

Auroville Today

APRIL 2018, No.345

Auroville's monthly news magazine since 1988

8000 people attend Auroville Sangamam

Sangamam in Tamil means 'confluence' or 'a group of people coming together' and this was very much the spirit of this year's gathering on the 4th of March that brought together around 8000 people from Auroville, its beautiful bioregion, and many friends and guests from around the world.

In fact, this Sangamam was the largest event of Auroville's 50th birthday celebrations. It was held in honour of all those who have come together over the last 50 years in Auroville to transform this landscape in a true spirit of human unity. These include many local as well as foreign pioneers.

The festival was inaugurated at 9:00 am with an invocation and lighting of the lamp, called the "kuthu vilakku", by the chief guest, the Auroville Foundation Secretary, Thiru. Mohan Verghese Chunkath I.A.S (retd.) and by Thiru. P.R. Srinivasamurthy. On the stage were many Aurovilian pioneers who came to share their experiences, taking us on a journey down memory lane. The special guests who had been invited to open the event included senior Aurovilians such as Meenakshi, Vardharajan, Shyamala, André, Thirumathi, Frederick, Aster, Thillai and Amudha. When these elders spoke, it helped inspire the crowd and many young aspirants to work in service of a



Welcoming guests to the Sangamam

greater purpose. Afterwards the elders planted a sapling together, a remarkable gesture in memory of the millions of trees that had been planted over the last 50 years.

The celebration included many different activities, including stage performances, exhibitions about Auroville and unending education (highlighting present educational activities in the neighbourhood), kolam art, music, the mass participation of women and games. Many youth groups had prepared impressive costumes and there were performances of theatre, dance, song, jazz and yoga. The performers came from the Auroville community, the bioregion as well as from elsewhere in Tamil Nadu, and the whole event was an inter-cultural programme which included offerings from both East and West.

This Sangamam was organized to share information about Auroville and the educational activities that unite this region as many felt that communicating the Auroville dream was crucial to its manifestation. Therefore, one of the highlights was an exhibition on Auroville's ideals, development, and projects. This exhibition was one of the first Auroville exhibitions to be fully translated into Tamil, making the information accessible to many more people.

The festival also included many informative stalls, such as those of the Auroville Institute of Applied Technology, Ecofemme and Terrasoul. Many other Auroville activities shared their handicraft products and gave information about their work.

The theme of 'unending education' was highlighted through speakers like Lourdes from Pitchandikulam on watershed management, Suryagandhi on hygiene care, Bala, Poovizhi and Sanjeev from the STEMLand team on education, Shankar on outreach education, Srinivasan on his association with Auroville, Arul and Kavitha from YouthLink on initiatives for young adults, Moris from AVAG on social work, Kalvi from Eco-Femme on sustainable menstruation, and Tom on water. Each presenter briefly described their activities in the language of their choice, at times assisted with translations into Tamil or English for the benefit of the mixed audience.

The programme also provided space for lively discussions between elders and youth about the early days, recent achievements, and future dreams for the Auroville bioregion.

Around midday, everyone gathered to share a meal together, which is a big part of Tamil culture. Aurovilians and units had helped cover the costs to provide a free meal for all workers, Aurovilians, friends, and guests gathered at the venue.

The event was held in a wonderful spirit of goodwill, leading many of the several thousand people who visited the event to express their wish that such Sangamams would happen more regularly. In highlighting the courage and perseverance that it took to build Auroville, it created both a sense of humility and an aspiration in all those who want to take this dream forward.

Kavitha Urvase



The audience came from Auroville, the bioregion, India and the world



The exhibition on Auroville's history and outreach activities



Dance performances by youth groups from in and around Auroville

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Dance performances by youth groups from in and around Auroville



Teaching origami



Theatre artists had been invited to perform at the festival



Kolam making

The Auro Sangamam Team

The Auro Sangamam team is quite a unique group, bringing together many Aurovilians. Sangamam events have been organized in Auroville over the last 30 years. However, this year the team grew to include around fifty Tamil Aurovilians! It is truly significant to have such a large number coming together to bring even more people together in the spirit of celebrating the Auroville dream.

The Auro Sangamam team had been meeting regularly for the past six months, focussing on bridging and connecting with everybody in Auroville's neighborhood to bring forward the Tamil culture's inherent nature of embracing and welcoming all people. This is why Sangamam events make a real effort to highlight the local culture as well as being a platform to communicate about Auroville.

As the Tamil population in Auroville comprises over one third of its residents, this culture would love to share its genius in order to enrich the life of Auroville. In this spirit, members of the Sangamam team welcome anyone who would like to learn about and explore this culture, as well as to find creative ways to help the people of the bioregion better understand the many cultures coming from other places in India and abroad.

This Sangamam celebration has been organised in collaboration with many Auroville groups and individual volunteers who have stepped forward to offer their time and energy to co-create this beautiful event. When one witnessed the hard work and goodwill that went into the organization, resulting in a sense of deep fulfillment and celebration, one caught a glimpse of how a true Human Unity actually manifests.

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Performers and audience



A theatre artist performs



A dance performance



Body decoration

Prestigious government award for Deepika Kundaji

Aurovilian Deepika Kundaji was one among 30 women and 9 institutions to be conferred the “Nari Shakti Award for 2017”, India's prestigious award for women, by the President of India on the occasion of International Women's Day at a ceremony at the Rashtrapati Bhavan, the President's Palace, in New Delhi on March 8th.

“It came as a total surprise,” says Deepika. “On March 3rd I got a call from the Ministry of Women and Child Development that I had been selected for this award and that I had to be in Delhi on March 7th, a day before the ceremony. I was in Bangalore at the time, taking care of my brother who has met with a serious accident and is hospitalized, and my mother, who is bed-ridden; and in the middle of all that I got this call.”

“So I took the plane and went to the hotel in Delhi they had booked for me. Someone from the Ministry welcomed us and informed us about the programme. At dinnertime, all the awardees had an opportunity to interact and come to know each other and their work.”

“I was deeply impressed by them – a typist who became women's world billiards champion; a woman who ended up raising 1,500 orphans after her husband evicted her from her home when she was pregnant; a bomb blast survivor who lost both hands but is now a motivated speaker for disability rights in the UN; a bakery run by sex traffic survivors; the first woman temple mural artist; a wildlife biologist working to protect an endangered stork called hargilla; and many more.”

“The next day a bus took us all to the Rashtrapati Bhavan, which is an incredibly impressive building. We were ushered in through the front entrance. The ceremony took place in the Durbar Hall, the same Hall where independent India's first Government was sworn in on August 15th, 1947. We received instructions as to what was expected from us, but were left free to do a *namaste*, or an *adab* – the muslim way of greeting, or to offer a handshake.”

“When my turn came, I did a *namaste*, then walked up to the President who congratulated me and gave me the award. I was on the point of walking away when he reminded me to turn and look at the camera – I was grinning like anything, I had forgotten that part of the ceremony! The ceremony was moving and memorable, to say the least.”

“It was followed by a brief interaction with the President at the Ashok Hall, known for its magnificent wall paintings. We interacted with previous years Nari Shakti awardees over tea at the Banquet

Hall. I had the opportunity to speak with the Minister for Women and Child Development, Smt. Maneka Gandhi, who is a great supporter of organic farming.”

“The next day we had an informal meeting with the Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi, at his residence. He offered us a high tea and talked to us about how effective ordinary people have been in nation building.”

The why of the award

Deepika was given this award for her 24 years of work in the fields of biodiversity and seed conservation, for reviving traditional vegetable varieties and for her role in regenerating eight acres of severely eroded land at Pebble Garden in Auroville. Three other women were also rewarded for their work in the field of organic farming and seed preservation. For the organic agriculture revival movement this is very encouraging. It is very rare that contributions in this field receive such high recognition.

Deepika's work is not confined to Pebble Garden. She has been travelling a lot, especially in the last five years. Seed conservation, she explains, isn't just about growing a variety year after year in the same place, but also involves reviving it by spreading seeds and awareness. “Every traditional variety is unique and my work is to motivate farmer communities to conserve valuable varieties that are on the brink of extinction. For that, I need to personally interact with farmers.” Deepika gives workshops for farmers on seed saving techniques.

She is an active member of seed conservation networks. Her partner Bernard was one of the founders of the first organic seed revival movement, together with Vandana Shiva and Claude Alvares. Gradually, the next generation of grassroots seed savers formed the *Bharat Beej Swaraj Manch (The India Seed Sovereignty Alliance)*. Deepika has been attending almost all national seed savers' gatherings held all over India. “At first I used to be the only one carrying vegetable seeds, often up to 40 different varieties. Other seeds savers came with paddy and millets and pulses. At almost every seed fair my stall was mobbed. There was such a demand! That didn't go



The President of India gives the award to Deepika Kundaji

unnoticed, and at every following *mela*, several other farmers too came with lots of vegetable seeds next to their paddy and pulses. The movement spreads!” At a national organic farmers convention in Chandinagar in 2015, Deepika's book *Reviving Vegetable Diversity – a seed saver's guide* was released by Maneka Gandhi, the Union Minister of Women and Child Development.

