



Detailed Development Plans for the Residential Zone ready

Luis Feduchi is a Spanish architect and town planner. He was Professor of Urban Design at the Berlin Technical University, Germany, before moving back to Spain to work as Dean of Architecture of the University of Madrid. For the last six years, he has been working on the plans of the Residential Zone of Auroville.

Auroville Today: What specific work has been assigned to you by the Town Development Council (TDC)?

Luis: I have been asked to make the detailed development plans for sectors 1 and 2 of the Residential Zone of Auroville. These two sectors comprise a large portion of the Residential Zone. The plans were completed in July last year, but we were requested to supply some more information. This has now been provided in a second document.

Who is 'we'?

The team consists of Kaja Delezuch, a Polish town planner who has been working at the TDC for over a year and is now part of the team, myself and a number of volunteers. This is something of a skeleton team. I have been trying with the TDC to build a full-time technical and experienced team as the TDC itself lacks technical expertise in certain areas. There are many resourceful people working for the TDC, with goodwill, ideas and inspiration, but there is not a team that can provide a steady management based on its technical expertise. Such a team is long overdue.

What kind of town planning office would be required?

Because of its size, because of its ideals and because Auroville is unconventional, Auroville needs a sound town planning office. Auroville, of course, is still small, with only 2,400 registered residents. However, there is a large influx of temporary residents such as volunteers and guests; and Auroville employs over 4,000 people who come in from outside.

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This has planning implications, such as with regard to housing and mobility.

To pinpoint an ideal size for an Auroville town planning office is difficult. However, the present situation is untenable. For an effective office for the present situation, you would need double the staff, working on a permanent basis, apart from those working part-time or hired to do a specific job only.

Could we employ a professional town planning office to do the work?

The TDC outsources a lot of work to individuals. However, there is no outsourcing of work to a reputed town planning office outside Auroville. I am sure this would be counterproductive, as those offices have their own system of working that might not be suitable for Auroville, as Auroville presents challenges that are unusual for professional town planning offices. But as long as Auroville cannot manifest an effective office, outsourcing to experts and individuals who may not be based in Auroville is the only solution I can see to bridge the gap.

What are the most significant features of the detailed development plans for phases 1 and 2 of the Residential Zone?

We have tried to work on the basis of the premises of the Master Plan as delineated by Roger Anger, concentrating on the low-density areas of sectors 1 and 2 of the Residential Zone as a gradual approach to an increased urban density of the city.

If you look at the present development in these zones, you will see that neither the *Master Plan* nor Roger's *Directions for Growth* have been followed. Auroville has been allocating land to housing projects on an ad-hoc basis. Maitreye II, to give an example, is a high density building in an area where there was no provision for that. Arati is a low-density development built in an area envisioned for high-density buildings. In addition, there are areas, such as Grace and Surrender, where there is more population than planned.

Another concern is the development of private gardens which diminishes public green spaces. Maitreye I, for example, is low density, which is according to the plans, but the residents have fenced off a portion of an area which was earmarked to be public green space and turned it into private areas. Auroville is intended to be a 'green city', but these type of developments go against that.

The detailed development plan sanctions small fenced-off gardens connected to isolated housing devel-

opments located in low-density green areas but it opposes those private gardens in areas earmarked as urban. Once there is no longer a threat that cows and goats will invade these residential developments, all these fences should come down and let their land integrate into a common territory. The fences of today often, if not always, fall where the public spaces should be. Paradoxically, the in-between space instead of becoming a space for integration has become a space for segregation. The next residential projects have to be open projects, where there are people's amenities, people can circulate. And this is how they are described in the DDP.

Your plans also have a provision for the Lines of Force?

Of course! When Roger set out the main principles for the town plan of Auroville, the Lines of Force were included as one of them. They are essential for Auroville to become a green city! If you do not have those buildings, you cannot have a city with that amount of green space. The provision for the Lines of Force, along with the Crown and the Matrimandir Lake, is also written into the L'avenir d'Auroville mandate (2007) as a significant element.

Two Lines of Force are envisioned in sectors 1 and 2 of the Residential Zone. A very big line of force borders sectors 2 and 3. It is placed on top of the radial which separates sectors 2 and 3. It is a bit difficult to imagine how that will work with traffic, but this Line might perhaps become possible once Auroville is a car-free city. I mean a city free of the need to use private vehicles to the extent that it does now, a city that sets priorities for non-polluting modes of transport so as to make community and visitors change their mobility patterns.

Progress community is part of the second Line of Force. It is planned to house 500 people, which is about 1/4 of the present population of Auroville. This Line of Force will be a great opportunity for testing and explaining what these buildings can do.

We propose that Auroville concentrates on exploring higher density developments rather than continuing building new low-density communities. It is a very important pillar of the city.

You are talking about a huge apartment block?

No. The Lines of Force should be more than just apartment blocks. In fact, the Master Plan only indicates the width, the length and the height. It could be one big structure, but also a number of smaller structures could constitute the Line of Force. They should not only house



Luis (standing, left) with volunteers and Kaya (right) working on the model in a studio at Citadines

residences but also small work-spaces and public amenities. Provisions could be made for greening walls and roofs. However, Lines of Force are very complex. For example, they have an effect on wind circulation that needs to be tested to produce benefits and resolve difficulties.

It is important to remember the Lines of Forces, as envisaged by Roger, are very permeable, locally varied structures, not only providing the residential units but also forming a sequence of commonly used spaces, with diversity of qualities and privacy levels – all this creates an unprecedented opportunity to exercise a model of collective living so imperative to Auroville's ideals. Lines of Force should not be treated as stand-alone entities but rather elements closely interwoven into the local urban fabric, staying in close relation and enhancing the public realm quality of the areas neighbouring them.

Two years ago, Gilles Boulicot did a study on water management [Harvesting rainwater for Auroville's water needs, AVToday #284 March 2013] and Suhasini Aiyer made a Land Use plan for Auroville. [AVToday #290 September 2013]. Have you incorporated their findings in your plans?

Yes. The chairman of the Town Development Council, Mr. B.V. Doshi, has been very active in making us work together and taking into account each other's recommendations regarding the water management and the sensitive areas in the two sectors of the Residential Zone.

Open channels or drains have been designed in both sectors which will allow storm water to flow into the Matrimandir Lake. This will not only be a beautiful embellishment but also create a nice biodiversity corridor.

Do your plans recommend that ecological architecture be practised?

Yes and no. The plan is not prescriptive. It does not specify using specific alternative building materials such as earth bricks or ferrocement. Ecological architecture is still very young. But Auroville,

of course, is a perfect place to experiment with that concept. This should be and I think is in everyone's agenda and it is certainly formulated like this in the DDP.

We are concerned about the urban harmony. That is lacking in the present developments, where most architects have built without consideration of what already exists in the neighbourhood. We are being very strict about the urban form, not only about where you can build, but also where you can build three or more stories and where you can only build one, and where the ground floor should be designed for public amenities and so on. In future, the architecture has to conform to the plans, include public common areas and, as much as possible, abolish private gardens. Projects will also have to align with neighbouring developments.

One of the difficulties of apartment blocks is noise pollution. This could be solved by using glass, but this necessitates air-conditioning, which is high-energy consuming and not to everyone's liking. Do the plans have something to say about that?

An architecture needs to be developed where ventilation, light and noise prevention are combined. We have given guidelines but the detailed exploration of the above is in the hands of the projects' architects.

But unless this problem is solved, people will not be happy to make donations for moving into large apartment complexes such as the Lines of Force. Many people have been fleeing the cities as they are fed up living in apartment buildings. How do you change that?

We have to find the appropriate building technology, and well-trained architects and visionaries who can come up with convincing designs. Aurovilians have to work together to find innovative ways to progress, and not stick to the well-trodden paths.

You mentioned that you envision a car-free city. How realistic is that, taking into account that the majority of the city is still to be built, which will bring in a lot of construction traffic, and that in some seasons the climate is not conducive to walking or cycling?

