islands will provide a rhythm, a dwelling place for various aquatic birds, where 21st century gondolas will leisurely circumnavigate - will be the intersection of all sectors, the town's centripetal focus. This is where, in addition to the fairy-like charm of canals, the main commercial centre will be located. Here one will find theatres, sports grounds, recreation halls, gardens for meditation, forums for meetings, hotels... visitors galore, of course, since Auroville is not a closed town, but a town open to the world and town-planners must never forget this essential openness."

Ten months later, on 21st January 1968, five weeks prior to Auroville's Inauguration Ceremony, Roger landed in Chennai with his latest model, that of the 'Galaxy', which he had conceived with Charles Gianferrari and others and which had evolved from his previous models. In this 'Galaxy' concept, there is a sculpture of a flame in the centre (the Matrimandir was not yet conceived), and, for the first time, there is a Greenbelt surrounding the urban area. Roger is likely to have met Mother the next day and presented it to Her. She approved it, commenting that its shape existed in the cosmos. But there is no record that Mother said that this final model was Her vision.

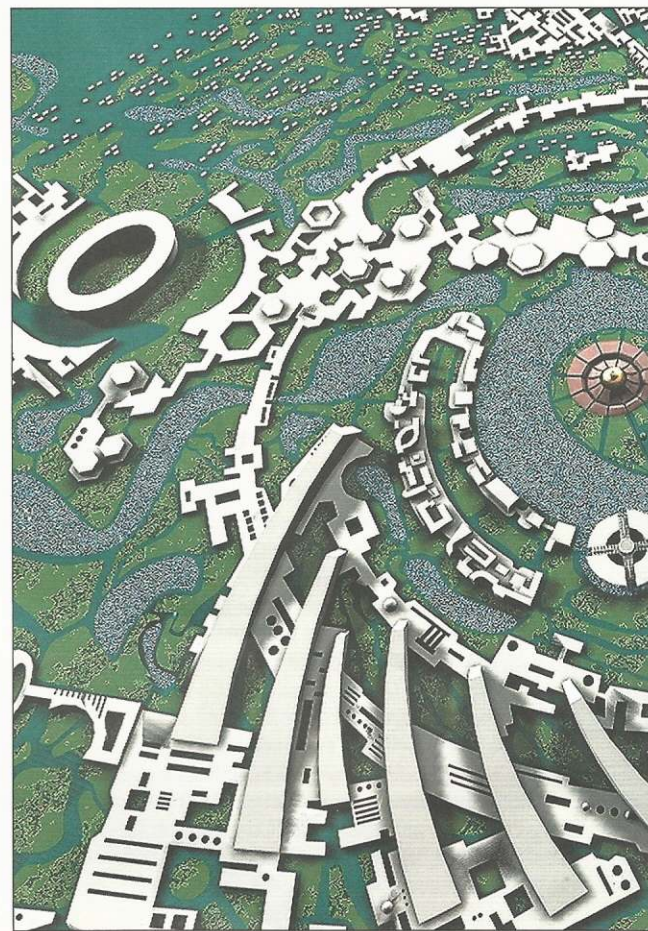
#### Planning problems

One of the consequences of the third shifting of town was that it became close to the villages of Edaiyanchavadi and Kottakarai. Roger therefore reduced the town's diameter of the city from 3 to 2.5 kilometres. This increased its density from 7,000 inhabitants/km² to 10,000 - a 40% increase. To fit the proposed population within the now smaller city, Roger conceived of 18-storey high



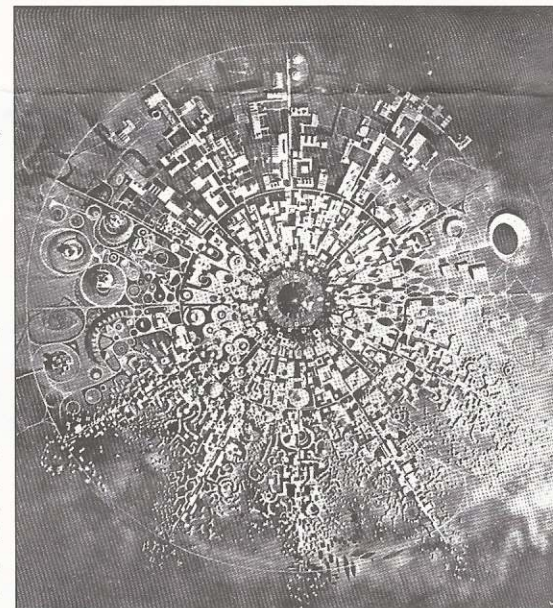
The first rectangular model for Auroville, which was rejected by The Mother in 1966

# Exploring the his



buildings, the so-called Lines of Force. While Roger seems to have taken this 50,000 population figure as a given and beyond discussion, we don't know whether Mother indeed considered the 50,000 figure more important than the density Roger had earlier opted for.

Roger's planning was also at odds with Navajata's work of 'selling' housing plots. From



The Nebula model of Auroville, approved by The Mother in 1966

1964 onwards, people were invited to come to Auroville and contribute to a plot of land. Three different sizes were offered: 250, 500 and 1,000 square metres, and people were allowed to build on up to less than a third of it - on a 1,000 square metres plot, you were allowed to build a 280 square metres house per storey! Mother, in 1967, said that She had signed hundreds of these applications, and people paid up and were granted the right of possession.

But this was not what Roger envisaged. In the early 1970s, in one of the meetings of the *Comité Administratif d'Auroville*, Roger said he found it very difficult to plan a city accordingly with people who just bought a plot and wanted to build a house.

In an interview in 1996 given to Luigi and Aryamani, Roger mentions that when, in 1976, he was taken by Navajata to see Promesse community, the then proposed site for Auroville, he was shocked because he felt that Navajata was acting like a real estate agent. Roger planned for 30 square metres for a single person and 120 square metres for a family of four - completely at odds with the house sizes permitted by Navajata and signed by Mother.