Deepika reflects how amazing it is that she has received this award given the small scale of her work. “Pebble Garden is a two-person job; we do not employ any workers, I cling to doing all the work myself because it is personally important for me to be in touch with plants and the soil. That has its limitations in spreading the work widely to society at large. So it is reassuring that despite the limited scale, my work has been noticed and honoured. Over the centuries, simple peasant women have selected the best crops and seeds each time, and the value of those seeds is immense: losing

these seeds is losing hundreds, if not thousands, of years of work. That is the importance of conserving seeds, now endangered by the introduction of modern varieties by the seed and agro-chemical industry. It is heartening that the Government of India recognises the work of ordinary people in preserving India's natural heritage.”

Does she have plans for the future? “Right now my focus is my family and I have very little time to do my work. When I am more free, I will start rewriting my book – I have been asked to expand it even though it is now in its second print with 3,000 copies having been sold – and translations in Bengali, Hindi and Oriya have been published. I also hope to create a website for Pebble Garden to publish all the experience we have in small videos and downloadable texts. There is a huge need.”

In conversation with Carel

Deepika can be contacted at pebblegardenforest@gmail.com

INTERNATIONAL ZONE

Temporary European Pavilion inaugurated

The occasion was celebrated with song, dance and poetry from around Europe.

Some time ago, Auroville's town-planning office, TDC, took the wise decision to allow for temporary structures in the International Zone. In the past this underdeveloped zone of Auroville has faced great challenges, like land encroachment, littering and vandalizing by outside parties, with only Bharat Nivas, the Pavilion of Tibetan Culture, the Unity Pavilion, the International House, the Inuksuk, Savitri Bhavan and the Visitors' Center as its first settlers and guardians.

Active presence provides the best protection and stimulates the imagination of what one day will become a vibrant international campus of cultural, educational and research activities. So the African and the French pavilions recently took their first temporary shape and Sankalpa Art Journeys found its first temporary home in colourful blue containers opposite the Inuksuk.

The call for an increased presence in this zone also came from the European pavilion group, which had had been in existence for more than a decade with members from Auroville International (AVI) and from Auroville. In its earlier years, the group had concentrated on the inner search, on the question of whether one can speak of a common European identity, of a “European soul” striving to shape its body – a question that cannot be easily answered. Recently, confronted with major threats to the unity of Europe, which is so important and precious after two devastating wars in the



Isa Wagner from Auroville International Germany speaks at the inauguration of the temporary European Pavilion

last century, the group felt the urge to create a material space to receive and anchor the Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's force working for human unity. As a first step, two years ago, on February 21, 2016, a tree was planted and a small sculpture with the Mother's name “Mirra” in Sanskrit erected and consecrated in the designated European area of the International Zone.

Then fundraising started for the manifestation of a temporary European House and a place was offered in the fenced and protected compound of the International House. Donations came in from different European AVI groups and individuals, from a Luxembourg Green Party member of the European Parliament, who donated for the solar equipment of the house, and from Aurovilian pavilion groups and individuals.

On February 17 of this year the first section of the European House – two modules and an open platform – was inaugurated with a lively programme. The construction team of Jothi Prasad Rajan's Aurocreation and a dynamic team of landscaping volunteers, guided by Michael Roberts from Scotland, had worked until the last moment to beautify the surroundings and give an idea of a future garden setting around the structures.

Aurovilian Denis Capdeville, who was the main organizing force behind the construction, welcomed the guests, among them Ms. Nirima Oza, member of the Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation, who also greeted the participants. Isa Wagner, the former Secretary of Auroville International, spoke on behalf of AVI, mentioning the importance of

Auroville as an “earth-laboratory”, of which nations and continents are the distinct and indispensable parts, each developing a specific aspect of collective evolution to lead humanity to its true unity in diversity.

She quoted Sri Aurobindo who described Europe's main achievement as follows:

It is now fixed that social development and well-being mean the development and well-being of all the individuals in the society and not merely a flourishing of the community in the mass which resolves itself really into the splendour and power of one or two classes ... But in addition, there is this deeper truth which individualism has discovered ... He [the individual] is not merely a member of a human pack, hive or ant-hill; he is something in himself, a soul, a being, who has to fulfil his own individual truth and law as well as his natural or his assigned part in the truth and law of the collective existence. ... That is an idea, a truth which, intellectually recognized and given its full exterior and superficial significance by Europe, agrees at its root with the profoundest and highest spiritual conceptions of Asia and has a large part to play in the moulding of the future.”

The Human Cycle, Chapter II – The Age of Individualism and Reason

The 250 participants of the event were offered a copious fundraising

lunch. The programme also included small activities and performances by different national groups, mirroring the rich cultural diversity of Europe: a master potter from Kazakhstan, a German pianist, recitals in Catalan, Spanish and Luxembourgish, songs in Swedish, Portuguese and French, a German canon, an Italian aria, a Russian modern dance and a French circle dance, a British and an Irish poetry recital, an Austrian volunteer with drummers from Swam, and much more.

The next step is to start a new fundraising for a third building module to complete the original layout based on a three-pointed star-like form around a hexagonal platform; to complete the landscaping and beautification of the surrounding area; to look for furniture and, above all, to fill the place with life, cultural activities, small performances, exhibitions and such.

The space will also be offered as a base camp for further planning activities of other pavilion groups, in the spirit of true sharing and collaboration. A taste of this became obvious when the neighbours from the International House communicated their plans to build another guest house within the compound, which would also be for guests of the European House, as well as a community kitchen offering the possibility for an adjacent European restaurant.

All this is a promising outlook for an accelerated development of the International Zone.

Friederike, Auroville International

Preparing for the 50th

Beginning in 2014, Aurovilians began to envision and plan for the big celebrations. Here is how they did it.

In spite of concerns from some quarters that the 50th anniversary celebrations would be disruptive of community life and not 'in tune' with the deeper purpose of Auroville, there was general acknowledgement that they had been a great success, both in presenting Auroville to the world and in strengthening our communal bonds and aspiration.

Much of the success was due to the enormous amount of energy poured into the organization and communication of events by dedicated Aurovilians. In these pages we describe and celebrate the often invisible work of some of these people that helped make the 50th celebrations such a success.

Brief organizational chronology

The formal planning for the event began with the Governing Board setting up the Envisioning Committee in August, 2014, consisting of some members of the Governing Board, International Advisory Council and Working Committee. The new Working Committee offered its help to the Envisioning Committee and, with its approval, invited the community to submit projects. The Auroville Arts Service and Outreach Media took on the preliminary task of ordering the many proposals. As it was clear that government funding would be required, a monitoring group subsequently formed to examine the viability of the projects in detail. Their recommendations were forwarded by the Working Committee to the Governing Board.

In December 2016, the Governing Board submitted a finalized proposed programme to the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), requesting funding through a special grant. The total budget requested was 28.5 crore rupees (approximately US\$ 4.3 million) to cover many different activities, including exhibitions, conferences, cultural offerings and celebrations with the neighbouring villages etc., as well as infrastructure projects.

It was unclear, however, how much the government would be willing to provide, so there was a necessity to prepare different budget scenarios. There was also a need to prepare detailed plans regarding venues, dates, event coordination, media and public relations, as well as documentation, overseeing the budget and, finally, evaluation.

The Working Committee appointed a few Aurovilians to be the Core Organization Team for this enormous task, a task that became even harder when it was learned that the Prime Minister would be coming during the birthday week.

In September, 2017, this team organized a meeting at the Unity Pavilion to update the community on their work. They explained that the government grant had still not come through, so they were working on additional fundraising. They also sought additional support from the community. As a result, a number of people stepped forward to help, so enlarging the core team.

In mid December, a special task force was set up, drawing upon some members of the core group, to prepare specifically for the visit of the Prime Minister in February, 2018.

The first tranche of government money, 10 crore rupees, finally came through, but this was only for capital and infrastructure expenses and not in time to finance the first event of the 50th anniversary year, an Auroville exhibition and conference held in Delhi between 21st - 24th November (the Auroville Foundation advanced funds to enable this to happen). The most recent event was Sangamam, a collaborative celebration between Aurovilians and workers held in early March. In between, something like 25 different events, exhibitions, recitals etc. took place, culminating in the dawn bonfire and water ceremony on 28th February.

A further government grant is expected, which may enable other 50th anniversary projects that had been stalled because of insufficient funds to be realised in the coming year.