First we all have to agree that this is to be done. Car circulation can be easily restricted, it happens in

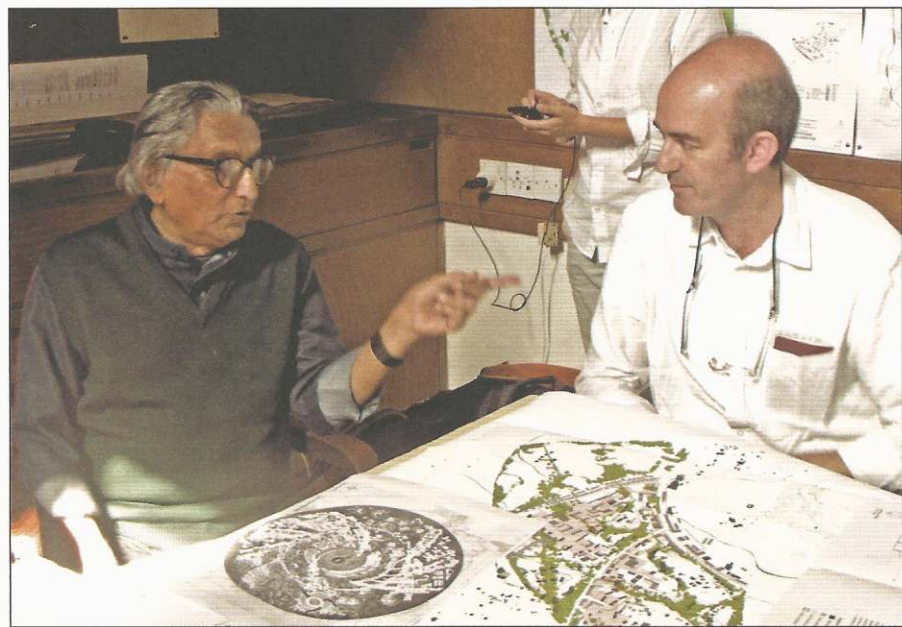
cities all over the planet. Once you have agreed on this, you'll find solutions and come up with plans for reducing the traffic. For example, the access to lorries that provide the goods for the city could be restricted to certain times of the day. Construction traffic could be channelled to follow specially landscaped roads which could be redesigned after the construction work is over. Private cars could be shared, to minimize their number. Taxis is a big problem also. The number of taxi companies that operate within and around Auroville is big and it keeps growing. I cannot believe that an innovative community like Auroville has not found a way to crack this model. A mobility model inspired by the Uber model could work.

But, most importantly, a detailed design of convenient walking and cycling paths will over time help change the daily pattern of the inhabitants of the Residential Zone. The DDP makes a provision for an uninterrupted shaded walking network throughout the Zone. In the urban areas, the incorporation of a covered walkway into the proposed project becomes one of the parameters given to the architects. In the green areas the detailing of Green Corridors ensures continuous shaded connections, entirely separate from the currently used motorised transport routes. This walking and cycling network became a crucial driving aspect of the detailed planning for the Zone. The proposed changes and improvements will happen gradually over the years and will require, as previously mentioned, re-evaluation of the necessity for fences which, at the moment, create barriers – a significant challenge in providing a practical and complete inner zone/sector connectivity.

What about access for people coming from outside, for example to visit an Auroville restaurant, a workplace or an office, or simply to meet up with friends?

At present there is no critical mass for a sound public transport but that doesn't mean we should resort to purchasing cars and bikes and hire taxis. Vehicle-sharing is very developed nowadays all over the world, using non-polluting traffic, e.g. electric cars. It is all possible if the will is there. That's what planning is about.

In conversation with Alan and Carel



Governing Board member Shri B.V. Doshi (left) in conversation with Luis

The first caravan

Last year was the 40th anniversary of the arrival of the second 'caravan' in Auroville. That caravan, like the first caravan a few years earlier, was made up of a motley collection of individuals who travelled overland from France to offer their energy and idealism to Mother's Dream. Many did not stay – the collision with the ground reality was too abrupt – and some have since died. But the two caravans occupy a unique niche in Auroville's history, not so much because of their influence on Auroville's future development – although this was not unsubstantial – but because they represent the spirit of the times which combined the 60s search for freedom with a thirst for new forms, new beginnings.

The first caravan of fourteen people left Paris on 15th August, 1969 and reached Auroville in early October. Auroville Today spoke to the three members of that caravan who are still living here: Gérard Maréchal, Janaka and François Gautier.

Auroville Today: What was the origin of the first caravan?

Gérard: Vincenzo had the blessing of Mother to organize the caravan. He told Mother he had to go back to France for an operation, and Mother told him to bring back people, materials and tools.

How did each of you find out about the caravan?

Gérard: I had a friend living next to me and one day he showed me a leaflet where Mother spoke about Auroville. I learned that in Auroville there would be no police, no money, no army, and I thought, that's it. It was 1968 and it corresponded very much to what was going on. Also, I wanted to become a professional photographer and travel somewhere to make my press book. I went to the Auroville Association office and they told me a caravan was going to go to Auroville.

Janaka: I had been connected to Mother since 1965. At first I wanted to come to live in the Ashram, but then Pavitra sent me some literature about Auroville and I became more interested in that. I visited the Auroville Association in Paris and I also went to see Roger. It was there I met Vincenzo who told me about the caravan. Immediately I said 'yes'.

François: I heard by accident. My best

François: Alain Monnier, Sébastien and Vincenzo had already come. They had met the Mother and Alain and Vincenzo were the leaders. The rest of us had not been to Auroville and did not know each other.

Was there a selection process? Did you have to send your photos to Mother?

Janaka: Yes. We had meetings with Roger and he wanted to know who was going to leave for India with the caravan. He wanted to make the selection but we had already sent our photos to Mother.

You set off from Paris on the night of 15th August.

Janaka: Yes, but before that we had worked for six months on repairing the vehicles – two vans and the cars. They were all second-hand and not in good condition. And they had to take us 12,000 kilometres, through Germany, Austria, Yugoslavia, Greece, Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan to India.

Did the vehicles hold up?

François: No. The main problem was the oil sumps of the vans kept breaking because they were so low they collided with the ground.

Janaka: We would repair the sump with Araldite and matting, using camping gas to dry the glue. It would take hours. Then we would put it back and, after one kilometer, bang! it would happen again. This also happened in the desert, where we had no water and no food. Later, the gearboxes of the two vans broke, and



Three Aurovillians of the first caravan: Gérard Maréchal, Janaka and François Gautier

had to guard everything.

Did these challenges help you bond as a group?

Janaka: No. For me, there was no unity.

François: It wasn't at all a carefree journey. There was no sightseeing because Vincenzo wanted to get to Auroville as quickly as possible and he knew that the vans were not in good condition. Gérard, Krishna and myself were happy together, but the leaders, Alain and Vincenzo, were often in conflict. There was a van that we used as a kitchen, and Alain used to put Mother's photo there, and Vincenzo would remove it. That was the main source of tension: it was already the 'mental' world versus the 'vital' world! Then, in Turkey, Vincenzo wanted to kick me out. I was smoking and he felt I was just not fitting. But Krishna intervened and said he could not do that.

Janaka: We drove like crazy, often at night, and this increased the tensions between people. It took us only five weeks to reach Delhi, and another week to reach Auroville, where we arrived in early October.

François: Delhi was very important for me. We had driven overnight from Lahore and reached Delhi in the early morning. We drove to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. It was the first time we had been in an atmosphere like that and I was very much attracted by it. It was a beautiful place and that evening, at sunset, I climbed on top of one of the vans and started reading Sri Aurobindo. And when I read a few lines, everything clicked in me somehow. I didn't know anything about India and about Auroville but suddenly, in an intuitive flash, I understood so many things. I understood that I had come home; that India was my place and I was going to be with the Mother. Suddenly I knew I would be in India for the rest of my life. It was a very strong experience.

Roger and Navajata even flew up to Delhi to greet us and they gave us a talk about Auroville. I think they were a bit disappointed in what they found. Maybe they were expecting older people with skills and we were young and without any great capacity. Roger disguised his feelings at the time, but later, in Auroville, he made it very clear that he didn't think we were up to it.

But Mother had seen your photos...

Gérard: With Mother it was different. In *The Agenda* you can read how someone complained about us guys in Aspiration, how we were wild and smoking and not working: we

represented all the sins of the world! And this person asked if Ashram people could not go and live in Auroville as they would obviously be much more suitable. And Mother said, 'No, no'. She was very strong about this. She said, I will take care of these young people. She wanted to do something with us...

Can you remember the moment you arrived?

Janaka: We arrived in Promesse and we were very tired because we had been driving through the night. Somebody gave a talk and Barun Tagore took a photo of us a group.

François: We expected a city and there was nothing!

Did you feel for a moment that you made a mistake? That you had come all this way for nothing?

All: No.

Gérard: It was more strange than disappointing. For me the change happened when some people came, they were blond and beautiful, and said 'Let's go to Aspiration'.

François: We entered Auroville for the first time from the JIPMER road. There was nothing! Only a few palm trees, the blue sky and the red earth. It was very striking. Then we had to cross through Kuilapalayam village because there was no other access to Aspiration, and I remember the villagers looked at us in a very hostile way. Finally, we came to Aspiration, which had actually been built for us. We had had a very uncomfortable journey, often sleeping outside, and here were these nice houses with clean bathrooms.

Do you have any striking memories of the caravan journey? Were there any 'legends' of the caravan?