There is no information on record what Mother Herself envisaged. In 1972, Her Secretary for Auroville, Shyam Sunder Jhunjhunwala, tells Mother about the difficulty of the Tamil Nadu Land Ceiling Act



# History of Auroville



Final Galaxy town plan, 1971

which prevented the SAS from buying all the land required. Mother's observation was, "but will everyone still have the possibility of having a garden with their house?"

In any case, these plots were never allocated to the people who had paid for them. Roger did not like the idea and did not promote it. And when, in 1980, the Auroville Emergency Provisions Act came into force, which was eight years later succeeded by the Auroville Foundation Act, these early 'homeowners' lost their investment.

## Everything is possible

Roger's concepts were all based on the brief given to him by Mother and on the feeling he and many others had at that time that "everything is possible". This feeling was based on the common belief that Mother would remain in Her body; and that money, political support and securing the required land wouldn't be problems. Brochures released at the time of the Inauguration Ceremony spoke of the need for 17,000 acres, including 1,200 for the city.

The town was expected to be built in a few decades. Mother hoped to obtain the financial support of the two 'superpowers' of the time, USA and USSR, and stressed that "it is only the internationalisation of Auroville that will give it its true image and dimension." But this failed, and so did attempts to interest the World Bank and the Ford Foundation.

Also an attempt to acquire all the lands with help from the Tamil Nadu government floundered. The proposal was approved by the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, but rejected by

Her. This shows that Mother was not involved in all decisions regarding Auroville.

## Ideal city vs ideal society

The Auroville Mother described initially was a far less ideal society than the one She later spoke of. On 23.6.65, She told Satprem that Auroville was "for a slightly more ideal way of life" and that money would circulate within it "as long as human habits will be such". On 3.6.67, Mother told Satprem that Her son, André, had written to Her from Paris that, when people asked about these conditions he was answering "Oh, that hasn't been decided yet!" She then commented: "At least three or four hundred Aurovilians have been accepted and I signed them in. So one can't answer like that.... I know what he based himself on: I had told him that, naturally, from the material point of view, the conditions of life in Auroville were not arbitrarily fixed in advance." She then showed Satprem the first conditions She had drafted. "From the psychological point of view, the essential conditions are: 1) Being convinced of the essential human unity and having the will to collaborate in the advent of this unity. 2) The will to collaborate in all that furthers future realisations." She then added: "The material conditions will be worked out as the realisation progresses." Nine months later, with Auroville's Charter She added as a further condition: "to be the willing servitor of the divine consciousness". All these conditions are psychological, not material. And up to early 1969, the brochures depicted a city with all the modern facilities one could dream of, but said almost nothing about the conditions to be met to live there.

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## No circulation of money

Mother appears to have let things develop and see what wanted to manifest. She repeatedly affirmed that Auroville was "sure to succeed", but did not specify what kind of Auroville it would be.

On 1st January 1969, a Consciousness descended into the earth consciousness which Mother later identified as the 'La Conscience du Surhomme', (literally translated as 'the consciousness of the Overman'), the intermediate being between the present mental consciousness and the Supramental Consciousness. Perhaps because of this new Descent or simply because volunteers had started to settle in Auroville and many more were expected soon, She started enunciating principles which required a higher consciousness on the part of the Aurovilians.

One of these was Her expectation that Auroville would become the Cradle of the Superman. Another one deals with money. On 30th August 1969, She told Satprem: "Some things are beginning to come for Auroville... I would like there not to be any money within Auroville (we will see how to arrange things), that money be kept only for relations with outside." On 25.3.70, She told him "Those who will live in Auroville won't have money! - there's no circulation of money." This represented a radical policy reversal with major implications, for it meant that, within Auroville, the Aurovilians' personal money wouldn't provide them with access to goods and services.

It is also at the beginning of 1969 that 'Guidelines for economic activities in Auroville' were drafted and approved. These stipulate that "All industries should belong to Auroville from the beginning or eventually." Mother did not want people to invest there in order to make money for themselves. ("Money is not meant to make money, money is meant to make the earth ready for the New Creation.") The adoption of these guidelines represented another radical policy reversal. Two years earlier, on 30.12.67, Mother had mentioned

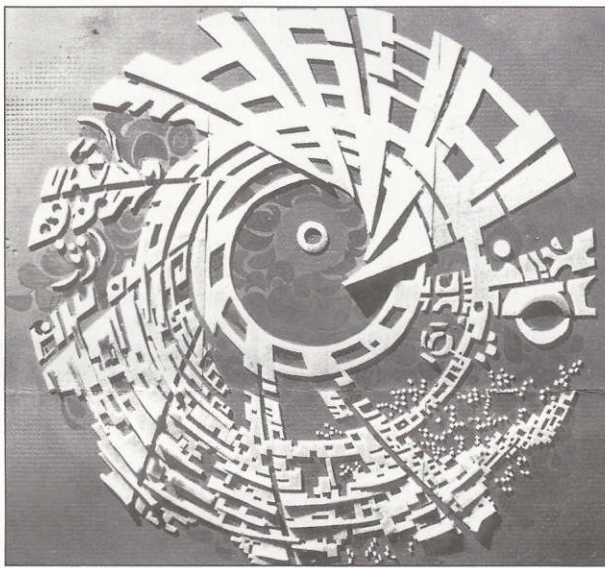
Aurofood Pvt. Ltd. as an example of an Auroville business, thus giving the impression that there could be private businesses in Auroville. The policy reversal resulted in Aurofood Pvt. Ltd. not becoming an Auroville business. Businesses that had already signed up for the Industrial Zone never joined.

## "In Auroville I want true people"

During the last three years of Her life (1971-73), Mother often expressed Her concerns about the quality of the people who would come to join Auroville. On 9.6.71, She told Shyam Sunder: "Twelve good men would be better than hundreds of stupid persons. Auroville is not for comfort but for the servants of the Divine. People in Auroville should not shirk hard work. They should not think of escaping from the outer control until the divine control is there." On 1.10.72: "In Auroville I do not want many men. I want some people, but true people. If you want many people, I can give you a hundred thousand in a moment from South Africa." Three months later, Roger echoed this when he told a French journalist (J. P. Elkabash) in a televised interview: "What is important is not to build a city but to build new men". Satprem said something similar in a 1973 interview with J. Biès: "the point is not building a city; the point is building men - this something which will turn us into really complete beings."