Organizing the Prime Minister's visit

Preparations for the two hours had their share of surprises and challenges

I nge is a Working Committee member and part of the 50th anniversary team. She was also part of the special task force which was set up at the request of the Foundation office to organize the Prime Minister's visit on 25th February. Here she talks about what was involved.

For me, the Prime Minister's visit was the most intense part of the birthday celebrations because the rest of the birthday week events were organised, and organised very well, by the respective teams.

From mid December, the task force really began working on the visit. Originally, we were told that the Prime Minister would be here for three hours but this was later cut to two. We broke down those three hours minute by minute. This included Angela filming and timing the drive between Matrimandir, Savitri Bhavan and the Auditorium to see how long it would take. Then, together with the Foundation, we started to look at a programme of who should be where to greet him or to explain things.

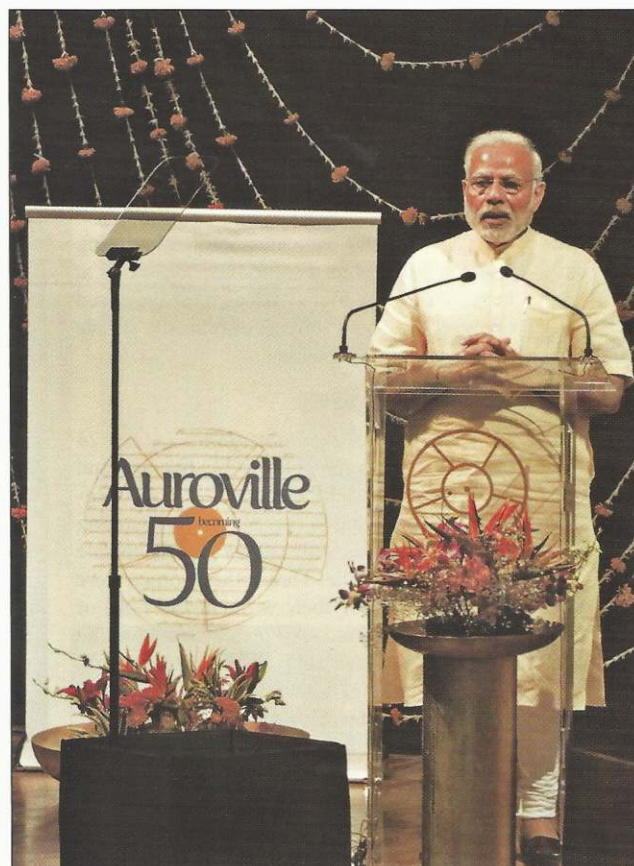
Regarding his visit to the Matrimandir, there was a lot of discussion about what he would do there, who he would speak to, how the water ceremony by the lotus pond would be organized etc. The Matrimandir executives took responsibility for this and did an amazing job.

However, there were things on the original programme for the Prime Minister's visit that didn't make it or were changed, even at the last minute, because of time issues. In fact, our biggest challenge was trying to get answers to the many questions we received regarding his specific programme on the day. Many of these were left unanswered or the information changed every few hours, depending on whether you spoke to somebody from the police, the Ministry, the Prime Minister's office or his Special Protection Group (SPG), the people who were in charge of overall security. This made it very difficult for us in the task force to keep others involved in the picture, and some people got frustrated, but we had to ensure that everything went forward according to the best information we had at the time.

We didn't feel there was any real pressure upon us from people who wanted to meet the Prime Minister. It was clear from the beginning that certain pioneers and other relevant persons, such as the executives of the venues, would be included as well as members of the Working Committee and 50th team. However, the final decision was out of our hands.

There were two types of passes. One was for programme staff who would have access to the venue to be visited by the Prime Minister. But a day or so before the visit, we discovered that if you wished to be closer to the Prime Minister, you needed another pass called a 'proximity clearance pass', which required a much higher level of clearance.

We learned very late that not everybody on the list we had submitted received these passes, for



The Prime Minister at Bharat Nivas

security reasons and because of the time available. The entire line up at Savitri Bhavan and Bharat Nivas, for example, was drastically reduced. The Prime Minister's office and the Special Protection Group made the final decision about who got these passes and, unfortunately, two members of the Working Committee and many others, such as venue executives, did not receive these passes.

Just getting the passes to the right people was another challenge. Doordarshan showed up at the Foundation office at half past midnight on the morning of the visit because they needed personalised passes to film the Prime Minister. Most of us only got our passes that morning: it was a tough job delivering them because the roads were blocked by security, and the local police were not always in agreement about who should be let through.

In fact, the authorities also took decisions regarding who would meet the Prime Minister, where they would stand and what would happen. For example, two hours before the Prime Minister was due to arrive, the programme at the Matrimandir was changed significantly: there, too, the size of the welcoming committee was reduced.

However, the heads of the SPG really tried to accommodate our wishes. They understood that we wanted to create an intimate atmosphere for the Prime Minister. The final venue of his visit was the Sri Aurobindo Auditorium. We wanted more than half of the auditorium – 250 seats – to be filled with Aurovilians. Approximately fifty were for the parents of children who would be on the stage, organisers, trustees, etc, and the rest were chosen in a draw as more than 800 people wanted to

attend. Firstly, we had to check that all the names in the final draw were community members, then the Blue Light people helped me to allocate a random number to each name, and the top 200 received an invitation. If someone dropped out, the next person on the list would receive a seat. The final list was only ready on the evening before the visit in order for us to accommodate as many last minute name changes as possible.

We were also told by the police that a hundred people on the waiting list could come to the venue, and we arranged for a screen outside where people could watch the proceedings. Security subsequently allowed some of these to enter the Auditorium to watch the speech, as there were a few free spaces. Sadly, some people who were originally told they could watch the proceedings from the balcony were ushered down by the SPG minutes before the start.

Actually, the police and security were very accommodating and trusting. Even if someone turned up at the Auditorium without an ID, or late, they would let them in once they were identified by one of us.

The other 200 seats were taken up by the entourages of the

Prime Minister and other VIPs, by panchayat leaders, important donors, chartered accountants, the media etc. We had about a hundred VIPs, including the British Deputy High Commissioner from Chennai, people from the French and Russian Consulates, Governing Board and ex-Governing Board and former International Advisory Council members.

Chali and I were in the Foundation office until 2.30 of the morning of the visit working out where everybody should sit according to protocol.

We had invited the Ashram trustees but they couldn't come because they had a function with the Prime Minister in Pondicherry beforehand, and road access and time did not allow them to travel to Auroville.

Everybody, including the Foundation staff, worked so hard. We were really in awe of what the Matrimandir and the Bharat Nivas teams achieved in such a short time. The latter team worked all night but they remained so cheerful and happy. It was really an example of what we can do when we all work together.

In the end, everything happened beautifully, in spite of fears in the community beforehand that there would be chaos during that week, that people would not be able to leave their homes, that there would be garbage everywhere etc.

As everybody wanted to prepare the best programme possible, we trusted that it would be something memorable and beautiful, and it was. What was amazing was how everything finally came together; we all felt we were carried by something.

From an interview by Alan

Water from the world comes to The Matrimandir

The highlight of this year's 50th anniversary bonfire was undoubtedly the moving water ceremony.

Srimoyi, a member of the Matrimandir Events Team, describes on behalf of the team how it came about.

The water ceremony was planned at least 1 1/2 years ago. The Matrimandir Events Team felt they should do something special to mark Auroville's 50th anniversary. For the original inauguration, earth had been brought from many countries to symbolise unity, so this time they thought that people from around the world could bring or send another element, like water. They floated the concept with many people and everybody was enthusiastic.

They announced the idea in the *News and Notes* a year ago. They also opened a Facebook page and Manohar put it on the Auroville website and created a beautiful logo for it. Initially the team felt all the water should be boiled or sterilised to prevent contamination, but dropped this idea when people told them this would destroy the specific structure of the waters.

The Auroville International Centres helped them to spread the word and last August, the water started flowing in.

There were many water stories. Three Auroville trekkers brought the first water from India from high up in the Himalayas. One man chipped ice off an iceberg in Antarctica. Mother's great grandson brought water from Tlemcem in Algeria, the place where Mother studied with Theon in 1905-6. An ex-Ashram student who had represented Cuba in the original inauguration ceremony made a special trip there to bring back water and so 'complete the circle'. Some of the water came from pilgrim sites or sacred places, like Lourdes or The Chalice Well in Glastonbury, from sacred sources in Spain, Portugal, South America and many other countries, as well as from the sacred places and rivers of India.

"Everything was done with so

much care and consciousness," says Srimoyi. "Somebody from a small Sri Aurobindo Centre in the middle of the Western Ghats told us he read page 352 of *Savitri* near the water before he collected it. Two Ashramites collected water from the drinking tap near the Samadhi, kept the water in both the Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's room, said a special prayer, then brought it in special blue bottles which The Mother had used for her eyewash. This particular water, along with water from the Lotus Pond under the Matrimandir, was used as the base water for the water ceremony.