François: I remember that Sébastien used to like watching stars. He would climb up on the roof of the van and watch them for hours. He also managed to get himself locked up in the Taj Mahal at night. It was full moon and he spent the night wandering the gardens. I think it was a very important experience for him.

Janaka: I remember Afghanistan was very dangerous. One night we were driving in Afghanistan and suddenly we came to a barrier across the road with these armed guys. We stopped and got out. We talked, they inspected the vehicles and let us go. Probably we had to pay something.

François: Of course, it helped that Krishna was a Muslim. He knew what to say in situations like this.

When you arrived in Auroville, did Roger have a programme of work for you?

Janaka: There were lots of meetings. Roger and Gilbert came from Pondicherry and spoke to us about the consciousness of true Aurovillians. While we respected people like them, we were the ones who were daily confronting the difficulties of life in Auroville. So when they came in their cars and nice clothes from Pondicherry to tell us how to live the ideal of Auroville, it was difficult for us to accept.

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Members of the first caravan depart from Paris 15-08-1969 (far left Gérard, far right Janaka next to François)

friend's father was the Governor of Pondicherry. My friend had come back from Pondicherry in 1968 and he told me about the planned caravan. I didn't know anything about Auroville or about Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, but I thought it would be a good way to start my round-the-world tour. I was not interested in Auroville.

So there was a mixture of people in this caravan, some people knew about Auroville and some didn't?

the two small cars had to pull them for over 8,000 kilometres because all the equipment was in the vans. And the towing ropes would keep breaking...

François: We also had an accident in Turkey, when Danielle was driving. She skidded on a curve and the van went over. We had to do a major repair, to cut the top off and make a new frame. We were stuck there for 10 days, living in tents. It was a tough time because there were army guys around who were not so nice and the girls had to be protected. At night we

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Gérard: We were kind of lost. We didn't have skills. I think our first activity was to start planting trees in Aspiration.

Janaka: Apart from gardening and planting, the only activity in those early days was cooking and working in *Toujours-Mieux*, the mechanical workshop.

François: We suffered a lot during the first monsoon. We had never experienced the monsoon, which started about a week after we arrived. I remember after these huge rains everything started rotting, mushrooms were sprouting everywhere, and you couldn't go anywhere: there was no road. After the monsoon, there was the heat and the dust.

In spite of this, almost all the caravanners stayed in Auroville for some time.

François: Most of these people stayed for at least three years. I think Mother's passing was a kind of watershed. After that, people began to drift away. But we three are still here, and Sébastien is living in the Ashram.

Gérard: I tried leaving once in 1970. I planned to go to Canada via Kathmandu. But when I reached Kathmandu I realised the only thing that mattered was Mother, was Auroville, and I came back. Then I knew I had to stay.

Janaka: I left after one year. I had problems with the collectivity, and my wife, who had come with the caravan, had returned to France and I was missing her. I went to Mother and told her I had decided to return. She looked at me, laughing, and said, 'It would be better if you stayed here, petit'. I told her again I wanted to return. She looked at me and then I knew I could return. Mother paid my plane ticket, I had no money. I often came back in the winter months to work on Matrimandir and I returned for good in 1988.

François: I liked the Ashram, I used to go a lot to the samadhi and I also met Satprem; it was very easy to meet him in those days. Then I moved to Golconde for three months, and when my money ran out, Satprem asked the Mother if I could become an Ashramite. She agreed and she put me in a garden where they grow the flowers that come to the samadhi. I stayed there for seven years and was very happy.

But when Mother died, everything began to change. I came back to Auroville in 1977. It was not an easy re-entry because that was the time of all these troubles with the Society.

What was the importance of the caravan?

François: There were already a few people living here, but I think Auroville really started when we came. Aspiration played such an important role in the early history of Auroville, and this caravan, whatever the faults of the people and their shortcomings, gave an impetus to Auroville. Everything started from this.

Gérard: You could feel that Mother had a plan for the people who had come. I had a lot of problems in the early days, I didn't know what to do, but I knew she was preparing us for something. When Matrimandir started in 1970, I knew that was it, and I didn't do anything else for 20 years. She was preparing us.

Janaka: Mother saw the Aspiration group quite regularly; that helped. The first time I went, she answered a few questions and then she looked at each of us, one by one. It was very impressive. After this, nobody spoke. When the concentration finished, she said it had been a very noisy silence!

François: I think she was fond of the French group, even though we did not conform at all to what the Ashram expected.

Janaka: Mother liked sincerity. If you were sincere, it was okay.

François: In spite of all the physical difficulties, it was a good time. The best time.

Gérard: It was different then. The mind was not there, it was more of an intuitive thing because of Mother. Then things changed. We have gone from a very simple way of life to very elaborate organizational structures. I don't think anything is lost: we are on the way to something else. It was like magic then, but the magic of Auroville is still here. That's why I stayed. The magic is still here, Mother and Sri Aurobindo are working on and leading the way.

From an interview by Alan

La Caravane pour Auroville

Initially, I did not wish to speak or write about it. So far I have always refused to be interviewed on the subject. All my life I have never been keen on stirring up the past or dwelling on it too long. I tend to look forward, not back. And here we would be talking of something that happened not only many years ago, but many lives ago! How was I to restore a faded picture that has long lost for me its appeal, its shine? I said no.

But my brother Cristof insisted I share whatever survives of this 'mythical' episode with Alan and others. Words, sentences, images started trickling in... So here is my take on the 1969 Caravan to Auroville. An account necessarily subjective, partial and woefully incomplete, since I have only dim recollections, and no vivid memories, except for a couple of incidents, or accidents rather, and an overwhelming experience in the grounds of the Taj Mahal, which I do not care to relate here.

In retrospect, it was not the glorious Odyssey some would have liked it to be. Yes, when the convoy left Paris, it truly felt special: the name AUROVILLE written in big letters across the white vehicles, the emblematic pink Hibiscus flower painted next to it! The goal, the mission, the challenge! How proud we all were! Bystanders and motorists must have been wondering what this new 'Auroville' circus was about! The happy clowns, the deft acrobats, gradually lost their smile and balance in the dust of Afghanistan. What started off as a leisurely summer picnic turned into a grim race against time. A gruesome race against pain and fatigue. Sore backs, stiff necks, aching arms and shoulders, cramping legs. Bodies which felt so exhausted, so utterly drained, that our brains started to go numb, and our eyes glazed over.

We all did our bit, as best we could. Some were better at driving, some better at fixing up the battered vehicles, some better at dreaming up or thinking aloud. Some better at just trudging along.

Who then was the best or the most helpful camel in the lot? I cannot say. I personally loved driving, and was not too bad at it. I believe I did my share. I have always been fond of working backstage, unnoticed. After all, in 1969 I was coming out of a tough 2-year apprenticeship under Guy-Claude François, the talented stage designer working for Ariane Mnouchkine and her 'Théâtre du Soleil'. This taught me, among other things, that for a human collectivity to survive, it must be founded on a shared vision, and not on any petty personal gain or selfish ambition.

Then there was M'zali. None of us knew really how M'zali got on the bus, but in the end we were all glad he did. The happy-going grinning Malian, the soon-to-be 'Krishna', had no driving experience, was no mechanic, yet proved a valuable cook. His strength never ceased to impress. He could lift up a truck's wheel with one finger (say two), and push a car out of a hole almost single-handedly! He was, it seemed, no stranger to deserts. To me it looked like he had been secretly trained by Tuaregs to rescue sick camels fallen into dry wells.

Alain Monnier had a driving license and a keen sense of duty. A little older than the rest of us, the only officially married person in the group, the only one too with a real profession and an undepleted bank account, discipline in his eyes was the key to success. Bernard Delambre, alias BD, now our 'homme de lettres' Janaka, was more willing to confront the leadership and promote his own ideas on all kind of topics, from cooking to tent pitching to road picking.

Like the outspoken Bernard, François Gautier never minded late night discussions, sharing with night birds his penchant for the occult or the unconventional. François loved bringing up lofty or weird otherworldly subjects during the conciliabule. Not many of his less cultured companions, Gérard excepted, could share his passion for surrealist poetry, ritual art and the supraphysical.

Vincenzo the boss, el Padrone, did not care much for the sightseeing exercise. Once we hit the road, he tensed up. He was no longer the charming companion, the laid-back hero who had won so many hearts at the

'L'association pour Auroville' headquarters in Paris. He realised that most of the money allotted to the project had already been spent on vehicle purchases and upgrades, on spares to keep us going till Aspiration and beyond (how childish day-dreamers we all were!), on tons of equipment for Auroville. We were on a mission, not on a holiday. We were nomads, migratory birds, tigers on the prowl, budding supermen.

The mission! The boss kept driving the message home time and again when our thoughts strayed too far from India.