## Communication with the world

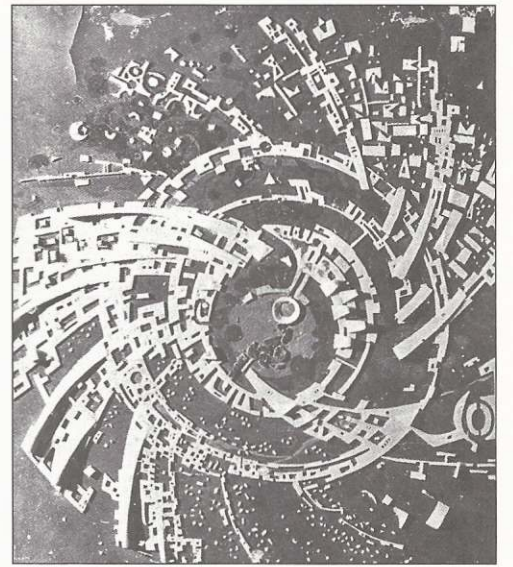
Another seeming reversal of policy related to how Auroville was to be communicated to the larger world. Initially, Mother hadn't objected to Auroville being presented to UNESCO's General Assembly, to articles being published in all sorts of newspapers and magazines all over the world, to films being made and shown to the public at large. But on 30.1.71, Mother sent to Auroville this excerpt from a letter written by Sri Aurobindo with the comment "They [the Aurovilians] all have a false idea about propaganda and publicity."



Preliminary Galaxy model, early 1967

"...I don't believe in advertisement except for books, etc., and in propaganda except for politics and patent medicines. But for serious work it is a poison. It means either a stunt or a boom - and stunts and booms exhaust the thing they carry on their crest and leave it lifeless and broken high and dry on the shores of nowhere - or it means a movement. A movement in the case of a work like mine means the founding of a school or a sect or some other damned nonsense. It means that hundreds or thousands of useless people join in and corrupt the work or reduce it to a pompous farce from which the Truth that was coming down recedes into secrecy and silence. It is what has happened to the 'religions' and it is the reason of their failure."

When asked about the distinction She made between informing and advertising, She said: "It is a question of mental attitude rather than of physical action. Publicity does not discriminate between the persons to whom one speaks. Publicity means



Preliminary Galaxy model, late 1967

addressing a public which cannot understand. What we try to do is carry the Light where it can be understood and received. It is a question of choice. It is a question of selection: not to spread the thing without discernment. It is to choose which milieu, which people, which conditions can understand and to act there only."

## The danger of dogmas

In studying the history of Auroville, one has to remember that Mother, on various occasions, said that the level from where She 'sees' things is so high that people can't follow and wrongly understand what She says. In a conversation of February 8, 1969, recorded in Mother's Agenda, She mentions how an attempt of a disciple to properly write down what She says about Auroville failed, and warns that Her words should not become dogma. "That's what I am afraid of: that people will make dogmas with the creation of Auroville ... What I have seen here (gesture above) while ... (gesture showing that it is heard at ground level) it becomes so stupid, so flat!"

Mother's views were in constant movement as She was responding to developments. Take Bharat Nivas, the Pavilion of India, for example. When the construction was to start, the land was not yet owned by Auroville. Mother was extremely pragmatic and simply rotated the entire Master Plan. Another example is when the construction of the Matrimandir started. At the time, the land did not belong to Auroville. Roger went to see Mother to discuss the problem. She told him not to stick to mental ideas. Plans can be changed. If the Matrimandir can't be built here, it can be built somewhere else. The lands were finally bought and Matrimandir was built at the place envisaged by Roger. But this shows how incredibly flexible Mother was. This is typically Her way of functioning: very practical, very organic, as we see when we study Her management of Ashram affairs.

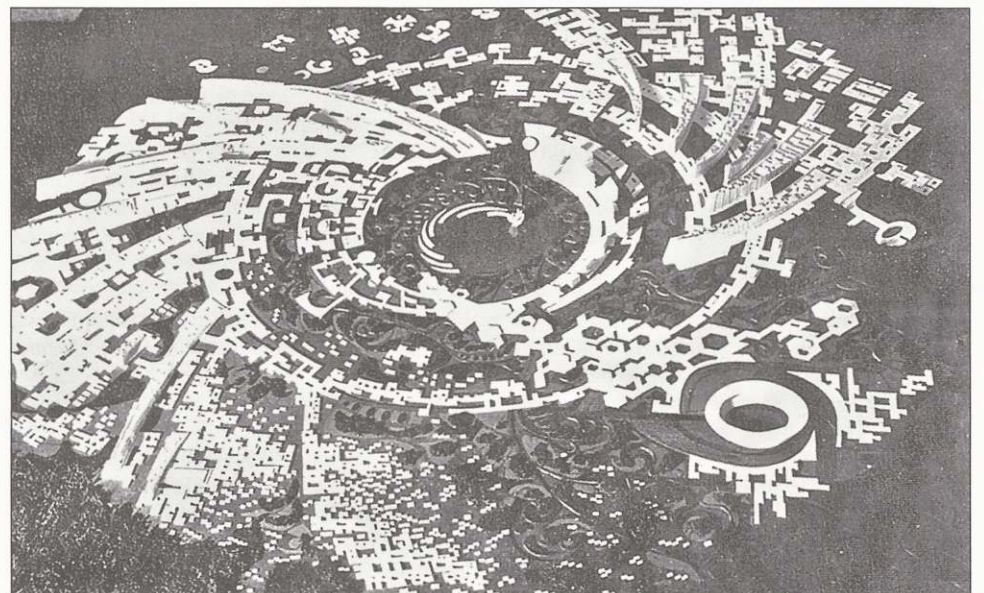
Mother often would give Her blessings to a proposal, and many people believe that such blessed proposals are unchangeable. But Mother herself has on more than one occasion said that Her blessings do not mean that things will happen as desired, but that what will happen is what is best for one's progress or the occasion. It is necessary to remember this when we make assumptions about what She did or did not want to happen concerning the development of individuals and of Auroville.