"We felt we had to honour every water sample." So every sample was labelled and kept on trays close to a picture of The Mother in the new dehumidified storeroom underneath the Amphitheatre. In all, over 321 samples were sent or brought from different water sources around the world.

Planning the ceremony

But obtaining the water was just the first step. The next question was how the water should be used. Srimoyi remembered that when there was a drought, The Mother had given the children in the Ashram particular instructions to invoke rain. She drew a sign for water which was traced out on the ground and told the children to walk around it, chanting a certain number of times. She gave them words to be chanted, calling for rain, but said that for it to work the words must be given by your guru and the invocation should be carried out with sincerity.

"This is why we chose children for the water ceremony, because of their purity and simplicity. We explained to the children that when they did this, it is like praying to The Mother for water for the world, for India, for Auroville. They took it very seriously."

It was decided that the children

would come down the spiral ramp from the urn in the Amphitheatre, walk along the water sign given by the Mother, enter the Auroville symbol then pour the water into an inverted gold disk that represented the central circle of the Auroville symbol: in its centre there was a crystal, representing the central dot. The disc was placed on sand from the Samadhi, "So it was a complete representation of the Auroville symbol with the Samadhi sand at the base of its centre. Everything was very sacred and symbolic. This was our way of praying for the wellbeing of one of earth's most precious resources both for Auroville and the world."

In an echo of the original inauguration ceremony, each sample of water would be accompanied by two children. One child would carry the water, the other would carry a placard in the shape of a water drop with the source of the water written on it. "It was truly a collaborative work. Shradhanjali workshop provided and spray painted the papers and made them into placards later, Vanaville Press cut them into the required shape and Auroville calligraphers wrote out the names on them."

"The very beautiful containers for the water were made by Priya as an offering. It was very beautiful; it just came from her heart."

Live music from the Auroville choir and musicians would complete the ceremony. A year before, the choir in a performance had sung a particular chant. The Mother had given it to a music teacher in the Ashram and called it 'The Earth's Aspiration Chant'. "It seemed appropriate to chant it during the ceremony as it would symbolise Auroville's aspiration for the New World, for unity, and for the water essential for its continued growth and sustenance. Nuria, the conductor of the choir, agreed to the idea

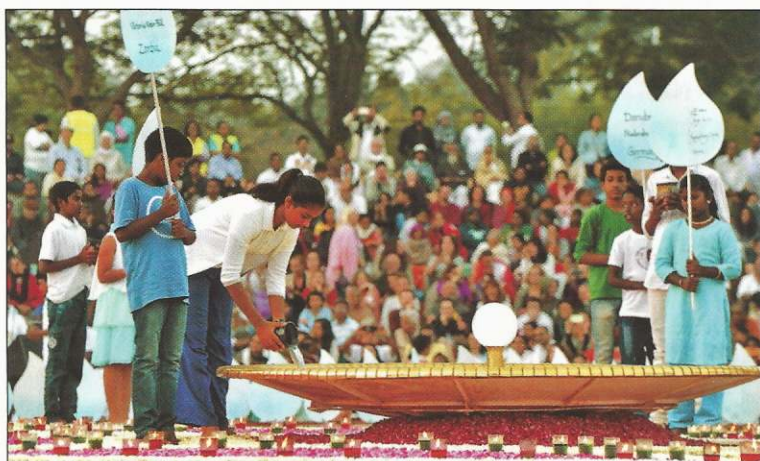


PHOTO MARCO SAROLDI

and asked Matthew to compose additional instrumental music because the water ceremony would take a long time."

In this way, all the four elements - water, fire, earth and sky (ether) - would be represented in the ceremony on the 28th February.

However, before then a lot of preparation was required. The organizers realised they would need a lot of children (two for each water sample), so about six months before the ceremony they contacted all the schools, including the outreach schools, and asked them if they would like to participate. They specified that the children had to be 10 years and above. By January, about 170 children had agreed to take part, plus a number of young adults.

In February, rehearsals began. The younger children ran through the whole ceremony four times, the older ones twice. A very efficient team of teachers and volunteers managed the children and conducted the rehearsals. Meanwhile, another team patiently sorted out the water samples and placed them with their respective placards in preparation for the ceremony.

Participation of the Prime Minister

"In December the Working Committee asked us if the Prime Minister, whose visit had just been confirmed, could inaugurate it. But how? We had already planned to take water from the Lotus Pond underneath the Matrimandir as the basis for all the other waters. So we thought if the Prime Minister pours some water into the Lotus Pond and we use some of this water on the 28th, in a sense he will have inaugurated the ceremony."

Around midday of 25th February, the Prime Minister solemnly poured the water from the Ganges, Narmada and Kaveri rivers (three of the sacred rivers of India) from three special containers into the Lotus Pond beneath the Matrimandir.

"The whole atmosphere around the Matrimandir during his visit was quiet and peaceful. There were relatively few people and the Prime Minister was very focussed."

Inspired by the Prime Minister, the Governing Board members and the Secretary of the Auroville Foundation also participated in the Water Ceremony and we facilitated by giving them water

from different rivers in India, which they poured into the lotus pond on February 26th.

The ceremony on the 28th

The night before the event, the two young men taking care of the sound system slept at the Amphitheatre to be sure that they would be ready in the morning in time to carry out their work.

"We had no idea how the ceremony would finally turn out because rehearsals had always been a bit chaotic. We always found things to improve, and we could never do a full run-through with all the children, choir and musicians. We only prayed to Her that everything would go well."

"The morning of 28th, after the meditation, when the choir and the musicians began to play and the children began coming down the ramp, was beautiful. Those children were so quiet, and they did everything with such sincerity: it was very touching. This is what created that beautiful atmosphere. There was also something else in the atmosphere that everybody felt and were deeply touched by. We believe it was the magic created by the special presence of the Universal Mother."

The crowd management was organized by the Matrimandir executives and Auroville Security, aided by about 100 or more volunteers from Auroville and the Ashram. "They collaborated so well and did a fantastic job. There must have been around 6000 people in and around the Amphitheatre, yet it was quiet and concentrated for a long time. When so many people are fully concentrated in aspiration, it is very powerful."

Actually, those numbers were even greater because the proceedings were being streamed live and many people around the world were watching. "Because of the live streaming, so many

people who had sent their water but couldn't come felt they were able to attend the ceremony. Afterwards, they contacted us to say how important it was for them to see their drop being poured. It was truly wonderful and very touching."

In fact, the first water that was poured came from Lake Mansarovar, the sacred lake of Mount Kailash, the abode of Lord Shiva high up in the Himalayas, followed by water from the Ganges at Gangotri and the other sacred rivers of India.

What next?

On 22nd March, World Water Day, a concentration was held under the Banyan and afterwards some of the water was sprinkled around the Banyan with a prayer and as an offering to Mother Earth.

At present, the rest of the water is stored in three airtight containers under the Amphitheatre in the same cool room that houses the sound system. What will happen to it?

"Now that this water has come here, it has received The Mother's force. It might be our imagination, but we believe this must have an effect upon each of the sources from which the water has been taken. As for the future of this water, The Mother had seen a lake around the Matrimandir, so we thought it would be wonderful if this water of the world flows in the Matrimandir lake."

"We hope there will be a test lake made at some point soon. When the test lake becomes the first segment of the Matrimandir Lake, the water will be poured into it, thereby bringing the Water Ceremony to its fulfillment and conclusion. We may preserve some of the water for posterity, it remains to be seen. We pray to be guided in this matter, too."

From a conversation with Alan

Covering the 50th anniversary events

Fabienne of Outreach Media, Doris of Auroville Video, Serena, an independent Aurovilian filmmaker and Valentina, who is editing the material, talk about the challenges and successes of covering the birthday events.

How did the Auroville media cover the 50th anniversary events?

Fabienne: The first project was to create a website where the media could follow the programme of events via a calendar, get general information and download images.

Regarding video, Auroville Radio covered an aspect of everything that was happening. Outreach Media, working with Doris and Francis, a volunteer from Chile, Valentina, and also independent filmmakers, like Serena, provided longer overviews of events. Manohar was also covering events for the Auroville website.

We didn't want there to be duplication, so we had meetings to work out who was doing what. This worked very well.

For the written material, we, together with members of the Working Committee, the Auroville website team and a representative of the Visitors' Center, had communication strategy meetings with Lakshay, who has a lot of experience in designing campaigns. He helped us to become clear about the message that we wanted to convey to the outside in our respective field of work. However, when the Foundation asked us to place articles in the Indian press to introduce Auroville and the 50th celebrations, it took us by surprise because this is something we never do. We took up the task because of special circumstances and time constraints but we felt this should be avoided in the future.