Most of the rest showed some genuine aspiration or good will, but were quite ignorant of what Auroville was or wanted to be. Several had not read a word from Sri Aurobindo or the Mother. The group leaders, Vincenzo and Steven, were the only ones who had stayed in Auroville or Pondicherry. They had been seen by the Mother. So had I, in July 1967, when Cristof and myself decided to spend our summer vacations with our mother Svetlana who had joined the Ashram two years earlier. When we were about to take leave, the Mother told us "A bientôt!"

So this journey to India felt more like a home-coming than a thrilling expedition to some unknown earthly Paradise. That may explain why I was not too concerned with what was going on around me, which the rest of the gang probably mistook for aloofness or disdain. Like Vincenzo, I had my eyes, mind and heart fixed on the goal: India, Auroville, and, above all, to be once again part of the Mother's atmosphere, to serve Her once more, in this life like in many others before it, to have once again the blessed opportunity to work for Sri Aurobindo.

Was La Caravane a success? Considering how ill-prepared we were for such a daunting challenge, both mentally and physically, I would be tempted to say we did not do too badly. With the help and protection of She who can only truly guide and save. For She had been told the madcaps were on their way! Without Her support it would have been an even more gruelling experience.

Do we need a remake? Probably not. If attempted again, the journey would have been better documented for sure. The Afghanistan leg alone, had it been recorded on camera, could have easily been made into a thriller! Once we hit the sandy tracks down south, all but the lead vehicle had to be driven in a cloud of dust with visibility ahead reduced to 3 feet! Soon enough one of the cars missed a sharp turn to the left, bounced off the track and got stuck in the sand. Good we had a spare Hercules onboard!

Then came the climax, the part Vincenzo dreaded most: the "tôle ondulée", or washboard road. To avoid being tossed up and down like pancakes, el Padrone told us we had to maintain a speed fast enough to sail over the hardened sand ripples... without losing grip!

Thanks for the tip! Before long, while slowing down on a curve, a van hit a nasty ridge, jumped in the air and fell flat on the road. Those trucks were so madly overloaded that ground clearance was down to a couple of inches. The bottom of the gearbox got punctured as it slammed in the sand. Oil started leaking out. We carried no spares for this. Anyway attempting to replace an old van's transmission box in the middle of the desert would have proved futile. It took Steven and Vincenzo hours to plug the hole with Araldite.

We eventually made it to India. Getting into Delhi, one of the vans decided to throw in the towel, and collapsed. It had to be towed by a car all the way from the capital to Aspiration, on often narrow, snaky, bumpy roads.

At last, we reached Auroville. We crawled our way to the Aspiration huts. On arrival, or very soon after, the four vehicles died. But we lived on to discover a by now familiar landscape, a little redder only. The treacherous Afghan desert had prepared us well for the sun-baked plateau. We were ready to take on the Auroville canyons. *À quelque chose malheur est bon!*

Sébastien Pitoëff Pondicherry, 21.02.2015



Aspiration in 1970

The second caravan: a modern odyssey

In early 1974 an Aurovilian, Jean-Claude Bieri, who was on a visit to France, suggested forming another caravan to take a large number of people to Auroville. Christine Devin, Nicole Elfi and Shankar, who were working in the office of the Auroville French Association in Paris, enthusiastically took up the challenge of organizing it. While Jean-Claude went to Germany to purchase a second-hand Mercedes bus, they circulated news about the caravan in their bulletin, and began collecting names.

By September about 30 people had signed up, and their details had been sent to Shyamsunder, the Auroville liaison appointed by Mother (Mother had left her body in November, 1973). Not everybody was immediately accepted by him. Nicole and Christine were rejected because they not have sufficient funds to stay for one year in Auroville, Claude Arpi because he did not treat the application form with the proper respect ("it seemed so old world"), and Paul Pinthon was invited to apply again in a few years. However, Paul wrote back to Shyamsunder that he had decided to come now and nothing would stop him, and when Shankar wrote a similar comment on behalf of the others, the issue was not raised again.

By this time the Mercedes bus had been repaired and converted, and two vans had joined the fleet as it was planned to transport considerable equipment to Auroville, in addition to the luggage of the caravanners, some of whom did not expect to return to France. The luggage included Claude's dental equipment, pullovers for Tibetans, Paul's record collection and a friend's set of Playboy magazines. He had planned to sell them en route, but finally was persuaded to leave them behind because of anticipated problems at border crossings.

The journey of 13,000 kilometres would last two months (for most of them) and would take them through Italy, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan, before reaching India. It did not begin auspiciously. While the rest of the caravan waited in Provence, one lorry that was meant to bring equipment failed to show up – it was rumoured that all the wheels had been stolen – and was never seen again. When the rest finally set off, on the first evening the driver of one of the vans managed to demolish the roof of a petrol station when he miscalculated the height. The van survived, but the bill for the damage to the petrol station was sent to the Association, much to Shankar's chagrin.

Eastern Europe was a new and not always pleasant experience for the caravanners. In Bulgaria they were stopped by large men with guns – "We didn't know if they were gangsters, army or police" said Hervé – who demanded to see their passports, and in Yugoslavia the caravan had camped for the night when the police told them to move on because they mistook them for a circus.

It was with some relief, then, that the caravan reached Istanbul, gateway to Asia. It was here that Claude experienced his first Turkish bath. "One of my travel companions was convinced (and he convinced me quickly) that the first thing to do was to find a Turkish bath, to 'wash away' all our fatigue and tension. Indeed, we soon found one of those famous baths (for men only, of course). I don't think I've ever experienced such pain, right down to the cells of my body, inflicted by the huge paws of the Turkish masseur, and all the while my companion kept telling me, 'the more it hurts, the better it is for the body'."

In eastern Turkey, the caravan stopped by a river one evening. The place seemed secluded, so a few of the women took off most of their clothes and began to bathe. However, the place was not as secluded as they had thought. They were being watched by an excited group of young men. That evening, as the group was preparing supper, they suddenly became aware that they had visitors: the young men were gathering around. It was a dangerous moment.

Luckily, the mayor of the nearby town came along with his dogs. "He told us we could stay the night but had to move on in the morning," remembers Christine. "This man spent the whole night guarding us with his dogs, and we also took turns ourselves to guard the camp. We didn't sleep. Next day we resumed our journey at full speed."

Iran was next. One day they were camped next to the Caspian when a man came along and invited them back to his place. "It was huge," remembers Paul Pinthon, "with many rooms. Incredible as it may seem, this man – who was a general of the Shah of Iran – knew about Sri Aurobindo and Mother. He gave us caviar and vodka and let us



Members of the second caravan

sleep on the floor of his palace."

It was a welcome break for the caravanners from the daily routine of long hours on the road and setting up and taking down camp. By this time, many of the roles had been established. Jean-Claude, Michelle Cortella and Jacques were the bus drivers, Hervé and Guy the van drivers, Paul Vincent, the tour guide who made sure they stopped at the right time every day, sat resplendent in his red robes at the front of the bus, and Paul Pinthon took responsibility for handling passport matters at border crossings.

By this time, also, differences were beginning to emerge among the caravanners. At first these were minor, like issues about sharing chores like the cooking and washing-up. Then there were those who wanted to get to Auroville as quickly as possible and those who wanted to do some sight-seeing on the way. And then there were 'the forcings'. "The forcings," explains Christine, "were the times when we couldn't find the right place to stop for the night and we would start discussing where to stop. Then Hervé, would say, 'Discuss all you like but I am going to keep driving,' and we would end up driving through the night."

"I had everybody's luggage with me," says Hervé, "so they were obliged to follow."

There were other tensions, remembers Christine, as people's propensities and capacities began to emerge. "There were the complainers and the preachers. There were the hard workers who did the shopping, cooking and dishes, and there were those who only came to the fire when the soup was served. There were those who wanted to sleep in the morning and those who took responsibility for getting us going on time. There were the professional protesters who wanted daily meetings and argued about whether decisions should be made by a relative majority or an absolute majority, there were the reasonable ones who tried to discipline the unruly, and

then there were those who remained stubbornly silent. In other words, this group of individuals was already a mini Auroville."

Surprisingly, one of the things they never talked about en route was Auroville, in spite of the fact that Auroville was their destination and that three of them – Jean-Claude, Paul Vincent and Jacques Chapdelaine, a Canadian – had been there before. "We were more interested in the new things we were discovering on the way," explains Paul Pinthon, "and, anyway, the major topic was always who was going to do the cooking. If nobody cooked, there would have been a revolution!"

The cultures they were passing through also exerted their own pressure on the group. Claude remembers that the people of Iran were very tense. "You felt the power of the ayatollahs."

At first Afghanistan felt far more relaxed. "Nature was so beautiful, the air so clean," says Christine, "and the people from the mountains had such a noble quality to them".

They stopped in Herat, where the only vehicles were tongas. "It was like stepping into the Middle Ages," says Christine. "At night you would hear nothing but the bells of the tongas. It was beautiful."