Gilles Guigan



The Macro structure model 1967

Navajata who believed that it would take less time to buy the land by common agreement. According to Anjani, the Chief Secretary of Pondicherry who had prepared the proposal, Mother was very unhappy that Navajata had taken this decision without even referring it to



Galaxy model 1968, centre with the sculpture of a flame



# Yatra's journey through the arts

**T**emperate July evenings are usually the perfect setting for outdoor functions in and around Auroville. But when the skies open and wash out a performance and its audience of 125 people, it says much about an organisation's professionalism that it can bundle the audience, projector and sound system into the nearby building, and have the show up and running again in a mere five minutes. Yatra Multimedia's screening of its most recent films demonstrated that the organisation embodies the old show business adage: "The show must go on."

Yatra has grown considerably since Auroville Today's 2009 profile of its founder Srinivas, who now sports the professional name Yatra Srinivasan. The Yatra organisation now consists of two arms: Yatra Multimedia, the commercial arm that makes films and street plays; and the non-commercial Yatra Foundation, which provides (mostly free) dance, acting, music, painting and after-school tuition classes for village children.

"Yatra is a pilgrimage. It's our art journey," explains Srinivas. "We had a dream to create this. The arts connect us, and allow people to express feelings."

Yatra is driven by three key people – Srinivas, his brother Osiva, and Srinivas's wife Adhalakshmi – plus two administration people and one amma. There is also the theatre team, as well as the many collaborative filmmaking relationships that Srinivas engenders. "It's not a corporate company, it's a close family," says Srinivas. "Yatra is a good example of team spirit. It has a long-standing relationship with other directors and artists who come."

## Recent films

This collaborative capacity of Yatra is borne out by the new seven-minute film *Full Stop*, for which Srinivas shared co-directing duties with filmmaker Raghu. The idea for the film, which is intended to be a public service announcement to be posted on social media to promote discussion, came from Raghu's team's observations during recent travels around India. "A common sight in Tamil Nadu is of the drunken man lying on the road," says Raghu. "We used to make fun of such people because of the way they act. But we realised it is also a problem for the men's wives at home because these are not just guys who just drink; they go way overboard. So we thought, 'Why don't we do something?' Why not give it a comical twist, but also highlight a problem that's very prevalent?"

Raghu wrote the script and brought his team of four to partner with Yatra Multimedia in order to share resources and skills. Srinivas plays the lead role of a public drunkard who is whisked into a van by a vigilante team that then dumps him in a remote location to dry out. Raghu explains that "fulla" means a full bottle of alcohol in Tamil slang, so the film's title *Full Stop* essentially translates as *Stop Drinking*.

Perhaps unusually for a Tamil film, the vigilante team is all women, dressed in urban black and sporting 'don't mess with us' attitude. "We think that women are under-represented and misrepresented in film, and we like to break stereotypes," says Raghu. "The affected people are women... We thought it would be interesting to shake things up."

With its tight editing and building drama, the film's debut screening during the July function evoked a strong audience reception. While Srinivas's performance as a drunk initially provoked much hilarity, the serious message took over by the film's end.

It was a similar case with the other drama film screened at the function, the 12-minute film *Semmozhi*, which means classical language. In the film, Srinivas plays a self-satisfied film director travelling through India by car. He boasts of his global travels and extended stints in foreign countries to his travelling companion (played by Auroville's Loretta), flipping through smartphone photos and smugly talking up his capacity to speak different European languages. However, when the car stops at a tea stall, the character is flummoxed when he's unable to order chai in a common language, whilst his companion easily does so in Hindi.

The highly ashamed character then explains to his companion how Tamil Nadu vociferously resisted all attempts in the 1960s by the Central Government to make Hindi the national language, and the visuals flashback to dramatic black and white protest scenes that capture the heightened

tensions in Tamil Nadu at the time.

Srinivas explains that the film was inspired by his own experience of going to north India for the first time, and being mortified when he was unable to communicate with his own countrymen. The film's core argument is that Tamil Nadu could have benefitted by taking on Hindi as an additional language, in a manner that did not undermine the importance of Tamil as the state's first language.

The third film to have its debut screening at the Yatra function was the delightful film clip *Happy Children*, set to the hit song of the same name by Pharrell Williams. Featuring Yatra's Bharat natyam students dancing in various outdoor locations, its saturated colours and infectious joy made it a big hit with the children in the audience. The dancers also performed live at the event, displaying excellent technique, timing and feeling, and a confidence that often belied their age.

"Art gives shape to the youth and kids," says Srinivas, pointing out that children in his village of Kuilapalayam previously had to go to Pondicherry to learn dance, drama or music. "We wanted to bring this opportunity to the village."

## The Yatra vision

Srinivas's original vision for Yatra Foundation was for an arts college that would teach children and create artists who could then teach others. Yatra now absorbs up to 40 students for after-school tuition on a daily basis, as well as students in Bharat natyam and veena, a musical instrument.

Yatra is something of a family affair – Srinivas teaches drama, while Osiva teaches painting and coordinates exhibitions. Daughter Priyadarshini choreographs, and his wife Adhalakshmi coordinates classes, manages the bookings for the Yatra dance troupe, and does film production work and budgeting.

Srinivas's style of teaching drama encourages students to develop work that reflects the life they see around them. "I encourage the children to observe situations in the modern world and body language," says Srinivas. "They watch lots of TV these days, so kids catch stuff so quickly now. Their interest in arts is really developing. Some former actor colleagues of mine from 25 years ago still attend the drama programme, so the arts connect us."

Osiva points out that the Yatra activities are designed to give balance to the conventional schooling system in the village. "Playing is important," he says. "With their other studies, they suffer. School is study, study, study. Lots of the kids are from poor families or their fathers are drunkards, so the kids are under the control of grandparents. They come here and they're happy. That's the success of art."