We created a press kit specifically for the 50th celebrations that was sent out to the newspapers and magazines in India and to every country where we had a contact. It was translated into Tamil and French. The press kit was in three parts: a general overview, more detail about different activities, then facts and figures.

Interestingly, the way we presented Auroville didn't work for France: we had to rewrite the whole thing with the help of a French journalist.

Was there much coverage by national and international media?

Fabienne: Nationally, there was an increase in interest for Auroville when they knew the Prime Minister was coming. There were a number of articles in local editions of newspapers, mainly in *The Hindu*, but also in Marathi and Hindi newspapers in other states of India. In Chennai, *The Hindu Business Line* magazine presented and analysed Auroville in a very interesting way.

In addition, the local studio of Doordarshan, the government-owned broadcaster, offered us five minutes a day for one month at a peak broadcasting time to show Auroville videos.

Doris: I had to collect high quality video from our filmmakers, covering different aspects of Auroville, to make into these five minute videos. Potentially this was a great platform for presenting Auroville. However, many people couldn't see them because it was only available on cable and few people are on cable these days.

Fabienne: But a Doordarshan film crew from Delhi did come and they made a much longer film on Auroville. This has been aired nationally and the Aurovilians who have seen it say it is good. We are waiting to receive a copy.

We have also had international radio and filming crews and journalists coming to cover Auroville. These included media from France, Switzerland, Spain, Holland, the U.S., Thailand and Estonia. In fact, we didn't respond to requests from a number of television channels because we knew we would never have been able to cope.

Were these media primarily interested in the 50th celebrations?

Fabienne: Yes, but through different angles. The French and Swiss were more interested in the green aspect of Auroville. In these countries, spirituality is a difficult topic to approach, so they play for safety by concentrating upon something upon which everybody can agree, like saving the world.

How positive has the coverage been?

Fabienne: Quite good in India. In Europe, we have had good coverage in France, Germany, Belgium, Italy and Switzerland, although a rather 'tabloidy' article was published in Spain. We have not seen the T.V. films from Switzerland or France yet, but the French programme is going to be aired on prime time television in the near future.

Fred Chebron was also involved in two short documentaries about Auroville with Arte Channel (Franco-German channel) and Discovery channel in



From left: Valentina, Serena, Fabienne and Doris

French (Voyage). He was the director for both and the producer for the latter.

Overall, we have been covered well in both the Indian and international media. At least in India, knowledge about Auroville has increased tremendously because of these efforts and the Prime Minister's visit. And there have already been some results. People want to donate for the land, and this week we had two people asking how they can participate in Auroville.

The other way information about Auroville was disseminated was through exhibitions and conferences. How successful were these?

Serena: The overall attendance at the Delhi exhibition in November was poor, in spite of it being well publicised in the newspapers. The people who came were interested to speak to the Aurovilians and see Auroville products but it is difficult to get many people in Delhi to attend such events and the location was not easily accessible. Another feedback we received was that we should have invited more young people and students: the first day we focussed upon the diplomats. In fact, on the final day when we moved the exhibition to the Delhi branch of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram many more young people came and the energy was incredible.

Fabienne: The idea behind the Delhi exhibition was to reach diplomats so that we could invite them for the celebration on the 28th February. We also planned to move the exhibition to different places in India, but without the finance we could not

do it then. We may still do this when the government grant for general expenses comes in.

Serena: There was also a major conference in Auroville called The Bridge which was designed to create collaborations between Aurovilians and outside researchers on topics important for Auroville's growth. This involved presenting them with an overview of Auroville activities. It was very well received by the visiting participants and there will be ongoing collaborations.

What were the biggest satisfactions from covering the events?

Doris: It was exhausting at times - for example, we had three rehearsals to prepare for the visit of the Prime Minister to the Matrimandir, and then everything changed at the last minute - but overall the way all the teams worked together was great. And the final product was fantastic.

Serena: There had been many efforts before among our media people to collaborate but with the 50th it all happened organically, and we will continue to work together. At the moment, Valentina is putting all the footage together to make a collage video.

Valentina: It will be mainly images to capture the atmosphere of these days. We are planning two videos: one using material shot by the 'professionals' and another one made by the people for the people.

Fabienne: There were huge challenges at times, like problems with the cash flow and covering all the different events, but everybody worked so hard and so well together. And, in the process, we have made very good connections with the Indian press, with Doordarshan and some foreign media. Our weak point in the past has been our poor links with the local Tamil press but with the help of Sivakumar, who posted information in Tamil on social media and contacted all the Tamil press to come for the 28th, this has been remedied.

All this will help us communicate about Auroville much more effectively in the future, both in India and abroad.

From an interview by Alan

"My equipment had better work the first time"

Dev Mohanty describes the trials and satisfactions of live streaming Auroville's 50th events.

February was a very busy month for Dev Mohanty. He helped organize a crafts fair at Bharat Nivas, videoed the SEAS performance in the Amphitheatre, was a volunteer Ashram coordinator for the Matrimandir team, and helped set up the live streaming of the Prime Minister's speech and the Auroville birthday bonfire celebrations.

Many people around the world enjoyed the live streaming of the birthday bonfire. But what lay behind this and other 50th anniversary broadcasts?

Dev had the right expertise for the job. After graduating from the Ashram school, he worked overseas for some time, including a stint with MIT Labs in Boston and fibre optics corporations in the South Pacific. When he returned to Pondicherry three years ago, he became involved in helping Aurinoco Systems lay a fibre optic network in Auroville.

Early in January, Chandresh asked him if he could organize the Auroville marathon market this year. He agreed and arranged for tribal artisans to get to Auroville from different parts of India to display their products at an Arts and Crafts mela.

At the same time, Aurinoco was busy digging trenches and laying fibre to the Bharat Nivas Auditorium in preparation for telecasting the upcoming Prime Minister's address: Auroville was allowed to stream it within the community for the many who could not attend the event. So Aurinoco and the 50th Core Group asked Dev if he'd be willing to help set up the live streaming of the visit for viewing across Auroville.

While this work was underway, Dev was also asked if he would be the point of contact for all the Ashram-related people who wished to attend the bonfire celebrations on 28th February. Hemant Shekhar, one of the new executives of Matrimandir, arranged to meet him at the Amphitheatre to tell him what it would involve.

"While we were discussing," says Dev, "I noticed people rehearsing and was told it was for the upcoming SEAS performance. That's when I thought that perhaps we could live stream this event to test the hardware as a dry run for the Prime Minister's address."

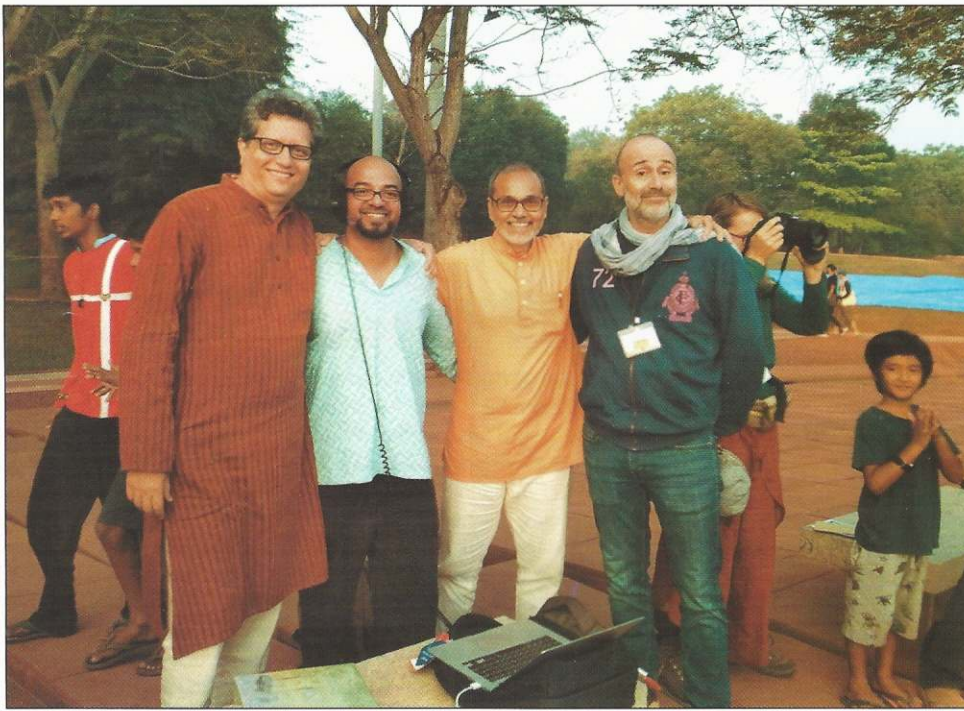
The SEAS rehearsals

Hemant and Vladimir from Matrimandir were very supportive and Chandresh and the Aurinoco team worked out the details. Within two days, all the necessary fibre connections to the Amphitheatre had been made. Dev also asked Auroville Radio if they could help with the filming because they had just acquired new cameras. However, when the SEAS organizers heard about the idea to stream the event, some of them had reservations about the quality of the audio. In the end, it was agreed that Dev and team could live stream the event but without audio.