However, there was another side to Afghanistan. They were passing through a Pashtun area and the army and tribes people constantly stopped the caravan and demanded money to proceed. And it was in Afghanistan that the most serious incident of the whole journey took place.

Guy was driving one of the vans along the road when a man suddenly appeared from behind a bus. Guy could not stop in time, the man was knocked down and his leg broken. Hervé, who was also in the van, takes up the story. "We stopped immediately and were surrounded by about a hundred people. A man with a gun came into the van, and we had to take the

injured man to the next village, where we had to pick up an official before taking the man to hospital. It took this official five or six hours to say goodbye to his family because we had to go back to Herat, and meanwhile the guy was groaning in the back of the van.

"We took him to hospital, then we came back to the village with a police escort. We parked the van outside the office of the local chief of police, which was just a small room. The chief of police got a guy out of jail to play an instrument, and meanwhile somebody offered him a trout. He started cooking it in front of us while the other one was playing this instrument in the corner, and then we all ate together. Later, he sent the musician back to jail (the police chief obviously only released him when he wanted a musical accompaniment to his meals) and asked us to sleep on the floor, but we insisted on sleeping in the van for security.

"In the morning, we found we were free to do whatever we wanted. So for some weeks, while we waited for the guy to be released from hospital, every morning we would go to the baker for bread and then we settled down for the day. A few times we had to go to court to answer questions. There was a jail in town but we never went to jail. I was relaxed. I was reading Mother's *Entretiens* and eating well, but Guy was suffering. He wanted to get away as soon as possible."

Guy was not the only one who was suffering. The rest of the caravan stopped in Kabul and held many intense meetings about what they should do next. "The differences between our different groupings, the 'vitalists', the 'supramentals', the 'democrats', the 'I don't cares' and the hard workers were increasing," remembers Claude. "Winter was coming and tensions mounted because we did not know if the Khyber Pass, (between Afghanistan and Pakistan), would be open much longer. Should we leave or wait for Guy and Hervé to be released?"

"All this was the subject of many debates, meetings, disputes, altercations. The actual human unity was not always obvious. Finally, it was decided that Christine and myself would remain and try to free our two fellow prisoners with the assistance of the Embassy of France, while the others continued on to India."

When the French Embassy staff proved as sleepy and uncooperative as everybody else in Kabul, Christine and Claude took the train to Amritsar, and finally caught up with the rest of the caravan in Delhi.

The first contact with India was a significant moment for some of the caravanners. "The Golden Temple in Amritsar was very beautiful," remembers Claude. "I attended the reading of the Guru Granth Sahib, the holy book of the Sikhs, and it was my first contact with this profound India. It was another world in which we had entered ... to stay.

Forty years later, we forget sometimes what makes India so special, but if one is willing to take a step back, we can always find this India that welcomed us so warmly in 1974 and ... preserved us."

Paul Pinthon had a similar deep experience at the border crossing itself.



Meals on the road

continued on page 6



The caravan arrives in Aspiration. From left to right: Jean-Claude Refuveille (Sourya's father), Christine Devin, Ella-Maria Vieris (in Ashram still), Nicole Elfi (in Coimbatore), Claude Arpi, Paul Pinthon, Jacqueline (not part of the caravan but she was there that afternoon to welcome it), Jean-Claude Bieri, Jean Bembaron

continued from page 5

"In Pakistan we had felt the hatred in the streets because the women in our caravan were not wearing chadors. When I entered India, the first thing I saw were women – they were so magnificent, so feminine – and then birds. It was like a welcoming. It was a very strong moment."

Once the caravan reached India, the tourist lobby among the caravanners finally won out, and quite a few side trips were made to places like Agra, Brindavan and Khajuraho, as the caravan made its way towards Pondicherry (Claude, Paul Pinthon, Nicole and Christine went to Brindavan and Mathura to avoid even looking at the Taj Mahal, which was right in front of their noses at one time. But that is another story).

Near Hyderabad, the bus hit a speed breaker while travelling too fast and the front of the vehicle collapsed. "There followed one of the most fantastic repairs that I have ever done in my life," remembers Paul Vincent. He and Jean-Claude ran a large wooden beam underneath the bus and joined this to a kind of mast. The collapsed front and back of the vehicle were then tied with strong ropes to this mast. Incredibly, this makeshift repair held up until the caravan reached Auroville.

The main part of the caravan, 35 people, finally arrived in Aspiration on December 20th, 1974. "My first impression of Auroville was that it was so beautiful," remembers Christine, "the nature was very beautiful." Amazingly, while accommodation was already scarce in those days, everybody was allocated a place to stay, some in Aspiration itself, others in communities like Utility.

Some weeks later, Hervé and Guy finally arrived. They had been released from 'trout' custody after a few weeks, but their adventures were not over. When they reached the Pakistan border, the border guard demanded the transit permit for the van and they realized they had mislaid it. Hervé went into the back of the vehicle, scribbled something on a piece of paper, poured a little oil over it, then presented it to the border guard. He stamped it without comment.

However, when they reached the Indian border, the Indian guards were not so obliging. When Guy and Hervé could not produce the correct import document for the vehicle, the border police confiscated the vehicle. "They cocooned it completely in the kind of paper you wrap samosas in," said Hervé. Hervé and Guy tried for some days to get help from Pondicherry and Auroville, but nobody responded. In the end, they took the train to Pondicherry. "When the Toujours Mieux people heard that all the promised equipment had been confiscated at the border, they were furious," remembers Hervé. Eventually, an Aurovilian did fly up to negotiate the release of the van and most of its contents. But Paul Pinthon's prized collection of records was never seen again.

Today, only seven of those thirty-four caravanners are still living here: Claude Arpi, Christine Devin, Paul Pinthon, Paul Vincent, Hervé, Jerome and Gundolf. In fact, many of the original group did not stay long. "Everybody had their own motive for coming," says Claude, "And it soon became clear that not everybody was coming for Auroville."

"Some had dreams," explains Paul Pinthon, "but their dreams were too far from the reality. Some people thought Auroville was already built. It was a big shock for them when they saw how little was here, and that the Matrimandir was just

four pillars sticking out of the earth. They were just not ready for this. For me, however, it was exactly the right time."

So what was the significance of the second caravan to those who had made the journey?

For some, like Paul Pinthon, it was an invaluable introduction to Auroville and the Aurovilians. "The caravan helped us, prepared us, for what we were coming to. I took the caravan as a tool to learn, because I knew it was a kind of mini-Auroville."

For others, like Christine, it was a unique adventure. "We sung around a fire with kids in Anatolia; we tasted caviar washed down with vodka on the banks of the Caspian Sea. We visited the bazaars of Istanbul and Kabul and politely refused to barter one (or two) of the girls for fifty camels. We negotiated with the Afghan authorities for the release of our friends. We drank Turkish coffee on the shore of the Black Sea, ate Yugoslav yogurt that tasted like cement, Iranian naans the size of carpets, black bread of the Afghan military and brown rice – we were all macrobiotic in those days – transported from France in large jute bags. We camped at the foot of the Taj Mahal, in the middle of the temples of Khajuraho, and we prayed in the sacred dust of Brindavan."

And what about the significance of this caravan for Auroville?

Paul Vincent felt that a kind of group spirit had been created that would survive long after the caravanners arrived in Auroville. "It would be the seed that would form the body of the revolt of Auroville against the oppression of the so-called 'leaders' and 'owner' of Auroville in 1975. If these people had been able to predict what was going to happen, they would never have allowed us to come to Auroville."

Paul Pinthon did not feel that the caravanners ever 'bonded' and that the arrival of the second caravan did not change anything immediately. "But we were all full of enthusiasm; we were new, we were fresh. In that sense the second caravan brought young blood in order to participate in that fight with the Society."

Claude remembers that they immediately started to change things. "We started to clean up the Health Centre and change things at the school. There was one Bengali devotee teaching at the school. He would bring water in the morning from the Samadhi, and every student had to stand in line and get a drop of that water. We stopped that, but they didn't like it at all, the Ashram people who were coming to Auroville. The old establishment got a bit tense."

There were to be no more caravans. Within a few years the overland route to India was almost impassable and Auroville was no longer the 'promised land' of the early 1970s: life here became progressively harder as the struggle with the Society intensified. Yet, for all its shortcomings, the caravan symbolized something of the spirit of those times and the heartfelt response to Mother's call – "I invite you to the great adventure" – that inspired, and continues to inspire, so many of those early Aurovilians.

In that sense, the caravan never stopped rolling...

Alan

This article is partly based on articles by Christine and Claude in the February, 2015 issue of *La Revue d'Auroville*.