Osiva teaches painting in a way that reflects his own development as an artist. He taught himself painting by studying French impressionist techniques, as well as observing Auroville artists. He travelled all over India, including to the Andaman Islands and Kashmir. "Here, I go out early in the morning on my bicycle, and paint in the open air," he says. "I show the kids books, take them to the exhibitions at Pitanga. I like to encourage them to touch their inner creations, explore their inner joy."

As with many not-for-profit initiatives around

Auroville, funding is often tight and the Foundation survives more through passion, flexibility and some dedicated support. "The street plays and films that we make through Yatra Multimedia bring income which supports most of the running expenses of the foundation," says Srinivas. "A Swedish friend Leif, Pallas from Holland and some other individuals also supported us by giving some funds, and international students volunteer here."

And like many small not-for-profits, unexpected expenses can throw a spanner in the works. "On *Semmozhi*, the film shoot in the hired taxi was only supposed to take two days, but in the end it went to five days!," Adhalakshmi says of the challenges posed to her as production coordinator.



Loretta and Srinivas in 'Semmozhi'

"The extra taxi hire costs threw out all my calculations! Sometimes I have to adjust the family budget to accommodate these things."

## Beginnings

Srinivas and Osiva themselves benefitted from an upbringing that offered the best of both conventional study and the arts. Their father and grandfather were street players who staged the *Mahabharata* in Kuilapalayam village.

Srinivas did theatre in school and found that he also had acting talent. "I started an acting team in the village and put on a stage play, which was very joyful. My father, who worked in the Ashram paper-making unit, would take me to watch films in Pondy."

Srinivas did a BA in economics and then worked in Auroville units. While working at the Health Centre, he was encouraged in his creative pursuits by Dr Assumpta who was working there. "The Health Centre started putting on street plays, so I started doing that, as well as making films. She identified my talent, channelized my life. She supported me to study film in Chennai. By then I'd made seven films, doing deck-to-deck editing!"

Sometime after his mentor Dr Assumpta died, Srinivas decided to go out by himself and start

Yatra. "I had a lot of fear, but the idea clicked. I never focused on money, but on making quality films. Many NGOs doing outreach came to me because they knew the quality of my films."

Since then, dozens of NGOs have commissioned Srinivas to develop short films and plays to promote awareness about their causes. "The NGOs work on different issues – toilets, sanitation, toddy (the local alcoholic drink). They ask us to write the script, and we give a budget for 12 actors, usually for two days for a film. I take real subjects with a society-based message and make it funny. It should have a good story, not boring, as people need to relate to it."

Srinivas points to five awards on a shelf, for stage plays he produced. "I can't do without my street theatre team, Krishnamurthy, Rajaram, Arulmozhi, Dhanajayan and Prabhu. Sometimes we have to travel up to 80km at night to perform, and we get back very late. The actors have to hold down a day job, so theatre is really their passion."

Assessing the outcomes of initiatives that encourage 'behaviour change' is always difficult, but Srinivas is familiar with the challenges of portraying controversial issues in film and theatre.

"After our sanitation theatre play in one village, 40 people there agreed to build a toilet. Planting trees has been a success. But the film about solid waste created problems. People in the audience started accusing each other of dumping garbage, saying: 'Because of you, I got typhoid!' Personal hygiene for children has improved, but the issue of toddy is difficult, and drainage also – people still let their wastewater run onto the street, where it creates sanitation problems. Kids are easier to change, so we focus on them."

"Some time ago, when we made our HIV film, *Dharana*, the audience got angry at the character. In our culture, they don't want to be open to such topics, like talking about condoms and prostitutes. It was sensitive, it was seen as subversive. But people are getting more aware now."

Yatra has now done 25 films about social issues, and the solid waste film *Maattram* won the Auroville Film Festival award for best film. Yatra has also executed commercial work for businesses, including a highly amusing TV commercial for a Pondy burglar alarm company, in which Srinivas plays a brash thief who gets his come-uppance. He has also played comedy roles in Chennai films and TV series, sometimes sporting a large wig and the exaggerated expressions that are characteristic of the genre.

## The future

Srinivas relates how, every New Year's Eve, he would write up his goals for Yatra. While there were initially about 30 points, the list has reduced as he achieved many of the goals. "All our vision is coming together slowly, happening in a nice way," he says.

But his one yet-to-be-fulfilled goal is to direct his own feature film. In order to gain valuable feature film experience, he recently accepted an invitation to co-direct a major Chennai film with film director Chimbu Devan of *Imjai Arasan* fame. "I learnt a lot – it's totally different from making short films in Auroville. There's a lot of hierarchy, it's more formal, more commercial. He said I shouldn't be so nice! He said 'You can't request people to do things, you have to order them and give a deadline!'"

"The people on the Chennai film sets don't stay in contact off the set. I thought, 'Do I want to work like this?' They should enjoy it but they're suffering, shouting. I like good people to surround me. This was a big learning!"

One thing Srinivas is sure about is that his filmmaking process will always be collaborative and respectful of his team. "I held the [July] film screening function to show gratitude to the crew," he says. "It's a collective process. I saw them working hard during the shoot. We should honour them in the Indian way with the shawl. Some outside teams put the film straight onto YouTube without giving a CD to the crew. We presented the CD at the function and gave speeches. That gives inspiration to everyone. It's the Yatra tradition."

This ethos of collaboration also informs Yatra's relationship with Auroville, even though Yatra is not an Auroville unit. "We're very collaborative, we're sharing with Auroville," says Osiva. Srinivas chimes in: "Yatra is a bridge. We want to bridge Auroville and the village. We're connected to both. We're proud Auroville is near to us."

Lesley



# The craft of Making Place: Lessons for Auroville?

In September 2009, the first meeting for "Landscaped Spaces" took place in Auroville. It followed a proposal by Mr. Doshi, the Chairperson of Auroville's Town Development Council, to create interesting public spaces at various Auroville locations for people to gather and socialize. This included areas for art performances, places for families, tea stalls, farmer's markets, and public art installations. But unfortunately, the project didn't advance very far.