Dev streamed it to a few knowledgeable friends and the feedback was fairly positive. "It was a great relief to have got it all working. This was a first: nobody had been allowed to stream live from the Amphitheatre before. I began feeling that we had the right gear to work in low light conditions, so at this point we began thinking we should stream the bonfire on the 28th, provided the Matrimandir executives agreed."

The Prime Minister's speech

The technical hardware required for the Auditorium transmission was very different from that used at the Amphitheatre and Dev needed to



From left: Hemant, Dev, Chandresh and Andrea

coordinate with Auroville Radio to work out where to place the cameras etc. But this was difficult because the Prime Minister's security people were severely limiting access to the Bharat Nivas auditorium and campus. "And, of course, every time we came, all our equipment had to be scanned by security."

On the morning of the Prime Minister's speech, Dev was stopped everywhere by security, even though he had a Foundation press pass. Dev had a critical piece of equipment, a streaming media server, that security hadn't seen before and they wouldn't let him through with it until it was given security clearance. "Time was passing and I was freaking out as the Prime Minister was already at Matrimandir. Finally, after what must have been half an hour, they let me through."

The radio team had not yet arrived and it was not clear if they would get through security in time, so Dev prepared to do the whole broadcast from a backup camera he'd been carrying along. "And I kept thinking to myself that we had still not done the audio test, so my equipment had better work first time."

At the beginning of the programme, everybody stood up for the Tamil anthem. "At that moment, the cables that had been neatly plugged in started flying in all directions. I was scrambling around on the floor reconnecting cables while everybody else was standing, and I noticed some security guys giving me some pretty weird looks."

In the event, everything went well. Dev and his team streamed the proceedings in High Definition to around 300 people watching at various locations around Auroville.

The 50th bonfire

Now that Dev knew everything worked, his team started preparing for the morning bonfire and water ceremony. Dev decided to use more cameras for this event to cover different angles, so he reached out to Francis and Doris of Auroville Video, who were keen to be involved, along with the Auroville Radio team. Integrating the different video and audio feeds would be a challenge as time was short and they did not have the right equipment, so Dev decided to improvise using

some additional wifi equipment.

However, at the dress rehearsal the previous day, the wifi didn't work. Dev decided to go ahead anyway.

"I showed up at 2.30 on the morning of the bonfire. I hadn't slept the night before and I was a complete wreck. Earlier in the evening, Mauna had announced the YouTube channel feed for the live streaming of the event. I could already see 100 plus people tuned in, just waiting for it to go live! It's then that I realised the level of expectation for us to deliver was huge; there was no backing out of now."

Dev had been testing and retesting the equipment obsessively. The equipment wasn't ideal, but he thought it would do the job if the network held up.

However, the first thing that went wrong that morning was that the wifi wouldn't work. This meant that Doris's camera, which was to get close-ups near the Urn, could not be connected to the live feed. "It was a bummer."

Worse was to follow. The team recalibrated all the audio and video devices, "but when I hit the button to go live, nothing happened! At this point, I started getting frantic phone calls, emails and Whatsapp enquiries from people wondering what was happening as we were already late going live. My heart sank; I thought it was going to be an epic failure."

Not wanting to give up, Dev decided to create another YouTube channel, but then he learned that it takes up to 24 hours for a new channel to be approved. In desperation, he contacted a friend in the US who works at Google, and asked him to get somebody from the YouTube team to approve a new channel immediately. "Unfortunately, he was from a completely different IT project and, anyway, he couldn't make out what I was saying as the meditation had started and I was whispering. I wrote to Mauna, who was already receiving emails from around the world, saying we were working to solve some unforeseen technical hiccups but, finally, I'm leaving it all to Her."

"Within a minute of sending that email, I get a notification from YouTube that the new channel has been approved to go live!"

Dev hit the go-live button. "Instantly, I can see 100 simultaneous viewers, 200, then 300 people watching it from all over the world. I took a deep breath to savour the moment, and to thank the myriad people who got involved along the way, without whom it simply wouldn't have been possible."

Dev had enabled live chat, which allowed viewers to communicate with the production team. "That was the best thing that I did because people could tell us where they wanted the cameras to be pointed – at the children's faces when they were carrying water, or at the choir, or to catch the sunrise over the Matrimandir and Urn. We were able to fulfil these requests in real time: it was magical."

In the end, about 1000 people watched it live. A day later, the online video had been watched over 8000 times. "We started receiving emails from all over the world about how moved people had been. Groups had hired cafes, projectors and big screens, or gathered at friend's houses to watch the bonfire and the water ceremony, even at odd hours of the night. That's when I realised that what had started two weeks ago as a casual conversation had ended up becoming something very special."

Reflections

"Now, with hindsight, I feel there was a much bigger thing that made it all happen, something that was guiding us. I think it was just meant to happen in the way that it did, and we all had our roles to play in the bigger scheme of things."

Dev would love to do it again. "This was the first time something had been streamed live from the Amphitheatre and I am a firm believer that if it is something that brings people together, we should do it every year. But it is not for me to decide."

'Bringing people together' was not just a reference to connecting people outside Auroville with a profound moment in the community's history. When Dev was an Ashram school student, Auroville was out of bounds. More recently, a small group of Aurovilians had signed a petition opposing an invitation to officials of the Sri Aurobindo Society to attend the event.

So a few days earlier, when Dev went to invite the main Ashram trustee, Manoj Das Gupta, to attend the bonfire, he was not sure how he would react. "I was pleasantly surprised that he was more than welcoming. Manoj said we do not need to live in the past. Instead, we need to make the bridge with the youngsters. Are we not all Her children, are we not all here for a reason and, after all, Auroville is the Mother's vision. Isn't this what we're celebrating 50 years later?"

"As I was walking away, I couldn't help but remember the students' prayer, one that we must have repeated so many times over the years, but one that had never made more sense.

Make of us, the hero warriors we aspire to become. May we fight successfully the great battle of the future that is to be born against the past, which seeks to endure; so that the new things may manifest and we are ready to receive them.

"I guess this is why I was very happy to know that the Ashram school had sent over 150 teachers and students to attend the morning ceremony. What a wonderful start to the anniversary year!"

From an interview by Alan

The live stream footage of the bonfire and water ceremony can be seen at goo.gl/uwTBJE

POETRY READING

On the afternoon of Sunday March 20th, the sonorous sounds of classical Tamil poetry drifted across the Auroville landscape from the Vaastu Garden at Sacred Groves. They mingled with the thud of balls being struck during the weekly Edayanchavadi cricket match as players looked up in surprise. One after another, teachers, scholars, and Aurovilians came to the microphone to read and chant verses of the *Tirukkural*, the *Silapadikaram*, and other works, all under the direction of Meenakshi, Auroville's Tamil eminent poet in residence.

The Vastu garden, designed by Jana, has a huge stone which is oriented towards the Matrimandir, the ancient Irumbai Shiva temple and the Edayanchavadi temple and stone seats encircle this stone.

The session began with Varadarajan reading an ode to Meenakshi. Different readers read

Bhakti hymns and poems, an extract from *Silapadikaram* on the beauty of River Cauvery and Yatra Srinivasan lead a group song beginning 'Love is Divine'.

Appropriately for the season, there was an extract upon rain from Sri Aurobindo's translation of the Tamil *Thirukkural*:

*The world cannot live without its waters,
Nor conduct be at all without
The rains from heavens.*

Meenakshi read some famous sangam poetry (3rd B.C. – 2nd A.D.) in Tamil followed by Jonathan's English rendering of the famous *Yaathum Urr* – "All the world is our home" by the poet Kaniyan Punkundran.

*All the world is our home
All men our kin.*

*Good and evil
are not caused by other.
Nor are suffering and relief.
We do not exult
That life is sweet.
Nor do we cry
in bitterness
that life is cruel.*

Andal's hymns were much appreciated by Sri Aurobindo. In one poem Andal invites her friends to come together to praise the Lord Krishna.

*Black sparrows in droves
Fill the air with 'keech keech' chirps
Don't you hear it, stupid girl!
With their fragrant tresses
The milkmaids churn the curds
With achu thali and aamai thali
Dangling and jingling –*

*Don't you hear these sounds?
O The leader of our bunch!
We're singing the glory
Of Kesava, the Narayana;
While hearing this melody
How can you be tucked in bed?
O my lustrous friend!
Unlock and open your door.*

The readings were accompanied by beautiful classical music played by Gordon on his bamboo flute, knitting together these flowers of Tamil Poetry through ages. The setting sun, the cool southern breeze, the fragrance from the flowering trees and distant voices added a beautiful ambience to the special programme.