Organizing the caravan

Caravanning was pretty much in the air those days. So, when, in the beginning of 1974, in the office of "Auroville International France", (AIF), Paris 8^e, an Aurovilian, Jean-Claude Biéri, who had come for a visit, suggested forming a caravan to transport a large number of people to Auroville, the temptation was impossible to resist. Christine Devin and Nicole Elfi, who were both working with me in AIF, manifested an immediate interest. As for me, I decided to put on hold my major activity, namely touring UNESCO's exhibition on Sri Aurobindo, Mother, Ashram and Auroville, to take an active part in the organization. It was very exciting as we all shared the "Band of Brothers" spirit.

The saga ended by the arrival of the bus in Aspiration, in December 1974. I was not among the caravanners. The full story is too long to tell and, anyhow, I was more interested in the organisation than in the thrill of the journey.

The caravanners owe a great deal of gratitude to three persons who, like me, were not part of the crew. Firstly, Micheline Étévenon who was the head of AIF. She was already paying through her personal pocket the rent of the large flat that sheltered this association. In addition to that, she was the one who footed the bill of the heavy additional finances needed for the preparations. Micheline's generosity was legendary. All along she supported and encouraged the caravan, resisting her husband Pierre's stern reproof of what he considered – not without justification – as a crazy collective trip.

Another person was (in a way) helpful: Shyamsundar. In the summer of 1973, during my first visit to Auroville, I had been introduced to him as one of the AIF office bearers. As Christine and Nicole had not been to Auroville before, the task of dealing with the person in charge of Auroville administration was given to me. I had to liaise with Shyamsundar almost every day regarding acceptance of the caravanners in Auroville. They had to get the much needed recommendation letter from Auroville before applying to the Indian Embassy for a long-term visa. So I had to forward their biodata, administrative information and motivation letters to Auroville, relay back when further information was needed, and patiently wait for the precious sesame to open. Dealing with Shyamsundar was not that difficult. He was curt but direct. If a misunderstanding occurred, he seemed willing to reconsider a decision if he had made it based on a wrong impression.

Alain Bernard is the third person to whom the caravanners owe quite a bit. Before Micheline, Alain had been the head of AIF for one full year. He knew Micheline, Pierre, Nicole and myself very well, and he was already close to Christine. Alain was the one who, all along, maintained the necessary link between Auroville and Paris. He actively and efficiently prepared the ground for the caravanners' arrival, finding for each one of them a decent shelter in an Auroville already suffering from scarcity of accommodations. And he was also the one who liaised with Shyamsundar whenever explanations were needed. A considerable work was accomplished by Alain. Without him, the arrival of the bus in Aspiration would have been a fiasco.

Today, in spite of the fact that Vincenzo was Italian, Jean-Claude was Swiss and the bus was German, both caravans are being somewhat introduced as part of the activities of "Pavillon de France". In reality, the caravanners' mood was more in tune with the 'Mai 68' rebellious spirit than any kind of patriotic feeling. In brief, nobody was carrying the "tricolor".

The only event bearing some French flavour happened in Aspiration soon after the arrival of the caravan with the launching of a restaurant called "La Joie de Vivre". This odd initiative got Satprem's attention. He reminded the joyful chaps that they had not come to Auroville to dance the "French cancan" and that their "Folies Bergère" was out of place in Aspiration. So a discreet farewell was hurriedly given to "french fries" and "croque-monsieur"!

Shankar

EQUESTRIAN SPORTS

RERS hosts second PEC



PHOTO: A.J. SHARMA

From February 2nd to 8th 2015, the second Pondicherry Equestrian Challenge (PEC) was hosted at Red Earth Riding School, Brihaspati, Auroville. Horses and riders came from Bangalore, Chennai, Tirupur, Tuticorin and even as far as Calcutta.

Auroville riders, who had been training at Red Earth and felt ready to meet the challenge, also took the opportunity to showcase the progress they have made in the past year to crowds of up to 1,500 spectators from Auroville, Pondicherry and the surrounding areas.

The tournament started with two days of dressage, which was part of the Indian Dressage League (IDL), an ongoing competition across India, and the National Dressage Championship. Two Fédération Équestre Internationale (FEI)

judges travelled to Auroville to oversee the event.

On the weekend, there were twelve thrilling showjumping courses, ranging from 80 cm jumps for beginners to a 130 cm jumps grand prix finale on Sunday afternoon.

Special guests from Pondicherry, including the Honourable Lieutenant-Governor A.K. Singh and the Minister of Tourism Mr. Rajavelu, attended during the weekend, and they deeply appreciated the spirit of the occasion. For the PEC presents a wonderful opportunity for people from Pondicherry and the surrounding area to participate in an event in Auroville which is free and open to all. Visiting riders enjoy being in a supportive environment where they perceive there is a common effort to make the show a success and to help everybody to progress in their riding.

Hilary Smith

Saarang: A space to experience Indian music

Sometimes it's the small moments of synchronicity that seem to point quietly at something else that is at work, perhaps a grace. Such was the case for the recent Saarang exhibition-event at India Space in Bharat Nivas. The project, which explores the essence and histories of Hindustani and Carnatic music, had been in the planning stages for months. The date for the inauguration was shifted continuously to suit everyone's needs, until it settled on January 24. In the meantime, the symbol of Saraswati, the Hindu goddess of education and music, was chosen to highlight the art adorning the festival brochures and banners. It turned out that January 24 was Saraswati Puja. Another synchronicity: the closing ceremony will coincide with the closing day of the upcoming Auroville Retreat, and Dr. Karan Singh, mentioned within the panels of the exhibition by renowned musician Shiv Kumar Sharma, will be invited to attend the final concert.

These few moments have been the magic in the months of planning and preparation for the exhibition-event. It marks the second such event in the past year, the first being the Tribute to Kerala last fall. As India Space wants to explore the essence of unity of India through all its diversity, the India Space Team, consisting of Aster, Shilpa, Tapas, and Anu, decided to showcase the instruments and music taught, played, and loved across religious and regional divides in India. But they didn't want it just to be an exhibition. They wanted to create a space into which one would enter and experience something.

One of their first ways of attempting this was to exhibit musical instruments from both the Hindustani and Carnatic traditions of Indian classical music. Individuals and art centres generously came forward to loan over 45 musical instruments. One man brought a drum played only by Dalits. Another rarity is a five-headed drum from Kerala, "Panch Mukha Mizhavu," which is so old that no one knows how to play it anymore. As the exhibition began to take shape, it seemed something was missing, as it did not show the process of creation of the various pieces. So the team created a corner of India Space where one can see how an instrument is created, such as in the villages of India. Two tall pieces of bamboo tower over a workshop table, and as you look closely, you can observe the process that bamboo undergoes to become a flute.

So many instruments in one space are an open invitation to pick them up and play. But the team



Shilpa, Aster and Anu at Saarang in India Space, Bharat Nivas, in the International Zone

took this into account and there is a table full of instruments that you can practice on.

It doesn't stop there. The event portion of Saarang features concerts and workshops that have been running continuously since January and will end in March. This has included a sitar performance, talks on Carnatic and Hindustani music, interactive workshops on the tabla, and more.

This integrated experience, more an "educational exploration" than an exhibition, says Shilpa, has drawn in crowds. While they expected 40 people to attend the inauguration, over 200 showed up. Every day there is a stream of visitors from Auroville and the outside, and 80 people attended the most recent workshop. School groups come from Pondicherry and Auroville to see the wide variety of musical instruments on display. "The response has been unexpected, but very fulfilling," says Anu. "Many people comment on the atmosphere here."

It is this atmosphere that continues to draw people to the centre of the Bharat Nivas for the Saarang exhibition. And this echoes the larger goal of India Space: to create a central core in Bharat Nivas in which to explore the theme of Unity in Diversity. There are future plans to conduct guided walking tours around the campus, but India Space hopes to serve as a central starting point in that journey.

A recent article in Auroville Today noted that Bharat Nivas seems a little empty these days. Saarang seems to be changing that. Not only is it increasing the number of visitors to the site, but it is furthering connections between Auroville and the larger art scene in India. "Artists are excited to come to Auroville to perform; they know Auroville," said Anu. "We like to connect with artists who connect inwardly with Auroville."

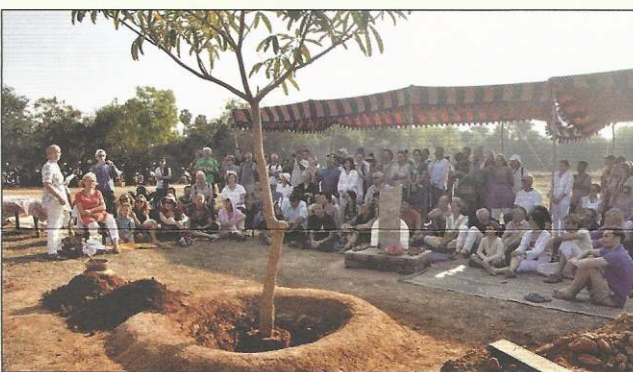
Working with such artists and creating such experiences for the people who visit continues to take time. "For the team, and for the people who come to visit, it's a totally different path we're walking," says Aster. "The experience is multi-dimensional. That's also India. You can live it at so many levels. And that's Auroville too. To walk into a space and experience it is, to me, real creativity."