The question of how to create vibrant common spaces remains. All too often, communal spaces in or between our communities are neglected or are simply spaces of transition or movement. But public spaces remain an integral part of the city we want to inhabit, and how we design and use them speaks directly to what we value as a community.

Outside of Auroville, efforts are underway to reclaim common spaces, especially in cities dominated by the life-alienating grid system of town planning. In the city of Portland, Oregon, USA, the volunteer organization *City Repair* organizes an annual Village Building Convergence (VBC) to encourage place-making, defined as "a multi-layered process within which citizens foster active, engaged relationships to the space which they inhabit, the landscapes of their lives, and shape those spaces in a way which creates a sense of communal stewardship and lived connection".

For a period of ten days each year, neighbours from across the city engage in projects to revitalize, beautify, and embody their neighborhoods. Projects range from intersection painting to the construction of cob benches, kiosks, pizza ovens, or Little Libraries, which



Local residents in Portland, Oregon, USA, beautifying a public space

are small, covered kiosks in which people can leave and take books for free. Neighbours might mobilize around schools and construct a natural playground, or come together to create a community garden or a reflective space. All projects are based on the principles of natural building and permaculture, ensuring that the process of 'localizing' neighborhoods is harmonious with the natural environment.

The first stage of these projects begins eight months earlier, and is usually initiated by a citizen seeking to energise their neighbourhood. The first step is to meet the neighbours. In most urban American centres, where anonymity is the norm, this step of breaking the ice can be the biggest one. Informal get-togethers, such as potlucks, are organized for neighbours to socialize and become familiar with one another. There is then an open process of brainstorming the shared values of the neighbourhood, which may include safety, accessibility, creativity, cleanliness, the natural world, self-sufficiency, or the honouring of

those who lived there in the past.

The next step is to brainstorm projects that are feasible for the neighbourhood. Ideas might include a book exchange, a poetry kiosk, a community post-box to write notes between neighbours, a tool-lending library, a tree house, bicycle racks, murals, creating mosaic stepping stones, or events such as monthly teas or litter pick-ups.

The months of preparation are assisted by VBC coordinators, who help to facilitate meetings, lead design workshops, and assist with permit processes where required. Then, over a 10-day event, in which everyone in the city is invited, neighbourhood work parties happen. They are as much fun as they are work – and not only to beautify spaces but also to build connections between neighbours.

Are such projects relevant to Auroville? In some ways, Auroville is already far beyond the challenges that other cities have to overcome. We are not subjected to the grid mentality that plunks cities down in squares, without

regard to natural surroundings or the curves of human creativity. We also, for the most part, are familiar with our neighbours, and that first knock on the door isn't such a revolutionary act.

But Auroville also faces a host of other challenges. A different reality exists, for instance on the material level. In the US, supplies are often donated by neighbours themselves, who scrounge through their garages to find old paint, wood pieces, or old doors or window frames. Doubtless, also Auroville's storerooms contain much that can be used in public areas. But one can't help but wonder whether such projects in Auroville might become another fundraising burden on someone's shoulders.

At a deeper level, though, such projects might help us finally face the question: "What do we value as a community?" A collective reflection within your neighbourhood might reveal some curious answers. Perhaps your neighbourhood, filled with children, values exploration and play, or maybe it values solitude and reflection. What could be creat-

ed in the common spaces to reflect these values?

Unlike Landscaped Spaces, which seeks to revitalize common public spaces within the city, place-making begins on the smaller scale, in our communities. It expects each person to individually take up the work of determining what we value in our communities, to talk to our neighbours about it, and become an integral part in the creation of the space to reflect those values. And instead of waiting for funding to come, it encourages us to give what we have, be creative, and think outside of the box in terms of natural design.

Based on what an Auroville neighbourhood determines as its core values, perhaps the installation of a community garden would be appropriate. Or maybe the shed that houses waste bins could be beautified with the creative genius of the young ones in the neighbourhood. Or perhaps your neighbourhood values meeting spaces, and decides that it wants to build a small, shaded sitting area and host monthly tea parties. These small projects might have a large impact on how we live in our neighbourhoods and on our sense of empowerment in the act of town planning.

Ing-Marie



Celebrating the renovation of a crossing

## PASSINGS

## Toshi Malik

Aurovilian of the first hour, Toshi (Santosh) Malik, wife of late Prem Malik, left her body on June 20th after a year's illness in New Delhi. She was 86 years old.

Prem and Toshi had been living in Auroville since its inauguration in 1968. Their joy of being here, their total engagement in this adventure, and their work as pioneers was known to all. After Prem passed away in 1999, Toshi continued her work at the Visitors' Centre and in Bharat Nivas.

In June this year, while visiting family in New Delhi, she was admitted to the hospital due to stomach ailments. She left the hospital soon, and was recuperating at her sister's house in Delhi where she told Aster, "I am always walking around in Auroville. I want to be there. Take me back with you..."

A silent gathering to remember Toshi took place under the Matrimandir Banyan Tree on July 11th. Auroville salutes them with love and deep gratitude for the many long years they have so wholeheartedly given to the Mother's Dream, the city of Auroville.

**Style, Substance & Spirit:**  
A unique personality passes on

*Dharmesh remembers:*

It was probably my first day of arrival in Auroville, 22 years ago, when I got into an informal chat with an unassuming Punjabi lady, gracefully occupying the space at the Visitors' Centre giving information on Auroville. She answered my very basic queries with patience, clarity and kind of an inviting note, which now I realise was the beginning of a long, intimate and inspirational communication. This was Toshi Malik, affectionally known as Toshiji.

Toshiji represented the ultimate, unconditional commitment which many Indian mothers, sisters and wives make to their families, in good times and in times of distress, in shaping careers



PHOTO: DHARMESH

and futures of their kin, making their kin's dreams theirs and giving up their own. Santosh Malik represents that Spirit of the Women of India, in accompanying Prem Malik, an iconic Aurovilian, who helped shaping and grounding the Vision of Auroville, be it the land, finances, Government or corporate support, without which Auroville would have been probably missing a lot. She provided this unflinching support to the journey of many Aurovilians who plunged into this unknown experiment hosted by this country, leaving behind their luxurious lives, corporate careers or family businesses, joining a bunch of unknown, sometimes unruly, Aurovilians. As she passes on, she takes along many stories, experiences and struggles to which she has been a close witness.