As dusk approached, the entire group gathered in a circle around the central stone to join hands in acknowledgment of a profound experience.

Gordon Korstange

An Integral Education for Growth and Blossoming

Fabrice Dini's new book, translated from the French by Aurovilian Divya Lieser, is a practical guide for teachers and parents.

As Dini's background and experience are in mindfulness practice, much of the book is built around that theme.

The book is divided into five sections: physical education, vital education, mental education, psychic being, and the role of the adult. Each section is packed with exercises and discussions that teachers and parents could use. Many of the exercises are excellent, such as the ones on cultivating gratitude through a meal or on using improvisational theatre to explore emotions. The book is not designed to be read linearly – the reader can dip into any section using the table of contents at the back of the book.

The book has a few quirky features that are immediately noticeable. The main table of contents in the beginning of the book is called Summary. Only "The Vital" is identified as a section title in the "Summary", while "The Body" and "The Vital" are the only section titles in the table of contents at the back of the book. No publisher is identified, nor is there any copyright information. This lack of attention to detail shows up in some sloppy editing. For example, adults are asked to "incite" children to help themselves to smaller servings of food. In a graphic that lists 24 character strengths, "gratitude" is repeated. Emanuele's illustrations are bright and colourful but have very little to do with the content of the pages where they appear.

But there are several shortcomings of the book that go beyond the nitty-gritties of typo and design. One of the biggest is a key question that is left unanswered – what is Integral Education? This question is posed on page 21 and the reader is asked to go to page 290, which has a few bullet points. The book makes no mention of the principles of Integral Education, such as Sri Aurobindo's first principle of true teaching that "nothing can be taught". This seemingly simple pronouncement contains a vast depth of philosophy of education and of the modern science of learning. It would have greatly helped if Dini could have unpacked some of this. Take language, for example: as Vinoba Bhavé said, "In none of the fourteen languages in which the Indian Constitution has been written [does] the word teach exist; but there is a word for learn. There is no equivalent of the English verb 'to

teach' in Sanskrit or any of the other Indian languages. In the English language, one is to learn and the other is to teach. Both are independent verbs. ... It is the egocentricity of the teacher that he thinks that he can teach."

The tone of the writing is a little confusing. At times, the author uses what Americans call "motherhood and apple pie" statements, such as, "Caring for animals can also be a rich learning activity, and living and learning in contact with nature also offers our children a joyful and rich childhood." At other times, the text uses soaring rhetoric, such as, "Indeed, the rise of the infranormal to the rational is a crucial step to emerge from the misty swamps of life; but if we want to fly into the sky of Knowledge-Wisdom, then we will eventually have to continue our ascent towards the supra-rational."

I couldn't help thinking about how a typical teacher or parent would understand some of the content. Some of the well-meaning stories of inspiration could even be counterproductive. For example, the chapter on physical education talks about Michael Jordan and Roger Federer. It lists people who have broken records in marathon, Ironman and "Double Deca Ultra Triathlon" competitions. So, is physical education important only if you want to be a world-class athlete? It might have been much more interesting and relevant to see how famous non-athletes, such as scientists, artists or musicians, use regular physical exercise.

While missing the mark on inspiration could be relatively harmless, some of the statements in the book could lead to serious misunderstanding about children and how they behave. In one chapter, Dini writes, "It should be noted that some children get sick to avoid situations or to receive attention; we should give them sufficient attention and they will learn (with kindness and firmness) to face difficult situations." This is certainly true in some cases, but the danger is that the lay reader will use this information in entirely inappropriate situations. I am reminded of a personal story. My son, who did not do formal schooling, once registered for a Cambridge biology exam to test himself. He was down with extremely high fever the day

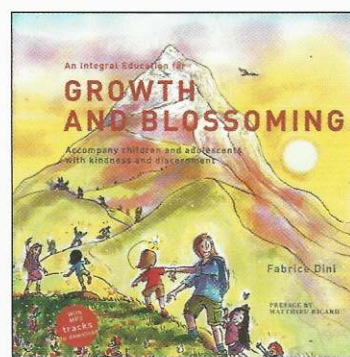
before the test, and the family doctor diagnosed it as a case of anxiety, saying that my son was not used to test-taking. A blood test, however, showed that he had a serious case of dengue fever.

Here's another example of somewhat irresponsible writing: "Ludivine is a 13-year-old teenager who, from a very early age, systematically hurts herself when she is malicious: she runs after ducks to scare them and trips, she comes to pinch you and twists her ankle, etc. Aware of these patterns, she can decide on a strategy as soon as these specific thoughts or feelings arise in her, and thus avoid getting hurt." What is the reader to make of this? That children with malicious thoughts hurt themselves? Or that if a child is hurt, she is having such thoughts?

Unfortunately, the book is filled with generalisations, such as "On the basis of a study, ... it is even easier to learn and remember information when it is associated with movement" or that "... ideally, one should stop eating when 80% full." How on earth can I tell when I am 80% full? Or when the author says that, "our body is the prodigious outcome of more than 13 billion years of evolution" and that, "this marvel of incredible complexity, with infinite potential and on which our lives depend, deserves all our attention and our solicitude," what does he mean? Does a billion years of evolution also have infinite potential? What separates a hermit crab from a human?

Although the book quotes findings from modern science, it makes some fairly dodgy statements, such as "synapses are generated by everything the child experiences". What is generated is an action potential, which triggers the pre-synaptic neuron to release a neurotransmitter into the gap (called the synapse) between two neurons. This electrochemical signal travels to the post-synaptic neuron. Lots of other things happen, such as reuptake of excess neurotransmitters from the synapse, but what is important is to ensure that readers don't leave with fundamental misconceptions about how the brain works.

This carelessness about science also shows up when Dini talks about the



child acquiring the "precision and knowledge of the scientist and the sensitivity and creativity of the artist." It is surprising to see that someone who is passionate about education thinks that scientists are not creative or that artists do not need precision. This false dichotomy between what scientists do and what artists do is at the root of much of students' biases. A student of mine recently said that she was not a "science kind of person." Depending on how we understand science, this could mean that she is not interested in "precision and knowledge" or that she is a superstitious person.

It is slightly uncomfortable to read, in the same book, about the effect of oxytocin in the body and read that "the vital ... is the life force that flows in each of us like a river of energy." We can all have our own beliefs about "vital energy," but it will be hard to find a molecular biologist who subscribes to the idea of a "life force".

While some ideas could be debated, other parts of the book are just plain baffling. In a section about how to integrate the 12 Qualities (which are attributed to The Mother in the Notes at the back of the book) in "classical branches", here is what is suggested for mathematics: "Julie is a great athlete, Marc prefers to walk calmly; they are both following the route to Santiago de Compostela; Julie walks without a break, Marc stops for 15 minutes every hour. Knowing that they both walk at a speed of 4 km/hour, how far have they travelled and how many metres ahead is Julie after 2 weeks if they walk 6 hours every day? Knowing that Marc stopped walking for 2 whole days because of rain and another day because his foot hurt, which village are they closest to? They both left Le Puy

Cathedral and are following the road from the Abbey Church of Saint Foy in Conques towards the Moissac Abbey." I have absolutely no idea what this has to do with the 12 Qualities.

Here is another example: While talking about the *Ramayana*, the author says, "In those bygone days, the Indus Valley Civilization included cities such as Harappa, one of the first cities in the world, which is believed to have had as many as 40000 residents, 3000 years BC." What is the connection between the *Ramayana* and the Indus civilization? The early Indus cultures (Kot-Diji, Sothi-Siswal, Amri-Nal), which predate the city of Harappa, are dated between 3200 and 2600 BCE. As for the *Ramayana*, if we go by traditional dating, the story of Rama takes place in the Treta Yuga, more than 1.5 million years ago. If we use modern historical analysis, the text is composed between 400 BCE and 400 CE.

As with the past, the future also rests on somewhat shaky ground. The author's "framework conditions for the 21st century school" offers nothing new or specific to the challenges of the current century. The framework could very well have been written by Rousseau, Dewey or Tagore. Dini talks about how to remember the value of pi, but nothing about how to understand the idea of pi. He talks about ways to improve memory, but very little about deep conceptual learning.

In summary, it looks like Fabrice Dini has a set of excellent exercises that he uses in his training programmes on mindfulness and "integral education," which he wanted to compile into a book. In doing so, he has collected eclectic pieces of information, some of which he perhaps did not have the time to research thoroughly. I do hope the next edition of the book provides a deeper understanding of Integral Education.

Manas

Manas has recently joined Auroville. He has 27 years of experience in educational research.