As of now, the India Space team plans to host two exhibition-events per year, though they are keeping quiet about what's next in store. "What is happening here now," says Aster, "is that we're working to create new forms for the new energy. And that's why the challenge of the new creation is so difficult."

Ing-Marie

European pavilion tree planted

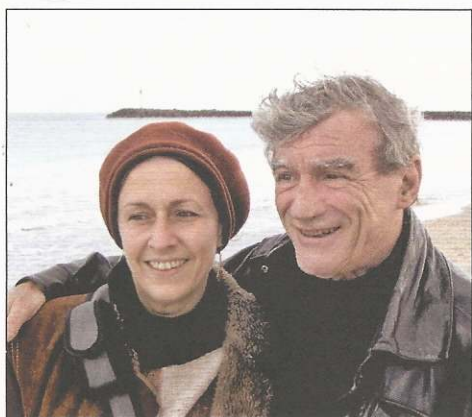
On the afternoon of February 21, a festive ceremony of the European pavilion groups took place attended by 160 people. In a beautiful atmosphere – concentrated and charged with the aspiration for freedom, peace and unity on the European continent and for the world at large, but also light and cheerful with impromptu musical performances – a tree was planted to mark the beginning of further development in the European area of Auroville's International Zone. Soil from 44 European countries and soil from the Samadhi was mixed with the Auroville soil with the sincere wish that it may nourish the tree and also our own dedication and joy of togetherness. As a companion to the tree (*Alstonia Scholars*), a stone sculpture was close by, a combination of white marble pieces from Matrimandir, originally hailing from Italy, and a shell limestone which is common all over Europe.



The central marble piece carries the Mother's name, Mirra, in Sanskrit, a symbol with great protective power, as once described by Her. Protection is very much needed, for the International Zone and for Auroville's overall integrity, so it is hoped that this little ceremony will have positive repercussions in the future!

Friederike, AVI Germany

PASSING



Serge Cataneo

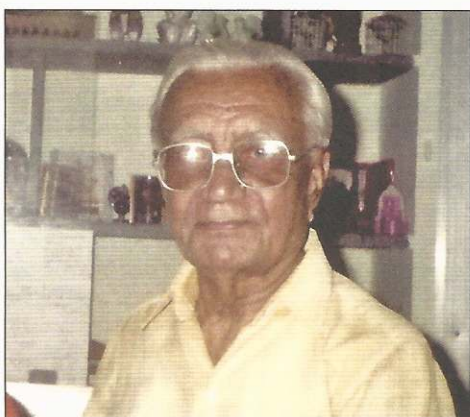
One of Auroville's pioneers, Serge Cataneo, passed away on February 6th at the age of 77, in France where he lived with his long-time partner and wife Flore, also Aurovilian for many years.

Serge came to Auroville in 1976 and lived and worked here until 1992, at first located in Aspiration and working at Toujours Mieux (today Eureka). At a later stage he and Flore moved to Dana, and many of us may remember him through his participation in the 'Théâtre Expression Auroville'. Serge also worked at Aurelec, setting up the software for various Auroville services. The photo shows him together with his wife, Flore.

Jayanth Thakkar

On February 15th, long-term Aurovilian and pioneer, Jayant Thakkar, who lived in Promesse, passed away in the Ashram's nursing home at the age of 94.

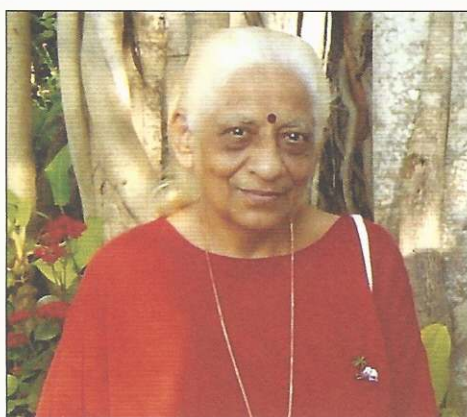
Born in Gujarat in 1920, Jayant participated as a freedom fighter in India's struggle for independence for which also he ended up in jail for a while. During that period he studied works of the



spiritual masters and this gave direction to his life. In 1946 he received his first darshan from Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and thereafter, always remaining in close contact with the Ashram, Jayant established himself in Chennai where he built up a business in surgical equipment. In 1973 the Mother approved of him settling in Promesse, one of the first communities of the City of Dawn, where he has been living since. Jayant taught for several years in Udavi School and did Matrimandir duty.

Jayant Bhai was also a philanthropist, and he helped the people in Morattandi village by giving them the basic necessities at very low prices, which he got from other donors. He did not give anything free because he believed that people do not attach value to anything that is got free. The collected money was again spent for them for different purposes. He was a businessman. He said Mother gave him money in his business so that he could give it back to the Ashram and Auroville, which he did.

Jayant Bhai was fondly remembered, along with the other two of the trinity of Promesse in those days – Kusum Ben and Shanti di. They will be remembered with respect, for the way they stood up alone, against all odds, in their lives and for their undaunted spirit.



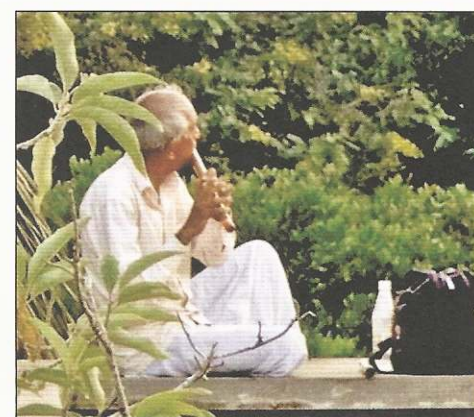
Lachmanben

Long-term Aurovilian Lachmanben (Lachman Melvani) peacefully left her body in the early morning on the eve of the Mother's Birthday, February 20, in her house in Aurobindavan. She was 85 years old.

Born in Karachi in the late twenties, Lakshmanben joined Auroville in June 1969. Very soon she started experimenting with various food and other products with a handful of local employees. This developed into the New School Crafts enterprise in Aurobindavan, which produced amongst other things the now famous, and very much Auroville-used, Avatar hibiscus juice.

Lachmanben maintained a close contact with her workers, whose wellbeing was dear to her. Up till her very last day she was passionately talking about new plans and projects for her company.

Lachmanben was a friendly, low-profile and self-contained person whose strong link with Sri Aurobindo and Mother was the guiding line in her life. Having friends and family in the Ashram, the connection always remained close. Her remains were taken care of by her family there.



7 (Ramachandra Rao)

Long-term Aurovilian 7 (Ramachandra Rao who insisted he be named '7') passed away in a Chennai hospital where his family had taken him. The exact date and cause of his death are still unconfirmed. He was 67 years old.

7, who joined Auroville in the early seventies and has been here off and on since then, may always remain an enigma for us as his apparently passionate and burning need to express his inner findings and vision of Auroville tended to come through in a continuous flow of not easy to follow monologues, profoundly interlaced with his interpretation of the vision of our founders. As one Aurovilian put it, "There was something about his unique personality that could effortlessly (and unconsciously) unmask our pretensions and make us confront elements of ourselves that we didn't suspect were there. The work of a collectivity is complex work. Each of us is indispensable. I am grateful..."

In later years, many may have witnessed 7, neatly and cleanly dressed, quietly sitting at a corner of La Terrace on the roof of Solar Kitchen, playing his flute for hours on end in the late afternoon sun.

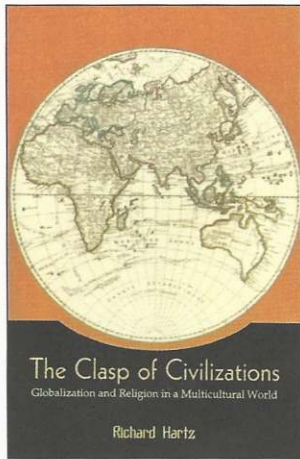
The clasp of civilizations

One of the greatest challenges of our times is how to view and to handle diversity – religious, cultural, gender, or whatever. Are our differences a potential source of conflict or of strength? Should we seek to protect, for example, endangered languages and cultures or accept that the future lies in the increasing homogenization of humanity?