Her style and grace were perhaps at times seen as a posh Punjabi high society presence in Auroville, something that did not fit in

Auroville's early years. But Toshiji carved out her own niche amongst the spiritual, intellectual and political discussions she was intimately part of. Sharing a close contact with most in the community of Auromodèle, especially with Asterji and Jayantibhai, Toshiji had always her own unique take on most situations, such as in the work she did for Bharat Nivas, the Pavilion of India. As an ardent reader, a scholar in her own right, she kept herself informed of the latest literary writings in India and the world. Toshiji was the one whose command of English, Hindi, and Sanskrit was handy for many translations of Auroville publications and brochures and she shared her Sanskrit knowledge with many Aurovilians.

In the early years of Auroville, she also gave lessons in Indian-style dressing to struggling Aurovilians who were caught-up in their sixties' outfits. She kept her inimitable style statement intact for decades, even after being in Auroville for so long, in the midst of the craziness of Auroville and its ups, downs and twists and turns of organizational upheavals.

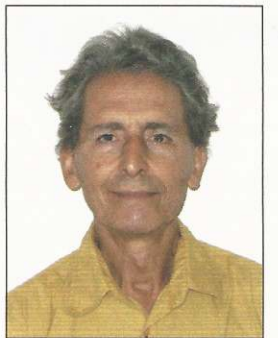
I was fortunate to have shared many evenings in her place chatting about all issues of Auroville life, also after Premji passed away, relishing her home cooked meals. The time I spent with her in her summer house in Ramgarh valley in the Nainital district of Uttarakhand was inspiring and invaluable. She had her own sense of humour in Punjabi style, at times making profound observations in the most humorous ways about some serious Aurovilians. But her support to the Auroville experiment in all its craziness was unflinching.

Toshiji lived up to the Master's dream, that attracted most of us. She proved that being in Auroville and transforming oneself is surely not external. Toshiji represented humbly and quietly how one internalizes this freedom, this revolutionary idea and spiritual quest.

Toshiji, our respects, gratitude and admirations for your presence with which you graced Auroville.

## Jagran

Jagran (Maurizio d'Angelo) passed away at AUM hospital on May 26th, 2014, in the presence of his son Sid and daughter Alice. He was 71 years old. Jagran had joined Auroville in 2009, but shortly after met with a stroke. He had also been suffering from cancer. Following a fall, he underwent a hip replacement. But Jagran, a model of life-affirming resilience, never succumbed to depression and maintained his openhearted and upbeat personality. His body was cremated at the Farewell Burial and Cremation Grounds at Adventure community.



## Rakesh

Rakesh Tiwari, who joined Auroville in 2002, passed away on July 17th. His sudden death was due to a heart related medical condition. He was 40 years old. Rakesh has worked at Needam Guest House, the Matrimandir, and at Aurofuture (the earlier name of L'avenir d'Auroville). In 2008, he left Auroville and moved to Nice in France, where he lived with his wife Violaine. From there they worked in various developing countries in South America and, more recently, in Sudan in an effort to improve the quality of life of people living in remote areas. They were contemplating moving back to Auroville and raise their as yet unborn child there.





## Extreme weather

In the fourth week of June, 2014, the thermometer reached 41 degree Celsius for three consecutive days. The UV Index, adopted and standardized by the UN's World Health Organization and World Meteorological Organization in 1994, was at its highest at 11 (extreme risk). During three weeks of June and the first week of July, the UV index had already reached 9 and 10 (very high risk). These measurements were taken in Pune, Karnataka. Auroville does not yet have a monitoring UV Index system (costs: Rs 7 lakhs or about US \$ 10,000).

### Protect yourself in 5 ways



High UV radiation may lead to skin cancer and cataract. According to the World Bank, in India cataract has been reported to be responsible for 80% of bilaterally blindness in the country, compared to 50 percent worldwide. India also reported an earlier onset age of cataracts (younger than 60 years) and a high prevalence of cataracts among women. Five states – Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, Maharashtra, and Rajasthan – and the union territory of Pondicherry account for more than 70 percent of India's cases of cataract blindness.

High levels of UV radiation may also suppress cell-mediated immunity and thereby enhance the risk of infectious diseases and limit the efficacy of vaccinations.

In Australia, schools and parents are made aware about the dangers of UV radiation. Under Australian law, hats are compulsory in most Australia schools as part of the SunSmart Policy. Skin cancer is one of the biggest killers of Australian adults and the damage starts in childhood so they make the kids very aware of slip (on a t-shirt), slop (on some sunscreen), slap (on a hat) and wrap (your eyes in sunglasses) during late spring, summer and early autumn.

## Last school moves



After a period of 30 years, Last School has finally moved from the Last School compound near Aspiration into new premises between Kalabhumi and Future School. A community concentration and invocation took place on July 28th.

## Recommended fees for Auroville building projects

The Funds and Assets Management Committee, which is mandated to review the financial viability of proposed public buildings and housing projects, has stated that henceforth all projects in excess of Rs. 1 crore will need to submit a bill-of-quantities (BoQ). Regarding fees, the FAMC recommends that architect fees should not exceed 3.5% of the BoQ; and that a project holder may receive compensation in equal value to an Aurovilian maintenance (full-time is approximately Rs.12,000, part-time is approximately Rs. 6,000 per month). This compensation is not to be linked to the BoQ value but only to the amount of work involved. Engineering fees are also to be based on the BoQ and should not exceed the Public Works Department rate. This fee is over and above architect and project holder fees. Exceptions would have to be explained to the FAMC.

The Auroville architects, in a joint statement, have meanwhile categorically rejected this proposal. They question why it was

made without consultation, and demand to know the reasons why the FAMC proposes to overrule the scope of works and scale charges and professional practice as recommended by the Council of Architects, India.