An Integral Education for Growth and Blossoming. Available from saier@auroville.org.in, price in India Rs 950.

E-MOBILITY

Getting smarter: an update on Auroville's sustainable mobility

Kinisi celebrates its first anniversary

Kinisi is a unit under CSR, dedicated to bringing sustainable mobility to Auroville. Kinisi started officially on March 13, 2017, when it obtained a desk in a shared office at CSR (Center for Scientific Research) as well as a small workshop space downstairs. In the June-July 2017 issue of *Auroville Today*, Kinisi documented all of Auroville's failed and successful attempts to move Auroville towards smart mobility. Marlyse recounts the progress since.

"We decided to start with researching e-cycles, as this type of vehicle is best adapted to transportation within Auroville and has the smallest ecological footprint after the pedal cycle. We worked on a business plan, procurement and fundraising. One Aurovilian donated start-up funds and others provided loans or committed to contribute for the initial running expenses.

"In order to overcome some prejudices about electric vehicles which stemmed from previous encounters with outdated technologies, we opened a Facebook page to create more awareness about sustainable mobility and published articles to inform Aurovilians about the progress in battery technology, ecological impacts and financial advantages of going electric.

"We searched for the ideal e-cycle and electrifying kit. One of the team, Debo, attended the 27th China International Bicycle Fair in Shanghai and travelled to Delhi, Bangalore, Coimbatore and other cities in India, contacting companies and establishing collaborative relationships with the best ones, such as Hulikkal for e-kits and Hero for e-cycles and e-scooters.



Matthias testing the Honda e-scooter

"We spent a lot of time researching procedures and tax exemption possibilities for importing 100 cycles from China. However, the import tax for electric cycles from China in 2017-18 was 146%, which made all Chinese cycles unaffordable here and we had to give up on this idea.

Testing e-cycles and e-scooters

"Testing protocols were set up. Matthias bought three e-scooters for testing: Hero Maxi, Hero Nyx and Auroville's HumVee. We purchased several sample e-cycles from Hulikkal, Hero and others. We tested the limits of all the vehicles and obtained very valuable feedback and improvement suggestions.

"Our first cycle was converted to electric in June 2017. It has a strong, lightweight, removable battery, 2.5-hour charging time, and very powerful front and back lights. We use this kit for giving extra pedal power. Debo also contacted Hero about their Ozone model e-cycle, and negotiated special prices with them.

"On August 15th, 2017, our first e-cycle went out for rent. From that point onward, our e-cycle fleet has increased steadily, with Raleigh Cinderella/Hulikkal kits and Hero Ozone e-cycles. In the first year of Kinisi's existence, we went from nothing to 70 e-cycles on the road. We hope to have at least 250 e-cycles on the road by February 2019.

"We are convinced that with our wellwishers' help, the hard work of our staff and the cooperation of our residents, Auroville's smart sustainable mobility goals will be achieved.

"For the future, we also plan to implement an in-kind mobility scheme on the model of PTDC, where Aurovilians pay a small monthly contribution and get access to all the e-cycles (and later on, electric cargo tricycles, motorcycles and bus transport) they need."

The KINISI team

For further information, contact kinisi@auroville.org.in or www.kinisi.in



The electrified Raleigh Cinderella

Oli branches out

An Auroville school uses various educational methods to engage children from the local area.

How can we integrate curiosity about the world with deep inner connection, individual boldness with respect for others and freedom with responsibility? These are some of the questions that the team of teachers and facilitators at Oli school are asking themselves. Housed in one of Roger Anger's early buildings in Aspiration, Oli is an outreach school to which 120 young people from the neighboring villages of Kuilapalayam, Lakshmiapuram, Edaiyanchavadi, Kalapet, Bommai-yapalayam, and Mudaliarchavadi, come each day.

Oli took seed as a small project in 2010 when Ana Garcia, a Montessori teacher from Mexico, was invited by André and his team to implement the method at the New Creation boarding house. Ana trained Sangeeta from Kuilapalayam who was working in the crèche, in the Montessori approach and together they began to use the method with the 12 children at the boarding house. Very quickly, their work began to attract more and more families from the neighbouring villages and in a couple of years the project had evolved into an indepen-



Snack time at Oli

sorial tools and activities through which they can develop life skills, gain an understanding of the world and internalize concepts. Learning how to button a shirt or cut with a knife, putting together a puzzle that is the map of India or piling cubes on the basis of size and weight are some examples. At Oli, this hands-on approach to learning and integration flows out of the classroom and into the kitchen where the children help in

choose their activity without any imposition, they learn to self-connect, listen to and honour their own needs, and to exercise choice. They also learn to respect the materials they use and consider others.

The balance between connecting with the inner being and relating to the outer world is at the heart of Oli School's vision for the "society of the future". How can children become independent, confident members of society while nurturing their inner awareness? How can they participate in the world while "keeping the psychic being very aware and very present"? What would such an education look like? Who do the adults and teachers need to be so that they can nurture these capacities with sensitivity and care?

It was these questions that first brought Oli School and Marie Claire together. A former nursery school teacher in France, Marie Claire had undergone training with Dr. Laskow in Holoenergetics. Holoenergetics is a healing practice originally meant for people in the health sector that includes a technique to ground, align with Source and centre in the heart, using breath and visualization. While in France, Marie Claire had used this

breathing technique in her class and found it very helpful for facilitating growth and harmony. But it was when Oli School invited her to train the whole school in Holoenergetics that she saw how its immense power could serve education.

Sangeetha speaks of Holoenergetics as a simple, yet practical and efficient alignment practice for the teachers at the school. "We are all ladies from the village and we come from difficult circumstances. When we're working with children we need to be centered, very grounded. And here we're working with very small ones. The teachers need to be especially clear and focused. This tool helps us to ground ourselves every morning. It refreshes and regenerates us and supports the teachers to connect with the children at a deeper level". Marie Claire believes it supports

school and a resource for powerfully and intentionally energizing the collective body of the school. Once aligned and centred in the heart, for example, a teacher can use intentionality to build a bridge, heart to heart, with a child and let the Divine Love flow to help the child if he or she is feeling low."

"Building bridges" describes well the impact that Oli School has in the region. The quality of care, connection and learning experienced by the students at Oli is appreciated by the community. For this reason, people from several villages in the surrounding bioregion bring their children here, and students from different communities and castes interact with each other building trust and goodwill. The school is also a bridge that connects the villages and Auroville. As Sangeeta says, "We are very proud that we, ladies from the village, are able to learn all the tools that we get from people like Marie Claire and Ana to enrich our children". Even in



A young group deeply engaged with Montessori materials

dent kindergarten for children between the ages of 2 and 6.

In the following years, this tiny seed grew deep roots and spread its branches wide. 12 more teachers were trained by Ana for different age groups and in the different areas of the Montessori method. Gradually more children were admitted into the school. In 2014, the kindergarten, now a 100 children strong, shifted to the Last School campus.

The day at Oli School begins with a meditation and morning circle at 8.45. From 9 to 10.30, they have free choice of work where the children can choose which area of the Montessori space they want to engage in – practical life, sensorial, language, mathematics or cultural.

The Montessori system offers children a large variety of multi-sen-

sory preparation and serving of snacks for the entire school.

Over the years, the team at Oli school has also embraced elements from other educational approaches and offerings available in Auroville. One of these is a free play corner where children looking for something less structured can spend the morning. Blocks offer them another opportunity for exploration. Oli has a dedicated space for Play of Painting where students spend 3 afternoons a week. And recently a platform has been added for ATB or psychomotricity body work. In addition, the children go swimming and for regular visits to Matrimandir.

According to Sangeetha and Marie Claire, at the centre of all these activities, a deeper, more fundamental level of learning is offered by Oli. By giving young people the freedom to



So far so good - making sense of the English language

the school on a subtle, energetic plane. "I can feel the power of this simple tool. I see the teachers growing in energy, growing in confidence. They are more present, settled and loving." The technique, practiced with the children 3 times a day, has become part of the daily fabric of the

short span of its existence, Oli is recognized for the quality of students that graduate from here. They are bold, confident, eager to learn, prepared to face the world while remaining connected to themselves.

Oli's deep commitment to their students is reflected in the continued training and learning that its team of teachers undertakes. In addition to the monthly workshops they had with Anna, some teachers are currently undergoing professional training online in USA and in Pondicherry. The Oli staff periodically connects with other Auroville schools and teachers to share knowledge, experiences and perspectives.

To sustain a project such as this several other people give of their time and resources. Palani, Guy and Marie Claire, the Executives of Oli, work hard on fundraising, maintenance and development and accounts. Oli's biggest challenge, however, continues to be funding. They rely completely on individual donations, and while these are accepted with gratitude, they would be supported best by a regular grant.

Anusha

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Editorial team:

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

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