These are some of the questions addressed in Richard Hartz's new book *The Clasp of Civilizations: Globalization and Religion in a Multicultural World*. The title, of course, refers to Samuel Huntingdon's influential book, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, in which Huntingdon argues that future conflicts would most likely occur because of the 'clash' of the values of different civilizations, noting that the most likely conflicts would be between the West and Islam or China.

Hartz believes that Huntingdon overstates the distinctiveness of different cultures, noting that there is no such thing as cultural 'purity' and that all cultures influence and are influenced by the contact with others. Historically, these cross-influences have often been to the benefit of both. Hence the 'clasp' of civilizations.

Today, however, under the pressure of globalization the future of some cultures may be in doubt. Predictions of the effect of globalization upon cultures fall into three groups: either it will



have no effect upon cultures because the differences that distinguish them are too strong; or it will lead to convergence and homogenization; or it will result in 'hybridization', where different cultures act upon each other to generate new forms.

Francis Fukuyama, Huntingdon's former student, argued in his book *The End of History and the Last Man* that Western liberal democracy is possibly the end-point of humanity's social and political evolution. In a fascinating chapter on the first Parliament of Religions, held in Chicago in 1893, Hartz examines this 'supremacist' tendency as it relates to religion. He shows how the organizers of the Parliament hoped to use it as a display case for the supremacy of Christianity over all other world religions. But this was stymied by the charismatic Swami Vivekananda, who mounted a vigorous defence of religious pluralism:

Much has been said of the common ground of religious unity... But if anyone here hopes that this unity will come by the triumph of any one of the religions and the destruction of the others, to him I say, 'Brother, yours is an impossible hope'...

Vivekananda, writes Hartz, "was a breaker of barriers and had contempt for narrow and exclusive identities". He was also a fine example of a strong rational intellect informed by a supra-rational vision. "The way to intuition is through reason," he wrote.

Sri Aurobindo, of course, was another such figure, and he is often quoted in this book. In one chapter, Hartz compares the insights of Sri Aurobindo with those of the American philosopher Reinhold Niebuhr, who wrote so incisively about the dark side of the 'American Dream'. While Niebuhr was a Protestant theologian, like Sri Aurobindo he applied the insights of an ancient spiritual tradition to the problems of the modern world. Both agreed upon seeing the human ego as a false centre of existence and of the need to cultivate serenity or equanimity as a first step for spiritual progress. And both foresaw the possibility of a future human unity being founded upon a spiritual basis.

In the final chapter, "Intuition and the Limits of Reason", Hartz examines the influence upon science of, respectively, Platonic and Aristotelian thought. Whereas the latter emphasises empirical analysis, the former sees intuition as a critical factor in scientific discovery. Hartz notes that while empirical analysis has played a key role historically in freeing science from the grip of superstition, many of the most important recent discoveries – particularly in the new physics – stem from a process akin to intuition.

Hartz is not interested in elevating one culture above another. He argues that the future of humanity may not depend upon the triumph of one civilization over another but upon the realization by the 'rational' West that rea-

son has its limits, and that it must be informed by those intuitive processes and insights which are more characteristic of the civilizations of the East.

This is a very timely and well-argued book, a major contribution to the debate about multiculturalism, globalization and the future of civilizations. If I have one small criticism, it is that sometimes there is needless repetition – as in some chapters relating to the Parliament of Religions – and this betrays the fact that the book is actually a collection of distinct talks. No doubt, some astute editing will remedy this in the second edition.

Alan

The Clasp of Civilizations: Globalization and Religion in a Multicultural World by Richard Hartz. Published by Nalanda International and D.K. Printworld (P) Ltd. First published in India, 2015. Rs 750

Czerwone Drogi Auroville

Pawel Kowalczyk, who volunteered in Auroville in 2010 in the project "Integral Sustainability Platform" of Alon and Batel, has written a book on Auroville from the volunteer perspective. "Czerwone Drogi Auroville. Wolontariat w Indiach i swiat tamilskich wiosiek" (The red roads/paths of Auroville. Volunteering in India and the world of Tamil villages). The book is probably the first on Auroville in the Polish language. It was published in Poland in October 2014.

SPORTS

Run for the Joy of Running!

Auroville's eighth marathon took place on February 8th 2015. Around 3,500 people ran the winding dirt trails through Auroville's forests – the full marathon of 42.195 kilometres, the half marathon of 21 kilometres, the 10K marathon, or, for children and their parents, the shorter run of 5 kilometres.

"Run for the Joy of Running" was the banner of the event. The marathon started early morning, after a breakfast of pongal and tea was served to all the runners and spectators, with an impressive drumming show organised by Svaram Musical Instruments.

The Auroville marathon continues to impress as Auroville's largest people event. The first Auroville marathon took place in 2008 on the occasion of Auroville's 40th anniversary with 250



runners participating. It has grown ever since. This time, participants came from Mumbai, Hyderabad, Bangalore and Chennai and from neighbouring Puducherry, Kuilapalayam, Edaiyan-chavadi, Kottakarai and other villages. About 370 participants were Aurovillians and students from Auroville's neighbouring schools. Another 150 participants did not register, but joined in on the day itself.

The previous day, each registered runners received a marathon T-shirt and

a number at the Auroville marathon market at the Visitors' Center. The market sells not only Auroville's regular products but also displays Auroville's environmentally and socially conscious wares to spread awareness of Auroville's ideals. Like the number of participants, the market too grows in size each year.

Why so many people? Auroville's marathon is unique as being one of the few, or perhaps the only, 'trail run' in India. Compared to other Indian marathons, the Auroville marathon may well be the greenest. Participants are aware that they are entering a different space, one with a sense of respect for the environment. There is a growing sports culture in India, and with that has come a search for methods of living more closely to nature. Many runners expressed their appreciation for the experience of running through a beautiful forest.

The core team of organizers include five people from the SaraCon Campus to do the logistics and operations; about 450 registered volunteers; an additional 250 volunteers who showed up to help on the day itself and many Auroville units. The Puducherry Medical Centre team, together with the '108' emergency ambulance, did a great job at ensuring that medical help was at hand when needed. Missing – for some runners at least – was the marathon memento, due to lack of funds. That will be rectified for the next marathon.

Kavitha

All-India Frisbee Camp in Auroville

A boy sprints into the end zone of a frisbee field as a spinning disc goes before him, beckoning and hovering. He climbs into the air after it, and with one swipe of his hand sweeps it into possession and a point for his team.

This was a common sight at Auroville's Dehashakti sports ground where the Auroville ultimate frisbee team played host to 180 children, coaches, and chaperones for a highly successful frisbee camp from December 25-30.

Organized by the Chennai NGO *Bridging the Gap*, which brings together schools for underprivileged children from all over India to play frisbee along with other confidence building activities, the young people, aged 10-17, were put together into teams, taught throwing skills and the rules of ultimate frisbee, and then participated in a tournament on the final day of the camp. There were 65 boys and 46 girls in the group.

In addition, they created logos and names for their team, painted t-shirts and played basketball and volleyball. Each participant received a frisbee at the end of the camp.

Besides some of the Auroville frisbee team, many Aurovillians contributed their expertise: Awareness Through the Body sessions, challenge activities (Suzie and Partha), Kalari (Vadivel), fire juggling (Aur) and a film show (Suresh).

Rajiv of Dehashakti opened up the sports ground facilities so that tents were pitched, food was cooked and pick-up

basketball and volleyball games could happen during breaks in the action.

According to Abimanyu of Auroville frisbee, the camp was tightly organized by two experienced members from *Bridging the Gap* so that there were activities of some kind happening all day long and into the evening. Coaches came two days early to receive a detailed schedule of activities (the "Rule" book, put together by Dan Rule, from Australia, coach of the Indian national team). So well organized was it that on the days of rain, a new printed schedule materialized within 20 minutes. During the rain, the camp moved into Transition to follow the new schedule.

Each team fielded five players along with substitutes. Some participants were raw beginners, while others had honed their skills on the beaches of Chennai. The coaches' job was to get everyone to participate and understand that the winning was less important than "spirit," the frisbee code of conduct that requires players to call their own fouls and refrain from pushing and shoving. There are no referees in ultimate frisbee.

The organizers and participants were highly appreciative of the Auroville environment and facilities for this event, especially the sports grounds so well-provided by Rajiv. According to Abi, *Bridging the Gap* plans to hold the event in Auroville again next December, making it another regular event like the marathon.

Gordon Korstange



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Alan, Caryl, Ing-Marie. Guest editor: Kavitha. Proofreading: Alan. DTP: Caryl. Photo editing: Jean-Denis. Published by Caryl Thieme on behalf of the Auroville Fondation. Printed by Brihat Consultants, Pondicherry, and published at Surrender, Auroville - 605101, Tamil Nadu.
Contact: Auroville Today, Samasti, Auroville - 605101, Tamil Nadu, India. Phone: +91.413.2622572, avtoday@auroville.org.in.

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