## Land donation

Kalya, a Tamil Aurovilian who is executive of Progress Landscape and also working for the Town Development Council, has offered 3.5 acres of land situated in the Greenbelt to Auroville.

## Pyramids for NESS science teaching



The Pyramids building near Aspiration community

The New Era Secondary School (NESS) has been granted approval from the Central Board for Secondary Education (CBSE) for the introduction of Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Mathematics and Computer Science to the curriculum with effect from April 1st, 2014. This will benefit the 13 students from the 11th Grade who are currently following the Science Stream programme and answer to the huge demand for a science education from families in Auroville and surrounding villages. The Pyramids building, which so far was the place for teaching arts for Last School, has been transferred to NESS and is being upgraded to a top class science laboratory for NESS.

## Graphic novel about Sri Aurobindo

Chandigarh filmmaker Gaurav Chhabra is currently undertaking a 6 months artist's residency at Kala Kendra. He is developing an illustrated storybook about Sri Aurobindo, and will be joined in this task by Egyptian artist Tarek Kamal. A publisher is already on board, and the creators are aiming for publication in 2015. They also hope to produce the storybook as large panels that can travel around India as an art exhibition.

## Auroville Festival in Chennai

Following the successful Auroville Festival in Delhi in 2012, the Governing Board, in their meeting of November 2013, has approved a similar event to be held in Chennai as many state government officials are unaware that Auroville is in Tamil Nadu and what it actually does. The name for the festival will be "What is Auroville?" It is to take place in the second half of January 2015. "What is this Auroville?" is planned to include an inauguration ceremony, a cultural evening, a conference, and special general and individual events. Some of the themes that this festival will focus on are: Auroville as a place of research and experimentation, of never ending education, as a multicultural centre for the development of human unity and as a working city. The duration of the Festival may be from a couple of days to a week.

## Auromodèle Atelier closed

Auromodèle Atelier has closed due to the high competition for ready-made garments for export.

## Extension of the electricity-in-kind scheme

The Budget Coordination Committee (BCC) has agreed that Varuna-Auroville, an Auroville unit that operates two wind generators owned by the Auroville Foundation, will cover the electricity bills of all grid-connected residents receiving a City-Services maintenance and those who pay the full monthly contribution of Rs. 2,850 to the Central Fund. During the next three months the details of this new phase of the electricity-in-kind scheme will be worked out. Varuna Auroville is already paying the electricity bills of all Auroville services and, from August 1 onwards, will pay for the electricity bills of all Auroville guest-houses and home stays.

The electricity-in-kind scheme intends to become an integral part of an overall in-kind economy for Auroville whereby Auroville residents give their time and energy to Auroville while Auroville pro-

vides for shelter, food, water, energy, education, health, clothing, mobility and other minimum needs.

## Land issues

The Land Resource Management team reported that in the period of March to May 2014 it had been doing 25 land surveys and dealt with a number of boundary disputes and plot fencing issues, land disputes, a land encroachment including the manhandling of the steward, land access issues and a number of court cases dealing with land issues.

## Police patrolling

The BCC has asked community feedback on the police patrolling in Auroville in view of the high costs of security. For the financial year 2013-14, the Auroville Security Budget was Rs. 30.5 lakhs, which is the second highest budget allocated by the City Services. In addition, the BCC has been paying Rs.17,000 per month towards refreshments for the patrolling police personnel in Auroville.

## Passing

Danapalan, father of Aurovilians Kanniappan, Nagappan and Arumugam passed away on July 27th. He was in his eighties. Danapalan gave his land to Auroville and has been working for Auroville from the early days, starting with the Matrimandir Nursery where he drove the first bullock cart of Auroville bringing compost from Pondicherry. In 1983, he started working with Bhavana in the Bliss garden. From there he got into afforestation, a work that he continued as watchman till 2013. While his children joined Auroville, Danapalan continued to live in Kottakarai, dedicating his life to building Auroville.

## LETTERS

# Acres for Auroville

Dear Auroville Today Team, Still, I have some reflections and suggestions to make upon this:

Thanks very much for publishing 'Acres for Auroville' campaign as a lead article in May-June 2014 issue of Auroville Today. This has indeed helped spread the word and we have started receiving queries and contributions from the friends and well-wishers of Auroville. While we individually thank each contributor, we would also like to thank through Auroville Today all who have responded or showed interest in the cause. We would also like to point out that while the focus of the campaign is Matrimandir area (the City Centre) and the International Zone, we regard it only as the first phase of a bigger challenge. All of the lands in the City area and the maximum possible in the Green Belt must be our target if we really seek the marvellous possibilities of Auroville for the good of Tamil Nadu, India and the world to manifest.

Aryadeep  
Acres for Auroville

14.7.2014

Dear Auroville Today Team,

In your last issue you announced a fund-raising campaign, 'Acres for Auroville', to protect and purchase land in the Matrimandir area and in the International Zone. The spirit and motivation of this campaign comes from loyal friends of Auroville.

Amicalement,  
Alain Grandcolas

## Subscription information

### Subscription rates for 12 months issues:

**Print + digital edition:** India Rs. 600; other countries Rs. 3,000 equivalent.  
**Digital only edition:** India Rs. 420; other countries Rs. 2,100 equivalent.  
**Reduced rates:** Those for whom the subscription rate is an obstacle are invited to email us for information on reduced rates.  
**Benefactor:** Auroville Today does not receive any subsidy nor carries advertisements. Subscribers are invited to send donations to help continue this work.

### There are three ways to subscribe:

- 1. Through our website:** Subscriptions can be ordered and paid online through [www.auroville.com/auroville-today](http://www.auroville.com/auroville-today)
- 2. By sending your contribution directly to Auroville Today:** Surrender, Auroville - 605 101, Tamil Nadu, India. Cheques sent directly to Auroville Today should be made payable to Auroville Unity Fund, specifying: 'Contribution for Auroville Today'. Personal cheques are preferred to bank cheques. Please do not send postal money orders or cash.

### 3. By sending your contribution to:

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